

BREGUET CITATION SPEECH by GAIL THOMAS. 20.11.2021.

Frederic Breguet was one of the fathers of vine-growing in Victoria. He was born in Coffrane Neuchatel Switzerland on 21st December 1813 and came to Australia in 1842.

Together with David Louis Pettavel he established our region's earliest vineyard at Pollocksford naming it Neuchatel after the Canton from where they came and making their first wine in 1845. Their partnership didn't last long and in 1848 Pettavel purchased his own property at Waurm Ponds, establishing his Victoria vineyard and a second vineyard Prince Albert in 1857.

In Ebenezer Ward's book *The Vineyards of Victoria* in 1864 he states the Neuchatel vineyard, also better known as 'Pollocksford' was the oldest vineyard in the western district and was situated on the Barwon River about ten miles from Geelong, between the Fyansford and Barrabool Hills roads.

There were about 14 acres under vine along with six acres of orchard and garden. The vines were planted on a hill, which rose in some places all but perpendicularly from the river flat. The soil on the lower slopes of the eastern side is a red porous loam, sparsely intermixed with limestone. On the southern side the loam is blacker and richer, and the vines thrive more luxuriantly; but on the higher slopes throughout the vineyard, limestone is more abundant, and it is fair to infer that if quantity of produce decreases, its quality improves.

The extreme steepness of the challenging site saw the difference in altitude between the lowest and highest vine in this vineyard being 300 feet. In addition, the possibility of surface soil from the hill summit being washed down by storm water meant all labor from cultivation to carrying grapes to the winehouse had to be performed by hand.

The vines were all staked and as Frederic was in favor of close planting, he considered he was making a great allowance for richer soil than he was accustomed to in Switzerland, by planting the vines, originally, so far apart as four foot by four.

It is said Frederic brought the Pinot Meunier and black Burgundy with him from Dijon in France. The principal red varieties planted were Hermitage, black frontignac, mataro and pinot noir each producing individual varietal wines although the Burgundy usually received a small proportion of frontignac. The white varieties were chiefly chasselas, rousset, pinot blanc, pinot gris, white frontignac, gouais, and sweetwater.

When planting was commenced in 1842, the partners were unable to obtain anything but sweetwaters from Melbourne. However this variety was not esteemed by Frederic so remaining vines were grafted over when they procured an assortment of cuttings from the Sydney Botanical Gardens with hermitage and chasselas being especially cultivated. Subsequently, again, he sent to Sydney for 10,000 cuttings of chiefly hermitage, pinot noir, Burgundy, Tinto, and pinot blanc. From the Tinto, although principally used for imparting a deeper color to the red wines, a pure rich and luscious wine had been occasionally made with marked success.

The nursery at Neuchatel was said to contain 150 varieties of vine cuttings and a choice assortment of fruit trees. An olive tree was flourishing and hops were also growing successfully.

When it came to winemaking, Frederic Breguet did not use a grape mill, but merely a lever press. The grapes were smashed in tubs with wooden beaters, and the reds partially fermented before being pressed. This was never done with the white grapes, and their husks were not fermented with the must. After tasting some two-year-old wines Ebenezer Ward cited them as being of excellent quality. Of the young wines the best was deemed to be the Hermitage, a rich, full-bodied wine, with plenty of flavor, and developed character while the Burgundy and frontignac blend was noted as being a capital wine, with a very fine aroma.

He said the pinot noir was delicate, lighter and drier than the others and of the white wines, his preference was for the pinot blanc and the chasselas, light, delicate, and, when fully matured, ought to entirely supersede, in these colonies, foreign Hocks or Sauternes as summer wines.

Later Frederic became the proprietor of several extensive vineyards in Ceres and one near Belmont. In 1854 he established the Suisse vineyard on the corner of Barrabool and Merrawarp Roads in Ceres. The 8 acres under vine were planted to around ten wine grape varieties along with black Hamburg, black prince and sweetwater table grapes. The 4½ acres of orchard included white mulberries and some apple varieties he'd sourced from Switzerland.

Heading down the sandstone steps, the 20x30 foot cellar, supported by solid Oregon beams and still intact today, is quite remarkable with the temperature staying at 12 degrees. It has a unique carefully laid sandstone floor as at the time, most of the wine cellars in the Barrabool Hills had earthen floors. To prevent flooding, Frederic laid a cast iron pipe to carry excess water to Merrawarp Road. By this means the water level pit remained constant and provided a permanent source of water for washing and cleaning of the wine-making implements while rain caught off the house slate roof for drinking water was run off and stored in a 10,000 gallon underground tank. The property was later cultivated by his nephew Frederick Ulysse Breguet also known as Fritz, and who served as a Barrabool councillor and President.

As with other Geelong vineyards, the Suisse vineyard's vines were almost totally destroyed following the discovery of phylloxera in the 1870's. However, one old chasselas vine over the coach house entrance still remains and fruits today. Surviving buildings on the property include a 19th century Barrabool sandstone house, the 1861 stables, cellar and coach house. The property passed out of the hands of the Breguet family in the early 1890's and in 1959 was renamed Neuchatel by the then-owners the Loffel family, giving a nod to the Swiss Canton and the original vineyard at Pollocksford.

Only one photo of Frederic Breguet seems to exist but we can further envisage his image from details on his 1853 passport when he visited Switzerland to recruit labour for his vineyards to replace those who had joined the gold-rushes of the 1850's. It stated forty-year old Frederic was five foot one inch in height, had a round, full face and chin with an average nose and mouth, receding chestnut hair and chestnut beard, grey/brown eyes and coloured complexion.

In 1849 he married Elizabeth Oswin however she died in 1854. His second marriage to Helen Perry at Christ Church Geelong in 1859 produced two children Mary and Julien. By 1863, instead of working in the day-to-day operations of his vineyards Frederic continued as a wine wholesaler from his Georgian style cottage home and cellar at 197 Little Malop Street Geelong. He retired in 1868 and died at home aged 58 on 22nd of August 1872. He is buried at East Geelong cemetery with his wife Helen.

At the time of his death Frederic owned the Neuchatel and Suisse vineyards, a vineyard in Belmont, seven houses in Geelong and a lime kiln. He was also a philanthropist generously donating the stone, possibly from his own quarry, for the building of the Barrabool Hills Holy Trinity church. In his will his personal legacies included 40 pounds to 'the Treasurer of the Fund in Coffrane Switzerland for the benefit of the poor' and 50 pounds (10G) to the Geelong Hospital. His obituary in the Geelong Advertiser reported - 'The deceased, who has long been looked upon as the wealthiest of our Swiss residents, has left property worth up to 25 thousand pounds (\$4mil).'

Frederic Breguet was esteemed among his friends as a man of kindly disposition with his loss being deeply regretted. He was also one of the pallbearers at David Pettavel's funeral and was appointed treasurer of the Vinegrowers Association to collect funds to erect a monument over Pettavel's grave at the East Geelong cemetery.

In 2020 Frederic Breguet's own grave monument was in need of restoration and with the wonderful support and guidance of Frank de Groot of the Geelong Cemeteries Trust who has joined us this evening, some of Frederic's descendants and the Geelong Branch of the National Trust generously contributed funds for that work to be done. As a tribute in commemorating Frederic's contribution in establishing the original Geelong wine region industry a plaque at the grave site has also been installed from his descendants. I would also like to thank Frederic's great great granddaughter Claire Thompson for agreeing to the installation of the grave plaque and to the family history which her late father so diligently researched and documented.

So in recognition of our pioneering vigneron, it is with great pleasure that we induct Frederic Breguet into the Geelong Wine Industry Historic Hall of Fame.