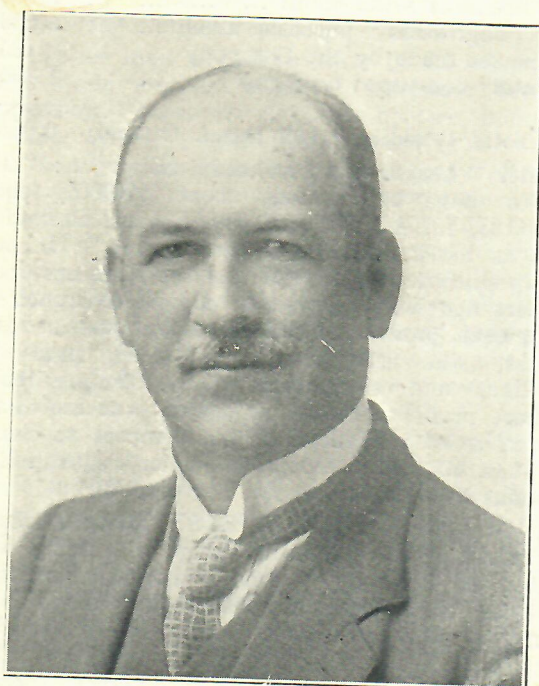


Historical Notes on the Wine Industry at the Cape during the XVII and XVIII Centuries

By Dr. A. I. PEROLD,

WHEN the Dutch East India Company decided to establish a settlement at the Cape, the object was to have a refreshment station between Europe and the East where their ships could take in fresh water and fresh meat, vegetables, etc. Fortunately for the future development of this "fairest Cape," Jan van Riebeeck was sent out as the first Commander of the new settlement, a most able and far-seeing man with a splendid character, great sense of responsibility and a great faith in the future possibilities of this new undertaking.



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Van Riebeeck landed for the first time at the Cape in 1648 and went through Tamboerskloof to Kloofnek, but when he returned as Commander of the new settlement which he was to form at the Cape he landed in Table Bay towards evening on Sunday, the 7th April of 1652. After having built a fort, etc., to house and protect those under his care, he laid out gardens and had various seeds planted to produce vegetables, wheat, fruit, etc. He imported fruit trees and vines from various parts. His biographer, Godée-Molsbergen, tells us that by 1655 he imported and made experiments with Muscadel and other white, round grapes, also blue and Spanish grapes. He certainly grew Hanepoot (which he called Spanish), Muscadel and Steen. He imported his vines from Brazil, St. Helena, Batavia, Amboina, Japan, Persia,

Spain, Italy, Mauritius, Madagascar, Germany and France (via Holland).

Van Riebeeck was the first wine farmer in South Africa. In 1657 he had ripe grapes which, in 1658, he pressed and turned into a small cask of wine, which had a good taste. In 1658 he established the first vineyard in South Africa by planting out 1,200 vines at Protea (Bishop's Court). Near Wynberg the Company gave him a piece of land, which he called Bosheuveld and on which he planted a vineyard. During the first couple of years he spent on it more than 3,000 gulden, or about £250. In 1665 this vineyard produced 1½ leaguers of wine of quite good quality (1 leaquer equals 127 imperial gallons). On account of its lovely bouquet some travellers took it for French Muscadel and others for Rhenish Rheingau or Moselle wine (Hock).

The free burghers were, at first, not keen to plant vines on a commercial scale as they had to wait too long to their liking for a good crop. This attitude gradually changed, and to-day our great trouble is to prevent our farmers from planting too many vines.

From 1679-1699, when Simon van der Stel was the Governor at the Cape, he not only had thousands of oaks planted in the Cape Peninsula, at Stellenbosch, etc., but he also encouraged the planting of many vines and, indeed, developed the farms Groot Constantia and Klein Constantia as wine farms for his own account. The advent of the French Huguenots in 1688 gave a marked impetus to the young wine industry at the Cape, as many of them had been wine farmers in the South of France.

Willem Adriaan van der Stel, when he succeeded his father as Governor at the Cape, was a great believer in the wine industry which, by that time, had been well established, not only in Constantia, but also in Stellenbosch, Paarl, etc. On his farm Vergelegen, near the present Somerset West, he grew anything from 100,000 to about 250,000 vines. His wine-farming on such a large scale was one of the causes that led to his downfall and recall to Holland by the Dutch East India Company.

In "Life at the Cape in Mid-Eighteenth Century," written by O. F. Mentzel as a biography of R. S. Allemann and published in an English translation by the Van Riebeeck Society in 1919 (V.R.S.2), we read on p. 50: "They reached the world-famed 'Wynberg,' which is distant about three hours from the Cape, and which, under the name of Constantia, supplies the popular, and really good, delicate Cape wine." This happened in 1711 and shows that Constantia was already a famous wine at this early date.

Governor-General Baron von Imhoff (V.R.S.1, 1918), on leaving the Cape for Batavia, left a memorandum to Mr. Hendrik Swellengrebel, Governor and Director of the Council at the Cape, dated 25th February, 1743, in which he stated, *inter alia*:

"Export of wine is not permissible except when the Company has no other cargo for its ships. Wine can only be stowed in the hold and not between decks. . . . Further, the making and treatment of wine has, in my opinion, by a long way not reached that stage of perfection which is possible and I shall, therefore, request the Directors to send out a few viticulturists from the Rhine and also a few from France, if they are procurable, in order to instruct the settlers in the proper way of making wine."

Thus, we see that von Imhoff must have been favourably impressed by the quality of the grapes grown at the Cape and expected much better wines to be produced from them if men with expert knowledge in wine-making could be brought out to the Cape. I do not know how far he got, but it is, at any rate, pleasing to see that a man in his position took such a keen interest in the wine industry at the Cape.

In O. F. Mentzel's "Description of the Cape" (V.R.S.4, p. 172, 1921), published in Germany in 1785* (Mentzel left the Cape in 1741, after living eight years at the Cape), he quotes the following from Vol. 3, p. 58, of the "Nieuwste en Beknopte Beschryving van de Kaap der Goede Hoop," by Allamand & Klockner (published in Amsterdam, 1778): "The Company acquires at a fixed price the whole vintage of the two vineyards at Constantia (i.e., Groot and Klein Constantia, A.I.P.). It offers a quantity gratuitously to foreign powers and distinguished persons, and sells the rest. Thus, in the autumn of 1762, 144 aums (equal to 36 leaguers, A.I.P.) of Cape wine were sold at Amsterdam; the red wine fetched from f.500 to f.180 per aum; the white from f.360 to f.590. In the previous year an aum of Cape red wine topped f.1,000." On p. 57 there is this statement: ". . . under favourable circumstances the two vineyards (at Constantia) would yield 60 leaguers red wine and 80 to 90 leaguers white wine, but the average yield was 120 leaguers in all."

These Constantia wines were, therefore, sold in Amsterdam in 1762 at £120 to £196 13s. 4d. per leaguer of white wine, £166 13s. 4d. to £270 per leaguer of red wine, and the top price for the red wine in 1761 was £333 6s. 8d. per leaguer, or 8s. 9d. per bottle, when bought in bulk at Amsterdam. The Constantia wine farmer got from the Company for his white wine 60 Rds. (rix dollars), or £12 per leaguer, and for the red wine 80 Rds., or £16 per leaguer.

Mentzel continues (Mentzel, V.R.S. 4, p. 173): "Besides the Constantia wine, the Cape Administra-

tion purchased annually 100 leaguers of common Cape wine, which was to be sent to Batavia, or for the supply of those ships whose stock Spanish wine had been exhausted; this wine is valued at 24 Rds. (or £4 16s., A.I.P.) per leaguer."

It is interesting to note that the price of common Cape wine—which had naturally to be sound and of fair quality, being only **common** in relation to the expensive Constantia wines—was about the same some 170 years ago as it is to-day.

In Chapter XI of Mentzel's work (V.R.S. 6, p. 37) he writes under "**Revenue derived from Viticulture**": "The tithe has not been imposed upon wine products because it would have been regarded as too crushing a burden in view of the existence of licences for the sale of wine. The Company imposes an excise of 20 st. (equal to 1s. 8d. A.I.P.) per leaguer of wine pressed.

| | Leaguers. |
|---|-----------|
| The licences retail about | 2,000 |
| The "engrossers" purchase about | 3,000 |
| Purchases made by the Company | 185 |
| Privately consumed on farms | 1,800 |

Total (yielding 6,985 Dutch Gulden) 6,985."

Under "Leases and Licences" he writes: "The licences have to pay out about f.70,000 (equal £4,666 13s. 4d. A.I.P.) annually, but are allowed to charge as much as 100 per cent. profit." I could not help smiling when I read that the licences about 150 years ago were allowed to charge **as much as 100 per cent. profit**, and thought of our present retail licences, who can charge as much profit as they like, and sometimes take 200 per cent. and more profit. I think we ought to revert to the old practice of not allowing the licences to charge more than 100 per cent. profit, when we shall hear less about over-production or "surplus."

In the same work (l.c. pp. 85-87) **Mentzel** tells us about many other interesting things of which I wish to quote the following: "Among the most profitable businesses is a **licensed wine-shop**. It will be remembered that the lease of Cape wines is offered in four parts (perceelen). This enables the lease-holder to open four retail shops for each "perceel," or 16 licensed places in all. The holder of the European wine-lease can keep only four wine-shops, since his lease is not divisible into "perceelen." The lease-holder may assign these retail rights to others and does so on condition that they purchase all their requirements from him at his price. This is usually double the ordinary wholesale price per half-aum. Thus, the licensee pays 6 Rds. per half-aum, instead of 3 Rds., which is the current price. In the cheapest type of wine-shop, wine is sold in four-pint flasks, 30 of these go to the half-aum. The charge is 12 stuivers

* Mentzel's "Beschreibung des Vorgebirges der Guten Hoffnung" was published at Glogau in 2 vols. in 1785 and 1787.



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(equal to 12d. A.I.P.) each, yielding a profit of 1½ Rds. per half-aum. In practice the bar-keeper manages to measure out 31 or 32 such flasks to the half-aum. . . .

"A more reputable place, frequented by non-commissioned officers and men of similar standing, retails the same wine in pint bottles at 6 stuivers per bottle. . . . The most fashionable taverns charge 8 stuivers per pint bottle; the wine is of the same quality, but the attendance is much better and the furniture and fittings superior. Such houses are very comfortable, **pipes and tobacco are offered free of charge.** . . . No one is importuned to drink, in fact, excessive drinking is discouraged as the host does not desire to have any drunkards on his premises. These houses have separate billiard rooms; no charge is made for play, but after every game the players have a drink, the charge on this occasion being 10 stuivers, instead of 8 stuivers per bottle. Thus, the same wine is sold in different places at the following rates: 3, 6, 8 and 10 stuivers per pint. . . .

"Other men who draw their livelihood from the wine trade are the so-called **wholesale dealers or engrossers.** These are not lease-holders, but permit-holders, whereby, upon the payment of a stipulated fee, they are allowed to bring into the town 12 leaguers of wine. They may not sell in lesser quantities than a half-aum, for which they charge 3 Rds. (equal to 12s. A.I.P.), or half the amount charged by the leaseholder to the retailer. We see, therefore, that no one is compelled to buy his wine from or through the leaseholder if he can afford to buy in quantities no less than one-half aum. An entire leaguer can be bought direct from the wine farmers at even a cheaper rate than that paid to the engrosser. No permit is necessary for such a purchase. The monopoly of wine is thus strictly a retail monopoly; I know of no other place anywhere where the citizen is so free from the caprices of monopolists as far as the stocking of one's wine-cellar is concerned. Wine farmers who own houses in town can bring in as much wine as they require and sell in the same way as the wholesalers—that is, in quantities not less than one-half aum. No price is fixed, either minimum or maximum. This applies only to wine grown by the farmer himself, for he may not purchase in bulk for re-selling without a permit, which, as in the case of the wholesale dealer, is limited to 12 leaguers at a time. Permits are obtainable, likewise, for selling wine in bulk to ships; proper checks upon the quantities that are delivered are kept, since all wagons have to pass the patrols, to whom written consignment notes are to be shown."

From these extracts it is seen that wine was retailed in those days at a much lower price than to-day, if we exclude the cheapest canteen wines.

When I read about the "stocking of one's wine cellar," I wondered how many people to-day keep well-stocked wine cellars, or wine cellars at all. This, of course, applies to private cellars, usually in a cool part of the dwelling-house, for storing the wines for one's own consumption, and must not be confused with the cellars of the wine farmers.

How many people nowadays, in building a dwelling-house, think of providing a suitable wine cellar or room for storing wine for consumption in the home? Still, wine ought to be stored in a quiet, cool place, in order to be and to keep at its best, and the consumption of good wines is a sign of civilization, at least, of our Western European civilization. Alas! that so few people in our country possess the necessary respect for, and knowledge of, a good wine! If our civilization in South Africa is to have a bright future, this sad defect will soon have to be remedied.

In the extract from "A new voyage round the world," by **Captain William Dampier**, 1691 (V.R.S. 5, p. 122), we find an interesting reference to Cape wine, which reads as follows: "The chief Fruits are Grapes. These thrive very well, and the country is of later years so well stocked with vineyards, that they make abundance of Wine, of which they have enough and to spare; and do sell great quantities to ships that touch here. This wine is like a **French High Country** white wine, but of a pale yellowish colour; it is sweet, very pleasant and strong."

Sparman, "Voyage au Cap de Bonne-Espérance," Paris, 1787, Vol. I, p. 55, writing about the Cape or Constantia wine, so highly esteemed in Europe, states that the white Constantia wine, crop never more than 90 leaguers, is produced on Klein Constantia, and the red Constantia, crop never more than 60 leaguers, is produced on Groot Constantia. He quotes the price of ordinary white wine at the Cape as 10-70 Rds., or £2-£14, per leaguer. He states that near the Cape (*i.e.*, Capetown), wines of the Burgundy, Madeira and Moselle types and Muscat wines are also made. These wines cost more than the ordinary white wines. He thinks that Cape wines, if matured longer, made with greater care, and if less sulphur were used in making them, would be as good as the best wines of Europe.

In those days the better-class wines were also slightly sweetish, if not sweet, and in order to make them keep well with the **little brandy** used in making them, it was obviously necessary to burn sulphur tags in the vats when the wines were racked into them. Hence, Sparman's remark about using less sulphur.

He proceeds: "The real Constantia wine is undoubtedly a dessert wine, delicate and strong, and it has something singularly pleasant in its bouquet."

(Continued on page 947.)

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He reckons the special soil accounts for the wonderful quality of this wine, and that it is not due to a special method of wine-making. I am, however, of opinion that the grape varieties (Muscat de Frontignac and Red Muscadel for the red, and probably Hanepoot with perhaps some white Muscadel for the white Constantia wine), the soil and its **aspect**, the climate and, last, but not least, the method of wine-making adopted, all contributed to produce this wonderful product. Spaarman states that much more Constantia wine is sold in Europe than is produced in Constantia, so that a lot of it is not at all the real article.

In the "**Memorandum**" drafted by Commissary **J. A. de Mist**, in 1802, in Holland, "containing the deliberations and recommendations of the Department for Indian Affairs, with reference to the form and method of Government which should ultimately be adopted at the Cape" (V.R.S. 3, 1920), we find some interesting facts and figures about Cape viticulture near the close of the eighteenth century. Paragraph 47 (V.R.S. 3, p. 204) of this important document reads as follows:

"**Wines.** The Cape grapes, which were originally either indigenous or introduced from Madeira or Europe, produce, besides the universally famous Constantia wines, various other kinds of very healthy and delicious wines, known under the names of Cape Madeira, Cape Malaga, medicinal wine, steen wine, vintint, and others, differing in kind and quality according to the nature of the soil in the vineyard, its degree of warmth and its aspect. The time of the year at which the grapes are picked, and the methods employed in handling them also influence the flavour of the wine. Good brandy can also be made from these wines, and vinegar from the raisins."

Although De Mist had no very accurate knowledge about the origin of Cape grapes, his knowledge about the factors determining the quality of a wine was very accurate. It is interesting to note his testimony to the **universal** fame of the Constantia wines. The names **Cape Madeira** and **Cape Malaga** prove that the practice of calling Cape wines after their European prototypes, *e.g.*, Cape Port, Cape Sherry, etc., is nothing new.

In paragraph 50, "General Return of Products" (V.R.S. 3, pp. 206-207), he gives the following statistics according to the official lists for 1793:

"Vines.

| | Vines. |
|------------------------|-----------|
| At the Cape | 863,000 |
| At Stellenbosch | 907,300 |
| Altogether | 1,770,300 |

The number for Swellendam is not given.

Leaguers of Wine.

| | Leaguers. |
|------------------------|-----------|
| At the Cape | 544 |
| At Stellenbosch | 5,330 |
| Altogether | 5,874 |

Swellendam as above."

Since Stellenbosch at that time included the present districts of Caledon, Stellenbosch, Paarl, Malmesbury, Piquetberg, Tulbagh, Ceres and Worcester, the above figures cover practically the whole of our present wine-growing area and must have been near the totals for the whole colony.

In paragraph 51, "Means of Improving Agriculture," he recommends: "6th. That experiments should be made in introducing all kinds of French and European vines at the Cape, and a prize given to anyone who, after a certain number of years, is able to show some results."

This was a capital suggestion, which was carried out fully a century later by the writer of this article when he imported on behalf of the Cape Government, in 1910, about one hundred of the best grape varieties of Europe and Algeria, and he was certainly "able to show some results."

In paragraph 105, "Proofs of the Abundance of Products," he gives the following list of "the Cape products which, in the year 1792, were brought back to the Netherlands on the Company's flute **de Hoop**, on its return from the Cape, where it had just landed 219 Militia.":

| | Gulden. |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 5,230 muids of wheat, costing | 20,710:16 |
| 20 leaguers white Steenwine, costing | 960 |
| 8 ,, Red ,, ,, | 1,408 |
| 2 ,, Assorted wines ,, ,, | 264 |
| 1 ,, Small ,, ,, | 88 |
| 1 ,, Pontac ,, ,, | 176 |
| 6 ,, Brandy ,, ,, | 528 |
| 52,740 lbs. Talc | 5,801:8 |
| 4,144 ,, Aloe | 1,508:7:8 |

It is interesting to note that Pontac and Red Steenwine, whatever that might have been, cost nearly four times as much as ordinary White Steenwine, which cost £4 per leaguer.

He further states that the Cape exported the following quantities of wine in 1793:

| |
|--------------------------|
| 632 leaguers of wine. |
| 35 aums of wine. |
| 88 aums Constantia wine. |
| 8 half-aums Vintint. |

From Holland were imported: "casks, put together or in staves, bottoms, and hoops."

During the first British occupation, Lord Macartney paid Mr. Cloete, in 1798, for one cask (equal to 1 aum, or 32 gallons) of Groot Constantia wine, 75 riksdalders (at about 3/6 per rd.), and 12 riksdalders for one half-aum of ordinary good wine. For four casks of Constantia wine he paid Cloete and Colyn 300 riksdalders, *i.e.*, £52 10s. for this leaguer of Constantia wine, which was thus sold at three and one-eighth times the price of ordinary good wine. The latter, at 16 guineas per leaguer, would be considered expensive at the present time. If we could again produce a wine equal to the famous Constantia wine which made the name of Cape wine famous all over the world, we would have no difficulty in selling it at the price Lord Macartney paid Mr. Cloete.