

Provisioning: A food journey in Sydney town in 1820 2024

In what follows I have taken the liberty of collapsing together items from several newspapers and across the two colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.

I've got guests coming to early supper tonight. So today will be spent provisioning for supper and also some of my larder foodstuffs need replenishing. This is the provisioning plan.

First things first. Off to John Moses, Bread and Biscuit Baker, and Confectioner who sells exceptional 'Loaf Bread, at 3½d per Loaf'.¹ I'll have to get in early to get a couple of loaves. He may also have some drop biscuits I can buy and scoff during the day. And yes, they are what they sound like, biscuit batter dropped on a hot surface.

Then to the market at Sydney Cove. There will as usual be 'boats down from Kissing Point with maize, potatoes, fruit, vegetables and poultry.'² There may be some tomatoes and pumpkin or beans. I know where there is a patch of native greens, the one's that taste a little like spinach, which I will forage. I might also get some leaves from the native sarsaparilla nearby and make tea to have before supper. There was an interesting article in *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* last week describing the wide range of fruits now being cultivated in the colony. Listed were: the Lisbon and common lemon, small round and large oval citrons; limes; Brazil and Java shaddocks; apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, apricots, cherries, and plums; table grapes; quinces are of two kinds, viz. the common or Austrian; and the clustered flowered or Japanese; walnut, sweet chestnut, and medlar; the black Italian, Tartarian, white or Chinese, and Cape mulberry; gooseberries and strawberries.³ I was astonished by the variety as you might imagine. Not half of them come to market which is disappointing. I will get whatever is freshest and in season.

George Marshall, Cook, Pastrycook, and Confectioner advertises that 'he has now commenced making his usual winter supplies of Soups, which will consist of Mock Turtle, Ox-tail, Gravy, and Mulligatawny, made without reference to any thing but quality'.⁴ Heaven only knows what he means by that unless he means cost. I will order mulligatawny for tonight's dinner. He also has some Mock Turtle for tasting. I know it's popular, but I remain unconvinced.

Marshall is running a '£20 Lottery to be drawn for on the 5th Jan. The principal prizes are one two guinea cake, three one guinea ditto, and ten half guinea ditto. Also, 34 Prizes of one pound of comfits, value 6s each. All blanks will receive half a pound of comfits, which will insure the buyers of tickets the full value of their money. Tickets. 3s each to be had at the Shop'. He will 'also exhibit a superior collection of cakes on the above day'. I'll be in that.

Mrs. Campbell, Pastrycook and Confectioner 'has just received a large quantity of Oranges and Lemons, of a superior quality, having been only five days on the passage, and which will be sold on the most reasonable terms'. So that's one fruit I don't have to get at the market. Fresh oranges will go down well as a palate cleanser after the mulligatawny.⁵

¹ 'John Moses', *The Tasmanian* 8 November 1827 p.1

² Kingston, Beverly, *Basket, Bag and Trolley. A history of shopping in Australia* Oxford University Press 1994 p.7

³ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 22 April 1824 p.2

⁴ 'Soups a la Birch.', *The Austral- Asiatic Review, Tasmanian and Australian Advertiser* 26 March 1839 p.3

⁵ 'Oranges and Lemons', *Colonial Times* 22 April 1834 p.8

Time for lunch. I noted that Rosetta Stabler has opened a New Eating and Chop House, though it's just that she has moved premises. She puts on boiled mutton and broth for lunch at noon each day which I will welcome with all the walking I am going to do today.⁶ She advertises that she 'continues to Sell Dressed Victuals at the same reasonable rate as usual.'⁷ I'll see what she has suitable for dinner – maybe some wild duck or maybe one of her roast joints of meat 'dressed in the English way' for which she has a reputation.

Now to sweets. F. Girard, Baker and Confectioner advertises an 'Assortment of Preserves of superior Quality - Quinces, Nectarines do. and Peaches do'. He also advertises 'Pastry of all descriptions supplied at the shortest Notice'. I'll order a preserved quince tart and have it delivered.⁸ John Hedger, Pastry Cook and Confectioner, makes excellent Blancmanges so I will order one of those also.⁹

After lunch I will check out the 'nice little well-furnished Parlour always ready for private parties for Luncheon, Dinner, etc., on moderate terms' at F. Durand's for a small dinner next week to celebrate my birthday. He's recently added Baker and Confectioner to his business as a Provisioner and 'now pledges himself to pursue the same assiduity which formerly gained him so liberal a share of public patronage'.¹⁰ He may be over-reaching.

Now to the task of stocking the larder. First off to J. Tawell, Apothecary, for spices. All the Apothecaries sell spices as well as 'The general variety of drugs and chemicals'. Tawell advertises that he sells the best fine nutmegs, mace, cinnamon, cloves, allspice, ginger pepper, ground ginger, and ground spices; English caraway and coriander seeds.¹¹ He also has excellent curry powder.¹² I'll get some of that and some of pretty much all the spices. I get these in small amounts to keep their flavour and potency. Tawell, as other Apothecaries in the colony, is a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Society of Apothecaries. He undertook his training in London. He must be doing well. He published an advertisement for a suitably qualified Apprentice to Pharmacy, and manufacturing Chemistry for 5 years.¹³ Tawell has my family prescription for a recurring bowel problem, which I will get filled. I'll also pick up some lavender water and hair oil.

I note that Stephen Bax, Cook and Confectioner, has received by the *Pyramus* and *Swiftsure* some goods he says he will 'sell lower than any other House in Sydney'. He has some preserved ginger and dried fruits - apples, apricots, and pears, that I will get while the price is low, re-hydrate them, put them up with some syrup and keep them to add to my breakfast porridge.¹⁴ He also advertises that he makes my favourite Queen cake – currants, nutmeg, brandy added to a basic cake batter. I will order one for my birthday.

Then to J. White, Lamp Contractor and Oilman who is advertising that 'he has laid in a stock of the most pure oil ever brought into Port Jackson'.¹⁵ I am guessing he means salad or olive oil. He also has 'oil of an inferior kind, at a low price, which he cannot recommend to his customers'. I will go with his

⁶ 'New Eating and Chop Shop', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 3 July 1803 p.3

⁷ 'New Eating Shop', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 3 July 1803 p.4

⁸ 'F. Girard, Baker and Confectioner', *The Monitor* 19 July 1837 p.2

⁹ 'John Hedger', *The True Colonist Van Diemen's Land Political Dispatch and Agricultural and Commercial...* 6 May 1836 p.3

¹⁰ 'F. Durand', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 15 August 1833 p.3

¹¹ 'J. Tawell, Apothecary', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 15 December 1821 p.1

¹² 'J. Malcolm', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 21 May 1887 p.1

¹³ 'Wanted an Apprentice', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 29 November 1822 p.2

¹⁴ 'On Sale At Stephen Bax's', *The Sydney Monitor* 27 July 1825 p.3

¹⁵ 'J. White, Lamp Contractor and Oilman', *The Australian* 28 April 1830 p.1

recommended oil, pricey though it may be, my guests deserve the best oil on their salad. I will get some lamp oil also for 3s per gallon. I will ask him to come and have a look at my domestic lighting which perhaps could be improved by his 'newly invented reflectors' whatever they are. I'll drop in at John Paul's oilman's store and pick up some Durham mustard, mixed pickles and capers, all superior to what I can get at White's.¹⁶ Thompson's is best for brandy, rum, Hollands, and Madeira wine.¹⁷ I will get some Madeira for tonight and some brandy of which I am very fond. I can't wait till those experimenting with grapes for wine here come up with a local wine.

I'll hire a carter to have all the goods taken to my home. I'll end the provisioning with a cup of Rosetta Stabler's excellent coffee. It will give me time do a check to see I have got everything I need. I will also undoubtedly have bought non-dinner items that caught my eye.

Then home to rest further till five o'clock when I will begin preparing for the supper. The bought dishes are to arrive at five-thirty with the guests scheduled to arrive at six-thirty. I just may have to crack open the Madeira.

¹⁶ 'John Paul', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 26 May 1832 p.3

¹⁷ 'C. Thompson' *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 16 December 1815 p.2