

Heaps (Simpson) Bryce



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Heaps Simpson, my grandmother, was the daughter of William Simpson and Jane Auld, of Maleny, who had nine children. Heaps was born at Landsborough in 1887 and married Charles Bryce in Maleny in 1910 at her parents home in North Maleny.

“The Chronicle” records that there were 100 guests at the wedding breakfast but unfortunately does not list the dishes. The paper does however, record the presents which shows that there was a pleasant social life in Maleny at the time. For example Mrs E Pattimore gave a cruet set, Mrs Alcorn a set of jugs, and Mr & Mrs Rough a tea & water set.

My earliest culinary memories of my grandmother, date back to the 1940’s and the days of the Second World War, when she was in her 60’s and living at Sandgate. These are of a very frugal cook who used the basic ingredients and never wasted anything. It was still a time of food rationing and the coupon system, so she welcomed any addition to the pool of food stamps.

A lasting memory is that she always boiled the tea in a small saucepan and reused it until it was “stewed” and almost tasteless. As a youngster I sat through innumerable afternoon teas with a large group of relatives when the sponge cakes and tea took centre stage, with the tea getting gradually worse. Grandmother was not a “great” sponge maker, but it was very acceptable.

Grandmother was to me not a noted cook, probably due to her rural upbringing and to the limited range of condiments, spices and ingredients available. She believed that waste was ungodly and that plenty of plain simple food was the way to good health. Breakfast was the most important and largest meal of the day. It was “after milking” when one had done the early chores such as cutting wood for the stove. It usually consisted of porridge, fruit, a meat course, and jam & toast with copious tea available. The meat, usually accompanied by poached or boiled eggs, would be an offal, such as celery tripe or brains or liver. Sometimes if you were lucky it would be skirt steak. Lunch was a smaller meal, often leftovers, and the evening meal would be a broth or vegetable soup, meat course and sweet dish or cake. Bread was a major staple as were potatoes, root vegetables, and boiled chokos. Sunday was the day for roast beef and (rarely) chicken. Grandmother, to my recollection, hardly ever fried or steamed any food. She boiled everything, every the lamb chops, which not surprisingly, were as tough as old boots and I used to hate. But I loved her tomato jam made from cherry tomatoes with lots of sugar. I wish I had her recipe.

Grandmother would probably be a talented and inventive cook if she had lived today. She did her best with what she had and according to the dictates of the time. After all, she only had a wood stove initially and none of the appliances we have today. The word “multiculturalism” was not in the language. However, she lived to her 99th year and her four children have all made it into the eighties. Maybe there is something to be said for plain food.

Ian Bryce