

A Nova Scotia Story

Tom Robinson (from the 'Grapevine')

The 2008 AWC National will be held in Nova Scotia, a province we know little about except that it's over 3000 miles away. The best wines from B.C. and the rest of Canada will be sent there in August for judging. There are two clubs in the AWNS, The Annapolis Valley Vintners and the Halifax Dartmouth Wine Club. Alan Baker of Wolfville is Chairman of the National, John Starr from Wolfville is the Chief Steward, and the Nova Scotia National Director is Marta Milhoff who lives in Musquodoboit Harbour .

What else I know of Nova Scotia I remember from WW2 when they sent me there to be trained and to train others for overseas service. It was a culture shock. I was living in history. Firstly, in an old red brick building on Citadel Hill, a great stone fortress that's guarded Halifax from attack for centuries. Then a trip across the harbour to Dartmouth and Eastern Passage where my Bofors anti-aircraft gun shared ferry space with an ox and cart. I was to see many of these huge bovines during the two years I spent waiting for a troop ship. If you go to Nova Scotia this summer you wont see the oxen nor the ferry nor the old red brick building. A bridge has replaced the ferry. On a BCAA fall foliage tour in 1996 I could not find that old brick building. No one at the guard-house had ever seen it. During the war I was told that it should not have been there in the first place. It was one of two military' buildings designed in England by the Royal Engineers and was destined for a British possession in the West Indies. On some tropic isle you might still see the stone building that was meant for Citadel Hill.

Grapes have been grown in Nova Scotia since 1611 but the

only wine I ever had there was port at an army mess dinner and Bright's Sherry. Until after the war, Haligonians, indeed all Canadians just didn't drink wine the way we do now. It was no different in B.C. - Scotch, rye, gin, rum, and beer. The change came when our troops came home from Europe where they had learned there was something else to drink. One might note the great change in the wines and wineries in California after 1945. Dennis Culver and I had no alternative but to drink the Bright's sherry after the first few days of the month when the ration of spirits ran out. All there was to drink was the sweet sherry wine night after night while taking on all comers at cribbage. No thoughts then of founding The Grapevine 25 years later.

My interest was rekindled last summer when I learned that Nova Scotia has a wine industry. I had lunch with a friend who knows about grapes and vineyards and wine, some of which she learned on one of our BCAWA sponsored wine tours to California. Anna told me about a spring tour she made to the province's wine country. The tour took her to three wineries, Domaine de Grand Pre, Sainte Famile Wines and Gaspereau Vineyards, all that could be handled in one day. Other vineyards she did not see outside of the Annapolis Valley are in the Bear River Valley, the Le Have River Valley and Malagash Peninsula. They are Cabot Wineries, Jost Vineyards, Lunenburg Country Winery, Telder Berry Wines, Habitant Vineyards, Pereau Creek Winery, Williamsdale Winery, Bear River Wines, Blomidon, Petite Riviere, and L' Acadie Vineyards.

My conversation with Anna yielded brochures from these three wineries that the tour took her to, a page from the tourist bureau and a newspaper clipping that tells how this particular tour came to be. Halifax has a restaurant called the Five Fishermen whose sommelier is enthusiastic about Nova Scotia wines. So much so that his wine list devotes a whole page to them. It won him an award from Wine Spectator magazine. One

sunny day he rented a van and took his wait staff out to some vineyards to show them how grapes are grown and how the wine is made that they serve in the restaurant. It was a successful experience. Soon, Valley Wine Tours was founded to accommodate visitors to Halifax.

Anna paid \$95.00 for the tour and found it well worth the price. It included plenty of wine tastings and what she called a scrumptious winery luncheon even with scallops. On the hour-long trip from Halifax, the van driver gave a local history lesson. She remembered Tony DiGiovanni doing this as he drove us to and from San Francisco on our CalTours. What happened in the vineyards here was different from our California experience. In the Annapolis Valley vineyards the winery guide led the party between the rows of vines, stopping every so often to pour a glass of wine made from the grapes that had grown on the vines where they stopped. The guide wore a husky apron with four pockets. Each pocket held a bottle. They stopped four times.

Gaspereau was the youngest vineyard on the tour. It's in the Gaspereau Valley on 35 acres, 3 km from the town of Wolfville. Like that of many vineyards in the Okanagan, land for Gaspereau's vines was created by tearing out apple orchards. The first vines were planted in 1996 on an ideal south facing slope. A successful harvest three years later established this valley as an ultimate grape growing region. Successive plantings and bountiful harvests led to the opening of the Gaspereau Vineyards Winery in 2004. They make wine from such varieties as Lucie Kuhlmann, DeChaunac, Baco Noir, L'Acadie Blanc, Muscat, New York Muscat, Ortega, Vidal and Riesling. They make port and icewine and maple wine too.

Only a few Nova Scotia wineries use viniferas. One makes Shiraz, another makes Pinot Meunier, two make Pinot Noir and

Chardonnay is on three wine lists. The province's twenty-two growers concentrate on varieties that do well in this wine country with its unique climate and soil conditions that favor these distinctive grape varieties

Many of the grapes Gaspereau uses are unfamiliar to most of us. I doubt if any are now grown commercially in the Okanagan, although at one time we amateurs may have made wine from some of them. Saanich Sommeliers use Ortega, Siegrieb, Leon Millot and Marechal Foch grown on Vancouver Island. Other Nova Scotia vineyards grow Castel, Marechal Foch, Leon Millot, Siegfried, Pollux, Michurinetz, Severnyi, Triumph d' Alsace, Seyval Blanc, Geisenheim, and Zwiigelt. In years past, travelling in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and Long Island, I found some of these varieties growing. I'm sure it's because of the climate away from our Okanagan and Washington and Oregon and California.

Gaspereau is one of many wineries that's found it's good business to make icewine. Many of the wineries use New York Muscat for this. Gaspereau harvests their grapes between -8 and -14 Celsius. They can count on getting these temperatures every year. It gets colder in Nova Scotia than it does in the Okanagan. One winter I saw salt water freeze in Bedford Basin, the innermost part of Halifax harbour. New York Muscat was created at the Agricultural Experimental Station at Geneva, N.Y. It was born in 1961 and found its way to B.C. I have made wine from it with most success as a dessert wine. The grape makes great jelly. My daughter, Sal, grows the vines in her Vancouver garden and makes jelly for The Corkscrew Inn, a five-star bed and breakfast owned by her and her husband, Wayne Meadows.

At least seven Nova Scotia vintners make wine called L' Acadie Blanc from a hybrid created in the 1950's at the Ontario

Horticultural Institute. It is also known as Habitant Blanc.

For years many trophies and medals in British Columbia wine competitions were won by D&K Jones. Not any more. Dan is now a professional and still winning medals for the wines he makes as the winemaker of the Pacific Breeze winery in New Westminster. Dan and Kathy told me about the wild blueberries that grow in Nova Scotia. The bushes are much shorter than ours and the wine is very good. It is made commercially by Williamsdale and the Lunenburg Country Vineyard. The latter also makes Montbeliard Pear and New York Muscat. We in B.C. have come to think of the grape as the only fruit worth making into wine. Our competitions used to have many more red and white fruit classes but now how many of us drink wine with a meal except for dessert? I'll bet there are dry table wines among those made at Williamsdale and the Lunenburg Winery. Some years ago in New Jersey I stopped at an all-fruit winery in the late afternoon. Drivers in car after car on their way home from work stopped to buy a bottle for their dinner - dry fruit wine.

Since 2002 the wineries of Nova Scotia have had an association that promotes the growth and development of Nova Scotia wines. In 2005 the Nova Scotia Wine Standards, NSWS, were adopted. A logo was created as a symbol of quality which members may use on their wines that are made from 100% locally grown grapes and fruit. The Association would like prospective growers and vintners to know that there is an abundant supply of inexpensive land for development.