

VINES & WINES IN THE ALBURY DISTRICT

An article by Sue Gray, Pat Strachan and members of the Publications and Research sub-committee of A&DHS Inc, 1999.

Can you imagine the City of Albury with vineyards scattered throughout its streets? This is the picture which emerges from the past.

The first recorded vineyard was planted by John P. Frauenfelder, Henry Rau and Sebastian Schubach. They arrived from Germany with their wives and families on the "Beulah" in 1849 under contract to work for William Walker for two years. Having fulfilled their obligations at Kyeamba Vineyard (near Wagga Wagga) they came to Albury which they likened to their beloved Rhineland. After their arrival on 12th May 1851 they leased land east of Kiewa Street between Guinea and North Streets and planted a quarter acre of vines for each family. The Kyeamba cuttings had originally been obtained from the Sydney Botanical Gardens. Young John Frauenfelder, then 15, was given the honour of planting the first vine which was christened by his father with a bottle of sherry. Within three years the vineyard had been extended to three acres. Grapes matured quickly in Albury and the discovery of gold in the area provided a profitable market for fruit and wine despite the hazards of Border customs duties.

Numerous German families migrated in succeeding years, many being experienced vigneron related to Albury settlers. They established themselves in East Albury, Wirlinga and Thurgoona where they planted vineyards. Some of the early German vigneron were - Bopp (Popp), Brumm, Dallinger, Dick, Eberle, Eck, Eisenhauer, Gaber, Gehrig, Helm, Kalbrunner, Klein, Knobel, Kolb, Merkel, Muller, Reis, Stassen, Strauss, Wartzelhan, Weidner and Zoeller.

Somewhere between 1854 and 1856 two brothers who had a profound impact on vine growing arrived in Albury. They were James Thomas Fallon and Patrick Edwin Fallon who initially established a store in Kiewa Street, south of Dean Street.

VINEYARD ASSOCIATION

The Joint Stock Company, Murray Valley Vineyard Association, was formed in Albury in 1860. On its behalf, John Walker Jones, first Manager of the Bank of NSW in Albury applied for a grant of land from the Crown. A grant of one square mile of land costing one pound per acre was made on 13th July 1860 and subsequently Jones transferred this land to the Association's Trustees. The area was bounded on the south by Union Road, the east by Dallinger Road, the north by Kaitlers Road and the west by the back of blocks in Sutherland Street and by Webb Street. The vineyard preceded both the railway and the Hume Highway. A working man could enter the industry for an outlay of sixty pounds which would provide a property on which to grow vines. He could then continue his present pursuits till the vines yielded a return in about three years. Capitalists could also invest in the vineyard for profit without leaving their local districts.

Capital was to be twelve thousand pounds in 200 shares of sixty pounds each. J. T. Fallon was a founder of the Association as was the treasurer, J. W. Jones. George Mott was the secretary. John Frauenfelder became the first manager of the vineyard on 23rd July 1860. In the first season about 100 acres were fenced and 36 acres cleared. The following year 25 acres were trenched and planted with vines. However the Association was under capitalised and failed.

FALLON'S EMPIRE

In 1867 J. T. Fallon bought the Murray Valley Vineyard at a mortgagee's auction with only 25 acres in full bearing. The same year he bought land in Kiewa Street, just north of the Swift Street

junction, where he built a cellar and retail outlet for local wines. The building has changed considerably but the cellar with its huge timber beams and supports still exists and can be entered from the rear where the original brickwork is still visible. Fallon's vineyard and cellars were extremely successful and important visitors to Albury were always taken to see them. The cellars had storage for 300 000 gallons of wine. The Greer and Co. cellars built in 1874 were next in importance with a capacity of 84 000 gallons. They were situated below the Howlong Road overlooking the river. Capacious cellars which held up to 30 000 gallons also existed at the Ettamogah Vineyard adjacent to the railway.

J. T. Fallon made his first trip home to Ireland in 1873 and also toured the wine producing districts of France. He persuaded Francois Gaston (Leonce) Frere to come to Albury to make champagne for him. It was the first sparkling wine ever made in Australia. Although it was not a commercial success the Frere family stayed and starting in 1876, bought parcels of land at Thurgoona where they established the St Hillaire Vineyard.

While in London in 1873, J. T. Fallon had spoken out against the duties imposed on Australian wines. At that time, duty on wine was 2/6 (25c) a gallon whereas duty on continental wine was 1/- (10c) due to the lower alcohol content. Fallon argued that Australian wine contained naturally high alcohol levels and was, in effect, called a liar. On his next visit to London in 1876, he took certified facts and figures which proved that the alcohol content of Australian wines regularly exceeded 26%. After presenting a paper to the Royal Colonial Institute on the 20th June 1876 he joined a delegation which took the matter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 27th July. As a result duties on Australian wines were relaxed.

John Delappe Lankester had come to Albury in 1870 to promote and manage J. T. Fallon's wine business. He became well known throughout NSW, Victoria and South Australia as a first class judge of wines. In 1909, J. D. Lankester with his son bought the Ettamogah Vineyard which had been established by or for P. F. Adams, Surveyor-General of NSW.

VIGNERONS

The Murray Valley Vineyard was huge in area compared to the rest of the early established vineyards. In 1863 the next largest holding was Rosenberg Vineyard (5 acres) owned by Mr Schubach followed by the two acre vineyards of Henry Rau, Mr Eisenhardt and Mr. Gehrig Snr. Smaller vineyards belonged to J. P., F. and J. Frauenfelder, J. Zellar, E. Crisp, J. Rau, V. Kolb, W.M. Miller, Captain Brownrigg and Messrs. Gehrig Jnr., Dallinger, Hargraves, Poole, Beihl, Denny, Levie, Hatch, Butt, Hibberson, Dick, Reis, Carroll, Keefe, Gallagher, Weidner, Eisenhauer and Hilsley. The Roper's Point vineyard of only 1½ acres produced the astounding quantity of 1400 gallons of wine per acre in 1863.

Other vineyards mentioned in the *Border Post* of 1874 and 1875 included - Valverde, Black Range (R. L. Phelps), R.W. Knowles at Anfield and Mr. Curley who leased Maryvale, both of Table Top, The Hermitage, Doctor's Point (Dr Barnett), A Hill and W. Woodlands' Vineyards at Seven Mile Creek, J. Hay at Eight Mile Creek, J. Bell at Nine Mile Creek, G. Weissel and James Day both at Thurgoona, Mrs J. Lester at Morebringer and W. Kelton and the Burrow Brothers at Moorwatha.

Albury Municipal Rate books of 1880 show a myriad of vineyards within the present city area: - Olive Street - William Hargreaves and Peter Eberle; David Street - William Morrissey, George Adams, Layton's Estate and Le Gouziou; Nurigong Street and Wodonga Place - James Reilly; Young Street - C. Stassen; Electra Street -W. Phillipi and C. Stassen; Kiewa Street - Henry Eisenhardt; Atkin Street - H. Reuss; Doctor's Point - W. Huon. In the suburbs were the previously

mentioned German settlers who, by 1880 were joined by Messrs. Eppell, Herman, Mutsch and Schneider.

In the early 1870's the Albury district was acknowledged to be the country's leading wine producing centre.

DECLINE OF THE INDUSTRY

The wine industry has always been sensitive to climate, blight, mildew, pests, depression and government charges. Bottle shortage was another problem and a newspaper article of 1861 commented "Our vigneronns are obliged to content themselves with old porter, ale or vinegar bottles, whenever they wish to bottle off their wines. We need scarcely say that the wine is hardly merchantable when packed in this form, and that consumers accustomed to the tasty bottles used for French and German wines, would open their eyes with astonishment if they found a dozen Murray River wine packed in four or five different sorts of clumsy bottles, originally used at the antipodes for other beverages. Now the materials for making bottles are plentiful enough on the Murray, and a factory of this kind would probably be found a remunerative speculation."

The vine disease *Phylloxera vasteris* is the most commonly stated reason for the loss of the wine industry to Albury. Its first appearance in the area was in the Rutherglen district in May 1899 on the property of Fritz Ruhe. By this time, compensation for uprooting vines had been discontinued and considerable research was being undertaken. It was recommended that vigneronns plant new vineyards with *Phylloxera* resistant vines. In New South Wales compensation had also ceased by 1902-1904 when the disease was located in the Murray Valley Vineyard. When John Aloysius Fallon took over the running of the vineyard about 1906, managers had already made an excellent job of replanting.

Many of the smaller vineyards were not replanted. By the turn of the century, Albury had become a large diversified centre, and it was not too difficult for the vigneronns to change their occupations. Over the border, in Victoria, Rutherglen and Barnawartha vigneronns struggled and succeeded in retaining their wine industry. Recently, north of Albury, plantings were again begun at Table Top where Coopers now have a thriving vineyard.

The Fallon vineyard continued until 1930 when it had to be sold to finalise the estate. The buyer was not interested in viticulture. J. A. Fallon kept the retail outlet in Albury. In 1963, the building was sold by his daughter and son-in-law, Kathleen and Tom Ortiz.

The significance of the contribution of the early German vigneronns was obvious to the citizens of Albury. At a ceremony on April 29, 1870 the Mayor of Albury, Alderman George Day, presented Messrs. Frauenfelder and Rau and the widow of Sebastian Schubach with silver jugs in appreciation of their enterprise as pioneers of the wine culture, and winemaking in the valley of the Murray. The Frauenfelder jug is with the family in Perth, the Rau jug is missing (thought to be destroyed in a house fire) and the Schubach jug is in the Albury Regional Museum where it silently bears witness to the pioneers of the Albury wine industry.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andrews, Arthur, *History of Albury, 1824-1895*, Albury, 1912.

Cornish, Henry, *Under the Southern Cross*, 1880 (reprinted Harmondsworth, 1975).

Fallon, James Thomas, *The Murray Valley Vineyard, Albury, NSW and Australian Vines and Wines*, Melbourne, 1874.

Fallon, James Thomas, *The Wines of Australia*, London and Chilworth, 1876.

Kirchner, Wilhelm, *Australien und feine Northeile fur Unswanderer*, Frankfurt am Main, 1850.

Diary of John Frauenfelder, written 1872-1877.

Contemporary issues of the *Border Post* and the *Rutherglen Sun* and *Chiltern Valley Advertiser*, Rutherglen.

Extracts from General Rate Book of the Council of Albury, 1880.

Verbal source, Bert Brumm and Kath Ortiz.