

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Winemakers of Indian Hill: Lewis Finch and Isaac F. Waring

Two 18th century residents of Indian Hill were renowned for their skills as vintners. Lewis Finch (1829-1901) of Indian Hill Road and Colonel Isaac F. Waring (1799- c.1885) of current day Waring Drive gained national acclaim for the products of their vineyards.

Ohio winemaking began in the early 1800s when New Jersey immigrant Nicholas Longworth planted Ohio's first vineyard near Cincinnati using European vines. The vines died, but he persisted until about 1820 when he discovered the Catawba grape – easily cultivated, hardy enough to winter over, and then he produced a semi-sweet wine. Longworth built the nation's first commercially successful winery. His dream was to make wine part of an agrarian republic. He viewed it as a beverage of temperance against the excesses of distilled spirits. An *Ode to Catawba Wine* was composed by the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, extolling this local beverage. Soon there were many acres of vines in the Cincinnati area. In 1845, the annual production of local wine was over 300,000 gallons, and by 1860, Ohio was an epicenter in the nation for the production of wine.

Lewis Finch was one of five children, the youngest son of Henry Finch, shoemaker and farmer. By age 10, he had learned to graft shoots of fruit trees. He pursued the study of fruits all his life and was renowned for his vineyard. A member of the Cincinnati Horticultural Society and the Indian Hill Horticultural Society, he combined his agricultural pursuits with his profession as a builder. Colonel Waring, a military man, became a horticulturist midlife. Known for his imposing appearance, he studied chemistry and philosophy. He was President of the Indian Hill Horticultural Society and a member of the Hamilton County Horticultural Society. At meetings of these societies, members would discuss and sample each other's products. No doubt Finch and Waring shared knowledge about techniques of winemaking at meetings of these horticultural associations.

There are varying accounts of the origin of the Ives Seedling Grape. Originally introduced by Henry Ives III of Cincinnati in 1840, it was exhibited in 1844 before the Cincinnati Horticultural Society. Ives stated that the seeds were from Madeira, off the coast of Africa, but the variety is mostly Labrusca, a wild American type. It was thought that the Madeira seedlings got accidentally mixed with native seedlings. Planted along the banks of the Ohio River in the 1850s, it was sour to most tastes, so Ives ceased trying to develop it commercially. One story goes that Colonel Waring marketed the grape after Ives gave it up, and that in 1864 he made \$2,000 an acre profit. Another account gives Lewis Finch the credit for experimenting with the grape, allowing it to mature more and bottling it in a different fashion. His 21 acre farm was on Indian Hill Road, at the site of current day Voorhees Vineyard. In later years he also owned 15 acres adjacent to Armstrong Chapel. The Ives Seedling Grape was vigorous and fruitful and became popular when the Catawba vines along the river began succumbing to a fungus to which the Ives was resistant.

Whether Finch or Waring perfected the wine from the Ives grape cannot be determined, but both vintners successfully processed the fruit and gained it fame.

In 1869, the Ives Seedling Grape was placed on the grape list of the American Pomological Society, and in 1868 it was awarded premium status of the Longworth Wine House (Cincinnati) for the best wine grape in the United States.

Both Colonel Waring and Lewis Finch entertained guests in outbuildings known as wine houses where their wine casks were stored. Meetings of the Indian Hill Horticultural Society were also often held in members' wine houses. Finch founded the Finch Wine Company and managed his fruit farm until the 1890s. When Waring's grape crops failed, he acquired a printing press and began writing, publishing his own works at the age of 69. Both men were experienced grape growers who planted, tended, and harvested their fruit, and transformed it into local wines of high caliber. As Indian Hill's earliest vintners, Finch and Waring were pioneers of viticulture.



Catawba Grapes



Colonel Waring's Home in Indian Hill