



A Timeline of the Early History of the Michigan Wine Industry to mid-1980s

1679 Wild, native grapevines are discovered by French voyagers, along what is now known as the Detroit River.

1702 The state's first plantings of grapevines take place in Detroit when Fort Ponchartrain is built under the command of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac.

1793 French settlers make their way to what is now known as the River Raisin, named for the wild grapevines cascading the banks of the river, near Monroe.

1863 Joseph M. Sterling is the first to plant a vineyard in the Monroe region for the purpose of making wine; several others soon follow. Around the same time, vineyards are planted in other regions in the state.

1868 A. B. Jones plants several hundred vines on a small farm near Paw Paw Station, a depot built where an "Indian trail" and the railroad intersected (now Lawton). This planting is the first of many that help attract Welch's to the region in 1919, a pivotal milestone in Michigan's vineyard history.

1868 Commercial winemaking commences in Michigan when Sterling produces the first wine under Pointe Aux Peaux Wine Company of Monroe; several other winemakers soon follow.

1870 Joseph M. Sterling builds the state's first winery in the Monroe region.

1873 Pointe Aux Peaux Wine Company showcases seven wines and seventeen varieties of grapes at the Michigan State Fair and is awarded a gold medal by the State Pomological Society.

1884 In 1884, 24,685 gallons of wine are produced, 3,228 acres of vineyards are planted, and 1,550,702 pounds of grapes are sold. Notably, half of the wine production takes place in Monroe County.

1889 Michigan's first experiment station is established in South Haven on the farm of Theodatus Timothy Lyon.

1918 The State of Michigan bans the use of alcohol; the state's legal wine industry ceases, and eight commercial wineries operating in the state do not survive Prohibition.

1919 Prohibition commences on a national level.

1933 The ban on alcohol is lifted with the Repeal of Prohibition.

1933 Following the Repeal of Prohibition, several wineries open, including La Salle Wines and Champagne Inc. (Farmington), Bronte Champagne and Wine Company (Detroit), Risdon Wines and Champagne Inc. (Detroit), Houppert Wine Company, Frontenac Vineyards (Detroit then Paw Paw), followed a few years later by Milan Wineries Company (Detroit), Paw Paw Wine Company (Paw Paw) and Chateau Wines Corp. (Royal Oak).

1934 Michigan's oldest, continuously-operated winery is established when Border City Wine Cellars relocates to Detroit from Canada, changing its name to Meconi Wines, Ltd. (Its name changes again in 1936 to The Italian Wine Company and in 1941 to St. Julian Wine Company).

1938 Michigan Wineries (now Warner Vineyards) opens in Paw Paw.

1938 Michigan Wine Institute is founded by the state's wineries to support the growth of Michigan's wine industry through promotional, research and lobbying efforts.

1946 St. Julian produces its first sparkling wine after installing four Charmant tanks, each able to ferment up to 1,000 gallons of wine at a time. By 1991, St. Julian is processing 16,000 gallons of effervescent wine.

1950 The State of Michigan changes a regulation to eliminate a \$5,000 licensing fee that had been prohibitive to the wineries. The change in regulation enables wineries to produce fortified wines with 20 percent alcohol for the first time since before Prohibition, improving competition against California's fortified wines and boosting the state's wine industry.

1959 I-94 opens near Paw Paw, signifying a new era for St. Julian. Tourists visit the winery, prompting the start of winery tours, wine tastings and the development of non-alcoholic sparkling wine for the youngest visitors.

1962 Angelo Spinazzé of Bronte Champagne and Wine Company makes the state's first wine with a French-American hybrid varietal, Baco Noir.

1965 Bernard (Bernie) Rink plants 10 vines each of more than 30 varietals. The vineyard includes all French-American hybrid varietals except for three vinifera varietals for test purposes.

1968 Leonard Olson and Carl Banholzer plant Vidal Blanc and Aurora vines in Buchanan, followed by the planting of 27 varieties the following year, including Chardonnay and Riesling.

1969 Warner Vineyards acquires equipment from the Hommel Wine Company, a major sparkling wine producer founded in 1878. The Warners begin using the 1890 méthode champenoise equipment to produce Warner Vineyards' Brut Champagne, which earns the winery many accolades in ensuing years.

1970 Bernie Rink plants 15 acres of the best six varieties from his test plot, which becomes Northern Michigan's first commercial planting of wine grapes.

1971 The first vintage of wine is produced at Michigan State University. Labeled, "Spartan Cellars," the Vidal Blanc is the first of many wines made and tested at MSU by researcher Dr. G. Stanley Howell. Wine grape research, led by Howell for the next 37 years, is focused on identifying which varieties thrive in Michigan's cold climate and produce high-quality wines.

1972 The State of Michigan changes a law increasing the amount wineries are required to pay to farmers for grapes to receive a much-needed tax break. This shuts down operations for many of Michigan's long-standing wineries that had operated since the 1930s.

1972 Leonard Olson opens Tabor Hill Winery in Buchanan and sells the first bottle of wine on July 14.

1973 Bill and Doug Welsch plant vineyards in Fennville, later opening Fenn Valley Vineyards and Wine Cellar.

1974 Ed O'Keefe, Jr. plants an acre of several test varieties on Old Mission Peninsula in Traverse City, followed by the planting of a 55-acre vineyard the following year. The vineyard is the state's first large-scale planting of European vinifera.

1976 Ed O'Keefe opens Chateau Grand Traverse's tasting room on Old Mission Peninsula in Traverse City.

1977 Bernie Rink opens Boskydel Vineyards tasting room in Lake Leelanau on Leelanau Peninsula.

1978 Mike Jacobson opens Leelanau Wine Cellars' tasting room in Traverse City.

1978 Larry Mawby opens L. Mawby Vineyards' tasting room in Suttons Bay this year.

1980 Bruce Simpson opens Good Harbor Vineyards on Leelanau Peninsula in Leland.

1981 The Fennville American Viticultural Area (AVA) is established in southwest Michigan, becoming the state's first AVA.

1982 The Leelanau Peninsula American Viticultural Area (AVA) is established in northwest Michigan.

1983 The Lake Michigan Shore American Viticultural Area (AVA) is established in southwest Michigan.

1985 The Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council is established through state legislation to provide research, education and promotion for the advancement of Michigan wine grapes and wines. Shortly afterward, the Michigan Wine Institute dissolves.

1987 The Old Mission Peninsula AVA is established in northwest Michigan.

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