

Pioneer Vignerons:

Joseph Ernst SEPPELT: (1813-1868)

Joseph Ernst Seppelt was born in 1813 at Wustewaltersdorf, Lower Silesia. After a liberal education in music and the arts, he toured Germany and Italy where he learned the commercial and technical aspects of tobacco, snuff and liqueur production in order to head the family business. When this declined in the 1840s, he decided to emigrate to Australia.

He sailed from Hamburg in the *Cezar Helene* on 9th September 1849, with his wife Johanna Charlotte Clementine (nee Held) and their three children, Benno, Hugo and Ottilie. The Seppelts were accompanied by thirteen families from their neighbourhood and a group of young men who had worked in their factory. They disembarked at Stode and took the *Emmey* to Melbourne, arriving there in January 1850. Joseph Seppelt was naturalized in January 1851. After a brief time at Klemzig, he purchased 158 acres of land in the Barossa Valley, north-west of Tanunda, in February 1852. He named the property Seppeltsfield and later this name was also applied to the surrounding district.

Following an unsuccessful attempt to grow tobacco, he planted corn, wheat and a small vineyard. Family tradition states that he made his first wine in his wife's dairy and in 1867 built the first section of a wine cellar using pisé construction. The structure apparently subsumed the dairy but the story does not tell us where Charlotte made her butter after this. The business expanded rapidly and Seppelt concentrated on the production of table wines, liqueurs and cordials. Early price lists and labels reveal that he marked his products 'J.E. Seppelt, manufacturer of cordials, liqueurs, bitters, syrups, etc., Seppeltsfield'.

In 1887 the first substantial winery building was constructed by Seppelt and his son Benno. Based on a gravity feed system, it was a three-storey bluestone building situated on a sloping site. It had a single gable roof and was about 30 feet wide and 60 feet long. It has remained in almost continual use since its construction and is one of the Seppeltsfield landmarks.

Joseph Seppelt did not live long enough to see the business prosper, as he died at Seppeltsfield on 29th January 1868 and was buried at Greenoch Cemetery. Charlotte died a little over two years after her husband, on 13th April 1870. Their son Oscar Benno Pedro Seppelt (known as Benno) assumed control of the family wine-making business. He was educated at Tanunda and possessed considerable natural ability and a determination to succeed. Assisted by his able wife Sophie (nee Schroeder), he undertook a substantial programme of expansion over the next twenty years, increasing

the acreage of vines under cultivation, enlarging the cellars and building a new distillery. By the 1890s Seppelts was one of the largest winemakers in South Australia.

Source

John Healey; *S.A.'s Greats – The Men and Women of the North Terrace Plaques*, Historical Society of South Australia Incorporated; 2001

adelaide.sa.gov.au website

Prepared March 2018 by Kevin Gogler and Barry Philp