

A short history of Muratie

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This piece is based on a much more detailed history written by Dr Helena Scheffler for the Melck family. It was originally presented at a VASSA visit to Muratie in 1996, when Helena stood in front of the old opstal to address the group.

In March 2005 Muratie was chosen as a distinct contrast to neighbouring estates within the day's excursion theme of upgrading and rebuilding in the context of new trends in the wine industry. Muratie was one of the first estates to open to the public for wine tasting and direct sales of wine, but the buildings themselves and methods of wine-making have scarcely changed for hundreds of years. Rijk Melck and his family continue to greet and serve their visitors and to retell the old stories in the midst of architectural and artefactual remnants (and ancient cobwebs) (Fig. 1). For instance, the 1930s concrete tanks in the old cellar have been minimally converted into alcoves for wine-tasting and there is a bar behind old wooden stable fittings.

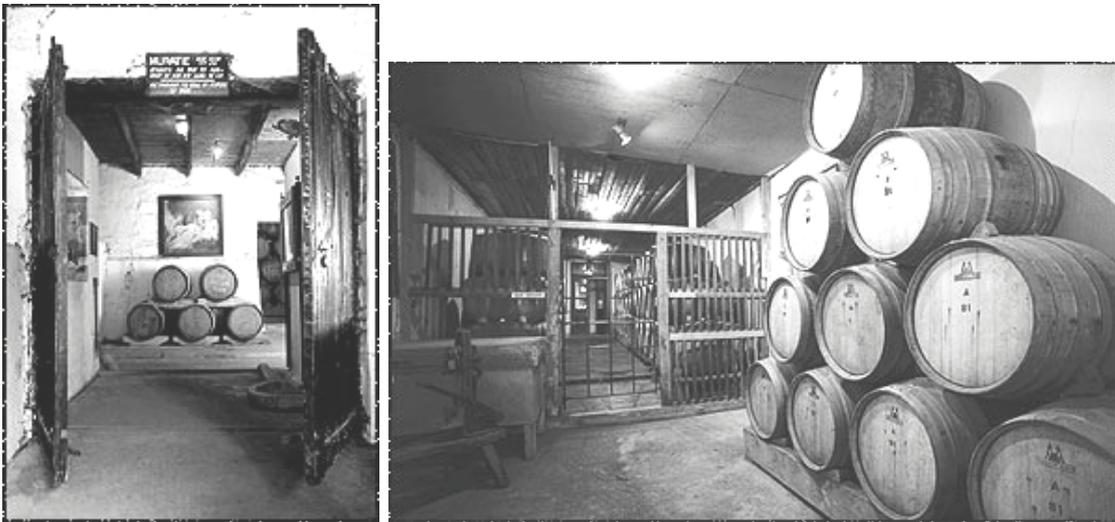


Figure 1. Outbuildings are used for wine tasting and remain scarcely changed over the years (photos off website).

The settlement at the Cape was only 47 years old when Muratie was granted to the first owner in February 1699. It was originally known as De Driesprong, which means 'a place where three roads come together'. The first owner, Lourens Campher, was a German from Pommerania, and he was already living on the farm when it was granted to him.

Earlier, while Campher was still living in Table Valley, he befriended a young Company slave called Ansela van de Kaap. She lived in the Company slave lodge at the top of the Heerengracht. Her mother came from Guinea and her father was an unknown Company official. Ansela and Lourens had three children. They were all born in the slave lodge and baptized in the church in the Castle. Soon after the birth of their first baby, Lourens moved away to Stellenbosch and from then on he could only see his beloved whenever he visited Cape Town on business. He did not own a horse and had to travel the 50 kilometres through the deep sand of the Cape Flats by ox-wagon or on foot. This romance continued for ten years.

Ansela was fortunately freed in 1695 after she was sold to a wealthy and influential woman. Lourens probably felt wonderful when he left De Driesprong to fetch his little family from Cape Town. The journey back must have been a very happy one. Freedom beckoned and it

was probably also the slaves's very first excursion into the interior. Cornelis was nine, Agnita five and little Jacoba three years old.

Lourens and Anselma married and worked hard to establish the farm. They were quite poor and never had servants or slaves to help them. At one stage they had 8000 vines and on average they produced about 600 litres of wine a year. After Lourens's death in 1729, Anselma and her son Cornelis continued to farm for five years before selling De Driesprong.

The Camphers's humble abode still exists today, behind the homestead. It is near the river on a small rise – close enough for fetching water but high enough to escape floods. The house is shown on the original title deed (Farm 47 DO OSF1.I-137, SG dgm 30/1699). On this drawing it has a pitched roof, straight end-gables, and a door in the gable wall nearest to the river. This corresponds today with the kitchen on the left. We know that these early drawings were not merely imaginative, but were of buildings that really existed at the time.

According to a tree expert, a surviving oak is about 300 years old and must therefore have been planted by the Camphers. The Camphers lived here for forty years.

After the Camphers, the farm was owned by three Germans and in 1743 the son of a French Huguenot immigrant took over. Hercules du Preez not only bought Driesprong but also the nearby farm, Het Kleigat. These two farms were sold together for many years. Du Preez sold the properties to his brother-in-law, who in his turn sold them to the famous Martin Melck in 1763.

The 40-year old Melck had just made a fortune during the Seven Years War. Apart from Driesprong and Kleigat he also bought properties in Cape Town and the farm Uitkyk. He and his wife Anna Hop lived at Elsenburg. After Melck's death in 1781 his vast domain was divided between his children. His oldest daughter, 28-year old Anna Catharina, received De Driesprong and Kleigat. She was married to a German, Jan David Beyers, and they lived in the elegant double-story house on the adjacent Uitkyk.

After Jan's death Anna kept Driesprong and Kleigat for a further thirteen years before passing the farms on to her eighth child, Jan Andries Beyers. A year later her son received an adjacent piece of land of 61 morgen. It was a narrow strip that stretched in the direction of Simonsberg. Today it is part of Delheim.

In 1827 Jan Andries Beyers and his wife built themselves an H-shaped house on Kleigat and moved in. (This house was later damaged in a fire and only part of the gables and four doors survived). Jan Andries, who was a builder, also erected a house on De Driesprong. Today this is Muratie's homestead.

Later, Jan Andries received another 600 morgen of land surrounding Driesprong and Kleigat and which bound his property together as a whole. The name of this new farm, which incorporated Driesprong and Kleigat, was Knorhoek. The name comes from *waar de leeuws knorren* – where the lions roar.

After the death of Jan Andries, his oldest son Jan Andries II inherited the huge farm. The new owner was 46 years old, a widower, and known as *Klein Koning* (Little King). A month after he received the enormous piece of land, he married Tryntje Albertyn. She was only 19 years old and from the neighbouring farm Groenhof.

After Klein Koning's death Tryntje continued to farm but unfortunately her son was not interested and in 1897 she divided the land into two pieces and sold it to outsiders. The Melck-Beyers family had owned Driesprong for 134 years.

At that stage the land on which today's Muratie stands was already known as *Muratie* (ruin), although officially the name was still "part of Knorhoek". It was called Muratie because the roof of the original pioneer dwelling had burned down.

The new owner, William van der Byl, was 31 years old. When he and his wife and little toddler moved into the homestead, it was the first time in more than a century that the owner himself lived on Muratie. During Van der Byl's ownership two pieces of land were sold off. This was in 1903. They still exist as Drie Sprong and Nieuwe Tuin. Van der Byl sold his farm to John Wright in 1907.

John Wright was married to his cousin, Louisa Cronwright. Her brother was married to the writer Olive Schreiner. The Wrights were leading citizens. Louisa's father, brother and an uncle were all Members of Parliament. Olive's brother, Will Schreiner, was Prime Minister of the Colony.

The Wrights lived on Muratie for only a short while before selling it in 1909 to Alice Sarah Stanford. From now on the farm was officially known as Muratie. Her husband, Walter Stanford, was a Senator. When they moved into the homestead their daughters were all still living at home. They did not attend school but were educated at home. One of the sons studied at Elsenburg. Prime Minister John X, Merriman, who lived on Schoongezicht, often called at Muratie. Walter Stanford traveled to Cape Town by train on Monday mornings and returned on Fridays. He adored farming and devoted all his spare time to it. He planted wheat and grew apples, grapes, peaches, melons and apricots.

The Stanfords's life reminds one of the 'landed gentry' in England. Guests often came over from Cape Town for the day; others came for lunch or for tennis parties. Hardly a weekend went by without house guests. Stanford loved shooting parties and riding. All members of the family were excellent riders. They often went for walks, to Knorhoek or Uitkyk, and climbed Simonsberg. Once a week they went to Stellenbosch where Mrs Stanford took singing lessons at the Conservatory, and the daughters took dancing lessons. They attended dances at Government House (Tuinhuis) in Cape Town and went to Hunt Club Balls, and in turn hosted dances and fancy-dress parties at Muratie. They traveled to Elsenburg by Cape cart for the College sports days, where they also danced. According to Stanford's diaries, the return journeys by moonlight were always very romantic.

After the oldest Stanford daughter married, with a reception at Muratie, they sold the farm because it would have been too lonely for the remaining two girls. The next owner, Philip Lotz, owned Muratie for 15 years. After him the well-known German painter, Georg Paul Canitz, took over in 1926. He knew little about wine-making but fell in love with the beautiful setting and the old oaks. His friend Professor Abraham Perold, who founded KWV, helped him and soon Canitz produced very fine wines. Until 1975 Muratie was the only South African farm which produced Pinot Noir wine.

In the morning Canitz donned his white dustcoat and painted in his studio, in the afternoons he farmed, and in the evenings he jumped into the saddle. He loved horses and was an excellent horseman. In the lounge of the homestead there is a portrait of him in riding gear, painted before he left Germany. There are also beautiful paintings of his wife Hanne and daughters Annemie and Ilse.

Canitz left Muratie every year to go on painting expeditions in the Transvaal and elsewhere. People streamed to the farm to buy his work and he could hardly supply the demand. He exhibited in London, Paris and Hamburg.

Canitz's parties were very famous. During the weekend, guests came from Cape Town and relaxed at the pool (which he built on the Standford's tennis court). Photographs show rather daring-looking girls with the latest bathing suits, often even smoking cigarettes. The real party place, however, was the small *Kneipzimmer* (pub) near the pool. The roof and walls were covered with inscriptions in German, Greek, French, English and Afrikaans. It was the scene of Bohemian gatherings where German drinking songs were often sung. Canitz referred to the room as 'the chapel' (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. A family portrait, stacks of wine bottles and a path leading through the cool shadowed werf attest to the hospitality to be expected at Muratie (photos off website).

Annemie Canitz helped her father in the vineyards and it was she who took over after he died in 1959. At that stage she was the only woman winemaker in the country. She also loved horses and rode until she was 80. She used to say: “I was rough, I was tough, I could ride”. Annemie kept everything the way it was during her father’s time - the cellar, the chapel and the house. It is still very much the same today.

In 1987 she sold Muratie to Ronnie and Annetjie Melck (Fig. 3). The farm thus once again became the property of the Melck family. After Ronnie died in 1995 his ashes were buried on a high part of the farm. He is the only owner whose remains rest on Muratie. Today the wine estate is managed by Ronnie and Annetjie Melck’s two sons, Rijk and Anton.



Figure 3. Two generations of the Melck family (photos off website).

Addendum

Hans Fransen describes the estate buildings as follows: “The present homestead is undated, but must have been built c1830 by Johan Andreas Beyers, perhaps for a manager. It is rectangular in shape, and has a kind of ‘condensed H-plan’. The front-gable, tall in proportion

because of the comparatively great depth of the house, has a pediment with a mock-chimney in its centre. The name Muratie only came into use round the turn of the century during the ownership of H. Porter; the ruins of the first homestead must still have been visible. Muratie was the home of pioneer wine make and painter Georg Canitz from 1925; an outbuilding with large arched windows must have served as his studio. The farm has a fairly complete enclosed werf behind the homestead” (Fransen 2004: 203-204).

References

Fransen, H. 2004. *The Old Buildings of the Cape*. Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball.

www.muratie.com