

Prize medal in sterling silver awarded to Greiffenhagen at the Geelong Industrial and Juvenile Exhibition 1879-80.



Photo: Dean McNicoll

County of Bendigo Agricultural and Horticultural Society prize medal in silver, awarded to 'W.Greiffenhagen Axe Creek 1st Prize for Wine Oct 27th 1880'.



## in search of gold

Lured by reports of incredible finds on the Victorian goldfields, three young German men sailed to Australia in 1854. Wilhelm Greiffenhagen and his twin cousins, Carl and August Heine, came to Australia in search of gold on the newly discovered Bendigo goldfields. They were only moderately successful prospectors, and their 1861 certificates of naturalisation record them as 'being wishful to have a legal title to real estate'.

The three cousins bought adjoining land on Axe Creek (near Bendigo), planted experimental vines and formed a fruitful partnership. In 1864 they established the Hercynia Vineyard of Heine and Greiffenhagen – named after the region in Germany where Greiffenhagen was born. Heine and Greiffenhagen were part of a wave of Swiss and German immigrants who greatly influenced Victorian winemaking practices during the 1860s. Owing in part to their vineyard, Bendigo became an important centre of winemaking and by this time was the colony's fourth largest wine-growing district.

In 1869 the Hercynia vineyard's influence in the region increased with the construction of a three-storey homestead fitted with a first class winery and cellars. Bendigo architects and German immigrants Vahland and Getzschmann designed the building as a central facility for the many small grape growers of the district. The homestead was widely admired; a wood engraving of the structure was published in the *Illustrated Australian News* of June 1878. Unfortunately the cost of the building brought an end to the cousins' partnership, and between 1870 and 1873 Greiffenhagen bought out his partners' shares to become the sole proprietor of the vineyard.

Meanwhile, the Hercynia wines went from strength to strength, achieving acclaim and medals at many local and international exhibitions. The Museum recently acquired a collection of three nineteenth-century prize medals and a silver prize cup awarded to Greiffenhagen's vineyard. A silver cup won at the 1877 Bendigo Agricultural and Horticultural Society Autumn Show is a beautiful demonstration of the pre-eminence of Hercynia wines in the region.

Tragedy struck however in 1893 when the vine louse *Phylloxera vastatrix* was discovered in the district. Growers were ordered to pull out all vines within a two-mile radius of the affected vineyards (at the time this was thought to be an effective remedy). The Hercynia vines were destroyed, along with the promising local wine-making industry. Greiffenhagen never replanted his vines, and concentrated instead on producing apple cider from his extensive orchard. He continued to run the property until his death in 1916, when his youngest son James took over.

Like so many early settlers, the skills and knowledge Greiffenhagen brought with him to Australia were the basis of his success in the new colony. Instead of finding his gold on the Bendigo goldfields, he found it in the rich soils of his vineyard.

Rowan Henderson is a Curatorial Assistant in Australian Society and Culture



Sterling silver prize cup, hand decorated with intertwined grapevines. Engraved 'Autumn Show 1877 Prize Cup Awarded to Wm Greiffenhagen, Esq, By the Bendigo Vine and Fruitgrowers Association For the Best White Wine Vintage 1876'.

Photo: Dean McNicoll