



# AWOnews



**Produced by The Amateur Winemakers of Ontario**

**A forum for the exchange of news and opinions on home  
winemaking in Ontario**

**September 1996 Newsletter No. 1**

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**First Edition!**

## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

**by Paul Dunseath**

**Welcome to the First Edition of AWOnews, which is also  
the Convention 1996 (The Unconventional Convention) Issue!**

**As you know, Better Winemaking has been sold by its Publisher, Paul Jean Jr.,  
to a private publisher. We all hope that it will continue, and provide the high  
standard that Paul has established. At the same time, however, your executive  
believes that there remains a need to have a publication dedicated exclusively to  
the needs and interests of members of the Amateur Winemakers of Ontario.**

**Consequently we are launching a rather more modest newsletter, the first copy  
of which you are now reading.**

**AWOnews will be published four times a year: early Spring, with information  
about the upcoming Convention; summer, with an "after action report"; fall, in  
time for the new winemaking season; and winter. For our First Edition, we are  
timing the publication to correspond to the Unconventional Convention; those  
attending will have their copy in the convention package; those who are unable**

**to do so will have theirs mailed, but will be the poorer for it!**

**In each issue to come we will have club news, feature articles, letters to the editor, and an "ask the Vinicologist" column (Vinicologist (n): Doctor of the Wine) for those hard-to-find answers to winemaking questions.**

**We welcome your club news, letters, article submissions, and questions. There are a lot of interesting activities in which clubs engage, and your fellow Winemakers across Ontario are certainly interested in picking the brains of program coordinators for ideas that they can use in their own planning. Don't hide your light under a bushel; let's hear what you've found to be especially interesting.**

**While overall copyright of AWOnews rests with the editor, anyone submitting articles for publishing may reserve copyright themselves, and this will be acknowledged in AWOnews. Letters to the Editor may be sent via ordinary mail to the editor at the address in the masthead above, or via the internet to PDunseath@aol.com. Submissions of articles will be accepted in paper form, but would be preferred on 3½ inch diskette in WordPerfect, MS Word, or ASCII format (diskettes will be returned). The editor reserves the right to edit any**

**submissions for publication needs.**

**How much does AWOnews cost you? Nowt, as they say in Yorkshire, if you're a member of AWO; it's included in your membership fee to AWO. \$6.00 per year (cheap at twice the price) if you're not. So, relax, enjoy, and let's have your feedback and ideas.**

**Prosit!**

## **THE 1996 CONVENTION**

**This year's Unconventional Convention features an awe-inspiring array of activities. If you're attending, you will know this from the information package in your kit; if not, you will have only the vicarious pleasure and regret at missing it that we will attempt to describe. Ted Griesbrecht and his organizing committee have been at work for over a year to make this a very special occasion (future convention organizers, take note!). You want pig roasts? we got pig roasts. You want cigar tasting? we got cigar tasting. You want road kill cuisine? we got road kill cuisine. You want garage sales? we got garage sales (garage**

**sales???)**.

**As well, don't forget the "Winetaster of the Year" competition. Chief Judge Peter Pigeon has organized a Masters' Program, of which this is the first step.**

**Have a great weekend, folks (and if you can't attend, eat your hearts out!!)**

## **CLUB NEWS**

**This is your place to shine. Please share with us the highlights of your club activities!**

### **Ottawa Valley Wine Circle**

**The OVWC, which is now in its twenty-sixth season, had a particularly interesting program on Friday, May 17. Program Coordinator Andy Viciulis presented four Chardonnays from California, Australia, Chile and France; members were also given professional descriptions of each wine, and then were challenged to match the descriptions with the wines in a blindfold tasting. Not as easy as it might seem! Previous programs during the year have included a blind**

**tasting of Pinot Noirs (the consensus was that the most typical of this chameleon of a wine was a Coldstream Hills [Australia] 1993); the annual Christmas party; and an evening on dessert wines (with both dessert and wines) arranged by Lee Kinsman. OVWC closes its club year with a Barbecue in June.**

### **Capital Amateur Winemakers**

**Ontario's oldest club (founded in 1962) had more than its share of sadness during the year. Club President Sarah Pettit passed away, as did long-time members Art Crook, Alice Trafford, and Clary Willman. They will be missed.**

**The club did, however, continue its practice of inviting members of all other winemakers' clubs in the area to its annual Christmas Party, held at the Legion Hall in Manotick, Ontario in mid-January. After an excellent catered meal the evening continued with dancing and a draw for prizes, the highlight of which was a complete filter kit donated by Sarah; she had won it herself in an earlier draw and had never had the opportunity to use it.**

**[EOAWC](#)**

**The annual Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition was held for the eleventh time on March 2. Over 160 wines were entered in this open competition (anyone may enter, but an individual is restricted to one entry per class), and almost the same number attended the wine tasting and dinner in the evening. EOAWC originated the "medal concept" of rewarding wines for absolute merit, rather than simply relative merit, and as we all know this concept has now been adopted by both AWO and AWC. Planning has already begun for the twelfth Competition, under the leadership of André Trottier, who was this year admitted to the Ontario Judges' Commission. All are invited to enter the competition in 1997, scheduled for late February. Watch AWOnews for further information.**

## **AWO JUDGES' TRAINING**

**During the late winter two training courses were held for prospective new AWO judges. One was organized by Chief Judge Peter Pigeon, assisted by Steve Gunning (Deputy Chief Judge, Western Ontario) and other members of the**



**Judges' Commission, for candidates in the Toronto/Kitchener area. The other was organized by Paul Dunseath, Deputy Chief Judge (Eastern Ontario), assisted by Gary Koestler and Marcel Sarazin, for candidates in the Ottawa area.**

**Both programs began with a "bar exam" to identify those candidates with the potential to become judges; and then proceeded with the successful applicants attending four sessions spread over some two months.**

**The programs were as identical as possible, and included "hands on" judging sessions, essays, multiple choice tests, and "odd man out" tests, in which the candidates were challenged with three wines, two of which were identical, and one nearly so. The requirement was to identify, in a blind test, the odd wine. If this sounds easy, try it at your club with two Rieslings; one from the Bench and the other from Pelee Island.**

**Candidates also were faced with judging (and commenting upon) five wines, and then doing the same with the identical wines in a different (scrambled) order.**

**Points were awarded based on their consistency in judging the two flights.**

**Again, this could be a useful and instructive club program.**

**The end result was that eight candidates, only about 40% of those who took the**

**full program, and about one in five of those who took the Bar Exam, have been invited to join the Judges' Commission. Ontario Winemakers can be assured that their judges have been through "The Devil's Proving Grounds", thanks to that old devil Peter Pigeon who crafted this tremendous training program!**

## **IN THE BEGINNING...**

**Feature article by Paul Dunseath**

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**Heretical though it may sound, I must assert at the outset that wine and beer are not among humankind's more notable inventions. For that matter, they would not be classed as minor inventions either; the process of fermentation by which wine and beer are produced has been in existence since the dawn of time, and the role of the human race was not to invent but to discover it, and then over the centuries to domesticate it. It's important to understand the difference; thinking of wine as an invention leads one to believe that the winemaking (or beermaking) process can be totally explained and totally controlled, whereas in**

**reality even the most skilled winemaker is at times little more than a bystander to a process which, even today, refuses to disclose all of its secrets. There is at least as much art as there is science in the production of wine and beer.**

**Who, then, was , the person who stumbled upon the first wine or beer to be tasted by a human? We shall never know. It could have been a primitive hunter-gatherer who found an abandoned honeycomb lying in a rain-filled hollow in a tree after wild yeast had converted some of the sugar to alcohol. Possibly it was a cave-dweller who attempted to store some grape juice as part of the hoard of food for the cold months and, when it underwent natural fermentation, boldly decided to taste it. One can imagine the conversation that evening around the cooking fire! Beer undoubtedly first saw the light of day when one of our ancestors discovered that if barley grains were left - perhaps forgotten - in a water-filled vessel, they first sprouted (a process by which the starch in the grains is converted to sugar), and then fermented. This discovery resulted in much more than simply a pleasant-tasting drink, however, and may be one of the major milestones in our long voyage to civilization.**

**Think about it for a moment. The hunter-gatherers led a nomadic, and spartan,**

**existence, depending for their survival on the availability through happenstance of sufficient food to keep body and soul together. It would be hard to imagine, however, that this existence included what we would call a balanced diet; certainly protein would be lacking, except on those occasions when they were able to make a kill, and the vitamin content of the forage that they gathered must have been deficient as well. History suggests that malnutrition and disease were common.**

**Enter, . This beverage provided not only a pleasant quaff, with some mood-altering qualities; it also provided protein, from the barley; quick energy, from the alcohol; and - most importantly - B Vitamins. Fermentation, as you know, is brought about by the action of yeasts, microscopic entities which appear to lie near the boundary of the plant and animal kingdoms. During fermentation, yeast consumes sugar and converts it into roughly equal quantities of alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. Yeast itself is also a major source of B Vitamins. So, not only were the wines and beers made in the earliest days a pleasure for primitive humans to drink, but as well they nourished and gave health to early human society.**

**It has been theorized in fact that the discovery of fermentation was a major impetus behind humankind's evolution from a hunter-gatherer society to an agrarian one. If our ancestors wished to assure themselves of a plentiful supply of raw materials, it was necessary to cultivate and care for the grains and fruits, rather than collecting them in a haphazard manner. And, in the symbiotic way that often has characterized the relationship between humans and the plant world, the grains and fruits provided a reward of immense value. Primitive beers and wines - as with the cultivated ones of today - provided not only a significant source of food but also, as we have seen, of vitamins as well to a society in which they were vital to health. To many of our ancestors it must have been a life-saver.**

**Over the centuries that followed the dawn of , many people whose names are lost in history set about learning how the process worked and, through trial and error, developed techniques to avoid some of the haphazard results of untamed nature, which was by itself at least equally capable of producing a weak, sweet result, one infected with bacteria or moulds, or vinegar, as it was a clean, healthful drink.**

**The Bible tells us that by the time of Noah there was a flourishing winemaking industry; beer was being produced in quantity at the time of the Sumerian kingdom, in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers before the rise of ancient Egypt; the Sumerians apparently had written recipes for at least 16 types of beer, while the Code of Hammurabi prescribed both the price and the quality of beer offered for sale. Paintings found in the pyramids at Giza also depict beer and winemaking, as well as the daily ration of beer for a worker (about 1 litre; senior officials got as much as 5!); and of course wine was a staple in the civilizations of Ancient Greece and Rome.**

**Although in its broadest sense wine is defined as fermented juice, origin unspecified (hence "country wine" books with their recipes for Potato Champagne, Birch Sap Wine, and even Vine Prunings Wine), by the time of the march of the Legions it was generally accepted that grapes provided the best balance and, as Roman influence spread throughout Europe, the planting of vineyards and the emergence of winemaking followed. With the spread of Christianity and the establishment of monasteries, grape cultivation and winemaking became one of the avocations of the monks, both for the importance of wine in the sacraments and for the cheer it provided in an otherwise ascetic**

**monastic life, as well as a welcome offering for their occasional guests, an occupation for their few hours of leisure, and a source of income for their orders. As the monasteries spread, so too did viticulture, until winemaking was practiced all across the Judeo-Christian world.**

**By the time of the middle ages, beer had acquired a further and well-deserved reputation, that of a reliable and hygienic beverage. As civilization spread, so of course had untreated human waste and the diseases that result. By this time in our evolution, however, beer-making had become fairly scientific. After the malting stage it is necessary to extract the sugar from the grains. Primitive people simply allowed this to take place by soaking the grains; however it was later discovered that the process can be accelerated by boiling the malted grains. The side effect of this, of course, was that harmful microorganisms in the water were destroyed in the boiling, and beer became known as a safe and healthful beverage.**

**Wine, for its part, had already been renowned for centuries for the same properties; since the vines draw water from their roots, and subsist almost entirely on rain water, wine has always been regarded as safe to consume, no**

**matter how foul the local water supply may be.**

**When the early monasteries were first established in California so were the first vineyards, forming the basis for that State's present-day wine industry. In due course vineyards were planted widely across the planet's temperate zone, wherever soil and climate permitted, and are now found from the Okanagan Valley in the northern hemisphere to New Zealand in the southern. While, in Canada, vineyards are concentrated in the Niagara, Southwestern Ontario, and Okanagan areas, there is an historical record that a Vineyard once existed in the Britannia Heights area of present-day Ottawa, renowned as one of the coldest capital cities on Earth; the "Chateau du ChPne Wine Company, Manufacturer of Still and Sparkling Wines", apparently numbered no less a luminary that Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, among its patrons.**

**The first grapes to be planted in California were not the ones we know today. The first plantings were of "Mission" grapes, hardy and relatively easy to grow, but not as well-suited to winemaking as the variety Vitis Vinifera which formed the base of the European industry at the time and now used almost exclusively world-wide. During the 1800s a massive program was undertaken to replace**



**Mission grapes with imported European cuttings which were grafted onto the existing root stock, with a Hungarian expatriate, Count Agostan Harasthy, importing over 100,000 cuttings alone. The Count appears to have had a somewhat chequered history and reportedly departed California abruptly, just ahead of a mob of creditors. He is said to have made it to South America, where he was eaten (so it is said) by an alligator.**

**Count Agostan's departure has left us with a minor mystery. Among the cuttings which he imported was the Zinfandel grape, now grown widely in California, but non-existent in Europe, whence it came. There are many theories for the origin of this distinctive and powerful red grape, but most probably it was a spontaneous hybrid of two other grapes. In any event, the Count isn't talking.**

**In the latter part of the last century a number of cuttings were re-exported from North America back to Europe. Alas, this resulted in a disaster. An insect native to North America, but until then unheard of in Europe, the Phylloxera Root Louse, hitch-hiked along with one shipment and spread across the European continent. Phylloxera feeds on the roots of grape vines; North American root stock is resistant to the insect, but European roots were not, and in the space of a**

**few years the vineyards across Europe were devastated. The vineyards were salvaged only by importing North American root stock onto which the European grapes were grafted, so that today virtually all European wine grapes are grown on North American roots. Ironically the Phylloxera louse is now reappearing in California in a new strain which is threatening large tracts of existing vineyards. Experts expect to beat it back, but the situation graphically illustrates that in winemaking there are no sure things!**

## **THE 1996 COMPETITION**

**This year's competition, organized by Chief Steward Gary Maldaver, saw over 500 wines and beers judged over a two-day period by 12 experienced judges and eight new judges. At least three, and usually four, judges were assigned to each class, and every bottle was tasted by every judge! The next article gives some technical detail on how this was done. We welcome to the Judges' Commission the following new members:**

**From Central/Western Ontario:**

**Ted Griesbrecht**

**Bill Thornton**

**Dean Wilkinson**

**Herman Zapletal**

**From Eastern Ontario:**

**Ian Beausoleil-Morrison**

**Bob Madill**

**George Pikor**

**André Trottier**

**In addition, a number of trainee judges had the opportunity to work through a number of classes under the supervision of a senior judge as part of their professional development.**

**HOW'D THEY DO THAT?**

**Have you ever wanted to be behind the scenes at an official AWO judging?**

**AWOnews brings you this exclusive inside report, which reveals all of the hidden details. Neither fear nor favour, that's us. All the news that fits, we print.**

**Seriously, though, Chief Judge Peter Pigeon introduced an approach this year that overcomes many of the both perceived and actual problems with the approach to judging in the past. Historically, because of both timing constraints and the limited number of qualified judges available, smaller classes were judged by a single judge, and the larger ones by two, or occasionally three if the numbers warranted. In the case of multiple judges, each assessed his or her half or third of the show bench and identified the three or four wines to be considered for possible award status. Both (or all three) judges then assessed the wines with potential and came to a consensus on the standing. With the introduction of the Medal category this meant that each judge assigned a rating of Gold, Silver, Bronze, or NO MEDAL to each of the finalists. The ultimate standing was then determined through a formula: for example, GGG (Gold, Gold, Gold) obviously qualified as a Gold; GSB (Gold, Silver, Bronze) was a Silver; S, NO, NO was a NO.**

**The problem with this, which the Judges' Commission recognized, was that a wine could be rejected by one judge (being in his or her portion of the class) which might, had another judge assessed it, been brought forward for further consideration. Even judges have biases!**

**Peter's solution to the problem is both simple, and elegant.**

**Each class is assigned from three to four judges (this year it was generally one new judge per class, with the others being experienced judges). Taking the case of a large class with four judges, each judge examines one quarter of the class and identifies those entries which he/she considers to be of potential medal quality, and those which are "rejected".**

**Next, and this is most crucial, every judge then assesses the "rejects". If any judge decides that a wine that had been "rejected" (i.e. determined to be of non-medal status) by another judge should be further considered, he/she may "pull it forward". There is no challenge. On the other hand, no wine selected for medal consideration may be "rejected". This means that for any wine to be excluded from the "medal round", all judges must agree that it doesn't quite make the cut.**

**Next, all judges discuss the wines "pulled forward" and express their views, including their assessment of medal qualification.**

**In the last step, judges "vote" anonymously for their medal rating of each wine.**

**Pressure tactics, histrionics, and other attempts to influence findings are eliminated. The final rating is, of course, done in the same manner as previously (i.e. GSB equals a Silver), but is done by the Chief Steward in his sole and impartial capacity.**

**This approach seems to eliminate some of the biases in the previous system, but at the same time requires a great deal more time, and more judges.**

**ENTER: Fred Passmore**

**Fred was our previous Chief Judge, and very generously offered the facilities of his (and Shirley's) ranch near Caledonia for the judging weekend. Many of the judges arrived on the evening of Friday May 24 and either camped out in the spacious grounds of the Passmore property, or took bunk beds, or (a few of us with wives present) had the use of a spare bedroom. Gordon Barnes and Gary Maldaver spent many hours (into the wee small hours in fact) replacing the competition label with a generic numeric one (BRIEF COMMERCIAL: Please**

**don't use cellophane tape; it's very difficult to remove. Use masking tape ONLY!!!)**

**By about 2 in the morning Gary and Gordon packed it in, and then at about 8am the remaining 300 bottles arrived.**

**Judging began at about 11am on Saturday after Gary and Gordon had managed to sort out the last minute entries and the stewards had laid out the first of the classes to be judged.**

**Judging proceeded from 11am to almost 6 pm, with no break for lunch (if a judge was between classes, he or her could grab a sandwich, if any were left) and was followed by a BBQ (now if you ever wondered if your left-over wines were appreciated...) Sunday morning started with a great breakfast organized by Shirley Passmore and Gary (Bran muffins, Bagels, Sour Cream and Lox has to be the best way to start a long Sunday judging session. Recommended). The stewards again set up the "show benches" for the judging, and the remaining entries were judged between 10 am and 1:30 pm. This session included instructional events for trainee judges, in which they were asked to assess a class of wines, previously examined by experienced judges, and compare results.**

**Trainee judges found it a very educational experience in which they could not only express their opinions but also debate points of merit with the judges who had previously assessed the same class. After a barbecue lunch cooked by master chef Ludvick Furbacher, judges and stewards headed home about mid-afternoon.**

## **"MASTERS OF WINE" PROGRAM**

**AWO is planning on a two-phase program to qualify members as "Masters of Wine". One will be in the Western Ontario Region, under the tutelage of Peter Pigeon. The other will be in Eastern Ontario. More in the next issue!**

## **NEW MAGAZINE**

**Winemaker's Quarterly, a new magazine, has just announced publication.**

**The first edition includes articles on "Wine and Health", information and suggestions on keeping records, and "scheduled events" among others.**



**Winemaker's Quarterly has no direct relationship with AWO, but is available for \$14 per year from S. White, Winemaker's Quarterly, 125 Alexandra Street, Oshawa, Ontario, L1G 2C5.**

**Support your local winemaking club!**