

“He Sowed; Others Reaped”: Ephraim Wales Bull and the Origins of the ‘Concord’ Grape

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While Emerson and his colleagues were designing a philosophy for the unique needs of an expanding nation, one of their townsmen was quietly developing a grape to match the demands of its rigorous physical environment

The Origins and Spread of “The Vine”

In their peregrinations over the ages, the grape and mankind have crossed paths, have even trod the same path, many times. East and West, for millennia, they have followed similar routes of history, myth, and romance—first in the Northern Hemisphere, in Asia, in Europe, in North America, and then, within the last few centuries, in the Southern Hemisphere as well. Companion to mankind from dimmest antiquity, the grape has been one of mankind’s most important, most esteemed fruits.

In the West, the story of the grape has been largely the story of *Vitis vinifera* Linnæus—“the vine”—from which all cultivated varieties of grapes were derived before Europeans came to North America. Cultivation of the vine—called viticulture—is a very ancient art: from earliest times and in every country, wherever it would thrive, the vine has been cultivated with care, especially here in the West. What wheat is to other cereals the vine is to other fruits—the most important in Western eyes, as rice is in Eastern eyes. Asia Minor, somewhere between and south of the Black and Caspian seas, apparently is its home. From Asia Minor, its culture spread both west and east.

In early history viticulture was carried out largely to supply grapes for winemaking. Long before the beginning of the Christian

era, grapes and wine were of considerable importance to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean peoples. Thousands of years ago the Egyptians were well acquainted with the use and properties of wine, which their traditions say were revealed to them by Osiris. Their chief vineyards were planted on the banks of the Nile. Joseph’s dream, described in Genesis, gives evidence that the vine was cultivated in Egypt at least eighteen hundred years before Christ. Grape seeds have been found with mummies in Egyptian tombs that are at least three thousand years old, and details of grape growing appear in mosaics of the Fourth Dynasty of Egypt (2440 B.C.) and later.

Viticulture was practiced very early in Palestine (“And Noah began to be a husbandman, and planted a vineyard.”—Genesis 9:20). By 600 B.C., the Phoenicians probably had carried varieties of wine grapes to Greece, which were carried thence to Rome and on to southern France. Hundreds of varieties now are cultivated in the vineyards of the wine-growing country there. Ancient records show that the Chinese had vineyards of native grapes at least one thousand years before Christ. During the second century B.C., *Vitis vinifera* was introduced into China from western Asia, by way of Persia and India.

Viticulture flourished in Greece during Homer’s time. It was Dionysus, god of revelry and protector of the vine, who gave them the

vine, they say, and taught them viticulture. Viticulture must have been introduced very early into Italy also, by the Greeks. The Roman writers Virgil, Cato, the Plinys, Varro, and Columella describe numerous varieties of the vine, list many types of wine, and give directions for training and pruning vines and for making wine.

For a time the Romans seemed to prefer Grecian wines to their own; not until about the first century of the Christian era did Italian wines begin to find favor in their own land. In Virgil's time the varieties in cultivation seem to have been exceedingly numerous; and the varied methods of training and culture now in use in Italy are in many cases identical to those that Columella and other Roman writers described.

Because viticulture was so important in Roman life, it is often referred to in Roman poetry, such as Virgil's *Georgics*. Bacchus, god of the vine, whom the Romans identified with Dionysus, was enormously popular at Pompeii, which was destroyed in A.D. 79 by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Archæologists have found the sites of many vineyards at Pompeii, some of them surprisingly large. They have found also numerous wall paintings of the vine, countless wine shops, and innumerable amphoras. All of this archæological evidence attests to the importance of the grape as a staple of daily life in Pompeii and verifies the information on viticulture given in the writings of Pliny the Elder, Cato, Varro, and Columella.

During Roman times grape culture extended inland from the coast, moving up the Rhone River valley of France and as far north as the Rhine and Moselle valleys. By the second century A.D. the Romans had taken the vine to Germany.

Well before the second century, raisin and table grapes had spread around the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea to the countries of North Africa. Because the customs and religions of North Africa differed from those of the northern coast of the Mediterranean, the raisin and table grapes on the one hand,

and the wine varieties, on the other, spread along different routes.

Centuries later, when Europeans colonized lands around the globe, the grape was always among the plants they took along. In the fifteenth century viticulture became established in Madeira and the Canary Islands. Later it spread to South Africa, Australia, and South America. The first wine grapes were brought to California from Mexico late in the eighteenth century. During the first half of the next century grape growing and wine-making became established in California and expanded rapidly between 1860 and 1900.

Grapes and Their Uses

Most grapes (*Vitis* spp.) are coarse, woody vines that cling to their supports by means of tendrils. Some species native to arid regions are almost-erect shrubs rather than vines. Grapes are members of the Vitaceæ, or Vitidaceæ (the Grape, or Vine, Family). The genus name *Vitis*, which is the classical Latin name for the grape, was conferred by Carolus Linnæus. Over the years *Vitis* has been variously defined to include or exclude the genera *Cissus* and *Ampelopsis*, from which it is distinguished on the basis of small differences in floral structure. (*Cissus* was the Greek name for the ivy, and *Ampelopsis*, the name created by Michaux, comes from the Greek *ampelos*, the vine—*i.e.*, the grape—and *opsis*, appearance.) *Vitis* is widespread in the Northern Hemisphere, especially in the temperate regions. Defined strictly, it includes around sixty species; when *Ampelopsis* and *Cissus* are included, it consists of some two hundred fifty species.

As noted, grapes may be cultivated for any of a number of purposes: for making wine, for example; for eating out of hand as "table grapes"; for drying as currants and raisins; for preserving as jams, jellies, and preserves or for nonalcoholic beverages; and, latterly—owing to the elegance and rich color of the leaves of some grapes or to the shade they afford—as ornamentals, perhaps one of their least known uses.

Several species recommend themselves as ornamentals:

Vitis coignetia, known as the gloryvine, is a handsome, fast-growing, climbing vine. Its very large, heavy leaves reach ten inches in diameter and turn red in the fall. Probably the fastest growing of the grapes, gloryvine is ideal as a screen, its shoots increasing their length by as much as fifty feet in a single season, and a single plant of *Vitis coignetia* can cover a thousand square feet of trellis in a few years. It produces inconspicuous and inedible fruits. Hardy to Zone 5, *Vitis coignetia* was introduced into the United States from Japan by the Arnold Arboretum in 1875.

Vitis amurensis, the Amur grape, is a vigorous vine native to the Amur River region of eastern Asia. Hardy to Zone 4, it is grown as an ornamental. Producing black fruit, *Vitis amurensis* comes into its own in the fall, when its coarse foliage turns crimson to purplish. Introduced to horticulture around 1854, this species is hardier than *Vitis coignetia*.

Vitis californica, the California grape, is hardy to Zone 7. It is native to the West Coast, from Oregon to California and like *Vitis amurensis* is effective in the fall, its coarse leaves turning red at that season. Although rather dry, its glaucous-white fruits are, nonetheless, pleasant-tasting.

Vitis riparia, the riverbank grape, is a very hardy, high-climbing vine that is native to a large area of the United States. (It is hardy to Zone 2.) *Vitis riparia* produces purple-black fruit that are covered with a dense bloom, and it bears leaves with lustrous, bright-green undersides. Its staminate flowers are fragrant, but they are too small to be effective ornamentally.

Grapes of the New World

North America has been called a natural vineyard: the first record of the continent is also a record of its grapes, which grow wild in the greatest profusion in the wooded parts of the continent, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. When the early explorers visited North America, wild grapevines were so prominent that the region was repeatedly called "Vineland." Leif Ericson, for example, reached our northeastern shores in about the year 1000. "Farther south and westerly they went," says Justin Winsor's narrative, "and going up a river came to an expanse of water, where on the shores they built huts to lodge in for the winter, and sent out exploring parties.

In one of these . . . a native of that part of Europe where grapes grew . . . found vines hung with their fruit, which induced Leif to call the country Vineland." The English colonists found the coast of what is now New England to be profuse in grapes. In 1621, Edward Winslow wrote that in New England "are grapes, white and red, and very sweet and strong also."

Governor's Island, in Boston Harbor, was granted to Governor John Winthrop in 1632 on condition that he plant a vineyard or orchard on it. The island early became known as "The Governour's Garden." In the Middle Atlantic region, the native grapes also attracted the attention of colonists and travelers. In Virginia in 1607-09, for example, Captain John Smith saw "[o]f vines, great abundance in many parts, that climbe the toppes of the highest trees in some places, but these beare but few grapes. But by the rivers and Savage habitations where they are not overshadowed from the sunne, they are covered with fruit, though never pruned nor manured." The Spanish colonists of Florida and the French *voyageurs* were attracted by the abundance of grapes. Even as far north as Michigan the *voyageurs* found the banks of streams festooned with grapevines.

John Adlum's vineyard near Georgetown in the District of Columbia, which was planted in 1820, first successfully produced grapes on the Atlantic coast. His introduction of the 'Catawba' into general culture would eventually yield valuable new cultivars. In 1860, nine-tenths of the 5,600 acres of vineyard established east of the Rocky Mountains were 'Catawba' grapes.

The Mission Fathers in California were the first to grow successfully a variety ('Mission') of *Vitis vinifera* in what is now the United States; they brought it to San Diego in 1769. 'Mission' remained the leading variety grown until 1860, when European varieties were introduced. Between 1860 and 1870 in California there was a rapid increase in the acreage of varieties derived from native American grapes. It was during this time that the culti-

var 'Concord' became the leading commercially grown grape of American origin.

The vine of Europe and of history, *Vitis vinifera* has always led a precarious existence whenever it was introduced into the eastern United States. It has been supplanted there by derivatives of the native species—*Vitis labrusca* (the northern fox grape), *Vitis æstivalis* (the summer grape), and *Vitis rotundifolia* (the southern fox grape)—and by their hybrids with *Vitis vinifera*. Being essentially table fruits, the American grapes are quite different from their Old World counterpart, which, as has been said, is a wine fruit. Thus, European writings historically have dealt with "the vine," American writings with "grapes." But early American writings also dealt with the vine and with wine; it was not until the middle of the last century that the native grape began to be appreciated and understood as a table grape.

Each species, native or introduced, has many varieties, is best adapted to specific regions of the country, and is managed according to its own special requirements. The "vinifera grapes," or "European grapes," as they are sometimes called, are grown in California and other areas with mild climates and, as said, descend from *Vitis vinifera*. They are cultivated in vast quantities in all major grape-growing regions of the world except eastern North America. Some of the American varieties have been introduced into France and other countries that became infested with phylloxera in the latter half of the nineteenth century, to serve as stocks for the better kinds of European vines, because their roots suffer less injury from attacks of this insect than do European species.

Vitis labrusca produces purple-black fruit and has leaves that are dark green above. It is a rampant grower, ranging widely throughout the eastern United States, from New England to Georgia, Tennessee, and southern Indiana, and is hardy to Zone 5. *Vitis labrusca* is the parent of most of the American grapes now in cultivation and is the mainstay of grape-growing east of the Rocky Mountains, with

the most extensive plantings near the southern shores of the Great Lakes.

'Concord' may be the most famous American cultivar; it is certainly the most widely grown. Because of its wide adaptability it is produced in almost every grape-growing state of the Union. Although often considered as pure *Vitis labrusca*, it more likely is a hybrid of that species with another species. In fact, most of the older American grapes are thought to involve more than one species. Therefore, "*Vitis labruscana* L. H. Bailey," a name used in some horticultural literature, has been applied to American grape cultivars of *Vitis labrusca* parentage.

'Concord': A Hardy Grape for American Vineyards

The story of 'Concord' is one of the more interesting chapters in the history of North American viticulture. While not the first or only important cultivar developed in America, 'Concord' may well be the most noteworthy. It and Ephraim Wales Bull, its originator, are the protagonists of the account that follows. The past has been a long prologue to their story.

Ephraim Wales Bull came to serious grape-growing and to the town of Concord, Massachusetts—after which his cultivar was named—in a roundabout way. He was born in Boston on March 4, 1806, the day on which Thomas Jefferson was inaugurated for his second term as president. The farmhouse in which he was born stood in the area of Washington Street that would later become known as "Newspaper Row," around the corner and a mere five hundred feet from the house on Milk Street where Benjamin Franklin was born almost precisely a century before. Ephraim was the eldest son of Epaphras Bull, a silversmith who had left the hamlet of Bull's Pastures (now Bullsville), New York, for Boston. His family was descended from Captain Thomas Bull, who had come to America in 1635 on the ship *Hopewell*.

Boston was, in those days, a large, thriving town, and Washington Street, now one of the

principal and most congested thoroughfares in the "Hub," was a village highway. Cows grazed on Boston Common. Behind the Bulls' house was a large garden where young Ephraim indulged a love of horticulture, experimenting in grape growing, among other things.

A studious child, Ephraim received the Franklin medal at school in 1817, when he was only eleven years old. In 1821 he was apprenticed to Louis Lauriat in the trade of gold-beating—the beating of gold into leaf, then much in demand by bookbinders and gilders. At about this time his family moved to nearby Dorchester, Massachusetts. While pursuing his trade as goldbeater, young Bull devoted all his spare time to horticultural pursuits, particularly to small-scale grape growing, in his home garden. (Bull raised the varieties 'Isabella', 'Catawba', and 'Sweetwater'.) This was the period during which 'Isabella' was first grown in Boston.

In 1826 Bull acquired a shop of his own, and on September 10 of that year he married Mary Ellen Walker, a relative of President James Walker of Harvard College. After their marriage the Bulls moved back to Boston, taking a small house on Fayette Street, in the South End. Bull was by now a first-class gold-beater, working long hours in a hot, dusty shop on Cornhill (near modern Government Center). He continued to indulge his interest in horticulture during his off hours, in the small garden behind his house.

Eventually, Bull developed lung trouble, and his doctor advised him to live in fresh air and away from Boston's chill east winds. In August 1836, therefore, he quit Boston, buying seventeen acres of land in Concord, a town located some twenty miles northwest of Boston. There the Bulls lived in a little white house on the road to Lexington. Though he continued his trade as goldbeater in a tiny shop behind his home, Bull loved farming more. Whenever the gold business slumped he would have time to putter in his garden. His passion by now was the grape, and

the 'Isabella', 'Catawba', and 'Sweetwater' grapes he had cultivated in Boston had come with him to Concord. He was unable to ripen the grapes in open culture, however, even in favorable seasons. This was due, he said, to "the late spring and early autumn frosts, which we are liable to in this deep valley of Concord."

Bull had moved to an interesting town during an interesting period of American history. Concord was hardly a typical rural village. There, where "the shot heard 'round the world" was fired in 1775, the American Revolutionary War had begun. Decades later a social movement, American Transcendentalism, took root and flourished in Concord around the writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. The land on which Ephraim Bull had settled made him next-door neighbor to the Bronson Alcotts and later to the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, with whom he was soon on friendly terms. During the years of struggle before he discovered the famous grape, Bull was assisted and encouraged by these and other neighbors and townsmen, many of whom were members of the Emerson-Thoreau-Alcott Transcendentalist group. In strategic ways, many of which will never be known in full detail, Bull worked alongside his Transcendentalist friends when antislavery agitation reached its peak in Concord just before the Civil War.

Hawthorne's son, Julian, recalled Bull in his book, *Hawthorne and His Circle*. "Another neighbor of ours," he wrote,

hardly less known to fame [than the Transcendentalists], though in a widely different line of usefulness, makes a very distinct picture in my mind; this was Ephraim Wales Bull, the inventor of the Concord Grape. He was as eccentric as his name; but he was a genuine and substantial man, and my father took a great liking to him, which was reciprocated. He was short and powerful, with long arms, and a big head covered with bushy hair and a jungle beard, from which looked out a pair of eyes singularly brilliant and penetrating. He had brains to think with, as well as strong and skilful hands to work with. . . . He often came over

and sat with my father in the summer house on the hill, and there talked about politics, sociology (though under some other name, probably), morals, and human nature, with an occasional lecture on grape culture.

In 1841 Bull bought the Eben Dow farm, which adjoined his property, setting out many trees, shrubs, and vines. The farm's soil was sandy, and a south-facing slope suggested to Bull great possibilities for grape growing. Determined to develop an earlier-ripening grape that would be hardy in Massachusetts, he obtained from every available quarter vines having local reputations for excellence. (He knew about Jean Baptiste Van Mons' success in raising pears from seeds and concluded that the same process could be applied to grapes.) Again he was disappointed but persevered—eventually turning to wild vines he found growing nearby.

He had been watching carefully an early-ripening native of the northern fox grape, *Vitis labrusca*, growing in a distant part of his garden, noticing, when it fruited at the end of August 1843, that it possessed at least some of the essential qualities he sought. The grape was of good quality, and the idea immediately occurred to him that another generation would be a still greater improvement. He removed and planted it near his 'Catawba' vine, by which it was probably pollinated. Bull (he informs us) planted the resulting grapes from the wild vine "whole, into the ground, skin and all, at a depth of two inches, and covered the row with boards.

"I nursed these seedlings six years," he informs us further, "and of the large number obtained only one that proved worth keeping. On the tenth of September 1849, I was enabled to pick a bunch of grapes, and when I showed them to a neighbor who tasted them, he exclaimed, "Why this is better than Isabella!"

"I looked about to see what I could find among our wildings," Bull would reminisce later. "The next thing was to find the best and earliest grape for seed, and this I found in an



Ephraim Wales Bull in 1861. From Transactions of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society for the Year 1908.

accidental seedling at the foot of the hill. The crop was abundant, and of very good quality for a wild grape. I sowed the seed in the autumn of 1843. Among them the Concord was the only one worth saving."

The exact source of the accidental seedling is obscure. Bull had bought his house in Concord in 1836. That year, he told Liberty Hyde Bailey decades later, boys brought up from the Concord River some wild grapes and scattered them about the place. A seedling appeared in a corner of the garden, evidently the offspring of these truant grapes.

The stray seedling grew at the base of what is now called Revolutionary Ridge, an interesting landform so named for the key role it had played in the battle between the Americans and the British on April 19, 1775. Extending a mile or so eastward from the center

of Concord, this sandy, gravelly ridge is a kame delta that was deposited some ten to twenty thousand years ago in Glacial Lake Concord by meltwater rushing from the retreating continental ice sheet. British troops, advancing from Lexington to Concord North Bridge along the road that parallels the Ridge, passed Bull's cottage en route to the bridge, and passed it again during their ignominious retreat to Lexington and Boston. The Concordians, knowing their native terrain far better than did the alien British, who kept mainly to the public highway, travelled across lots, on the far (north and eastern) side of the Ridge, rushing from the Bridge to Meriam's Corner, a fork in the road located only three hundred yards east of Bull's cottage, at the eastern tip of Revolutionary Ridge. There the Americans ambushed the British troops. In one of his romance fragments, the posthumously published "Septimius Felton," Nathaniel Hawthorne makes Revolutionary Ridge the scene of a duel between Felton and a British soldier.

'Concord' Makes Its Debut

In 1849, Bull paid a visit to the editorial offices of the *Boston Cultivator*, telling its editor, Samuel W. Cole, that he had a new and promising seedling black grape that he wished to exchange for one of 'Diana', which the *Cultivator* had offered for sale to its readers. Cole, who owned a nursery in Chelsea, had his foreman set the cutting out. It soon fruited, but little was made of it. Bull had stipulated that it was not to be propagated for sale.

In the spring of 1853, Bull took the limited stock propagated at Cole's nursery, having decided that the best way to publicize the new cultivar would be to exhibit it at Horticultural Hall in Boston, during that fall's meeting of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. Accordingly, 'Concord' was exhibited for the first time on September 3, 1853, three years after it had produced its first fruit.

It is said that, through some mixup, the 'Concord' originally was exhibited among the

vegetables and was nearly overlooked by the judges. In the perhaps embellished account of a journalist, when the show opened and Bull's new grape had not arrived,

two members of the Society went out to Concord and said, "Where are those grapes you promised to send in?"

Quite taken aback, Bull stammered, "I did send them in, by a neighbor. I was too sick to make the trip myself, but I sent them just as I said I would."

Very much puzzled, the committee went back to the horticultural show. They rummaged around and found the grapes hidden in a pile of squashes and turnips and other vegetables. One look and they knew they had something. They looked at the big round, juicy fruit that had ripened fully two weeks before any other grape and then snatched a couple to eat. They smacked their lips and said, "I'll bet he girdled the vines—we better make sure there's no trickery here."

So back to Concord they hastened, notebooks in hand, and gave poor Mr. Bull quite a going over. But he showed them the vines and some other clusters—far bigger and better than those he had sent to the show.

Once convinced, the committee announced to the world that, at last, a grape had been developed that would grow in New England—bigger and better than any grown before.

The next issue of *Hovey's Magazine of Horticulture* reported that, "Mr. Bull's new, early and delicious native variety, was exhibited before the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, on Saturday the third of September, fully ripe, being more than two weeks before the Diana was mature. It has not only proved by far the earliest grape we have, but also one of the most delicious, having in place of the musky flavor of Isabella, the rich aroma of the Catawba, with which, probably its parent was somewhat fertilized. Specimens were exhibited before the committee who say it fully maintains the high character heretofore given it."

"We are gratified to announce," *Hovey's* continued, "that Mr. Bull has decided to offer it for sale in April next, and has placed the entire stock in the hands of Messrs. Hovey & Co. for disposal. . . . It will be called the CONCORD grape, having been raised in the town of that name, very near the spot so

memorable in the annals of our history, and known as the Concord battle ground."

When Hovey & Company introduced it in the spring of 1854, it attracted considerable attention and was placed on the grape list of the American Pomological Society as one of the "new varieties which promise well." It attracted still more attention in 1855. The next few years found 'Concord' in the catalogs of every nursery in the country, and it spread rapidly throughout most of the eastern and midwestern states. Within the brief period of a year, 'Concord' was growing in the Middle West. One source, George Husmann, states that in the winter of 1855 he secured buds of 'Concord' at Hermann, Missouri, from James G. Soulard of Galena, Illinois—half way across the continent. In 1858 'Concord' was placed on the regular list of recommended varieties by the American Pomological Society, where it remains.

Bull himself took a hand in promoting 'Concord'. In August 1854, for example, he

corresponded with a Dr. J. C. Bennett of Great Falls, Iowa, who he hoped would market 'Concord' in Iowa. "The Charter Oak and the Concord are entirely different in all respects," Bull wrote.

The Charter Oak is very large in berry though small in bunch, coarse, foxy, and wild. The Concord is as handsome in the bunch as a black hampburgh [the variety 'Black Hamburg'] and as large, delicate, full of juice, and has a rich aroma—and as unlike a wild grape as possible. It is hardy in wood and foliage and berry, which is not the case either with the Catawber ['Catawba'] or Isabella with me—both being infected by rot this very season, while the Concord is wholly free from any of these things.

By 1860, vineyards of 'Concord' had been planted in Chautauqua County, New York. In 1865 it was awarded the Greeley prize and called, prophetically, "the grape for the millions." During this period horticultural societies would maintain frequent contact with one another about new fruit varieties and cultural practices; by 1867 the Ohio Horticul-



The original "Concord" grape vine, still growing after nearly a century and a half. Photograph by the author.

tural Society was writing about the extensive plantings of the "noble Concord" in Ohio and Missouri. Within fifteen years of its introduction, thousands of acres of vineyards had been planted to 'Concord' all over the country. By the mid-1870s more 'Concord' had been planted in the Northeast than all other varieties put together. It had become the outstanding grape for both fresh and processed use. Fruit was shipped from the grape belts of the Lake Erie region to most of the major cities of the United States.

"The Greeley Affair"

In 1866, journalist Horace ("Go West, young man! Go West!") Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, offered a prize of one hundred dollars "for the best grape for general cultivation." 'Concord' won. When the winner was announced before the Farmers' Club of the American Institute of New York City in October of that year, there was unanimous applause from the audience. Many members of the public later would express strong opposition, however, among them Horace Greeley himself! A Dr. E. Ware Sylvester described the controversy at a Farmers' Club meeting in March 1869 (Horace Greeley was in attendance), sparking a lively exchange:

An effort has been in progress to discover among our native grapes, one which in healthfulness, hardiness and productiveness, should be adapted to the wants of the million. To this end the prize of \$100 was, years ago, offered by Horace Greeley, and other prizes have since been awarded. You are well aware that the Greeley prize was given to the Concord. This brought out a torrent of abuse mainly from those interested in other vines, and even Dr. Greeley, with his usual kindly feelings, thought it best to apply a *Tribune* soothing plaster to the wounded head of Iona island. [The cultivar 'Iona' was developed by Dr. C. W. Grant of Iona Island, New York, which is situated in the Hudson River about forty miles north of New York City.] To the base insinuations which were made in the public prints, the members of the Greeley committee made no reply, and make none now; they were willing that time and experience, the great regulators of agricultural matters, should justify, as they were sure to do, the award of the committee.

Dr. Sylvester proceeded to cite a large number of authorities, statements of farmers, nurserymen, vineyardists, and vintners in all parts of the country, showing that 'Concord' was more successful and gave more satisfaction than any other grape. Horace Greeley then spoke:

As the prize I offered has been directly alluded to by Dr. Sylvester, I may say that with the award of that committee I had nothing at all to do. When they came to their decision I paid over the \$100. But the end I had in view was not attained by that investigation. I intended to stimulate the production of new and better vines, and hoped some grape would be brought out having the hardiness and adaptability to soils and climates of the Concord, good bearing qualities, and, what the Concord wants, high and delicate flavor. But the award was to the Concord, and I could never see what that man [not Bull, but William H. Goldsmith of Newark, New Jersey, who recently had exhibited the 'Concord' at a fruit show of the American Institute of the City of New York], whoever he was, did to deserve his \$100. The Concord was widely cultivated, and all my money did was to advertise a grape already known; thus improvement was not stimulated, but rather checked. I am a little discouraged by the result, and do not propose to offer another bank note for a plate of common grapes. To my taste the Concord has no quality superior to the wild wood grape of my boyhood. [Greeley grew up in New Hampshire.] I admit that it is hardy and prolific; but after all, is it much of a fruit? I hope others will take up this matter, and at length bring out a grape hardy, productive, adaptive and highly flavored.

P. T. Quinn responded to Greeley's remarks:

As a member of that committee, a word of explanation may be in order. There were two committees. The first decided on the Iona, and Dr. Grant claimed the award as the originator of the Iona. But there was a protest, a delay, a change in the personelle of the committee, and the feeling with those who made the final award was that a grape like the Iona, known only to a few amateurs, did not come up to the requirements of Mr. Greeley, and should not receive the money.

Greeley responded that

What I complain of is the eagerness of the committee. I did not care if they waited five years, and thus gave grape culturists a chance to enter new varieties. How do we know but Caywood's grape,

for instance, the Walter, is as hardy and well suited to different soils as the Concord? If the prize were now open the Walter might take it for aught I know.

Dr. Sylvester countered that

Two years or more have elapsed since that award, and has any grape risen up that could contest the palm with the Concord? This last fall, did not Concord receive the silver cup at Cincinnati for being the best wine grape, and the best table grape?

A Mr. Fuller assured Greeley that his money had not been wasted:

While I agree with Mr. Greeley as to the qualities of the Concord, yet I must say that he never put out \$100 that has done more good to the farmers of this country. It arrested attention everywhere, and people began to buy Concord vines who never bought before. It has been the means of planting a vine in 10,000, yes, 100,000 yards and gardens. Of course we are not to rest in the Concord; but it is so much better than no grape, besides it affords the best sort of a stepping-stone to something superior.

Despite his harsh remarks, Greeley is said to have relented, calling the 'Concord' "a grape for the millions."

Life after 'Concord'

Bull's success with 'Concord' did not end his experimenting. On the contrary, it led him to grow twenty-two thousand seedlings over a period of thirty-seven years, of which he selected twenty-one for introduction. A white grape, which he believed to be the most beautiful he could produce, he named 'Esther' in honor of his mother, for example; another, later production he named 'Cottage', out of love for his home, the little house which survives to this day as "The Grapevine Cottage"; yet another, 'Rockwood', he named after his lifelong friend, Judge Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar. 'Iona' and 'August Rose' were among his later introductions. Many seedlings he left unnamed. At one time he had one hundred twenty-five vines that he thought

were worth saving; but, growing more critical, he discarded most of them.

Marshall P. Wilder, a noted nineteenth century horticulturist, stated that, "Had Mr. Bull done nothing else for the benefit of mankind, than originate the Concord grape, his name would be held in grateful remembrance, while the fruit of the vine shall cool the parched tongue, or the juice make glad the heart of man." Judge Hoar asserted that "had Bull conferred such a public benefit as originating the Concord grape in the Old World, the government would have conferred its recognition upon him, whereas in his own country what he had given years of patient study and toil to attain, was accepted as a mere matter of course."

Ephraim Wales Bull received scant pecuniary reward for his work after selling stock to Hovey & Company. He had sold 'Concord' vines directly at five dollars apiece during the first year, receiving a total of \$3,200 in net income, but almost nothing thereafter because the commercial nurseries were propagating and selling it to the public in vast quantities and paying no royalties to Bull. He did garner many honors nonetheless: he was invited to lecture at Harvard on grape



A corner of Ephraim Wales Bull's house, showing Bull's workshed. Courtesy of the Concord Free Public Library.



Monument to the 'Concord' grape and Ephraim Wales Bull erected in front of the Grapevine Cottage and the original 'Concord' grapevine by the town of Concord.

growing, for example; he was elected a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives from Concord and was chairman of the committee on agriculture; he later held the same position in the Massachusetts Senate; and he was appointed to the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture.

The Massachusetts Horticultural Society awarded him three medals for the production of the 'Concord' grape and the best seedling grapes, including, in December 1873, a gold medal "for the production of the best hardy seedling grape, the Concord, which has proved, after a thorough trial, so universally adapted to general cultivation throughout the United States, and the most reliable grape for vineyard cultivation in Massachusetts." Later, he became an honorary member of the Society.

Bull deserved to benefit handsomely from his dedicated and painstaking work in developing 'Concord', but nearly all profits from it went to the commercial nurseries. Had his later cultivars been properly introduced they might have brought him wealth, but because 'Concord' had failed to be profitable, he hated commercial grape culture and, refusing to put them on the market properly, grew disappointed and embittered.

Thus, Bull had to be content with less tangible rewards: much respect and affection at home and a modest fame abroad. He saw his 'Concord' spread over the continent, leaving great wealth in its wake, while he, its originator, grew more and more impoverished. From a simple, frank, neighborly man he became a suspicious recluse, spending his days tending plants in a small greenhouse behind his cottage. This became the chief solace of his lonely later life.

Ephraim Wales Bull died on September 26, 1895. The epitaph on his grave is an apt description of his life: "HE SOWED; OTHERS REAPED."

The True Place of 'Concord'

Today, a century and a half after it was developed, 'Concord' remains the preeminent grape of the eastern United States. It is well adapted to conditions in that part of the country, whereas the European varieties are not. According to a recent survey, more than seventy percent of the grapes produced in the northeastern, north central, and northwestern states are of this cultivar. As a progenitor of many other cultivars 'Concord' has an even greater claim to fame. Among the more familiar cultivars of 'Concord' parentage are 'Worden', 'Martha', 'Cottage', 'Niagara', 'Diamond', 'Moore's Early', 'Highland', 'Cole-rain', 'Brighton', and 'Black Eagle'. A score of others are either directly or indirectly linked to the family tree of 'Concord'.

Other claims have been made for the 'Concord', some of them patently false or exaggerated—although no doubt made in

good faith—some of them true. Local folklore, for example, claims that 'Concord' and varieties derived from it "saved the vineyards of Europe":

Cuttings of 'Concord' went to Europe directly from Ephraim Wales Bull's own vineyard in the late 1870s or early 1880s, when the phylloxera was devastating the vineyards of France. An agent of the Emperor Napoleon came to America to investigate American grapes. The agent visited Bull in Concord and was presented with a bunch of 'Concord' cuttings.

The phylloxera is an insect, *Phylloxera vitifoliae* Fitch, that is indigenous to the eastern and central United States. Imported into Europe between 1858 and 1863 on American vines taken there for grafting purposes, it has since reached almost every vine-growing country in the world. The first definite record that the phylloxera had reached Europe was made in 1863, in England; soon thereafter it was identified in France, through whose vineyards it spread rapidly. Within twenty-five years it had destroyed nearly one-third of France's vineyards—in all, more than two and one-half million acres. By 1885 the phylloxera had extended to most other grape-producing countries of Europe and had reached Algeria, Australia, and southern Africa. It was first discovered in California in 1880, but there is evidence it had reached that state more than twenty years earlier, having been introduced along with American vines from east of the Rocky Mountains.

The truth is that 'Concord'—like *Vitis labrusca* in general—is only slightly resistant to the phylloxera. Other American species and cultivars derived from them are notably resistant to the phylloxera, however; it is

these that provided stocks for susceptible vines in Europe and elsewhere, not 'Concord' or its descendants. In any event, the folklore is in error on at least one other score: "the Emperor Napoleon" died decades before his agent is alleged to have visited Bull, and there is no evidence that the French government of the time dispatched an agent or agents to obtain 'Concord' from Ephraim Wales Bull. Representatives of the French government, led by Pierre Viala, did visit other Americans during those bleak years for French viticulture, however, even visiting William Gilson Farlow of Harvard University, who was a cryptogamic botanist, but they would have had little or no reason to visit Bull.

Nevertheless, 'Concord' holds a venerable place in American viticulture. After nearly one hundred fifty years, it is still propagated and planted from coast to coast, and its end is nowhere near. Until 'Concord' appeared, grape growing in eastern North America had been difficult at best. Bull, by developing 'Concord', proved that native species could be employed in viticulture, and that viticulture could be made profitable in eastern North America. 'Concord' was only one step toward the improvement of the grape, but it was a crucial step. Bull's success prompted many further efforts to adapt viticulture to the trying demands of the New World.

Note

Because this article is an early version of part of a larger, ongoing project centered on the history of the 'Concord' grape, some of the interpretations and conclusions must remain tentative.

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