WAYWARD TENDRILS QUARTERLY

Vol.12 No.1 | A WINE BOOK COLLECTOR'S SOCIETY | January 2002

A LUST FOR THE LADY DE COVERLY

by *Allan Shields*

[*"Myths die hard, even about a bunch of grapes...." It is only reasonable that, following Charles Sullivan's dissolution / solution of the Zinfandel myth / mystery, we now untangle the roots of one of California's (the world's?) most extensively planted grape varieties—and the only one to have a California historical marker placed in its honor. Our indefatigable researcher has plowed deep into the library archives, even the internet, to dig out and document this vintage saga, which shall conclude next issue.* — Ed.]

The Grape that can with Logic absolute
The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute.
— Stanza 57, Omar Khayyam (Transl. Fitzgerald)

The longer the remove from the actual events concerning the origin of the Thompson Seedless grape in California, the more numerous become the apocryphal accounts, for any misstatement of fact early on gets repeated, and even amplified through the retelling. The paucity of reliable, written documents on the subject presents a formidable obstacle. Thus, any effort to rediscover the exact facts about William Thompson's saga faces two essential problems: First, to correct any mythical account, and second, to replace the familiar, traditional, but fictitious accounts with the accurate one. Myths die hard, even about a bunch of grapes, because people tend to hang onto beliefs long held, in preference to changing them. Even more difficult an obstacle is a printed account purporting to be a true account. We are disposed to accept the printed word at face value, even when shown it to be in error, and many of the accounts about William Thompson's great vine have fostered incorrect information.

In broad strokes, the familiar accounts are true. William Thompson emigrated from Yorkshire, England, with his family in 1851, eventually arriving in Marysville, California, in 1863. In 1872, he did receive three cultivars of the grape, Lady de Coverly (a synonym for Sultanina), from the firm, Ellwanger and Barry in Rochester, New York. Of the three cultivars Thompson grafted onto his own rootstock, only one survived a flood, producing a prodigious amount of fruit in the fall of 1875, leading to a display at the Marysville Fair in the fall of 1875. To identify the exhibit, a Fair clerk labeled the grapes, "Thompson's Seedless," only as a temporary name during the Fair. In 1888, August 16, the Sutter County Horticultural Society (in Yuba City), in meeting, on a motion by John Paxton Onstott, voted unanimously to name the Thompson grape variety the "Thompson's Seedless," despite an earlier *caveat* by Prof. Frederic T. Bioletti (1865-1939) of the College of Agriculture, University of California, Berkeley. (More later about this detail.)

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In 1875-76, William Thompson freely gave cultivars from his already locally famous vine to fellow farmers, including J. P. Onstott, the Harter Brothers, and the

Stabler family (S.J. and Harry P. Stabler, especially), among others not recorded. William Thompson's son, George, tried to dissuade his father from giving cultivars away, urging him to seek a patent on what he believed to be a new variety, hoping to reap dividends on the sale of propagated vines. Finally, it is a fact that from William Thompson's original vine, thousands of acres of California vineyards were planted with descendant cultivars between 1876 and 1910 especially. In stark outline, this is the true story, often told and retold. Unfortunately, there is much more to the story. The mystery, devil, beauty, and the truth lie in the expanded details.

[*California Historical Landmark No.929, State Hwy 20, 8 mi W of Yuba City, Sutter County — Photo: R.F. Unzelman, 2001*]

William Thompson

In an age of jet plane travel, it requires an effort of imagination to return to the mid-1880s, when William Thompson and his young family sailed away from England headed for an unknown future in America.

William Thompson was born in 1816 in Wistow, Yorkshire, and his wife, *nee* Ann Marie Whiteley, in 1818 in nearby York. George, their first son, was born in 1839. Two other sons, William and Thomas, followed. All five family members left Wistow in 1851, crossing the Atlantic Ocean to settle in Macoupin County, Illinois, now called Carlinville. [1] After farming tobacco in Illinois for twelve years, William and Ann sold their farm, bought two wagons, seven horses, and a cow [!], then "traveled" across the continent with others by way of the Platte River and Salt Lake City, arriving in Marysville on August 25, 1863, local temperature not recorded.

From 1863, William Thompson, with the considerable help of George, by then age 24, farmed diversely—pigs, bees, horses, cows, grain, and grapes, continuously expanding their acreage. The family records fail to specify how many or which grapes they had planted, but it is known that the Muscat Gordo Blanco and Muscat Alexandria were popular varieties in the area.

One document, "Thompson History," which has some ring of authority—as some documents do not—states:

> In 1872, William received a catalogue from Ellwanger and Barry of Rochester, New York who had 6000 grape cuttings for sale. He ordered three grape cuttings under the name Lady DeCoverly (sic) at one dollar each. When they arrived, William successfully grafted them onto three Los Angeles grapevines. Then he ran into trouble. The Sacramento River overflowed its banks and washed away two of the grapevines. The remaining vine proved disappointing because it failed to produce grapes.
>
> William had pruned it the same as he did his Los Angeles grapes, cutting the canes back to three buds and providing no trellis for the vines to climb on. Disgusted with its failure to bare (sic) fruit he abandoned his vine, neither pruning nor cultivating it during the following season. The vine, left on its own, continued to grow and climbed a nearby tree. When William next checked on the vine, it had 56 pounds of grapes. The grapes were oval, yellow seedless, with thin skin, good but not strong flavor, and low in acidity, bunches large or very large, and the vine an enormous bearer.
>
> From this vine the seedless raisin grape propagated into California...[2]

Later we shall see that there are a number of details in this account that require amendment. Especially questionable is the assurance that Ellwanger and Barry identified the three cuttings as the Lady de Coverly in one of their catalogues, or that the number of cuttings for sale numbered 6000. Also, the precise number of pounds (56) is doubted in other sources, though this is unimportant. The value of this document is that it spells out clearly one apocryphal, traditional account of an historical event of some importance. The sequel will make clear exactly how it needs amendment.

♦

William Thompson's family history fails to record many details about his years in Yorkshire. We do learn that he was a farmer, and that, in his earlier years, he worked for a time in the "glasshouses" of a local nobleman who grew the vine, the Lady de Coverly. It is said about him that he never forgot the flavor and

Continued on page 8 —

NEWS & NOTES

Welcome! to 2002 and Volume 12, No.1 of our *Wayward Tendrils* ***Quarterly.*** The **INDEX** to Volume 11, No.1–4 (2001) is enclosed.

COCKS et FÉRET

Richard Kaplan sends an addition to our Checklist of *Cocks et Féret* (Vol.11 No.4, Oct.2001): *Le Médoc et ses Vins. Extrait de la 8th edition de Bordeaux et ses Vins*. Bordeaux: Féret et Fils, 1908. You might want to note this on page 3 of last issue.

RESISTANT ROOTSTOCK QUERY

"I need help from fellow Tendrils," writes Jack Fairchild, Wine Educator at St.Clement Winery in Napa Valley. "To wit: a brief history of American/California grape vine nurseries. In particular, when could an American viticulturist purchase resistant rootstock here at home rather than have to purchase them in France?" Jack's email: info@stclement.com.

VINTAGE NOVELS

Two vintage novels—one easily found, the other not so easy—are good reads and worth the search. The easy one is ***The Wine Room Murder*** by Stanley Vestal (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1935, 301 pp.). "Congreve, epicure and connoisseur of wine, ... is confronted by a mysterious murder in lonely Château Roet [in the French vineyards]. Will the right wine so stimulate and sharpen the perceptions that any problem capable of solution can be solved? Such is the belief of Congreve...." Vestal is the pseudonym used by University of Oklahoma professor, Walter Stanley Campbell, for his first and only mystery. ***The Three-Cornered Wound*** by George Dyer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931;London: Skeffington, 1932, 288 pp.), set in California's Napa Valley, "contains a method of murder absolutely new to detective fiction, and is filled with lifelike and unforgettable characters."

internet bits

Fun to browse: winelabelsworld.f2s.com features the wine labels of a Belgian collector. He has organized the colorful labels, from around the world, into scenic categories: architecture, animals, art, etc. More serious: winefiles.org, a project of the Sonoma County Wine Library. This enormous database includes citations, abstracts and links to articles in the technical, academic, trade and consumer wine periodicals, government documents, press releases, and other wine-related ephemera. Some of the links available: Viticulture and Enology Collection, Shields Library, U.C. Davis; Vincent E. Petrucci Library at C.S.U. Fresno; and the London wine book publisher, Mitchell Beazley's World of Wine. A bounteous harvest awaits you...

MORE, *PLEASE!*

In his "Books & Bottles" column this issue, **Fred McMillin** has introduced us to a different "category" of wine books, namely those produced by the winery that is featured. Could we have more of these, please?! Several, published by Port houses and Australian wineries, come to mind ... others? Your editor's "Want List" includes volunteer Tendrils to choose a favorite winegrowing area, and send us the information on these special, but not often widely known, books.

JANUARY IS
TENDRILS RENEWAL TIME!!
A renewal form is enclosed. Please note any contact information changes for the updated Roster to be sent in April.

DUFOUR REPRINT

Late last year Éditions la Valsainte (Vevey, Switzerland) published a French edition of John J. Dufour's 1826 ***American Vine-Dresser's Guide***, with added color illustrations (photos, drawings, maps). Now, due to be released the first of this year, is a new facsimile reprint edition in English, with the added illustrations and a Preface by James and John Butler, authors of ***Indiana Wine, A History*** (Indiana University Press, 2001). (See Tom Pinney's review of *Indiana Wine* this issue.) The Valsainte website has full details and ordering information: www.valsainte.ch; their e-mail: edition@valsainte.ch.

New HISTORICAL WINE POSTER

Noted California wine historian, Ernest P. Peninou, has produced yet another splendid historical wine poster, this one depicting (in text and illustration) the history of Leland Stanford's great Vina Ranch (1881-1919) of Northern California. As with Peninou's earlier posters featuring the California Wine Association and the Gallegos Vineyard & Winery, this is a magnificent, high-quality, full-color, 23" x 34" poster. The posters are $30 each (Tendrils receive a 20% discount). Contact your editor for a color brochure of Mr. Peninou's available wine books and posters: tendrils@jps.net.

By wine we are generous made;
It furnishes fancy with wings;
Without it we ne'er should have had
Philosophers, poets and kings.
Anon. 1710

A Book Review
by
Thomas Pinney

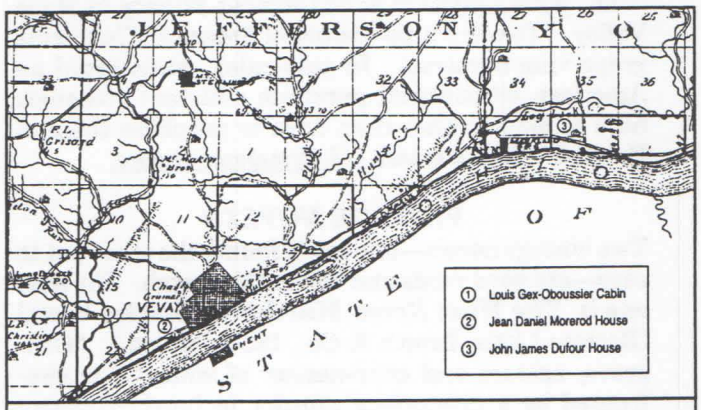
Indiana Wine: A History. James L. Butler and John J. Butler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. [xiv], 245pp. Illus. $24.95.

To begin with a little self-quotation, in 1989 I wrote in the preface to my *History of Wine in America* that "there is a history of winegrowing to be written for almost every state in the nation, and frequently there is room for more localized histories as well. For the most part the work remains undone." The situation now is not much different from what it was then. Clarence Gohdes' *Scuppernong: North Carolina's Grape and Its Wines* (1982) was, at the time I wrote, the only book that could be called a state history of winegrowing (not even California has a complete one). Now, at last, we can add another, the Butlers' book on Indiana.

The story they have to tell is strikingly unbalanced: 120 pages are devoted to the first quarter of the 19th century; about 80 pages provide a guide to "The Modern Indiana Wine Industry" that started up in 1975; but for the intervening 150 years or so, only thirteen pages are required. Why is this?

As it happens, the commercial beginnings of American wine were in Indiana, and those beginnings have been exceptionally well documented. The Swiss colony of Vevay, on the Ohio River, founded in 1802 by John James Dufour, has been studied in detail in several volumes of local history, and it produced its own notable record in Dufour's *American Vine-Dresser's Guide*, 1826 (reprinted Vevey, Editions La Valsainte, [2000]). The other significant pioneer enterprise in Indiana winemaking was at New Harmony, on the Wabash River, where the Harmonists under Father George Rapp made and sold wine between 1818 and 1824. That episode, too, has been extensively documented, largely through the devoted labors of Professor Karl Arndt in publishing the extensive Harmonist archive in a long series of volumes. The Butlers have made good use of these and other sources, and anyone who wishes to know the story of winemaking at Vevay and New Harmony now has a full and clear account laid out before him.

It is an advantage that the Butlers, father and son, are winemakers themselves: their Butler Winery in Bloomington was bonded in 1983 (Indiana bonded winery No.14) and produces wines from French hybrid grapes and native fruits. They thus bring to their work a more than usual understanding of what growers and winemakers faced in struggling to establish the vine on the frontier. But if I were to quibble with their account of the early days, it would be that it does not sufficiently emphasize the fact that what put an end to the first chapter of Indiana winemaking was not the remoteness of markets, nor the unwillingness of the children to continue what their parents had begun, but simply disease. When the vines died or the fruit rotted, winemaking died. The Butlers suggest that things might have gone on well at Vevay if people on the frontier had been willing to buy wine instead of cheap whiskey; but I think that after a time there wasn't any wine to buy. It also has to be said that the wine—whether from Vevay or from New Harmony— was never much good either. The Butlers do not conceal the facts that diseases were a formidable obstacle, and that the wine of the frontier was poor stuff, but as loyal Hoosier winemakers they perhaps prefer not to stress such things.



Switzerland County map, showing the location of the John James Dufour House and the boundary lines of Dufour's property, as well as the locations of the Louis Gex-Oboussier Cabin and the Jean Daniel Morerod House.

[From: *Indiana Wine, A History*]

After the two early experiments that have been so closely and carefully studied, come the dark ages of this history. One gets isolated and unexplained information from time to time: Indiana made 102,000 gallons of wine in 1860, and about the same quantity in 1890. In the latter year Indiana was reported to be sixth in the nation in the production of grapes and was said to employ 2,425 people in the vineyards—surely a fantastic number, typical of the sort of misinformation one gets about this unknown era. And where were the wineries? What were they? How big were they, and who operated them? Where were the vineyards? What kinds of grapes were grown? What wines were made? By what methods? And what was the system of trade? Where, and how, and to whom were these wines sold? All such elementary questions have no answers, and so we are unable to understand much, if anything, about the history of wine in Indiana for most of the time in question. This is not the fault of the Butlers; the documentation required does not seem to exist, or has not yet been ferreted

out. Local historians, on the whole, have not paid much attention to winemaking, and the long neglect of the subject probably means that much that might have been known is now practically irrecoverable, or will be recovered only with great difficulty when there are enough people prepared to do the work of digging.

The final part of the book, on the wineries now operating in Indiana, takes the familiar form of a guidebook, listing the wineries in alphabetical order and giving a summary of the vital statistics of each. This is perhaps the only way to handle the subject at the moment, though it is quite uncritical: one would like to know more about the problems, responses, successes, and failures belonging to the last thirty years. What do the authors, with their experience in the actual work of making and selling wine in Indiana, think are the best possibilities for the future? What are the dead ends? What are the missed opportunities? What might be done, and what ought to be avoided? The renewal of winemaking in Indiana is still too recent for such questions to be given confident answers, so we'll have to wait for another, later, book on Indiana wine for all that.

The book includes two instructive appendices setting forth the state laws governing wineries and listing all of the winery licenses issued in Indiana since the passage of the Indiana small winery law in 1971. And there are some interesting illustrations. The Butlers are to be congratulated for writing, and the Indiana University Press for publishing, *Indiana Wine*. One hopes that the example will be taken in other states.

A Book Review
by
Bob Foster

On Wine: A Master Sommelier and Master of Wine Tells All by Doug Frost. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2001. 144 pp. $40.

Doug Frost is one of only three people in the world to have earned both the Master Sommelier and Master of Wine credentials. He knows ... he really knows his stuff. And unlike some writers, he communicates without pretense, without taking any of it too seriously, with a wealth of great insights and humor. All that being said, I have some trouble getting a solid grip on this book. On the one hand, if the goal was to write an introduction to wine for a novice, it doesn't work because it is too cognitive and simultaneously too cursory. On the other hand, as a treatise on wine written to make the already involved wine buff think about numerous aspects of the beverage, it tantalizes and intrigues, and at times leaves the reader wanting more discussion from the author on his insights.

The book is divided into six major sections, each filled with gorgeous photos: a short history of wine, a section on styles, tastes and aromas, a section on the grapes used around the world to make wine, two sections on the world's winemaking regions, and a section on matching food and wine.

I think that for a beginner the section on styles, tastes and aromas would be of prime importance. I assume a novice would be looking for information on specific grapes or wines and how to discern what to try—an area where most beginners need lots of help and encouragement. Yet this section is a mere six pages in length. Moreover, the discussion is at a very involved level that might be over the head of a novice.

But, all this being said, there is a wealth of thought-provoking information for those beyond the beginning stages. As Frost notes in the introduction, no two wines are alike. "This is wine's best asset and biggest problem. It lacks predictability–from vintage to vintage and from region to region and from taste to taste. Marketers hate that. Lots of consumers hate that too and drink Budweiser instead." Rather than explore this and other concepts more, the author, apparently limited in space by the scope of the book, moves onward without the analysis and contemplation some of his keen observations deserve.

The same is true of his discussion of the fact that most wine is consumed with food, but judged by reviewers only by itself. Again, the observation is true, but the importance and application are left to be extrapolated by the reader.

I wish that the book was either much longer so that Frost could have delved deeper into some of these topics, or, in the alternative, I wish the scope had been narrower so that fewer topics could have been covered in more depth. I wouldn't give this book to a novice, as it is too sophisticated. However, despite these criticisms I certainly would give the book to a wine lover who will find many thoughtful insights into the beverage we all love. Recommended.

[*Our thanks to Bob Foster and the folks at California Grapevine for permission to reprint Bob's review which appeared in the October /November 2001 issue.* — Ed.]

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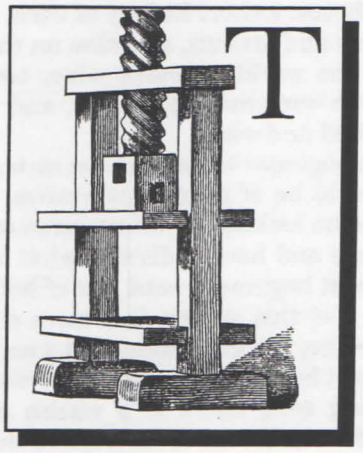
From WINE PRESS *to* PRINTING PRESS

by
Allan Shields



The unending pursuit of knowledge is full of surprises, surprising discoveries being the unacknowledged advantage of the ignorant. We are all of us, I have found, selectively ignorant, and thus candidates for noetic astonishment. Lately, for instance, Ellen Goodman startled me by stating casually in the *Fresno Bee* (Nov. 20, 2001) that the Mayflower, in 1620, was a "wine ship." Does everyone else know this fascinating factoid I had missed for 82 (long) years?

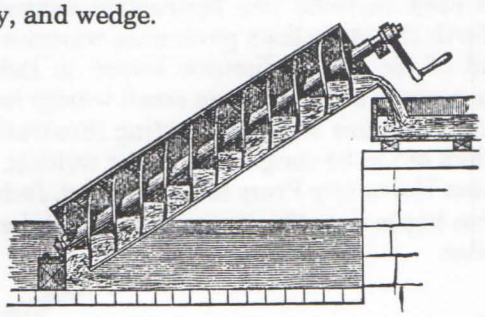
Another instance of such a surprise occurred as I read the *Christian Science Monitor* (October 26, 2001) article by Michael R. Fainelli, "Man of Letters," in which he states, "In the 1440s, a German named Johann Gutenberg turned a machine used for pressing grapes into a machine for pressing letters onto paper [or vice versa!]. The key innovation of Gutenberg was 'movable type' ...." Somehow, over my decades-long search for enlightenment, this cultural connection between wine and printing had escaped my speculum; so I looked further into the pressing matter.

Sure enough, a brief research into the literature of the history of printing produced even pictorial proof of the connection. The very earliest presses were direct imitations of centuries-old wine (grape) presses, designed to *press* or *squeeze* grapes for juice, or paper onto type-faces, by exerting great *press-ure* by mechanical contrivance. Early printing presses look like wine presses.

The central part of both kinds of press, the part that makes sufficient pressure possible, is the screw. The screw, often very large and wooden, was composed of incrementally increased spiral (helical) turns running up a cylindrical column. Like the old-fashioned moving barber pole, the moves up and down by turning within an unmoving frame, transfer the pressure against the bottom platform next to the paper, the pressure being the greatest at the screw's tip.

Though the adaptation of the wine screw to the printing press was no great intuitive leap, I wondered as I wandered about the stacks in the library just who devised or invented the principle of the screw itself. The turn of the screw (that would make a fine title for a novel, eh?), unlike the wheel or fire, was the result of Archimedes (287?–212 B.C. / or 2288–2213 B.P. – Before the Present) solution to the problem of raising water from a low source to an elevated irrigation ditch. Briefly, he devised a tube in the shape of a helix turned around a cylinder shaft which turned as a unit. At the critical angle of 45 degrees, water entering at the bottom of the tube was moved higher and higher to the top where it discharged into the ditch. *Voila!* This ingenious device is called "Archimedes' Screw."

Intuitively, this process appears to be impossible, like the idea of a jet 747 being able to fly—especially as you approach one on the tarmac. Engineers, I read somewhere, have proved that bumblebee flight is impossible aerodynamically. On the other hand, consider the eventual, practical uses of the screw principle: wood screws, bolts, worm gears, grape stemmers, ships' screws, corkscrews, etc. At one time in the history of engineering, the screw was considered to be one of the six "simple machines," basic to all mechanisms: the lever, inclined plane, wheel and axle, pulley, and wedge.



History fails to record exactly when Archimedes' Screw principle was first applied to a wine press, a subject beyond my current span of senile attention. Notice, however, how nobly I have been able to restrain my natural disposition to animadvert about the risible potential lurking in the suggestive, ambiguous connotations of Archimedes' brilliantly conceived principle. Better known is his discovery of "specific gravity" of materials and how to measure it. That discovery elicited from him an apocryphal, primal scream as he ran naked through the streets: "Eureka! I have found it! Eureka!" What primal scream might he have ripped off there in Alexandria on the Nile River when he discovered the screw?

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BOOKS & BOTTLES
by
Fred McMillin

WINEGROWERS THREE

♦ JACOB BERINGER was in the city of San Francisco on April 18th, 1906, when the great earthquake struck. He managed to return to St. Helena the next day to discover that the town and his winery had suffered extensive damage ... *e.g.* two walls of his ornate brandy distillery had crumbled [*Beringer*, Lorin Sorenson with Fred Beringer].

♦ LT. ANDRÉ TCHELISTCHEFF and his troops came under heavy machine-gun fire during a snowstorm in the Crimea. Cossacks, picking up their dead, threw and unconscious body across a horse for transport to a field hospital. There, the twenty-year-old soldier—future celebrated winemaker of California—awoke with both legs frozen [*Private Reserve*, Rod Smith].

♦ DIMITRI TCHELISTCHEFF, with his parents André and Alexandria, left France for California, arriving in New York on September 21, 1938. Dimitri was just an infant [*Private Reserve*]. Dimitri, who learned first from his great winemaker father, has the uncanny ability to taste a new wine and accurately predict what it will be like in two years, or fifteen years [*Three Generations*, William Jarvis].

The Books: What do the above three volumes have in common? Each is the story of a winery produced by the winery. Here are some highlights from each, given in order of the founding of each winery: Beringer in 1876, Beaulieu in 1900, and Jarvis in 1988.

Beringer, A Napa Valley Legend by Lorin Sorenson with Fred Beringer. St. Helena, CA: Silverado Publishing Co., 1989. 197 pp.

> "*...Jacob raised the grapes and Frederich raised the cash.*"

♦ "It's easy to make fine wine. Just start with good grapes and practice for a hundred years!"

♦ Born to a Rhine Valley winemaking family in the 1840s, Frederich Beringer always preferred the business aspects, while younger brother Jacob wanted to make barrels and wine. Hence, when they came to California, Jacob raised the grapes and Frederich raised the cash.

♦ Price List–1914: Zinfandel was 40¢ and "Cabernet" was 85¢ per gallon.

♦ From caption of striking vineyard photo: "Nearby, world-class Beringer Cabernet Sauvignon is tended on the very land where George Yount planted the first vineyard in the Napa Valley 150 years ago."

♦ 1934 – Phenomenal Beringer salesman Dan Gladstone used to sing with Al Jolson at Coffee Dan's in San Francisco.

Private Reserve: Beaulieu Vineyard and the Rise of Napa Valley by Rod Smith. Daglan Press, 2000. 184 pp. $39.95.

> "*...the most important story in the history of California wine.*"

♦ Hugh Johnson: "This book [tells] perhaps the most important story in the history of California wine. Its hero is André Tchelistcheff, the diminutive Russian aristocrat who towered over Napa wine when it was still fumbling for quality." Georges de Latour, French-born founder of Beaulieu, made considerable contributions himself, but none greater than "finding and employing this genius."

♦ Latour carefully explained to President Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture the value to the USA of admitting this outstanding French enologist. To his utter shock he was told it would be impossible: USA employment was high, and furthermore, wine was a luxury industry and not a high priority. So, Latour appealed to the US embassy in Paris, the California Wine Institute, University of California–Berkeley, and California wine publicist Horatio Stoll (see the previous issue of Tendrils). *Private Reserve* will tell you how he finally got in.

♦ Some two dozen years before Tchelistcheff arrived, Beaulieu Vineyard became a corporation: President Georges de Latour held 498 of 500 shares and was paid $100 a month. With no grapes or winemaking equipment, the first Beaulieu wine was a dry white called Sauterne (no "s") purchased from Wente in Livermore.

Three Generations: Adventures in a Changing World from 1850 – 2000 by William E. Jarvis. California: Wm. Jarvis, 1998. 213 pp. $35.

"Fourteen years at seven universities created an expert in particle physics, music theory, Greek philosophy and electronics."

The first Jarvis winemaker was not Dimitri Tchelistcheff, but a newcomer to the industry, William Jarvis. So what had he tried before winegrowing? He was the 300th hire of Hewlett-Packard. He left them in 1960 to start the exceptionally successful electronics firm, Wiltron, which he headed for 31 years before selling it. *Voila!* William and his wife Leticia had philanthropic money for their beloved Jarvis Conservatory plus twenty-million-dollars loose change to establish a vineyard-winery on the eastern slopes of the Napa Valley.

♦ "When I studied winemaking at U.C. Davis in the mid-1980s, I attended a lecture on how to prevent malolactic fermentation." Jarvis disagreed, felling it improved the taste of most wines. Before long, the industry generally agreed with him.

♦ "Since modern viticulture is hundreds of years old, it must have adopted the best methods by now ...," yet he soon discovered "the tried and true methods" didn't always apply: the heralded three-feet spacing of vines may be best for lean Bordeaux soils, but six feet was a wiser choice for his richer Napa hillside.

It is important to note that only ten pages of his biographical book, *Three Generations*, is devoted to the third generation's winery. Overall, it is a fascinating account of the Jarvises that reflects our country's advances during the past 150 years: William was working with one billionths of a second while his grandfather received no formal education and could not even write his name!

The Bottles: A Fabulous Five—all scored above 94 by my picky panel.

5th – Jarvis Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, 1996.
4th– Jarvis Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, 1996 (tasted a year later).
3rd– Beaulieu Georges de Latour Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, 1997.
2nd– Beaulieu Clone 6 Cabernet Sauvignon, 1997.
1st– Beringer Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, 1985.

SHIELDS, ***cont. from page 2 —***

characteristics of the grape, though he did not remember how to properly prune the vine in 1872-73. His family recalled that he often related his experiences with that particular grape and that he remembered the name. In California, he found no grape (between 1863 and 1875) to match the qualities of his favorite. He could not have known in 1873 or 1874 that the vine he ignored was the Lady de Coverly by taste, for it bore no fruit during those two years. It remains to discuss the evidence from documents whether or not he could have known the vine was the Lady de Coverly in another way. There is widespread agreement among documents of various dates that he did mistakenly prune the vine severely in 1872 and 1873. In the first pruning period, winter of 1872-73, he removed all of the essential bearing wood, thus producing a barren vine in the fall of 1873. For a year (1874) he ignored the vine, so that in the fall of 1875, with the previous year's rank cane growth (bearing wood), the vine, now vigorously growing and "trellised" in a nearby tree (how fortuitous!), was discovered to have produced a hefty 50 to 56 pounds of luscious grapes. (Two sources state that the amount was an impossible 500 pounds.)

Sultanina, Lady de Coverly, and the Thompson Seedless

Looking back from 2001, we now know the vine to have been a Sultanina, which is identical (synonymous) with the Lady de Coverly and the Thompson Seedless. We know this from ampelographical data given in many recent sources. We know this from expert testimony of horticulturists and nurserymen who were contemporaries of Thompson, such as the Harter Brothers, the Stablers, J. P. Onstott, and Gustav Eisen and his father, Francis. On page 258 in the fourth edition of his book, *California Fruits and How to Grow Them,* (1909) Edward J. Wickson, Dean of the College of Agriculture, University of California, Berkeley, following the legendary Dean Eugene W. Hilgard (1833-1916), identifies the relevant varieties:

Sultana; syn. *Seedless Sultana*—"Vine vigorous, upright; leaves large. five-lobed, with rather large sinuses, light colored and coarsely toothed; bunches large, long-cylindrical, with heavy shoulders or wings, well filled when not cultured, but not compacted; berries small, round, firm and crisp, golden-yellow and without seeds." — *Bioletti*. In California the variety is apt to have some seeds. It has more acid, and therefore more piquancy of flavor, than Thompson's Seedless, but the latter has recently far outstripped it in popularity among growers.

Thompson's Seedless—Named by Sutter County Horticulture Society, after W. Thompson, Sr., of

Yuba City, who procured the cutting in 1878 (sic), from Ellwanger & Barry of Rochester, New York. It was by them described as "a grape from Constantinople, named Lady Decoverly (sic)." [The quotation is from Gustav Eisen, *The Raisin Industry*, 1890, p. 91.] When it fruited in Sutter County, it was seen to be superior to the Sultana and has been propagated largely. It was first widely distributed by J. P. Onstott of Yuba City, and others, and is now to be found in all parts of the State [in 1909]. The variety is described by Dr. Eisen as follows: "Oval; greenish-yellow; as large as a Sultana; seedless with a thin skin; good but not strong flavor, and without that acid which characterizes the Sultana grape and raisin; bunches large or very large; vine an enormous bearer." Mr. Bioletti considers the variety identical with the *Sultanina* of Asia Minor, and gives this description: "Vine very vigorous and with large trunk and very long canes; leaves glabrous on both sides, dark yellowish-green above and light below, generally three-lobed with shallow sinuses, teeth short and obtuse, bunch large, conico-cylindrical, well filled, on herbaceous peduncles; berries under medium, ellipsoidal, crisp, of neutral flavor, with moderately thick skin of a fine golden yellow color."

Some questions in this important quotation will be discussed below. For now, there is a serious question to raise, whether William Thompson and/or George Thompson knew <u>at the time of planting</u> that the vine was the Lady de Coverly. If, indeed, they did correctly identify the vine *prima facie*, then why did they believe it needed the new name, Thompson's Seedless? This legitimate question leads us into documents that may or may not settle this question and others.

Stalking the Lady de Coverly

According to numerous newspaper and magazine stories, as well as family documents collected over the years, William Thompson and George were examining the Spring 1872 catalogue of Ellwanger and Barry nursery of Rochester, New York, in which were advertised 6000 grape cuttings for $1 each. Just how many varieties or which varieties are represented in the figure, 6000, is not recorded. It is said that William Thompson placed an order for fifteen different varieties of grapes. Subsequently, he received a shipment of cultivars, presumably all fifteen varieties. (We don't know how many of each.) It is at this point in the saga where the data become obscure. The traditional accounts maintain (on what evidence? George Thompson's later claims?) that there were in the shipment three cuttings of the Lady de Coverly (or unclassified cuttings, by some accounts), and these three were grafted onto his own rootstock, probably his "Los Angeles" vines (Were these the Muscat Gordo Blanco, or Muscat Alexandria?). According to George Thompson's own testimony, given in an affidavit published as a letter to the editor many years later in 1911, two of the grafts failed; only one survived. George Thompson never mentions the Lady de Coverly. The apocryphal story is that the Sacramento River flooded in 1872-73, carrying two of the vines away. Other accounts maintain the two simply "perished." George also testifies in the 1911 letter that "...twenty years later [in 1892?]..." Ellwanger and Barry were contacted by William Thompson and himself to find out the source of their great vine, but they received no reply.

Recent, diligent research in the Special Collections Library at the University of Rochester (the locale of all archives for Ellwanger and Barry), by Melissa Mead, Special Projects Librarian, discovered that the Lady de Coverly cultivars are never named in Ellwanger and Barry catalogues from 1871-1880. The name, "Sultanina," also does not appear in any of the Ellwanger and Barry catalogues for the relevant years. "Sultana" does appear, but with a clear description distinguishing it as the different grape from Asia Minor. How can this apparent historical anomaly be explained plausibly? One account to be quoted states that a note from Ellwanger and Barry that came with their order requested William Thompson to try their three cuttings and then to let them know the results. (I reject the temptation to animadvert on the irony of E&B's innocent request, given subsequent history of the single vine!)

"In 1873, a Sutter County farmer received an order of nursery stock from Elwanger (sic) and Barry, Nurserymen of Rochester, New York. Included in the shipment were three European grape vines. The farmer was asked to plant them and report his success or failure. Two of the vines died, but the third grew. The grapes from the vine had no seeds and local growers soon realized they would make good raisins. The Sutter County Horticultural Society named the grape "Thompson Seedless" after the farmer, William Thompson.

"While the Thompson Seedless is no longer produced commercially in Sutter County, more acres are planted with this variety than with any other raisin grape...." [1]

This account <u>suggests</u> that the cuttings were <u>not included</u> in William Thompson's order for vines, but added *gratis* by the supplier, who hoped to enter the California market with a new variety, new to cultivation in the United States, and, of course, in the California environment. If the three cultivars were tagged (named) separately from the other fifteen varieties, then clearly, William Thompson and George, at that point, could have known they were the Lady de Coverly variety. Moreover, they did, in fact, keep the

three identifiably separate from the others when planted, as subsequent events prove. A reputable nursery of the stature of Ellwanger and Barry would be extra careful to tag "plant material" in order for the buyer to retain control of his plantings. It is reasonable to believe that Ellwanger and Barry did, in fact, tag the three cultivars to retain their identity.

Setting this obvious explanation aside for the moment, it is at least plausible to believe that William and George may not have known the identity of the cuttings when they grafted them onto rootstock, so that not until 1875, when the sole surviving vine fruited could William identify the vine as the Lady de Coverly ampelographically by the taste and characteristics he remembered from his experiences in Yorkshire years before.

A plausible link in the Lady de Coverly variety's arrival in California is the real possibility that Patrick Barry, the Irishman in the firm, Ellwanger and Barry, may have known about the variety from his viticulture studies in the nurseries in England. As he was a devoted experimentalist in viticulture, it makes sense to believe that it was he, and not Ellwanger, who obtained the Lady de Coverly from a source in England, hoping to establish yet another *vitis vinifera* in the United States. Though this is, admittedly, a speculation, it is an informed one under the circumstances. This possibility augments other explanations; it doesn't displace them.

Then too, the source might easily have been William Robert Prince and his family who extended back three generations of botanical experimenters, notably in grapes. Ulysses P. Hedrick has extremely high regard for Prince's botanical work:

"Three generations of Princes tried to grow European grapes in America. William Robert Prince devoted his life to grape culture. He tried all of the varieties of *Vitis vinifera* to be obtained in the several countries in Europe where grapes were grown, but after fifty years of work with foreign sorts, he gave the rest of his life to improving and distributing varieties of native grapes. Because of his nursery, his book, and his writings, he must be ranked with Adlum and Longworth as one of the three geniuses of American grape growing. His *A Treatise on the Vine* was the first good work to appear on viticulture in America." [2]

Unfortunately, Prince's book contains no mention of the Lady de Coverly or its synonyms, such as Sultanina, or the many other names used in many countries. Mystery unsolved, so far.

Thus far, there are these explanations about how William Thompson knew his famous vine was originally the Lady de Coverly, that is, a variety which already had a given name: 1)The cultivars were tagged and named the Lady de Coverly; 2) William Thompson recognized the fruit and vine characteristics (the ampelography) in 1875; 3) An Ellwanger and Barry catalogue named the grape among the 6000 cultivars they had for sale. The third alternative must be set aside, for the simple reason that the Ellwanger and Barry catalogues do not in fact contain the name, Lady de Coverly. It is possible that both of the other interpretations are true. The cultivars were tagged <u>and</u> William Thompson did recognize the vine in the 1875 vintage.

Since these conclusions contradict the testimony of George Thompson and conflict with the long-standing, oft-quoted traditional story of the vine's origination, further questions must be raised and answered.

If the 1872 catalogue of Ellwanger and Barry did not contain the grape name, Lady de Coverly, why is George Thompson described as claiming that it did? George Thompson does not, himself, make such a claim in the records. Why did George Thompson and his father drop the name, Lady de Coverly, so quickly in 1875, if they did, agreeing with the Marysville clerk to name the exhibit, "Thompson's Seedless" *pro tempore*? Why did it require thirteen years (in 1888) for the Sutter County Horticulture Society to vote to name the grape "Thompson's Seedless" ? (One source claims they voted to call it simply, "Thompson.") Why did Prof. Bioletti refrain from extending his professional advice to George Thompson about establishing any official name for the vine, urging him to seek approval through the California Legislature offices? Why did George Thompson, and maybe William as well, try to get more information from Ellwanger and Barry about the name and source of their vine <u>twenty-years later</u> in 1892? Why did J. P. Onstott, whose considerable business interests were involved, step forward to be the one to urge the Sutter County Horticulture Society to vote unanimously to name the grape "Thompson's Seedless" as its "official" name, the one that has since become so well established, never to be replaced, at least in California?

For a time, early in the research, it seemed possible to answer all of these questions with some finality. Now, nearing the end of the study, the answers appear to be less clear and certain.

Professor Bioletti

From George Thompson's statement, and articles about him, it was he, and not William, who had ambitions for the vine's propagation from the first discovery. It was George who urged his public-spirited, Baptist, teetotaler father to cease giving away cultivars from the vine, to retain control of their distribution, even to seek a patent for the vine as a new variety. Clearly, George did believe the Thompson Seedless was a new variety, a species, a hybrid and thus eligible for a patent. It was no such thing, of course, as even his contemporary ampelographers

could have told him. Apparently it was George who approached Prof. Bioletti, the young viticulturist in the College of Agriculture at Berkeley, seeking to confirm the novelty of the Thompson Seedless vine as a variety. In the two-page document, "Thompson History," these passages are evidence that George was intent on his objective:

"William wrote to the nursery firm twenty years afterwards (1892) to find out where his three cuttings were grown and where they came from, as their booklet [catalogue?] did not give this information in 1872."

"Professor Bioletti of the University of California said [when?] they were mixed with fifteen other varieties and that the legislature ought to name this grape. The Thompsons claimed the right to the name, for out of all the cuttings [3? 15?], only one grew."[3]

Additionally, George Thompson himself paraphrases Prof. Bioletti in his important letter-to-the-editor in 1911:

"Bioletti of the University of California said they were hoodoo [doubtless a colloquialism from the 19th century for 'all messed up'] with 15 other varieties. He said the legislature ought to have the grape. We have the right to the name for out of 6000 cuttings only one grew. My father gave the cuttings away to several families." [4]

What is important to note about this imprecise statement is that George Thompson did take considerable pains to consult a professor of viticulture in the College of Agriculture about the possible justification for a claim for a patent on the vine.

Prof. Bioletti's reply was recorded, though not *verbatim,* as we have seen, stating that such an important, essentially scientific claim, had to be decided by the California State Legislature through the official process by the California Board of State Viticultural Commissioners; and that their Thompsons' Lady de Coverly could not be separated from the other fifteen varieties short of the official process. By implication, Prof. Bioletti may also have been suggesting that the Sutter County Horticultural Society was not *legally* empowered to name a new grape variety in California simply on a motion by John P. Onstott, and approved, even unanimously, by a voice vote. (As previously noted, Dean Wickson wrote in 1909, "...Mr. Bioletti believes the variety [Thompson Seedless] identical with the Sultanina of Asia Minor ..." The 1909 edition is the fourth. Presumably, the first edition would contain the same information even earlier.)

The Sultana and the Lady

In her thesis for the degree, Master of Arts in the History Department, University of California, Berkeley, in 1931, Edith C. Meyer states categorically, "The most important seedless varieties grown are the Sultana (f.n. The Sultana grape is extensively grown near Smyrna in Asia Minor and was first brought to California by Colonel Haraszthy in 1861) and the Sultanina which has been erroneously called Thompson seedless." [5] Edith Meyer is correct: The Thompson Seedless grape was named erroneously and by fiat of an unauthorized source. Even prior to its arrival in California in 1872, the grape was widely recognized in the rest of the world as *synonymous* with the Sultanina, and not the near relative, Sultana. As the Lady de Coverly, it was known in South Africa, where it was re-named Sultana, from where (as Lady de Coverly) it was carried by ship to Australia and where it is yet known as Sultana.[6] By tracing the lineage, I have found more than twenty names for Sultanina, usually listed as "synonyms." Strangely, no standard references I have consulted on wines and grapes published to the date of writing—wine dictionaries, encyclopedias, ampelographies, etc.—ever include the name Lady de Coverly as a synonym; neither is the name listed nor defined. Correspondence between Professor Vincent E. Petrucci, retired viticulturist at California State University, Fresno, and Peter Clingeleffer in Australia, clearly shows the pattern of distribution. In "Dried Vine Fruit in Australia," under the heading, "Sultana Types," we read: "The Sultana vines now in the Sunraysia and Riverland regions came from material that can be traced to Sultana vines held in glasshouses in England and known as Lady de Coverley's (sic) grape. These vines provided the material for the vineyards established in the Cape of Good Hope, near Cape Town in South Africa. These vines in turn provided cuttings that were brought by sailing ship to Australia. In 1867, Sultana buds from the Cape of Good Hope were successfully grafted onto the root systems of eight other grape vines to establish a propagation source for the Sultana variety." [7]

This document establishes the source for the Lady de Coverly in "glasshouses" (greenhouses, in the U. S.) in England in the nineteenth century. (It also clarifies the meaning of the expression, "People in glasshouses (not glass houses!) should never throw stones.")

Risking redundancy, it is helpful to add the following confirming summary of the naming problem written by H. W. Wrightson in 1925(?). [8]

> Following is an interesting technical description of the Sultanina [source not identified] — Synonyms: Thompson, Thompson's Seedless (in California), Lady de Coverly (English hot-houses), Sultanieh, Oval-fruited Kishmish (Turkey, Palestine). This variety is grown in collections or in small quantities as a table grape throughout the Mediterranean region. It is grown largely in the Levant, more particularly in the warmer parts of Asia Minor, as a raisin grape. It appears to be widely distributed in Asia as far east as Persia and probably beyond. From it are made the genuine

Sultana raisins of Smyrna.
It was brought to California in 1872 by Wm. Thompson, Sr., of Sutter County, who obtained it from Ellwanger and Barry of Rochester, New York, under the name of Lady de Coverly, a name by which it is known in English hothouses. It was distributed here under the name of Thompson's Seedless to distinguish it from the Seedless Sultana, a grape grown more sparingly in the same Asiatic regions. Its name of Sultanina, by which it is known in most countries, or Sultanieh as it is sometimes spelled, a name derived from the town of Soultanieh, in Persia.
Mr. Thompson deserves great credit for having introduced this valuable grape into California, but it seems hardly necessary or desirable to change the euphonious and appropriate name by which it has been known in most of the regions where it has been grown probably for hundreds of years....

(This quotation from Wrightson's article is only part of the longer section. The quoted statements are all those of Bioletti, not Wrightson. All of this quotation, as well as the remainder of the article, is used without attribution, and is a word-for-word repetition of Frederic Bioletti's article, "The Seedless Raisin Grapes.") [9]

George Thompson . . .

Virtually all of the questions raised above can be resolved, if it be assumed that, after about 1880, when the Harter Brothers, J. P. Onstott, the Stablers, and others in Sutter County and vicinity were actively propagating the vine, George Thompson was still continuing a campaign for the Thompson Seedless patent rights, futile though that objective was on any ampelographical basis. Informally, by popular acceptance, "illegally," "erroneously," calling the vine Thompson Seedless, instead of Sultanina, or even Sultana (which it eventually was and is called by some in the San Joaquin Valley), George Thompson became the proud, committed spokesman for his father's "discovery," and their good name. After 1897, when William Thompson died, George became recognized as the representative of his father's legacy. By 1915, George and his wife were made official spokesmen for the Sutter County Exhibit in San Francisco during the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, where he repeatedly recounted, orally, the story of the Thompson Seedless vine and its importance in California viticulture. Did hyperbole and embellishment, spawned and enhanced by the daily public performances, enter into his spiel, his account?

In an illustrated article, "Thompson Seedless Grape Had Start in Sutter County: Chance Cutting Almost Discarded, Produced State Raisin Industry," by Margaret Kimerer, in *The Appeal Democrat,* 1961, the caption for the two pictures reads: "The scene of origin of the Thompson Seedless grape, that gave rise to California's gigantic raisin industry and almost turned Sutter County into a vineyard, is shown above, the old home of the late Mr. and Mrs. George Thompson. It was Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, below, *who found unclassified cuttings in a shipment of grape stock and to which they gave their name,* who are the virtual "parents" of the state's famous raisin grape." (Emphasis added.)

The significance of the italicized portion of the above caption will not escape the reader who has been following this contorted saga to this point. This is the first recorded instance found where George Thompson purportedly admits that the three cuttings were "unclassified," despite other suggestions that they were "tagged," and even "named." The author of the article may have based her data on personal interviews with George Thompson, though she does not say so. She did go to the trouble to interview a close friend of Jacob Onstott (son of John P.), W. Ray Chandler, who had his own first-hand version of the events leading to the propagation of the Thompson Seedless vine in Sutter County. In Chandler's version, William Thompson gave John P. Onstott cuttings from his "non-bearing" vine, and Onstott developed his own vineyard and nursery business from those cuttings. Indeed, after subsequent trials, when Onstott found the trick with the vine was to prune long bearing wood, he made a point of returning to the Thompson place to tell William about his success. [10] This trail is a dim one, however, the stuff of controversy, as indeed it became. The point of Chandler's account is this: when J. P. Onstott received his cuttings, William Thompson believed his vine to be barren of fruit, and William even told Onstott it was, for Onstott only wanted a decorative cover for an arbor at his home.

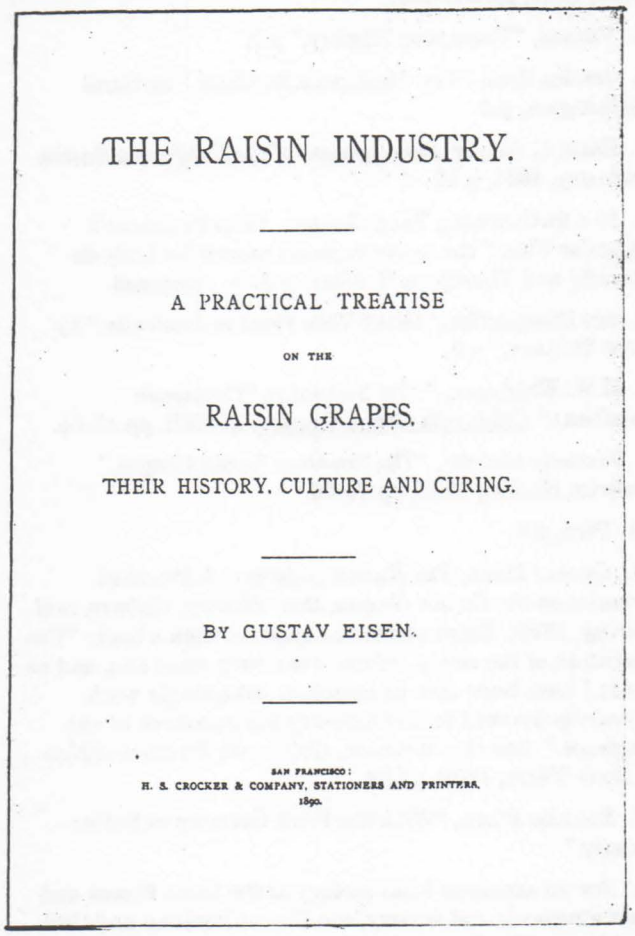
The most interesting observation in the caption, for our purposes, is the description of the three cultivars as "unclassified" cultivars, which simply appeared in the larger shipment of grape stock. Now unverifiable as fact, it does confirm our hypothesis that William Thompson and George did not actually place an order for the three cultivars, and were thus unable to know the vine with certainty until the first fruiting, at the earliest, when William especially could have recognized the Lady de Coverly.

In the *Pacific Rural Press* for 30 September 1893, the lead article, "Thompson's Seedless Grape," states, "This variety was brought to this State from Ellwanger & Barry's nurseries in Rochester, New York, about 1872 and was by them said to be from Constantinople and named Lady Decoverly (sic). No [reference] work on European grapes accessible here has any grape by that name, and the Eastern importers can give no further information about it..."

It is of importance to know that the editor of this journal, which was popular among California farmers, was Edward J. Wickson, dean of the College of Agriculture at Berkeley. His many books were directed to the farmers, though some of the technical ones were of greater interest to scientists. It can be inferred from the quotation that Wickson actually did attempt to ascertain the correct name for the variety. His major work, which went through ten editions, *California Fruits and How to Grow Them,* was first published in 1897, seven years after the work on raisins by Eisen.

The Three Eisens

As we have seen, there is no evidence in the University of Rochester archives to show that Ellwanger & Barry actually listed any vine with the name, Lady de Coverly. The passage quoted above from the *Pacific Rural Press*, was taken, in 1893, *verbatim* from Gustav Eisen's book, *The Raisin Industry* (1890). Indeed, the passage goes on to quote Eisen's ampelographical data of the grape. [11]



THE RAISIN INDUSTRY.

A PRACTICAL TREATISE

ON THE

RAISIN GRAPES.

THEIR HISTORY, CULTURE AND CURING.

BY GUSTAV EISEN.

SAN FRANCISCO:
H. S. CROCKER & COMPANY, STATIONERS AND PRINTERS.
1890.

Unfortunately, we are left with a fundamental question: Where did Gustav Eisen find his information about the Lady de Coverly?

We know something about Eisen's voracious curiosity and his expert management of his elder brother's vineyards in Fresno. In his book, he makes it plain that he actually spoke at length with many farmers, some in Sutter County and the vicinity of Marysville and Yuba City. [12] William Thompson is not so identified as having been interviewed. It stretches credulity to think that he wasn't made totally aware of Thompson's special grape and its bizarre history. Gustav Eisen, a master vineyardist and viticulturist, must have been fascinated to learn what he could about the facts. He was also a scientist—maybe a scientist first. [13]

The Eisen vineyards in Fresno were a family affair. Francis Eisen (1826-1895) was born in Stockholm, Sweden, educated in Bremen, and emigrated to America early in the Gold Rush period in 1850. He is said to be the very first vineyardist in Fresno County, but only after becoming a lucky striker in the Comstock Mines, which made his San Francisco business expansion and his Fresno vineyards and winery possible. The 650-acre Eisen ranch, purchased the year of the start of the Thompson Seedless saga, in 1872, lay very near South Clovis Avenue, adjacent to the railroad and a major irrigation canal.

August Eisen, his son, handled Francis' business interests after Francis' death, but it was Francis' younger brother, Gustav, who was the manager of the vineyards and the extensive experimental viticulture plot where Gustav tended vines and recorded detailed data to help advance the burgeoning agricultural businesses, including their own.

Gustav Eisen (1847-1940), was a near-polymath, who earned the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, from the truly ancient, academic citadel, the Swedish university, Uppsala. He arrived in California in 1871. Gustav's "groundbreaking" (sorry) book on the raisin industry contains many historical gems, yet fails to reveal, in a tantalizing passage, where and when he became acquainted with the Lady de Coverly. This is the passage quoted by others, notably Wickson, both in his book and the article in the *Pacific Rural Press*.

"*Thompson Seedless*—This variety has been growing in California for many years, but has only lately come into notice. It was imported from Rochester, New York, from the establishment of Elwanger (sic) & Barry, about 1872, and was by them described as a grape from Constantinople under the name of Lady Decoverly (sic). Thompson Seedless is the name given this grape by the local growers around Yuba City, and not the original name. I am inclined to believe that this grape is related to, but not identical with, the oblong seedless grape which is grown around Damascus in Asia Minor and there dried into a raisin of very good quality..." [14]

Earlier, Eisen writes the understatement of the 19th century: "...the Muscatel grape is planted to

some extent [in Yuba County], but the favorite grape is the Thompson Seedless, a new variety of great promise." (Actually it was not a new variety, though new to the region.)

Obviously, Gustav was well acquainted with the Thompson Seedless, though the Eisens' operation was mainly devoted to wine grapes and their winery, from which they "grew" excellent wines favored in Europe as well as the United States. It cannot be proved by documentation how Gustav came to identify the Lady de Coverly as synonymous with the Thompson Seedless, but surely, he must have discussed the identities with Prof. Bioletti—and even with William and George Thompson personally in Sutter County during his horticultural travels. With an experimental vineyard of three hundred varieties, exclusive of their producing vineyards, it seems implausible that by, say, 1885, he would not have placed orders himself with Ellwanger & Barry, if not other nurseries in the eastern United States. His *magnum opus, The Raisin Industry,* was published in 1890, and so must have been in preparation for, how long? eight years or more. If Gustav Eisen did in fact order from eastern nurseries, which had traveling agents taking orders, it may be that he came onto the Lady de Coverly independently and concurrently with the Thompsons. More likely, Eisen probably ordered the Lady de Coverly from either John Onstott, or the Stabler nurseries, both being ready to fill orders for rooted cultivars by the early 1880s. In the back of Eisen's book is a full-page advertisement by the B. G. Stabler nursery of Yuba City, offering Thompson Seedless "rooted vines." In very tiny print at the bottom of the advertisement is a carefully worded statement purporting to be an endorsement by Gustav Eisen, which reads:

> In a communication to *California, a Journal of Rural Industry*, May No., 1890, entitled, "With the Fruit Growers in Sutter County," Prof. Eisen thus refers to Mr. Stabler, and his work: "Mr. B. G. Stabler makes a specialty of dried peaches and seedless raisins and has succeeded well with both. The principal raisin-grape of this vicinity is the little-known seedless grape, Lady Decoverly (sic), here known as the Thompson Seedless, he being the first to grow it. Years ago, about 1872, this gentleman saw advertised in an eastern catalogue a seedless grape, said to come from Constantinople, and was called the Lady Decoverly. It proved to be very different from the common Sultana, being of yellow color, and of oblong shape. It is certainly strange that this singular variety of grape should have existed here so many years, and failed to attract general attention. It is an enormous bearer, heavier even than the Sultana, and ripens in early August. It makes very choice raisins for cooking purposes..."

This text mimics his statements in the body of his book.

On the other hand, Gustav Eisen was a world traveler. It is likely that he met the Lady de Coverly in England, as Patrick Barry and William Thompson both did. Gustav may have carried cultivars across the Atlantic. If Agoston Haraszthy could do that, so could he. It would not have been the first time some nobleman's lady was carried across shire borders.

[In our April issue we shall get to the root of this matter, including the author's "Undocumented Conclusions," a "Chronology of the Thompson Seedless Vine," and an in-depth bibliography of "Works Consulted." — Ed.]

NOTES

1. "Yuba City's Agricultural Heritage." (No author) 2 pp. http://www.syix.com/yubacity/ycag.htm.

2. U.P. Hedrick, *History of Horticulture in America to 1860*, 1950, pp.208-209.

3. Vorous, "Thompson History," p.2.

4. Jessica Bird, "The Thompson Seedless," by Carol Withington, p.5.

5. Edith C. Meyer, *Development of the California Raisin Industry*, 1931, p.19.

6. In a forthcoming Tendril essay, "The Professor's Singular Vine," the many regional names for Lady de Coverly and Thompson Seedless will be examined.

7. See Clingeleffer, "Dried Vine Fruit in Australia," by Ross Skinner," p.2.

8. H.W. Wrightson, "The Sultanina (Thompson Seedless)," California Grape Grower, 1925(?), pp.13-14.

9. Frederic Bioletti, "The Seedless Raisin Grapes," Bulletin No.298, 1918, pp.75-86.

10. Bird, p.3.

11. Gustav Eisen, *The Raisin Industry: A Practical Treatise on the Raisin Grapes, their History, Culture, and Curing*, 1890. Eisen states the need for such a book: "The literature of the raisin industry is a very scant one, and as far as I have been able to ascertain not a single work especially devoted to this industry has appeared in any language." See also Wickson, *California Fruits and How to Grow Them*, 1909, p.258.

12. See also Eisen, "With the Fruit Growers in Sutter County."

13. For an excellent brief history of the three Eisens and their vineyards and winery, see Ernest Peninou and Gail Unzelman, *The California Wine Association and Its Member Wineries 1894-1920*, 2000.

14. Gustav Eisen, *The Raisin Industry*, 1890, p.91.

Books on Wine

by

Colin Fenton, M.W.

[*Colin Fenton (1930?–1982) was well-known and respected in the wine trade. Educated at Malborough and Oxford before launching his wine career with Harveys of Bristol, he was head of Sotheby's wine department until he established his own London wine firm, Fenton Fine Wines. While he never authored a book on wine, he was well-qualified to do so. At one time, he was approached by Julian Jeffs, editor of the Faber Wine Series, to write one on Burgundy, but "he never got round to it." Jeffs relates that Fenton, a considerable scholar and friend of a number of literary figures, had a house full of books, on many topics, including a goodly number on wine. The following essay was first published in Christie's Wine Review, 1974. We gratefully acknowledge Christie's Wine Publications , London, for permission to reprint.* — Ed.]

"Why write at all about wine," it may be demanded, "let alone write about *books* upon wine? Wine is for drinking; not for discussion." Yet in the face of this objection a chorus chants, echoing names from the past: Barry, Henderson, Redding; Tovey, Vizetelly, Shaw; Simon, Saintsbury, and Shand... One has only to consult the eight hundred and more pages of Vicaire's *Bibliographie Gastronomique* to see that the list of books written upon wine up to 1890 alone, is enormous—and André Simon carried the list still further in his *Bibliotheca Gastronomica* of 1953. Why all the attention paid to a subject that is seemingly ephemeral?

Taking my own books as a start, and those by authors who are no longer alive so as to give the subject a needed limit, I shall try and show what may be gained by reading about wine. At the outset it will be helpful to recall a simple feature about wine itself: the level of emotion that it arouses. I do not simply mean the degree of intoxication that it can induce, though this has its life enhancing part to play; but I refer to the deeper emotions that wine can conjure up. It stimulates the memory and releases feelings normally aroused by works of art. Whenever our awareness is enlarged we are wise to investigate the source of our pleasure: a man who says that he knows nothing about wine but knows what wine he likes, should learn that his enjoyment would be doubled if he learnt *why* he liked it.

EDWARD BARRY

"... his whole approach to wine was serious and scientific..."

There is another reason that has produced authors and readers of wine books: the scientific or medical aspect. One of the earliest works to be written in English upon the subject was published in 1775, *Observations Historical, Critical, and Medical on the Wines of the Ancients*, written by Edward Barry in the 80th year of his age, a distinguished physician, a Fellow of the Royal Society, a former President of the College of Physicians and a newly created baronet. It is a disappointing book for it is chiefly concerned with the *Wines of the Ancients*, with comments upon his contemporary wines being mainly left to an appendix. From these we are reminded how practices and tastes have altered. It is interesting to hear Barry inveigh against the prejudice in favour of old wine. He had convinced a friend that young, cheaper hock was preferable to the old, the latter at double the price. Barry believed that champagne and burgundy were the best wines from France, but adds that for some years the French and English have been particularly fond of the "sparkling frothy champaigns (sic). The former have almost entirely quitted that depraved taste; nor does it now so much prevail here."

However, the interest in Barry's book goes beyond these fascinating titbits; it is in his whole approach to wine which was serious and scientific, a genuine attempt by a professional to probe the baffling subject and evaluate its effect upon health. To do this he first studied the wines of Greece and Rome, the wine of Chios and the Falernians, the Malvasians and Sentinums, in the hope of being able to improve the wines of his day by learning from old practices.

ALEXANDER HENDERSON

"a journalist...wrote easily and from personal knowledge..."

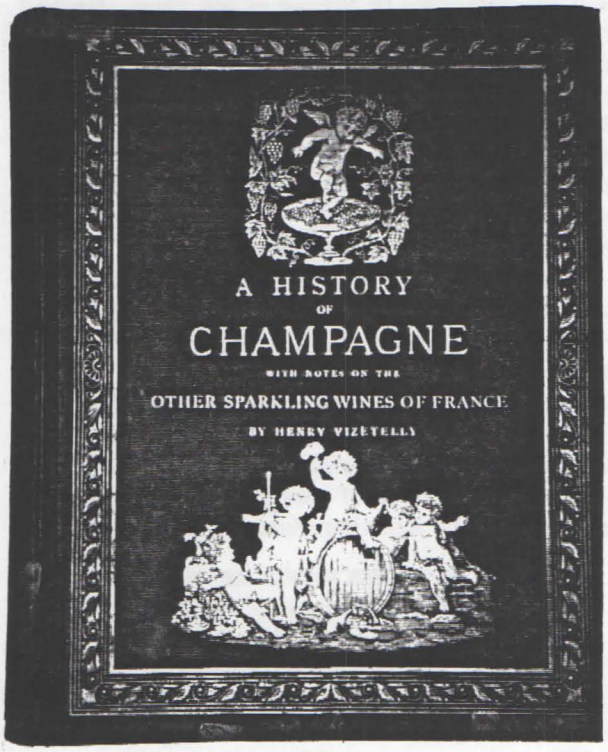
Barry's method was followed by another pre-Pasteur publication fifty years later: *A History of Ancient and Modern Wines* by Alexander Henderson, published in 1824. "The primary cause of fermentation," he states in the introduction, "will probably always remain hidden from our view." Henderson, another physician, adopts Barry's approach of looking at the history of ancient wines to compare them with the modern. He devotes fourteen chapters instead of an appendix to wines of the modern world and his book is more successful and balanced as a result.

Wine had surely improved in quality in those intervening fifty years. More study had been given to it and in particular M. Julien had published his *Wines of the World* in 1816, a work that Henderson relied upon. [Ed: *I believe Mr. Fenton is referring to André Jullien's Topographie de tous les Vignobles connus.*] More wine was bottled as opposed to being drunk from the cask, and tastes had altered. Henderson recommends the "growths of the Bordelais as perhaps the safest for daily use."

CYRUS REDDING

"deservedly...one of the best known authors on wine..."

Cyrus Redding with his *History and Description of Modern Wines*, published in 1833 and which ran into three editions by 1851, took the subject a stage further. He was a journalist and wrote easily and from personal knowledge of many of the areas he describes. He is one of the best known authors on wine and deservedly, for he is down to earth and not interested in the ancient classic wines. Modern wines were beginning to stand on their own. Unfortunately, his example was not entirely followed for we see the earlier approach persisting even today.



HENRY VIZETELLY

"a colourful character..."

Somehow the historical approach suits wine and its enjoyment, and we can gain it from the works of Henry Vizetelly (1820-1894), a colourful character who trained as a wood engraver and was associated with journalism all his life. During his career he was on familiar terms with Thackeray, Dickens, Jerrold and numerous other notabilities of the period. He published *A History of Champagne* (in 1882) and several other wine volumes in which can be found most attractive illustrations. In 1889 he was sent to prison for publishing *The Soil* by Zola; his health suffered but he published a year before his death, *Glances Back through Seventy Years*, a chronicle of his life. In an account of the vintage at Bordeaux in 1869, he reminds us that in those days bare feet were still used to crush the grapes, the vintagers dancing upon the fruit, "regulating their movements by the time of a couple of fiddles energetically scraped in a gallery above." I enjoy looking back at this earlier time, and reading Vizetelly it is easy to picture those days: the vintage scene, and the sailing ships at the Quai des Chartrons being loaded with hogsheads for foreign shores. Wearing Vizetelly's spectacles in Bordeaux today, it is simple to recapture the old atmosphere; the new city being built by the lake to the north—with its shoe, petro-chemical, and aero-engine factories—has taken the pressure off the old wine city, whose buildings largely remain untouched.

COCKS et FÉRET

"...a monumental record..."

Fittingly, Bordeaux, the district with the most complicated assortment of wines, has a monumental record to its credit: *Bordeaux et ses Vins* by Cocks & Féret. No other wine district can boast such a work, first published by an Englishman [Cocks] in 1846 when only 88 pages out of 215 were devoted to wine, the rest being a description of Bordeaux and its environs. It has since been much enlarged and devoted entirely to wine. It has been brought up to date by successive editions, the last being in 1969. [Ed: *See Cocks et Féret Checklist this issue for editions to date.*]

Before we look at the most eminent of those authors who have written in this century, two more works from the 19th century deserve attention and both are from the pens of wine merchants.

THOMAS G. SHAW

"important career"

Thomas Shaw was a Scotsman who started life as a dock clerk and salesman, and became a successful London wine merchant. His career is important, for it was he who, in 1820, began the campaign for the reduction of duties upon French wines. In 1860, nearly forty years later, he met with success when Gladstone did in fact bring down duties dramatically —a watershed in the history of the Trade that Shaw deals with in his second book *Wine, the Vine and the Cellar* [1863], the second edition of which was published in 1864.

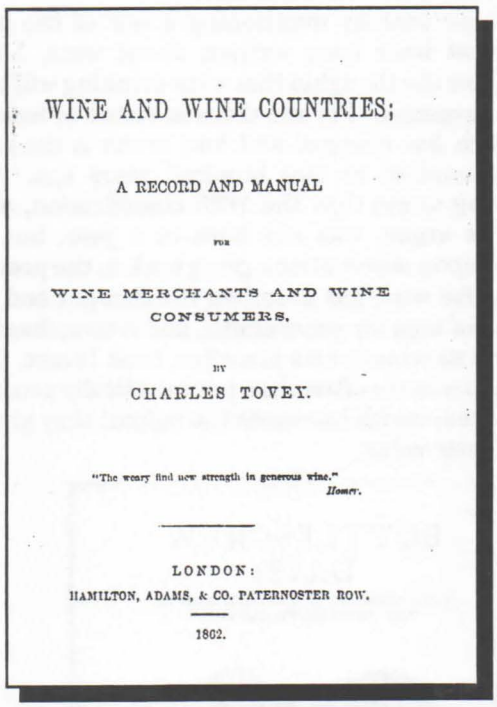
This volume also covers wines of the world and provides a wealth of tables upon their production and markets. Though Shaw makes clear that the compilation of these statistics was not to his taste, they are of immense value for reference today.

CHARLES TOVEY

"a patriot of the old school"

Charles Tovey, another wine merchant, first published *Wine and Wine Countries* in 1862 and produced a new edition of it in 1877, sixteen years after the duties had been brought to their lowest. Many

changes had taken place in the trade during those years as a result of the duty changes and the trade was, as it is now, in a transitional state. Tovey attacks unscrupulous merchants who, he argued, had appeared in consequence of the reduction of duties. One ignorant trader had advertised "Sherry: Château d'Yquem at 40/-per dozen." He also attacks the writers of wine books who dwell upon the wines of the ancients, or who write inaccurately and with trifling knowledge: "they have neither the grace of fiction nor the utility of truth." He attacks foreign salesmen who were then selling direct in England. He claims to have tender fingers and to dislike "le brutal shakehand d'un Anglais" which grates the bones and injures the marrow; but he prefers it, "vice-like though it be, to the soft silky palmistry of the man who presents his catalogue of Rhenish or Bordeaux wines, on fine glazed, flimsy paper, and in foreign typography." Tovey was a patriot of the old school.



WINE AND WINE COUNTRIES;

A RECORD AND MANUAL

FOR

WINE MERCHANTS AND WINE CONSUMERS.

BY

CHARLES TOVEY.

"The weary find new strength in generous wine."
Homer.

LONDON:
HAMILTON, ADAMS, & CO. PATERNOSTER ROW.

1862.

H. WARNER ALLEN

"the extravagance of his style grows stale and makes me irritable"

Moving to writers of the present century, one of the names that leaps immediately to mind is that of Warner Allen. There is much to be learnt from his *Romance of Wine*, first published in 1931, which I have on my shelves together with several of his other publications. He throws out ideas and comments, some of which are misinformed, but they are always provoking and this kind of writing is essential if we are to sharpen our perception and taste. His observations are useful additions to the history of the development of wine: I am interested to learn that Château Lafite 1893 was helped by a "noble remainder of ungrafted vines"; that even in the 1920s he recognised Montlouis wines near Vouvray as having special qualities, and yet we see that he could brush off Gigondas as those wines with an "uncouth name." I know also that he was a sincere lover of wine and he wished to express this. But I find the extravagance of his style grows stale and makes me irritable: when he describes a wine as the "Terpischore of Madeiras" I am not certain without going to the dictionary what he means. And when he recalls 1834 vintage port drunk in 1934: "its colour had paled to a faint tinge of tawny and its aroma was but a ghostlike shadow, though it was still sound, the corruption which was gnawing at the incorruptible substance of the Prince of Hell had not touched it" — when he writes this, I fail to have my pleasure in wine deepened or prolonged—or indeed to know precisely what he means.

Warner Allen, another journalist incidentally, has undoubtedly heightened "the fun in wine" for many, but perhaps his language is suited to a generation more versed in the classics than my own and for readers less eager for a simple approach than I believe we are today. Besides I do not know how he can argue that ancient wines and pre-phylloxera wines were better than wines are now. That is the burden of his argument and its seems to me to be self-indulgent nostalgia, impossible to prove.

I do not advocate that we entirely ignore the mystery or mystique in wine. Science has uncovered secrets in wine that no one dreamt could be solved a hundred and fifty years ago, but wine still retains qualities that cannot be analysed completely, and it behaves and matures in ways we cannot predict or explain. Any description of it should allow for this, but it is a fact that need not be emphasised for it is part of what we accept about the subject.

MAURICE HEALY

"full of enthusiasm..."

Maurice Healy in his *Stay Me with Flagons* is able to get this across unpretentiously. Of fermentation he writes: "one can imagine the curiosity with which primitive man and his wife watched the eager bubbling." This is the robust, opinionated book of a man who found great enjoyment in wine and wanted to share it. He does not expect us to agree with all he says, and for us in the 1970s it may be a trifle too anecdotal; but it is full of enthusiasm, and pathways to pleasure are well sign-posted. No one could read unmoved his prayer to wine in the last paragraph of his first chapter: it recalls Tennyson's remark that "all generous minded men are greedy."

"So give me wine. Let my meals still be occasions of good-fellowship, where pleasant conversation will help good digestion to wait on appetite and health on both. May the gleam of a glass of Claret still attract my tired eye; may its fragrance soothe my weariness; may its savour charm my palate and carry below a spirit of concord borrowed from the feast. May I remember all the kind thoughts it inspires, for they, like the decanted wine, are free from all bitterness and have left malice behind them. And may I never drink unworthily; may I always remember that the gift which I am enjoying is not given to all; may I be prompted to help the less fortunate and to give thanks to the Giver of all good things for this, the most friendly of His gifts. Come, fill the glass. Your good health!" [*Stay Me With Flagons*, 1940, p.25]

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

"soothingly autumnal ... full of gratitude for good things"

In any remarks upon wine books, it is impossible to omit George Saintsbury's classic, *Notes on a Cellar-Book*. Formerly a professor of English and a notable critic, he wrote it in his retirement when he was 75 years old. No longer able to drink claret or burgundy, he recalled "those voyages to the Oracle of the Bottle" that he had experienced in earlier life and for which he was thankful. It is a work of literature, and whilst it is dated as far as some of the practical information is concerned, there are still many useful hints to be gleaned from it. Besides it is soothingly autumnal and a book full of gratitude for good things.

ANDRÉ L. SIMON

"provides trenchant scholarly and useful information"

But what of the book that will start off the modern reader in a straightforward way, telling the facts easily but not dryly, filling in the background and preserving some respect for the unscientific side to wine? I believe that André Simon fully achieves this. From his *Wine Primer*, a model of how to present a lot of information clearly to the beginner, to the 18th-century background in his full-blooded *Bottlescrew Days*, he provides trenchant scholarly and useful information which is always designed to heighten our enjoyment. He has covered every important wine in his publications, and unfailingly makes us excited about them.

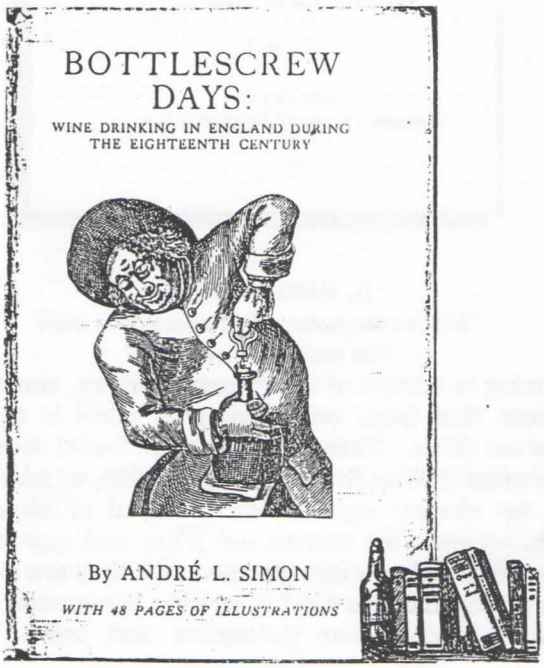
P. MORTON SHAND

"a scholar who wrote out of love for his subject"

Another writer who, for me, hits the right note is Morton Shand. His *Book of French Wines* was re-published posthumously in 1960, a revision of an earlier work [1928]. He was an individualist and his reasoning is always fresh; his judgements seem to be secure and based upon his own experiences. When his book was going to press within a few weeks of his death, new information came to him about the reclassification in Bordeaux; he wrote and sent to the printer a final note for the book, for he remained truly alive until the very last. He was a scholar who wrote out of love for his subject.

There are of course shelf-fulls of other books by living authors that will do the same job as either Simon or Shand; there is a particularly large number to choose from today. But there are too many to mention each one and would be unfair and certainly tactless to select. Some books now, as in the past, are in some degree compilations from other books, and the reader should beware these. Books upon wines of the world often have to rely upon sources of information that the author cannot personally check. The introduction to a book will usually reveal the degree of the author's personal experience.

I hope that by mentioning a few of the many books that have been written about wine, I have shown how the thoughts that wine drinking will bring can be deepened. For me there is virtue in learning how much has changed and how much is the same, from a hundred or two hundred years ago. It is reassuring to see that the 1855 classification, about which we argue, was not born in a year, but was founded upon observations going back to the previous century; for wine has absorbed the thought and skill of scores of men for generations, and it stretches back far. And as wine lovers are often book lovers, these volumes are more often than not beautifully produced and printed, which increases the delight they give, as well as their value.



ELISABETH WOODBURN: *A QUOTE AND A QUESTION*

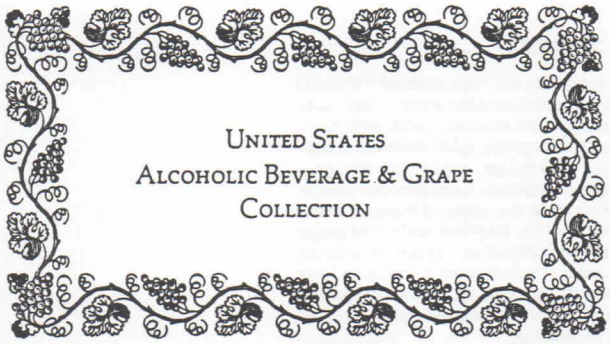
by

Thomas Pinney

turning over a file of the American Wine Society Journal I came across a rather odd remark about wine book collectors. It occurs in an article by Philip Jackisch, who, together with now-Tendril Lucie Morton, was making a grape-hunting expedition in Pennsylvania with the great French ampelographer Pierre Galet. At the end of the trip the three called on the distinguished dealer in books on wine and gardening, Elisabeth Woodburn, at Booknoll Farm, her home and bookshop in Hopewell, New Jersey. Here is the odd remark:

> Elisabeth commented, somewhat sadly, that collectors of wine books are often dour, as compared to the joyful collectors of gardening books. At least this has been her experience when these collectors visit her in person. She attributes this to the fear that wine book collectors seem to have of being less than infallible (American Wine Society Journal, Spring 1981, p. 19).

Those Tendrils who called on Elisabeth Woodburn at Booknoll Farm (I never did) will now know what sort of impression they made.



THINKING ABOUT MRS. WOODBURN reminds me that some Tendrils may have wondered, as I have, about what became of the remarkable collection of books that she offered for sale in 1981 as the "United States Alcoholic Beverage & Grape Collection. A Historic Collection, 1771–1919." This collection, which marked her retirement from the wine book trade, consisted of 145 items—spanning from the first U.S. printed work to the beginning of Prohibition—offered for sale as an intact collection only, at a price of $27,500. It was loaded with gems such as Antill's "Essay on the Cultivation of the Vine" (1771), Saint Pierre's *Art of Planting and Cultivating the Vine* (1772), Adlum's *A Memoir on the Cultivation of the Vine in America* (1823), Dufour's *American Vine-Dresser's Guide* (1826), and Rafinesque's *American Manual of the Grape Vine* (1830).

I heard nothing about the fate of this collection for some years. Then, about a decade ago someone said that it had gone to "Virginia," which I took to mean the University of Virginia. But when I found myself not long after in Charlottesville and went to the University to inquire about the "United States Alcoholic Beverage & Grape Collection," no one there had heard of it. Earlier this year another someone said that it had gone to Virginia all right, but to the Virginia State Library in Richmond (whose name is now the Library of Virginia). I called, and was told by a reference librarian that she had never heard of such a thing. I then asked if the Library had any of the titles in Mrs. Woodburn's list and found that it did in fact have some of them, including such rarities as named above. A call to Bradford Lyon, long-time assistant to Mrs. Woodburn and successor to the business, verified that the collection went to the Library of Virginia: the head librarian at the time had a special interest in wine books.

The reference librarian with whom I spoke is excused for her lack of knowledge of the Collection: the Library has not kept the Woodburn Collection as a single collection—and does not generally refer to it as such—but instead has catalogued and shelved the books and pamphlets according to Library of Congress subject classification. Some of the titles are available through the General Reading Room, rarer titles are in Special Collections. If one wanted to reconstruct the "United States Alcoholic Beverage & Grape Collection," the Library has a reference copy of Mrs. Woodburn's original offering catalogue.

While it is possible to examine the Woodburn Collection titles on the Library's website (keyword: Elisabeth Woodburn Wine Collection), it is, nevertheless, a pity this remarkable collection was not kept intact and made the center of a growing special collection of wine books.

[Editor's Note: *Although no longer handling books on wine as a special interest, Elisabeth Woodburn—Books (specializing in old and rare books on Gardening & Horticulture, Herbs, Landscape, and Garden History), continues under the proprietorship of Brad Lyon. Grape Growing titles often appear in their catalogues.* ☎ 609.466.0522 *e-mail: info@woodburnbooks.com*

Thompson's Seedless Grape

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SEEDLESS RAISINS

The very best for Culinary Use!

This Grape has been thoroughly tested in California, having been grown and raisins made of it, in Sutter County, for the past fifteen years.

It is far superior to the Sultana, being much sweeter, a heavier cropper, more easily dried, and ripens earlier.

For rooted vines, guaranteed true to name, address,

B. G. STABLER,

YUBA CITY,

Sutter County, California.

Prices reasonable; given on application for both one and two-year old rooted vines. Will also send *sample of raisins, if desired.*

Described by Prof. Eisen.

In a communication to *California*, a Journal of Rural Industry, May No., 1890, entitled "With the Fruit Growers in Sutter County," Prof. Eisen thus refers to Mr. Stabler, and his work: "Mr. B. G. Stabler makes a specialty of dried peaches and seedless raisins, and has succeeded well with both. The principal raisin-grape of this vicinity is the little-known seedless grape, Lady Decoverly, here known as the Thompson Seedless, he being the first to grow it. Years ago, about 1872, this gentleman saw advertised in an Eastern Catalogue a seedless grape, said to come from Constantinople, and was called the Lady Decoverly. It proved to be very different from the common Sultana, being of yellow color, and of oblong shape. It is certainly strange that this singular variety of grape should have existed here so many years, and failed to attract general attention. It is an enormous bearer, heavier even than the Sultana, and ripens early in August. It makes very choice raisins for cooking purposes. The color is similar to that of the Muscatel, and makes a raisin of beautiful color. Among other novelties in the way of fruit, Mr. Stabler has a Chance Seedling Apricot, which promises to be something extraordinary. It is not yet in bearing, * * * but think of apricot leaves six inches in diameter, and limbs many times as long and strong as those of ordinary apricot trees," etc.

[Advertisement from EISEN *THE RAISIN INDUSTRY*, 1890; Grape illustration from J. ROBINSON *VINES, GRAPES & WINES*, 1986]