



# CHANGING THE WORLD, ONE BITE AT A TIME

About 25 miles south of Boston is the township of East Walpole—population just under 5,000 as of 2020. The little town has a bit of a storied history. It has been around since 1647, when a prospector filed a mine claim on a plot of land. As more settlers moved into the territory, a sawmill was built, then a settlement, and 77 years later, in 1724, Walpole was officially incorporated by the Massachusetts General Court (Massachusetts' legislature established by the Massachusetts Bay Colony).<sup>1</sup>

Walpole was one of the first communities to defy the British Crown and the Intolerable Acts, and its Minutemen were on the front lines at Concord, Lexington, Bunker Hills, and many other key battles of the American Revolutionary War.<sup>2</sup> By 1870, it had its very own high school, and in 1878, it had its first newspaper, the *Walpole Enterprize*.<sup>3</sup> Over the next 25 years, the town survived cholera, malaria, scarlet fever, and several other epidemics, watched train tracks and telephone poles move into the area, and created a water works department to supply water to the town.<sup>4</sup>

Then, in 1903, two, very important things happened. In May, Walpole dedicated its public library.<sup>5</sup> One month later, baby Ruth Jones Graves was born.<sup>6</sup>

Very little is known about Ruth's parents or her early years. But, we do know that, when Ruth was 7 years old, she and her mother, Helen Vesta Jones, moved about 10 miles south to Easton, where her mother's family lived.<sup>7</sup> We also know that her family was very committed to her education. Although Ruth's mother died when she was young, Ruth's grandparents stepped in to raise her, and at the age of 17, Ruth graduated from Oliver Ames High School—named after the business man who funded the construction of the public high school.<sup>8</sup> Public-private partnership in education is nothing new.

Four years later, Ruth was graduating from the Framingham State Normals School—the first, public college dedicated to training teachers in standardized methods of education.<sup>9</sup> Framingham also just so happened to be one of the first public colleges to enroll both women and African American students.<sup>10</sup> For the next couple of years, she taught at the local high school, worked in the local hospital as a dietician, and began lecturing on food and how to prepare it.<sup>11</sup>

After she married Kenneth Wakefield, Ruth and her husband bought a 100-year-old house in Whitman, Massachusetts, about thirteen miles away, and they turned it into a restaurant and inn.<sup>12</sup> The house sat on an old toll road, where travelers once stopped to eat a meal while their stagecoach drivers paid whatever tolls or taxes were required.<sup>13</sup> So, they called it the Toll House Inn.<sup>14</sup>

It was 1929. Little did they know that, only a few months later, the stock market would crash, and America would find itself in the Great Depression. If jobs, food, and money were scarce, happiness and hope were even more so. Ruth and Kenneth were the owners of a 7-table restaurant and inn at a time when very few could afford to travel or eat out. As head chef, Ruth decided to try something new. She figured out how to make delicious meals, and she served them on the finest china—all for only \$1.00.<sup>15</sup> For \$1.00, people could put aside their sadness over what they had lost and fear of the future and just enjoy the simple pleasure of a good meal.

It worked. Ruth's reputation for ingenuity, tasty recipes, and dishing out a side of hope with each meal got around. By the time the Great Depression ended nine years later, the Toll House Inn restaurant

had grown from 7 tables to 60, Ruth had published a cookbook: *Ruth Wakefield's Tried and True Recipes*,<sup>16</sup> and thousands of people had been fed—body and soul. But, Ruth was not done, yet.

In 1938, she and her kitchen assistant, Sue Brides were in the kitchen making cookies. They were looking for something different to add to Ruth's already famous (at least regionally) pecan drop cookie dough.<sup>17</sup> Ruth's friend, Andrew Nestlé, had given her a few bars of semi-sweet chocolate, which were stashed away in the cupboard. Ruth and Sue chopped the bars up into tiny pieces, and then stirred them into the cookie dough.<sup>18</sup> They expected the chocolate to melt and flavor the rest of the cookie, but it didn't. And so, the Nestlé Toll House chocolate chip cookie was born.

Yes, the iconic cookie was born in 1938, but other than guests at the Toll House Inn, not that many people knew about it at first. Then, WWII started, and people started sending the cookies in care packages to the American soldiers stationed abroad.<sup>19</sup> The soldiers shared their treats, and soon, soldiers across the U.S. were writing home asking their families to send more cookies.<sup>20</sup> So, families started writing Ruth to ask for her recipe.<sup>21</sup>

Ruth did what most would find unthinkable. She sold the recipe to the Nestlé company for \$1.00 and a lifetime supply of Nestlé chocolate. Nestlé put the recipe on its semi-sweet chocolate bars and then bags of chips, and that is where it lives to this day.<sup>22</sup> That way, everyone could make Ruth's cookies for their loved one across the ocean. In 1967, Ruth and Kenneth sold the Toll House Inn, and Ruth died 10 years later in 1977.<sup>23</sup>

Ruth Graves Wakefield may be known for creating the Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookie, but in reality, her impact was much broader. She brought hope. During the country's worst economic downturn, she reminded people that not all was lost. During the darkness of World War II, she sent a reminder of the good things in life. And, then she gave others the ability to do the same. She made things better—one bite at a time.

1 Walpole, Massachusetts, Historical Timeline of Walpole, <https://www.walpole-ma.gov/library/pages/historical-timeline-of-walpole>, last visited July 4, 2022; Massachusetts General Court pp. 3-4 (2020), available at [https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/collection-guides/FA\\_CT.pdf](https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/collection-guides/FA_CT.pdf)

2 Historical Timeline of Walpole, supra n. 1.

3 *Id.*

4 *Id.*

5 *Id.*

6 Geaneanet, Ruth Jones Graves, <https://gw.geneanet.org/tdowling?lang=en&n=graves&oc=0&p=ruth+jones>, last visited July 4, 2022.

7 Easton Historical Society, 11 Mechanic Street, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/historicalimagesofeastonma/17867675611/in/photostream>, last visited July 4, 2022.

8 *Id.* Tammy Jo Eckhart, Herstory, Thank Her for Chocolate Chip Cookies, <https://www.monroecountynow.org/blog/2021/6/17/thank-her-for-chocolate-chip-cookies>, last visited July 4, 2022; Buildings of New England, Oliver Ames High School (Nov. 4, 2020), <https://buildingsofnewengland.com/2020/11/04/oliver-ames-high-school-1896>, last visited July 4, 2022.

9 Sam Roberts, Overlooked No More, Ruth Wakefield, Who Invented the Chocolate Chip Cookie, New York Times, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/obituaries/overlooked-ruth-wakefield.html>.

10 Framingham State University, FSU History – Part 1, <https://www.framingham.edu/academics/henry-whittemore-library/special-collections-archives/university-history/history-part1>, last visited July 4, 2022.

11 Roberts, supra n. 9.

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