

Donation of the Month

Grape Press

1995.22.2

Donor: Mr & Mrs. William Gustaitis



Grapes have been grown throughout the world for centuries; in fact 75,866 square kilometers of the world are dedicated to grapes. Grapes are a type of fruit that grow in clusters of 15 to 300, and can be crimson, black, dark blue, yellow, green, orange and pink. "White" grapes are actually green in color, and are evolutionarily derived from the purple grape. The best known areas are in France, producing some of the best tasting wines. However, grapes can be found

growing across the globe and sold raw or dried and as juices, wines, or jellies. Approximately 71% of world grape production is used for wine, 27% as fresh fruit, and 2% as dried fruit.

Grapes were a common fruit in Northwest Arkansas in the early 20th Century. In Benton County, there were almost 16,000 vines in production in 1910. Starks Wine Ranch in Monte Ne, for instance, was one of these early grape producers for wine. The family vineyard consisted of four 160-acre plots on a bluff along the White River, which they named the Vinola Wine Ranch. Lined with stone, the cellar at Vinola was filled with wooden barrels for aging the wine and racks for storing the bottles. Vinola wines won several medals in the U.S. and abroad, including one in 1893 from the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

Grapes were introduced on a grand scale, however, when the Welch Company set up a factory in Springdale in 1920. By 1950, Washington County was the 23rd largest grape-producing county in the United States. Growers boasted over 1.8 million vines in production, which had grown from only 50,000 vines in 1910. Resurgence in handicrafts and canning in the 1930s to 1950s saw the production of homemade jellies, jams and juices. Homemade grape juice is quite simple and the taste is much better than store bought. This grape press dating to about 1930 was used for home production of grape juice. A round wooden disk at the base of the turning mechanism pressed the grapes until the juice was released. The slatted bin allowed the juice to flow out and trapped the peel, seeds and other unsavory bits.

Back when grape production was at its height, Benton County made the list of top 100 grape-producing counties, ranking 49th with 252,000 vines. However, by 2000 grape production had largely come to a halt.