

Preface

This history is a first attempt to tell the story of grape growing and winemaking in the United States from the beginning and in detail. Now that winegrowing in the United States has succeeded so brilliantly after long years of frustration, and now that it is beginning once again to spread to nearly every state in the union, it seems to me particularly fitting that the many obscure and forgotten people and their work lying behind that success should be brought out into the light. It is also instructive to see how many names celebrated in other connections also belong to the story of American winegrowing, from Captain John Smith onwards. Even more important, a knowledge of the difficulties they faced and of the work they did will help us to understand better the success that has at last been achieved. At any rate, that is the conviction from which this history has been written.

The struggle to make the New World yield wine such as they had known in Europe was begun by the earliest settlers and was persisted in for generations, only to end in defeat over and over again. Few things can have been more eagerly tried and more thoroughly frustrated in American history than the enterprise of growing European varieties of grapes for the making of wine. Not until it was recognized that only the native grape varieties could succeed against the endemic diseases and harsh climate of North America did winemaking have a chance in the eastern part of the country. That recognition came slowly and was made reluctantly. Then, midway through the nineteenth century, the colonization and development of California transformed the situation. In California the European grape flourished, and the state quickly became a bountiful source of wines resembling the familiar European types. At the same time, the development of new hybrid grapes and an accumulating experience in winemaking produced a variety of wines in the diverse conditions of the country outside of California. By the beginning of the twentieth century the growing of grapes and the making of wine across the United States was a proven and important economic activity. The hopes of the first settlers, after nearly three centuries of trial, defeat, and renewed effort, were at last realized. Then came national Prohibition, apparently putting an end to the story at one stroke. Such, in barest outline, is the story that this history fills out in detail.

The choice of the era of national Prohibition as the stopping point of the story was not my original intention, but it came to seem inevitable as I learned more about the subject. There are deep continuities that hold together the history of

American winegrowing before and after Prohibition. But the story since Repeal is distinctly different. The industry faced different problems, had different opportunities, and developed along lines that could not have been foreseen in the pre-Prohibition era. More to the point, the very recentness of the period means that its story could not be told on the same scale that was possible for the years before Prohibition: we know too much about it, and any adequate account of the past fifty years would simply overwhelm the narrative of the beginnings. So the story of American winegrowing since Prohibition will have to be another book.

Perhaps the most striking fact that I have learned in writing this book is how little is known about the subject. 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. I have therefore had to depend all too frequently on my own resources. I sincerely hope that one effect of this book—perhaps the most important one that it can have—is to stimulate others to take up the historical inquiry. The gaps, distortions, misunderstandings, and mistakes of my own work will then be revealed, but the history of an important and fascinating subject will be much better served.

I have not been without the invaluable help of predecessors, however. First among them I would name two distinguished botanists and writers, Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ulysses Prentiss Hedrick. Bailey's *Sketch of the Evolution of Our Native Fruits* (1898) is only a modest item in the vast production of its author, and the section devoted to grapes is only a part of the *Sketch*. Nevertheless, it remains an original and valuable work. It is continued and expanded in Hedrick's misleadingly titled *The Grapes of New York* (1908), a monumental work that takes the whole subject of viticulture in the eastern United States for its province. For California there are far more authorities than for the eastern states, but just for that reason there is no one outstanding figure. The many publications sponsored since Repeal by the Wine Institute are together the single most important source of historical information; they include a long series of detailed and informative articles by Irving McKee, published in the 1940s and 1950s.

Three recent articles of remarkable importance illustrate the kind of fresh and original inquiry that the history of winegrowing in this country so badly needs. All three of them challenge received opinions on key points of that history, and all three demonstrate—conclusively to me—that received opinion has been utterly uninformed and utterly untrustworthy. They are Roy Brady's "The Swallow That Came from Capistrano" (*New West*, 24 September 1979), dating the origin of winegrowing in California; Charles Sullivan's "A Viticultural Mystery Solved" (*California History*, Summer 1978), demolishing the myth of Haraszthy's introduction of the Zinfandel to California; and Francisco Watlington-Linares' "The First American Wine" (*Eastern Grape Grower and Winery News*, October–November 1983), demonstrating the hitherto unrecognized claim of the Spanish on Santa Elena Island to be the first to plant vines in what is now the United States. It is exciting to think

of how many comparable points remain to be investigated critically for the first time; the three articles in question set an admirable standard for further such work.

I have been fortunate in having two notable experts read the larger part of this history in draft: Dr. John McGrew, formerly research scientist with the Department of Agriculture and the final authority on eastern American viticulture, and Leon Adams, whose comprehensive *Wines of America* does not begin to exhaust the knowledge of American winegrowing that he has acquired in a lifetime of association with the industry. It goes without saying that they have to do only with such virtues as my book may have and not with its defects.

It would be wrong to conclude the many years of pleasant work that I have spent on this history without at least a summary acknowledgment of the libraries upon whose resources I have largely depended. In England, for the colonial period, the British Library and the Royal Society of Arts yielded a number of interesting finds; as in this country, for the national period, did the American Philosophical Society, the Library of Congress, the National Agricultural Library, and the Kansas State Historical Society. In California, the Bancroft Library of the University of California and the Special Collections of the Library of the California State University, Fresno, were of particular value; I would like to single out Ron Mahoney of Fresno State for the freedom he generously allowed me to ransack the shelves of the library's rich collection, originally formed by Roy Brady and greatly extended under Mahoney's direction.

Beyond all of these excellent libraries, I have depended on the Huntington Library's splendid collection of American history to provide the information out of which this narrative has been constructed. It is people rather than institutions who ought to receive dedications, but if this book were to be dedicated to an institution, it would have to be to the Huntington.

Finally, I should like to make grateful acknowledgment to a writer personally unknown to me, Philip Wagner. For more than fifty years he has been writing gracefully, originally, and authoritatively about American wines and vines, and no one else now living can have done so much through his writings to foster an intelligent interest in wine among Americans.

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