

MEIER'S WINE CELLARS, INC.

6955 Plainfield Pike
SILVERTON, CINCINNATI, OHIO 45236
(513) 891-2900

August 14, 1981

Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms
Washington, D.C. 20226

Dear Sir:

In accordance with 27 CFR 4.25 a (e) (2) we hereby submit a petition for the establishment of Isle St. George as a viticultural area. Included in the enclosed material is the evidence required to show that Isle St. George is the recognized name for this area, and that the geographical features of this area produce unique conditions distinguishable from surrounding areas.

Isle St. George is an island with an area of about one square mile located in western Lake Erie in Ottawa County, Ohio. It is the smallest and northernmost of the Bass Islands, only 1.25 miles from Canadian waters.

Since the mid 1800's, the growing of grapes has been the principle concern of the islanders. The first grapes were planted in 1853 by Peter and Simon Fox. At the turn of the century, there were two wineries on the island to process grapes. Today, Isle St. George has approximately 350 acres of grapes which are sent to the mainland by ferry for processing. There are 10 families who live on the island year round. Isle St. George has its own post office, church and one room schoolhouse.

One of the earliest references to the name Isle St. George is found on the U.S.G.S map of 1903 (copy of map enclosed). According to the book Lake Erie Vacationland in Ohio (Stephens Publishing Co., Sandusky, Ohio 1941) the name was derived from the earliest settler on the island, a man known simply as George.

A local post office was established on the island in 1874. Today the mail arrives daily from the mainland by airplane to Isle St. George (ZIP Code 43436.) Mail from the island is stamped with an Isle St. George postmark (example enclosed).

Also enclosed is a copy of the first label approval that Meier's Wine Cellars received for an Isle St. George wine. Since 1943, Meier's has used the Isle St. George appellation on wines produced from island grapes.

The unique growing conditions of Isle St. George are due to the moderating thermodynamic effects of the surrounding waters on the island. During the spring and summer months the lake water stores heat. In the fall as the days become cooler, the water begins to lose its accumulated heat to the surrounding air and land, thereby warming the island. This warming effect prolongs the growing season and delays the first frost. According to the study; Resources of the Lake Erie Region (Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio State University Press, 1977, p. 81), Isle St. George has a frost free period of 206 days, longer than any other area in the state of Ohio.

Based on the soil survey completed by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, 1979, the soil structure in the vineyards is a fairly shallow, sandy loam and silt loam. The limestone bedrock is in some areas only 20 to 30 inches deep.

The average annual precepitation for Isle St. George is less than the average for adjacent areas. The island averages 26.7 inches of precepitation per year compared to 31.7 inches for nearby Kelly's Island, and 32.1 inches for Sandusky (Resources of the Lake Erie Region, p. 78).

Enclosed with this petition is the most recent U. S. G. S. map with the Isle St. George area marked. Included also, are some articles written about the island.

We feel that the necessary information required for the establishment of Isle St. George as a viticultural area has been provided for in this petition. If any additional information or material is needed, please let us know.

Sincerely,

MEIER'S WINE CELLARS, INC.



Edward Boas
Attorney-in-Fact

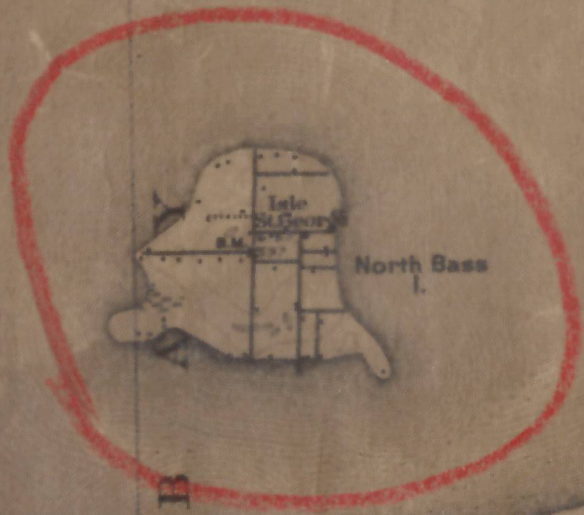
EB/md

Enclosure

OHIO
(OTTAWA COUNTY)
PUT-IN-BAY QUADRANGLE

80'

82°45'
41'45"



Sugar I.

Middle Bass I.

Middle Bass

Ballast I.

Rattlesnake

N

I

I

47



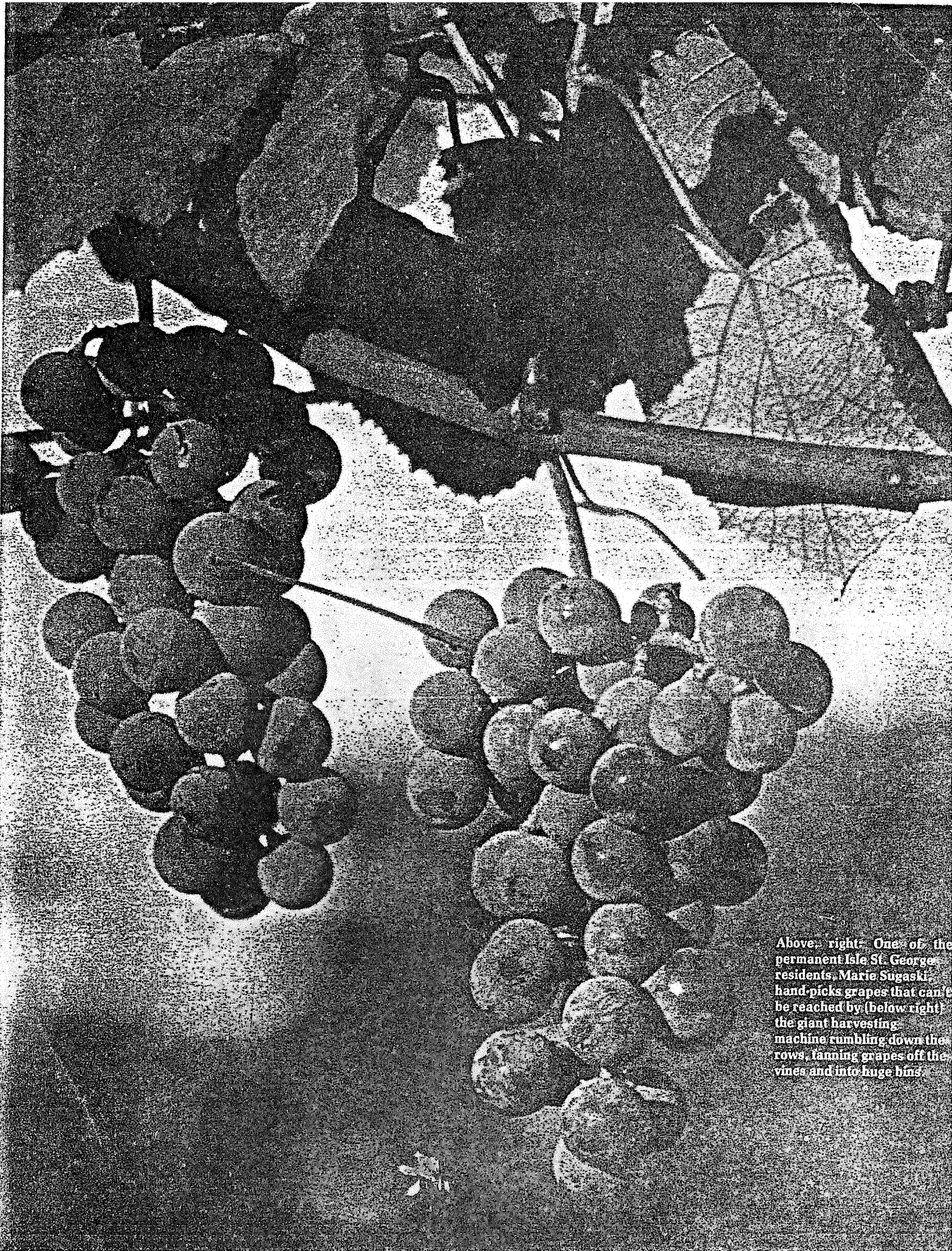
THIS MAGAZINE IS YOURS, TAKE IT ALONG / SUMMER 1974

Northliner

MAGAZINE



GRAPE HARVEST
ON OHIO'S
ISLE ST. GEORGE



Above, right: One of the permanent Isle St. Georges residents, Marie Sugaski, hand-picks grapes that can't be reached by (below right) the giant harvesting machine rumbling down the rows, fanning grapes off the vines and into huge bins.

Text and Photography by Ann Genett

HARVEST ON ISLE ST. GEORGE WHERE CATAWBA IS KING

It is a crisp October morning. The sun is just now giving some thought to showing its crimson face on the horizon. All is still on this tiny dot of an island anchored in Western Lake Erie 1½ miles from the Canadian border, except perhaps for the early call of a pheasant.

Then, a startling thing begins to happen: All silence is broken by the harsh sounds of trucks rumbling over muddy roads, people hurriedly shouting out orders, and—most startling—the fierce roar of two giant picking machines, gearing up to capture their day's quota, 120,000 pounds of juicy purple grapes.

The time: Harvest. The place: Isle St. George, 18 miles off the Ohio coast, and home of the rare, near-legendary Catawba grape.

Isle St. George is real. It's more than just a nice-sounding name on a bottle of

Meier's Chablis or Haut Sauternes; it's home, and work, and a lifetime of harvesting for a whole breed of people who are as much a part of the winemaking family as the descendants of Meier himself.

The island is owned by the Silverton, Ohio-based Meier's Wine Cellars, Inc., largest vintner in the North Central United States.

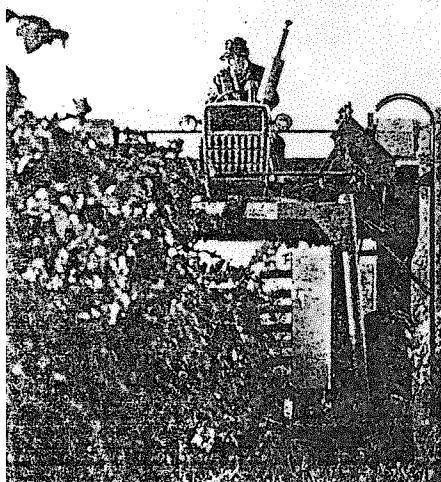
And everything they have, they owe to a juicy jewel called the Catawba grape.

The Catawba's history goes back to 1825 and a prosperous barrister named Nicholas Longworth. He brought a unique low sugar, high acid grape from its native Carolina territory and planted it along the Ohio River. Somehow the combination of riverbed soil, fine weather and good sun did the trick: by 1844, Longworth's vineyards were yielding plentiful grape harvests, producing what amounted to — American champagne! In fact, the bubbly stuff was good enough to win a gold medal or two alongside European competitors; Longworth was producing some 100,000 bottles yearly. The ecstatic Longworth stated in 1845: "The day is not distant when the Ohio River will rival the Rhine in the quantity and quality of this wine. I give the Catawba preference over all other grapes for a general crop of wine."

Alas, though, it was a doomed prophecy, at least for Longworth. His vineyards were eventually destroyed by drought, rot, and huge federal taxes on sparkling wines. Fortunately for the industry, however, Longworth had a contemporary — John Michael Meier, a German immigrant who also began planting the native American Catawba grape during the early 1850's. His son, John C. Meier, realized the potential of this rare and delicate fruit and began planting it on a large scale in the Sandusky, Ohio area, and on historic Isle St. George, first settled in 1844 and now the world's largest contiguous Catawba vineyard.

Why this little nondescript island? (Surely, it's costlier to grow grapes in the middle of Lake Erie than inland.)

(Continued)



ISLE ST. GEORGE

Answers Estal Cloud, Meiers' executive vice president: "Lake Erie acts as a giant radiator. It's a unique climatic situation which exists only in this tiny area. The highest point of the island is 14 feet above the level of the lake, and there's a network of underground limestone caves. These help to delay the ground frost until late fall, because the lake waters are still so warm. Spring comes early — and stays." Plus, says Cloud, the mild breezes of Lake Erie, the foggy mist, and the delayed spring "bud break" all help nurture along the island's 350 acres of grapes.

Only 50 people live on Isle St. George, year-round. (During harvest, the population doubles with the influx of migratory workers.) All the houses, mobile homes, the church, and even the one-room elementary school are maintained by Meier's. There aren't any stores or banks or hospitals, though: All these needs are filled by way of air or boat. The island's high school students fly to class on the mainland and back, via airborne "school bus," an ancient 1928 Ford Tri-Motor — the "Tin Goose." (The Goose belongs to Island Airlines, called the world's smallest scheduled airline; it runs regularly between Isle St. George, the mainland, and several other tiny islands). Other smaller planes are also available at a few minutes' notice; so Isle St. George, remote as it may seem, is

never out of contact with civilization. It even has its own telephone company.

Island employees are always busy. They must double not only as vineyard workers, but as electricians, mechanics, painters, plumbers, carpenters, engineers and dock hands. And of course, there are the extra-curricular roles: school board members, church officers, planners of social events. They're a close-knit group — but they have to be, or their work wouldn't get done on schedule.

And timing is all-important in the grape-growing game. One day too soon or too late could mean the difference between a good wine and a great wine, explains Cloud, who details the processing of grapes into wine:

- First, the harvest: Two mammoth picking machines fan the vines, shaking the ripened grapes off and into one-ton bins. The grapes — such as those at the end of a row, or on a slight slope — that can't be plucked by machine, are hand-picked and placed in wooden crates. Grapes come primarily from Isle St. George, but increasingly larger numbers are being harvested at an experimental vineyard in New Richmond, about 50 miles southeast of Cincinnati.

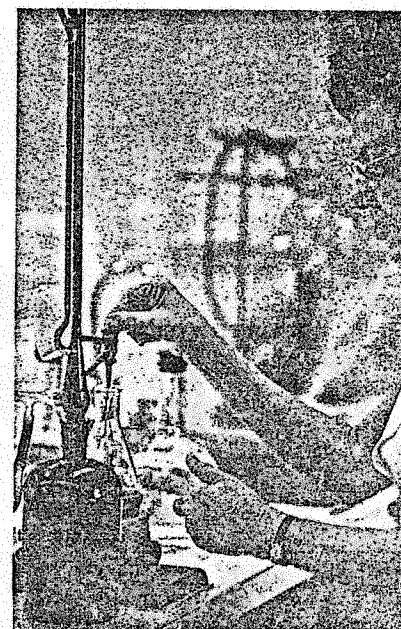
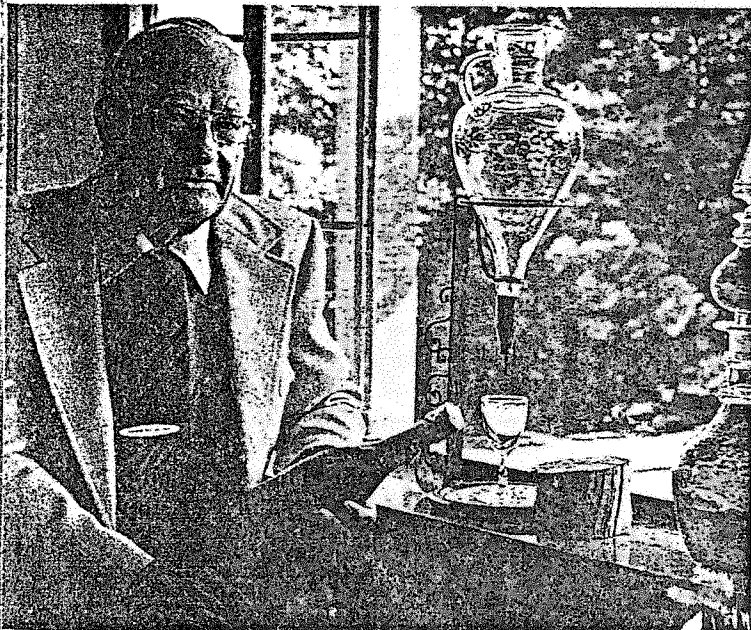
- The tons of grapes from the island are loaded, still in their huge bins, onto a ferry boat which carries them to Sandusky. (Since no point on the island is more than a mile from the dock, shipping time is cut considerably.) Then the grapes are trucked to the Silverton Winery.

- At the plant, the grapes are pressed, the seeds and skins removed and the resulting pulpy product is stored in one of the 90,000-gallon continuous fermenter tanks, which look for all the world like fuel holding tanks.

- The wine ferments in this unglamorous atmosphere for several days or weeks, depending on the type of wine being made, and then is transferred to one of the giant white oak barrels — ranging in size from 300 to 2,700 gallons — then to the cellar.

- Then, the important aging process begins. It ranges from under a year for certain sparkling wines to up to nine years for the Meier's #44 Cream Sherry (Processing and aging sherry, says Estal Cloud, is a bit different from wine "With wine, you have to be very careful of the temperature and the amount of light that gets in. With sherry, you can let the weather batter it all you want. The worse you treat it, the finer it becomes." The sherry, in fact, is stored outdoors in 50-gallon barrels, and the sometimes erratic southern Ohio weather is just what the vintner ordered. Since there's some seepage, though "We do get a few drunken bees now and then," smiles Cloud.

- From its casks, the wine is transferred to the winery and bottled. But not before each batch is tested in Meier's laboratory, staffed by two wine experts and headed by a master oenologist. The lab looks for color, aroma, taste, body — all the qualities that must be present before the wine gets the green light.



• Then bottling, corking, labeling, packaging and shipping. Voilà! — A glass of pink Catawba or tawny port, or one of the many varieties of wine.

Winemaking at Meier's has always been considered more of a craft than a business, a tradition established and perpetrated primarily by Henry Sonneman, who was considered the guiding genius of the organization. Sonneman, who joined Meier's in 1923, served as the company's owner and manager until his death at age 68 in April. He had done more than anyone before him to revive the Ohio State wine tradition that began with Nicholas Longworth.

A relative of John C. Meier (Sonneman's brother married Meier's granddaughter, inherited the company, then left the wine business), he continued producing the unfermented, nonalcoholic White Catawba Grape Juice for which Meier's was to become famous.

It was this "high-fashion, gourmet pop" which got the little company through Prohibition, and by the time of repeal in 1933, enough wine had been aging in the cellars to establish a whole new market.

It was a struggle, though, in the early years — Americans just weren't geared to drinking wine. However, in the mid-1950's and early 60's, U.S. citizens began to travel more abroad, sample European wine, acquire a taste for the grape.

"The California Wine Institute, ironically enough, began promoting American wines," smiles Estal Cloud, "and

our Ohio wine sales began to pick up. They have been on the upswing ever since — people are much more knowledgeable today about wine."

Cloud's pride in his work is obvious, and he's concerned about continuing all the traditions of winemaking, Ohio-style.

One of the projects he's most enthusiastic about is Chateau JacJan, the experimental vineyard in the Clermont Valley near New Richmond.

At JacJan, they've planted not only the native Catawba, but a whole host of French hybrid vines as well. There's a grafting area and a special greenhouse for propagating grafted vines. Hundreds of different combinations of native American and European grapes have been tried, all in the quest of discovering the most hardy, most succulent wine grape. Of the 180 acres at JacJan, 120 are now planted, with 300 more acres for expansion.

"We intend to use this area to produce whole new varieties of American wines," comments Cloud. Though it will be years before JacJan can produce the volume of grapes gleaned from Isle St. George, the progress so far has been remarkable, he adds.

At both vineyards, the Catawba grape shares its rich soil with the Niagara, Concord, and the various French hybrids. But the Catawba remains synonymous with Ohio and with Meier's Wine Cellars. It is still practically revered in that part of the country.

In fact, a favorite Meier's treasure is a gushing eulogy written in 1858 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow after tasting his first glass of Catawba wine. He said, in part:

*Very good in their way
Are the Verzenay
And the Sillery soft and creamy;
But Catawba wine
Has a taste more divine
More dulcet, delicious and dreamy.*

*There grows no vine
By the haunted Rhine
By Danube or Guadalquivir,
Nor on island or cape
That bears such a grape
As grows by the beautiful River.* .C

Left: The late Henry Sonneman, president of Meier's Wine Cellars, Inc. for 50 years.

Center: One-ton bins of juicy Catawba grapes are loaded onto the large ferry that will carry them from Isle St. George to the Ohio shore. Right:

Laboratory technician Edna Boyer runs a series of tests on a new batch of wine.

If you Ship by Air You Need

THE ALL NEW



Revised Six Times.
Per Year.

\$15.00 For Six Bimonthly Issues

The Only Complete Listing of the Airlines Own Local and 'Over the Road' Pick-up & Delivery Services.

A Complete Listing of All Motor Carrier Participants, Addresses and Phone Numbers.

A Complete Description of Air Freight Containers Including Sales, Trip Rental, Loading and Unloading, Pick-up and Delivery.

Subscribe Now!

Air Cargo Inc
1730-Rhode Island Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Company Name _____

By _____

Title _____

Address _____

THE ISLAND VINEYARDS

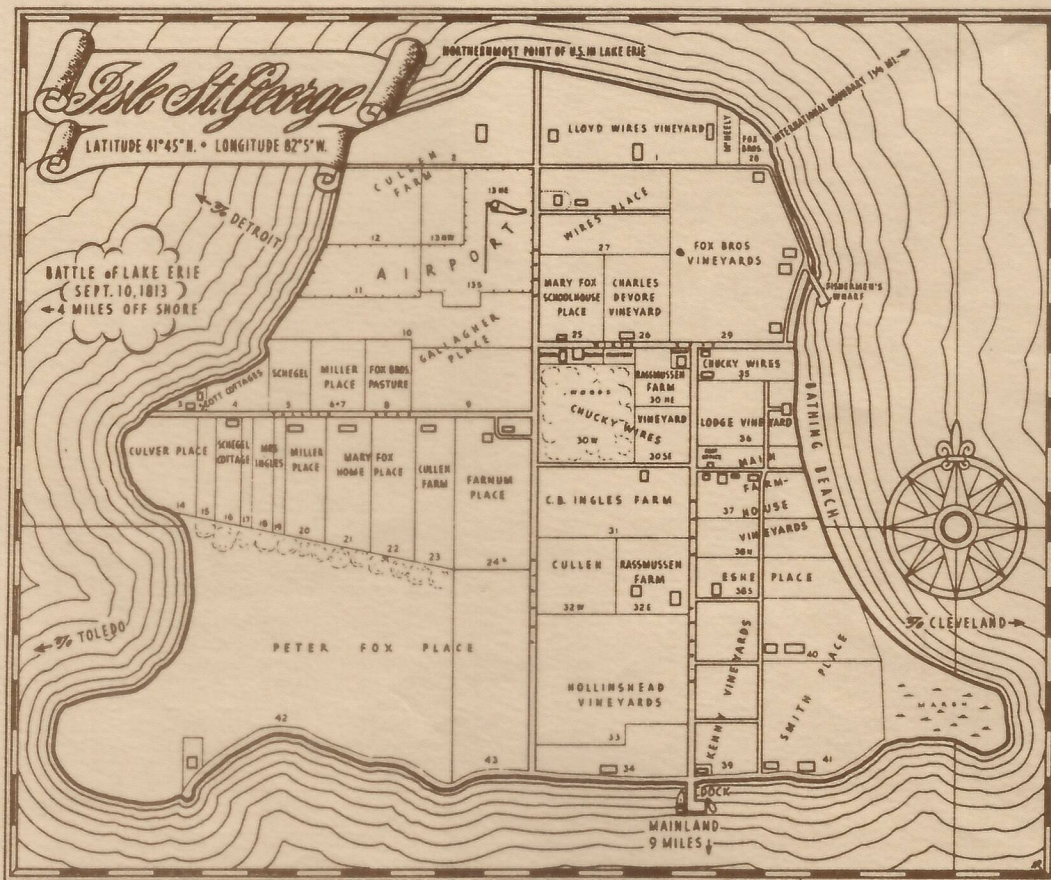
Famous in American history are the Lake Erie islands which lie northwest of Sandusky. On Put-in-Bay stands the great granite shaft commemorating Perry's victory in the Battle of Lake Erie, fought in September of 1813. The battle actually took place off the shore of the northernmost of these islands, Isle St. George. The islands are also famous for the rich-flavored grapes that their vineyards abundantly produce. The climate and soil conditions of these islands is ideally suited to viticulture, particularly on Isle St. George, which lies farthest from the mainland. Catawba grapes have been cultivated continuously on Isle St. George for more than 117 years.

A long growing season, averaging six weeks longer than on the mainland, is largely responsible for the richness of the grapes. The lake waters around the island freeze solidly during the winter and retain their chill well into spring, cooling the air over the island and retarding the opening of the grape buds until all danger from frost and unseasonable cold spells has passed. In autumn the effect is exactly

opposite and the waters, which retain their summer warmth, keep the cold air away from the island, thus lengthening the growing period during which the vines send out their sugar-roots and the grapes swell almost to bursting with rich juice.

The Isle of St. George vineyards where grape growing has been going on for well on 117 years, are constantly being replaced when production reaches a low ebb. Usually after 35 or 40 years a vineyard is pulled out, the ground turned under and planted to alfalfa for four years. Each year the alfalfa is clipped; but not removed from the vineyard land; and the fifth year the young selected grape roots are planted, and the vineyard given special care for cultivation, fertilization and spraying. The first crop picked, after nine years, is laid away in the deep, cool cellars in Sandusky to be used for blending two years later. Thus an eleven-year cycle is completed.

The entire yield of the vineyards on Isle St. George is used for Meier's fine wines. The island wines are the particular pride of all the workers at Meier's Wine Cellars.



From this tiny island, only a mile and a half wide and slightly less in length, come the world's rarest wine grapes. All vineyards are owned by Meier's Wine Cellars.

Grapes have been cultivated on Isle St. George for more than 117 years, and between 1844 and 1871 twenty families settled there and set out vineyards. The Hollinshead Vineyard is the oldest on the island, having been set out by one Roswell Nichols of Massachusetts in 1844. The direct descendants of some of the early pioneers are still engaged in viticulture on the original family tracts.

