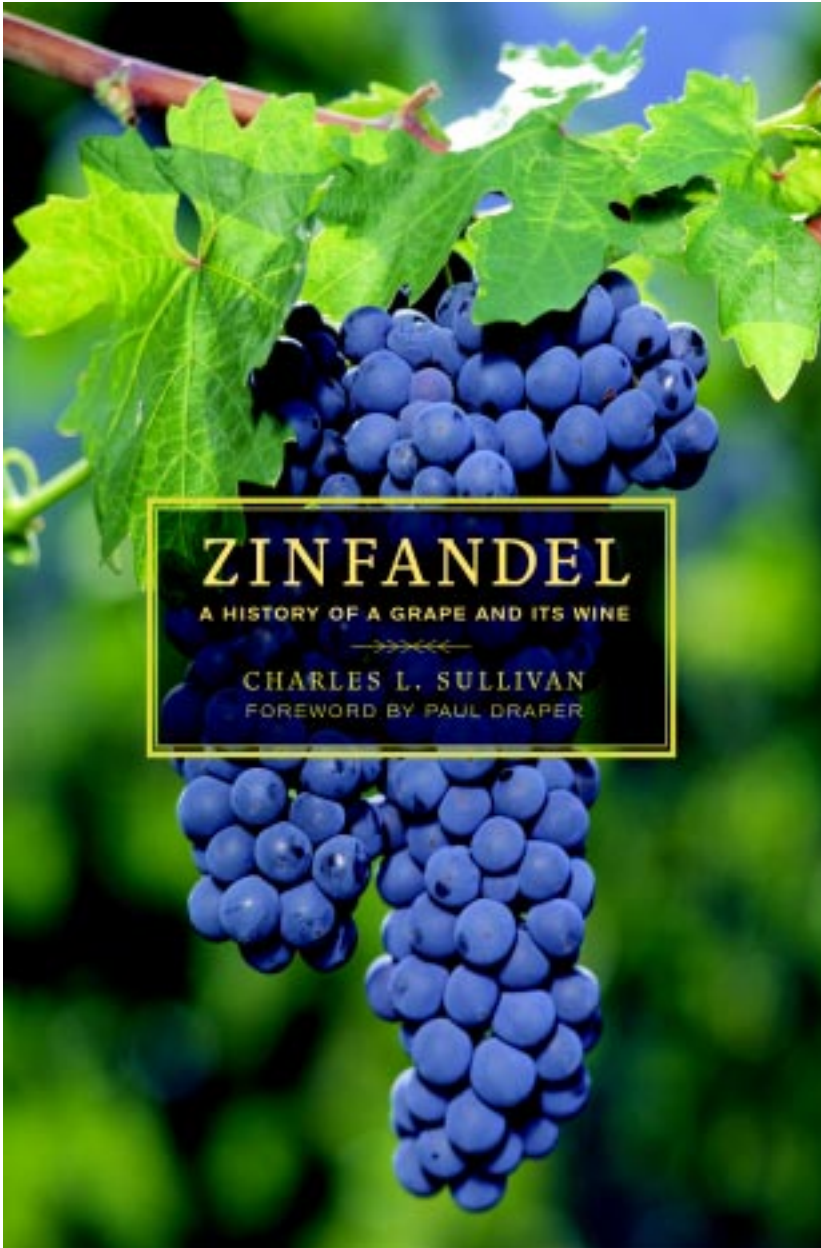
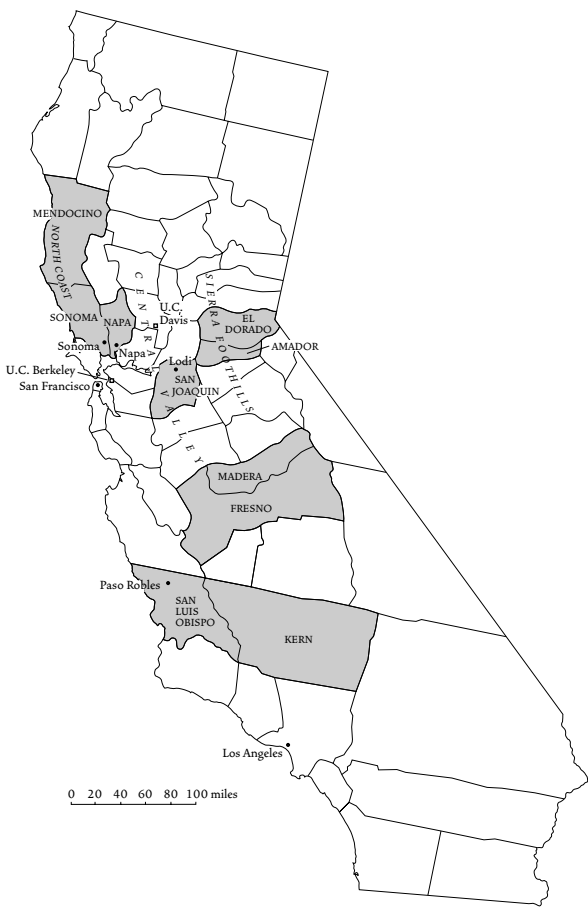


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Zinfandel country. Shaded counties are the leading Zinfandel producers in their regions.

CHAPTER TWO



SOJOURN IN THE EAST

AMERICANS IN THE ENGLISH COLONIES OF NORTH AMERICA GREW grapes from Florida to New England. In the early days of the republic, they took vines west to the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys. The growers were most successful when they raised grapes to eat. There were no great successes in the field of winemaking, although there were some admirable failures.

The grapes the Americans used fall into three categories: the native varieties found growing in North America, the European *vinifera* varieties transported to the New World, and the chance hybrids between the two. (In the nineteenth century American nurserymen began deliberately producing such hybrids.)¹

In the more southerly climes, winegrowing demonstrated the most potential, thanks to the warmer climate and the heterogeneity of the population. But as one looks north along the eastern seaboard, one finds fewer and fewer persons who thought of viticulture in connection with wine production; such views were rare north of the middle colonies (later states). You could draw a line north of Long Island and west to the Hudson River Valley as a sort of geographer's limit of serious winegrowing.

Viticulture as a source of table grapes was another matter. Between 1810

and 1835, Massachusetts saw the development of an interesting horticultural fad that gradually grew to be something of a small but serious commercial enterprise: the growing of grapes in hothouses. This hobby, which soon began to earn serious money for some of its adherents, was not simply intended to protect the plants from the icy winter climate. The special fad, developed from ideas already flourishing in England, called for vines to be forced by artificial means of heating so that they produced marketable bunches of delicious dessert grapes as early as March and April, when the ground outside the hothouse might still be deep in snow. New Englanders could draw on extensive English experience with this complex culture, first described in detail in a nurseryman's handbook in 1724.²

It sounds easy, but in fact it was tricky. The first requirement was plenty of free time and a bit of capital. (I have yet to hear of a humble dirt farmer involved in such a venture.) A grower would begin by building a glass greenhouse facing south with adjustable lights (windows) to let in a little air on clear, cool late-winter days when the vines might fry in temperatures over 95°F. To take care of the freezing days, and particularly the nights, a heating system had to be installed nearby with pipes that conveyed heated air to the greenhouse. Usually there was a hot-water furnace with many cords of wood stacked to fuel it. A trusted servant was often employed to keep the heat up during the night.

In the first year the vine received a normal greenhouse regimen. Then, the following March, forcing began. In the second year the heat was turned up on February 15; in the third year it was turned up on February 1. Each year the date was moved back fifteen days until eventually the furnace was fired up on December 1. By then the vines were dormant in the New England climate. The idea was gradually to trick the vines into thinking that spring had arrived only two months after they had lost their leaves in the fall. It worked. (And it still does. I put a potted Zinfandel plant through such a routine for five years, substituting a refrigerator and a short period in a freezer for the New England climate. The vine finally leafed on December 23 and made a remarkable New Year's table decoration the year before it died.)

J. Fisk Allen, then the leading American authority on the process, tells us that buds on forced vines started pushing around January 20. By February 10 many vines had shoots two and three feet long. By late February most varieties had blossomed, and Allen figured he would usually start thinning bunches for higher flavor in early March. Dark grapes were well colored by April. Allen noted that his Zinfindal (note the spelling) colored later in the month. He usually was able to harvest this variety in May or early June.³ Of course, Allen was describing what he thought were the best practices for top quality. Growers who pushed earlier and harder, with earlier ripening varieties, didn't have to wait until May. April bunches on the Boston market brought up to \$2.00 per pound (a price comparable to more than \$25.00 in the year 2000, when corrected for price inflation in constant dollars). Grapes ripe in May commanded only about \$1.25.

One incentive that helped propel this forcing culture beyond the simple greenhouse stage in the 1830s in Boston was the news of London prices for top-quality April grapes, as reported in English gardeners' publications, which were widely copied by American newspapers. Bostonians rightly surmised that such prices might be had at home. Allen tells us that a price equivalent to more than \$50.00 per pound in year 2000 dollars was not unheard of when this market was first developing.⁴

Several New England greenhouses had been built in the eighteenth century, the first in the Boston area by Andrew Faneuil in the 1750s. Between 1800 and 1810, when the forcing fad was still a few years away, several families of means built them with the specific intent of raising vinifera grapes for the table. One such gentleman central to the solution of part of the Zinfandel mystery was Samuel Perkins, who built his greenhouse near Brookline and had marked success at an early date, particularly with the Black Hamburg and Muscat of Alexandria varieties.⁵

Perkins and others like him, from Long Island to southern Maine, read English gardeners' publications and ordered vines from English nurserymen. They were often just as interested in apples, plums, and pears, but those are part of a different story. We can get a very clear picture of the grape varieties

available by reading English books and periodicals from the 1720s onward and from American horticultural periodicals. (None dealing strictly with viticulture had yet appeared.)⁶

Of these imported varieties, virtually every one that proved successful in New England could have been found in English nurseries before it arrived in America. We would classify most of these varieties today as table grapes, but a few have been used successfully to make good wine.

The following list of such varieties is partial, perhaps amounting to less than a quarter of the varieties we know were grown in New England greenhouses. But together these probably account for 95 percent of the grapes grown in this manner. One variety well known in Boston in the 1830s is not on the list, however, because it never appeared on any English nursery list or in any English horticultural publication from the 1720s to the 1860s. It is the vine that Bostonians were calling the “Zinfindal” in the 1830s. But the list does include a grapevine grown in England (marked ⁺) that, when it arrived in California under this name, was the same as the Zinfindal. The list also includes four varieties usually classified as wine grapes (marked ^{*}) that Allen and others thought were good for eating and that were usually raised for this purpose in New England.

- Black Hamburg (or Hamburgh)
- Black Lombardy
- Black Prince
- Black St. Peters⁺
- Cannon Hall Muscat
- Golden Chasselas
- Grizzly (grey) Muscat
- Muscat of Alexandria
- Muscat of Frontignan^{*}
- Red Traminer^{*}
- Royal Muscadine
- Sweetwater

- Syrian
- Verdelho*
- White Riesling*

The Black St. Peters is something of a mystery variety before it became settled in California. Many vines with “St. Peters” in their names were known in England and were imported into New England and Long Island. What this vine was on the East Coast is not clear, although Allen’s description is almost identical to that of his Zinfandal. But we know for sure that whatever arrived in California in the 1850s under that name and survived in the state’s vineyards in later years was the same vine that was by the 1870s universally accepted as the Zinfandel in the Golden State.



The Zinfandel/Zinfandal came to Boston in the nursery pots of George Gibbs of Long Island, an amateur horticulturist much interested in viticulture. His name is all but forgotten, though his wife’s name survives, attached to a grape variety she brought from Smithville, North Carolina, to Long Island in 1816. She presented it to William Robert Prince, the noted nurseryman, and he named it for her—the Isabella. It became one of the East Coast’s most popular native varieties.⁷

Beginning in 1820 Gibbs imported several shipments of vines from Europe. We have a partial record of his acquisitions from the Austrian imperial nursery collection in Vienna. In 1820 he imported twenty-eight varieties, five of which originated in the Kingdom of Hungary, then and until 1918 an important part of the Austrian Empire. The names Gibbs listed for the vines in this shipment included some that may be slightly familiar to us today: for example, “Chasselas,” “White Muscat,” “Frontenac.” Others, perhaps not so familiar, included “Early Leipsick,” “Faketi,” and “Schumlauer.” There was also the Frankenthal, which J. Fisk Allen later likened to the Zinfandal.⁸

Gibbs had a very close relationship with his neighbor William Robert Prince, whose work *A Treatise on the Vine* (1830), written with the help of his



1. The Zinfindal was one of the many vinifera table grape varieties sold by William Robert Prince in the 1830s at his great Long Island nursery, the Linnaean Botanic Gardens. (Source: L. H. Bailey, *Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*, vol. 3 [New York: Macmillan, 1944], p. 1591.)

father, was described by historian Thomas Pinney as being “of an entirely different and higher order” when compared to any previous text on American viticulture.⁹ (In 1793, Prince’s father, William Prince Jr., had established the Linnaean Botanic Gardens in Flushing, Long Island, discussed in chapter 1; William Prince Sr. had earlier established the country’s first commercial nursery.)

The Princes also imported vinifera vines from Europe in the 1820s, many from England, and many too from the Austrian Empire. William Robert Prince’s catalogue entries for these vines in later years can be confusing without a clear understanding of the political geography of central Europe in the nineteenth century. Vines from the German-speaking portions of the empire he listed as being from “Germany,” meaning from a land where German language and culture dominated. (There was, of course, no country called Germany until the unification process of 1870–1871.) The capital of the empire,

and the site of its imperial collections, was the very German city of Vienna. Vines from the Kingdom of Hungary, which comprised lands covering more than half of the empire, Prince listed as being from Hungary. (It goes without saying that the king of Hungary was the Austrian emperor.) These terms, “Germany” and “Hungary,” in the Prince nursery catalogues have been a continual cause for misunderstanding from the 1880s until recently.¹⁰

In 1829 Gibbs received a shipment of vines from Vienna and sent Prince a note listing them. “You may depend on [them] as genuine as I recd. them from the Imperial Garden at Schoenbrunn.”¹¹ No vine labeled anything like Zinfandel was listed, but there were some unnamed vines that must attract our attention. One was a “rough black” grape taken from Hungary to Vienna, “prolific, a very good grape.” Was this the Zinfandel? We can’t be sure, but later, when Prince began listing Zinfandel in his catalogue, he noted that it had been “introduced by the late George Gibbs . . . from Germany,” meaning from Vienna. We can’t be certain which one of Gibbs’s shipments he meant, but we can be very sure that Prince knew that the vine had come to Long Island in these shipments from the Schoenbrunn nursery collection.

At this point we should take a closer look at the geography of the Austrian Empire, both to understand previous references to Hungary and to see how its political components were related. Later this knowledge will also make recent scientific discoveries concerning the origins of Zinfandel more understandable.

The Kingdom of Hungary had been reconquered from the Turks by the Hapsburg rulers of the Austrian Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These Hungarian territories, the so-called Lands of St. Stephen, were dominated demographically by Magyars (Hungarians). But many other peoples were included. The kingdom was huge when compared to today’s Republic of Hungary and included much of what is today Croatia and Serbia. It also included much of Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania. It may help to illustrate this complexity by noting that the Hungarian (Magyar) Agoston Haraszthy, of California wine fame, was born in the kingdom, although his home village is today in Serbia, not far from Belgrade.

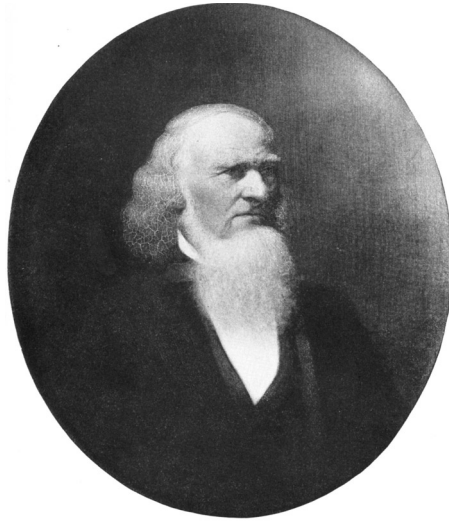
Vines from all parts of the empire, including those from Croatian areas

along the Dalmatian coast, were referred to in the Prince catalogues as being from Hungary. And such vines were collected and made part of the general imperial collection in Vienna. It is not difficult to understand how a person might be confused trying to find historical viticultural remains from the old kingdom in today's Republic of Hungary, which is about one-fifth of its size.

One can't help wondering about the origins of the name "Zinfandel." There is no record of any vine with such a name in European vineyards in the nineteenth century or before, nor is there any record of a vine with that name being shipped to the American East Coast. And yet Prince's 1830 *Treatise* contains a list of foreign varieties of recent introduction with two entries for the "Black Zinfandel of Hungary," one of them being "parsley leaved."¹² Could this be a reference to the vine in the Gibbs 1829 import shipment? It is certainly possible, and Prince also used this exact notation in his 1831 catalogue.

I am inclined to believe that it was not, for, as we will see, the Zinfandal later in the Prince nursery came to Long Island from Boston, by way of Samuel Perkins. But somehow Prince had this word, "Zinfandel," in his mind in 1830, before Gibbs's vines traveled to Boston. Later J. Fisk Allen, the country's most learned viticultural scholar, the first ever to give a detailed description of the Zinfandal/Zinfandel, carefully and explicitly avoided such an assumption. We may never know where Prince picked up that word, but he, Allen, and Gibbs all knew where the popular Zinfandal of Boston in the 1840s had come from and who had brought it here. And has anyone ever seen a parsley-leaved Zinfandel?

We are not through with 1830. That year George Gibbs went to Boston for the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society (MHS), of which both he and Prince were corresponding members. There he made a fine display of his "foreign"—that is, vinifera—vines, his European imports.¹³ The aforementioned Samuel Perkins acquired some of Gibbs's vines and was soon advertising cuttings of the "Zenfendal" for sale in Boston.¹⁴ Two years later William B. Roberts, who ran Perkins's nursery, advertised "Zinfandal" vines for sale in Boston. By the next year Perkins was selling rooted "Zenfendal" vines and displaying their grapes at the MHS annual meeting.¹⁵ By 1835



CHARLES M. HOVEY

2. The leading nurseryman in the Boston area between 1830 and 1860 was Charles M. Hovey. He sent loads of nursery stock to California by sea and was an early advocate of the Zinfandel, grown under hothouse conditions as a table grape. (Source: Massachusetts Horticultural Society.)

Charles M. Hovey, Boston's leading nurseryman, was praising the flavor of the "Zinfindal" and recommending it as a table grape. (Hovey's spelling soon became standard on the East Coast.)¹⁶

For the next ten years horticulture publications in the northeast were full of notices for Zinfindal.¹⁷ It had become a fairly popular table grape for the forcing house, or "early graperly," as some writers termed it.¹⁸ Its grapes were usually on the Boston market by June.

We might ask why no one thought to test the Zinfandel for its winemaking potential. In this situation, the answer is obvious. New Englanders had given up considering *vinifera*, no matter how the vines were grown, for wine in their frigid environment. In 1825 John Lowell had summed it up in the *New England Farmer*: "Cider tastes good here. . . . Wine tastes terrible." To the south,

people such as Prince did keep up hope for years. But New Englanders who drank wine bought it from other climes. For the year 1840, the census figures for wine from grapes in Massachusetts listed only 1,095 gallons.¹⁹

The grape-growing fad in New England remained strong through the 1840s. Professionals and serious amateurs exchanged vines and technical information, they held their shows, and they contributed learned papers to the local press and to agricultural journals. By the last half of the decade, the whole set of scholarly and commercial interrelations had become well organized enough for one man to bring it all together in one volume for the interested reader.

John Fisk Allen of Salem was a scholar and a practical botanist, the first person in America to produce a really good hybrid grape variety, when he crossed the Isabella, which he got from Prince, with the vinifera Chasselas de Fountainbleau. U. P. Hedrick, later one of America's leading viticultural experts, considered Allen's feat in 1844 one of the greatest events in the history of American viticulture, "surpassed only by the introduction of the Concord" in 1852.²⁰

In 1846 nurseryman Charles Hovey, the publisher of the *Magazine of Horticulture*, encouraged Allen to bring his knowledge together in an extended article for that publication.²¹ The article was published the next year and was soon followed by a slightly extended version in book form (55 pages). In 1848 Allen's 247-page detailed guide to viticulture, titled *Practical Treatise in the Culture and Treatment of the Grape Vine*, appeared. It went through numerous printings and five editions into the 1860s. In the 1847 article, Allen described the varieties with which he had personal experience. He gave more lines to the Zinfindal than to any other variety. His description was of the vine we know as Zinfandel. He noted that he could not find the vine described in any book, a point he continued to make in later editions of his own work. He further said that it probably was a "German" grape and had first been grown around Boston by Samuel Perkins, "who received it from a gentleman in New York State. . . ." You will recall that "Germany" in 1847 meant the vast region of central Europe where German was the dominant language. And we know full well that the gentleman in New York was George Gibbs.

In 1855 Allen addressed the fact that Prince had written about a “Black Zinfandel of Hungary” in his 1830 *Treatise*, but Allen had no idea what that vine was or whether it was the same as his Zinfindal. In 1847 Allen had had little to write about the Black St. Peters, but his later descriptions of that grape were very close to that of his Zinfindal. Samuel Perkins in 1830, and perhaps others in New England, had acquired this variety from England and had supplied Prince with the variety in 1830. As we will see, vines with this name arrived in California at about the same time as the Zinfindal, in the 1850s, and vineyards planted to the Black St. Peters in the 1860s were generally understood to be the Zinfandel in later years.

So what do we know from all this? I think that the traceable Zinfandel line is clearly Gibbs-Perkins-Prince. Unfortunately we have no “smoking gun” reference to the vine’s arrival in Gibbs’s nursery. Could it have been that “rough black” grape? Or was it Prince’s Zinfandel, which he had received from Gibbs?

Did it come from the imperial collection in Vienna? Probably. From Hungary? Quite likely, so long as we keep in mind how huge that area of the Austrian Empire was in the nineteenth century.



In the 1850s William Robert Prince came to California, taking his chances with some placer mining and collecting seeds from native plants to send home to Long Island. Later, in a notebook now in the National Agricultural Library, he commented on the Zinfindal in California, noting, “Zinfindal fine for raisins in Cal. Drying perfectly to Raisin.” Of course, this was before the chance discovery that this eastern “table grape” made a very good red wine. Prince also wrote that he thought the Zinfindal in California was the same as the “Black Sonora” there.²² I have no idea what he meant by this reference.

Some writers recently have wondered how we can be sure that what was called Zinfindal on the East Coast was the same as what came to be called the Zinfandel in California. Prince had seen the vine growing in California and knew it from home. Those troopers from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society who came to California and remained there, helping to establish North-

ern California viticulture after that state joined the Union, certainly knew what the vine looked like. Those who have questioned the identity of the vine on the two coasts might consider whether a man such as Frederick Macondray, who grew the Zinfandel in Massachusetts and brought it on his sailing ship from the Bay State to California, might not have known what he and his fellow New Englanders were doing. James L. L. Warren, founder of the California State Agricultural Society, was another former Massachusetts grower, whose nursery near Boston listed the “Zinfendel” for sale in its 1844 catalogue.²³

Before we end our sojourn in the east, it is worth noting what happened in later years to all the *vinifera* growing in New England. To make a short story of it, the fad of hothouse forced growing petered out. In the 1850s the discovery of the Concord variety, perfect for outdoor culture, turned almost everyone’s head. I have traced the change in popularity by reading the proceedings of the MHS to the 1920s, searching in vain for some reference to Zinfandel after the 1850s. By the late 1850s native varieties, crosses, and hybrids had become all the rage. The Concord made a satisfactory wine in the Massachusetts environment, and it was to New England taste. By 1857 a Boston grower was producing twenty thousand commercial gallons of wine per year from the variety.

The Concord, Delaware, Iona, and Allen’s Hybrid varieties were the darlings of the 1860s. In 1865 Hovey wrote, “The grape fever here rages higher and higher each succeeding year.”²⁴ But he was not referring to *vinifera* grapes. By the 1870s *vinifera* table grapes were arriving from California via the new transcontinental railroad.

Vinifera varieties still appeared at the MHS exhibits, but they were of such little moment that they were rarely named in the proceedings. When Allen died in 1876, Hovey lamented that the “circle of old cultivators is narrowing.”²⁵ No *vinifera* vines were shown at the annual meeting in 1878. In an editorial on the matter, the secretary of the MHS did not lament the decline. There were now better native grapes to grow at home, and good *vinifera* grapes were available directly from California.

G R A P E S.—*Vignes.*

The abbreviations are as follows:

1. *Form of the bunch*: comp. compact, when the berries are very closely set; loose, when they are loosely set.
2. *Color*: bl. blackish; g. green; w. white; pur. purple; r. reddish; y. yellowish; p. pale; d. dark.
3. *Quality*: 1. first rate; 2. middling; 3. indifferent.
4. * Native; † Foreign.

NAME.	Form of the bunch.	Color.	Form of the berry.	Qual.	REMARKS.
†White Chasselas, - - <i>Royal Muscadine.</i>	loose	y. w.	round	1	A superior variety.
†White Frontignac, - <i>White Constantia,</i> <i>Muscat blanc.</i>	comp.	w.	round	1	Excellent and highly esteemed.
†White Muscat of Alexandria, - <i>Frontignac Alexandrian.</i>	long	w.	oval	1	Superb—much esteemed.
†White Sweetwater, - <i>Chasselas Royal.</i>	loose	w.	round	1	A hardy foreign sort, and much cultivated in the
Black Hamburg, - - <i>Red Hamburg,</i> <i>Frankenthal,</i> <i>Valentine's,</i> <i>Admiral,</i> <i>Languedoc,</i> <i>Fville,</i> <i>Purple Hamburg.</i>	large	b.	round	1	Well known to be one of the most valuable varieties. The berry is uncommonly large and very productive, and is, as it deserves to be, more extensively cultivated than any other variety.
†Black Prince, - - <i>Black Spanish,</i> <i>Lombardy of Rome.</i>	large comp.	bl.	oval	1	A good bearer and colors well.
Black St. Peter's, - - <i>Black Palestine.</i>	loose	b.	round	1	Ripens late.
*Catawba, - - -	loose	r. p.	round	2	A very productive, hardy grape, of musk flavor.
‡Chasselas of Frontignac, ‡Constantia, - - -	loose	r.	oval	1	Very good.
‡Grisly Frontignac, - - <i>Muscat gris,</i> <i>Griseline,</i> <i>Red Constantia.</i>	long	y. r.	round	1	Muscat flavor and excellent.
*Isabella, - - -	loose	pur.	oval	1	Well known and productive. Hardy variety.
*Jewett's White, - -	-	-	-	-	-
†Miller's Burgundy, - <i>Le Moenier,</i> <i>Black Cluster.</i>	comp.	bl.	round	1	An old variety—a first rate wine grape.
†Oval Malaga, - - - <i>White Muscadell,</i> <i>White Jar Grape.</i>	large	w.	oval	1	Excellent for table use—keeps well.
*Pond's Seedling, - -	long	p.	round	1	Sweet, thin skin and very good.
*Schuylikill, - - -	-	-	-	-	-
*Scuppernong White, " Black, - - -	loose	bl.	round	1	Muscat flavor—excellent for dessert.
†Zinfendel, - - -	long, loose	bl.	round	1	An excellent variety, the flavor superior—grows in very large, long clusters of a conical form.

3. James L. L. Warren was the founder of the California State Agricultural Society. Before he came to the Golden State in 1849 from Massachusetts, he had owned a commercial nursery near Boston. Grapes were one of his specialties. Here is a portion of his 1844 catalogue, which lists the table grape varieties he had for sale. Note the last item in the Grapes section, as well as the "Black St. Peter's" earlier in the list. (Source: Professor William P. Marchione, Boston Art Institute.)

Then, in the 1880s, vinifera began to reappear at the annual shows. But the varieties were very limited in number, mostly Black Hamburg, Muscat of Alexandria, Syrian, and Muscat of Frontignan. There were a few others, but never a mention of Zinfindal/Zinfandel. In 1926 Archibald Wagstaff presented a paper to the MHS entitled “Growing Grapes Under Glass.” The tone of his comments suggested that he believed he had come up with something new.

Now let us turn to California, where the lure of gold would draw argonauts by the tens of thousands from all over the world. Among these were thousands of New Englanders. Many brought with them a sound knowledge of horticulture; a few would soon bring in their precious nursery stocks.