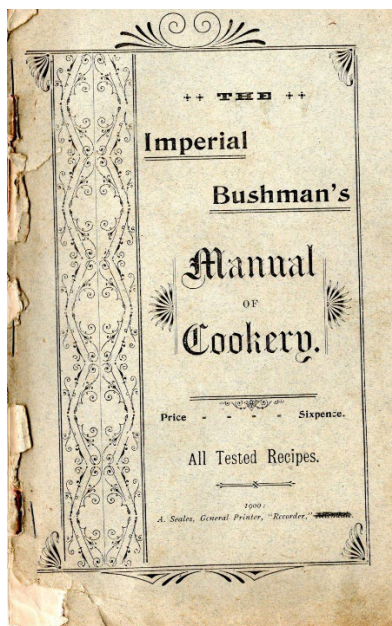


The Imperial Bushman's Manual of Cookery 1900: Looking for answers

I recently came into possession of this cookbook that has left me with questions that have gone unanswered in the websites for the Imperial Bushman Contingents in the Boer War, in the National Library of Australia, or in Trove the national digital repository for newspapers, magazines and journals. And it is not listed in Hoyle's index of Australian cookery books.



My copy as you can see is very fragile. All the pages are there, the worse for wear, but not showing any signs of having been used in a kitchen – no stains or splotches, no penned comments. Curiously there are new staples along its spine. The person from whom I purchased it knew nothing of its provenance – nor I think of its scarcity.

Who were the Imperial Bushmen?

I cite here from Lt Col P L Murray's 1911 '*Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*' accessed at www.angloboerwar.com.

LIKE the " Citizen's Bushmen's " Contingent in New South Wales, this corps was largely subscribed for by the public. It was resolved that, in lieu of drawing the men exclusively from the local forces, a class of Australian yeomen and bushmen should be obtained ; hardy riders, straight shots, accustomed to find their way about in difficult country, and likely to make an expert figure in the vicissitudes of such a campaign as was being conducted. There was an enormous number of candidates for enlistment. Those selected were, practically, untrained in military no less than 230 being farmers, or connected with that industry. They were selected by a committee, and passed a strict test in riding and shooting ; as also, of course, medical examination.

What was the book?

All I can gather from the book is that it was printed in 1900 by A. Seales, General Printer in Allendale Victoria.

It is mainly a contributory cook book, that is, it is for the most part recipes from individuals, in this case as in most from women. There is nothing to tell me how the callout for recipes was made and who collected the recipes and organised them into a book. Usually, these kinds of cookbooks are put together by members of a community or church group to raise funds for some project or other.

The Bushman's book sold for sixpence but is silent as to what purpose. The inside front cover and both sides of the back cover are full page advertisements for businesses, and I imagine they paid for these and that the monies went to the production of the book or towards its purpose. There is nothing in any of the advertisement that refers to the purpose of the book. I suspect it was to raise funds for some project or purpose.

There is no introduction or foreword. The recipes start directly on page 1. Again, this is unusual as contributory books like this usually have some statement about the book and its creation and sometimes there is also a note of commendation of the book and the project from some notable person.

What about the recipes?

There are 11 recipes for Meats and Poultry one of which is for pigeon, the only native animal mentioned other than 2 for Fish and 1 for oysters; 5 for Soups; 18 Puddings; 52 for Cakes, Biscuits, &c; 10 for Pickles and Sauces; 9 for Jams and Jellies; and 21 Miscellaneous. The recipes are no different to what is found in other contributors cookery books of the time, e.g. *Cookery book of good and tried receipts* Compiled by the Women's Missionary Association of the New South Wales Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1895. It has its share of recipes for offal and curries. The manual claims that they are "All Tested Recipes" as do other cookbooks of the time.

One thing is clear it was not a cookery book handed out to members of the Bushman contingents to take with them to make dishes in camp. They all require ingredients from the shelves of the colonial kitchen which it would be sheer cumbersome to carry in the field, ditto cooking implements, and the methods of preparation need a stove and oven and absolutely need a dedicated cook - and they need time. A look at the formal positions of members of the contingent shows no designated cook.

This adds to my belief that the book was sold in Australia to raise funds for some project related to the Bushmen. How it was sold I can't guess at. How many were printed and sold I also cannot guess. The timing of the book is interesting. 1900 was the year immediately before the colonies federated to form Australia. I imagine that is why the contingents are called Imperial and not Australian as they would be in the First World War. I find it particularly interesting for the one recipe that as far as I am aware of was produced in no other cookbook at the time or since.

National Cake

WHITE PART: Cream together 1 cup of white sugar and half a cup of butter, then add half a cup of sweet milk, the beaten whites of 4 eggs, half a cup of cornstarch, 1 cup of flour into which has been mixed 1 teaspoonful of cream of tartar, and half a teaspoon of soda. Flavour with essence of lemon. BLUE PART: Cream together 1 cup of blue sand sugar, half a cup butter, add 2 cups of sweet milk, the beaten whites of four eggs, 2 cups flour in which mix 1 teaspoonsful cream of tartar, and half a teaspoonful of soda. (No flavour). RED PART: Cream together 1 cup of red sugar and a half a cup of butter, then add half a cup of sweet milk, the beaten whites of four eggs, and 2 cups flour in which mix half a teaspoonful of cream of tartar, and half a teaspoonful of soda. (No flavour). Place in the bake pan first the red, then the white, then the blue. Bake in a moderate oven – A.R.

What now?

I am posting this article on websites on the off-chance that someone knows more of the book.