Pioneer of Albury's wine industry – John Lankester

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During the mid to late 1800s, the Albury region had become scattered with vineyards. Seeing the potential, Albury's first mayor, James Fallon, became a leader in this new Australian product. Fallon purchased east-Lavington's Murray Valley Vineyard in 1867 as well as various cellars in Albury and Melbourne. He promoted his wine to a global market and supported skilled winemakers to move to the area, including viticulturist John Delappe Lankester.

Born 1837 in Litchfield, England, Lankester arrived in Sydney in 1849 as a child with his family. Before arriving in Albury, he spent some time in the Paterson River district in the Hunter Valley before returning to Sydney where his father opened offices for Dr Lindeman's wine business. Henry Lindeman established one of the Hunter Valley's earliest vineyards in 1853.

Lankester arrived in Albury in 1868 to manage Murray Valley Vineyards. The vineyard was the largest in Albury. He managed the property for five years before moving to The Ettamogah Vineyard, owned by Harbottle, Alsop & Co. At its peak, Albury and district wines won awards in London, Paris, Bordeaux, Philadelphia, Chicago, St Louis and Calcutta.

When he arrived in Albury, Lankester was married – he and his wife had five boys and three girls. He purchased a property in the 1870s alongside Ettamogah called 'Emu Park' where he built a homestead. This land of 160 acres was granted by the Crown in recognition of his work with the volunteer forces in his youth. Here he produced wine for his own use while continuing to manage The Ettamogah Vineyard.

As a nationally recognised wine expert, Lankester's experience was sought far and wide. He was a fine wine judge, respected in NSW and Victoria. At the top of his field, he was appointed sole judge at the South Australian wine exhibition in Adelaide.

Emu Park Vineyard and workers with John Lankester
AlburyCity Collection ARM 11.324

Lankester remained in personal charge of the two properties for 46 years and retired in 1919 at 82 years of age. He continued as a member of the Albury and Border Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural Society where he also served as vice-president for 25 years. In 1937, Lankester celebrated his 100th birthday, and was the oldest resident of Albury. He passed away months later.

The wine industry faded in the 20th century, however the evidence of Albury's vineyards remains throughout the region.