

EVIDENCE OF JOHN TUCKER,<sup>1</sup> COMMISSARIAT STOREKEEPER

1. What situation do you hold in the Commissariat Department?  
Storekeeper.
2. How long have you held it?  
Sixteen years in this settlement.
3. What's your pay and emoluments?  
Three shillings per day, a man on the store, fifty acres of land on Paterson's Plains, and a man allowed me as a settler.
4. How many persons are employed in your department?  
Three assistants in the store to serve out provisions.
5. What are the rations served out to the military?  
Four pounds of salt pork or seven pounds of fresh beef and seven pounds of flour per week.
6. What is the ration of a convict?  
Four pounds of salt pork or seven pounds of fresh beef and eight pounds of wheat per week.
7. Has this always been the quantity?  
At the earlier periods, owing to scarcities, we have had only two pounds ten ounces of pork, and four pounds of wheat or maize as the supply would admit of.
8. What has been the quantity [quality?] of the meat supplied since you have been here?

Formerly, and for a long period we had English salt provisions with a small portion of Norfolk Island mutton, which was sometimes indifferent. Latterly we have had salt beef and mutton cured at Van Diemen's Land and Otaheite pork. The beef appears to be of middling quality, the mutton is frequently tainted.

9. From what cause do you think this arises?

From the provisions being salted at a wrong season, and a bad salt used; though you see very little of that used.

10. What is the size of the casks in which the Van Diemen's Land meat is packed?

Some weigh less than nine hundred weight, some as much as fourteen hundred.

11. Do the casks appear to be foul?

Some of them do, and the meat which touches the side is discoloured.

12. Is the meat now in use that which lately arrived?

Yes it is.

13. Do you find that the shin pieces are put up in the Derwent beef?

Yes, I do.

14. In whose presence are the provisions served out?

Those for the penitentiary [convict barracks] and gaol in the presence of two delegates sent from those two places. Those to the other prisoners in the presence of Sergeant Tierney, Sergeant Wright and Corporal Allen all of the 48th

Regiment.

15. How often are the issues made?

Saturdays and Wednesdays.

16. Is much dissatisfaction expressed by the convicts at the quality of their provisions?

They do at the Derwent mutton only.

17. What is the quality of the wheat that comes up here?

Pretty good generally, as good as wheat in the other parts of the Colony.

18. Have you directions to return the wheat that is not of a good quality?

I have, and I screen it before I take it in store, if it is not good, I reject it entirely.

19. The wheat which is brought here is generally shipped in private vessels by individuals, is it not?

I believe it is.

20. Do you then receive an invoice of the cargo from them or what document accompanies it?

A letter from Mr Cordeaux, the Deputy Assistant Commissary General, listing the quantity.

21. Has it ever occurred that you rejected any wheat that has been sent you in this manner?

I never have.

22. Can you state what is the weekly consumption of wheat at

this settlement?

About one hundred and twenty bushels.

23. Do you find any difficulty to preserve it from weevil?  
If I did not screen it daily I should find very great difficulty.

24. Do you think flour would be better to issue than wheat?  
I think it would, but it would require an immense quantity of casks to cask it.

25. You expect to derive considerable advantage from the mill now erecting?  
I do, it will be of great service.

26. How do the convicts grind their wheat now?  
In steel mills, and there are two stone hand mills.

27. Do you consider the present ration of wheat sufficient for a convict?  
No I do not: about five or six years ago the ration was eleven pounds and half of wheat. I think seven pounds of flour would be sufficient as that would make ten pounds of bread.

28. To whom are rations of fresh meat issued?  
According to the quantity turned in to the store. I am directed by the Commandant to issue to each.

29. How often in the year do the convicts get fresh meat?  
Generally three or four times a year.

30. From whom is the fresh meat supplied?

By the settlers or any of the individuals of the settlement here who may keep pigs.

31. At what price?

Five pence per pound for beef and pork.

32. Do you find the beef fed by the settlers at Paterson's Plains as good as quality as at the other stations?

It is quite as good.

33. Are the sheep as good?

They are not so large or so good as the sheep to the southward. They do not weigh above ten pounds a quarter.

34. What is the reason that the sheep in the government flock fed here are in such poor condition?

From the bad pasture, and driving them a distance in search of it.

35. Do you think that the settlers at this station would be able to supply a sufficient quantity of maize if it should be required?

I think they could.

36. What do they do with the maize they do not consume?

They barter it away to the masters of vessels and inhabitants of this settlement at the port.

37. What quantity of the flour of maize do you think would be sufficient to make a breakfast for each convict labourer?

I think that half a pound would be quite enough.

38. Is this sort of food much in use here?

It is, in the season for maizes.

39. Are your stores at this settlement sufficiently capacious?

They are not. The upper floor for wheat is not sufficiently large.

40. What stock of wheat will it contain?

Fifteen hundred bushels is the utmost that it will contain, to keep it in good order.

41. What is your present stock?

Nine hundred bushels.

42. Are you allowed or directed to take in wheat from the settlers here?<sup>2</sup>

I have no directions yet upon the subject; but as the harvest is over I have written about it. There will be near 1,500 bushels to dispose of amongst all the settlers. We took in 200 bushels last year.

43. What is the quality of the wheat produced here?

It looks good, as good as the Hawkesbury wheat.

44. What is the stated capacity of the lower room of the Commissariat Store?

It is not large enough for our present wants - nor is it airy enough, as it only has air holes about a foot long and five or six inches wide, instead of windows. The floor is ridged and not flagged, and is frequently damp as there is no means of carrying off the brine that drops from the casks. It requires to be flagged, and then it would be kept clean,

and it requires larger windows.

45. Has the Commissariat Store ever been broken open or robbed?

Never. It is well secured with bars and locks, and there is a sentry always over it.

46. What is the present price of potatoes charged by the settlers here?

I think it is eight shillings per hundred weight in barter, and five or six for money.

47. Have they plenty to dispose of?

I believe they have.

48. You have been a long resident in this settlement, and have observed its progress, do you think that the punishment of the convicts is more effectual now than it was formerly?

Their labour is now longer than it used to be. The convicts were formerly dismissed at 3 o'clock. The police and discipline is likewise much improved. There is also less drunkenness.

49. Do you ever see the convicts drunk in the settlement?

Never.

50. What are the measures adopted now that in your opinion have contributed to prevent the use of spirituous liquors in this settlement?

The vigilance of the police and sentries. The only way that I think any liquor is brought on shore is by the boats' crews of vessels in the harbour.

51. Such persons are now punishable, and punished if they are detected?

They are.

52. Do you conceive that labour or residence in this settlement is felt as a punishment by the convicts?

Most undoubtedly it is.

53. What do you think is the circumstance that renders it so?

The confinement to one place and having government work to do.

54. Do you observe that the conversation amongst the convicts is very bad?

I do, and I sometimes am obliged to make the constable at the store interfere to prevent them swearing at each other.

(Signed) John Tucker  
Storekeeper

#### REFERENCES

1. Bonwick transcripts, Box 9, pp. 3731-46.  
John Tucker was transported for seven years about 1790 and received his first post in the Commissariat from Governor Phillip. He was working as a Commissariat Storekeeper in 1803 when strong representations were made to Lord Hobart on his behalf and these led to his appointment at a much increased salary, £91. 5. 0. p.a., as storekeeper at the settlement on the Hunter River when it was re-established in 1804.

Although at that time Governor King described him as

'a very deserving man altho' he was a prisoner', he was discharged for 'neglect of duty and misconduct' in February 1805, and replaced by William Sutton. However, Sutton himself was dismissed in 1807 and Tucker was reappointed storekeeper. He continued in that position until his retirement on a colonial pension of £50 p.a. in 1823.

Tucker was allowed to establish a farm at Paterson's Plains in 1813 and his son John became one of the earliest free settlers in the Hunter Valley. In 1823 the Tuckers received a grant of 615 acres on the Paterson and it was to this farm that John Tucker retired. (Chapman to King, 5 April, 1803, H.R.A.I., vol. 4, p. 67; King to Hobart, 13 July, 1805, H.R.A.I., vol. 5, p. 112; Return of civil officers died or discharged, H.R.A.I., vol. 5, p. 543; Sydney gazette, 22 March, 1807, and 19 June, 1823; Tucker to Wemyss, 31 October, 1822, N.S.W. Colonial Secretary, Records, In-letters, Memorials, 1822.)

2. The Commissariat was the principal purchaser of wheat in the Colony and it was frequently offered more than it required. Consequently the Government attempted to spread its purchases among as many settlers as possible.