

A Fleeting Venture - Pukekura's "Rheinland"

Ron Lambert
Senior Researcher Puke Ariki

The *Taranaki Herald* of 18 August 1875 reported that the Recreation Grounds Board had heard an application "from two Germans" to lease part of the Grounds (now Pukekura Park) for 21 years to establish a vineyard. The local official German interpreter, Gottlieb Roch, formerly the owner of New Plymouth's Taranaki Hotel, was on hand to assist the applicants whose English was, presumably, not extensive. The Board responded with the following: "That four acres be leased for a vineyard on these conditions: For the first five years free, and if terms are duly fulfilled the Board will grant a lease for the remaining sixteen years, at £10 per year. Lessees (*sic*) to lay out, plant, fence, and keep in good order their four acres; same to be open to the public at all times except when fruit is ripe, for one month, and then with special permission" (*Taranaki Herald*, 18 August 1875). The two applicants then, through their interpreter, asked for time to consider the offer. It was Gottlieb Roch only who was at the Board's next meeting to inform them that four acres was not considered enough to support two men, so one had withdrawn and the remaining one asked for the rental to be reduced to £8 per year. This was agreed to by the Board, which resolved that the lessee clear up, lay out, and fence in the four acres within two years (*Taranaki Herald*, 25 August 1875).

The "two Germans" of the report were father and son, Heinrich and Johann Breidecker. The family hailed from the small town of Schwabenheim in the wine-making Rhein (Rhine) Valley south-east of Frankfurt. They had arrived in Wellington on the *Lammershagen* on 11 July 1875 (Pobog-Jaworowski, J; *History of Polish Settlers in NZ*, 1990) and then transhipped to New Plymouth by coastal steamer, arriving there four days later (*Taranaki Herald*, 17 July 1875). The *Lammershagen's* passengers were 330 "German" immigrants; many of them ethnically Polish, as much of modern Poland was then part of Prussia¹. (One of them, indeed, was my great-grandfather, Feliks Wojciechowski.) Most of the Poles in the group were then shipped off to the newly-established settlement at Jackson's Bay. The isolated

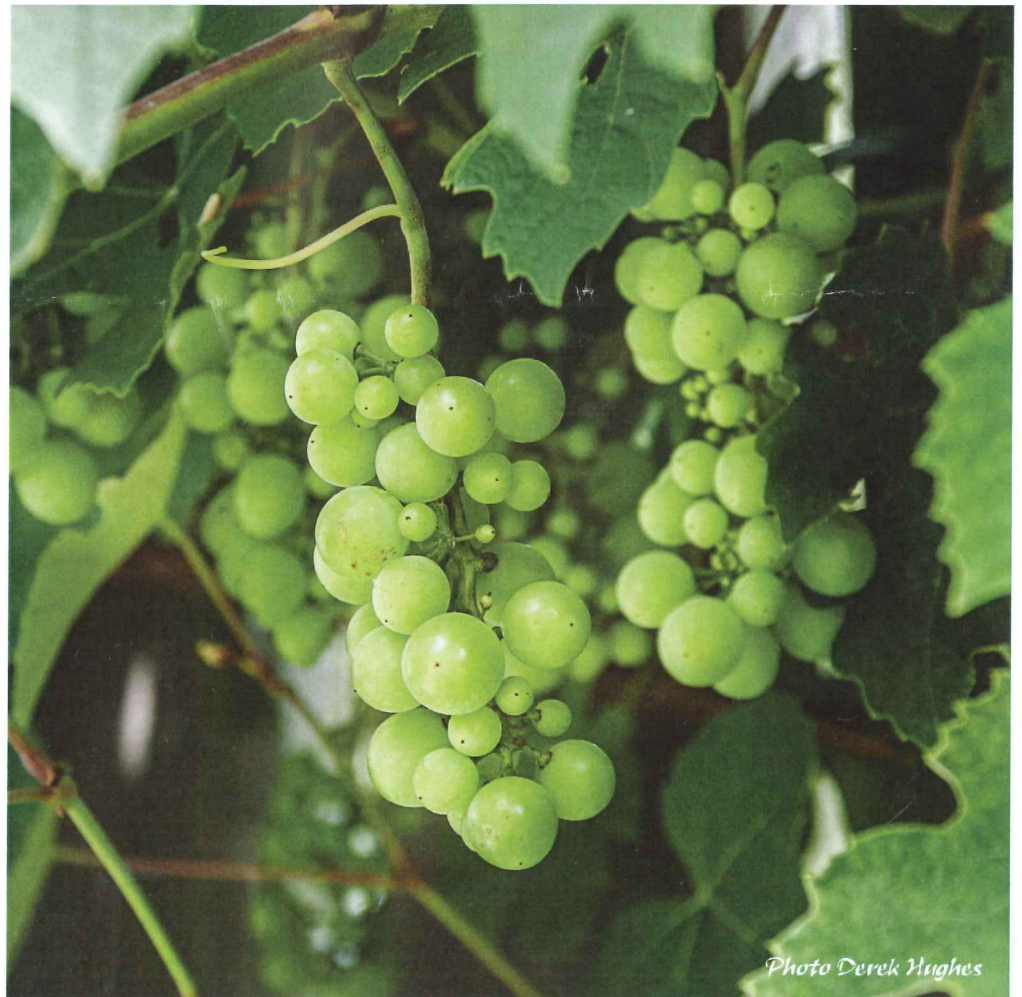


Photo Derek Hughes

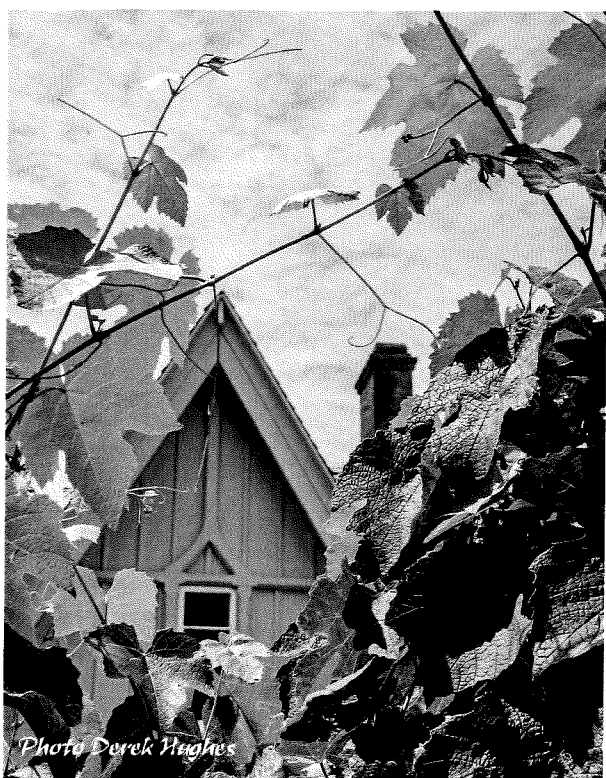
South Westland community failed miserably and four years later was abandoned. After arriving in New Plymouth, the Breideckers - Heinrich, wife Christiana, with sons Johann and Carl (Karl?) and daughter Marguretta - were, with 55 other adults and 46 children, installed in the old military barracks on Marsland Hill. Here, as new immigrants, they received free rations for six days until being "struck off" the list on 21 July (*Return of Free Rations*, ARC2002-138 Puke Ariki).

Heinrich obviously wasted little time in making plans for the future. We don't have many details of the miniature "Rheinland" enterprise but the plantings were made on the hillside between Stainton Dell and the Racecourse.

The area was “carefully prepared, being deeply trenched, and choice vine cuttings, some from Australia, were planted” (*History of Pukekura Park*, 1929). A single struggling plant grows there still, but about 2001 Fernery manager Ken Davey propagated several cuttings from the survivor so two vines can now be found behind The Gables at Brooklands (Ian Hutchinson: September 2012, *pers comm.*).

At least one of the Breideckers - it may well have been Carl - kept the wolf from the door by renting a house from the Board and being employed weeding the flower beds in the Park (*Taranaki Herald*, 3 January 1878; *History of Pukekura Park*, 1929). A news report in 1907 indicates that the family also tried strawberry growing while their vines were establishing (*Taranaki Herald*, 25 October 1907). That the enterprise did not proceed without its trials is revealed by a claim for £6 brought by Heinrich against neighbour, Robert Snell, “for damage done to his vineyard and garden by the trespass of defendant’s cows on several occasions” (*Taranaki Herald*, 12 August 1876). He was awarded a mere 10 shillings. In 1878, the Board resolved to ascertain C(arl) Breidecker’s intentions regarding the lease held by him (*Taranaki Herald*, 25 May 1878).

About 1881 the Breideckers upped-stakes in New Plymouth and moved to Auckland where Heinrich briefly opened a “First-class Dining-rooms” in Customhouse Street West serving, “A good meal for 9d, including bottle of Schwitz Herb Beer” (*Auckland Star*, 2 December 1881). Soon after, the family moved to Kohukohu on the northern shore of the Hokianga Harbour where they established a 0.8 hectare vineyard growing mainly the Isabella variety (*Auckland Star*, 8 February 1901). By 1884 Heinrich and Johann were producing a Rhein-style wine, supplemented with wild grapes gathered from nearby abandoned gardens and mission stations (Scott, Dick; *Winemakers of New Zealand*, 1964). Heinrich Breidecker’s enterprise at Kohukohu is now acknowledged as one of New Zealand’s first truly commercial vineyards. After his death in 1907² his son Johann³ maintained the winery until the mid-1920s (Harrison, Eric; *Kohukohu*, 1983). The old Rheinlander’s vintner expertise was, though, passed on to his son-in-law, John Lees, who married Marguretta. The Lees’ continued the family tradition on the Hokianga until the mid-1950s (Harrison, 1983). The younger son, Carl, visited New Plymouth after his father’s death when “Mr and Mrs Breidecker were renewing old associations”. It appears that Carl⁴ left New Zealand for Australia in 1886 (Australian Immigrant List - www.ancestry.com) to establish himself as a musical artist who “has travelled to all parts of the world” (*Taranaki Herald*, 25 October 1907).



The Breidecker name is now perpetuated in a Müller-Thurgau derived grape variety, and in the Marlborough-based Hunter’s Wines (NZ) Ltd German-style white wine Breidecker (www.hunters.co.nz).

The rear of The Gables framed by the grapevine.

1. As well as the official immigrants, a crew member of the *Lammershagen*, Peter Hinrik (Harry) Peters - also from Germany - jumped ship and later settled in Taranaki to become a well-known resident of Kaimiro and mountain guide.
2. Heinrich Breidecker died on 13 October 1907 at Kohukohu, aged 79 years (*Taranaki Herald*, 25 October 1907).
3. Johann Baptist Breidecker died in mid-1942 at Waiuku, South Auckland (Microfische New Zealand Deaths, Puke Ariki).
4. Carl Breidecker died in Sydney in 1938 (Australian Deaths - www.ancestry.com.)