

FEEDING THE FAMOUS

Ex-Chef of Bellamy's Looks Back on Three Decades of Catering for Political Appetites



HARRY STARR
"Nothing But The Best"

(no banquet complete without its boar's head on a charger, cock's combs in aspic, and jellied eels), Harry Starr from an early age specialised in confectionery and some of the more highly imaginative departments of the pastry-cook's art.

a gastronomic tour de force, the menu of which Harry Starr still preserves.

It was a menu which could not fail to contribute toward stronger and even more amicable Anglo-American relations.

From then on Ben Starr was a permanent fixture at Bellamy's, being appointed head chef in 1910. Harry Starr had his own business in Wellington, but it was not long before he joined his father. Harry Starr's first big function was a complimentary luncheon tendered by members of the Legislative Council to the then Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, just before he went to England to present H.M.S. New Zealand to the British Government. Not as elaborate as the banquet given for the American Fleet, it nevertheless included six courses and dishes that varied from roast beef and apple pie to Fillet Duckling en Aspic and Braised Turkey.

In 1920 Ben Starr retired, his son taking over a job which was becoming increasingly onerous. At one time, Bellamy's closed down when Parliament went into recess, but in 1925, during Sir Francis Bell's term of office as Prime Minister, the decision was made to keep open all the year round. This is greatly appreciated by the busy people up at Parliament Buildings, who are entitled to Bellamy's privileges, but it naturally means a good deal of extra work in the kitchen. Where Mr. Starr once served 40 to 50 lunches, of late years he would serve 150.

"It Is Easier Now"

But day to day catering at Bellamy's is child's play, says Mr. Starr, compared with the responsibility of putting on a State luncheon or banquet at short notice. Of recent years there has been a welcome trend toward simplification, but the emphasis on quality still remains, and a conscientious chef naturally feels obliged to produce his very best for such occasions.

Some of Mr. Starr's most notable contributions to official banquets have been in the confectionery line. He is an artist in sugar, and a display which he put on for a banquet in honour of the Prince of Wales took three weeks to make and occupied almost the whole of the centre of the main table.

His Most Uncomfortable Moment

A chef's principal worry at an official banquet is that "something will go wrong," which covers a multitude of

mishaps anyone of which might be ruinous to his reputation. Touching wood, Mr. Starr claims that he retired without ever having run into a major accident. His most uncomfortable moment was during a certain luncheon when a joint of beef turned out to be not as fresh as it should have been. It was a big joint, weighing some 50 pounds, and as beef is usually a favourite meat at banquets, things looked bad for a while. But fast thinking saved the day. Mr. Starr took a cold joint, heated it up in stock for 15 minutes and nobody knew the difference.

And now, after serving under eight Prime Ministers (Sir Joseph Ward, Thomas Mackenzie, W. F. Massey, Sir Francis Bell, the Right Hon. J. G. Coates, the Right Hon. G. W. Forbes, Michael Joseph Savage, and the Right Hon. Peter Fraser) and four Speakers (Sir Arthur Guinness, Sir Frederick Lang, Sir Charles Statham, and the Hon. W. E. Barnard), Harry Starr has retired. It says much for his healthy outlook on life that he can still enjoy a good, square meal.



HERE ARE SEVEN MENUS from Harry Starr's collection of souvenirs of official functions to the success of which his good cooking has contributed. They include the menus of his first big function, a complimentary luncheon to Sir Joseph Ward in 1909, and of his last, a luncheon in honour of E. van Kleffens, and C. J. I. M. Welter, the Netherlands Ministers, who visited New Zealand in May of this year

The Starrs arrived from England toward the end of last century and eventually settled down in a pastrycook and catering business in Wellington. Ben Starr's big chance came on the occasion of a visit in 1908 by Admiral Charles S. Sperry and the American fleet. The visit naturally had a good deal of significance, and the Government of the day spared nothing to make the stay a complete gastronomic success.

Proportionately heavy demands were made on the Government's catering resources; putting on a meal for 1,000 people at short notice requires not only vast quantities of food, but a considerable amount of careful organisation. At any rate Ben Starr was called in to ensure that everything went smoothly and his son Harry stood by and gave a hand when he was needed.

It is a matter of history that the American fleet was feasted most royally, the culminating point of the festivities being a banquet in Auckland, which was

PENETRATE deep enough into a certain wing of the older portion of Parliament Buildings, in Wellington, and you will sooner or later encounter an appetising smell of roast beef. Go much further and you will almost certainly be knocked down by a white-jacketed figure, laden to the gunwales with an assortment of food, including the roast beef you have just smelled.

This white-jacketed man-in-a-hurry may be rushing off to serve a Member of Parliament who has 15 minutes to spare before he attends a committee meeting or makes a speech to the House; he may be going to the assistance of a private secretary who has even less time to spare; he may be taking a complete three-course meal to the office of a Cabinet Minister who has no time to spare at all, and will gulp it down as he works.

If you have the courage to penetrate still further into this busy place, you will end up in the kitchen of Bellamy's itself, which, although few visitors are allowed to inspect it, is one of the most interesting departments in the whole of the administrative quarter of the Capital City.

Father And Son

For 22 years, up until a month or two ago, the kitchen at Bellamy's, one of the most sacred of Parliamentary institutions, was presided over by Harry Starr, whose father had been head chef for more than ten years before him. After attending to the preparation of a quantity of food that would be sufficient to maintain a division of troops in the field for an indefinite period, Mr. Starr has now retired to a pleasant little home on the heights of Brooklyn, Wellington, and a store of memories of the appetites of famous people that would make highly interesting reading could he be persuaded to reveal them.

Like his father before him, Harry Starr "served his time" in England, but whereas Ben Starr specialised in catering in the grand old English manner

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