

Book Reports

*Book reports by Bob Foster,
Edited and reprinted with the kind
Permission of "California Grapevine"*

Sonoma County Wineries: Part of the Postcard History Series

*Gail Unzelman and the Wine Library
Association of Sonoma County
Arcadia Publishing, Charleston,
South Carolina; 2006*

If you love wine books and are visiting Sonoma County, you must visit the Wine Library at the Sonoma County Public Library in Healdsburg, just a few blocks north of the town square. The library houses one of the finest collections of wine books and ephemera in this country. The book began as a display in the wine library wing of the Public Library where Gail Unzelman had assembled an exhibit of post cards depicting wineries of the region. Unzelman lives in Sonoma County, maintains an important private collection of wine books and other materials of her own, and is a founder of The Wayward Tendrils, a club for wine book collectors. Her display for the Wine Library was so well received, it provided the impetus for a full book telling the story of the wineries of Sonoma County. And I love old postcards; they capture a moment of time that reveals so much

about an era and all its complexities.

The cover photo depicts a load of grapes arriving at Scatena Brothers Winery, Healdsburg in the 1900's. A horse drawn wagon is stacked high with wooden boxes, men are all wearing hats and the ground is dirt. It is easy to imagine the huge amounts of manual labor that lay ahead to turn those grapes into wine. More than 100 post cards from the past two centuries fill the book, and they are fascinating. Each is accompanied by at least one descriptive paragraph tying a particular scene to the larger pattern of winemaking in the region. For example, the steamer ZINFANDEL, that used to haul wine from Sonoma and Napa to San Francisco, also made many humanitarian trips in the days following the Great Fire of 1906.

The book includes sections on the four major wine growing regions in Sonoma County, the huge California Wine Association, the materials promoting the region, and the Italian Swiss Colony winery. Remember "that little old winemaker-me?" This book is a delight. Its captivating material is very well presented. It is a topnotch effort that belongs in your wine library

Very Highly Recommended

The book is available from the publisher or Nomis Press/Wine Library Associates

of Sonoma County, P.O. Box 9023, Santa Rosa, CA 95405 for \$24.60. Sales benefit the Wine Library of Sonoma County. To request a sample issue of the newsletter The Wayward Tendrils, collectors should use this same address.

Wine: The 8,000-Year-Old Story of the Wine Trade

*Thomas Pellechia
Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2006
272 pages*

From the title one might think this is the story of how only wine was sold over the last 8,000 years. But it is far more than that, because wine has played a central role in the development of numerous industries including glass blowing, cooperage, cork production and advertising. The author covers not only how wine has impacted society but also how events in science, industry and politics have affected wine making and wine selling.

By trying to cover 8,000 years of history in a scant 272 pages, Pellechia has to write in broad terms but he does a fine job of giving the reader a general overview of the developments leading up to modern times. However, as wine production and wine sales have become global, more and more topics must be covered, and by the end the book, Pellechia jumps rapidly from region to region.

It is always difficult to predict which current trends will continue and which die out. Whether the author's emphasis on the new style wine shop that organizes wines by taste rather than variety or region is justified may not be known for decades: a passing fad or harbinger of things to come? Who knows?

Interestingly, the author ventures into the Robert Parker controversy by declaring that it is obvious wineries are altering their styles to achieve higher scores from Parker and thus higher sales. Pellachia calls Parker's denial of this trend "naive." In any event, putting the production and sale of wine into a full historical perspective is most interesting. The work is written in a detailed but easy to read style.

Highly Recommended.

Ancient Agriculture, Roots and Application of Sustainable Farming

Gabriel Alonso de Herrera, compiled by Juan Estevan Arellano, translated by Rosa Lopez-Gaston Ancient City Press, Salt Lake City; 1539 and 2006

In the 1500's, Gabriel Alonso de Herrera wrote an extensive work on how to grow many crops, including grapes, intertwined with directions on how to make good wine. His work was originally designed for use by wine growers and winemakers in Central Spain, but was used throughout the Spanish Empire.

This is the first of a two-volume set that will cover all of that huge original work. It is divided into three parts. Part One covers proper soil preparation, types of land best for certain crops and when and how to plant, weed and harvest. Chapter two deals with soils, climates and locations most favorable for vineyards and which varieties work best on which lands as well as how to plant, weed, graft and prune vineyards. Chapter three covers the most advantageous times to perform agricultural tasks month-by-month, based on phases of the moon. (If this third chapter seems similar to the current biodynamic craze, just remember the old adage that everything old is new again.)

The book is utterly fascinating. Many of our current vineyard practices were well known even then. Again and again we read of familiar techniques, such as egg whites recommended for fining a young wine. Others, however, seem oddly primitive, such as covering the bung hole in a barrel with pine nuts so the wine "will not be ruined;" or weather forecasting: "White clouds at sunset, resembling elongated masses of wool, indicate rain within a few days."

The book contains a detailed glossary of agricultural terms and index. It is an excellent effort and I greatly look forward to the second volume.

Very Highly Recommended

Imagery: Art for Wine

Bob Nugent

Wine Appreciation Guild, South San Francisco, in conjunction with Benzinger Family Winery; 2006

This really isn't a wine book. It's a lavish art book. For years Benzinger Family Winery has produced its Imagery Series of wines. Each bottling has had a different work of art on the label. This book presents all the original paintings for those labels in full color and in great detail on its right-hand page. On the left-hand page are a few words from the artist (or a noted art critic), a small photograph of the artist, a brief biography, and a list of exhibitions.

This is a classy art book with gorgeous reproductions, showing details often obscured by the small format of a wine label. It is a stunning presentation.

Very Highly Recommended.

To find out about "California Grapevine," visit www.calgrapevine or write them at Post Office Box 22152, San Diego, California 92192. An annual subscription is \$35.00.