

Returning to Tradition, the Making and Social Uses of Wine

Candace S. Barbee

December 3, 2013

Introduction to Folk Studies

Dr. Ann Ferrell

191-1 191-2

МОНАХИ КОПИРОВАЛИ ПИСЬМА
ГРЕКО-КАТОЛИЧЕСКОГО
МОНАХОВСКОГО ОБОИТЕЛЯ

As I made my way through the rolling hills and beautiful countryside of Alvaton, Kentucky on a sunny afternoon, I began to wonder if I would ever reach what the road signs were guiding me to. Minutes later, the signs sent me down a road with no outlet, at the end were pastures with horses grazing in manicured fields, several barns and a small, quaint farm house. At the driveway I pass the Reid's Livery Winery sign attached to a tree stump, beside it, yet another sign reading "wine about it, it helps." I already know I'm going to like it here.

The owners and only staff of the estate, Rex and Diane Reid know I am coming. Rex had told me earlier on the phone, "come on out, if you can't find us, just follow the fences to the right, we've got some fencing to work on." The four room wooden farm house is centered between the barns, on the front is a sign reading "Tasting Room." I knock on the door to find no answer so as instructed; I made my way down the fence row.

I spotted the Reid's mending fences and crossed a field full of equestrian equipment used for jumping and barrel racing. I found out shortly that Diane, long time horse trainer gives riding lessons and boards horses on the farm in addition to their winery. Upon entering through the front gate I instantly fell in love with the farm, and Rex and Diane made me feel right at home.

In front of the farm house sixty-two year old winemaker Rex Reid sat down for our interview with a cup of black coffee, offering me some first of course. While chickens pecked the grounds around us, I listened as he told his story.

I quickly learned during our discussion that Rex, obviously a humble southern gentleman, was indeed from the South but a bit further South than I expected.

“I was born in Bell County, Texas; I’ll always be a Texan. Daddy used to tell me, ‘you never ask anybody if they’re from Texas, because if they are, they’ll damn sure tell you and if they aren’t, there’s no use in embarrassing them.’”

He told me prior to the interview that he and Diane met in Texas and worked at a race track together, she trained race horses and he cleaned stalls. She convinced Rex that Kentucky wasn’t as hot as Texas, so they picked up and moved. What the Reid’s didn’t realize those thirty-two years ago; is they weren’t really leaving home after all.

“My sister contacted me after I bought this farm and wanted to know if I knew where ‘A-dare County,’ was. I said, ‘well no, but I do know where Adair County is.’ She came up and we went to Casey Creek and found my mom’s side of the family, so instead of moving away from home, I moved back.”

Rex is a retired third generation blacksmith, due to his arthritis. He hopes to replace that income with his winemaking and he seems to be well on his way. It made me curious to know how long he had been in the winemaking business.

“We’ve been commercial for five years, probably made wine for five or more before that, I just gave it for Christmas gifts, made from berries I grew on the farm. We grow blackberries, blueberries, black raspberries, peaches and elderberries.”

With that being said, Reid's Winery offers a variety of fruit wines, including my personal favorite, "Peachy Keen." If you're not feeling frisky enough to try the fruit wine, Rex still has the traditional covered.

"We also have grape wines, and the grapes are grown at Hilltop vineyards, its 22 miles from my gate to his gate. He's over in Scottsville, Allen County. We make the Norton which is a wine we've done well with and I'm proud of. Red grapes are fermented on the skins, you bring the grapes in and you crush them, destem them and you start the fermentation process with what's called the must. Which is crushed grapes, skin, pulp, seeds and all. The primary fermenting process is done that way. One thing you gain from that is with the red grapes, you want your wine to be dark in color and that sort of thing. This is also pretty much the way I make my fruit wines."

The grapes are pressed and further fermented after the initial fermentation, He said the Norton compares best with Merlot, and is more to the dry side.

"With white grapes, you crush them, draw the juice off and you actually ferment the juice. You discard the pulp and skin because it makes the wine bitter, and not what we're looking for. From there it's a process for both varieties of grape. In the First couple weeks you have wine, the next ten to twelve months is trying to get a wine that somebody would want to drink. There is the cleaning up and filtering and we do a lot of lab work and testing to make sure it's disease free and that sort of thing. We do all that in this little farm building behind me."

A white wine offered is the Chardonal which is made from a French-American hybrid grape which is also grown locally. The wines are even hand bottled right on the farm, on all the bottles there is a black and white photo of a solemn looking couple, I asked Rex the story behind the photo.

“Those are my grandparents on the Reid side, Ma and Pa Reid. He was a blacksmith, so was my father and they had a blacksmith shop in Texas where they worked. My grandmother was an Austrian immigrant and she made wine at home, so I guess that kind of tells my story.”

Regardless of his background, Rex did not have his Grandmother's help in continuing this ancient tradition. Wine separates itself from any other kind of alcoholic beverage possessing a certain stigma of class and professionalism. Winemaking as well of the consumption is still to this day considered an esteemed art that requires training and experience to be successful. Wine consumption has been part of Western tradition for millennia. Its role in society goes beyond consumption as an end itself. Wine drinkers, are more likely to consider the color and aroma of the product prior to consumption.

(Groves, Charters, Reynolds 2009)

To the surprise of most, Kentucky is actually highly regarded for its vineyards and wineries with over 60 wine producers residing and working currently. Kentucky was actually the first state in the country to grow grapes and prior to the Prohibition was the third largest grape and wine producer in America. Beginning the continuation of this tradition was a challenge and a learning experience for Rex. He obviously had a basic

understanding of the process, but he did extensive research on his own to help enhance his product.

“I thought you just put the stuff in there and you go sit down and wait, that was my plan anyway. But it didn’t work out that way, not if you want to have good wine. There are things you have to do every day and things you have to do every month. But there is a job to do every day.”

Having a winery in Kentucky has also worked to Rex’s advantage and frequently sought professional guidance in his starting years of wine production.

“I have been real fortunate that the University of Kentucky hired an enologist, that’s what you call a person that knows about winemaking I guess, I never could figure out how that word worked. But they hired an older gentleman named Tom Cottrell who has been there, done that and done it scientifically rather than just because Uncle Fred said so. He’s able to pass on some knowledge that gained working in wineries all over the country. He’s helped me to better a better winemaker for sure.”

Rex has also sent his wines off to be judged and analyzed by the best in the business.

“We’ve entered from California to Indiana international contests to the Wines of the South which is also an international contest, also the Kentucky Commercial Winery competition. We’ve been fortunate and done quite well in all of those, gold medals. It’s nice to have a wine judge that probably knows more about it than I do that thinks it’s good.”

Obviously not above learning and taking constructive criticism, Rex explained to me that there is a certain balance of the factors in being a successful winemaker and he enjoys the challenge.

“It’s like having your own little chemistry experiment going all the time, and I can’t shoe horses anymore, my arthritis is too bad for that. That’s how I made a living for years. Winemaking is science, but it’s also art, and luck. If you follow the cleanliness and the science, you’ll make a sound wine.”

When I commended him on his work thus far, he simply chuckled.

“Well, a blind hog will find an acorn.”

In the future Rex would like to upgrade the facilities of his farm to work more efficiently and hold more people for the festivities held on the farm. Reid’s products are sold at the community farmers market and in around five local liquor stores in the area. I spoke to a wine connoisseur who is a manager at the Liquor Barn in Bowling Green about the Reid’s products they carried and she had nothing but wonderful things to say about them and the Reid’s themselves. The Liquor Barn actually has the very last of the 2011 Norton, which I think Rex, is a bit envious of. I guess that’s when you know that you’ve made some good wine.

In addition to the farmers market, the Reid’s hold an annual festival in October on their estate complete with hay rides, tasting, bonfires and tours of the farm, they also participate in their local community Christmas parade. When the days are longer, they

host a weekly event they call "Wine Down Wednesday." Rex said he brought in a karaoke deejay, had tastings and of course sold wine at these events and everyone who attended had a great time, including himself. The community farmers market also has a series of events called the Third Thursday in which patrons are invited out to the farms they are purchasing their produce and products from to see how and where the growing happens. Being completely local and "Kentucky Proud" as it says on every bottle of Reid's wine, is something that Rex is proud of.

"They can see that what they're buying is all grown right here in Warren County."

As far as being considered organic, he isn't certified just yet, but Reid's wines undergo a natural production where as some wine producers add chemicals during the fermentation process. Rex only uses pesticide sprays if he is "completely eat up with something," as he put it. But he makes it clear that the fruits he grows on the farm are grown as naturally as possible.

The processes of winemaking vary from winery to winery, state to state and country to country, you just have to find what works for you and your environment. Some Italian farmers to this day do not even wash their grapes beforehand, now that's what you call organic, but probably not so safe or sanitary. In the Appalachian Mountains traditional winemakers fashioned blackberry wine much basically and a bit differently than Rex described.

Cover the berries with boiling water and let them stand twelve hours. Strain and add two pound sugar to each gallon juice. Put in jugs, taking care to keep the vessels full

to the brim so that as the juice ferments, the scum which rises may flow off. Jugs should be refilled every morning with juice from a smaller vessel kept for this purpose. Continue this for four or five days; then stopper the jugs loosely, and after ten days cork tightly. This will be ready to bottle and seal in four months. (Wigginton, p 284)

Wines have not only been consumed for millennia but were and still also quite literally consumed religiously and used in rituals and ceremonies all over the world. During the biblical period, the pagans used all types of wine for the practice of idolatry. (Alroy, 2001) Catholics consume wine during their Communion, the red wine symbolizing the blood of Christ. At a Greek wedding for example, even between quite poor families, it is a point of honor for the host to provide limitless quantities of strong wine-to suggest to the groom and his family that he has made a good match. (Robinson, 1989, p 144)

Wine also has a central role in Jewish tradition. The *Kiddush*, a special benediction is said for the fruit of the vine, is different from the benediction for other fruits and vegetables. It is recited on the Sabbath and on special joyous occasions such as circumcision, betrothal, and marriage ceremonies, as well as on Jewish holidays when the drinking of wine is considered a special *mizvah*, (religious commandment). (Alroy, 2001)

Wine consumption and wine making is a tradition that will be forever lasting, and as this tradition will only grow further, from the Reid's of Kentucky, to California and all around the world.

Works Cited

- Pp. 209-222 Groves, Charters and Reynolds, 2000. Journal of Wine Research, Vol 11, No. 3. "Imbibing, Integrating and Imparting: A Taxonomy of Wine Consumption Practices." Institute of Masters of Wine
- P 284 Foxfire 3, 1975 edited Eliot Wigginton and his students, The Foxfire Fund Incorporated, First Anchor Books Edition 1975
- P 1, Odelia E. Alroy, 2000, Kosher Wine

FA781

Manuscripts & Rare Books
Library Special Collections
Western Kentucky University