

## Our French Connection – The Huguenots

In 1685 Louis XIV, (the *Sun King* 1643 – 1715), revoked the Edict of Nantes which had provided a measure of religious freedom to Huguenot protestants in France. Persecution recommenced and a steady stream of refugees fled to Holland, England and Scotland and the United States. Many who stayed were killed or sold as galley slaves for the French and Turkish fleets. Being sentenced to the galleys was a particularly harsh punishment for educated and law abiding people.

About 250,000 Huguenots fled France and a small fraction, about 200 were sent to the Cape from Holland. Initially most were given farms in Franschoek (French corner) but soon they became spread over the colony. Their language was lost within a generation or two but French family- and farm names remain a feature of the Afrikaans community in South Africa.

The French had to swear an oath of allegiance (see Appendix) to Holland before coming to the Cape and they were allocated land alongside Dutch neighbours under a deliberate policy to integrate the new arrivals. The French were keen to maintain their own church and schools but they had to mix, and they lost their language and separate identity.

While their numbers were small (about one sixth of the settler population), they had a huge influence on the community which up to that time consisted almost completely of existing and former employees (sailors, soldiers, administrators and labourers) of the Dutch East India Company. The French came from many backgrounds and enriched the Colony with their culture, education and know-how. Several came from southern France having experience with crops of the Cape's Mediterranean climate.

The following extract is from a contribution on Genforum, a genealogy chat website, attributed to *Proceedings Of The Huguenot Society Of London*, Volume 5, No. 1-4, 1894-1896, Printed by Charles T. King, High Street, Lymington, 1898.



**The Dutch East India Company encouraged the Huguenots to emigrate to the Cape because they shared the same religious beliefs, and also due to the fact that most of them were highly trained craftsmen or experienced farmers, specifically in viticulture and oenology (the growing of grapes and making of wine, brandy and vinegar). They, as well as their descendants, proved that they were hard working and industrious, and their efforts led to a**

**marked increase in the improvement of quality Cape wines. A number of wine estates have French names to this day, as a reminder of their important contribution to this industry in the Western Cape. The number of vine plants**

increased from 100 in 1655 (three years after the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape) to 1,5 million in 1700.

When John Ovington visited the Cape in 1693, (*i.e. 5 years after most of the Huguenots arrived*) he wrote:

*“Their vineyards have been established over an area of more than seventy five English miles, yet they still have their eyes on large pieces of virgin soil before them. In this district they farm with livestock, plant maize, establish vineyards and improve everything conscientiously for the greatest benefit .... Their vineyards, which they have multiplied to a large variety of cultivars, can now also provide the passing ships...”*

A number of Huguenots were listed as experienced "vineyard pruners". The De Villiers brothers in particular arrived at the Cape with a reputation for viticulture and oenology. Through the years the De Villiers brothers planted more than 40 000 vines at the Cape. They moved from the original farm allocated to them (which they named *La Rochelle*) to finally settle on individual allotments near Franschoek with the names *Bourgogne*, *Champagne* and *La Brie*.

Several Morkels had wives of Huguenot descent. 2nd generation Willem Morkel and 5<sup>th</sup> generation Daniel Johannes Morkel had wives from the Malan family of Morgenster. My father, Daniel Johannes Morkel married Catharina Elizabeth Theron and my French names, André Theron are derived from this heritage. I married Barbara Elise Retief, from a well known Huguenot family in South Africa.

I shall post stories of other Huguenot wives, particularly the Malan, Theron and Retief families. The Theron story contains a rare letter from his father in France written in 1719, about 20 years after his migration. There is so much about the Retiefs, including two volumes about the family farm and relatives of Barbara, that it will be a task how much to include in our short story.

**Websites about the Huguenots** (a Google search will show plenty more:

<http://www.stamouers.com/>

<http://www.geocities.com/huguenotblad/?20091>

<http://www.museum.co.za/>

**An account of the horrors of a Huguenot as a galley slave is in:**

<http://manakin.addr.com/galleys.html>

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## Appendix.

### Oath of Allegiance taken by Huguenot immigrants to the Cape

To be taken by the Freemen not in the service of the Company, proceeding to the Cape of Good Hope before setting out from this country [Holland].

*'I promise and swear to bear true and faithful allegiance to their High Mightinesses the States General of the United Provinces our Sovereign Masters and Lords, to His Highness the Lord Prince of Orange, as Governor, Captain and Admiral General, and to the Directors of the General Chartered Company of the East Indies in the said lands, likewise to the Governor-General of India, as well as to the Governors, Commandants and others who may be placed over me during the voyage by sea and afterwards on land. That I will observe and execute faithfully, in every respect, all the laws and ordinances made by the Lords Directors, the Governor General and Councillors or Commandant of the place of my abode, and moreover, to regulate and behave myself in every sense as a good and faithful subject.*

*So help me God.*

*Done and registered at the meeting of the Seventeen on October 20th, 1687.'*

#### **In French :**

Que doivent prester les Personnes libres & estant hors le service de la Compagnie, qui vont au Cap de Bonne Esperance avant que de partir de ce pais.

*'Je promets et jure d'estre soumis et fidelle a leurs hautes puissances les Estats Generaux des Provinces Unies, nos Souverains Maistres et Seigneurs, a Son Altesse, Monseigneur le Prince d'Orange, comme Gouverneur, Capitaine et Amiral General, et au Directeurs de la Compagnie Generale des Indes Orientales de ce pais, Pareillement au Gouverneur General des Indes, ainsi qu'a tous les Gouverneurs Commandants, et autres qui durant le Voyage par Mer et ensuite par terre auront commandement sur nous. Et que j'observeray et executeray, fidellement, et de point en point, toutes les loix et ordonnances, faites ou a faire tant par Messieurs les Directeurs, par le Gouverneur General et par les Conseillers, que par le Gouverneur ou Commandant du lieu de ma residence, et de me gouverner et comporter en toutes choses comme un bon et fidelle sujet.*

*Ainsi Dieu M'aide.*

*Fait et arreste dans l'assemblee des Dix Sept. le 20 Octobre, 1687.'*

The regulations and agreements drawn up provided for a free passage in their ships to all those who wished to come out as colonists. They were only

allowed such luggage as was necessary for their use, and that was to be according to the discretion of the Directors of the Company, the Council of Seventeen. They were permitted to take as much specie as they liked, and were to earn their living at the Cape by agriculture, trade or any industry. As agriculturists they were to be given as much land in ownership as they could till, and such implements and cattle as they might require, but the price of these was to be refunded to the Company in corn or otherwise. Those going, whether married or single, were to remain in their new settlement for five years, which period could be reduced by special request to the Directorate. Those wishing to return to Europe after the five years were to pay their own passages.

**Source:**

CG Botha, 1919 *The French Refugees at the Cape*, Cape Times Limited.