

No ordinary custard. Ice Cream in Australia 1839 - 1939

February 2025

I couldn't resist it.

The GG

Chocolate ice cream dipped in milk chocolate, malted milk crumb, salted caramel + raspberry.¹

I've been writing a lot lately about iconic food in Australia or nearly so and my attention was immediately turned by this toward ice creams. From the first bite of a Lime Splice to the above ice creams have been a part of my life until recently when I was diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Relishing the GG was some kind of redress for the wrongness of this. This article is another.

Part 1. The commercial production of ice cream

In 1839 the first shipment of ice arrived in the colony cut from the lakes in Boston, USA. While 150 tons were lost through melting there was evidently sufficient to begin the ice business and so the ice cream business.

DUNSDON

FOR the very liberal patronage he has received during the past week, in his humble efforts to please his Patrons in the flavour of his ICES, begs to return his most grateful acknowledgments, and refers to the undermentioned list, which will be ready every day as named, should no unforeseen accident occur ; he also respectfully informs his Friends, that he has had every-day experience for years, in Bath and Cheltenham; therefore, to challenge competition would be superfluous for variety or quality.

MONDAY— Parfait l'Amour

Strawberry Cream

TUESDAY— Ginger Cream

Raspberry ditto

WEDNESDAY— Punch a la Romain

Raspberry & Currant Cream

THURSDAY— Chocolate Cream

Currant Water

FRIDAY— Raspberry Cream

Lemon Water

SATURDAY— Orange Water

Strawberry Cream

N.B.— Rough ice for cooling wine by the pound, every day.²

Over the next decades other ice cream businesses were established. Fast forward to the turn of the century. J. W. Huggal under a provocative headline - LUXURIES ! LUXURIES ! - informed the public that 'having purchased an Ice Machine ... He will now be able to supply Iced Creams and Jellies of the best qualities'.³ J. Webb told his friends and supporters that 'having imported a Masters Patent Freezing Machine for the rapid and economical production of CREAM and WATER ICES, ... with twelve months' supply of the patentee's FREEZING MIXTURE', he could 'supply the public with Water ices and Ice Creams at the shortest notice'.⁴

¹ Menu, Imperial Hotel, Clifton 2024, GG is Golden Gaytime an Australian iconic ice cream.

² 'Dunsdon', *The Sydney Herald* 2 February 1839 p.1

³ 'Luxuries! Luxuries! *South Australian Gazette and Mining Journal* 23 December 1848 p.1

⁴ 'Ices' *The Courier* 27 January 1849 p.1

Over the next years more ice cream manufacturers would be established. J. P. Sennit and Son in 1905 'installed in their extensive freezing works on the Yarra Bank a complete plant for its manufacture, and are now ready to supply in any quantity the purest and best ice cream ever offered to the public'.⁵ The Blue Bell Ice Cream Company, in East Perth said 'shopkeepers dealing in ice creams will find it much to their advantage to be supplied regularly from this factory and so save the trouble of making their own ... Those who intend giving a party or a social should get their ice cream from here'.⁶ Peter's Ice Cream, one of the two brands that would dominate the Australian ice cream market, established in 1907 was already expanding its business regionally in 1916.⁷ Street's, the other leading brand, began production in 1920.⁸

In 1962 10 vans were freighted to Australia from England to begin vending the soft serve ice cream Mr Whippy in the streets of Australia.⁹ It was not the first ice cream street vendor. In 1885 'A Sufferer' wrote to the *Evening News*:

Is there a law in Sydney to silence those fiends who, with their horns, create such blood-curdling, nerve-shattering, brain splitting who, to the terror of horses, sleeping children, and invalids, blow their instruments of physical and mental torture through the streets of the city and suburbs. I refer to the vendors of ice cream and think, as I'm sure others do, that the law (if there is any) should be put in force to abate the nuisance.¹⁰

It wasn't long after Mr Whippy began trading that the sound of 'Greensleeves' on high rotation would take over the role of after-school and week-end nuisance.

Part 2 Making ice cream at home

The woman who makes her own ice cream knows what she is eating. Ice cream is an inexpensive dessert, and costs less when made at home than it does when bought at the manufacturers. It used to take hours and hours to make and freeze ice cream now it can be made and served in an hour.¹¹

The freezer

Most recipes prior to the mid-1940s made ice cream using a 'freezer'. There were two ways to do this. Both consisted of two containers one fitting inside the other and holding the custard mix, the outer container holding ice and salt to bring about the freezing. The principle on which they both operated is that the salt melted the ice thereby making a colder environment in which to freeze the custard. The proportions of salt to ice varied being either given in the recipe for the ice cream or the instructions that came with the freezer. The two were sometime layered and otherwise the salt was simply sprinkled over the ice depending on the recipe or the freezer instructions

To Use a Churn

Place the mixture to be frozen in the cream container. Fix it in the churn, place the wooden paddle in, cover securely. Then pack the ice and salt in layers round the container. Churn continuously until the mixture is dense and creamy. Remove the paddle. Again closely cover

⁵ Record 9 December 1905 p.2

⁶ The Daily News 25 March 1916 p.4

⁷ The Gloucester Advocate 16 February 1916 p.2

⁸ [Streets | Unilever](#)

⁹ '1962 Mr Whippy arrives in Australia', [Mr Whippy arrives in Australia - Australian food history timeline \(australianfoodtimeline.com.au\)](#)

¹⁰ 'Ice Cream Fiends', Public Complaints, *Evening News* 18 November 1885 p.6

¹¹ 'Making Ice Creams' Recipes, *The Capricornian* 10 February 1906 p.5

the cream, making sure that none of the salt can possibly come in contact with the cream. Cover with a clean, wet bag, and stand until the cream has frozen sufficiently. It may be necessary to pour off some of the water by removing the cork, or bung. If so, add more ice and salt, This method is heavy work compared to others, but the result is better. The cream always has a velvety, smooth texture.

There were differences in when additions should be made to the custard, some including them from the start of the freezer process others adding them during the freezing.

The earliest domestic patented freezer on the market I found was a Packer in 1879 which as indicated in the advertisement had been available for some years prior to 1879:

The superiority of the principles upon which the Packer freezers are constructed, and the popularity and success they have achieved during the many years they have been before the public, have earned for them a first-class reputation, and they have been awarded the highest premiums.¹²

The pitches for other freezers on the market give an insight into what the potential consumer may have had on their minds when shopping for one. 'Gem - It is simple in its mechanism and cheap. No one need be without one of these little luxuries.'¹³

These freezers all depended on having ice. I found a reference for a freezer which used chemicals – unidentified – wrapped in little packets promoted as the solution to those in country districts who could not access ice.¹⁴

For those who couldn't afford a freezer there were suggestions for making a freezer at home from existing material around the house or close at hand. Mrs Wilson had a suggestion using the humble billy can..

A Home Made Ice Cream Freezer

How many housewives, whose children ask for ice cream in the hot weather, would welcome the addition of a simple home-made freezer which can be put into action whenever we have a heat-wave, and will give a goodly supply of delicious ice cream at an hour's notice. Here is a simple method of making an efficient freezer.

Purchase from any grocer or confectioner a big round confectionery tin, and to it add a glass preserving jar, with rubber ring and screw top.

Prepare the ice cream mixture to any recipe you prefer; allow it to cool, and then put it in the glass jar, screwing the lid down firmly. Now place the jar in the centre of the tin and fill the tin with chopped ice and coarse salt in the proportion of one handful of salt to three of ice. Press the lid on the tin securely, and in three quarters of an hour the ice-cream is ready for use. "ENID."¹⁵

Innovations in freezers continued. In 1929 the Australian General Electric Company advertised that with its new freezer 'The old method of ice-cream making is reversed. Instead of treating the

¹² Illustrated Sydney News and New South Wales Agriculturalist and Grazier 14 June 1879 p.22

¹³ Daily Telegraph 5 November 1890 p.3

¹⁴ The Maitland Daily Mercury 24 November 1923 p.9

¹⁵ The Sydney Morning Herald 15 February 1934 p.4

mixture inside a container, this machine freezes it on the outside of a roller, and then scrapes it off'.¹⁶

The refrigerator

But the push of the refrigerator to take over the freezing duty in the home was relentless. The first recipe I found using a refrigerator is from 1932.

Ice Cream

Heat half pint milk in a double boiler with two heaped tablespoons sugar, beat yolk of one egg with one heaped teaspoon cornflower and a little cold milk. Stir into hot milk and cook 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Set aside to cool.

Dissolve one teaspoon powdered gelatine in one tablespoon cold water, and add to custard mixture. Whip half pint of cream till stiff, and add to custard with dessertspoon essence of vanilla. Freeze four hours in refrigerator tray, stirring thoroughly with a fork about every half hour.¹⁷

After 1939 no recipe I came across used a freezer to make ice cream at home.

Some recipes

The earliest published recipe I found for homemade ice cream was in 1864 from Edward Abbott's *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*.

Ice Cream

Put the cream into a pan, then stir in the sugar by degrees, and, when all is well mixed, strain through a sieve; put it into a tin that has a close cover, and set it in a tub. Fill the tub with ice broken in small pieces, and strew round the ice a quantity of salt, taking care that none of the salt gets to the cream. Scrape the cream down with a spoon, as it freezes round the edges of the tin; while the cream is freezing stir in gradually the lemon-juice or the pulp of a pint of mashed strawberries or raspberries. When it has frozen, dip the tin into lukewarm water, Take out the cream and fill the glasses.¹⁸

It's an unusual recipe as it isn't based in custard as most ice cream recipes of that time were. This is the earliest recipe found from an article in 1892 in the *Hay Standard and Advertiser for Balranald, Wentworth and Maude*. It also doesn't use a churner.

One quart rich milk, eight eggs— whites and yolks beaten separately and very light —four cups sugar, three pints rich sweet cream, five teaspoonfuls vanilla or other seasoning, or one vanilla bean broken in two, boiled in the custard and left till it is cold. Heat the milk almost to boiling, beat the yolks light, add the sugar and stir up well. Pour the hot milk into this a little at a time stirring all the while; put in the frothed whites, and return to the fire, boiling in a double boiler or a pail or saucepan set in a kettle of hot water. Stir the mixture steadily for about fifteen minutes, or until it is about as thick as boiled custard. Pour it into a bowl and set it aside to cool. When quite cold beat in the cream and flavoring,¹⁹

¹⁶ Evening News 17 December 1929 p.8

¹⁷The Dandenong Journal 21 January 1932 p.2

¹⁸ Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, London, 1864 p.109

¹⁹ Hay Standard and Advertiser for Balranald, Wentworth and Maude p.5

By 1892 making ice cream at home had become popular enough to warrant an article giving recipes for 'Chocolate Ice Cream', 'Plain Ice Cream', 'Strawberry Ice Cream', 'Coffee Ice Cream', 'Pineapple Ice Cream', 'Tutti Frutti Ice Cream', and 'Orange Ice'. Recipes for these also appeared in later publications. Other flavourings included mashed or pureed fruit sometimes rubbed through a sieve – strawberry, raspberry, banana; caramelised nuts - filberts in one recipe; peppermint from candy sticks; coffee - essence or a strong black cup; preserved ginger; canned crushed pineapple or chopped fresh apricots.

There was a recipe for Tea Ice Cream:

To every quart of the cream [the custard cream as made the usual way] add ½ pint of an infusion of the finest black tea, made very strong. When cold freeze as usual. When infusions of any kind are added to the custard it will be necessary to sweeten with extra sugar, otherwise the sweetness of the cream mustard will be reduced.²⁰

Alcohol was the feature ingredient in three recipes I found. This 1955 one used sherry.

Sherry Ice Cream

Ingredients: 1 ¾ cups milk, 5 tablespoons sugar, 3 tablespoons flour, 1 teaspoon salt, 2 eggs, ¼ cup sherry. Heat milk then add sugar, flour and salt stirring until a smooth substance. Beat one egg and one yolk together, stir this in and cook one minute. Add sherry and cool. Then beat egg white and fold into cold mixture and freeze.²¹

This recipe tweaks the method for the custard adding egg whites after freezing has begun. It also

Hints for improvements to ice cream were sometimes given along with the recipe.

One woman who makes delicious ice cream confided that she achieved the fine-grained, velvety smoothness, and the mysterious, delectable flavor by stirring mashed bananas into the ingredients before freezing. The proportion, she stated, is three bananas to the gallon of ice cream.²²

For variety add to the foundation custard when cold add a half cupful of pulped fruit, either fresh or canned. The fruit is best prepared by pressing through a potato ricer, colander or strainer. This separates the fruit into small particles, which blend with the custard, producing a smooth result free from hard frozen pieces of fruit. The pulped fruit may need extra sweetening or not, depending on whether it is fresh or canned in a sugar syrup.²³

Ice creams are much nicer if they are bedded down in ice and left so for an hour after they are made.²⁴

Always make mixtures which are to be frozen much sweeter than other mixtures. The sweet flavor seems to be lost considerably in the freezing.²⁵

²⁰ The Sun 29 January 1922 p.19

²¹ Harvey Murray Times 11 February 1955 p.15

²² Sunday Times 27 April 1934 p.8

²³ Northern Star 3 December 1924 p.12

²⁴ Wicken, H.F. *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, 1888 p.243

²⁵ Smith's Weekly 3 February 1934 p.20

Endnote

This has been a brief history of the first hundred years of ice cream in Australia from the wharves of Sydney to the domestic refrigerator. At the same time, it tracks the development of refrigeration.