

A History of
The Moutere Inn
1850

The Oldest Pub in NZ

The Settlement of Upper Moutere

In the early 1840 s the NZ Company sought migrants from Europe to settle in Nelson and outlying areas. The first European settlers in the Moutere Valley were English and these were followed in 1843 by migrants predominantly from Northern Germany.

Early settlements in the valley such as St. Paulidorf were built in low lying areas, were affected by floods and abandoned. In 1850 Cordt Bensemman and his family led the permanent move to the valley by German Settlers. In a short time the village known as Sarau (now Upper Moutere) had a Church, Shop, School, Post Office and of course an Inn.

The History of Upper Moutere ...



Sarau School 1856



Harvesting Hops - Nelson c 1908

Early Settlers

Early life in the Moutere was difficult but with time, hard work and commitment a thriving farming economy and rural community developed based on pastoral farming, pipfruit, hop growing and tobacco.

Descendants of those early settlers still live and farm in the Moutere Valley and German names continue to be found in the surrounding valleys.

Above extract from The Historic Moutere Valley pamphlet by Jenny Briars Jenny Leith, authors of The Road to Sarau (1993).

The Founder of the Inn

Cordt Bensemman was one of the Hanoverian grenadiers chosen to represent Germany at the coronation of Queen Victoria in London in 1837. While there he learnt of the New Zealand Company offer of land in the New World.

At age 32 Cordt, a trained builder and soldier, left Germany and settled in Nelson on the Waimea Plains. With his wife Elisabeth and children, they started their new life in 1843 near the mouth of the Waimea river where Cordt built shelters for the settlers and worked demolishing the wrecked immigrant ship Fyfeshire.

In 1850 Cordt moved his family to Upper Moutere and began a lasting association with the village. His grave can be found in the cemetery of the Lutheran Church and many descendants of his 5 sons and daughter Anna still live in the region.



Our thanks to the Bensemman Family for freely sharing their family history and photographs with us.

Construction of the Inn

Laying the Foundations

Cordt Bensemman built a small house for his family in the grounds of the Inn using readily available rough sawn timbers from the clearing of native bush in the valley. He then commenced building the main wing of the Inn in 1850.

Construction was completed in 1853 and the Inn was granted a bush license in 1857.

This main wing is clearly visible in the first known photograph of the Inn taken in the late 1880 s with the three dormer windows of the guest rooms upstairs and the downstairs veranda facing the mountains. (right)



Settling Inn

Over the next four years Cordt Bensemman built a second wing onto the Inn with an impressive bay window that is still present today. The second wing was completed in 1857 and gave the Inn the L shaped layout that it still has to this day.

This wing was built as a family home for the Bensemman and their original rough sawn timber dwelling in the grounds of the Inn was demolished. The family lived at the Inn for the next 36 years until 1893 when Cordt's son Fred built an impressive double storied wooden villa in the village.



Building to Last

As a testament to his construction skills, like the Inn, this villa still stands untouched today.

It is located on the main street of the Upper Moure village, opposite the old post office and is home to local ceramic artist and potter Katie Gold and Owen Bartlett and their studio which is open to the public. (photo right)

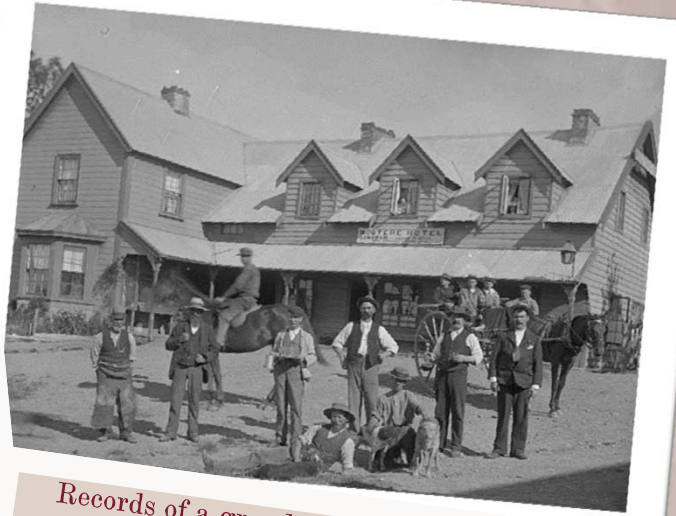


Changes over the Years

Any Old Iron

One of the first changes was the addition of corrugated iron roofing in the early 1900 s. When it was built the Inn was roofed with wooden shingles, a traditional building technique bought to the village by the German settlers. These shingles are still present under the corrugated iron on the household wing of the Inn.

By the turn of the century corrugated iron was gaining popularity. Although it was cheaper and required less skill to erect, it was not very easy to fit around the traditional dormer windows on the top storey of the Inn. This led to the second major change in the building with the removal of the dormer windows on the second storey when the iron was replaced.



Records of a grand evening held at the Inn in 1905 in honour of the completion of extensive refurbishments makes for interesting reading (see clipping on dining room wall). Everyone from the King to the Builders was toasted by the assembled gentry of the day.

The Big Boys Move in

The third and final main change to the building occurred in the late 1960 s when the Inn was taken over by Dominion Breweries.

The veranda that ran along two sides of the frontage was closed in to extend the bar. From inside the main bar and dining room the perimeter of the original walls can still be clearly seen.



Veranda, Iron Roof, No Dormer Windows Jan 1963

Change comes slowly if at all ...

The lack of change at the Inn during the last 160 years is quite remarkable. Very few buildings and the businesses in them from this era survive virtually untouched and even fewer pubs.

Pubs from this time often succumbed to fire or were rapidly and poorly built to service a temporary population such as gold miners, whalers or timber millers.

Cordt Bensemman built the Moutere Inn to last and to be a permanent anchor in a new settlement that has continued on to this day.



2011 showing closed in veranda done 50 years previously..

UPPER MOUTERE SETTLERS AND THE WAR.

The War Years

Being a German settlement Upper Moutere came under scrutiny by other parts of the district during the war years. The village changed its name from the original Sarau to Upper Moutere as a result of this.

During the war rumours of a territorial soldiers uniform being trampled on at the Moutere Inn and other incidents led to a public meeting being called. The rumours were strenuously refuted by publican Mr Thompson and all present at the meeting drafted an enthusiastic declaration of loyalty for the war effort.

The press cutting of the meeting from The Colonial newspaper is on the wall in the dining room together with other historic newspaper clippings about the Inn.

Stoush brewing over 'oldest pub' tag

The Oldest Pub in New Zealand?

Most recently the Inn has been making the news for its claim to the title of the oldest pub in the country. The competition is stiff. The Duke of Marlborough in Russell, the Horoake Inn and the Thistle Inn in Wellington all lay claim to it but there can be only one.

The claim of The Moutere Inn is unique as it is based on the endurance of the original building built by Cordt Bensemman in the 1850s. Whereas other pubs and hotels around the country have fallen victim of fire, earthquake and rampant redevelopment, the Moutere Inn is still as it was over 160 years ago, still serving good food and drink and offering travellers a bed for the night.

We believe The Moutere Inn to be the oldest pub in New Zealand still operating out of its original building. A building that has barely changed since the impressive two storey structure was completed in 1857.

Inn The News

Nelson Evening Mail.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1885.

RESIDENTS in the town are often anxious to get away with their families into the country for a few days, but are at a loss to know where they can find the necessary accommodation. It will therefore be doing them a favor to inform them that they cannot do better than select the Upper Moutere Inn, where private rooms are to be obtained at moderate rates, where they will be fed on the fat of the land, and where they will find a kind and attentive host and hostess in Mr and Mrs Brougham. The locality is an exceedingly pretty one, and in the neighborhood are rides or drives of a most attractive character.

Explorers, Travellers and Entertainers

From the outset the Inn has been a refuge for those on their way to somewhere else. A welcome stopping point for a bed, a meal and a thirst quenching drink. Rumour has it that at one point when the road was planned to divert away from the Inn, the proprietor of the day ensured a keg of beer was available for the road workers on a regular basis and to this day the road still leads to the Inn.

The newspaper clippings in the dining room give interesting accounts from travellers through the years. One disgruntled traveller wrote a stinging account to the Nelson Mail in 1888 about not being served breakfast at 5am. A more satisfied account was given by explorer Sir Julius von Haast while visiting in 1860. He recorded

"Instead of the uncomfortable English bar we had a cheerful typical German guest room before us. All round were tables and benches, at which guests were sitting; clouds of blue smoke from pipes and cigars filled the air, and daughters of the host, red-cheeked, with true flaxen hair and forget-me-not blue eyes, served the company."

TO STAND this SEASON, the powerful draught horse SOUTH STAR.

SOUTH STAR is by England's Hope, out of the prize mare Polly. He has taken three prizes. He will attend at Fox Hill on MONDAYS, calling at the Forest Inn; at the Moutere Inn on WEDNESDAYS, and the Motueka Hotel, calling at the Horse and Jockey on his return; and at the Plough Inn, Richmond, on SATURDAYS.

TERMS:—Two guineas a mare; groomage, 5s. To be paid on or before the 1st of January, 1888.

They're Drinking our Beer Here

From Paddock to Pint

Hops were grown from the earliest days of the settlement. Many small breweries sprung up to make best use of this harvest and Nelson beer was exported throughout the country to thirsty early settlers.

The onset of prohibition caused great consternation with one of the Bensemenn men representing to parliament the dire impact it would have on the community of Upper Moutere. At the time (1914) he stated that 55 of the 86 families in Upper Moutere were Hop Growers.

Over the years the brewery industry in New Zealand consolidated significantly until in the mid 60s there were only 2 breweries operating in the whole country. The variety of beers on offer went down significantly as a result and so did the time available to drink them. The photo below shows the 6 O'clock swill many will remember ..



Early Nelson brewer with a foaming fermenting vat



The Recent History of the Inn

In late 2008 four local beer enthusiasts got together and bought the Inn. They wanted to create a place where craft beers, ales and ciders from locally grown hops, grapes and apples as well as interesting brews from around the country could be enjoyed.

The pokie machines were stripped out, together with the jukebox and the telly and they set about creating a friendly and welcoming pub, not dissimilar to how it would have been in its early days.

After the bar was upgraded they tackled the dining room, the accommodation and most recently the outdoor garden bar.

Dave Watson and Andrew Cole, two of the original enthusiasts now own the Inn and have also started a contract brewery creating traditional German style beers that you can enjoy here on tap.

The Renaissance of Craft Brewing

In recent years the brewing of beer has gone full circle and there is now a proliferation of craft breweries popping back up in the Nelson Region and throughout the country.

The current owners of the Inn have been at the forefront of this renaissance offering several hundred different craft beers on tap since 1998, creating the beertourist.co.nz website for beer lovers travelling the country and championing Nelson as the Craft Brewing Capital.

Take part in their on-going quest for the best beer by trying a tasting platter and filling out the scoring matrix on the back of your beer coaster.

The wine list for the Inn is also completely local, all from within a 10km radius. Luckily the 21 vineyards they have to choose from produce some top notch wines.

Drink in the history & enjoy your visit.

Please sign up to our mailing list at the bar if you'd like a monthly email about events and happenings.