

Aunt Rose's Recipe Files

My Aunt Rose was born **Rozina Contino** on August 16, 1924, in York, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Italian immigrants. Her father came from **Sicily**, while her mother, **Pasqua Contino**, proudly reminded everyone that she was from **Vieste**, a small fishing town on the Gargano Peninsula in southern Italy. Although the cooking traditions of Sicily and southern Italy share many similarities, they also have their own distinct recipes, customs, and even differences in dialect. My grandmother never let anyone forget that distinction.

Unlike my Pennsylvania Dutch grandmother, Helen Busser, who carefully recorded recipes in a handwritten composition book, my Italian grandmother kept almost everything in her head. She rarely measured ingredients, seldom wrote recipes down, and family lore says she wasn't always eager to reveal every secret. Her meatballs, tomato sauce, biscotti, Tetù cookies, and countless other dishes were passed from one generation to the next by watching, tasting, and doing rather than by reading a recipe.

Rose belonged to a different generation.

Born and raised entirely in America, she embraced a style of cooking that reflected mid-century American kitchens. Instead of relying solely on family tradition, she collected recipes wherever she found them—from friends, magazines, newspapers, neighborhood recipe exchanges, and perhaps even television. Rather than one handwritten notebook, she accumulated a box of well-used recipe cards that documented decades of entertaining, holidays, and everyday family meals.

When my Aunt Rose passed away on February 12, 2021, my cousin inherited that recipe box. She graciously began sharing the cards with me so that they could be preserved for future generations.

There was just one problem.

Many of the cards were written almost entirely in **secretarial shorthand**.

Fortunately, modern artificial intelligence proved surprisingly good at translating shorthand into English. Working together, my cousin and I have been able to reconstruct many of these recipes while preserving the original cards exactly as Rose wrote them. Throughout this book, you'll find the original handwritten recipe card followed by our best transcription into modern recipe form.

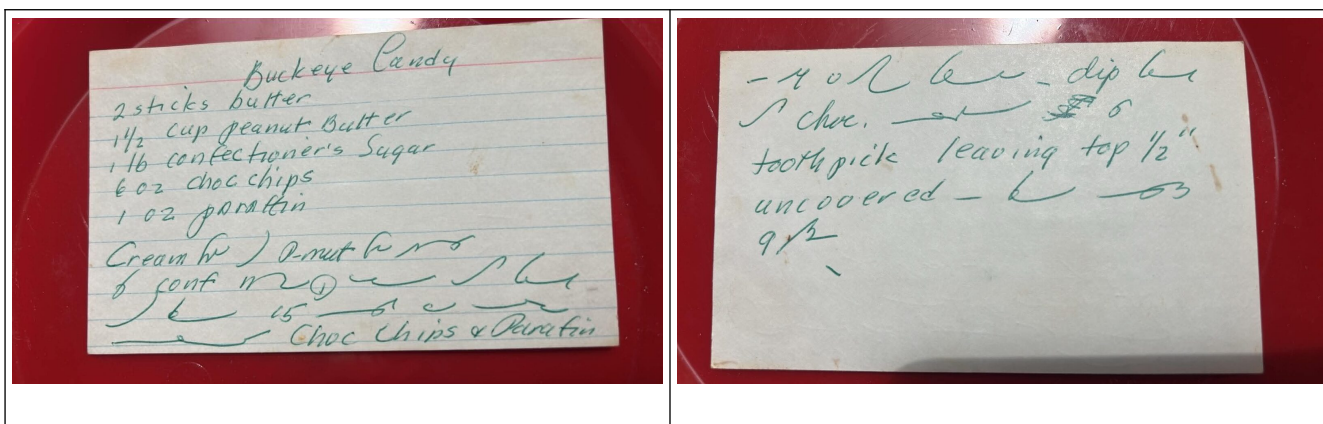
Whenever a recipe contains uncertain words, missing directions, or questionable ingredients, I've included **Recipe Detective Notes** describing what we know, what we're reasonably confident about, and where educated guesses were necessary. The goal has never been to rewrite Rose's recipes, but to preserve them as faithfully as possible while making them usable once again.

Taken together, these recipe cards tell more than the story of one woman's cooking. They document the journey of an immigrant family becoming American. My grandmother brought the flavors of southern Italy to our family table. Her daughter embraced the recipe-sharing culture of twentieth-century America while still carrying pieces of her Italian heritage with her. Every stained recipe card represents another stop along that journey.

As with Grandma Busser's handwritten cookbook, these recipes have been preserved as faithfully as possible. Some may require a little experimentation, and a few may still hold mysteries waiting to be solved.

Proceed at your own risk—and enjoy the journey.





Aunt Rose's Buckeye Candy

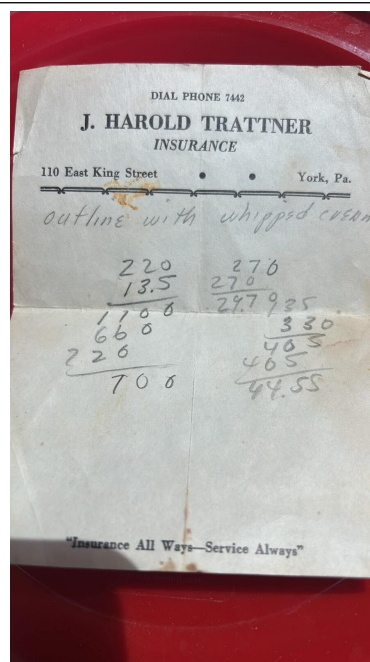
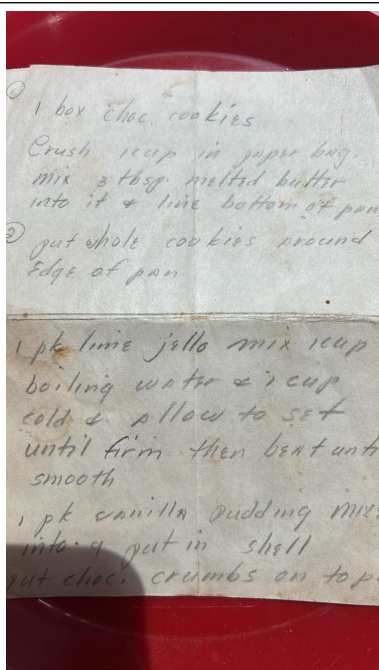
Case Status: ● Solved

Ingredients

- 2 sticks butter
- 1 1/2 cups peanut butter
- 1 lb confectioners' sugar
- 6 oz chocolate chips
- 1 oz paraffin

Directions

1. Cream together the butter and peanut butter.
2. Gradually add the confectioners' sugar until well blended.
3. Roll into balls.
4. Chill about 1/2 hour.
5. Melt the chocolate chips and paraffin together.
6. Dip each peanut butter ball into the chocolate using a toothpick, leaving the top 1/2 inch uncovered to resemble a buckeye nut.
7. Chill until the chocolate hardens.



Lime Refrigerator Pie

Case Status: ● **Mostly Solved** — The recipe is usable, but the original source and a few missing details remain unknown.

Crust

- 1 box chocolate cookies Directions
- Crush 1 cup of the cookies in a paper bag.
- Mix with 3 tablespoons melted butter.
- Press into the bottom of the pan.
- Place whole cookies around the edge of the pan.

Filling

- 1 package lime Jell-O
- 1 cup boiling water • 1 cup cold water
- 1 package vanilla pudding mix
-

Directions

1. Dissolve the lime Jell-O in 1 cup boiling water.
2. Add 1 cup cold water.
3. Allow to set until firm.
4. Beat until smooth.
5. Add (or fold into) the vanilla pudding mixture.
6. Pour into the prepared crust.
7. Sprinkle chocolate cookie crumbs over the top.
8. Outline (or garnish) with whipped cream.

Recipe Detective Notes

One Mystery Remains

One line of Aunt Rose's shorthand appears to be incomplete:

"...1 pkg vanilla pudding mix ... into & put in shell."

Something seems to be missing between "**mix**" and "**into**." I suspect Rose already knew the recipe by heart and simply omitted what she considered the obvious step.

Most Likely Reconstruction

Version 1 (Highest Confidence – ★★★★★☆)

Prepare the vanilla pudding according to the package directions, then fold it into the partially set lime Jell-O before pouring the filling into the prepared crust.

Alternate Possibility

Version 2 (Moderate Confidence – ★★★★★☆☆)

Stir the dry instant vanilla pudding mix directly into the lime Jell-O mixture until smooth before pouring into the crust.

Both methods appeared in American recipes during the 1960s and 1970s, although the first version is considerably more common.

Historical Clue

The memo paper used for this recipe came from:

J. Harold Trattner Insurance

110 East King Street
York, Pennsylvania

The four-digit telephone number ("Dial Phone 7442") suggests the stationery dates to roughly the **1940s or 1950s**, providing another small glimpse into when Rose may have copied this recipe.

Recipe History

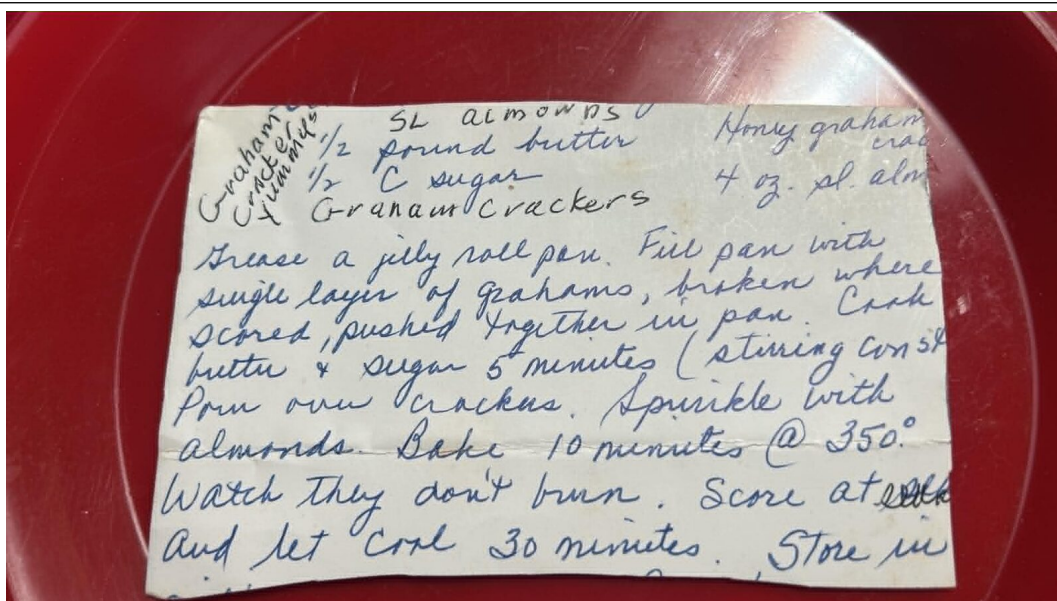
This dessert closely resembles the refrigerated "fluff pies" found in many Pennsylvania church cookbooks during the 1950s and 1960s.

Typical features include:

- Chocolate cookie crust
- Lime Jell-O

- Vanilla pudding
- Whipped cream topping
- No baking required

It shares characteristics with both **Grasshopper Pie** and **Lime Bavarian Pie**, although Rose's version appears to be her own variation.



Graham Cracker Yummies

Ingredients

- Graham crackers
- ½ pound butter (2 sticks)
- ½ cup sugar
- Sliced almonds (appears to say 5 oz, although a note at the upper right may say 4 oz. sl. almonds)

(The side note "Graham cracker crunchies" looks like an alternate name for the recipe.)

Directions

1. Grease a jelly roll pan.
2. Fill the pan with a single layer of graham crackers, breaking crackers where needed to fit. Push them tightly together in the pan.
3. Cook the butter and sugar for 5 minutes, stirring constantly.
4. Pour the hot mixture over the crackers.
5. Sprinkle with sliced almonds.
6. Bake 10 minutes at 350°F.
7. Watch carefully so they don't burn.
8. Score into squares while still warm.
9. Let cool 30 minutes.
10. Store in an airtight container.

Identifying the Recipe

After translating Aunt Rose's recipe card, it became clear that this wasn't a unique family recipe at all—it appears to be an early version of a dessert that has become wildly popular over the past several decades.

Today, this recipe is commonly known by several names:

- Graham Cracker Toffee
- Graham Cracker Crunch
- Christmas Crack
- Graham Cracker Crack

The basic technique remains nearly identical: graham crackers are covered with a hot butter-and-sugar toffee, baked briefly, and allowed to cool until crisp.

What Makes Rose's Version Different?

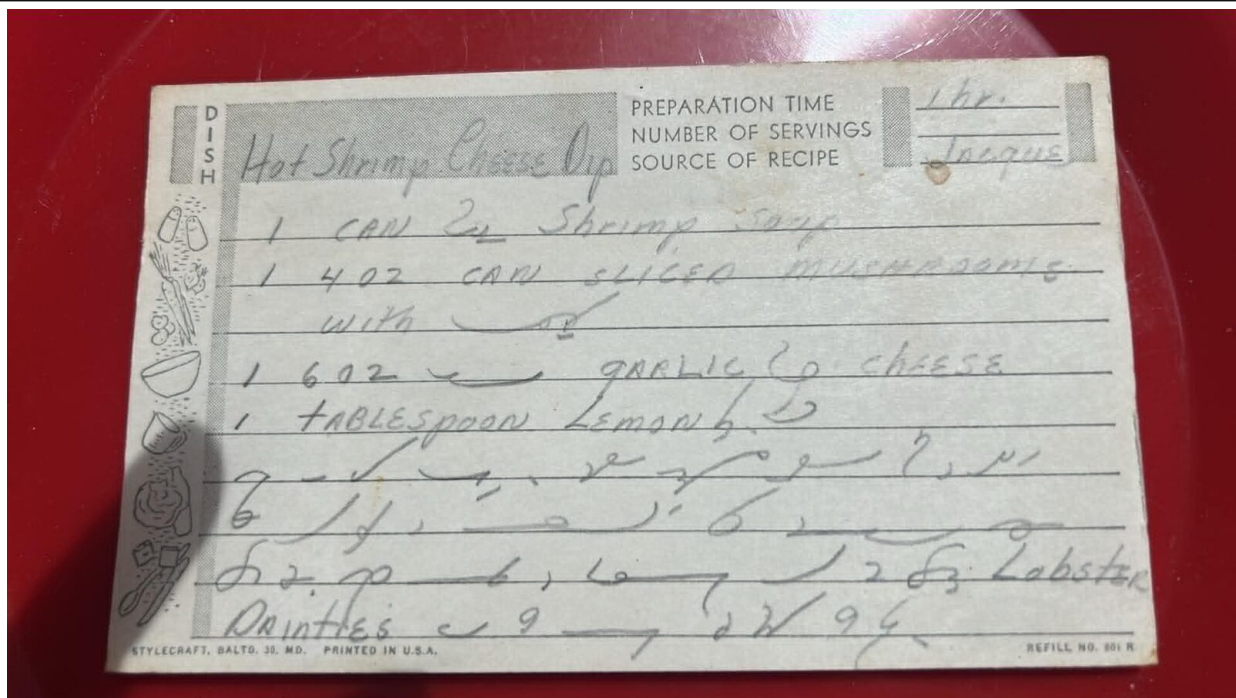
Most modern recipes add a layer of chocolate chips that melt over the hot toffee before adding nuts.

Aunt Rose's recipe doesn't.

Instead, she simply sprinkled sliced almonds over the hot toffee, making this feel like an earlier, simpler version that predates the chocolate variation. That likely places the recipe somewhere in the 1950s or 1960s before the "Christmas Crack" versions became popular.

★ Translation Confidence

Item	Confidence
Graham crackers	★★★★★
Butter & sugar toffee	★★★★★
Bake at 350°F	★★★★★
Sliced almonds	★★★★★
5 oz vs 4 oz almonds	★★★☆☆
"Crunchies" alternate title	★★★☆☆



Hot Shrimp Cheese Dip

Case Status: ● **Mostly Solved** — The recipe is usable, but the original source and a few missing details remain unknown.

Ingredients

- 1 can tiny shrimp (or possibly cream of shrimp soup)
- 1 (4-ounce) can sliced mushrooms, with liquid
- 1 (6-ounce) package garlic cheese
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Directions

1. Combine all ingredients in a saucepan.
2. Heat gently until the cheese melts and the mixture is smooth.
3. Stir until well blended.
4. Serve warm.

Serve with:

- Pringles
- Lobster crackers

Recipe Detective Notes

A Recipe with Missing Pieces

Unlike most of Aunt Rose's recipe cards, this one appears to be incomplete. The shorthand translation clearly identifies most of the ingredients, but the first ingredient and much of the cooking method are missing or difficult to decipher.

Fortunately, the remaining ingredients provide several strong clues.

What We Know

The recipe almost certainly includes:

- Tiny shrimp (or possibly cream of shrimp soup)
- Mushrooms with their liquid
- A 6-ounce package of garlic cheese
- Lemon juice
- Served warm as a party dip
- Recommended with **Pringles** or **lobster crackers**

Those details can be read with a high degree of confidence from the original card.

A Likely Origin

This recipe doesn't feel like a traditional Italian family recipe. Instead, it has all the characteristics of a popular American party appetizer from the late 1960s or early 1970s.

During that era, magazines, newspapers, church cookbooks, and neighborhood recipe exchanges were filled with warm cheese dips made from canned seafood, processed cheeses, mushrooms, and convenience foods. Rose often copied recipes she enjoyed, and this may be one of those favorites.

The Investigation Continues

Because so many unique ingredients appear together—shrimp, mushrooms, garlic cheese, lemon juice, Pringles, and lobster crackers—there is a good chance the original published recipe still exists somewhere.

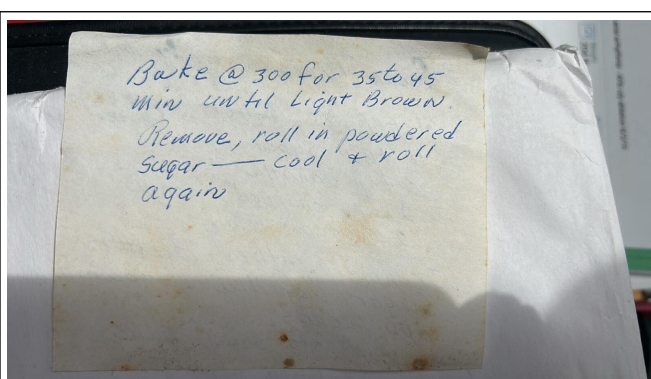
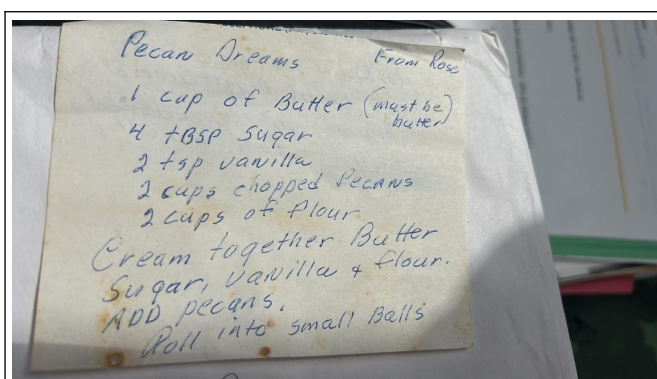
Finding that source would allow the missing ingredients and directions to be reconstructed with much greater confidence while still preserving Aunt Rose's handwritten recipe card as the family's version.

Until then, this remains one of the unresolved mysteries in Aunt Rose's recipe box.

★ Translation Confidence

Item	Confidence
Recipe title	★★★★★
Mushrooms with liquid	★★★★★

Item	Confidence
Garlic cheese (6 oz)	★★★★★
Lemon juice	★★★★★
Served hot	★★★★★
Pringles serving suggestion	★★★★★
Lobster crackers	★★★★☆
First shrimp ingredient	★★☆☆☆
Heating directions	★★☆☆☆



Pecan Dreams

(From Rose)

Case Status: ● Solved

Ingredients

- 1 cup butter (must be butter)
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 cups chopped pecans
- 2 cups flour

Directions

1. Cream together the butter and sugar.
2. Add the vanilla.
3. Add the flour and pecans.
4. Roll into small balls.
5. Bake at 300°F for 35–45 minutes, or until light brown
6. Remove from oven and roll in powdered sugar.
7. Allow to cool completely.
8. Roll again in powdered sugar

Side-by-side comparison

Grandma Busser's	Aunt Rose
1 cup of butter	1 cup of butter (must be butter)
2 scant cups of flour	2 cups of flour
4 tablespoons of sugar	4 tablespoons of sugar
2 teaspoons of vanilla	2 teaspoons of vanilla
2 cups of chopped pecans	2 cups of chopped pecans
Roll balls	Roll into small balls
Bake 300 for 45 minutes	Bake 35-45 minutes until light brown

Roll in 10x sugar twice	Roll in powdered sugar twice
-------------------------	------------------------------

This appears to be the same recipe in both books.

I think these are...

These cookies have accumulated a lot of names over the years:

- Pecan Dreams
- Pecan Crèmes
- Russian Tea Cakes
- Mexican Wedding Cookies
- Snowballs
- Butterballs

They're all essentially the same European butter cookie that became popular in America in the early 20th century.