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## Wineries, the Hudson Valley's best kept secret

Wineries have been an influential industry in the region. Many factors about the Hudson Valley such as the soil, climate, topography, and location make it a great place for wineries to prosper. Hudson Valley wineries have been increasingly attracting tourists to the area in recent years. This new attention has allowed the industry to prosper. One question worth addressing is why it has taken the areas wineries so long to gain acknowledgment when wineries have existed in the region since the 1600s. In the past, the wineries faced many challenges. Recovering from prohibition, dealing with deer and developments are all difficulties. However, the main obstacle was convincing the public that Hudson Valley wines had the same quality as ones from Europe and California. Although things have picked up recently this is still something the wine industry is addressing.

It is hard to understand how wineries have gained little attention through the years since fruit production is part of the Hudson Valley economy. When visiting or living in the area, evidence of these agricultural industries are all around. General fruit production is strong in the Hudson Valley but is often forgotten. "Fruit cultivation has been a major economic activity in the Valley since Europeans first settled the land during the 17<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>12</sup> In quarterly reports from 2001, it was estimated that fruit cultivation generated about \$51 million each year.<sup>3</sup> Yet, fruit industries also influence other sectors. Pat Baldwin from Baldwin Vineyards described how the wine industry influences many

local establishments from restaurants, hotels, and overall tourism in general, Baldwin itself is small, but famous for their fruit wines. They currently buy fruit and grapes from New York.<sup>4</sup> In this way, they also influence local and state growers. In general, it was calculated that for orchard crops (like apples and grapes), every \$1 increase in total farm output led to an additional 37 cents in economic activity in other sectors of the local economy. Basically, the fruit growing industry pumps an additional \$76 million into the local economy every year for a benefit of \$127 million annually.<sup>5</sup> Producing such profits, the fruit industry proves itself is a staple in the Valley.

There are many reasons that explain the affluence of wineries in the Hudson Valley. Certain characteristics of the area are good for growing grapes and selling wines. Wineries require specific environmental factors in order to be successful. There has to be the right kind of soil, climate, and location. According to the New York Fruit Quarterly: “The Hudson River Valley is blessed with optimum soils, topography, and climate for producing world class fruit products such as wine, cider, cassis, and grappa”.<sup>6</sup> Since the region contains these advantages, the area can be home to numerous wineries.

Another important aspect in wine growing regions are criteria about the land. For example, it is important that: “lands maximize water drainage and minimize the risk of late or premature frost in the spring and fall”.<sup>7</sup> Land near large bodies of water has an effect that prevents frost from occurring early, which is good for both apples and grapes. Another factor contributing to winery success is that agriculture has been important to the Hudson Valley for years. Thus, the area contains many skilled growers who know the process and are ready to react quickly to market changes. In recent years, the industry has benefited from increased public interest in wineries. It has become trendy to visit New

York wineries. Many feel that the interest is due to organizations such as Scenic Hudson and Hudson Valley Greenway, Uncork New York, and Meet Me in Marlboro.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the Hudson Valley is close to the Hudson River is also a benefit. The River influences the climate of the region by creating a lake effect over the area.

However, it also allows for easy transportation. In a discussion with Colleen Hughes from Brotherhood winery, it was explained that because of the river, Brotherhood primarily had markets in the metropolitan area. They had a partnership with Emerson Wine co. in the city and would ship grapes along the Hudson on barges. Without close proximity to these markets, the winery may not have been as successful.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, the geographic location of the Valley is optimal. “The Valley is uniquely positioned to make world class wines and to sell those wines on a local and national level”<sup>10</sup> When comparing the Hudson Valley wine industry with the Nappa valley industry it was stated:

it is important to notice that the industry in California cannot be replicated in the Hudson Valley due to relatively small parcels of land and rolling terrain.....For the Valley to be profitable it will have to accommodate “high levels of expensive hand labor and operate on small farms that have vineyards scattered at different sites. While the land in the Valley is relatively cheap, production costs will be high due to topography and intensive use of hand labor...cost factor can be offset by proximity to New York Metropolitan area.<sup>11</sup>

Since the Hudson Valley has many characteristics suited for wine growing, the region naturally had a rich history with the industry. It is often called the birth place of American wines. The French Huguenots first planted vines in New Paltz in 1677. This is about 100 years before vines were ever planted in California. Most of the original wines were made by local families for themselves. It was not until 1827 that Robert Underhill planted vines for the intention of making wine to sell.<sup>12</sup> Soon afterwards, other caught on.

Jacques Brothers Winery, the first commercial winery and the nations oldest continuously operated winery was opened in Washingtonville in 1837 (Renamed Brotherhood in 1885). They originally had and still have their own vineyards. However, they also now buy grapes from other areas of New York State (Hudson Valley, Long Island, and the Finger Lakes). During the Industrial Revolution they were the first to use steam production to propel their machinery. It was one of the few wineries lucky enough to stay in business during Prohibition, when most wineries in America were shut down.<sup>13</sup> They were able to stay open during prohibition because they sold altar wines, and wine for medicinal purposes to areas all over the metropolitan region.

Another winery that originally made altar wines was the Hudson Valley Wine Company. The company sold the altar wines to local monasteries.<sup>14</sup> In 1845, William Cornell established a vineyard with Andrew Caywood in Marlborough. They used hybrid vines, and developed the Dutchess grape. Today these vineyards are tended by new owners, at Benmarl Vineyards.<sup>15</sup> One of the last companies in the Valley before Prohibition was The Hudson Valley Wine Company. It was operated in highland in 1904 and also made altar wines for local monasteries.<sup>16</sup>

Even though Hudson Valley wineries were some of the earliest in operation in the country, that does not mean they did not face challenges. One of the biggest challenges that faced Hudson Valley wineries and American wineries in general was gaining public recognition. This has been a major struggle because people believe that European wines are just better. They are naïve and do not realize that quality wines are being produced in their area. Colleen Hughes from Brotherhood winery described this problem in relation to

the Hudson Valley as a main struggle. She said for New York specifically, New Yorkers often buy wines from California because they do not see what is around them.

Besides recognition and increasing markets, there are still other factors that present challenges to wineries. One of the main struggles in the Hudson Valley has been against development. Struggles over land disputes between developers who pressure them for their prime land threaten advancement. In comparison to California, the Hudson Valley wineries only have small parcels of land. This causes a problem because it forces the wineries to maintain small vineyards or to import extra grapes, adding to production costs.<sup>17</sup>

Recognition and land disputes pose threats to many wineries, however the Hudson Valley also faces climate challenges. In comparison with California, New York growers face extra struggles. Their climate is more difficult to deal with. Sometimes half a crop would be lost to frosts, black rot, or even mildew.<sup>18</sup> One especially difficult problem in the Hudson Valley involves deer. The region has an in proportionate number of deer that pose many problems for vintners. They eat the grapes and ruined crops, plus are hard to keep away. It is difficult to maintain a winery against so many factors. For New York wineries, the yields were often lower and the production costs higher.<sup>19</sup>

Another item Hudson Valley vintners have to consider is what type of grape to use. Different wineries use different varieties. Due to the location of the region on the globe, various varieties are more successful. The Hudson Valley is parallel to northern Spain, Southern France, and Central Italy; however because of the Hudson River the area is more humid, has more precipitation, and a cooler climate. Thus, Valley grape growers have become inventive. Sometimes French grapes (example Pinot) are grafted onto

American roots. This way, the same grapes from France can grow on the heartier American roots. They have found these breeds to be stronger.<sup>20</sup> Grapes native to America and hybrid grapes are also used.

The wine industry is complicated and involves many elements. It has many benefits but faces difficult challenges as well. However one event in history that basically halted and greatly set back the wine industry was Prohibition. On October 28, 1919, the Volstead Act was passed. Anything containing more than .5 percent alcohol was banned. When provisions in the law were allowing people to find loop holes (such as the production of wine in the home or for church and medicinal purposes). The law was tightened with the Wills-Campbell Act and the Jones Act (1929). The Jones Act specifically increased punishment for bootlegging to five years in prison and ten thousand dollars.<sup>21</sup>

Through this legislation the wine industry was crushed. Wine was out, and so were most substances. This hurt the wine industry obviously by the fact that their work was not allowed by the government. Some bigger wine corporations (as well as older ones like Brotherhood Winery) were able to convince the government to allow them to produce some wine for religious and medicinal purposes. Smaller wineries however, usually suffered. Even in the years after Prohibition, there was a stigma on the industry and many did not want to support it right away.

Eventually Prohibition was repealed. Many people subscribed to the idea that if the law was not changed, they would ignore it.<sup>22</sup> During prohibition, drinking illegally was common. After repeal however, the industry did not bounce back. There was still negative moral connotations associated with wine production. It was described:

The shadow of moral reprehension lay over it still, as it continues to do in many parts of the country and for large sections of the population. In this atmosphere, any industry would struggle for survival”.<sup>23</sup>

After repeal, there were strong efforts by certain individuals to revive the industry. Rexford Guy Tugwell was a member of President Roosevelt’s Brain trust. In 1933, he tried to spur research. He wanted to figure out how best to grow grapes, and under what condition good grapes would grow. He wanted United States industries and colleges to start to increase research to promote wineries. He wanted US wineries to produce their own kind of wines. He felt they could produce high quality brands as good as European ones.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Tugwell’s efforts and the creation of the USDA research program, it was not until war in 1939 that the industry picked up. During the war, Europe had to slow down production, which opened room for American wines. At the beginning of WWII, in 1939, the American wine industry produced 86,000 gallons of wines. By 1940, it was producing 400,000 gallons. Americans saw their opportunity to make a name for themselves. They tried to rise to the occasion.<sup>25</sup> A wine merchant described the time:

Nothing we have done since we became wine merchants in 1935 has given us much satisfaction as the inclusion of these good American wines in our catalogue, we can offer at long last American wines which are sound, properly made, honestly labeled, clean, which have a good taste and are ineffective”.<sup>26</sup>

It was not until after the war that the New York Winery system really developed. New York was at the forefront of wine development technology. It was far off from the industry in California, but it was a solid second because of the advancements it made. The Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva had a long history of research since 1882. In 1902, it began experimenting with cold climate vinifera. By post war time, they had figured out why vinifera had failed in the East. They studied native diseases like mildew, black rot, insects, pests, and phylloxera which had caused problems in the past.<sup>27</sup> With this information, the growers could make the suitable adjustments.

Despite these post war advancements, the wine trend declined again after the war. In New York, the number of wineries decreased from 117 in 1940 to 88 in 1950. Grape acreage even declined to 34,000 acres by the end of the decade. Production was down as well. In 1944 New York produced 9,352,000 gallons, but only 4,654,000 in 1948.<sup>28</sup> Luckily, this time there was a strong group of adamant wine supporters that was persistent in making the industry survive.

In the 1970s, John Dyson was the State Commissioner of Agriculture (now owner of Millbrook winery). He formed a task force that drew up The Farm Winery Bill. With testimonies from Benmarl vineyards and others, it was passed in 1976. This legislation was instrumental in the rapid growth of the Hudson Valley Wine industry. This bill directly dropped annual fees 125 dollars, making things easier for smaller growers to be successful.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, many wineries sprung up in the Hudson Valley. One of the first post war wineries to develop was Benmarl Winery. Although the original Winery existed in 1837, the current one was not established until 1956. At this time, the New York State wine industry was in low standing, and the state had not started experimental wine studies yet. Since the Miller family started grape growing as a hobby, they liked to experiment. They were able to be a successful post war winery because they created Societe des Vignerons. They invited friends to support a few of their experimental vines. In return, they would pay these friends in wine. This Societe caught the attention of farmers in the region. Its innovation opened up new areas of winemaking to the east, and it inspired farmers to grow better grapes. Today, Benmarl is pretty well established. In the 2000 Atlanta Wine Summit International Competition it was voted “Best US Red



Wine”.<sup>30</sup> Today, Benmarl contains an art gallery that sells prints, especially those of owner Mark Miller. Visitors can come to take a tour, visit the gallery or complete a taste test.<sup>31</sup>

Another Older vineyard site given new life by new owners is the Hudson Valley Wine company, now Regent Champagne Cellars. Located on the land that was the Continental army’s second line of defense after WestPoint, the land is significant to the area. The old vineyards are overgrown, but the buildings are still there for visitors. In 1897, Regent Champagne Cellars was open to the public. They are especially known for their fruit flavored wines (Blueberry, Raspberry, Peach, Almond, and Strawberry)<sup>32</sup>

Another Hudson Valley winery known for its fruit wines is Baldwin Vineyards in Pine Bush. Founded by Patricia and Jack Baldwin in 1982, they originally grew most of their own grapes (all but 15 percent) and ran their own winery. Although a much smaller establishment, their fruit wines put them on the map. In an Interview with Patricia Baldwin, she explained that in 1988 her husband was the first person to make fruit wine without including grapes in the drink. Strawberry was his first fruit wine, and now they make Black Raspberry, Blueberry, Apple, and Cherry all from their respective fruits alone. In 2006 and 2007 their fruit wines even got international recognition. In the last three years, they shut down their vineyards because it was too much to grow all of their grapes and make all of their own wine with just the two of them. Mrs. Bladwin also stated that there were both pros and cons to running a smaller establishment. Since they do not maintain their own vineyards, they currently buy grapes from New York growers. They still get to tell them how sweet they want the grapes, when the want them and how

much they want. In this way, Baldwin Vineyards influences other sectors of the economy. They buy grapes from the Hudson Valley and from the finger lake region.<sup>33</sup>

With more wineries being established in the Valley, the industry received more attention. Since Prohibition the ideology associated around wineries changed. They were no longer associated with immorality but have become a cherished highlight to the area. Wine itself has gotten a better name. It is even promoted for good health. Studies today suggest drinking Red wine lowers the risk of heart disease, and decreases LDL (bad) cholesterol.<sup>34</sup> Also, enthusiasm of local groups has helped promote them as well. Groups such as Scenic Hudson, Hudson Valley Greenway, Meet in Marlboro, and Uncork New York.

Through the years and especially more recently, the impact that wineries have had on the Hudson Valley is more obvious. On the Benmarl website it is described:

This acceptance of our own wineries is quite a recent development. It has come about only through the efforts of a few American wine lovers who are determined to demonstrate that fine winemaking, both as an art and as a business is well within the capability of our nation's climate, soils and talents.<sup>35</sup>

As wineries became more accepted, they also became popular. Now, wineries are trendy. They bring in tons of tourism.

Other impacts the wine industry has had on the Valley were in community building events. Many wineries hold festivals and special events that draw crowds and bring people together. Friends and families come out to take wine tours. There even are two wine trails in the Hudson Valley, the Shawagunk wine trail and the Dutchess wine trail. Also, to feed into the tourism, wineries are developing other attractions. There are 20 wineries in the Valley currently, and they all have something different to offer. Some have restaurants. The Magnanini Farm Winery for example contains a 170 seat restaurant that features Italian specialties and dancing. Along the same lines, Rivendell Winery sustains a bar, art gallery and micro deli during the day. At night it becomes a café, and a

Jazz club with cappuccino.<sup>36</sup> All of these additions are examples of wine popularity in recent years.

The Hudson Valley wine industry has greatly influenced the wine industry in America. It is often called the birth place of American wine because of its early roots. It has struggled through the years, but has still managed to contribute to the world of wines. Small wineries such as Baldwin are winning international awards. Larger wineries like Benmarl and Brotherhood have won higher awards. In the 1900s, Brotherhood won a world Champagne contest (angering the French who are normally experts).<sup>37</sup> Also, in the 2000 Atlanta Wine Summit International Competition Benmarl Vineyards was voted to have the best US Red Wine. In recent years there has been a great revival of wineries along the Hudson. After the Grape and wine Foundation was created, there were 200 wineries in New York State. A focus has been placed on area vineyards: “extravagant prices were being paid to glamorize the wine industry”.<sup>38</sup>

The Hudson Valley wineries have had to fight against many stereotypes and natural disadvantages. However through dedication, a long history, some environmental talents, and the love of wine, they have become a highlight to the Hudson Valley. Wineries in the area have always played a role in the life of the region. As word continues to spread about the industry, hopefully their voice and influence will grow tenfold.

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Fruit Quarterly*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2005., 4

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,4

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Pat Baldwin from Baldwin Vineyards 12/5/07

<sup>5</sup> *Fruit Quarterly*.,4

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,3

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*,4

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*,7

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Colleen Hughes from Brotherhood winery 12/6/07

<sup>10</sup> *Fruit Quarterly*.,7

<sup>11</sup> Report Of the New York State Senate Task Force for Hudson Valley Fruit Growers., 13

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca, Haynes, “*Grapes of the Hudson Valley: Where Wine Making in America Began*”

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- Hudson River.com,1.,1
- <sup>13</sup> Colleen Hughes from Brotherhood Wineries
- <sup>14</sup> Hudson river.com., 1
- <sup>15</sup> Thomas, Pinney, *History of Wine in America from Prohibition to the Present*, University of California Press, 2005.,2
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*,2
- <sup>17</sup> Fruit Quarterly, 5
- <sup>18</sup> Thomas, Pinney, *History of Wine.*, 162
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 162
- <sup>20</sup> Hudson River.com.,1
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas Pinney, *History of wine.*, 2
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* ,4
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 38
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*,37
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,119
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 140
- <sup>27</sup> Thomas Pinney, *History of wine.*, 169
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 170
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*,2
- <sup>30</sup> “Benmarl Vineyards” Benmarl.com., 12/4/07
- <sup>31</sup> Hudson river.com., 2
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*,2
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Pat Baldwin
- <sup>34</sup> “Red Wine Heart Benefits” healthcastle.com 12/6/07)
- <sup>35</sup> Benmarl.com.,2.
- <sup>36</sup> Goldberg, Howard G, “Toast of the Hudson Valley Vineyards” New York *Times*, Proquest., 6
- <sup>37</sup> Colleen Hughes from Brotherhood Winery 12/6/07
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas Pinney, *History of wine.*, 263.