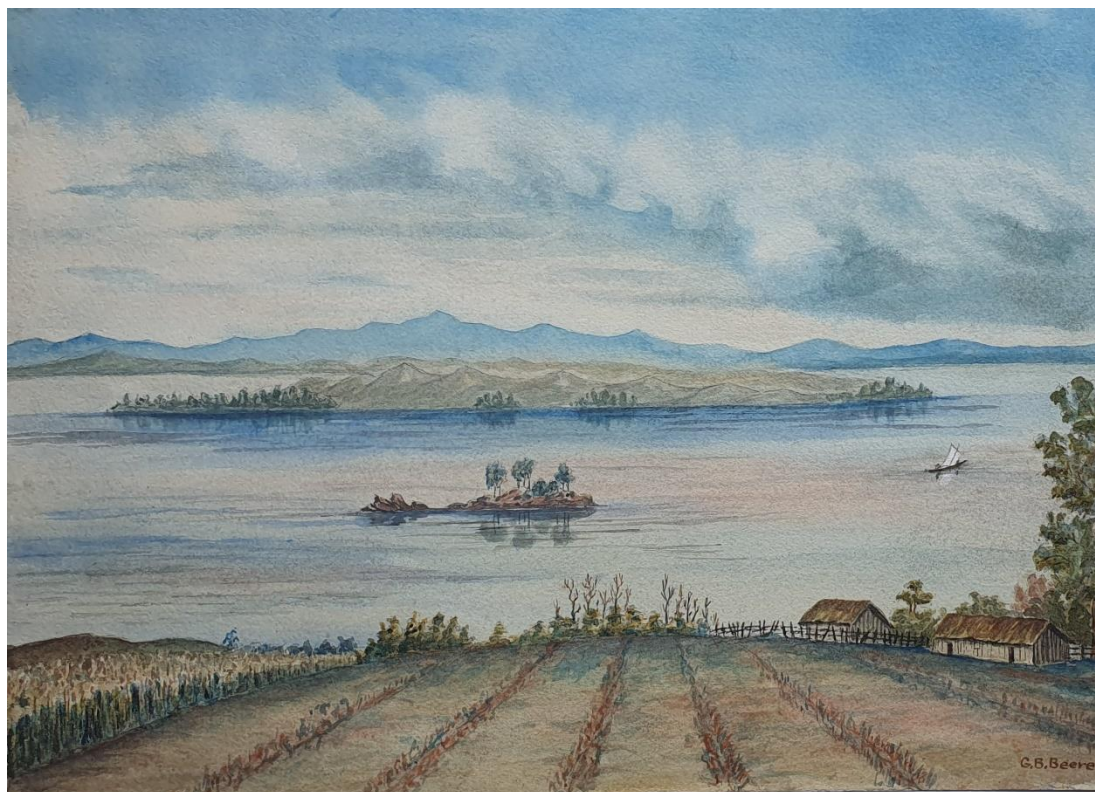


Beere and wine

Are they grapevines or are they some other widely-spaced crop? It's possible we'll never know, but this vibrant little watercolour by Gerald Butler Beere is keeping us guessing.¹



Gerald Beere was born in Kilbixy, Ballynacargy in 1836, the son of an Irish clergyman, and his wife Mary. His father bore the same name, and the son gave it to his own second son, which can all add to a titch of confusion. Beere married Matilda Wright around 1862 and in 1863 immigrated to New Zealand, sailing on the *Helvellyn* from Gravesend, along with his brother Daniel, well enough off to be cabin passengers. They arrived in Auckland on November 16 1863.

Beere had been both an engineer and soldier, serving in North America and the Caribbean, and in 1864 after his arrival was appointed Commander of the 4th Waikato Militia. The Militia was formed at the end of the Waikato wars with the intent of establishing a permanent force of soldier settlers that might help keep peace.² The 4th regiment, with wives and families, arrived in Kirikiriroa (Hamilton) in November 1864, and the Hamilton area known as Beerescourt is derived from Beeres fort, named after the regiment's commander, Gerald Beere.

From 1864 until 1881, Beere worked as an engineer, in the latter years working on the Waikato-Thames railway, designing bridges, and running a flour milling company. He then took up a position as Borough Engineer in Pātea in the Whanganui region, eventually retiring to Auckland where he died in Devonport in 1914.³

The Beere brothers were both involved in early photography, with Daniel Mander Beere becoming a noted photographer of early New Zealand. Beere and Matilda had eight children, the photos taken by his brother showing the growing brood.³



Gerald Beere reading a newspaper with a baby on his knee on the veranda of a house in St Georges Bay, Auckland. Photograph taken on 7 November 1864 by Daniel Manders Beere. Dated from copy of "Daily Southern Cross" that he is reading. Ref: 1/2-096140-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



(L.) Gerald Beere and family on veranda of house in Shortland St, photographed in 1868 by Daniel Manders Beere. Ref: 1/2-096138-G. Alexander Turnbull Library,



(R.) Gerald Beere and family at Takapuna, Auckland. Photograph taken in 1896 by Gerald's brother Daniel Manders Beere. Ref: 1/4-034271-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/23107172

Beere was an amateur watercolourist, with the national library holding four watercolours of the Whanganui, Ruapehu and Taupo districts. These are associated with his time in the southern parts of the North Island after 1881.⁴ The lake scene shown here was sold as a colonial scene of lake and island. But on the back, we found: "Lake Waikare, Waiwero Island

from Ruanana Kia. Near Rangiriri". This locates the view as that of Lake Waikare, at Te Kauwhata, to the east of Rangiriri, in the Waikato.

A discussion with local Te Kauwhata people suggested that the view is that looking south from what were then fields running down to the lake shore at Te Kauwhata. There are Māori burial grounds near the lake edge, and local iwi had storehouses on the islands of the lake. The watercolour shows small huts by the water and a small boat with sail. If this is the view, then today there is no island as shown, but 120 years of silting and encroaching swamp in this very shallow lake could mean that the islands have been joined to the land. There is record of islands which are no longer seen.⁵ Or this is a little bit of artist's license. The hills in the background, because of their height, are likely to be those of the Hapuakohe range, more to the east of the lake, which would give the view a more easterly perspective.

So what of the field and its rows of crops? Te Kauwhata has a history of grape-growing. In 1895 the Government had the European winemaker Romeo Brogato survey regions across the country for potential grape growing.⁶ Two years later the Department of Agriculture established experimental vines of syrah, chardonnay, pinot noir, cabernet sauvignon and riesling at Te Kauwhata, and in 1901 set up a research station which was maintained through to the 1980s, eventually managed through the DSIR at Mt Albert in Auckland.

On the left hand side of the painting is also what could be maize. The crop had long been grown by Māori and settlers over the 19th C.

Where does this leave us with the biggest unknown on the watercolour – the date? The style suggested at first a date before 1880 which was about the time that Beere moved south to Pātea. The style, colouring and buildings support this. However, there is no record of grapevines planted at Te Kauwhata before the mid 1890s.⁵ Beere eventually returned to Auckland, so it is possible he came down to his old haunts to paint. We don't know. If the rows are not vines, then we're not much better off, though it might support a date of before 1880.

In the end the unknowns don't matter too much. One thing about colonial art is that you are viewing historical scenes through the eye of the painter, which is not always the same as photograph, colour being a subjective thing. Just one other thing, there is a slight suggestion from the conservator¹ of stronger light in the sky mid left, and with the shadows depicted, this would fit with a morning view, the upper left being East. It's a nice thought that Gerald Beere might have been sitting quietly in the morning sun with his sketch book.

¹ Thanks to Camilla Bascomb for a wonderful restoration.

² <https://hamiltonlibraries.co.nz/heritage/discover-stories-and-articles/hamilton-as-a-military-settlement-4th-waikato-militia>

³ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/life-style/103982050/history-the-dead-tell-tales>

⁴ <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22401901>

⁵ Thanks to Jenny Kelly at Te Kauwhata for historical information. She has written a local history: *Past Times of Te Kauwhata People and Places*.

⁶ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/wine>