

MEMORIAL TO A SUGAR PIONEER

HISTORIC CEREMONY AT BOTANIC GARDENS

On Monday, 17 December, a historic ceremony was staged at the Brisbane Botanic Gardens. At 10.30 a.m. Mr. Norman J. King, Director of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, unveiled a plaque to the memory of John Buhot, the first man to manufacture sugar in Queensland.

That was in 1862, and the cane from which the juice was extracted and successfully milled into granulated sugar was grown close to the spot where the plaque is situated. The canes were supplied by Mr. Walter Hill, Curator of the Botanic Gardens.

Permission to establish the plaque was granted by the Brisbane City Council to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, which, in conjunction with the sugar industry of Queensland, provided the cost of the plaque.

Members of the Royal Historical Society, the Queensland Sugar Board, the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, and representatives of the Australian Sugar Producers' Association and the United Cane Growers' Association attended, and several descendants of John Buhot were also present. These were Mrs. Jessie Edith Frith (Jessie Edith Walcott Buhot, granddaughter), Jannine Rosemary Frith (great-granddaughter), and Stephen Henry Frith (great-grandson), Mrs. L. S. Phillips (Gertrude May Buhot, granddaughter), Mr. William Garnett Walcott Buhot (grandson), and Master John Buhot (great-grandson).

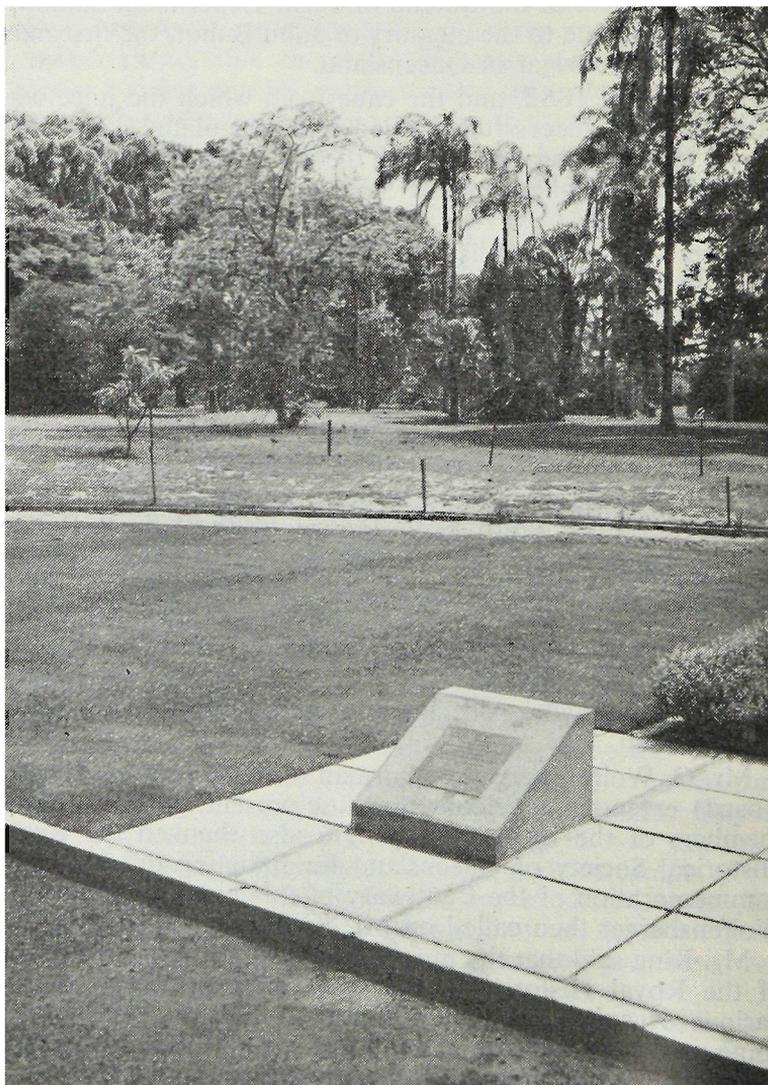
The Vice-Mayor, Ald. Buchan, represented the Brisbane City Council.

Mr. O. Wolfensberger (Chairman of the Queensland Sugar Board) extended a welcome to those present, particularly the members of the Buhot family. He also thanked the Royal Historical Society of Queensland for initiating the move for commemoration of the Centenary of this historic event. Mr. Wolfensberger then called on Mr. King to unveil the plaque.

Mr. King said that the purpose of the gathering of members of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland and of the various organisations within the sugar industry was to pay some public tribute to Mr. John Buhot and to record as permanently as was practicable his contribution to early sugar history.

According to the relatively sparse details available Mr. Buhot, at the age of 31, arrived in Brisbane on 11 April 1862 on the sailing ship *Montmorency*. It had been recorded that he was born in Barbados and had gained experience there as a sugar planter. This experience naturally fitted him for the part he was to play in the birth of Queensland's then non-existent industry here.

At that time, just 100 years and a few months ago, many people were growing small plots of sugar cane around



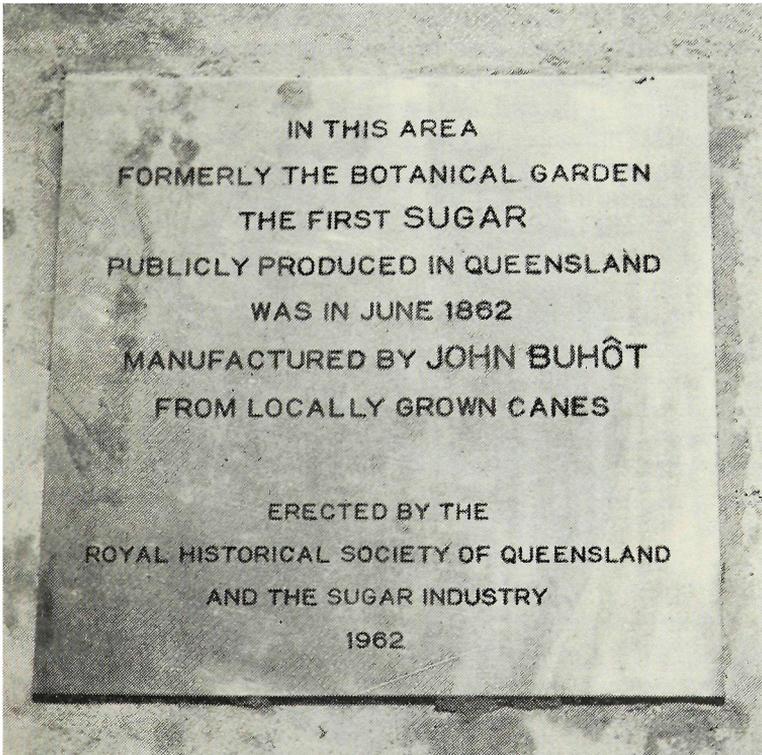
MEMORIAL PLAQUE TO JOHN BUHOT, BOTANIC GARDENS, BRISBANE

Brisbane and there was an official planting on the Botanical Reserve—now part of these Botanic Gardens. Several attempts had been made to make granular sugar from the juice of cane but, doubtless due to inexperience, none of these efforts had been successful.

Harry Easterby reported that even before this time, as early as 1849, proposals were made for the formation of a sugar company in South Brisbane and there was said to have been a small plantation at Eagle Farm, but apparently no sugar was made.

Some five or six years before Mr. Buhot arrived in Brisbane an attempt to make sugar was made by Thomas Bowden, who was introduced by Dr. Lang for the purpose of commencing cane growing and sugar manufacture, but he was not successful in the manufacture.

John Buhot was apparently confident of his ability to make granular sugar and, encouraged by several friends, he gained the assistance of Walter Hill, then Curator of the Botanical Reserve, in selecting cane from the official plot. It was a very interesting record that two others who encouraged and



WORDING ON THE PLAQUE

assisted him were Andrew Petrie, who made some of the necessary apparatus, and Captain Louis Hope, who had been christened the father of our sugar industry.

SEVEN GALLONS OF JUICE MADE 5 LB.

The sugar cane selected by John Buhot was crushed in the shop of William Brookes at 143 Queen Street, where the firm of Brookes and Foster carried on business as ironmongers. The juice was heated and clarified in public on the footpath outside the shop and was then taken to the Botanical Reserve where the clarified liquor was boiled until the sugar crystallized from it. The figures on record indicated that five pounds of sugar were made from seven gallons of juice. Some five years later a Select Parliamentary Committee found, for purposes of government record, that sugar was first manufactured in Queensland by John Buhot and recommended that a grant of 500 acres of land be made to him for his services. It was not clear whether this land grant was ever made.

Mr. King said that John Buhot later joined in Louis Hope's plantation activities at Ormiston, but the partnership did not persist and he was actively engaged in assisting to develop several other plantations in the Brisbane area.



JOHN BUHOT

There was historical record that a few years later John Buhot was manager of Pearlwell Sugar Mill at Oxley Creek and that his home, a stately building in spacious grounds, stood on the site of the present Greenslopes school in the area we know as Dunellan Estate. The home became a school, under control of the Education Department, in 1890. John Buhot died in 1881 and his remains lie in the South Brisbane cemetery.

Mr. King referred to the presence of some relatives of John Buhot and said he trusted that they derived some pleasure and some pride in the fact that the Royal Historical Society and the sugar industry had combined to honour their ancestor. Only a year or so ago he was able, by courtesy of Mrs. G. M. Phillips of Toowoomba, to have made a coloured, enlarged photograph of John Buhot and this now hung in the vestibule of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations building on Gregory Terrace.

A £75 MILLION INDUSTRY

Mr. King said that Mr. Buhot could never have visualised or guessed what a massive industry was destined to develop from the small beginnings in the 1860's, even though, at the time, Andrew Petrie prophesied that Buhot had laid the foundation for what would be Queensland's source of wealth. Within the period of one century the industry, inspired in 1862 by the production of five pounds of granular raw sugar, had grown to be the fourth largest producer of cane sugar in the world and would manufacture in the current season more than one and three-quarter million tons with a value approximating £75 million. No other cane sugar industry in the world had achieved such a rise within the space of one century and, in paying tribute to those personalities who pioneered the sugar industry's beginnings they must always reserve an honoured place for John Buhot.

Mr. Arthur Laurie (Senior Vice-President of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland) moved a vote of thanks to Mr. King and to Ald. Buchan. Subsequently the party was entertained at morning tea by the Sugar Board.—C.L.

Footnote: John Buhot never received any official reward or recognition. A Committee consisting of Messrs. S. W. Griffith, Moreton, Buzacott, and Macrossan found in a report published in 1874 that Mr. Buhot was the first person who actually made granulated sugar in Queensland from sugar cane grown in the Colony. The Committee further recommended that a free grant of 500 acres of land be made to Mr. Buhot as a reward. There is no official record that any action was ever taken by the Government of the day to give effect to the recommendation.—Ed.