

KEN WRIGHT CELLARS VINEYARD HISTORY PROJECT:

History in the Vineyards, A Genesis Tour of Ken Wright's Yamhill-Carlton Vineyard Sources

By Jim Gullo

PART ONE: SAVOYA VINEYARD

Long before the Editors' Choice awards, the 94-point scores, or the "blackberry, black cherry and hints of truffle on the complex, deliciously satisfying finish" accolades – long before Ken and Karen Wright even planted grapes on the property and coined the name "Savoya" for the first vineyard property that they would own – there were wagon trains headed to these fields, and pioneers and settlers who heard that there was prime agricultural land being given away to the west, in Oregon, to anyone who would homestead the land for four years.

Although no single pioneer claimed the land that would become the 40-acre Savoya Vineyard, four of them surrounded it with Donation Land Claims. To the east was the 640-acre claim of Andrew Schuck (DLC 126), who was born in 1815 in Indiana, married Mary Conlee of Byron County, Kentucky and crossed the plains from Iowa to Oregon in the late-1840s with six of their seven children. Besides farming the land, Schuck became the first sheriff of Yamhill County, serving two terms, and was one of the first three judges who met in the first session of probate court in Lafayette, the county seat. He made guns during the Indian Wars and served six sessions in the State Legislature. He passed away in 1894, Mary four years later, and both were laid to rest in the Masonic Cemetery in McMinnville.

Just north of the Savoya property was the land claimed by William D. Clark (DLC 975), a farmer who was born in New Jersey in 1808, and with his Connecticut-born wife Phebe, came to Oregon with daughters Clarissa and Nancy, claiming another 640-acre parcel that stretched from west to east between the present-day towns of Yamhill and Carlton. Clark was handy: One historical document gives him credit for building the first blacksmith shop in the county – "a tanned deer skin was used to make a bellows" – on the property of James Johnson, who built the first house in the county.

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To the south and west of the Savoya property were the lands claimed by the Rowland family: Jeremiah (DLC 25), from North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri before coming to Oregon in 1944, and son Green L. Rowland (DLC 935). Jeremiah was appointed by the governor to be a probate judge of Yamhill County for seven years; he passed away in 1879 and with his wife, Mary Ann Rowland (1820-1905) is also buried in McMinnville. Green, who married Sophronia Fouts, lived to be 83.

Abram Blackburn moved his family to the area from nearby Marion County in the 1870s and acquired a parcel of land within the present Savoya property: The Blackburn Road street address is thanks to him. He and wife Caroline had seven children, including Sherman (1870-1937), who was the property owner in 1928 when Metsker mapped the property, and Daisy and Verna, who were infants when they appeared in the 1880 census but would retain ownership of the land well into the 1940s. The sisters would pass away within four months of each other in 1965.

Also residing on the land was John Allen Hickman, who received a lengthy obituary and photo in the McMinnville Telephone-Register newspaper when he passed away at the age of 88 in March, 1935, because he was one of the six remaining Civil War veterans left in Yamhill County at the time. A native of Indiana, he enlisted for Civil War service as a 17-year old in 1863 and saw combat in 13 major engagements in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. He came to Oregon in 1883 to build the Fulton Park power house in Portland, operated a general store and post office in Aims, Oregon, and then acquired the Yamhill property in 1908, which he farmed until he retired in 1921.

Hickman's neighbors and also farmers of what is now the Savoya vineyard land were William Felix and Ida H. (Penzig) Allen, who cultivated prunes on the property in the 1920s, when prunes were a major agricultural product of the region, and many prune drying houses sprang up in nearby Carlton and Dundee. William was born in Missouri and worked the coal mines of Idaho and Montana after moving west as a young man of 21; his relatively young passing at the age of 56 was blamed on the tuberculosis that he had acquired in the mines. He asked his younger brother George to look after Ida, the daughter of German immigrants to Wisconsin, who retained ownership of the prune farm through the '40s. The couple married in 1945, but were killed on March 19, 1954, when their car went through a guard rail and off a bridge into the Long Tom River, drowning them both. They had no children.

The fourth neighbor and resident of the present Savoya property was Grace Fox Trullinger, whose grandfather, Benjamin Stewart (DLC 3967) had come to the Oregon Territory in 1845 from his native Pennsylvania. The property would remain in the Fox family through the 1940s.

Surrounded by orchards of fruit and walnuts, the property remained in agricultural use through the pre-vineyard years of the '50s and '60s. Anthony C. Harmon, who was a large landowner and farmer

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in the region, owned the property at least from the mid-'50s until his death in 1994. A local man who attended Carlton and McMinnville high schools, Harmon raised fruit and sheep and drove a log truck after serving in the U.S. Navy during the Korean conflict. His estate sold the property in 1994 to Victor Von Schlegell, and four years later, in 1998, it was acquired by Ken and Karen Wright, and was the first vineyard property that they owned outright.

Located on a southeast facing inclination with an elevation of 350 to 400 feet, the vineyard was planted in 1999 on 4.5 acres in Dijon clones 777 and 115, on phylloxera resistant rootstock. Subsequent plantings over the years increased the vineyard to 17 acres. The first wine to be released from the Savoya vineyard was in 2002, and subsequent vintages have seen Savoya single-vineyard wines receiving some of the top scores in KWC's history, including a 94-point Editor's Choice to the 2010 Ken Wright Cellars Savoya Vineyards Pinot Noir.

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