

Pioneer Vignerons:

Richard HAMILTON: (1792-1852)

Richard Hamilton was born at Dover, Kent, England, on 18th February 1792, the son of tailor Richard Hamilton and his wife Sarah. He married Ann Holmes on 9th November 1813 at the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Dover, and they had a family of three daughters and six sons. Hamilton was described as an agricultural labourer, aged 45, when he applied to emigrate to South Australia in July 1837. The couple's four youngest children accompanied them, and their older children, Elizabeth, John and William, had separate passage.

The Hamilton family arrived on the *Katherine Stewart Forbes* in October 1837. Three weeks before leaving England, Richard had purchased a land order for 80 acres in the colony and the land he took up was located on the Sturt River, six miles south of Adelaide. Apparently his son John was working with a surveying group and thought the land looked good. They named the property Curtis Farm.

By 1840 Richard Hamilton had nearly 5 acres planted to cereal crops and potatoes, an acre of garden, 25 acres fenced with a post-and-rail fence, a 28-foot well, a dwelling house and stockyards. His first wine sales were recorded in his farm journal in 1848 and in the same year his eldest son Henry (1826-1907) joined him at Curtis Farm. Henry had been only eleven when the family left England and he had stayed behind to complete his education. He arrived in South Australia in July 1841 in the *Christina* and family lore tells that his mother walked all the way to Port Adelaide to meet him.

Richard Hamilton became ill soon after Henry's arrival and died at his home on 13th August 1852 from intestinal disease. He was buried at St. Mary's-on-the-Sturt Cemetery.

Henry Hamilton and his mother continued to run the property and in July 1854 Henry purchased an adjoining 47-acre property which he called Ewell Farm. (He probably named it for the village of Temple Ewell, near his home town of Dover.) Although Henry worked Curtis Farm, it was left to his mother for her lifetime and was then to be divided equally between the nine children. Ann Hamilton died at Ewell Vineyards on 30th April 1886. Over the next decade Henry bought the property from his siblings and at the same time expanded the vineyards on his own property.

Little is recorded of the early years of the Hamilton family's winemaking activities. Henry was active in the local Agricultural and Horticultural Society and in 1890 Ewell Vineyards won the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society of South Australia award for the best farm under 200 acres. The property comprised 48 acres of wheat, 16 acres

of ploughed fallow, 40 acres of vines and 46 acres of grazing land. The vineyard had 20 acres of Pedro Ximines (four years old) and 20 acres of good wine and table grapes. 'The wine-making plant and buildings were very good, and some fine large casks in the cellars are full of wine; if equal to the samples we tasted, it is of the most excellent quality. The vineyard is well kept and free from weeds, and everything about the steading is clean and orderly.'

Henry's son Frank joined his father in the wine business in 1890 and he considerably expanded its production and storage capacity. Fermentation capacity was increased to 12,000 gallons and, between 1899 and 1908, 65 acres of vines were planted. In 1907 Frank Hamilton produced 18,000 gallons of wine. Further expansion of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards Ltd. occurred in the 1920s and 1930s under the direction of Frank's sons Eric and Sydney, the latter being one of South Australia's most notable winemakers. Henry Hamilton died at Ewell Vineyards on 10th February 1907 and was buried at North Brighton Cemetery.

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

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