

FOOD PATTERNS OF AUSTRALIANS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

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There is little published information on the food patterns of Australians during the 19th and early 20th century. Scattered information exists in a variety of books including recipe books, in newspapers and in the reports of some physicians of the time. For example, Dr. Philip Muskett reported that a large amount of meat (264 pounds/head/year) was eaten with boiled potatoes and boiled cabbage, while little fish or salad were consumed. The only other source of information about earlier food patterns in Australia are those Australians alive today who still remember the food eaten during their school days.

Australians over the age of 76 years were contacted through the local newspaper and clubs for the elderly, and if they were willing to provide the necessary information were subsequently interviewed at their homes. The interview took the form of a discussion about the foods consumed based on a number of questions relating to meal patterns, method of preparation and factors affecting the availability of foods. Their responses were recorded on tape and the tapes will be kept for future reference.

So far, 30 elderly people have been interviewed and some preliminary analysis of the data has been carried out. Table 1 shows those foods which were mentioned by all of the subjects as having formed part of their diet. The information is given separately for subjects from urban and rural areas, to illustrate the differences between them.

TABLE 1. Food items mentioned by all subjects from urban and rural areas (except where shown)

Food groups	Urban	Rural
Fresh meat	Mutton	(94%) Beef, mutton, chicken
Salad vegetables	Beetroot, tomato	(94%) Lettuce
Cooked vegetables	Cabbage, carrot, onion, parsnip, potato	Carrot, parsnip, potato
Fresh fruit	Apple	Apple, plum
Grains	Oat, barley, rice	Oat, rice
Fats	Beef, mutton, dripping and suet	Beef dripping
Dairy	Fresh milk, butter	Fresh milk, butter
Beverage	Cocoa, milk	Cocoa

No single source of fresh meat or salad vegetables was mentioned by all the subjects from the rural areas. This suggests the availability of a greater variety of such items to this group. On the other hand, foods mentioned by urban subjects tended to be items that could be easily transported or those which kept better.

The types of food eaten were very much dependent on availability but a general pattern of consumption was common to subjects who grew up in rural and urban areas.

MUSKETT, P.E. (1893) "The Art of Living in Australia". (Eyre and Spottiswoode : London).

PEARL, C (1974). "Australia's Yesterdays" (Reader's Digest Services : Sydney).

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