

# Hunter Semillon it's early history

Among the grape varieties brought back by James Busby in 1832 was the Semillon grape. He divided his collection into thirds, one going to the Botanical Gardens, one to Thomas Shepherd and the remaining to his Hunter Valley vineyard Kirkton.

Thomas Shepherd was a renowned nurseryman who had his establishment near Vine Street in Darlington, just near what is now Sydney University. Shepherd was a friend of Busby's and helped him write his manual for growing grapes. Shepherd also gave lectures on viticulture at the Mechanics School of Arts in Pitt Street, Sydney. The building designed by the colonial architect John Bibb is still standing and has been restored and become the Art House Hotel.

The School of Arts was a precursor of Sydney University and served as an important resource for providing know how to the colonists. The Reverend Henry Carmichael one time president of the Hunter River Vineyard Association and owner of the Porphyry Vineyard was on the School of Arts Board

A report seen here in the Maitland Mercury of 1850 outlines Shepherds identification of this grape variety as suitable to plant in the colony and how it became known as Shepherd's Riesling.



About twenty years ago the late Mr. Thomas Shepherd, a well-known colonist of that period, the original former and owner of the "Darling Nursery," had the merit of first taking notice of this grape, as it grew in luxuriance and freshness in front of one of the primitive dwellings in Sydney, gratifying the eye by its greenness and health, in the midst of an atmosphere which was withering and desiccating every other form of vegetation. On, consequently, procuring and rearing this variety in his Darling Nursery, Mr. Shepherd had the satisfaction of finding that it stood well the trying vicissitudes to which that locality is subject, and that it proved a juicy and richly flavoured grape. He, thenceforth, recommended the culture of this variety with his characteristic zeal; and it has, in consequence, become pretty generally known in the vineyards of the colony. In deserved compliment to Mr. Shepherd's sagacity it is usually called "Shepherd's Grape;" and as it is known to bear close resemblance to the larger Riesling of the Rhine, if it be not, indeed, that very variety, it has been proposed to designate it by the name of "Shepherd's Riesling."

Mr. Carmichael, of Porpyhry, William River, produced two wines, a red and a white. The red wine was of full rich colour, and was of the vintage of 1849, and made from mixing the wine of two hogsheads, one being made from the Pineau Noir solely, and the other from a mixture of grapes; it was a very strong and full flavoured wine, of Burgundy aroma, and was pronounced a strong and good wine. The white wine was of a rich golden colour, of the vintage of 1849, made from the Shepherd's variety (Shepherd's Reisling) grape; this was a delicious wine, and one of the very best produced at the meeting, the flavour being luscious and most agreeable; it was highly commended by all the members, as beautiful, delicious, sound, beautifully clear, and very good. Mr. Carmichael was asked a number of questions as to his process in the manufacture.

James King of Irrawang among other members of the Vineyard Association recognised the suitability of Shepherd's Riesling in the Hunter such that by the 1850's it had proven to be a most successful white grape variety.

Known as Shepherds Riesling then Hunter River Riesling because of its resemblance to the German wine that was so popular at the time. We know it today as Semillon and indeed the Hunter has become famous for this Varietal thanks largely to the keen observations by the early pioneers of our wine industry.