

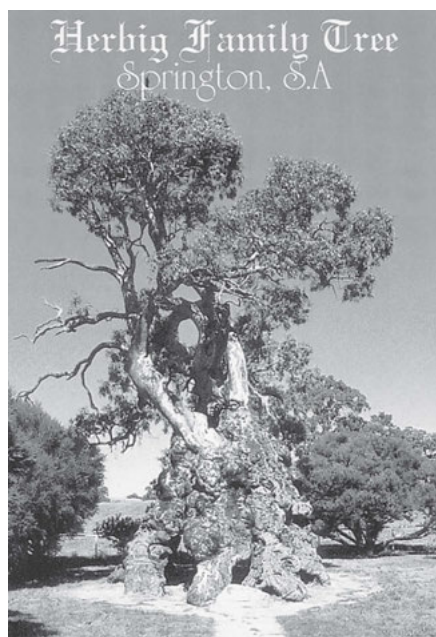
Trees of many different sorts, shapes, sizes, locations and significance have been featured on postcards. Few can be as unusual and historic as the gnarled old red gum tree now celebrated and lovingly preserved as the HERBIG FAMILY TREE, which picturesquely exemplifies a seminal chapter in the story of early settlement in South Australia a century and a half ago.

It stands at the southern approach in Springton, a neat township on the road that links places happily named Mount Pleasant and Eden Valley, in the south-east corner of the Barossa, an area covering some 25 by 20 miles situated about 50 miles north-east of Adelaide.

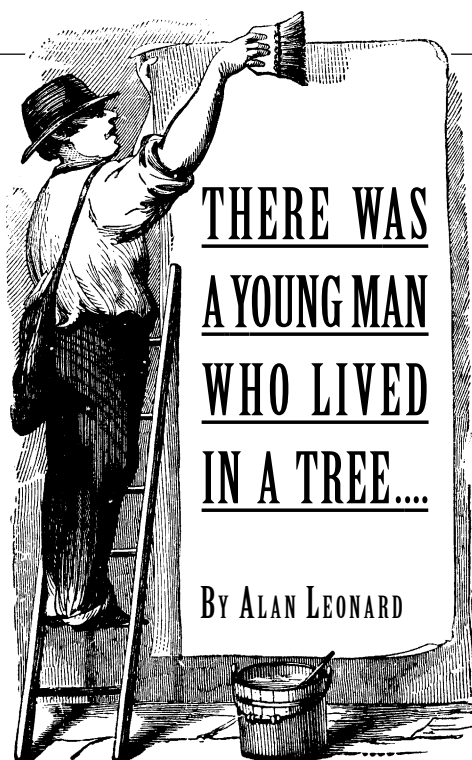
Today this is a popular scenic region, highly cultivated, with nearly fifty "wineries" supplied by almost ten times as many vineyards, making it widely known as a major centre of the Australian wine industry.

The Barossa was named in 1837 by Colonel William Light (1786-1839), the first Surveyor General of South Australia – now best remembered for his layout of its fine capital city. He took the name from a battle of 1811 in the Peninsula War, Barossa meaning 'hill of roses' in Spanish; the initial local misspelling as Barossa soon became the accepted Australian form. Otherwise, there was nothing Spanish about the Barossa, whose early settlers were mostly German – as still recalled by attractive survivals of vernacular architecture, Lutheran churches and a heritage embracing brass bands, vintage festivals, distinctive cuisine and, of course, some old-established wine-making businesses.

The German connection had its beginnings in discussions in London in 1836 between



The Herbig Family Tree, depicted on a modern card (bought in the nearby township by the author on a recent visit, courtesy Mrs. Pamela Deverell)



August Kavel (1798-1860), an energetic Lutheran pastor from Prussia, and George Fife Angas (1789-1879), a Tyneside businessman and philanthropist who was the prime mover in the South Australian Land Company, promoting the development of a new colony entirely of free settlers, without taint of convict transportation (not finally ended elsewhere in Australia until 1867).

The German Lutherans, mostly peasants from the areas straddling the present Polish-German border, sought to maintain their religious independence against the Prussian government's centralising policies imposing unification with the Calvinist churches. Angas welcomed such sturdy migrants and Kavel's persistence secured the agreement of the Prussian authorities to their migration. He led the first party of about 250 Lutherans aboard the *Prince George*, which left Hamburg in July 1838, reaching South Australia in November. Three other vessels followed during the next few weeks.

Over the ensuing years there was a steady flow of German emigrants, attracted by prospects of land ownership and good economic opportunities as well as religious freedom. By 1860 some 12,000 Germans had arrived in South Australia in over 80 emigrant ships. They soon spread to other areas but the Barossa remained their main centre.

Among the emigrants aboard the barque *Wilhelmina* which left Bremen on June 5, 1855 and landed them at Port Adelaide on October 3, after an exhausting voyage lasting 129 days, was **Johann Friedrich Herbig**, then 27, a tailor from Silesia seeking a new life on the other side of the world.

He leased a plot of 80 acres from G.F. Angas, who in 1851 had himself emigrated to create his estate and homestead near what became the township of Angaston. Herbig combined working on the Angas dairy farm

near Springton with the tasks of clearing and planting his land. These pressing occupations left him little time to build himself even a small stone and clay cottage but he was fortunate to have his first home standing immediately available on his plot, which he may well have chosen to get the benefit of this amenity.

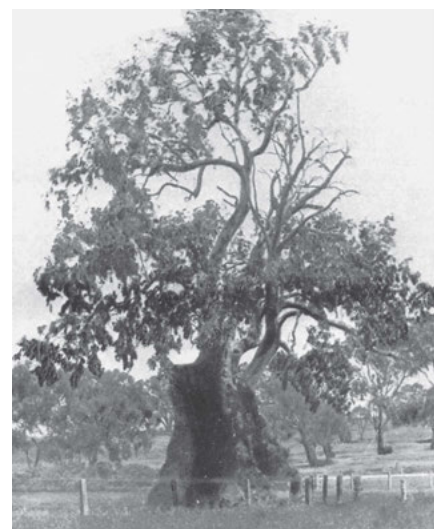
It was a red gum tree, already well over 200 years old. Its top had been broken off decades previously, by storm or lightning strike, but the stump had sprouted new branches, to a height of 70-80 ft. Its main feature was the trunk, some 20 ft. at its widest; this had been hollowed out by fire – either naturally or by the aborigines, for whom it provided winter shelter, probably supplemented by lean-to frameworks of boughs covered with bark, grass or reeds.

The Barossa area had been sparsely occupied by its original inhabitants, who moved further inland as soon as Europeans arrived there.

This old tree was a survival which the enterprising newcomer was quick to re-use for the room it afforded. Herbig could hardly have envisaged that his tree would still be standing in the 21st Century, virtually unaltered apart from becoming rather more gnarled and nobbly at its base – as shown by postcard photographs of the early 1900s and the present.

Friedrich Herbig (he always used his second name) led a bachelor life in his tree house until July 27, 1858, when he married **Anna Caroline Rattey**, then 18, one of a family of German peasants from the Posen area of Poland who had emigrated two years previously.

He brought his bride to share his unusual home – which he doubtless improved and supplemented as much as practicable. The first of their sixteen children was born there in August 1859, followed by the second in September 1860. (con't)



One of the earliest surviving photographs of the old hollow tree, taken in the early 1900s



Friedrich and Caroline Herbig, photographed after their wedding in 1858

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→ Descendants of Friedrich and Caroline Herbig gathered around the historic tree after the memorial service there during the second big family reunion in April 1978



Soon afterwards their father completed building a new family home nearby – a two room “pine and pug” cottage with a thatched roof. In 1864 he was able to complement it with an adjacent stone-built house, which still stands.

Friedrich Herbig was evidently prospering. He made the final payment on his original plot in 1867, raised crops and stock, traded as a chaff merchant (teaching himself English in the process) and bought more land, on part of which he created a small vineyard. When he and Caroline celebrated their silver wedding in 1883, he owned about 1,000 acres.

Herbig’s life was cut short at the age of 58 in 1886; he died of injuries received when he fell from his wagon crossing a creek. He was buried at the local Friedensberg church, of which he had become a respected elder. His widow lived on until 1927, dying at the age of 87.

Meanwhile, the one-time family tree house sheltered a succession of itinerant “swagmen”; in the 1920s it was used as a centre for

Members of St. John’s Lutheran church, which included many members of the extensive Herbig family, walking into Springton for lunch during their annual Mission Festival, c. 1910

providing refreshments in connection with sales at the stockyards established nearby.

Its historic significance was highlighted in 1946 when Martin Fechner, headmaster of Springton primary school, arranged for an explanatory notice to be paced on the tree.

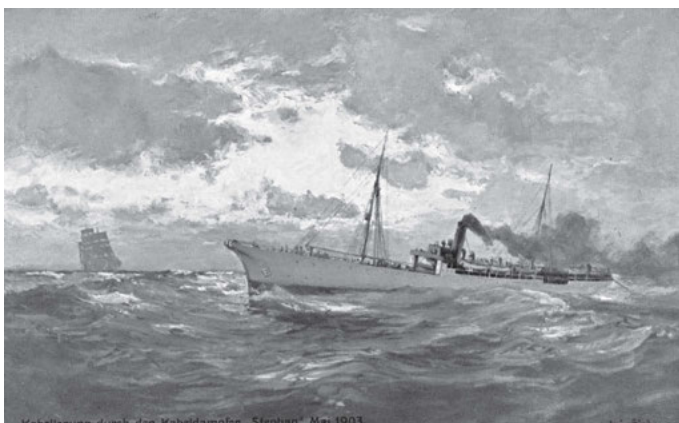
In April 1968 some of the Herbig descendants, by then numbering several hundreds, formed the J. F. Herbig Memorial Trust, to purchase land around the old tree home and preserve it as a memorial. Over 300 of them gathered at Springton on November 24 that year for a big family reunion and a service of dedication beside the tree, where Sir Keith

Angas, a great-grandson of Friedrich Herbig’s first employer, unveiled a plaque and display outlining its history.

These celebrations strengthened family ties, which were furthered by annual newsletters and a series of five-yearly reunions started in 1973, bringing together descendants from all over Australia and beyond.

Listed by the National Trust, the Herbig Family Tree, now some 400 years old, is today much cherished and visited as a unique historical feature.

What better souvenir and reminder of it than a postcard?



German cable layer “Stephan” (built in 1902) somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean, laying the second German-American cable from the Island Borkum via the Azores to New York. The painting (signature half cut off and illegible) is dated May 1903. Sailing vessel seen in background. Coloured halftone printing by “Peter Luhn, Barmen” (PELUBA). This is card no. 4 from series 3, published by “Deutsch-Atlantische Telegraphen-Gesellschaft” – Eagle Line (see trademark). Originally for distribution in German speaking countries, this sample received an additional imprint in English. “Kindly hand cablegrams for Germany, the German Colonies, Holland and elsewhere to the COMMERCIAL CABLE POSTAL TELEGRAPH offices, the *Exclusiv* connection in the United States of the GERMAN ATLANTIC CABLE COMPANY.” (Card discovered by Jim Ward)

