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A Food Culture Transplanted

Origins and Development of the Food of Early German
Immigrants to the Barossa Region, South Australia
(1839 – 1939)

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Abstract

The German-speaking Lutheran congregations who came to settle in the Barossa Valley, South Australia, between 1839 and 1860 brought with them traditional food customs from Silesia, Brandenburg, Posen, Mecklenburg and Saxony. Many foods that they prepared required skills developed over centuries in Europe and suited to European temperatures and climate conditions. The settlers transplanted these food practices to another part of the world and to a completely different set of environmental conditions. My thesis examines how this transplant affected the food prepared by the settlers and their descendants. Different climates and soils, new ingredients and other people's food customs tested the ancient practices. This study identifies the elements of people's food culture that endured and offers reasons for any changes. In the Barossa the settlers, their descendants and their food were in contact with two other distinct and culturally cohesive groups of people. I describe these cultural encounters and I discuss the extent to which they influenced the general food practices of the German-speaking immigrants. Of the foods still familiar to Barossa people in the early twenty-first century I examine five in turn, devoting each a chapter to discuss their origins, cultural significance and old ways of making them, and assessing how much these altered in the Australian setting. This culinary history evaluates the importance of cultural, geographic, religious, political and economic factors in the process of change. It illustrates fundamental elements of human behaviour and adaptation, all manifest in people's food.