

# The Louisville Times

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## Mystery Pastry

*Louisville's best-kept secret*

By RICHARD DES RUISSEAU  
*Louisville Times Staff Writer*

Daniel Ellsberg snatched the Pentagon Papers, and columnist Jack Anderson made public ITT lobbyist Dita Beard's memo. But no one yet has been able to solve the Mystery of the Kern Kitchen.

On a quiet, narrow street in Lyndon, Ky., there stands a modest red-brick house with a gravel drive and a two-car garage. Gray squirrels are sometimes seen skittering across the yard and up into the trees.

It is known that Leandra and Walter Kern live in this house, and that they are 73 and 75 years old, respectively. Further, it is known that they are in the chips, rolling in dough, as it were, especially as Derby week approaches.

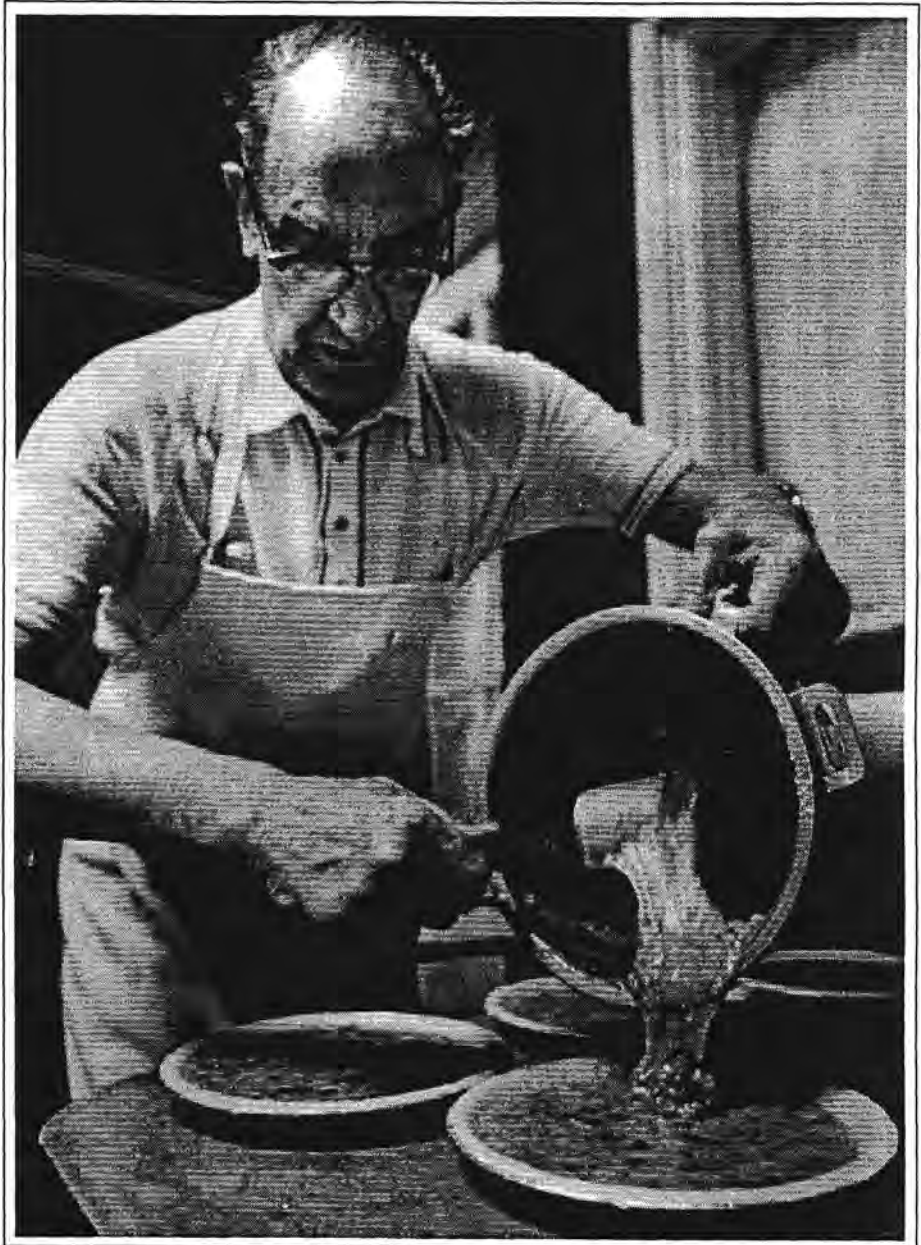
The chips, however, are chocolate, and the dough is used for pie crusts.

Now, many people bake pies at home—apple pies, cherry pies, blueberry pies, pies like mother used to make—but nobody, repeat, nobody (except Leandra and Walter Kern) makes Derby pie. Not at home, not anywhere. The reason is twofold:

First, nobody, repeat, nobody (except Leandra and Walter Kern) knows the recipe for Derby pie.

Second, Derby pie is copyrighted. So even if you baked a similar tasting pie, you'd have to call it something else: Steppingstone pie, or Bluegrass Stakes pie, or Gerby pie. And the copyright is jealously guarded, as several local bakeries and restaurants have discovered. Reports that so-and-so is purporting to sell Derby pie, when in fact he isn't, a brief visit from the Kerns' lawyer rectifies the situation quickly.

The recipe for Derby pie was created by the Kerns' son, George, a restaurant man-



STAFF PHOTOS BY MICHAEL COORS

**Says Walter Kern; "Anybody can make pie crust the same as we do." But it's the recipe for that melange he's pouring that people want, and Walter's not talking about that—not at all.**

ager and gourmet who died in 1968, with revisions by Mrs. Kern. In the mid-1950s, when the family operated the Melrose Inn on U.S. 42 in Prospect, Ky., Derby pie went public. Though the Kerns have long since sold the business, the motel restaurant's slogan remains "The Home of Derby Pie."

Okay. Fine. But just how good is Derby pie? It's this good:

"One night, after we had sold the restaurant," said Mrs. Kern, "some people drove down from Cincinnati to get a piece of Derby pie. But the restaurant was closed. So they stayed at the motel that night just so they could get in there in the morning and eat pie."

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# Louisville's best-kept secret

(Continued from front page)

It's this good:

A New England man who had tasted the pie arrived at the Kerns' house one day, put a blank check in front of Mrs. Kern and gave her a pen. "You fill out the amount and I'll sign it," he said. "I want that recipe to take home so my daughter can make that pie."

But the gentleman left with his bank account intact and his heart's desire unfulfilled. The only way he can get Derby pie is to come to Louisville and drop in at one of the dozen or so places that the Kerns supply.

The Kerns bake an average of 110 pies a week and deliver them to the retailers themselves. They wholesale the pies at \$2 apiece, and restaurants sell them at 60 to 85 cents a slice, eight slices per pie.

The profit margin is high, and there's an additional advantage for the retailer. The pies are delivered frozen and are plunked into the restaurant's freezer. To serve, a slice is cut and heated in the oven. The pie goes back into the freezer. There is never any waste, as with ordinary pies, which may have to be thrown out after a day or two.

**THE KERNS' WORKROOM**, separate from their own kitchen in compliance with state regulations, is a 15-foot-square carpeted patio that their son-in-law walled in.

The Kerns make the dough for their pie crusts, but have a woman come in once a week to roll them. The crusts are placed in pie tins, stacked up with wax paper between, and put into a freezer. They are taken out and filled on the two days a week that baking is done.

The Kerns say there is no secret to their crusts. "Anybody who can pick up a can of shortening can make pie crust the same way we do," Kern said. "If they'll adhere to the instructions that are on there, that's all that's necessary."

As for the filling, that's a secret. English walnuts, yes, and chocolate chips, but beyond that it's anybody's guess. And some guesses have been pretty wild.

"We've even had people say there's corn flakes in it, and prunes, and I don't know what all," Mrs. Kern said. (Hint: there's no corn syrup in it, either.)

The walnuts are bought in 3-pound cans, and the Kerns meticulously sort through the

nuts, spreading them out on the plywood table and removing any pieces of shell. The walnuts are then put through a grinder.

**ON BAKING DAYS**, the crusts are removed from the freezer and allowed to thaw before the filling is put in. Then it's into the oven for 35 minutes, half at the top of the oven and the last 17½ minutes on the bottom. This is to insure even baking. It would not be necessary if the Kerns had a regular baker's oven with a fan to circulate the air.

Then the pies are allowed to cool on the rack for about three hours before being frozen.

But it is eaten into quickly around Derby time when demand for the pies increases.

So the Kerns are kept hopping. But they're not complaining.

"It's been a blessing in disguise that we've been able to maintain ourselves and keep going," Kern said. "Any time you get to our age and don't have something to keep you busy, you're in trouble."

"The feeling that you're needed, I think that makes you want to go on," said Mrs. Kern.



STAFF PHOTOS BY MICHAEL COORS

**Leandra Kern sets a pie on the cooling rack where it sits for three hours before being frozen.**