

The Classic Aussie Burger (CAB). An incomplete history.

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Order a hamburger with the lot at a café in Australia and you can expect to get a round white bread roll, halved to contain a minced beef patties, a fried egg, a slice of cheese, a slice of pineapple, a strip of bacon, sauteed onions, slices of tomato, slices of beetroot, lettuce, mustard if you ask for it and a sauce of your choice (tomato or barbecue usually). How did all this get into the Classic Aussie Burger (CAB)?

Received wisdom is that it was 'the Americans' who introduced Australians to the hamburger.

Australian hamburger sightings started during the '30s: a by-product, no doubt, of our blossoming post-first world war relationship with America.¹

The hamburger is really a rissole made with fresh meat (and this recipe has no egg for binding), but it is the way it is served that is so typically American. Australians who came into contact with Americans during the [second World War] war learned that! Place [the pattie] ... between toasted buns. Garnish with slices of raw onion, tomato, pickle, relish, catsup, mustard or a combination of any of these.²

Neville Friedlander writing in 1946 persuasively identifies the specific time – 1934, and the specific individual - an unnamed 'American steward [who] severed his ties with the sea, rented moderate quarters near the site of Mick Simmons' store in George-street' and began to make American style hamburgers ... Three ounces of meat and seasoning which splattered onto the heated plate ... launched the hamburger steak on its Australia-wide tour of popularity'.³

On the early departure of the American steward, local entrepreneurs entered the market and soon 'hamburger stalls began to mushroom throughout the city'.⁴ By 1935 bakers had created the sweet round bun on which to serve the hamburger.⁵

How did the go-withs end up in the CAB?

Beginning with this recipe for 'Hamburgh Steak' from Harriet Wicken's *Kingswood Cookery Book* of 1888 recipes were published for flattened minced meat with various additions all of which ended up on the CAB

Hamburgh Steak
1 lb steak
1 gill milk
½ teaspoon mixed Sweet Herbs
2 oz butter
Pepper and Salt

¹ Veenhuyzen, Max, 'Burgers with beetroot: a great Australian dish', *The Guardian* 24 January 2014

² 'American Hamburger', *Chronicle* 5 August 1954 p.34

³ Friedlander, Neville, The Humble Hamburger's Formula is Secret, *The Sun* 4 September 1946 p.4

⁴ Friedlander

⁵ Friedlander

Mince the steak or put it through a sausage machine; mix thoroughly the seasoning and make into a paste with the milk; form into a flat cake and fry in hot butter. Serve with mashed potatoes.⁶

Think of this as one big plain hamburger pattie. Next is this 1930 Luncheon Recipe which adds tomatoes and onions.

Luncheon Recipe

A lady sends the following recipe for making a tasty lunch for five at the small cost of 1/8½⁷. Take two pounds of seasoned mince, 1lb. ripe tomatoes, 1lb onions, and two cups of bread crumbs. Make the mince into patty cakes, roll in flour, and place in a greased baking dish; cut onions into thin slices, place on top of patties, add a layer of sliced tomato and lastly a layer of bread crumbs, pepper and salt. Continue until dish is full, then drop pieces of butter or good beef dripping on top of bread crumbs. Bake in a moderate oven twenty minutes.⁸

It is a layered baked affair so quite different in form to the CAB. More like the CAB is this 1940 recipe for Hamburgers with Onion.

Hamburgers with Onion Rings

1 lb minced steak with breadcrumbs, parsley, suet, and season with salt and pepper. Shape into round flat cakes with seasoned flour, and cook on hot greased griddle or frying pan. or under heated griller, turning once to cook both sides evenly. When golden brown, serve -with peeled thinly sliced onion rings fried in heated fat or clarified butter.⁹

For other than the baked version we don't know how these domestic rissoles/burgers were plated, but I'm thinking they literally were plated. Or were they served between slices of toast as in this recipe?

Beef Hamburger

Mix some chopped beef with a few breadcrumbs and enough egg to make into stiff paste. Brown in a pan of hot fat, flattening while browning. Serve between hot toast, garnished with tomato and lettuce. This may be lightly browned, if desired.¹⁰

This recipe doesn't qualify fully in this journey as it uses egg to bind the meat, but it does introduce lettuce into the ingredient mix.

This next recipe I want to look at in 1947 adds pineapple and bacon to the mix.

Hawaiian Dish For Luncheon

No coupons are required for this Hawaiian luncheon dish, which gives a tasty combination of flavours. Allow for each person 1 slice of peeled pineapple, 1 slice of tomato, 1 slice of bacon and 2 heaped tablespoons of sausage meat. Put the sausage meat—flavoured with salt and pepper—in a saucepan over a low heat to cook for 10 minutes. This will remove excess fat. When slightly cooled, shape into patties to fit each slice of pineapple. On top of this place a slice of

⁶ Wicken, H.F. *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, 1888. p.155

⁷ 1 shilling and 81/2

⁸ 'Luncheon Recipe' My Pet Economy, *The Dandenong Journal* 18 September 1930 p.98

⁹ 'Hamburgers with Onion Rings' Recipes Worth Trying, *Narrandera Argus and Riverina Advertiser* 29 March 1940 p.6

¹⁰ 'Beef Hamburger' Cookery Nook, *The Farmer and the Settler* 1 June 1939 p.19

tomato and a strip of bacon. Put on a greased tray and place under a hot griller for five minutes. Garnish with parsley and serve hot.¹¹

Peeling a fresh pineapple would have been a labour of love. Happily, in the same year, 'Golden Circle' began canning pineapples. It became the largest fruit canner in Australia with its canned pineapple being added to everything from hamburgers to cakes.

Another stream in the hamburger story was the cheeseburger. Recipes I came across for cheeseburgers usually added the cheese to the mince before making the patty. This one in 1954 deploys the cheese as it used in the CAB.

For the housewife on a budget, mince steak is the answer if you want to serve an economical, appetising dinner dish. Try these tasty mince hamburgers which are sandwiched together with cheese and tomato.

Ingredients: 2lb. minced steak, 1 large onion, 1 ½ level teaspoons salt, level teaspoon each pepper, nutmeg, 1 egg seasoned flour, 2 tomatoes, slices of cheese.

Method: Make sure minced meat is finely cut – If necessary put through the mincer twice. Grate peeled onion, add to minced meat with salt, pepper, nutmeg, and beaten egg. Mix all well together. Form into round patties, using the seasoned flour. Heat little dripping in frying pan, fry burgers (turning a couple of times during cooking) until well browned and quite cooked. Remove burgers from pan, pour off fat, add thinly sliced tomatoes, pepper, and salt. Fry until heated through. Serve burgers in pairs with a slice of cheese and tomato between each.¹²

The cheese here was likely to have been a block of Kraft processed cheese¹³. Slicing it must have been arduous. It wasn't until 1959 that processed cheese slices were in the market.¹⁴

What is still missing are the fried egg and beetroot. In 1947 the *Telegraph* published this recipe:

Hamburgers

An appetising dish for breakfast these cold mornings is hamburgers. Serve on rounds of crisp buttered toast and garnish with fried parsley. Mrs. J. Sim, 84 Thomas Street, Torwood. who sent in the recipe, wins to-day's prize in "The Telegraph" competition.

How to make them: Rounds of bread, ½ lb. mince steak, salt and pepper, 1 large onion, 2 tomatoes. Flavour mince steak with salt and pepper. Make into flat round cakes. Dry fry, turning frequently from 10 to 15 minutes. Fry the onion until soft and a golden brown. Toast the rounds of bread, spread with a little butter. Place the meet cakes on toast and cover with a little of the onion, then with slice of tomato, flavoured with salt and pepper and a little sugar. A fried egg may be added to each hamburger.¹⁵

I couldn't find any recipes where beetroot nuzzled up to a meat pattie in the kitchen. It may have evaded the kitchen and gone straight to the hamburger in the early 1940's.¹⁶

¹¹ 'Hawaiian Dish For Luncheon' Special Recipe, *The Telegraph* 29 November 1947 p.4

¹² Recipe of the Week, *Queensland Times* 24 May 1954 p.4

¹³ Farrer, Keith, *To Feed a Nation*, CSIRO Publishing 2005 p.99

¹⁴ Farrer, Keith, *To Feed a Nation*, CSIRO Publishing 2005 p.169

¹⁵ 'Hamburgers' Recipe Competition, *The Telegraph* 10 July 1946 p.4

¹⁶ Veenhuyzen, Max, 'Burgers with beetroot: a great Australian dish', *The Guardian* 24 January 2014

How did the go-withs get into the CAB from the kitchen? I imagine a hamburger vendor sitting down to a meal of a beef pattie with one or other of the go-withs and liking the combination, trying it out at the stall and depending on the reaction from customers either giving it a miss or making it optional like mustard and sauce. Word of mouth from satisfied customers brings people to the vendor seeking it out. It becomes a standard part of the vendor's menu. Other vendors noticing it start providing it also. It becomes a market-wide expected option. Combinations multiply till one day a customer asks for 'the lot'. The CAB is born.