



Braden's Cake Shop

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In 1927 a young baker and his wife moved to Dallas from Muskogee, Oklahoma. Kathryn and Roy Braden who had learned to bake on a troop ship in World War I, bought a little shop on Gaston Avenue around the corner from Doc Harrell's Pharmacy. Utilizing a home oven, they sold six cakes the first week. That was a start!

From the first, Braden's was a family affair. The first major addition was a brother-in-law Andrew Gardner, who joined the staff in 1937 and ultimately became a master baker. Gardner became the head production man, while Braden printed all of his own labels (and amusing/uplifting stories) on an old-fashioned printing press. He also frequently repaired machinery. Mrs. Braden, who iced and decorated the cakes, was a consummate salesperson with the ability to make a customer drool in anticipation even over the phone.

By 1947 Braden's Cake Shop had moved to a new plant at 4527 Travis, a \$300,000 building designed especially for the bakery. By that time they were using Master baker revolving ovens. One day Gardner offered a demonstration ride on the trays (which revolved) in a cold oven, to young nephews, Lee and Lucius Smith (Lee is a DCPA member) and daughters, Andretta and Kathleen. The daughters declined a ride but remained fascinated with the sight and aroma of baked goods coming out of the ovens.

Another addition to the facilities in the new plant was the Partyways Room, a display area for birthday or wedding cakes and products for special parties. Brides could see a variety of styles and sizes and talk to specially trained personnel about their wishes. If customers so desired, they could rent plates, cups, silverware, tea set, tablecloths; order handmade custom-tinted mints; and arrange for printed napkins on the spot. Many Dallasites availed themselves of those services, including Doak Walker.

In 1950 Braden's Cake Shop had six retail outlets, were in eleven supermarkets, served a drive-in grocery chain, and supplied a major airline with thousands of tart shells. Also about that time a special "million dollar cake" was prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of Everts Jewelers. The \$1,000 cake was decorated with \$100,000 worth of precious stones, which remained secreted in the Braden home until time to adorn the cake. Mrs. Braden developed ulcers about that time. Seriously!

Mr. Braden served as secretary and later president of the Texas Bakers' Association and was a Director of the American Retail Bakers' Association. Through the next two decades, Braden's was known for quality and variety of products. More than thirty varieties of bread filled the shelves: white, wheat, 100% wheat, salt rising, pumpernickel, potato, onion, marble (choose your colors), cheese, nut, orange nut, Boston brown, black rye, party rye, etc. Special orders abounded for sandwich bread sliced thin, sliced lengthwise, unsliced, decrusted, whatever. Party-givers knew about Braden's.

Cookies galore filled the cases. Mediterranean macaroons and sand tarts were popular, along with perennial favorites chocolate chip, peanut brittle, and icebox. No holiday was complete without festive cutouts, but Christmas cookies were everybody's favorites.

And what cakes – light, moist, tender and delicious. The days of six cakes a week were long gone. Now an average day saw over 150 cakes baked and sold. White, devil's food, sunshine, and angel food were standards, but the new German chocolate was a huge hit. And pies! All kinds of fruit pies and meringue pies and a pecan pie to die for!

Another specialty was Christmas fruitcake. The "deluxe" fruitcake was a secret recipe developed by Gardner, using no sugar, no flour, no eggs, but with the same amount of pecans as fruit. The fruitcake would be made by Thanksgiving. Customers knew to order early because when the supply was gone, there would be no more. One year the suppliers sent pineapple slices instead of chopped. The Gardner "family time" for days consisted of chopping pineapple, a vivid memory for some fifty years. Fruitcakes would be gift-wrapped for take-out or mailing. From Thanksgiving until New Year's was an exciting, BUSY time at the bakery.

Through the years, many family members worked in various capacities in the bakery: nieces and nephews, sisters, and a variety of their friends. Non-relative employees became extended family and remained friends with the Bradens long after retirement. The bakery was sold in 1969, but Gardner still bakes on a limited basis for his family. One who knows where to go can still get a fabulous Braden's sweet roll, cookie, or slice of pie.

By Andretta Lowry and Kathleen Brooks

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