

History of Domestic Wines on Display

By Pamela Goddard

It's often been said that those who don't know the past are doomed to repeat it. Sometimes, though, knowing the past can point to the future. For 10 years the Cornell libraries have collected items documenting the history of grape varieties, wine styles, and wine marketing plans — some of which were successful and some that were not. All summer and through the fall, the public can see parts of the Eastern Wine and Grape Archive in a series of exhibits across the Cornell campus.

Cornell and its Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, a home to grape-growing and wine-making research, are ideally suited for reflection on what has worked in the past and what might be better in the future. "Song of the Vine: A History of Wine" is one of a series of exhibits hosted by the university during the latter part of 2008.

The exhibit exploring the development of wine making in America is now on display in the Hirshland Exhibition Gallery of the Carl A. Kroch Library. Related exhibitions are also on view at the Mann Library, Bailey Hortorium, Olin Library, libraries in Statler and



Photo by Ted Crane

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Comstock Halls and Jordan Hall in Geneva. Visitors can learn aspects of wine history, ranging from insect control and grape vine research to wine marketing and the hospitality industry.

There has been interest in growing grapes and making wine in North America for more than 300 years, but only during the past 50 years has the American wine

industry finally come into its own and produced excellent results. The success of the Cayuga Wine Trail — and the other wine trails that have followed — is an indication that consumers like what they find in a bottle of New York wine.

Sometimes it takes time for people to notice important trends. A decade ago, historians and archivists realized that the records and ephemera of wine grape agriculture and the New York wine industry were not being saved. Something had to be done.

"Ten years ago, with America's wine industry experiencing explosive growth, we realized that the history of this industry — the papers and records of grape growers, wine makers, and others — was not being well-represented and preserved in research archives," says Katherine Reagan, assistant director for collections at Cornell's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections. "We established the Eastern Wine and Grape Archive to document and capture these important historical materials."

Song of the Vine explores the origins of viticulture in Europe and the development of wine making in America, as well as the cultural movements and legislative acts that have shaped the nation's complex relationship with alcohol. Rare books, photographs, documents and artifacts tell the story of the growth of the New York State wine industry, from America's oldest wineries to today's "Uncork NY" advertising campaign. Other archival materials highlight Cornell's extensive contributions to the development of new grape varieties through the work of the Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva.

"Wine permeates our culture," says Anne Kenney, the new University Librarian at Cornell. "The archive is for anyone with a passion for wine. Cornell is the only institution with a dedicated program to document the production and consumption of wine, from temperance to cocktail cul-

ture. The Kroch Library is proud to serve as the home for this important collection."

The series of wine history exhibitions opened on June 5 during Cornell Reunion Weekend. Thomas Pinney, noted wine expert and author, presented a lecture titled "A Very Short History of Wine in America," covering 300 years of wine history in just one hour. Pinney divided his talk into three unequal chapters: "Getting it Wrong," "Compromise" and "Getting it Right."

"Getting it Wrong" covered the first 200 years of "complete, comprehensive failure," in Pinney's words. Plant diseases and pests caused a "hopeless repetition of failure" until the discovery and development of hybrid wine grapes.

Pinney describes the next 150 years as an age of "Compromise" in America's wine history, until the "vinifera revolution" started by Dr. Konstantine Frank and his Vinifera Wine Cellars on Keuka Lake in 1962. At the same time, Americans were transforming their beverage consumption preferences, choosing table wine over distilled and fortified beverages such as sherry and port. In the 26 years since, wine quality (and consumption) has grown several hundred-fold.

Knowing the past can lead to improvements in the future. Entomologists, grape breeders, geologists and chemists at Cornell are all at work creating more hardy grapes and more delicious wine. The seven exhibits in the Song of the Vine series provide a colorful and interesting overview of the world of grapes and wine. "When looking back at the history of wine in America, keep in mind the powerful obstacles," Pinney said during his talk. "These were daunting and difficult, but they have been overcome and that's a wonderful achievement."

All exhibitions are free and open to the public. For more information visit <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/ewga/>.

Ithaca Carshare Vehicles Hit the Road

Ithaca Carshare vehicles are now available for use. The local nonprofit provides members self-service 24-hour access to six hatchbacks, with a pickup truck expected shortly. Carshare members use an online reservation system to choose the vehicle they need at the time they need it. All six vehicles were driven by organizers in the Ithaca Festival parade.

Vehicles will be located in several locations around town, including downtown, Collegetown, two locations on the Cornell campus, at Ithaca College and at EcoVillage on West Hill. Both Ithaca College and Cornell are supporting participation by students and staff, and as a

result, organizers expect to increase vehicles and locations around Ithaca within months.

Two membership plans are available. "Just in Case" is directed at people who have occasional use for a car or truck; and "It's My Car" caters to drivers looking for a way to replace car ownership or the need to own a second car. Details on costs and an application form are available at www.IthacaCarshare.org.

Members pay an annual or monthly fee and then by the hour and mile for usage, which covers gas, insurance, cleaning, maintenance and other vehicle ownership costs.



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