

FOOD & RESTAURANTS

EVOLUTION OF DINING IN TASMANIA

When Tasmania's first legal public house opened in 1804, Hobart Town's population was 261 people, 195 of which were convicts. By 1818 there were twelve licensed inns and taverns in Hobart and three outside the town, of varying quality. By 1843 there were more than 160 public houses, taverns and inns, which serviced all coaching routes. However, not everyone was happy to have drinking establishments proliferate in Tasmania; with temperance (moderation) being a key issue by the 1850s.

To counter the public house, recreational facilities were established; and, in fact, Tasmania's first restaurants have their roots in the coffee houses and temperance hotels, which were created to provide an alternative to these often rowdy taverns.

In 1836, the Tasmanian Temperance Society took a pledge for abstinence (teetotalers) whilst the less extreme Launceston Temperance Society merely advocated against excessive drinking. In the 1840s, while many establishments were rough drinking houses, some offered lodging and a dining room.

The dining room of old was likely to be a communal table with little choice, and would unlikely be frequented by the upper classes. Yet, by the 1860s, things had changed drastically, and people were now frequenting licensed establishments to partake in the pleasure of the food. Despite this evolution, it was not until much later, in 1968, when the Martini in Burnie opened, that Tasmania had its first self-contained licensed restaurant. Why? It was actually the Licensed Victuallers' Society which, along with "other industry organisations that followed, ensured that if you wanted to dine with wine, you ate in a hotel."

There were, of course, many examples of unlicensed restaurants operating in Tasmania in the interim. Records show that in 1834 Mrs Jones' Coffee, Tea and Chop House was running in Hobart Town. Toward the end of the 19th Century, Temperance Houses were becoming more popular. They provided all the services of a hotel, also with dining rooms, but served no alcohol.

Until the 1960s, fine dining was limited to first-class hotels, such as the Wrest Point Riviera and Hadleys in the south, and the Launceston Hotel in the north. By the late 1960s, there was pressure, fuelled by tourism needs and those who had travelled abroad, to lessen the licensing restrictions and allow other establishments to be able to serve wine or beer with a meal. John Licandro (Martini) started the trend, and in November 1968, the Monna (sic) Lisa became Hobart's first licensed restaurant. In 1969, the Astoria, the Don Camillo and the Dutch Inn (all in Hobart) were granted licenses, along with the Scotch Thistle Inn in Ross.

With restaurants becoming more integral to Tasmanian life in the 1970s, a large variety of food was emerging. On their menus, George and Jill Mure featured deep sea scale fish, mussels and the state's first wines. At St. Andrews Inn in Cleveland, restaurateur Tom Samek cooked central European dishes; Chris Stucki of Stucki's served fondue; Austrian beef lover, Alf Rannegger, served "serious steak" at Beefeaters; and at Sall's in Launceston, James Sall served crepe suzette cooked at the table.

As Tasmanians increased their interest in wines, unlicensed restaurants began to promote their "BYO" status, offering corkage fees in return for alcohol service. Tasmania's blossoming restaurant culture saw the establishment of the Drysdale Institute in 1976.

Tasmania now boasts a quality selection of dining options, from fine dining and wineries, to bistro and family dining, to contemporary and café bars. While no fare lays claim to be distinctly "Tasmanian", the state has earned a reputation as being purveyors of fine foodstuffs such as leatherwood honey, chocolate and confectionary; cheeses, fish and other seafood; and more recently, wasabi and truffles.

Our gourmet produce is enjoyed locally, interstate, and internationally, and our reputation for fine food and wine is an enormous draw card for tourism, and the hospitality industry that has grown alongside our fine food reputation is now a cornerstone of the Tasmanian economy.



— WREST POINT RIVIERA BUILT IN 1939 —



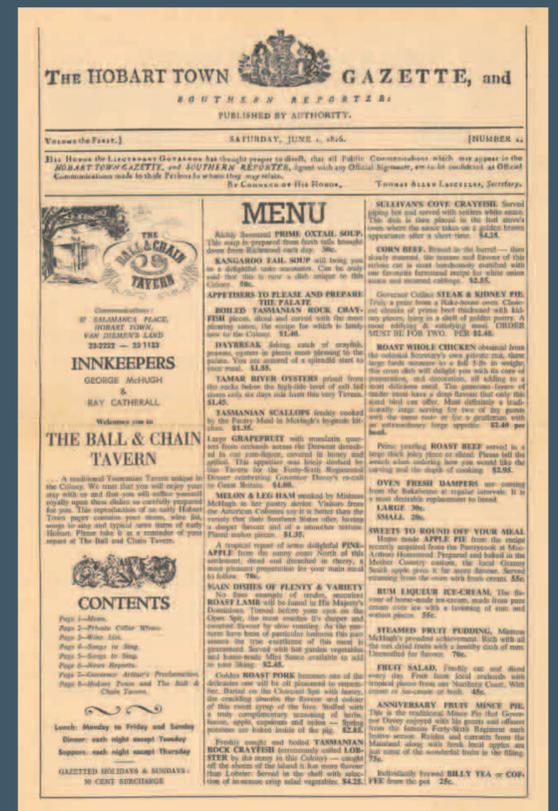
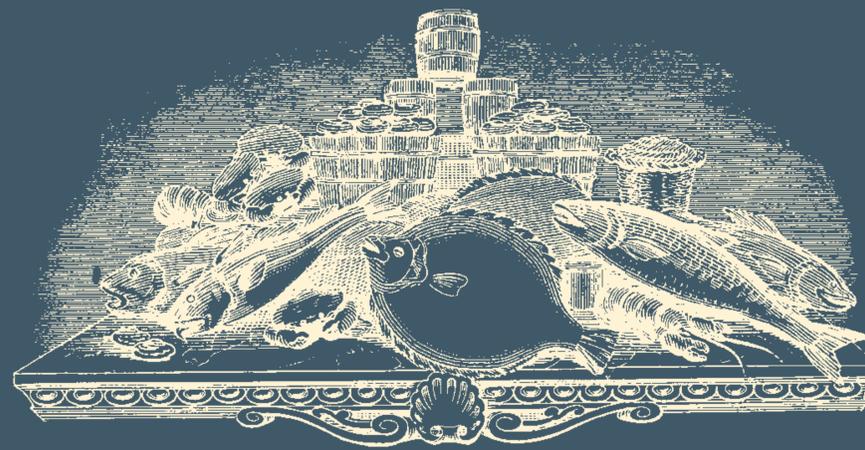
— SCOTCH THISTLE INN, ROSS C.1840 —



— MURES HOBART C.1902 & THE LATE GEORGE MURE AND WIFE JILL —



— THE FEDERAL COFFEE PALACE LAUNCESTON C.1890 —



BALL & CHAIN MENU

CIRCA 1840's