

## Finger Lakes Winegrowing: Some Historical Highlights

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### 1. How this student of Finger Lakes winegrowing got interested in its history.

I am a retired professor of philosophy, not an historian. My interest in Finger Lakes wine history began to grow about the time I planted a home vineyard in the late 1960s in the Town of York – a ten minute drive northwest of Geneseo. I had purchased an 1827 home on six acres, acquired a Troy-built rototiller, and thought I'd have a big garden and plant a few grapevines for eating and for jelly.

Although not a frequent wine drinker – Mateus Rose when company came -- I had tasted a palatable Concord wine made by a fellow faculty member at SUNY Geneseo, and had read about the French hybrids in a Long Island nurseryman's catalog.

When I tasted the 1968 Chardonnay made by another fellow SUNY Geneseo faculty member, from juice he had purchased from Dr. Frank, I impulsively decided: I'm going to grow those things in my yard.

I planted quite an assortment of French hybrids like Chancellor and Verdelet and some nameless ones bearing such numbers as JS 23 416, the NY hybrid Cayuga, and several Vinifera, especially Riesling clone 90, and just a few vines of Native American varieties including Concord.

The total number of varieties I grew at one time or another over the years approached fifty. By about 1977 I had about 150 vines planted. I *worked hard* at this hobby *and enjoyed* home winegrowing from about 1969 until 2005. I did *not* enjoy the frequent spraying (but Native American variety Cynthia/Norton didn't need it), nor dealing with the weeds under the trellises, nor the destruction or theft of ripening grapes by birds, racoons, squirrels, opossums, and the occasional dog. Nor did I enjoy the ignoble rot that usually developed in some ripening clusters.

I *very much enjoyed* canopy management, harvesting, crushing and pressing with friends in the autumn, followed by the winter tasting with a straw of the clear, cold-stabilized wine from still-cold carboys. I enjoyed trying some unusual things like making straw wine from grapes dehydrated on homemade racks. My wife Shirley and I always enjoyed serving our wine at The Silver Tendril, the B & B she and I operated at our place in York beginning in 1999. And I especially enjoyed the various social aspects of renting our Riesling vines for our Church fund raisers. And of course there was satisfaction when the wines won awards in AWS competitions. It was Shirley who originally nudged me to enter an AWS competition with her “What do you have to lose?” And it was she who had the final word on residual sugar and blends.

Having purchased a really old house, I soon became curious about local history, and read in an out-of-print book on the history of York that a **Samuel Warren** had planted a vineyard in York – a mile from where we were living . In 1832 Warren produced his first small vintage of 20 gallons. I found it mildly interesting.

## 2. *The usual history of early FLX winegrowing.*

At some point in the early 1970s I became aware of the *usual story* about how winegrowing began in the Finger Lakes region. You can find versions of the *usual story* in Hedrick's monumental 1908 *The Grapes of New York*, in Leon Adam's *The Wines of America*, in the first volume of Thomas Pinney's *A History of Wine In America*, and with some revealing detail in Richard Scherer's *Crooked Lake and the Grape*, and elsewhere.

The *usual story* begins with the Episcopal rector William Bostwick's planting a few cuttings, or vines, of the Native American varieties Catawba and Isabella in his garden in Hammondsport in 1829 or 30. Apparently there's no record he ever made wine from these, but there is agreement that he distributed cuttings to others in the area, and the vines flourished. One or two sources add that their fresh fruit – new to the area – was enjoyed locally.

As a result, grape plantings expanded around Hammondsport and Keuka Lake. Several grape growers are named. About 1853 one Andrew Reisinger introduced pruning, and, according to one source, made a small amount of wine, but it was sour and he abandoned that effort. Expansion of plantings was spurred by attractively high prices for grapes when one ton was first shipped in half barrels as table grapes to New York City.

A point often *mentioned without comment* in the usual story by those who write about these things, is that these early Finger Lakes grape plantings were *for the fresh market*. The late County Historian Richard Scherer points out that most of the trees from the hillsides had already been harvested and sold for lumber. *Those high prices* paid for fresh grapes in New York City led to a *flurry of vineyard planting* around Hammondsport in the 1850s. Hedrick says that many of the cuttings for these came from an unnamed source in *Livingston* County.

However, those seductively high prices paid on the East Coast *soon plummeted*, when a *glut of fresh grapes for table use* came on the market. As historian Scherer explains, “Many people that had incurred a big debt to plant grapes were going broke – what else could you do with grapes – make wine! Thus by accident” writes Scherer,

“the wine industry [in Hammondsport] began.”

So it was that crisis of too many grapes grown for the fresh fruit market, that precipitated the *1860 founding of The Pleasant Valley Wine Company*, which, according to *the usual story*, was *the first successful commercial winery in the Finger Lakes region*.

The *usual* story needs revision because it is virtually *silent* about 19<sup>th</sup> century winegrowing developments in *Livingston* County, where the two westernmost of the Finger Lakes are located.

**3. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century significant commercial wineries arose in three places in Livingston County, almost never mentioned in the wine histories that deal with the FLX region or the state.**

a. *The earliest* of these developments was in the *western* part of the county, in what is now the *Town of York*. **I'll just introduce it here**, then come back after describing the other Livingston County wineries founded there later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Samuel Warren *began planting his vineyard in western Livingston County* about the same **time** as the Rev. Bostwick planted a few Catawba and Isabella cuttings or vines in his rectory garden in Hammondsport.

*Warren's intention* from the outset, however, was to grow grapes *for wine, with his first vintage coming in 1832, a year in which Bostwick would have just begun distributing cuttings to Hammondsport area residents*.

Winegrowing continued in York for **half a century**, with Samuel's sons, Josiah and Harlan, succeeding him.

It's this Warren family story that provides *a new beginning* to the history of commercial winegrowing in the Finger Lakes. *And, as wine historians and wine writers have begun to recognize, it's a new beginning for the history of commercial winegrowing in New York State as a whole*.

Because the Warren story represents *a significant first*, and is one that I've been closely connected with, and is the one that has been *researched the most* in recent years – especially by historian Jane Oakes - I'll go into it in some detail in a few minutes.

But wine historians need to acknowledge *two other locations in Livingston County* that had significant western Finger Lakes commercial wine operations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*The second place* in Livingston County where commercial wineries sprang up in

that century was in the southern part of the county, in and around Dansville. Two pages in a book entitled *Dansville, 1789-1902*, edited by A. O. Bunnell, are very revealing, and they are my source.

*The first vineyard there was planted by Dr. F. M. Perine in 1860* – the same year Hammondsport's Pleasant Valley Wine Company was founded to deal with the table grape surplus there. About this time a remarkable enthusiasm for planting grapes –it has been called a *grape mania* – began to sweep the country.

Dr. Perine's first vineyard amounted to about 8 acres and was located on East Hill, just above the so-called Castle on the Hill, once-famed for its water cure, and later for Bernarr Macfadden's physical culture institute, and now long-abandoned.

In and around Dansville there were thirteen growers with vineyards ranging from 3 to 20 acres by the beginning of the 1900s; there were also smaller vineyards – not identified. Vineyard acreage there totaled “a little over 200 acres.” Overgrown terraces can still be seen, and there are still a few small vineyards around Dansville.

As regards **grape varieties**: early plantings by Dr. Perine included Catawba, Isabella, Diana, Concord, and Delaware. His later plantings – made in 1889 and 1890 - covered 15 acres and included [and I quote]: “principal new varieties such as Pocklington, Worden, Niagara, Empire State, Wyoming, and Brighton.”

No fewer than *six Dansville wineries* – with their annual production in gallons – are identified in the Bunnell book. Production by Dr. Perine and by the Charles Stadler estate, topped 3,000 gallons each annually. The 1902 crop was estimated at ~ 400 tons some of it being shipped and the rest pressed into wine. The Bunnell book has a photo of one of these Dansville wine cellars.

Hopefully Dansville folks interested in that town's early wine industry will go to work on the pre-prohibition winegrowing in their area. The Bunnell book identifies its own main source on this subject as an article in a **local newspaper**. I personally know there are advertisements, and more photographs to be brought to light, wine houses to be identified, gravestones to be located. Perhaps even vineyard and winery records can be recovered.

And there are Dansville wine stories passed along orally, including two stemming *from the prohibition era*, when, I'm told by Alice Burdick of Dansville, a truck reportedly would arrive in Dansville by night, drive up East Hill with headlights off, later to descend and head off in the direction of Buffalo. And there's another prohibition era story – this one of a very loud explosion one night up on East Hill, presumably at one of the wine cellars up there. It was heard by many, but discussed by no one.

You don't have to be a trained historian to notice excessive local enthusiasm and exaggeration in the following quotation from the Bunnell book.

“The result of [Dr. Perine's] test vineyard *established the fact now conceded that there is no better soil and climate for successful grape culture to be found anywhere in the Eastern states than on the slopes of East Hill.* A southwest exposure and almost complete exemption from frost insure, with other advantages of soil and atmospheric conditions, large yields and superior size and delicacy of flavor. Grapes ripen here a week to ten days in advance of those in the Naples district which is noted for its early ripening.” p222

Setting aside the *excessive* local enthusiasm, it is, I think, worth realizing that even though the vineyards around Dansville have never been close to significant bodies of water, they still benefit from that town's very good heat summation and surprisingly mild winter minimum temperatures.

Apparently it was Prohibition, or the mindsets or attitudes that produced Prohibition, that were the principal cause of the end of the wine industry in Dansville.

Rather high on Dansville's East Hill just this past spring (2010), Tim McGowan planted quite a few vines – both table and wine grapes, including the hardy and resistant, but late ripening indigenous grape for red wine: Cynthiana/Norton – the *only Native American grape to make a very good, big, dry red wine.* It was grown in the Finger Lakes region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the current widespread oversupply of most wine grapes in the Finger Lakes and elsewhere, I would be more pleased than surprised to see something of a renaissance of wine production in the Dansville area.

*The third area* in Livingston County where some often-overlooked commercial wine production began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is in the sparsely populated *eastern portion of the county*, in the Town of Conesus, above Hemlock Lake. Strangely, writing only about 30 years after its founding, Hedrick makes no mention of this winery, though it's not many miles from Geneva. Leon Adams does mention it, but it's neglected in most other historical accounts.

It was here in 1872 that Rochester's first Catholic Bishop, Bernard McQuaid, founded O Neh Da winery. Like the Warrens in York, Bishop McQuaid produced wine for *sacramental use.* Still producing under the O Neh Da brand in 2010, after several changes of ownership, the winery continues to produce large quantities of several native

and non-native sacramental, or altar, wines according to church law. That law forbids use of non-grape sugar, so grape concentrate is used to bolster the brix. Those wines are widely distributed in the Northeast to Roman Catholic churches.

I've been told that when this winery – known in the 1970s as Barry Winery - was owned by the Cribari's of California fame, many if its historically significant documents were thrown out. Nevertheless some devoted digging would surely augment what's now known.

*In recent years* under the **Eagle Crest Vineyards** label, the winery has given increasing emphasis to *table wines* featuring Native American grapes, French hybrids, Vinifera, and some newer American hybrid grapes. In May of this year, Eagle Crest's winemaker, Rob Beckmann, collected 7 medals for the 7 wines he entered in the International Eastern Wine Competition. Eagle Crest's 2009 Dry Riesling took Best of Class for the Dry Riesling class, besting dry Rieslings from over 30 states and 12 countries. I'd say Eagle Crest is coming on strong.

#### **4. Helpful background for the Warrens and York Wines: Persistent failure w/ Vinifera**

Before returning to the story of Samuel Warren and his sons and *the first* successful commercial winery in the Finger Lakes and in New York State as a whole, I want to remind you of *a huge fact about winegrowing in the colonies and the young republic*:

Most if not all of you know that literally for centuries, many East Coast colonists and citizens of the early republic – including Thomas Jefferson and even George Washington – attempted to grow European wine grapes - Vinifera – without success. They blamed the repeated failures on severe winter weather, but it was North America's diseases and pests that were the real culprits. Only under nursery conditions did the European varieties survive long enough to bear crops.

Wine historians have *gone to great lengths* to report these failed attempts that took place along the East Coast and elsewhere. Wine historian Thomas Pinney, who writes *over a hundred pages* on these failed attempts with Vinifera in the East, summed up the results of each of them in a talk he gave at Geneva a couple of years ago in *just three words*: “. . . and they died.”

The nation's first successful commercial winery was finally established at Vevay, Indiana, by the Swiss Jean Jacques Dufour. It was based on the now extinct Alexander or Cape grape, about which little was and is really known, except that the wine it yielded left much to be desired. The first vintage at Vevay was **1806 or 1807**.

Historian Pinney tells us that *by 1810 the young republic had 14,000 stills producing high-alcohol spirits, but, apparently only one winery* – off in southern Indiana. Drunkenness was notoriously rampant in the young republic. Couple that with the widespread male chauvinism of those times, and spousal abuse abounded.

Also, given the lack of domestic wine, and the high cost and poor quality of much imported wine, Christian churches had trouble finding wine for the ancient Christian sacrament that had for centuries been observed in both Catholic and most, if not all, Protestant traditions.

**5. With that background I turn to a chronological sketch of New York's first successful commercial winery – that of Samuel Warren in western Livingston County.**

In **1816**, when Samuel Warren was **just nineteen**, and seeking brighter life prospects, he came west to the Genesee Country from Litchfield in eastern New York, and did farm work. It was a time when woodlands were still being cleared for farms here. Completion of that most important route for westward migration, the Erie Canal, still lay 9 years in the future.

In **1817** Samuel purchased a 33 acre farm from his employer, built a log cabin, and brought his widowed mother to live with him *here on the frontier* in what would soon become the Town of York in Livingston County.

**In the next few years** this *remarkably industrious pioneer* – who's also remembered as an *avid reader* – built one of the town's first sawmills on his own property, taught in a nearby 18' x 22' school building made of logs, and would begin the production of bricks and drainage tiles on his property. An expert horticulturalist, he also grafted fruit trees in the surrounding countryside.

**By the late 1820s** Samuel Warren had married Sarah Flagg of Boston MA, and had begun planting a vineyard near Bidwell's Creek (a.k.a. Warren's Creek) about two miles south of York Center. Posts and slats were used to support vines; trellis wire was not yet on the scene.

Instead of European grapes, Samuel Warren, like a few others at that time, wisely chose for his vineyard, American varieties like Catawba and Isabella. These were, it appears, chance interspecific hybrids of American wild vines and the European varieties, and, in some cases, like Warren's Early Catawba, the seedlings of such vines. (Like some others in the Victorian era, Warren probably grew Black Hamburg and perhaps other *Vinifera* for table grapes in the glass graperie he built on his property.)

In the autumn of 1832 – *28 years before the founding of Hammondsport's Pleasant Valley Wine Company* (and several years before the *planting of vines* and founding of Blooming Grove – now Brotherhood Winery - ) - Warren's vineyard had produced enough fruit for *a tiny vintage of 20 gallons*.

Around 1834, Warren built a modest home on his farm. The cellar's unusual depth, and wide door and passage to the outside, suggest it was used for wine storage. Later, during the Civil War period, a *large stone wine cellar would be* built on the property.

By 1836 Warren was marketing the wine from his own vineyard in York.. Cornell Librarian Marty Schlabach uncovered Warren's advertisement in – of all places – a widely-read periodical of that time called *New York Evangelist*, now accessible in digitized form. *Marty's discovery has had quite an impact. I'll describe some of that impact now.*

For one thing, this 1836 ad has convinced wine historians Thomas Pinney, Hudson Cattell, and more recently both Emerson Klees and Thomas Pellechia that, according to the most up-to-date evidence, 19<sup>th</sup> century Finger Lakes winegrowing history needs to be revised to recognize Samuel Warren.

My own letters to local historians in the Finger Lakes region and in the other winegrowing regions of the state, have not brought forth any contradiction to the *conclusion that Warren is now to be regarded as the first successful commercial winegrower of the Finger Lakes region and in New York State as a whole.*

Second, the impact of Schlabach's discovery of the 1836 ad has helped to launch the rewriting of FLX winegrowing history – not just by me but by others:

The *latest* edition of Klees' book Wineries of the Finger Lakes Region now includes more than two pages about Warren as pioneer winegrower.

And in a recent piece you may have read a few months ago, that Thomas Pellechia wrote about the Finger Lakes wine region for the AAA magazine Going Places, the author acknowledges the FLX region's 1830s commercial wine production beginnings in the Town of York. Pellechia has even agreed to *tear out* – on camera – the misleading pages 141-143 from his recent book The 8000 year-old Story of the Wine Trade – *provided* he's properly compensated with a bottle of good wine.

*So thanks to the discovery of that 1836 ad, the re-writing of New York's wine*

*history has begun.*

*Now, back to the chronological sketch of the story of York Wines.*

Warren had planted his Isabellas and Catawbas about the same time as the Rev. Bostwick, but his first vintage (1832) and his 1836 advertisement make it clear that unlike Bostwick, Warren had planted those vines with the intention of making wine, and making it to sell to the churches of Western New York.

*Why did Warren focus on the churches?* I think it was largely a matter of this:

The churches must have had a *supply problem*. If they were to resume and continue the centuries old sacrament of holy communion that involved wine, what were they to do? – there was only one winery in the entire nation in 1807 and very few in the next couple of decades. Imported wine was scarce, expensive and often adulterated. Churches needed wine.

*Why did Samuel Warren not, apparently, sell to inns and taverns?*

Warren (like Brotherhood and O-Neh-Da) was, I believe, reluctant to sell to inns and taverns because of the *notorious drunkenness* of the era - often associated reasonably enough with these establishments. (See Pinney: chapter 16)

The Christian tradition had generally advocated *personal moderation* in the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Warren probably thought that to market to inns and taverns would be to promote the drunkenness that was, among other things, helping to injure women and to destroy families. It was that pervasive drunkenness that would lead to the Temperance and Womens' rights movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When Warren and others marketed to *pharmacies*, it was because of the restorative or medicinal properties wine was thought to have. This goes back at least as far as the New Testament letter known as First Timothy, in which Timothy is urged to stop drinking water and to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake.

Was Warren's *overriding motive* in marketing wine to the churches *the dollar motive*? I think not, for at least two reasons. First (1) he could, I believe, have *made more money* marketing his wine to inns and taverns, which were selling – along with spirits - noxious concoctions they called wine to their thirsty customers; and second (2) he was *a really devout* Christian. This is evident through such facts as (a) he was one of the founders of the York Bible Society; (b) he was a long term Deacon and a long-term Sunday school teacher in the Congregationalist Church of York; (c) he and Sarah gave religiously significant names to their children, even naming one of them after a

prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist. and (d) the scene at the end of his life, and his obituary, also make his devoted Christian faith obvious.

*As a well-read, devout Christian, Warren surely wanted to avoid contributing to that rampant drunkenness, and was very probably himself one of the church folk who wanted decent, affordable wine to observe the sacrament of holy communion in line with church tradition.*

Although like most Christians of those times, Warren was *no Tee-Totaller*, it is interesting to note that his 1836 ad appeared on the same page as ads for alcohol-free or anti-alcohol establishments. The anti-alcohol movement was, understandably, well under way by the time of Warren's 1836 ad.

*About 1851 Warren became ill* with “consumption” (i.e. tuberculosis) and his older son Josiah took on much of the vineyard and winery work.

*In 1853*, seven years before the founding of the Pleasant Valley Wine Co. in Hammondsport, the Warrens' wine production grew to more than 3,400 gallons. They had begun to purchase grapes grown by other growers in and around York.

We read surprisingly, but in a credible primary source, that *about this time the reputation of the Warrens' wines stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific.*

*In 1862 Samuel died peacefully* at home with family present, except for his younger son, Harlan. Harlan's departure a few days earlier as a volunteer in the Union Army had evoked Samuel's benediction and his expression of hope that our nation would be a nation of *free men*.

*In 1863 Josiah Warren* entered no fewer than **twelve wines from different grape varieties** in the Livingston County Agricultural Fair which had established premiums, or awards, for only a few of those varieties by that year.

*About the time the Civil War was coming to an end*, Josiah built a *large stone wine cellar* on their property in York. Harlan returned after the war, ran the family businesses, and added a mill for feed and flour, and facilities for making cider. He reportedly did a large business.

Following the war, Josiah moved to Irondequoit and helped establish the almost forgotten but long-lived Irondequoit Winery, overlooking the bay.

*About 1880, apparently with an unrestrained power of eminent domain*, the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad acquired a right-of-way through the

Warren farm that *destroyed their family businesses*. When travel through York on the DL & W began *in 1882*, Harlan Warren -- Civil War veteran, farmer, winegrower, miller, musician and purveyor of musical instruments – *tragically hung himself in the remains of the winery*. The winery's limestone blocks may well have found their way into the supports of the former DL & W railroad overpass, that now enables a DEC hiking trail to cross Dow Road very near the Homestead.

The York Historical Society's *trained researcher, Jane Oakes*, has unearthed a host of truly fascinating details regarding the entire remarkable Warren family and the area's wine history. Jane has been putting together the *list of grape varieties* grown in York by the Warrens and/or those nearby residents who sold grapes to them: the list so far includes: Iona, Delaware, Long, Long's Seedling, Ontario, Catawba, Warren's Early Catawba, Oporto, Concord, Isabella, Clinton, Lincoln, Claret, Chisalus, (which must be Chasselas), Early York, and Miller's Burgundy.

#### **6. Four periods of FLX (and other Eastern) winegrowing**

Such Native American grape varieties – accidental and deliberate interspecific hybrids and seedling descendants of these – completely dominate *this first period* of commercial Eastern (and Finger Lakes) winegrowing, which extends from about 1830 until about 1940.

As I see it: *The second period* begins about 1940 with the arrival of the French hybrids, popularized in the U. S. by Maryland's Philip Wagner, and promoted in the FLX by Walter Taylor at Bully Hill. *The third period begins* when the array of Finger Lakes varieties expands **again** from around 1960 with long-sought success here with Vinifera thanks to Gold Seal's Charles Fournier and Dr. Konstantin Frank. What I consider the *fourth period* of Finger Lakes winegrowing begins – with the arrival of American hybrids bred for cool and cold climates – beginning about 1973 with Cayuga White.

#### **7. Are We Witnessing The Return of the Native? Do they merit neglect?**

Over the years I've enjoyed many Finger Lakes Vinifera wines, many French hybrid and, recently, several of the newer American hybrid wines. *Finally, after many years*, and mainly because of my connection with the surprising story of the Warrens' winery, I've had a real introduction to *our region's Native American wines*. Perhaps there has been a bit of the wine-snob in me, an unconscious prejudice I may have picked up from folks who put down the Native American wines as “foxy” and “too sweet”.

Some of the Natives are gone and won't return; others may be just barely hanging on -- some of these are at the USDA germ plasm unit at the Geneva Experiment Station.

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Some, however, are making a comeback, like Salem, which Dave Peterson – General Manager of Swedish Hill, Goose Watch, and Penguin Bay wineries - has just had propagated at Double A Vineyard, having obtained cuttings from the germ plasm unit's two vines of Salem.

***But quite a number have not returned, because they never went away!***

FLX Native American wines are ***very big sellers in the tasting rooms*** of those wineries that offer them. Cindy Peterson, an owner of those same three wineries, told my wife and me a year and a half ago: ***These are the wines that pay the bills.*** I've heard the same from other winery owners. Shannon Brock, teacher and wine coordinator at the NY Wine and Culinary Center, tells me that the Hazlitt winery annually sells 100,000 cases of their Red Cat – made from one of the first Native American varieties, Catawba.

Influential so-called wine experts and self-styled wine authorities may ignore the Native American varieties, or badmouth or dismiss these wines ***with the term “foxy”***. Whatever that term may be defined to mean, it's clear that – ***even when used by the usually objective wine historian Californian Thomas Pinney*** – it's a put-down term that very clearly implies “undesirable”.

Interestingly, Pinney's fellow Californian, Dan Berger, has structured the Long Beach Grand Cru **competition** to allow Native American wines – like other varietals - to be judged ***both*** in comparison with ***other wines of their own varietal class, and,*** if they receive ***both a gold medal and best of class,*** they go to the ***sweepstakes round.***

In ***that*** round there are just 5 broad categories within which wines are judged: sparkling, red, white, rose, and dessert. So Gold medal, best of class sparklers from all around the world, regardless of their region or genetic makeup, compete with each other. So too for reds, whites, rosés, and dessert wines. The judges are almost all Californians, professionally involved full-time in the wine industry. There are other such competitions.

How have the ***FLX Native American*** wines been doing recently on the West Coast? In 2008 the ***2007 Goose Watch Isabella Rosé***, having won a gold medal and been judged best of its varietal class, not only ***went*** to the sweepstakes round; it was judged ***best rosé of the show.***

This year the ***2009 Torrey Ridge Catawba (with only 8% alcohol!)*** went to the sweepstakes round and was judged best rosé of this very large ***international show.***

*Perhaps you say:* those are just rosés; serious home- and full-time winemakers don't bother much with them. But I reply for medals, for very helpful PR, to help pay those bills, *but mainly for some unexpected flavor delights*, I think they *should* pay attention to those very old “Natives”.

And consider **Native American whites:**

In 2009, can you believe it, the **2008 Goose Watch Diamond**, having been **judged best in its class and awarded a gold medal, went to the Long Beach sweepstakes round and tied for *best white wine* of the entire show – surpassing virtually all the fine, gold medal-winning, best of class Rieslings, Chardonnays, Pinot Grigios, etc., etc. that had been entered from around the world.**

My point is that *these judges are light years removed* from unsophisticated or half-inebriated folks, just coming recently to wine from the chocolate milkshakes and Coca Cola of their youth, and who are buying a few low-cost cases while out frolicking on a weekend wine trail tour by limousine.

**And these very well-qualified California judges have picked some FLX Native American wines as best rosé and best white wine of the show in very large international competitions.**

It's *not just* “unwashed masses of tourists and wine neophytes” who, with their credit cards, continue to vote for Native American FLX wines. Those highly-qualified California wine professionals have been voting for them too. Wine-snobs may still turn up their noses at Native American wines, but in the face of those facts - they and we *should*, I believe, *rethink that attitude*.

The fact that the Native American grapes tend to be *high in acid* helps to explain why winemakers usually finish them with *lots of sugar*. These wines can, however, I find, be *pleasantly sipped on their own when very cold, or even “on the rocks”*.

Of course the fact that they usually taste *both intensely fruity and sweet* militates against drinking *them* with *delicately flavored foods*. But we can't *dismiss* them for *that reason* or we'd have to dismiss every normally extracted Cabernet Sauvignon or Noiret. To my palate the well-chilled Goose Watch Isabella or the Arbor Hill Iona – even with their sugar levels above 5% – go very pleasantly with *spicy, taco stuffed green peppers as well as with hot Italian sausage* that would overpower nearly every vinifera or hybrid wine. I'll try them with Thai food when I can.

If I had my many years of home winegrowing in York to do over, I'd surely still include plenty of Riesling clone 90, and I'd grow more Traminette, more Valvin Muscat,

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as well as Foch, Chambourcin, and more Noiret. And I'd certainly include in my home vineyard *those proven native American varieties for white wine and rosé*, especially: Diamond, Catawba, and Isabella.

*I'd consider ways to reduce their acidity* - and not just mask or balance it with sugar. I'd try *blending with lower acid, delicately flavored hybrids*.

And especially with the prospect of continued global warming, I'd plant more of the great, but late-ripening Native American Cynthiana/Norton for a big, dry, *indigenous* red wine. And I'd do that even if it meant I'd have to blend it with some low-acid red (or even white) hybrid wine for a pleasing finished product. Shiraz producers in the Rhone Valley don't hesitate to add some Viognier (a low-acid white variety I grew in my York vineyard) to their blockbuster reds.

Let's not be *so* preoccupied with growing and vinifying the *international* varieties – that is, the *Vinifera* – that we fail to offer the consumers and winegrowers of our own and other nations some *indigenous Native American varieties and blends* to enjoy, and perhaps to emulate.

As a result of my historical studies of early Finger Lakes winegrowing and my involvement with the Samuel Warren Story and Homestead, and with the York Historical Society's **New York Heritage Collection** of high quality Native American wines - visit [www.YorkWines.org](http://www.YorkWines.org) - I guess you could say I've become *less of a wine-snob*, *less of what some call a grape racist*, *less Euro-centric* in the wines I enjoy and suggest to others.