

Justin De Courtenay and the Birth of the Ontario Wine Industry

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Article abstract

The introduction of extensive vine growing and commercial wine production to Canada owes its origins to the visionary Justin McCarthy De Courtenay who created the first viable commercial operation in Cooksville in County Peel in the 1860s. He accomplished this through a systematic approach: first, arguing that extensive grape production was possible in the Canadian climate; second, showing that one could produce palatable wine from Canadian-grown grapes; third, engaging government to arouse its interest in a possible new industry; fourth, securing sufficient funds to establish a commercial-scale vineyard and winery; and fifth, through his commercial example, interesting Ontario horticulturists to see the value of vine growing. Despite his departure from Canada in 1869, he had, in less than a decade, established a permanent industry.

Justin De Courtenay

*and the Birth of the Ontario
Wine Industry**

by Richard A. Jarrell



In the summer of 1859, Alexander Tilloch Galt (1817-93), Minister of Finance for the Province of Canada, received an intriguing letter from a recent immigrant. J.M. De Courtenay proposed to plant vineyards and to manufacture wine, neither of which had ever been done in Canada. This letter set in motion a complex set of moves that resulted in Canada's first winery in Cooksville in the early 1860s. Although De Courtenay has become a footnote in the history of Canadian wine, the establishment of a permanent wine industry in Ontario owes its origins to this visionary wine maker and advocate. It was he, more than any of his contemporaries, who brought the advantages of vine growing and wine making to the Canadian farmer, public, and government. He accomplished this through a systematic approach: first, arguing that extensive grape production was possible in the Canadian climate; second, showing that one could produce palatable

wine from Canadian-grown grapes; third, engaging government to arouse its interest in a possible new industry; fourth, securing sufficient funds from investors to establish a commercial-scale vineyard and winery; and fifth, through his example, interesting Ontario horticulturists to see the value of vine growing and other entrepreneurs into opening wineries. De Courtenay was unquestionably the first person in Canada to produce wine and brandy on a commercial scale.

Conditions for a Canadian Wine Industry

When De Courtenay arrived in Canada in 1858, no one produced grapes as a cash crop and no one manufactured wine for sale. Within a decade after his death, a small but viable wine industry had been established in Ontario and, despite its vicissitudes, never looked back. His timing was per-

*Acknowledgments: The author wishes to thank Brian Gilchrist of the Region of Peel Archives, the staff of the Mississauga Central Library, and Matthew Wilkinson of Heritage Mississauga. Financial support by York University is gratefully acknowledged.

Abstract

The introduction of extensive vine growing and commercial wine production to Canada owes its origins to the visionary Justin McCarthy De Courtenay who created the first viable commercial operation in Cooksville in County Peel in the 1860s. He accomplished this through a systematic approach: first, arguing that extensive grape production was possible in the Canadian climate; second, showing that one could produce palatable wine from Canadian-grown grapes; third, engaging government to arouse its interest in a possible new industry; fourth, securing sufficient funds to establish a commercial-scale vineyard and winery; and fifth, through his commercial example, interesting Ontario horticulturists to see the value of vine growing. Despite his departure from Canada in 1869, he had, in less than a decade, established a permanent industry.

Résumé: *À l'origine de la viticulture et de la production commerciale du vin au Canada, un visionnaire, Justin McCarthy de Courtenay qui, dans les années 1860, créa la première opération commerciale viable à Cooksville, dans le comté de Peel. Plusieurs étapes marquèrent sa réussite. En montrant qu'un vin de qualité pouvait être créé à partir de raisins produits au Canada, il fit d'abord admettre qu'une production viticole importante était possible dans le contexte climatique canadien. Ce qui suscita l'intérêt du gouvernement qui y vit les possibilités de développement d'une nouvelle industrie. Ayant ensuite rassemblé les fonds nécessaires pour établir une exploitation vinicole de grande échelle, Justin McCarthy de Courtenay réussit à prouver la viabilité et la rentabilité de la viticulture en Ontario. Il quitta le Canada en 1869, mais, en à peine 10 ans, il y avait établi une nouvelle industrie, une industrie qui, sur son modèle, continue à prospérer aujourd'hui.*

fect, as Canadian agriculture was undergoing a seismic shift.¹ Despite reciprocity with the United States—which would

soon be at war—there were deep problems. Wheat was no longer the primary crop in either half of the province, cattle raising had yet to replace it and the first steps towards dairying were still a few years in the future. Fruit growing was still small-scale but would soon expand rapidly but more so in the western half of the province. Grapes could be part of that expansion.

De Courtenay's own experience of growing grapes and making wine was in France, Switzerland and Italy where wine was an essential part of the culture and economy. In Canada it was neither. For a Canadian wine industry to exist, certain conditions had to be met. First, was there a sufficiently-large market for wine? Second, if there were a market, could Canadian farmers grow suitable grapes and in the quantity required for wine manufacture? Third, were experienced vineyard workers and wine makers available? And fourth, essential to success, would sufficient capital be available? When De Courtenay began his quest, only the first of these conditions

seemed to have been met because the social circle within which he moved drank wine and were eager to support his quest

¹ For an overview of the period, see Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), and Ian M. Drummond, *Progress without Planning. The Economic History of Ontario from Confederation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

for a home wine industry.

The extent of the wine market is difficult to ascertain with any precision given the lack of statistical evidence. Canadians were known as prodigious drinkers, attested to by the number of distilleries, breweries and taverns in the Province. The level of wine consumption is unknown as this was an imported product while the beer and whisky consumed was almost all locally made.² The best brands of sherries and ports were much more expensive than beer or whisky.³ That the socio-economic élite drank table wine, champagne, sherry and port is unquestionable; there was also a small market for sacramental wine. An 1839 Toronto auction offered for sale twenty cases of champagne, fifteen cases of claret along with casks of Madeira, port and sherry, while at the Stephenson Dinner in the city in 1853, diners had a choice of three kinds of sherry, two of Madeira, two of port, three of champagne (including Mumm's), one sparkling hock and two clarets (Château Margaux and Château Léoville).⁴ It is evident that those who could afford it could obtain European wines, at least in cities.

Given sufficient demand, distribution would not have been a problem as grocers sold spirits and wines, as did hotels and inns, taverns and retail liquor shops. Drummond notes that, by 1874, Ontario had more than 6,000 outlets for alcoholic beverages. Imported wines would have been handled mostly by wholesale grocers, of which there were three in Toronto at the time of Confederation, but dozens later.⁵

As a market did exist, the next question was where to obtain grapes. Apart from a few enthusiasts, virtually no Canadian farmers grew grapes of any kind. Table grapes were available in Canadian towns, but they were all imported and expensive. Two species of native grape, *Vitis riparia* and *Vitis labrusca* (then called the frost grape and fox grape, respectively) grow in Ontario but neither produces dependable crops nor distinguished wines. In the early 1850s, E.S. Rogers in Salem, Massachusetts, crossed *V. labrusca* with European varieties of *V. vinifera* to produce Rogers Hybrid grapes which made their way to Canada over the next decade.

Grape-growing was a rare topic in the

² On the social history of alcohol in Canada, see Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003). Later figures, supplied by the Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic in 1895, noted Canada-wide sales of spirits as 3.8 million gallons, malt liquors (presumably mostly beer) as 17.4 million gallons and wine as 512,000 gallons. There was no distinction between domestic and imported wine. Thus, wine accounted for only 2% of the nearly 22 million gallons sold.

³ Montréal market prices in the spring of 1865 show that imported rum or whisky could be purchased for \$1.50 a gallon compared with as much as \$5.00 a gallon for the best sherries and ports. *The Trade Review* (7 April 1865), 146.

⁴ Handbill: "Sale this day: extensive sale, by auction, of liquors, wines, groceries, &c. at the stores of Sanford, Vass & Co., will be sold on Tuesday, the first day of October, 1839" [CIHM 43483]; "The Stephenson Dinner, Toronto, 26th of August, 1853, wine list" [CIHM 44984]

⁵ For liquor distribution, see Ian M. Drummond, *Progress without Planning. The Economic History of Ontario from Confederation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

agricultural press in the 1850s and early 1860s. For information on grape growing, editors looked south, particularly to the Cincinnati area where German immigrants had planted vines. As early as 1849, the *Farmer and Mechanic* noted that the Toronto nurseryman George Leslie (1805-92) carried hardy varieties of grapes which, in Ohio, had been made into Madeira, hock and champagne; in 1855, the *Anglo-American Magazine* discussed the Cincinnati experiments and also noted that Leslie carried a variety of seedlings. Both the *British-American Cultivator* and the *Canadian Agriculturist* published very occasional notes on grapes during the late 1840s and early 1850s, the former lifting its material from the *Boston Cultivator*. By 1857, interest seemed to have increased and several farmers were experimenting. In that year, the *Canadian Agriculturist* reported on the experiments of A.B. Brownson of Bayfield. He had the best luck with the Clinton grape, suggesting "It would pay well to have a plantation of this variety for wine-making purposes, as the wine brings from two to three dollars per gallon for Sacramental purposes."⁶ However, a survey of the agricultural press suggests that interest in growing grapes was slight, even among fruit farmers. For those who were interested, Leslie carried an astonishing variety of seedlings, listing at least twenty-seven varieties.⁷ The primary varieties were hybrids based upon native grapes: Clinton (which Leslie signaled

as very excellent), Catawba (excellent for wine), Creveling, Adirondac, Concord, Delaware, Diana and Isabella. These were all varieties of *V. labrusca* developed mostly in the 1850s and which produced sweet wines with a "foxy" taste. Leslie's other offerings were European varieties of *V. vinifera*, including several forms of Chasselas, Zinfandel and Muscat, none of which would have thrived in Canada West. Few people must have purchased seedlings as it was not until 1860 that grapes were even shown at the Provincial Exhibition in Hamilton.

Were there experienced wine-makers in Canada? It is possible that a few knowledgeable wine makers had immigrated to Canada but clearly did not ply their craft in their new country. An additional labour question was who would maintain the vines? This was the art of the *vigneron*, and there was no call for that trade in Canada. Articles in the agricultural press offered advice on training and pruning vines for home consumption but producing a much larger crop that could be marketed required more expertise. Field workers would have to be brought in from Europe or local people would have to be trained by experienced *vignerons*.

Finally, where would the capital come from? If one were not independently wealthy, there were two main possibilities: government subsidy (or tax breaks) or individual investors. Even a brief survey of the Legislative Assembly's journals

⁶ *Canadian Agriculturist* (22 January 1858), 24..

⁷ "Descriptive catalogue of fruit trees, ornamental trees and shrubs, roses, dahlias, grape vines, minor fruits, etc. cultivated and for sale at the Toronto Nurseries, King Street East" [CIHM 57945].

during this period reveals a depressingly-long queue of individuals and groups with their hands out. To obtain government funding would require intensive lobbying and influential friends. While investment for large-scale infrastructure projects did come from the United Kingdom, it seems unlikely that a wine-producing venture would interest British investors, which left local investors if government were not forthcoming.

De Courtenay's Proposal: to Create a Wine Industry in Canada

Justin McCarthy De Courtenay (1820-71) has been described as the *comte* De Courtenay, as a Frenchman and as an aristocrat. He was none of these.⁸ By his own statement, he was born in England. In 1859, he claimed to have had twenty years' experience in vine-growing in Italy and France and to have lived in northern Switzerland; as he is not listed in the 1841 English census, he must have already emigrated. Part of the time he spent working in Périgord then in Piedmont. He and his family arrived in Canada, probably in 1858, locating near the village of Bury in the county of Compton, an area of the Eastern Townships then almost entirely inhabited by anglophones and Norwegian immigrants. With them came two Italian servants, suggesting De Courtenay

was a man of some means. In fact, in the 1861 census his neighbours are described as farmers but he is listed as "gentleman." In Italy, he tells us, he had 200 labourers under his direction, which suggests he was a farm or vineyard manager there. Moving into a frame house on a property he dubbed "Val de Courtenay," he had "a grand hill of a southern aspect of nearly 300 acres in extent" where he believed he could grow grapes.

In his letter to Galt of 3 August 1859, De Courtenay announces the "certainty of being able to establish Vineyards on the hilly parts of this district," noting that vines prospered in Crimea and Neuchâtel, Switzerland, where the climate was more rigorous than in Canada East, so long as the vines were pruned low.⁹ He cites the French authorities Foigneux and Moreau on northern grape-growing, and argues that only the Eastern Townships were fit for grape-growing, as Canada West had early springs with frosts and insufficient snow cover. He now proposed to the government that it support his attempt to create a vineyard that could produce commercial amounts of wine. The proposal outlined his plans and goals: if he obtained 50,000 cuttings from Neuchâtel, which would be expensive, he could cultivate at least ten acres, the amount a single man could maintain; within three years, the plot could produce 2,000 bottles of good wine along

⁸ Paul-Louis Martin, *Les fruits du Québec: Histoire et traditions des douceurs de la table* (Sillery: Les Editions du Septentrion, 2002), 144, refers to him as "le comte Justin de Courtenay," a French immigrant. Also, Jean-Marie Dubois and Laurent Deshaies, *Guide des vignobles du Québec: sur la route des vins* (Québec: Presses Université Laval, 1997), 20.

⁹ The correspondence is in Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1860), Appendix 22.

with 1,000 bottles of inferior wine to the acre; in five years' time, wine production would double and also provide some juice for brandy; and that, with such support, he could plant 100 acres ten years in the future. De Courtenay estimated that such a vineyard could produce 300,000 bottles of excellent red, white and sparkling wine, along with 100,000 bottles of inferior wines. He planned to fulfill the first part of the project on his own. If he did manage to produce 20,000 bottles of wine, then government aid would be provided to him, but if the quality were poor, he would expect no support.

Galt was interested and passed the letter to William Hutton (1801-61), Secretary of the Bureau of Agriculture and Statistics, to obtain expert advice. As no wine industry and very limited grape-growing existed in the Province of Canada, Hutton turned to William Hincks (1794-1871), Professor of Natural History at the University of Toronto, for botanical knowledge and to Henry Parker (1822-77), a grape grower in Cooksville in Peel County. Hincks was dubious that *Vitis vinifera* would succeed in the Canadian climate. He knew that in Ohio, experienced German growers had had to turn to the native grape, *Vitis labrusca*, and cautioned that De Courtenay might have to as well; however, the terms of De Courtenay's proposal seemed quite reasonable to Hincks, who thought "if he can succeed in introducing Wine-making as an additional branch of Canadian industry, I should think he would be a

public benefactor."¹⁰ Parker was also enthusiastic, although he, too, believed European vines would not survive the winters even if pruned low. He had managed to obtain a few tons of grapes from his own vineyard and made some champagne and sherry and sold some of it. Only the Clinton grape succeeded as other native varieties and hybrids did not survive the climate. It is clear that Parker was working in a vacuum:

I have tried everything in my power to spread the vine culture, but without sufficient means; what can I do single-handed. I have given away plants, and tried to impress upon numbers the great advantage accruing to themselves and the country from Grape culture, but they will not incur the first necessary expense, and they also have a fear of the want of a market. Let the engine, however, be once set in motion, and there can be no doubt of the country soon being covered with a splendid article of commerce.¹¹

When Hincks concurred with Parker on employing native grapes, De Courtenay replied that two varieties of Burgundy grape grown in Belgium might be grafted onto the successful Clinton stocks.

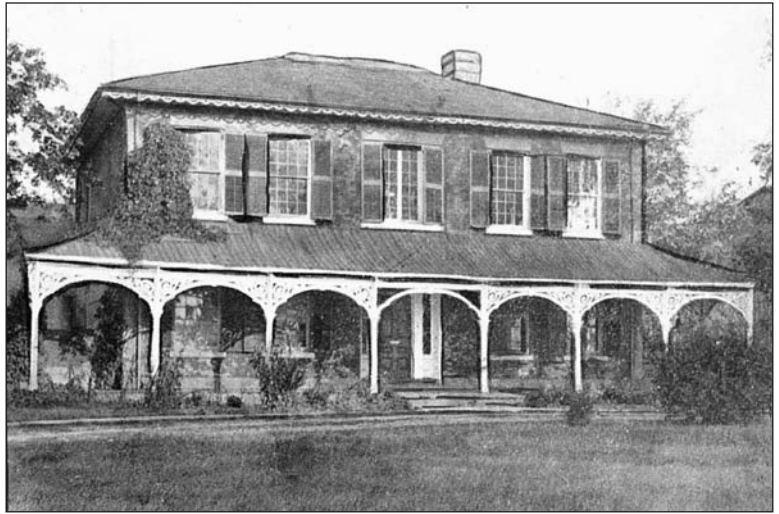
An Embryonic Winery: the Parkers of Cooksville

It must have been a surprise to De Courtenay to discover another would-be wine entrepreneur labouring in Cooksville where the Parker family were the local squires. Rear-Admiral Sir William George Parker, Bart. (1787-1848) retired to Canada from the Royal Navy in 1841

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

Clair House (William Perkins Bull Collection, 93-0042 #2-17). Credit: Region of Peel Archives at the Peel Heritage Complex



and built Clair House on the north side of Dundas Street. He had brought out three younger sons, Henry, Melville (1824-1903) and Albert (1826-51), all later investors in De Courtenay's project. Clair House was a substantial stone, two-storey residence. Although Sir William is said to have planted vines on the property it seems unlikely as he returned to England in 1848.¹² The Parkers occupied Clair House until 1864, when Henry moved to Toronto and Melville relocated on a property north and west of the vineyard.¹³ It was probably Henry alone who experimented with grape-growing; he was certainly growing a considerable crop of grapes by 1859.

How would Henry Parker learn about vine growing and wine making? Having grown up in England, he would have had no experience with either. His operation appears to be the work of a man unwilling to be an "ordinary" farmer but who was a keen to try something new. To tend

his vines, he hired Italian *vignerons*. As he reported to Hincks, the primary grape for wine making was the Clinton. The Clinton grape is a natural hybrid of *V. labrusca* and *V. riparia* discovered in New York State in 1835. According to the Missouri vine-growing Bush family, it "makes a fair, dark red wine, resembling claret, but of somewhat disagreeable taste, which, however, improves with age. . ."¹⁴ It produces a very acidic wine which requires three or four years' ageing. Making wine is not difficult and Parker likely had advice on how to proceed.

Parker was not active in horticultural circles and was not mentioned in the agricultural press until De Courtenay's proposal circulated, nor was he active

¹² In contemporary publications, the house and winery are called Clair House, Clare House and Clarehouse. Later writers refer to Château Clare, but that term seems to have been a trade name for the wines themselves. The property consisted of most of lot 17 and part of lot 16 north of Dundas. Kathleen Hicks *Cooksville: Country to City* (Mississauga: Mississauga Library System, 2005), 46, claims that Sir William built Clair House and wine vaults.

¹³ On the Parkers, see W. Perkins Bull, *From Strachan to Owen: How the Church of England was Planted and Tended in British North America* (Toronto: Perkins Bull Foundation, 1938), 189-90.

¹⁴ Bush and Son and Meissner, *Illustrated Descriptive Catalogue of American Grape Vines* (St. Louis, 1883), 82.



The Winery at Clair House (William Perkins Bull Collection, 93-0042 #2-15). Credit: Region of Peel Archives at the Peel Heritage Complex.

in the new Fruit Growers' Association that formed in 1859. The two quickly developed a friendship; De Courtenay, speaking to the Select Committee on the Cultivation of the Vine in 1864, refers to the "indefatigable exertions of my much esteemed friend" and states: "I cannot, however, refrain from expressing my conviction of the incalculable services rendered to Canada West by the energy and perseverance of Mr. Parker, in bringing to a successful issue so great an enterprise, and which will one day render his name a 'House-hold word' on this continent."¹⁵ Hyperbole aside, De Courtenay had many more years of experience in growing several grape varieties and making wine and the Cooksville operation did not emerge as a viable business until he took over the

management of the vineyard and winery. Parker's cooperation, on the other hand, was extremely timely as his vineyard was large enough for commercial purposes and produced a good crop of grapes. Had De Courtenay attempted to plant vines in the colder Eastern Townships, he would likely have failed.

Selling the Idea

Ever the entrepreneur, De Courtenay was equally interested in bringing French-speaking Swiss immigrants to Canada—they mostly immigrated to New York at the time—who could turn the countryside into pastoral lands for sheep and the slopes for grapes.¹⁶ He suggested that Canada might investigate the introduction of silkworms to create a local silk industry and sparred with Hincks on which trees might replace mulberries. He even suggested operating a large-scale fish-farming operation in the Townships by stocking lakes with commercial species;¹⁷ evidently, De Courtenay had hired many labourers from his area, suggesting a man of means but perhaps also a man with too many visions to tackle at the same time. In the event, the wine project did move forward.

The correspondence on grape-growing was printed in the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly* in 1860 and immediately caught the attention of agricultural writers. It was excerpted in the *Canadian*

¹⁵ Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1864), Appendix 13, A13-2.

¹⁶ De Courtenay's testimony is in *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of United Canada* (1860), Appendix 15, 8.

¹⁷ "Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands," Province of Canada, *Documents de la session* (1860), Appendix 12, 94.

Agriculturist whose editor—probably Hugh Thomson (ca 1822-77), as co-editor George Buckland (1804-85) was overseas at the time—believed the idea of growing grapes for wine appeared promising although also doubted that European grapes would survive in Canada. He thought that certainly, the native grape would do well but “whether a good article of wine can be produced, however, in such quantities, and over such considerable areas of country as to make the product one of commercial importance, has yet got to be shown.”¹⁸ In response, Charles Arnold (1818-83), a farmer, fruit grower and hybridizer in Paris, wrote to say he fully agreed with De Courtenay and others that the Canadian climate was perfectly suitable for vines but disagreed on the varieties to employ.¹⁹ Based upon ten years’ experimentation, Arnold believed a variety that produced good fruit and was not susceptible to mildew had yet to be discovered, which he thought a good argument for more government financial aid to provincial horticultural and agricultural societies.

The discussion also caught the attention of Catherine Parr Trail (1802-99) who, in her 1860 work, *The Canadian Settlers’ Guide*, paid tribute to the advocates of wine production:

We have a native Vine that produces excellent and wholesome wine—and while tens of

thousands of idle and thriftless landowners will stoutly deny the fact, the last Report of the Bureau of Agriculture, proves the complete success which has attended the experiment in the cases of Mr De Courtenay, who resides in the Eastern Townships, and Mr. Henry Parker, who lives at Cooksville near Toronto. The country ought to feel deeply indebted to both these gentlemen.²⁰

Evidently the government did nothing with De Courtenay’s proposal. In the spring of 1861, he rented a villa from Colonel John Sewell near Cap-Rouge and cultivated a small plot of vines planted a decade earlier, producing that autumn both good and mediocre wines. Why he moved to the Québec area is unknown, but it may have been his desire to be in the Capital. He was certainly able to forge useful alliances during this period. His neighbour, author and civil servant James MacPherson LeMoine (1825-1912), tested one of the better wines and enthused: “Le vin est d’une superbe couleur et ressemble, quant au goût et à la couleur, au Bordeaux.”²¹ In December 1862, Joseph-Xavier Perrault (1836-1905), Secretary of the Lower Canada Board of Agriculture, writing on American wine-making efforts in *Revue agricole*, reported that “M. De Courtenay, au Canada, a commencé une série d’études sur la viticulture qui nous promettent les plus beaux résultats.”²² This was immediately reprinted in the *Journal de l’Instruction publique*; together, these

¹⁸ *Canadian Agriculturist, or Journal and Transactions of the Board of Agriculture of Upper Canada* 12 (2 July 1860), 295.

¹⁹ *The Canadian Agriculturist* 12 (August 1860), 400. For Arnold’s obituary, see *Canadian Horticulturist* (May 1883).

²⁰ Catharine Parr Traill, *The Canadian Settlers’ Guide* (London: E. Stanford, 1860), 68-70.

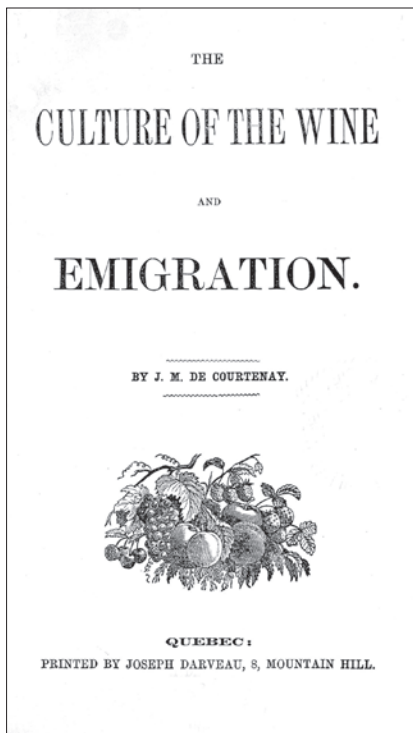
²¹ *Gazette des Campagnes* (2 décembre 1862), 25.

²² *Revue agricole* (décembre 1862), 97.

publications reached the teachers and better farmers of Canada East. Results of these experiments were lauded by the Minister of Agriculture, François Evanturel (1821-91). De Courtenay had planted several grape varieties in St-Augustin near Cap Rouge and from these, according to the minister, he produced several bottles of wine with excellent flavour.²³

By early 1863 De Courtenay had written *The Culture of the Vine and Emigration* and petitioned the Board of Agriculture of Lower Canada for a subvention; the board replied

with a \$200 grant at its meeting of 11 March 1863.²⁴ One wonders whether the members had an inkling of its content before approving funds. The pamphlet is a curious mixture of facts on wine production, drawn mostly from French sources, particularly *le comte de Gasperin*, and sketches of De Courtenay's own theories on making Canada productive as was France in silk, wine and oil, the last being pressed from walnuts. The pamphlet's primary target is Hincks. Claiming that



Cover page for De Courtenay's *The Culture of the Vine and Emigration*. Note the misspelling. Credit: Toronto Public Library

only Galt had shown interest in the matter "which was evidently referred to Professor Hincks, to be Pooh Poohed,"²⁵ De Courtenay's dealings with the government now veered into comic opera territory. He had approached Thomas D'Arcy McGee (1825-68) who had become Minister of Agriculture that year, laying out his scheme. McGee then spoke with Louis-Victor Sicotte (1812-89), the Attorney-General for Canada East and deputy premier, who said he would make \$1,000 available to De Courtenay by Septem-

ber. No money appeared. De Courtenay then provided bottles of his September vintage, made from native vines as he was requested to do. By January 1863, with no response forthcoming, he wrote to Sicotte (although he knew the latter was in England) and approached the Executive Council. There, the Minister of Agriculture professed to know nothing of this wine. De Courtenay then asked the provincial secretary to prod Viscount Monck (1819-94), the Governor General, to

²³ Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1863), No. 4.

²⁴ *Revue agricole* (mars/avril 1863), 1; J.M. De Courtenay, *The Culture of the Vine and Emigration* (Québec: J. Darveau, 1863).

²⁵ De Courtenay, *The Culture of the Vine and Emigration*, 9.

press McGee to respond. Although the wine was “green,” De Courtenay believed it to be similar to Burgundy in colour, quality and flavour. Opposition, however, existed: “It being notorious that Mr. Evan-turel, and Mr. McDougall, did not conceal their opinion of my project. I waited upon Mr. Sicotte upon his return.”²⁶ William McDougall (1822-1905), a former agricultural journalist and drafter of the 1850 agricultural act and now Commissioner of Crown Lands in the Sandfield Macdonald-Sicotte Ministry, claimed that the wine was sour and that wine grapes could not be grown in Canada, as even Catawba and Isabella grapes would not thrive in the warmer climate of Canada West. De Courtenay shot back that the wine was bitter (from tannin), not sour, that he had not been allowed to use European grapes—of which he had “magnificent examples”—and that the native grapes had performed well. At the time the pamphlet was published, Sicotte was evidently still musing on whether to provide assistance. It is clear that De Courtenay esteemed the attorney-general and had nothing but contempt for Hincks and McDougall.

Interest by the Bureau of Agriculture was sufficient to stimulate the Assembly to strike a Select Committee on the Cultivation of the Vine in Canada in June 1864. The committee included, among others, J.-X. Perrault, McGee and De Courtenay’s nemesis McDougall. After taking evidence, the committee

concluded that a Canadian wine industry could and should be developed, with government offering assistance.²⁷ In his response to the committee’s questions, De Courtenay remarked that he had successfully grown both native and “several delicate varieties” of European vines. He had, in the meantime, struck up a friendship with Henry Parker and passed along to the committee Parker’s report of having twenty-five acres planted in Clinton vines, tended by four Italian *vignerons*. Parker’s cellar was nearly full from the 1863 vintage, which he hoped to sell in the autumn; he also intimated that preliminary arrangements for a “Royal Company of Vine-growers” for both halves of the province were underway. Other respondents were uniformly favourable to De Courtenay’s approach. Recently-appointed judge on the Court of Queen’s Bench, Lewis Drummond (1813-82) supported assistance to the industry; he had tasted De Courtenay’s wines made from his St-Augustin experiment, finding them “especially superior to the *vins ordinaires* imported from France.” Another respondent, W.J. Bickell, who had years of experience in the wine trade, was equally positive. He had seen two varieties of French grape, the Chasselas doré and the Champagne grape Meunier, produce abundant fruit when pruned properly by De Courtenay’s assistant. LeMoine, who had an extensive graperie at Spencer Wood, was also impressed by how De Courtenay pruned wild vines

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷ “Report of the Select Committee on the Cultivation of the Vine in Canada,” Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1864), Appendix 13.

and with the wine he had produced. Ralph B. Johnston, Shipping Master at Québec, had observed old vines with little fruit in the fall of 1861; after De Courtenay pruned them, and even after a hard frost the next spring, the vines produced abundant fruit, “grapes—individually—as large as I have seen them in the wine-growing parts of France.” Johnson kept bottles of the 1863 vintage and found them, in the following spring, to be of superior quality. Judge Charles Dewey Day (1806-84), the new chancellor of McGill University, was also a solid supporter. The Commission’s report closes with excerpts from *The Culture of the Vine and Emigration*. Evidence for the committee was then published in the *Revue agricole*. Interestingly, the report came into the hands of Thomas Shaw in England who, in the second edition of his *Wine, the Vine, and the Cellar* stated that “Although convinced that the climate of Canada is totally unsuited for the growth, and the making of good wine,”²⁸ he provided an account of the 1864 proceedings without further comment. The *Toronto Leader* provided its readers with a positive report on the Select Committee’s deliberations.²⁹

With all this activity, where was the Bureau of Agriculture? In the decade before Confederation, many men, few of them truly interested in agriculture,

passed through the ministry, while the bureaucrats focused mostly upon non-agricultural matters.³⁰ The only agricultural expertise lay in the two Boards of Agriculture. At the time of these discussions, the secretary of the Lower Canada board was Perrault, an agronomist trained in England and France, while his Upper Canada counterpart, Hugh C. Thomson, was a newspaper proprietor. Thomson’s predecessor, English-educated George Buckland (1804-85), was then Professor of Agriculture at the University of Toronto. None had experience in grapes or wine and none contributed to the discussion except to make supportive noises. Rhetorically, the discussion never suggested that Canada could be self-sufficient in grapes and wine but rather focused upon what we now call the “value added” potential of the industry and its economic benefits.

From Experiment to Production

With glowing recommendations from friends and some enthusiasm on the part of the Select Committee, De Courtenay might have expected, finally, some succor. There was none. With no parliamentary assistance forthcoming, De Courtenay tells us “in the meantime, myself and my friends have solved the problem, unassisted,”³¹ by forming a

²⁸ Thomas George Shaw, *Wine, the Vine, and the Cellar*. 2nd edition. (London: Longman, Green 1864), 471.

²⁹ Translated into French and run in the *Revue agricole* (septembre 1864), 373.

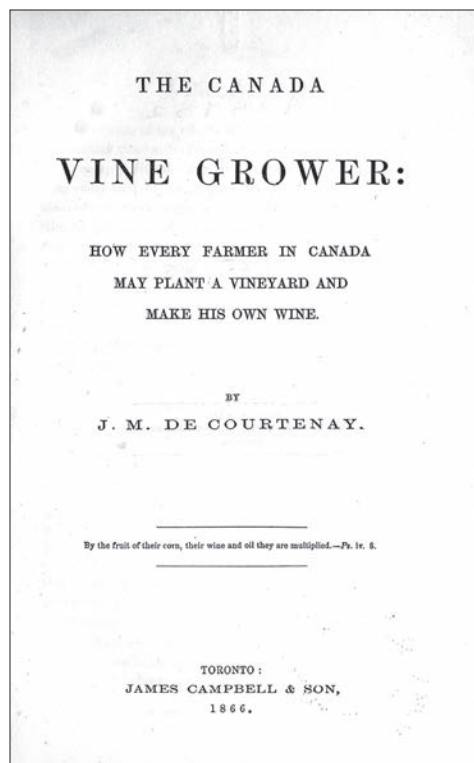
³⁰ On the organization of agriculture, see J.E. Hodgetts, *Pioneer Public Service. An Administrative History of the United Canadas, 1841-1867*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955).

³¹ *The Canada Vine Grower*, 6.

Cover page for De Courtenay's The Canadian Vine Grower. Credit: Toronto Public Library.

company of investors, the Canada Vine Growers' Association (CVGA). This was the "Royal Company" hinted at by Parker, although the idea is very likely to have been De Courtenay's. It appears that the Parkers were willing to sell the Clair House property to the company. Sometime in 1864, whether before or after the select committee meetings we do not know, De Courtenay moved to Cooksville to manage the property and, under his direction, had extended the vineyard;³² he was still in Québec in June for the hearings, which suggests he had arrived in the summer of 1864. To prod the government, De Courtenay wrote to John A. Macdonald (1815-91), Attorney-General for Canada West, inviting him down to Cooksville to look over the vineyard. They had likely first met when De Courtenay lived in the Québec suburbs; their surviving correspondence suggests mutual respect. In this instance, Macdonald promised: "I shall try to take your matter and get you the redress which I think government owes you,"³³ and speak with McGee when he returns.

In his annual departmental report for 1864, McGee reported that he had been negotiating with the "Royal Canadian Vine-growers' Company," though he was certain they were unhappy with delays caused by Confederation discussions. In December 1865, Charles Dewey



Day and Henry Parker arranged for Day's purchase of 160 acres for \$20,000. An indenture was drawn up in February 1866 for an unincorporated company to hold title to the Cooksville property in trust with De Courtenay the trustee, but by the summer of 1866 the Canadian Vine-Growers' Association (CVGA) was formally incorporated (29/30 Vict., cap 121). De Courtenay's partners listed in the act were Charles Dewey Day and Ralph B. Johnston, who had supported him before the Select Committee; Henry Parker's brother-in-law John Hector of Toronto; and William F. Doherty, a

³² "Report of the Minister of Agriculture," Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1865), No 6, 5-6.

³³ Macdonald to De Courtenay, 24 December 1864. Library and Archives Canada [hereinafter cited as LAC], MG26A, vol. 510, 123.

successful farmer and well-off landowner who owned properties near Cooksville. Other shareholders appeared over the next few years.³⁴ The company was to be capitalized at \$100,000, with each share selling for \$100. An important concession provided by the government was freedom from any excise duty on the company's products for ten years. The CVGA was a novel investment scheme as it coupled corporate farming with industrial production. It also allowed investors in Canada East, where the demand for wine was likely greater, to have a stake in a new industry which needed to be located in the more clement part of the province.

Interest in wine was increasing. In its report for 1865, the Upper Canada Board of Agriculture mentioned a highlight of the Provincial Exhibition held in Hamilton the previous autumn:

A notable feature. . . was the large quantity of wine shown in bottles, mostly produced in the neighborhood of Hamilton, and much of it of very good quality. There are now several vineyards of considerable extent in this section, amongst which may be specially mentioned that of the Messrs. Parker of Cooksville, near Toronto, which consists, as I understand, of some 50 acres, and has already gained considerable celebrity, under the able direction of Mr. De Courtenay. It seems highly probable that this new and attractive industry may, at no very distant day, become an important and profitable branch of Canadian agriculture.³⁵

This report suggests that De Courtenay had doubled the extent of vines in his first year. Although some Niagara-area farmers had grown table grapes, a few had become interested in the possibility of growing grapes for wine; their forum was the Fruit Growers' Association. At a meeting of the Association in Grimsby in October 1866, some ten members, including Charles Arnold, discussed the merits of the grape varieties and hybrids they were growing. De Courtenay was present and offered advice on the various grapes' potential for wine. Asked to address the meeting on the activities at Clair House, De Courtenay noted that, by employing the Italian method of training vines on the longest-cultivated part of the vineyard he had produced fifteen tons of grapes per acre. He sketched the nature and possibilities of the new CVGA and stated that a wine resembling claret could be made and sold for fifty cents a gallon, along with pure brandy that could compete in price with the "miserable compounds now in our market." He closed with an invitation for members to visit Clair House and try the year's vintage, adding prophetically, "... if such good success could be had there [Cooksville] under all the difficulties of that climate, what must the results be in the more favored climate of the County of Lincoln."³⁶

During the winter of 1864-1865, De

³⁴ Bellegham mentions early shareholders Melville, Henry and Albert Parker; Hon Francis Day and the Robinet family. Bellegham Scrapbooks, Canadiana Reading Room, Mississauga Central Library.

³⁵ "Report of the Upper Canada Board of Agriculture," Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1866), No. 5, 186.

³⁶ *Canada Farmer* (1 November 1866), 334.

Courtenay tried his hand at *eiswein*, evidently with success.³⁷ It was a rarity then, appearing in Germany only in 1830, with few vintages at all in Europe given its mild winters. De Courtenay knew that it was rare but much prized in Europe. He had produced both red and white ice wine (or *vin congelé* as he termed it) and believed it would fill a gap in the European wine market. In perhaps his most prescient statement, he declared: “I consider, and my friends know, I have always considered the exportation of congealed wines to Europe as the great future of both Upper and Lower Canada.”³⁸

With an international exposition to be mounted in Paris in 1867, the CVGA decided to send samples for exhibit. The wine was made, presumably, from grapes grown in the older section of the vineyard and produced by De Courtenay. Despite being shipped such a long distance, it arrived in sound condition and, much to everyone’s surprise, won a medal. The *Toronto Leader* reported that the French judges had found the Clair House wine to resemble Beaujolais.³⁹ As Joseph-Charles Taché (1820-94), the federal Deputy Minister of Agriculture would tell a parliamentary committee the following year,

Several persons have declared to me, that our

wine was a ‘good ordinary wine,’ and amongst those persons I am proud to quote Mr. Maurial, a high authority on the subject who has written an article on the subject in the *Moniteur vinicole*, of which he is the principal editor, declaring that from all the foreign wines tasted at the Exhibition, the Canadian wine was nearest in general qualities to the French *vins d’ordinaire*, resembling somewhat the Tavel of one year. . .The tasting of our wine in Paris, at the time of the Exhibition, creating in fact, a good deal of astonishment, so far were people there from being prepared to consider Canada as capable of producing such an article, and I had some trouble, at first, in persuading members of the Jury and others to look at our wine at all.⁴⁰

This also instilled pride in Canada’s first federal Minister of Agriculture, Jean-Charles Chapais (1811-85), who suggested that “Mr. de Courtenay. . .may be called the father of vine-culture and wine-making in Canada, if ever it becomes common here.”⁴¹

Now prospective growers had to be persuaded. To that end the CVGA placed advertisements in *Canada Farmer* offering cuttings, which were considered superior to rooted vines, for \$1.00 a hundred from their “celebrated vineyards.” Anyone ordering at least a thousand cuttings would receive a free copy of De Courtenay’s pamphlet *The Canada Vine Grower*.⁴² Other landowners in the

³⁷ “Report of the Minister of Agriculture,” Province of Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1866), No. 5, 5. This was reported to a wider audience in *Revue agricole* (janvier 1867), 90. Ice wine did not become a standard Canadian product until the 1980s.

³⁸ *The Canada Vine Grower*, 16.

³⁹ Aspler, *Vintage Canada*, 8. See, also, *La Gazette des campagnes* 6 (15 août 1867), 158.

⁴⁰ “Report of the Select Committee on the Cultivation of the Vine in Canada,” *Journals of the House of Commons* (1868), Appendix 6, 2.

⁴¹ “Report of the Minister of Agriculture,” Canada, *Sessional Papers* (1867), No. 42, 7.

⁴² *Canada Farmer* 4 (15 April 1867), 126.

Cooksville area tried their hand at vine growing on smaller plots. Miles Cook, who was secretary of the CVGA in 1867, grew six varieties just south of the village. In that year, he participated in the harvest at Clair House, which yielded 2.5 tons of grapes per acre. Following European precedent, De Courtenay was willing to take on apprentices at Clair House and hoped that county councils would be willing to support young men this way. The men would work for three years with no pay after which they would be able to make wine or silk anywhere. This last reference was to his long-held opinion that Canada could develop a silk industry. Parker had planted 500 mulberry trees at Clair House likely on De Courtenay's suggestion. Sometime in the mid-1860s, the CVGA also built a large wine plant and extensive underground wine vaults extending nearly a quarter-mile; the vaults were still extant in 1926.⁴³

Enthusiasm among the members of the Association and at Clair House was seriously dampened to hear that the new Dominion government, in its Act respecting Inland Revenue, had inserted a clause (171) that allowed the government to charge duty on any distillation—in this case brandy—carried on by the CVGA.⁴⁴ The issue was the addition of sugar in the fermentation process, there being too little natural sugar in Ca-

nadian-grown grapes. De Courtenay had made clear, before the CVGA was chartered, that this would be essential. He had even suggested that locally-produced potato starch might be a cheap source of glucose. Matters became ugly. De Courtenay wrote to the Prime Minister late in 1867 with accusations against a cabinet member. Sir John was taken aback:

...you state that a Minister of the Cabinet had lately declared at Montreal, that your establishment was every day liable to seizure for selling brandy, that your Managing Director McLeod was obnoxious to the Government who would throw obstacles in the way of his management, and that without the assistance of the Government, you must fail.

He denied that any cabinet member would say anything like that as "...I am sure that not one of them has any feeling except to encourage your enterprise."⁴⁵ None of them, he claimed, would have any animus towards McLeod, either. He also asked for the source of the story, but we do not have De Courtenay's response.

At this time, a key player in the CVGA was Delos White Beadle (1823-1905), the influential St. Catharines' nurseryman and horticulturist and a founder of the Fruit Growers' Association. He had been experimenting with several varieties of grape since the early 1850s and had visited many of the amateur vine-growers

⁴³ Affidavit of Wilfrid Mactavish, 22 September 1926. LAC, RG95, vol. 1216.

⁴⁴ With Confederation, the oversight of agriculture was split between federal and provincial governments, but the former had no active agricultural programs until the experimental farms were established in the 1880s. Thus, the CVGA's dealings with the federal government took place within the context of taxation.

⁴⁵ Macdonald to De Courtenay, 12 October 1867. LAC, MG26A, vol 514, 144-145.

in the province and neighbouring states. He was a frequent visitor to De Courtenay's operation in Cooksville, which he recognized as being the foremost in the country. He soon became president of the CVGA. In April 1868, he petitioned the House of Commons to repeal the clause that was prejudicial to the association; the House struck a Select Committee on the Cultivation of the Vine in Canada with John O'Connor (1824-87), the MP for Essex, as chair. After reviewing the 1864 committee's report and recommendations, O'Connor's committee called upon Taché for his views. It had been Taché who had prepared the memorandum for the minister in 1864 on whether open-air vines would be viable in Canada, concluding they would although it was "an opinion then yet generally looked upon as rather extraordinary." Taché noted with pride the showing of the Clair House wine at Paris. De Courtenay, in his testimony, was clearly bitter about the new legislation as "our young establishment, which certainly might have compared favorably with *any similar one* of the same age, was prematurely crushed by a clause we discovered in the Inland Revenue Act..." Beadle's testimony was more alarmist; many farmers in the western part of Ontario, especially in the Chatham area, were ready to begin planting vineyards but had second thoughts when they learned of the situation. The Select Committee was sympathetic, with O'Connor soon presenting a bill to deal

with the problem. The House passed a two-year extension to the original term of freedom from excise duty on 19 May, with assent following three days later.

At the time De Courtenay gave his testimony to the committee, he was preparing to move on. He was still in Cooksville as late as August 1867 and then moved to Amherstburg, leaving the maligned Mr. McLeod in charge at Clair House. He evidently wanted to investigate the warmer climate of Essex County. His dealings with O'Connor may have been the stimulus, as the latter was from nearby Windsor. He may also have known about the new vineyards being planted on Pelee Island. In October, De Courtenay wrote to Macdonald to encourage the government to bring in more Italian immigrants. Sir John replied "have yours of 22 Aug that you have left Clair House and now in Amherstburg and have commenced vine growing on your own property there. I wish you every success."⁴⁶ In the meantime, operations in Cooksville must have taken a turn for the worst. By November 1868, Macdonald sympathetically wrote, "I am truly sorry to hear of the bad prospects of the Vine Growers Association, but I hope that it will, ere long, recover from its present state of depression."⁴⁷ One solution was to sell the Cooksville vineyard. In November 1868, the property and corporate name were purchased by Windsor lawyer Solomon White (1836-1911), born near Amherstburg the son of a Wyandot chief

⁴⁶ Macdonald to De Courtenay, 12 October 1867. LAC, MG26A, vol 514, 129.

⁴⁷ Macdonald to De Courtenay, 6 November 1868. LAC, MG26A, vol 515/1, 105.

and French-Canadian woman.⁴⁸ Surely it was no coincidence that White was John O'Connor's law partner. The Select Committee's hearings may have piqued White's interest, as he certainly had no prior experience as either a farmer or a wine maker. De Courtenay, who must have met him after his own move to Amherstburg, was back in Cooksville during the winter months of 1868-1869, perhaps to show White the ropes.

One hopes that De Courtenay warned White about troubles with bureaucrats: by March 1869, the Customs Department was creating trouble over the CVGA's importation of raw materials. The Minister, Samuel Tilley (1818-96), insisted that the company charter allowed freedom from duty only for domestic purchases, not for imports, which were dutiable. De Courtenay strongly disagreed and privately wrote to Macdonald for assistance and to the Governor General to exempt company purchases of "fresh and dry grapes and other saccharine matter, Barbadoes and Jamaica spirit, and bottles and corks." In his reply to Tilley, De Courtenay recounted how his theories were scorned and he was considered an imposter, but "I have proved by practical operation that no finer vineyard exists in Europe than the one I have created at Clair House, and have proved by

receiving from the Paris Exhibition the *only* medal accorded to American wines, that my theories were correct. . ."⁴⁹

After his return to Amherstburg, De Courtenay now hatched a new scheme; the details are not known, but it was likely the creation of a winery. Once again he turned to government for assistance, going directly to the Prime Minister. Macdonald temporized: "You say that if the Government wish for the success of your new enterprise, they must do as the United States have done and support it in its infancy. Pray tell me in what shape you expect the support to come."⁵⁰ De Courtenay must have followed up with a specific request, which Sir John said he would give the "greatest consideration." Evidently nothing came of this request. By this time De Courtenay had been fighting to develop a wine industry in Canada for a decade, but nothing had come easily and prospects must not have seemed bright to him. Sometime in the summer of 1869, he decided to end his quest and informed the Prime Minister, who replied: "I have yours of the 14th and regret to learn from it that you are going to desert Canada. I am not at all surprised at your having come to that conclusion as your exertions have met but scant acknowledgment."⁵¹ The De Courtenays moved back to England,

⁴⁸ Peter E. Paul Dembski, "Solomon White," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 1053-54; also, his entry in *The Canadian Parliamentary Companion and Annual Register* (Ottawa: The Citizen, 1879), 272; and George Maclean Rose, ed., *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: Rose Publishing, 1886), 625.

⁴⁹ Tilley to De Courtenay, 23 March 1869; De Courtenay to Macdonald, 26 March 1869; De Courtenay to Tilley, 25 March 1869. LAC, RG13-A-2 1869/03.

⁵⁰ Macdonald to De Courtenay, 11 May 1869. LAC, MG26A, vol 515, 842.

⁵¹ Macdonald to De Courtenay, 17 August 1869. LAC, MG26A, vol 516, 121.

settled in the hamlet of Ferndown near Hampreston, Dorset, where they leased a seven-acre plot. Justin McCarthy De Courtenay died early in 1871, just fifty-one years of age.



Solomon White (William Perkins Bull Collection, 93-0042 #2-13) Credit: Region of Peel Archives at the Peel Heritage Complex.

Justin De Courtenay's Legacy

From the early 1860s, De Courtenay had demonstrated that wine could be made from local grapes and had established a sizeable vineyard and winery. The test of his ten-year campaign would be whether the industry would survive after he left Canada. Solomon White op-

erated Clair House until 1876, when he returned to a farm near Windsor where he continued to grow grapes. He appears to have maintained the pace of activity there. In a discussion of vineyards in Ontario, an 1870 report in *The Canada Farmer* notes, "there is also a vineyard in Cooksville, probably the largest vineyard in the Province, planted mainly with the Clinton, in which the fruit attains a high degree of perfection."⁵² Three years later, a committee of the Fruit Growers' Association claimed: "At Cooksville, just outside the limits assigned to your Committee, one of the largest, if not *the largest* vineyard in Canada is established, being about forty acres in extent. It is stocked with a large number of varieties, the Clinton being the leading kind in point of quantity."⁵³ This suggests that White may have scaled back production somewhat. By 1872, the CVGA wished to move its manufacturing operations to Toronto. This triggered the interest of staff at Inland Revenue who requested advice from the Justice Department whether the CVGA's operations were even legal, given the limitations of its charter. White must have been alarmed and soon Judge Day, one of the original partners, wrote to support the CVGA, reminding the department that the company had almost been ruined by government action in 1867 and now White was concerned that Inland Revenue would try again.⁵⁴

⁵² *Canada Farmer* 2 (15 December 1870), 462.

⁵³ "Report of the Fruit Growers' Association," Province of Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1872-3), No. 1, 360.

⁵⁴ C.D. Day to unknown respondent, 12 March 1873. LAC, RG13-A-2, 1873, file 364.

On a brighter note, as part of Canada's participation in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, Clair House sent six specimens of "Canadian wine," while four other companies sent one bottle each of their wines.⁵⁵ One of the CVGA wines took a silver medal. How much wine and brandy Clair House produced is unclear. Responding to questions in the House in 1877 about the duty relief for the winery, Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919) replied that an Order-in-Council had been passed in 1873 to allow the company to produce 80,000 barrels of spirits from then until 1878, so long as three gallons of wine were made for every gallon of brandy. One local historian claims that the vineyard produced 50,000 gallons of wine annually from 30 acres of vines, which would have allowed for the production of an additional 16,000 gallons of brandy.⁵⁶ This is confirmed by a contemporary account by W.H. Read, a grape-grower in Port Dal-

housie, who wrote: "It has been reported that the young vineyards at Cooksville, Canada, will turn off, for 1865, 50,000 gallons of native wine, and this wine has all been purchased by the Lower Canadians. This augurs well for the future, and means nothing but real success."⁵⁷ The Montréal and Québec shareholders must have contracted to take most of the production of De Courtenay's expanded crop, although it was for sale in Toronto by 1869.⁵⁸

With a new owner at Clair House, the original group of investors moved on. Henry Parker, for a short time Sir Henry, sued the CVGA in 1875 and was dead in 1877.⁵⁹ White appears to have taken on other investors or possibly partners. In an 1873-1874 Peel County directory, White is listed as proprietor, but also noted as connected with the vineyard were Thomas Cramp, Daniel, George and John Torrance, along with M.G. Glassbrook.⁶⁰ It is not likely these men lived in Cooks-

⁵⁵ *Catalogue of the Canadian Exhibitors at the International Exhibition Philadelphia* (Montreal: Le National, 1876).

⁵⁶ *Debates of the House of Commons* (1878), 1206-7. Laurier must have mistaken gallons for barrels as a typical barrel would hold 59-60 gallons, meaning an allowed annual brandy production of nearly a million gallons! See Margaret Gildner, "History of the Village of Cooksville," cutting in the Canadiana Reading Room, Mississauga Central Library. She also writes that Chateau Clair was named after the "palatial residence of a French nobleman who came to the area."

⁵⁷ *Canada Farmer* (March 1866), 77. Another contemporary confirmation: "A large vintage was established a short distance from the village in the year 1863, called the Canada Vine Growers Association, J.M. DeCourtney [sic], Managing partner. The grounds comprises about 40 acres, each year's vintage produces from 30 to 40,000 gallons of wine, and of the choicest quality." *Mitchell & Co.'s General Directory for the City of Toronto and Gazetteer of the Counties of York and Peel for 1866*, 438.

⁵⁸ The wine and spirit merchants Barnard, Spey and Co., who had just opened at 135 Yonge Street, offered pure imported sherry, port, tenerife, burgundy and Canadian Vine Growers' Association wines.

⁵⁹ Archives of Ontario, RG22-409, Parker vs CVGA 1875. Nothing had been paid on the principal of the mortgage in a decade and Parker claimed that the company had fallen behind in interest payments, which was denied by George Torrance.

⁶⁰ John Lynch, *Directory of the County of Peel for 1873-74* (Brampton: Brampton Progress Chromatic Printing House, 1874). Copies of land transactions in the Region of Peel Archives show that Thomas

ville. Cramp (1826-85) was a partner in the Montréal firm David Torrance and Company, which in 1870 had created a Toronto branch, Cramp, Torrances and Company. The firm, on Front Street, was a large importer of tea, coffee and sugar. From 1873, George Torrance managed the firm.⁶¹ If Cramp and the Torrances were shareholders in the CVGA by 1873, it suggests that they had just moved into the wine business. In 1876, White decided to return to Essex County, and the CVGA was reorganized with Cramp, Torrances and Company becoming the proprietors of Clair House, with George as the winery manager.⁶² This move, a wholesaler owning a vineyard and winery, was surely one of the earliest Canadian examples of vertical integration in the wholesale grocery business. In an interesting marketing approach, the company's representative, James White, visited Toronto physicians with samples of wines in hopes of collecting letters of commendation. De Courtenay had touted wine as a healthy alternative to strong drink, and physicians of the time saw wine as a tonic. James White was also preparing to make a cross-country tour "and hopes to secure the approval of the profession and a large

patronage from the general public."⁶³

At the time the vineyard changed hands, the *Sanitary Journal* in Toronto noted that the best light wines in the world came from the Rhine and its tributaries, where the climate was similar to that of central Ontario. Clair House wines had been tested chemically by Henry Holmes Croft (1820-83), professor of chemistry at the University of Toronto and by Dr William Ellis (1845-1920), chemist at the School of Practical Science; they were found to be pure. Better yet, "while there is no question as to their goodness, there being no duty on native wines, they can now be supplied at less cost than the imported article."⁶⁴ The *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* quoted Prof Croft as saying "The wines are, in my opinion, most excellent, equal to many of the best wines of France," while the finer brandies from Clair House were equal to the best French brandies. According to the editors, given such a solid recommendation, "For patients requiring mildly stimulating wines, these appear to be well adapted."⁶⁵ Given the strong temperance movement in Ontario at the time, this was a good boost for a local wine industry. One drawback to the advancement of

Cramp and Company were first involved as shareholders with the CVGA in 1873, as was Glazebrook.

⁶¹ Frederick W. Armstrong, "Thomas Cramp," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol.11 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 211-12; see, also, J. Timperlake, *Illustrated Toronto: Past and Present* (Toronto: Peter Gross, 1877), 321.

⁶² There is some inconsistency in accounts. Rose says White lived in Cooksville until 1878 but sold the business in the latter part of 1876; it appears that Cramp, Torrances already had a substantial share in the business before that. As he was nominated to stand for the Legislature for Peel in 1878, suggesting he was still residing in Cooksville.

⁶³ *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* 3 (October 1878), 348.

⁶⁴ *The Sanitary Journal* 3 (October 1878), 318.

⁶⁵ *Canadian Journal of Medical Science* 3 (October 1878), 348.

wine consumption had been removed: “the high price of wines has usually heretofore operated against their use in this country, but now Canadian wines are manufactured in abundance, and owing to there being no duty, they can be sold at about the price of ordinary whiskey.”⁶⁶ By this time, the CVGA had some seventy acres in production. The wines offered by Clair House included Sauternes, Savigny, Vin de Porto and Madeira, made from non-European grapes, which shows that Canadian taste for sweet and fortified wines, still evident in the 1960s, was already well rooted before 1880.

The CVGA had shown that a viable industry could be built, and the challenge was taken up in other, more favourable areas. Vineyards were planted on Pelee Island by Kentucky investors in 1866, with wine being produced from 1868. Their “Vin Villa” brand attained some popularity in Ontario. With a warmer climate, Pelee Island growers could introduce Isabella and Catawba grapes, then common in American vineyards.⁶⁷ Grape and wine production in Essex



Advertisement for Clair House wines in the Streetsville Review, 31 January 1890.

County continued to grow, but after the turn of the century, tobacco production supplanted much of wine industry. In nearby Kent County, by 1869 some 300 acres were planted in vines, mostly Clinton and Concord; members of the Fruit Growers' Association in the area reported that trials with European vines showed that they were highly susceptible to mildew—which the native vines were not—which weakened them sufficiently so that they could not survive the winter.⁶⁸

Activity in viticulture was sufficiently advanced as early as 1871 to prompt John Carling (1828-1911), Ontario's first Commissioner of Agriculture, to enthuse:

The extension of grape culture in the open air has been really marvelous during the past few years, and from the diffusion of sound, special information on this subject, this delicious fruit is now being brought, in suitable seasons, to a degree of perfection in parts of the country formerly regarded as wholly unsuitable to its cultivation. Indeed in several parts of the peninsula of this Province, so extensively and successfully has the culture of the vine been carried on, that wine of good quality is already being made on a scale

⁶⁶ *The Sanitary Journal* 4 (September-October 1879), 58.

⁶⁷ “The wines of the ‘Vin Villa’ vineyard there are very highly spoken of, and were the only Canadian wines awarded a prize medal at the Paris Exposition last year. The Prince of Wales, who ought to be a good judge, tasted them, and expressed himself as highly pleased with their flavor and quality.” *Ibid.* This vineyard is often claimed to have been Canada's first commercial winery, but it did not produce its first wine until 1868, several years after Clair House was in operation and with a greater area under vines.

⁶⁸ “Report of the Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario,” Province of Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1869), 266.

to give this branch of industry an increasing degree of public importance.⁶⁹

Still, persuading the public to adopt their own country's wines was an uphill battle. As *The Canada Farmer* noted, Clair House wines and brandy from late 1860s vintages had been tested by Croft, who found them to be pure and pleasant. But

With such wines and brandy, made in our own Province, from our own grapes, pure and unadulterated. . . he must be strangely wedded to the mixtures of spirits, dye stuffs and poisons, that pass under the name of imported wines and brandies, who will continue to use them. Yet, strange as it may seem, there are many whose tastes have become so vitiated by the use of these deleterious mixtures, that a pure and wholesome wine is no longer palatable, and they turn again to the cup of poison as the washed sow goes back to her wallowing in the mire.⁷⁰

In Niagara, the Fruit Growers' Association continued to champion grape production. Information was widely available through the *Canada Farmer*, of which Beadle was the horticultural editor. Hybridization experiments continued in the hands of Arnold, Beadle,

John Leslie and, in western Ontario, by London entomologist William Saunders (1836-1914). After De Courtenay's death, no new edition of his pamphlet *The Canada Vine Grower* appeared, but Beadle published, in 1872, his *Canadian Fruit, Flower, and Kitchen Gardener*, the first comprehensive Canadian horticultural manual.⁷¹ It contained both practical information on vine growing and the wide range of varieties available. Grape cultivation and wine-making had become sufficiently important by 1880 that the Ontario Agricultural Commission devoted a chapter to them in its published report. Progress had been slow but interest was rising; at the time of the Commission's study, only about 400 acres of grapes were planted, but this multiplied six-fold by 1890 and doubled again by 1901, with perhaps one-third of the production going to wineries.⁷² By the 1880s, Concord and Rogers hybrids had replaced the Clinton for red wines.

Ten years after De Courtenay went to Cooksville, T.G. Bright and Francis Shirriff formed the Niagara Falls Wine Compa-

⁶⁹ "Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Public Works," Province of Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1870-71), No. 5, viii.

⁷⁰ *Canada Farmer* (July 1869), 270. As almost any modern wine drinker would prefer a European wine over any wine made from North American native grapes, it seems surprising how many of De Courtenay's contemporaries praised Canadian wines. This may reflect the poor quality of European wines then being exported, or damage to the wines through shipment and storage.

⁷¹ The limited agricultural machinery of the Ontario government, with George Buckland as lead bureaucrat, funnelled legislative grants to agricultural societies and specialist groups such as the Fruit Growers Association. That association responded with voluminous and detailed reports published in the *Sessional Papers*. These reports provided up-to-date information on grape growing. See Thomas W. Irwin, "Government Funding of Agricultural Associations in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario." PhD Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1997.

⁷² See F.M. Clement, *The Grape in Ontario. Ontario Department of Agriculture, Fruit Branch, Bulletin 237* (1916) and T.B. Revett, *The Grape Growing Industry in the Niagara Peninsula. Ontario Department of Agriculture Bulletin 202* (1912) for details on the early grape producers.

ny, at which time the centre of vine culture in Ontario began to shift to the Niagara peninsula. As for Clair House, the CVGA continued operating under different owners into the twentieth century. Curiously, De Courtenay's unshaken belief that *Vitis vinifera* grapes could thrive in Canada was

assumed by everyone in the industry to be impossible. As a result, Ontario wineries continued to produce wines only from *V. labrusca* or hybrid grapes until the 1970s, when the modernized industry began to take root and Justin De Courtenay was finally vindicated.
