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Reference

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HUDSON CATTELL: *Wines of Eastern North America from Prohibition to the Present: A History and Desk Reference*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2014, 400 pp., ISBN 978-0-8014-5198-0, \$40.00.

This remarkable book represents a lifetime of work for Hudson Cattell, its author. Now 83 years old, he has been around the wines of the Eastern United States long enough to have personally known and photographed (he receives the credit for many of the photos in the book), the characters who were instrumental in the slow rebirth of the Eastern wine industry at the end of Prohibition. Despite the rebirth's origins in the work of Konstantin Frank and Philip Wagner, the movement began to reach critical mass only in the past decade. As Cattell shows, from 1975 to 1995 the total number of wineries in the East grew from about 200 to 600. By 2005, however, there were over 1,200 Eastern wineries, and by 2011 there were nearly 3,000. These numbers trace a growth curve that has not yet reached its inflection point. To put things in perspective, California has around 3,500 wineries, and Washington and Oregon combined have about 1,200. The largest Eastern producer state is New York, with 320 wineries, but Virginia is not far behind, with 223. Believe it or not, at last count Nebraska and Kansas each had 29 wineries, and an experimental hybrid grape (a cross between *riparia* and *tempranillo*) called *Temparia* had been developed and successfully grown in Nebraska.¹

Cattell begins his story with chapters on Frank and Wagner, who clearly had different views of how progress in the creation of Eastern wines would evolve. Konstantin Frank believed that Americans should plant *vinifera* grapes, the source of the dry table wines of Europe. As Cattell explains, Frank, an agricultural scientist who immigrated from Ukraine and landed in upstate New York, had worked with *vinifera* in his home country. He was convinced that these grapes

¹Cuthills Vineyards in Pierce, Nebraska sells this wine for \$26.00 a bottle. See <http://www.cuthills.com/scripts/wineList.cfm>, downloaded February 16, 2015. It is apparent that many of these wineries are commanding premium prices for their finest wines.

could be grown in the East despite the harsh winters, which killed so many vines. There was a reason for this belief—Frank had invented plows with which to bury and uncover the Ukrainian vinifera vines that he had successfully grown in the harsh winters of his home country!

Frank, a respected agricultural scientist in Ukraine, has a remarkable back story. Prior to immigrating to the United States, he had earned a PhD in viticulture with a dissertation titled “Protection of Grapes from Freezing Damage.” He arrived in New York City without speaking a word of English and settled into a job as a dishwasher at Horn & Hardart’s Automat in 1951. By 1952 he had moved to Geneva, New York, where he worked for \$1.00 an hour with the extension service, doing what he later euphemistically described as “hoeing blueberries.” By all accounts an extremely difficult man to deal with (as a personal note, I met him once and I endorse this view), he was a passionate advocate for vinifera varieties and an equally passionate critic of all other varieties.²

Wagner had a different view. A professional journalist, whose diaries are a key source for Cattell, Wagner was a champion for a broader selection of grape varieties. Wagner’s view was also based on his own experiences. He had begun making wine in 1931, during Prohibition, from grapes he had purchased in Baltimore.³ His experiences making wine led, in 1933, to the publication of his *American Wines and How to Make Them*, establishing him as an authority on the topic. Wagner liked some of the wines he made from French and American hybrid grapes, so he did not have the bias common among wine consumers today. Moreover, his attempts to grow vinifera in Maryland were mostly unsuccessful. Wagner became a primary advocate for hybrid grapes and ran a commercial nursery from which cuttings could be purchased.⁴

With this tension over what types of wines will dominate remaining in the background, Cattell next plots the history of Eastern North American wine developments. Cattell’s definition of his subject is broad, but not all inclusive. He is interested mainly in developments in North America east of the Missouri/Mississippi Rivers, but with Kansas and Nebraska added. He includes Ontario and the Eastern Canadian provinces in his purview of North America.

² Frank’s winery still exists and, based on its web site, continues to sell wines made only from vinifera grapes. See <http://www.drfrankwines.com/>, downloaded 2/17/2015. Dr. Frank’s 2010 Meritage red wine sells for \$49.99.

³ Although apparently not well known to anyone but wine historians, wine making was perfectly legal (up to 100 gallons per family member per year) during Prohibition—indeed, Prohibition led to a boom in grape growing in many Eastern states, as well as California. Home wine making was not only legal, it flourished, while commercial wineries were mainly (religious exceptions existed) illegal.

⁴ Wagner and his wife started Boordy Vineyards, which still survives in Baltimore County, Maryland, and, based on its web site, appears to now sell primarily wines made from vinifera grapes. See <http://www.boordy.com/>, downloaded 2-17-2015. Boordy’s Landmark Reserve 2012, made entirely from vinifera grapes, sells for \$45.00.

Cattell's discussion of the historical progression of Eastern wine falls naturally into two periods: before and after the widespread adoption of "farm winery laws" by the various Eastern states. The period before adoption of the "farm winery law" includes a discussion of the large-scale wineries such as Bright's of Ontario and Canandaigua of the Finger Lakes region in upstate New York—which have now coalesced into the massive Constellation Brands.

But the most interesting developments have been associated with "farm winery" legislation. These laws, passed in many Eastern states in the 1970s and 1980s, were a form of deregulation that followed nearly 40 years of the stifling legislation that followed Prohibition. Parallel with this movement was the passage of the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA), which led Ontario wine production to focus on much higher-quality (and higher-priced) wines. Cattell's discussion of NAFTA's effect on Ontario wines is especially interesting, as it shows how the Ontario provincial government attempted to facilitate adjustment to the Act—a lesson from which many U.S. states could learn a great deal.

One of the many attractive features of Cattell's book, which really does justify its subtitle as a "desk reference," is the set of appendixes included. These, and an extensive bibliography, make up nearly one-third of the book. Included are a list of Eastern American Viticultural Areas (67 and growing) and a list of the grapes most commonly grown in the East. They include the "bunch grapes," *vinifera*, and native American varieties, but also the muscadines, which grow more in a format reminiscent of cherries, and are native to the Southeast. The list of hybrid grapes includes those from both U.S. and foreign breeding programs. I found especially interesting the list of American-produced hybrids (I counted 50, including 11 from Wisconsin—where cold heartiness is an issue—and 4 from Florida—where resistance to Pierce's disease is an issue.) But my favorite is the 37-page Appendix E, which provides a brief history of wine developments in each state, starting with Alabama and ending with Wisconsin. Many of these little mini-histories tell unique, almost hard to believe, stories.

Arkansas, for example, had a history before Prohibition of grape growing and winemaking due mainly to several immigrants of Swiss origin who settled near Altus.⁵ With this infrastructure in place, Prohibition, and the legality of home winemaking, led grape production to increase from about 1,200 tons in 1920 to nearly 8,000 tons (or the equivalent of about 6 million bottles of wine!) in 1930. Indeed, the surplus of grapes at the end of Prohibition led the Arkansas legislature to encourage the growth of wineries to use them. Ultimately over 100 Arkansas wineries emerged in the 1930s, creating a backlash that drove many counties to vote in favor of keeping their locales "dry." It was not until the 1960s that some of this

⁵Both Wiederkehr Wine Cellars, <http://www.wiederkehrwines.com/>, and Post Familie Vineyards, <http://www.postfamilie.com/index.htm>, still survive in Arkansas.

legislation was revised, although as the Post Familie Vineyards website explains, “We currently aren’t allowed to directly ship to anyone in our own state!”⁶

The rest of the book is divided into chapters that trace the details of the industry’s development up to the present. These include a discussion of the viticultural research undertaken to find grape types adaptable to the varied growing conditions of the heterogeneous Eastern states, the development of wine trails, wine festivals, and other marketing devices, and the advent of publications and associations aimed at Eastern producers. In some ways, the various states act as laboratories for experimentation, and I think wine producers in fledgling wine regions would do well to learn from the lessons Cattell recounts that came from other, more highly developed, regions. One recurring issue is the web of state legislation that continues to act as a regulatory brake on viticultural development and winemaking.

One refreshing aspect of this book is its nonjudgmental character. The flavor profiles and price points of many wines made from hybrid or muscadine varieties appeal to some consumers, and Cattell does not take them to task for their preferences. No doubt these wines will not be showcased in the *Wine Advocate* (now owned by a Singapore syndicate) or the *Wine Spectator* (owned by Shanken Communications, along with *WhiskeyAdvocate.com* and *Cigar Aficionado*), but those who consume them are not likely to care.

But Cattell’s nonjudgmental approach is also a weakness because it offers him no way to discuss the quality of the Eastern wines he describes. There is no doubt that some of the Eastern wine producers are making great progress and, as a result, can command premium prices for their wines. And there are no doubt many other Eastern wineries whose wines, still undiscovered, represent especially good value. However, you will not learn much about this aspect of the story from *Wines of Eastern North America*.

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CHARLES LUDINGTON: *The Politics of Wine in Britain: A New Cultural History*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, 360 pp., ISBN 978-0230238657, \$130.

Great wine books, like great vintages, are often more hyperbole than reality. In fact, they are both rare. Charles Ludington’s 2013 book, *The Politics of Wine in Britain: A*

⁶<http://www.postfamilie.com/wines.htm>, downloaded 2-20-2015.