

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 TWO: TANAGER VINEYARD

History tells us that there is little surprise that the land on which Tanager vineyard is located is superb for growing world-class fruit. Fine-wine grapes are just the latest commercial fruit crop to spring from these bountiful soils, dating all the way back to pioneer days. We will look at the history of Tanager backwards, from present day all the way back to pioneer days in Oregon.

In Ken Wright's annual Harvest Newsletter of 2012, written in November of that year, Ken announced the bottling of the first wine from his new Tanager vineyard, named for the Western Tanager bird that visits the area every spring and is a favorite of bird-loving property owner Art Crum. Located on old Yamhill Road between the towns of Carlton and Yamhill, the vineyard lies at 350 to 400 feet elevation, on Willakenzie soil with a western-facing inclination. The original artwork on the bottle's label shows an American Kestrel, a member of the falcon family that can be trained and mobilized for vineyard protection, a practice that vineyard manager Mark Gould utilizes to good effect.

Art Crum is a Delta pilot, and he and wife Susi – who is Karen Wright's sister and Ken's sister-in-law – bought the nearly 10-acre property in 2008, leasing 6.5 acres of it to KWC to plant and develop on a 30-year lease. The instincts and expertise of Ken and Mark Gould were spot-on: The 2012 Tanager received 95 points from Wine Enthusiast and was called one of the top-three wines in the KWC portfolio. "A rich mix of Asian spices coat a sensuous wine with a rich core of ripe black cherry fruit," wrote Paul Gregutt. "Seams of cola and sassafras run through the palate, and on into a lengthy and utterly delicious finish."

That is just the most recent success of a property that has a rich and varied history. Prunes were a major orchard crop of the region dating back a century, when the little town of Carlton saw several

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prune-drying facilities built in and around its borders. And prunes were an ongoing hobby on the Tanager property from the early-'50s right up to the turn of the 21st century when Ward and MaryEllen Schwarzmamm owned the land. MaryEllen spent almost of her eighty-seven years in and around the Yamhill/Gaston area, and the property on which Tanager vineyard lies was her home for over fifty of them. A remembrance of her reveals a cheerful, vibrant woman with many interests and hobbies, all centered around the home on old Yamhill Road that the couple purchased in 1952.

Born in Forest Grove in 1924, MaryEllen Ahlgren graduated from Gaston High School in 1942 and attended nearby Pacific University on a full scholarship. There she met and married Ward Schwarzmamm, an optometry student. After a brief stint in San Francisco, they purchased the Yamhill property with the expansive territorial views and remnants of an old orchard. "They had a small prune orchard," wrote MaryEllen's biographer, "and it was quite common for MaryEllen to take her 'organic' prunes to different outlets to sell. The 'farm' is where Maryellen always called home. This is where her heart was. Many happy times were spent there with her family and friends." Ward passed away in 1990, and Mary sold the property to the Crums in 2008, three years before her passing. They were laid to rest together at Forest View Cemetery in Forest Grove.

Before the Schwarzmamms, the property, which had a Southern Pacific railroad track running through the western edge of it, was a part of the Yamhill Orchards tracts, with Fairview Orchards just to the east of it. Metsker maps of the area in both 1928 and 1942 show both of the orchards occupying several tracts of land. Fruit trees had been a part of the local landscape for over eighty years by that time, after Henderson Luelling set out from Iowa in 1847 on an ox train with his wife, eight children and 700 grafted, one-year old fruit trees that included 18 varieties of apple tree and eight pears, as well as cherry, quince, peach and the black walnut starts that would soon establish the region as a major domestic producer of walnuts and, later, hazelnuts. Luelling and his brothers John and Seth established their nursery in Milwaukie in 1848 and soon populated much of the Willamette Valley with their fruit trees.

The original, 640-acre land claim on which the Tanager vineyard rests was awarded to William D. Clark (DLC 975), a farmer who was born in New Jersey in 1808 (see Savoya Vineyard for more information on Clark). Clark's neighbor to the south was Robert Merchant (DLC 119), who was born in Scotland in 1797 and stowed away on a ship crossing the Atlantic at the age of 16. He worked in New York as a shoemaker, moved to Ohio and married his wife Lucretia Stewart in 1838, and crossed the plains with three children, arriving in Oregon City on September 27, 1847. They made their way to the

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valley and began to homestead the land that would lead to his 640-acre donation land claim. He was both a farmer and the first shoemaker in Yamhill County. The family lived in a dirt-floor log cabin until 1856, when Merchant constructed a frame house for \$3,000. He served on the first jury in the county – the first court session ever held in Yamhill County was conducted at his house -- and was a Justice of the Peace for several years before passing in 1862. Lucretia passed away in 1890.

Their son Warren Merchant, who was the first child born on the land claim, in 1848, remained on the property with his wife, Sarah Ann Laughlin, and built a house and barn there in 1876-77. He owned cattle stock yards in Portland in the late-1890's, was a lifelong Republican and a member of the Grange for 45 years. On June 8, 1917 Warren was pitching hay from a loft in the barn, sat down to rest and never got up, dead of an apparent heart attack. Later in her life, Sarah became a member of the Oregon Pioneer Association, and lived in the town of Yamhill until her passing in 1931.

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