

The Beginning

Hendrik Elbertz was the first owner of the original farm, Vredenburg. Hendrik was born in 1625 in Osnabruk, Germany, and died in 1699 in Stellenbosch. He was married to Aletta ter Meulen (Molen) of Schüttorf in Hanover. Nine children were born out of the marriage, eight of whom went on to outlive Hendrik.

Hendrick Elbertz was one of the 9 officials who, on the 21st of February 1657, received “vrybriewe” from the Dutch East India Company, and became one of the first independent farmers (“boere”) in the Cape. In May 1660, he was promoted to Corporal of the Vryburgers, who lived along the Liesbeeck River. On the 31st of January in 1678, Hendrik took his dismissal from the service of the VOC and rented the outpost at Hottentots Holland, and in doing so became one of the first livestock farmers in the country’s interior. (The Hottentots Holland outpost is known today as Vergelegen).

When the Company took the Hottentots Holland outpost back at the end of 1680, Hendrik Elberts went to farm at Vredenburg along the Eerste River in January 1681. His farm was later valued at 8,000 guilders, and his milk cattle and oxen at 3,000 guilders.

In August 1682, van der Stel saw that there were still many continued disputes over farm boundaries and public roads in and around Stellenbosch. Hendrik Elberts, being one of the local residents, was one of the people appointed to solve these problems.

The earliest dated image of a Bosch home (1686) appeared on the deed of the farm Vredenburg at Vlotenburg, from the pen of John Mulder, the town's first magistrate and surveyor.

In 1687, Stellenbosch already had more than 109 000 vines and more than 233 000 in 1692. On the 24th of January 1691, Vredenburg (62 acres) was granted to Hendrik Elbertz by Governor Simon van der Stel. After Henry's death in 1699, his son Izak inherited the farm.

On the 22nd of July 1716, Izak's niece Geertruy and her husband, Johannes Wessels, inherited the farm. Johannes Wessels also bought the neighbouring farm, Vottenburg, from Antoni Vlotman on the 5th of November 1716. After John's death in 1719, Geertruy married Jan Cloete. On the 30th of November 1734, Geertruy Cloete bought a portion of land from the widow van der Bijl (allocated to Izak van der Hiet on October 24, 1689). This is an important part in the history of Vredenburg, as this is where the Manor House was built. After the widow Cloete, it changed owners a few times: Johanns Loubser (1742), Matheus Guillamet (1743), Jan de Villiers (1756) - he and his wife Aletha (born Hugo) were murdered by a slave on 25 July 1761 - and Herculius Adrian Malan (1761). Paul Roux IV bought the farm on the 6th of May 1772, and Vredenburg remained in the Roux family until 1942 – 170 years.

The Manor House

Paul Roux built the Manor House in 1789. In 1811, a board was appointed for improving methods of viticulture and viniculture. Two prominent farmers, Paul Roux of Vredenburg and Pieter van der Bijl, both from the Stellenbosch area, had already implemented better farming methods.

Paul bought a further piece of land on the 13th March 1818. Paul Roux IV divided the farms on the 30th of July 1824: Vlotenburg went to his eldest son Paul V (also called "The Wynkoper"), and

Vredenburg went to his third son Jacobus Petrus ("Koos Witkop"). JP Roux was the 4th wealthiest wine farmer in Stellenbosch district . In 1825, the number of vines at Vredenburg totalled 110 000 – 108 leers (62,316 litres) for wine production and 2 leers (1,154 litres) for brandy. JP Roux bought another share of land on the 4th August 1831. In 1861 Vredenburg was divided into two. The remainder of Vredenburg, Goudvertrouw, was given to Paul Jacobus Roux.

Johan Wilhelm Herold Roux (an Afrikaans Jew) inherited the farm on the 31st of December 1897. He was married to Nettie Neetling and they had no children. Tielman Neetling, Nettie's nephew, worked on the farm from 1917. Tielman Neetling bought the farm on the 21st of December 1942 for 22,000 pounds. He was known for making quality Pport and Sherries, which were distributed under the Gilbeys label. When his son Johan wanted to register the farm as an estate in 1962, he found out the name belonged to the Gilbeys group. He then decided on the name Vredenheim. John was known for quality Cabernet Sauvignon.

Today's Ownership

Coen and Rikie Bezuidenhout bought the farm in 1986. Their daughter, Elzabe, started winemaking and was the first female winemaker on the Stellenbosch wine route. Coen Bezuidenhout died in 2005. His son, daughter and grandson went on with the operations of the farm. Kowie du Toit, former winemaker of Vlotenburg cellar (today Stellenbosch Hills), is the current winemaker.

Buildings

The Manor House was built in 1789 by Paul Roux. It was declared a National Monument in 1975.

The gable's outline consists of a series of curves, the lower curves turning inwards while the others swing upwards to end in a central shell-like motif. There are other lovely ornaments as well – birds, flowers and what looks like the face of a little man. The whole gable is strikingly similar to the gables built in both Idas Valley (1789) and Hazendal (1790). It's therefore possible that the same craftsman was responsible for all three. There is a gable on the back of the house which is less complex, but equally beautiful. The house was built in an H-shape. Although the interior has changed a lot, there is still a beautiful similarity.

Like many other old Cape houses, it was subject to heavy Victorian influences in 1920: the thatched roof was replaced with corrugated iron, and a "stoepafdak" (veranda roof) complete with cast iron and lights was added. The original front door was built into an outbuilding, and the beautiful gable was preserved.

The house was restored in 1940/41. Mrs. Neetling (windower Tielman Neetling) said that the house was restored in the war, making it difficult because all of the necessary material was not available. They were therefore very lucky to be situated nearby to a quarry, where they could source the right kind of uneven tiles that were needed for the front porch. Unlike most homes from that time, Vredenheim's homestead did not have Batavian tiles in the foyer, but black slate. Vredenheim's windows still have the original small patterns of handmade glass, but the shutters were replaced over time.

According to San Vivier (granddaughter of Tielman Neetling), the es (oven) was apparently not built at the right height. She also said her grandfather took people to Groot Constantia's Manor House in order to get an idea of how they should restore the house. Some of the original furnishings are still in the house today.

Other Buildings

Behind the Manor House (to the left), there is another outbuilding with end gables, probably built before the Manor House. This is only one of many examples of "curving" end gables. Other examples include Vergelegen, built in 1701, and Nootgedacht in 1774. It is very unusual and rare to find such heavy gables used as end gables.

According to Mrs Simone Vivier (daughter of Tielman Neetling), her father used some of the rooms as wine cellars. Today it is used mainly as a residential area.

The Cellar

The cellar was demolished in 1950 and rebuilt in the same place as the original cellar. In 1986, a porch was built at one end of the cellar, which was later enclosed for a restaurant (Restaurant Barrique). The interior was also turned into a function room and a wine tasting area. Some of the old concrete wine tanks were opened to house offices.

The farm barn adjacent to the winery was turned into a coffee shop, Hudson's, and a function room in September 2002. The wetlands behind the building were transformed into gardens with breathtaking views of the Helderberg, and a lovely dam.

Interesting Facts

- 1) In 1806, at the Battle of Blue Mountain, Gen. Jansen's troops were defeated by the British, so he and a few of his troops fled away from Cape Town, overnighing at Vredenburg.
- 2) There is a large two-storey building that was restored in 2006 by the Bezuidenhout family, and converted into apartments. The building was constructed by Mr. Tielman Neetling in the 1940s, and was part of the Tokai correctional school. The more rehabilitated students were taken to Vredenheim. The building next to the double-storey school was the office, kitchen and a time-out room, used when the children ran away and were caught, where they'd stay until the following day when they returned Tokai. They are divided into teams to work on neighbouring farms, and Mr. Neetling was entitled to a quarter of the group. Their daily wage was 7 and sixpence. The school was only open until about 1958 and then closed for good. Mr. Albertyn was the principle until 1950, Mr. Horten Griffiths until 1956, and Mr. Carstens for the final two years.
- 3) Mr. Tielman Neetling was also, amongst other things, a dairy farmer. He also imported gladiola and daffodil bulbs from Holland, with the flowers being harvested and then sent to Cape Town and Adderley Street. The students could sell the surplus flowers for extra pocket money.

- 4) The Vlottenburgh cellar (Stellenbosch Hills) today was once a farm shop and was owned by Saphiro, a German Jew. He had an excellent knowledge of cattle.

- 5) There are two cannons in front of the Manor House, and a further, larger one in the garden near Barrique. In December 2007, the three guns were identified as 292, 293 and 294, and the two smaller ones were cleaned and given a new stand by Mr. Jerry Smith. The smaller one can now shoot again. The larger gun is a cast iron 1 Pounder Bailey Pegg & Co. of Brierley Hill in England, and dates back to about 1800 to 1830. The presence of the weight marking 2:0:21 indicates that it may have been in military service either at sea or with land forces. The smaller gun, when it was cleaned, revealed its true identity as being a 1/2 pounder cast by the Carron Co. of Falkirk in Scotland in 1782. The 1/2 pounder was never formally used by military forces, but was cast for merchant ship use, or for sale to the general public.