

Research Project By Cindy Ryan
Australian History: Thur. 10-12, O.F.C.

Vineyards in the Lower
Hunter Valley

Interviewee: Megan J. Cooke, school teacher,
born and raised in Cessnock area.

Interviewer: Cindy Ryan

Subject of Interview: The Impact the Vineyards
Have on the Cessnock Community and Tourism.

Date: 30.8.88

Cindy: Megan, when does your personal
memories start about the vineyards?

Megan: Well, that would go back about fifty years
ago. I never went there myself, because we
didn't have a car. But I can remember Uncle
Jim had a horse and sulky, dear old Kate, the
horse, and the family tradition was that the men
would periodically take the horse and sulky out to
'Draytons', I think it was 'Draytons' they went
to and they would take their stone jars out or
any other containers they had, but I remember
Grandfather had two big stone jars and they
would bring back their wine, until such time
it ran out. They weren't heavy drinkers, so I
would say probably one trip a year would have
just about done it.

Cindy: Really, probably just before Christmas.

Megan: Yah! Probably just before Christmas, and a
bit of wine in the Christmas pudding and the
trifle.

Cindy: It would be rather a rough trip too,
with the dirt roads and everything.

Megan: Yah, it would have been all dirt roads,
and taken them a fair while to get out there
probably with a horse and sulky.

Cindy: Yah, maybe did they often make a family

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outing, taking the children and everything?

Megan: No, because it wasn't really a big thing, you know, to take a lot of people in, but it was just mainly Uncle Jim or Dad, or perhaps Grandfather, but that would be about all that would go.

Cindy: And did you ever work in the vineyards when you were a teenager?

Megan: Ah, around about the time I left school I went out and had a few days out there.

Cindy: And what did you do?

Megan: Ah, picking.

Cindy: Picking the grapes.

Megan: Picking the grapes, I remember at... ah, yah, it was at Tyrrells vineyards, we got a message down the line that there was some special table grapes down the bottom end and if we would mind leaving those table grapes for the families consumption, but it was a bit too late, the chap and I that were picking together, we had already found those and we had our pockets jammed full of lovely white 'Lady Fingers', not to mention what we had eaten. (laughter)

Cindy: And how much did you get payed for that?

Megan: Ah, I can't, ah, one place it was about three pence a bucket. And up at Dan Tyrrells he took me aside, being an innocent person he took me around the corner and said I'll pay you and gave me the money and when I was on the back of this ute going home with the other people, they said "has he payed you?", "yes", "How much did he give you?" and the old fellow had chopped it down because he knew I was a novelist and would know how much I was getting payed. The people on the truck were quite indignant over Dan showing his mean streak. (laughter)

Cindy: Taking advantage of you.

Megan: Taking advantage, um.

Cindy: How long was it since you been went out there after being employed there as a teenager?

Megan: Well, I would say it was about five or six years, and I bought a car, this would be

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about thirty years back, I'd bought a little car and was staying down the lake during the week and we'd decided we would like a little wine with our meals occasionally. So we ended up buying it at Wilkinsons vineyards, Wilkinsons, at that stage, were pretty old, I would say they would be getting towards eighty.

Cindy: Really!

Megan: Um, one of Audrey's dreams was that he would live to be there when the hundred years was up on his vineyards. But none of them made it, they died before hand.

Cindy: Ah, its a shame.

Megan: But I remember him telling me that, that they would like to live to see the century of the vineyards that were started by the family.

Cindy: And what was he like?

Megan: Quite a character, he was still back in the last century, in fact, the whole lot were. They, ah, would be well in their seventies to eighties and there was two unmarried brothers and a unmarried sister living there and running the vineyard. You would go in there and it had a dirt floor and the place was covered in dust and yet they produced the most beautiful wines out. And I remember old Audrey telling me one day that if he still had his youth he could produce wines that these other big vineyards around would wonder how they had been produced. They were really (pause) and we use to buy a white port that had a really nutty flavour and I have never been able to find a white port that had that same kind of nutty flavour anywhere since, I've tried the odd white port but nothing like it. And, ah...(pause)

Cindy: You were telling me that when you would talk to him it would take a long time before you would get the wine you actually came for because of the conversation.

Megan: Yah, there was quite a procedure, you had to have that last century courtesies, such as,

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"How's the weather been?"; "How have you been?"; and hand shakes all round. Oh, and then you still couldn't say that question "I have come for wine." You just had to let him, let them talk on about the crops are doing well this year, or we should have a good vintage or we should have a bad vintage, or things like that. And eventually you would get to the wine order, but you still couldn't get it over fast because everything had to be done so neatly, the bottles had to be wrapped in paper a certain way to take home, and maybe a label had to be attached some where, it was quite a procedure, you just couldn't go out in a hurry.

Cindy: Megan, what changes have you seen in the last thirty years in the Cessnock area?

Megan: Well, the biggest changes have been in the last twenty years. That's when the booms come in the vineyards and a drop in the coal mines. Because the coal mines have got to the stage now that there are very, very, very few coal mines in the area at all. When I was a kid that was the main industry and the vineyards was a little thing on the outskirts.

Cindy: So most of your friends parents were all employed by the mines?

Megan: Yes, they were all employed by the mines, not the vineyards. But now you have lost of people you know that have got perhaps seasonal jobs, say pruning, pruning in the winter and tying, and all that sort of jobs, tying up the vines. And then of course with your picking in summer. And then you have got bottling, the odd one selling out there, and then of course doing the work inside the cellars. Oh, not abt yet like, Adelaide and South Australia where they got people employed to take tourist groups around. I don't think there is anything particularly much done out there like that. I think there is a lot of that still to come there. (pause)

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But it has made a lot of difference that there is jobs out there for some of the mining jobs but mostly the miners, the men themselves, have had to find work out of town like Newcastle and other places in the industry. Or in coal mines further up or in coal mines further south towards Sydney. But we have gained with motels, because fifteen years ago there were no motels, no caravan parks, and now we have three caravan parks, I think, and about five or six motels.

Cindy: The motels are to cater for the tourism that is coming into the area.

Megan: Yah, that's come mainly into the area. The tourist industry has sort of boomed.

Cindy: So it's really drawing the people to Cessnock, mainly at weekends to visit the area.

Megan: At weekends there is lots and lots that go out to the vineyards on weekends.

Cindy: And it would be bring money into Cessnock to that Cessnock's Council could use for up-grading the roads, and for shopping complexes, or housing and things like that.

Megan: Yah, especially the roads which we need desperately.

Cindy: Also, do you have any idea of the views about the airport they are talking about improving in Cessnock. Do you think that will bring a lot of people in?

Megan: Well, that would have to come if they are putting in that big complex. Which they are.

Cindy: The big hotel complex.

Megan: Yah, the big hotel complex. I would say they would have to upgrade the airport now with that coming in.

Cindy: Yes, I have heard that they were going to bring in people from Sydney, weekend transport from Sydney, you know, instead of driving they could fly. They feel that they may even bring Japanese people in, I've heard.

Megan: Well, we have a daily small flight.

I think it's twice a day. I would be sure. Two flights down and two flights up. I think

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that's what it use to be anyway, and that's quite handy for the vineyards. But that plane only would take about eight or nine people, so it's not going to cater very well for a great big complex like that, where you do have the Japanese people and all that sort of people wanting to come out.

Cindy: Do you see tourism dominating the wine industry?

Megan: Ah, I can see some changes with the way the vineyards are going to be run, with these big tourist developments are going to go ahead, because if you go down to the Barossa Valley, there's a lot of tourist dominated things there. Where they got tours running all the time to explain things. I don't think any of the vineyards out there have got a lot of that worked up. But you got Hungerford Hill out here where there is a lot of tourist development and it is a good catch with all that little complex out there, people go to see that. But your vineyards are still running to produce wine.

Cindy: The vineyards are the most important part.

Megan: They are still running to produce wine and you got this extra boost to their income.

Cindy: And this extra boost would help the community in general because it is bring money to Cessnock.

Megan: Well, actually a fair bit of the money by passes Cessnock and just goes straight out there. But we do have a lot more people through town. There's fifty percent more traffic this year.

Cindy: Oh, really.

Megan: So it's got to be boasting the vineyard trade as well, that's with the expressway coming through and there is actually fifty percent more traffic than is formerly, so these people we are going to catch more there and that going to boast that.

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Cindy: Yes, make easier access.

Megan: It's going to make easier access but I'd say it will even out in the end. The wine industry will still hold its own.

Cindy: Thank You very much, Megan.

Australian History

O.F.C.

Thur. 10 - 12.

M. Henry

Research Project

"The History of Vineyards
in the Lower Hunter Valley."

Due on 8.9.88

By Cindy Ryan

By Cindy Ryan
Research Project
"Vineyards in the
Lower Hunter Valley"

O.F.C.
Aust. History
Thur. 10-12

Summary of Essay

The Hunter Valley is the oldest and most important wine growing district in Australia. James Busby established the first vineyards in 1824. The early vineyards were part of the farm's holdings and it was only in latter years that they became the farm's main industry.

The acreage of vineyards in the Hunter Valley has steadily risen since 1965, when there was a major wine boom. This boom was due to a rise in the popularity of Australian wine and an increase in export of our wines to the overseas market. Nowadays with a readily available labour force, advanced technology and high quality wines Australia has become recognized as a major producer of high quality wines. Tourism has become a major form of marketing and is drawing an increasing number of people to the Hunter Valley vineyards.

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Research Project
1,000 word Essay
Due 8.9.88

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The History of Vineyards in the Lower Hunter Valley

The Hunter Valley is the oldest wine growing district in Australia. In 1824, James Busby received a land grant of 2,000 acres on the Hunter River, which he called 'Kirkton'.¹ The land was cleared by convict labour and vineyards were planted. Busby traveled to Europe and purchased a variety of vine cuttings, which he planted at 'Kirkton'. He donated seventeen cuttings to the Botanical Gardens in Sydney, but these latter died of neglect. This large variety of vines played an important part in the development of Australian wines.

In the 1830's small vineyards were scattered along the Hunter River. These vines were planted as part of the farm holdings. Most vines planted were varieties which were largely unsuitable for eating, but excellent for wine making.

The move to wine making in the last century was spurred by the revolt against the excesses of the rum trade in the new colony.

"They started in propitious set of circumstances provided by nature, reinforced by the skill, drive and vision of a handful of men, to found a style of wine unique in the world." ²

James King was a successful Sydney merchant who established his 1,920 acre property, 'Irrawang', on the William River, near present day Raymond Terrace.³

¹ Parks, W.S., Comerford, J., Lake, M., Mines, Wines and People, A History of Greater Cessnock, Newcastle, 1987, p.224.

² Ibid., p.228.

³ Ibid., p.227.

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In 1832 when King planted his vineyards, ten settlers had a total of 15 1/2 acres of vines in cultivation.⁴ These farms were typical of the settlers who practised mixed farming. Many were planting vines and experimenting with viticulture to supply the settlements of Newcastle and Sydney.

"James King was important because he had a vision of the Hunter Valley as the centre of a distinctive regional style of wine."⁵

He experimented to find the most suitable vines for the region and the best wine style. He passed on his ideas to other wine makers in the Valley and was probably the most active promoter of local associations of wine growers. The most important of these associations was the 'Hunter River Vineyard Association', established in 1847; it arranged meetings to discuss wine growing problems and methods of production.⁶

In 1828, George Wyndham obtained a Crown land grant and established 'Dalwood', one of the oldest working vineyards in the Hunter. Six acres of vineyards were planted. The vineyards were extended and in 1867 there were 35 acres at 'Dalwood', 12 acres at 'Fernhill' in the east Hunter, and 18 acres at 'Bukkulla' near Inverell, all owned by the Wyndhams.⁷ Dalwood was the show place, the most important vineyard and winery in the Hunter. It is now renamed 'Wyndham Estate' and is Australia's oldest operating winery. It was constructed of convict sandstone blocks in 1831.⁸

5. Evans, Lloyd, Wine, Melbourne, 1978, p. 55.

6. Ibid., p. 55.

7. Morgan, F., A Guide to the Hunter Valley, Sydney, 1971, p. 46.

8. Wineries of Australia, N.R.M.A. Publication, Australia, 1987, p. 9.

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Dr. Henry Lindeman, an English Naval surgeon, planted 'Cawarra' on the Paterson River in 1843. The Lindeman family became leaders in the Valley's wine production. They purchased other vineyards, such as, 'Ben Ean', 'Coolatta' and they acquired 'Kirkton.' Today, Lindeman's is one of Australia's top wine producers with vineyards and wineries in many wine making districts.

There was an increase in vineyards in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the availability of labour and the spur to develop new and profitable business ventures. Prominent men like Dr. Lindeman spoke up in Parliament in favour of table wine as an aid to temperate behaviour. James Busby, who was living in New Zealand, was the foundation president of the 'Temperate Society of the Bay of Islands'.^{9.}

The colony passed through a severe depression in the early 1840's, due to fluctuations of labour and money. The colony was in an economic trough. Most of the Valley's vineyards were fairly small, forming only part of the owner's agricultural holdings. The situation changed rapidly in mid-century, and the second wave of plantings began. In 1843, the Valley had 262 acres under vine; this doubled in the years to 1850, in which there were thirty two vineyards operating.^{10.}

The men who first worked as labourers in the vineyards were convicts and ticket-of-leave men, they had to be taught to prune and cultivate the vines. This source of cheap labour ended with the abolition of transportation in the mid-century. In 1847, trained non-British

^{9.} Parks, Mines, Wines and People, p. 231.

^{10.} Lake, Max, Hunters Winemakers, Their Canvas and Art, Milton, Queensland, 1970, p. 3.

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immigrants¹¹ became readily available. German vineyard workers boosted the wine making industry.

The gold rush of the 1850's jerked the colony out of its financial straits, but the call for diggers gravely challenged the stability of vineyard management. However, the industry was sufficiently established to cope and the 'Robertson Land Act' of 1861 led to a rush to Pokolbin for land and a increase in vineyards.¹¹

In 1866, there was 5,840 acres under grapes.¹² This was about the peak of cultivation in the nineteenth century.

The serious bank failure in 1893 was part of a major depression, yet the Hunter vineyards were able to continue.

In 1919, after World War I, the Hunter shared in the scheme devised by the government for the settling of repatriated soldiers on the land. Fifty acre blocks were given to men returning from the war. World War I helped the vineyards to recover from economic distress.

In 1922, there was 2,700 acres of vines producing wine in the Hunter.¹³ However, downy mildew started to cause problems and in 1925 three quarters of the whole grape crop of the Valley was lost from this cause. A similar loss occurred from drought in 1926, and in 1927 the hail was so extensive in the district that there was virtually a total loss of the whole of the years grapes.¹⁴

¹¹. Parks, Mines, Wines and People....., p. 231.

¹². ibid. p. 249.

¹³. Morgan, A Guide to the Hunter Valley....., p. 30.

¹⁴. Parks, Mines, Wines and People....., p. 249.

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During the depression years of the early 1930's vineyards declined to a total of about 1,000 acres.¹⁵ Family wine growers sold their vineyards to big companies such as, 'Penfolds' who bought 'Dalwood', 'Lindemans' and 'Hardys'. The depression sent the Hunter into decline, fine wines were on offer at sixpence a gallon and wine makers went broke overnight.¹⁶ The wine areas shrank back into Pokolbin and by the end of World War II only a handful survived. In 1936 the vineyard acreage was down to 1,500 and in 1947 about 1,100 acres remained.¹⁷

By 1962, the wine boom had begun and by 1965 the wineries were doing good business and 1,324 acres were planted with vines.¹⁸ The wine boom was due to the more readily available labour, expansion of the export of wines overseas, and the increased recognition of Australian wines. By 1971, more than forty nine different organisations operated vineyards, comprising of 5,270 acres.¹⁹

Recent grafting technology and improved fermentation methods has guaranteed good yield and high quality. New improved and hardier grape vines are being cultivated.

Labour and transportation was and always will be the dominating factors in Hunter Vineyard management. The first wines were transported by bullock teams. They were in constant use and a number of taverns were

15. Evans, Wine p. 57.

16. Morgan, A Guide to the Hunter Valley , p. 30.

17. Parkis, Mines, Wines and People , p. 250.

18. Morgan, A Guide to the Hunter Valley , p. 34.

19. Ibid.

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built to serve as shelter for the transport teams. With the increasing penetration of the Hunter by farmers and travellers there was a remarkable growth of taverns and wayside houses. These inns were the centre of social and political life in the period from 1825.^{20.}

The port and the Hunter River provided transportation by sail boats and in 1830 by paddle steamers. In 1831, the road from Sydney to Newcastle was completed, but the paddle steamers continued to compete for trade.^{21.}

In 1924, rail provided transportation.^{22.} Nowadays, bulk tankers and heavy road transport carry most of the wines to their destination.

Today Hunter Valley wine growing is booming with thousands of acres of new vines planted each year. They make their wine in their own individual styles, in the tradition of the founders, James King and Henry Lindeman, but with the latest wine technology.

Many of the Hunter's wines have been awarded gold medals at the Australian wine shows. In recent years millions of dollars have been spent in expansion of this industry and in improving facilities for tourism. Tourism has become a major part of the wine industry.

20. Parks, Mines, Wines and People ... p. 236.

21. Evans, Wine, ... p. 22.

22. Ibid. p. 25.

Hunter Vineyards
Planted Acres (approximate)

date	acreage	details of important events.
1830	20	Maitland, secondary punishment centre for convicts, land grants for free settlers.
1843	262	Transported by paddle steamers.
1847	—	Hunter River Vineyard Association formed, trained non-British immigrants available
1850	500	Gold rush.
1861	5,840	Robertson Land Act grants Pokolbin.
1893	—	Bank crash, increased South Australian wine production.
1900	—	Abolition of state customs barriers.
1919	—	Downy mildew, post war trough, Government settles land to repatriated soldiers.
1922	2,700	
1924	—	Railway provides transport.
1933	1,000	World depression, fine wine price drops to sixpence a gallon.
1936	1,500	
1947	1,100	
1960	1,000	Credit squeeze 1961.
1965	1,324	Wine boom.
1967	2,600	
1971	5,270	Tourism flourish
1975	12,000	Increase in production and export of wine.

This graph is from Mines, Wines and People by W.S. Parks, Jim Comerford, and Max Lake, Newcastle, 1979, p. 257.

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Summary of Tape

Megan Cooke is a school teacher who was born and raised in the Cessnock region. Megan's first memories of the vineyards take place about fifty years ago when she was a young girl. Her Uncle Jim had a horse and sulky and he used to take some of her male relatives to visit Drayton's vineyard. This outing was a family tradition and was exclusive to the men-folks. They would take large stone jars with them to bring the wine home in. The dirt road was rough and the journey a long one.

When Megan was a teenager, about fifteen years old, she worked for a couple of days picking grapes on Dan Tyrrell's estate. She remembers eating white 'Lady Finger' grapes that were being saved by the family. After the picking, Dan Tyrrell took her aside from the other pickers and payed her. On the journey home she found out that she was under payed. The other labourers were quite indignant with Dan for taking advantage of her innocence.

About five years latter, while living with a friend at Lake Macquarie, she would drive to the Wilkinson's vineyard and buy wine. This was about thirty years ago, and she can remember the Wilkinson's cellars having a dirt floor and being very dusty, but their wines were excellent. There were two unmarried brothers and an unmarried sister, all in their seventies, and they owned and ran the vineyards. They were real characters and it was impossible for the customers to buy their wine in a hurry. Audrey Wilkinson told Megan that his ambition was to live to reach the

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centenary of his vineyard; unfortunately he did not live to see his dream.

In the last twenty years Megan has witnessed the vineyards booming and the coal mining decreasing. When she was a little girl almost everyone was employed by the coal mines. Now the coal mines have closed down and the miners have found other jobs. Some have found employment at the vineyards, others have had to move their families to other districts close to operating coal mines. The vineyards employ a large number of labourers, some seasonal and some permanent. The seasonal workers prune the vines in winter and tie them to stakes and lines. In summer they pick the ripening grapes. Labour is also employed to work in the cellars.

The town of Cessnock has grown in the last twenty years. There are increasing numbers of motels and caravan parks to cater for the increasing number of tourists coming to the area. The vineyards draw the tourist and the money spent helps to improve the Cessnock area. There are big plans for the tourist industry in Cessnock. The local airport is being expanded and upgraded to attract more overseas tourists. There is a thirteen million dollar complex being built in the area.¹ The Cessnock City Council has approved the plans for the one hundred and twenty room hotel resort and recreation area.²

The tourist facilities will help to bring

¹ Newcastle Morning Herald Newspaper, Friday, Aug. 26, 1988, '\$13.5 Million Tourist Complex Goes to Cessnock', page 1.

² Ibid

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more people to the Cessnock area and surrounding vineyards. Hungerford Hill is an example of a well organised tourist facility. It has a large motel, restaurants, wine tasting, craft and antique shops, childrens playground and barbecue facilities. It is located on a picturesque sight overlooking a large dam. It attracts a large number of visitors each weekend.

Tourism has become a major part of the vineyards, bringing in extra money that can be recycled back into the industry. However, grape growing and wine production is still the most important aspect of the wine producing industry.

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1988

I, Megan June Cooke give my
permission to Cindy Ryan

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for
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the Newcastle University

.....
for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed Megan J Cooke

Date 30.8.88

Interviewer Cindy Ryan