



## THE WINES OF THE REGION

*“Great wine will be made in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State.”*

Source Unknown but attributed to Bacchus, God of Wine

It is no stretch to imagine Bacchus, God of wine, surveying the Finger Lakes Region and foreseeing that wine making was a natural fit. Some things just go together – and the two have had a perfect fit for almost 150 years.

The story of commercial winemaking in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State dates to the mid 1800s. An Episcopalian minister, Mr. Bostwick, is credited with planting a small vineyard for the purpose of producing sacramental wines in Hammondsport, NY, located at the southern end of Keuka Lake. The Finger Lakes was made to grow grapes – possessing the right soil, terrain and a favorable climate for the crop – and Hammondsport was perfectly situated to become the center of the fledgling winemaking industry.

Innovation and entrepreneurship were hallmarks of the first 50 years of commercial wine making in the Finger Lakes Region. In 1860 Pleasant Valley Wine Company, the first United States bonded winery, opened its doors in Hammondsport, NY. The Urbana Wine Company followed in 1865 and Walter Taylor established Hammondsport’s third major winery in 1880. By the turn of the century, forty wineries were operating throughout the region.

The heyday of the wine industry came to an abrupt end in 1919 with the passage of the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which banned the manufacture, sale, transportation and importation of intoxicating liquors within the United States. Only six Finger Lakes wineries survived the era of Prohibition, which ended in 1933.

One of those wineries, **Widmer’s Wine Cellars** of Naples, New York, is still making wine today. Widmer’s produced its first vintage in 1888, five years after the arrival of its founder, John

● **Finger Lakes Visitors Connection** ● 25 Gorham Street ● Canandaigua, NY 14224 ●  
1-877-FUN-IN-NY ● [www.visitfingerlakes.com](http://www.visitfingerlakes.com)

Jacob Widmer, from Switzerland. Mr. Widmer – quick to realize that the soil and climate of his new home were compatible to growing grapes – planted his first vines in the spring of 1883. Under the leadership of Widmer, the winery grew and prospered. During Prohibition the Widmers altered production to include unfermented grape juice, fruits and wine jellies, syrups, and a limited amount of wine for sacramental and medicinal use. The ability to adapt and change has held the company in good stead. Widmer's product line now contains more than 30 different types of wines – including the traditional ports and sherries as well as wines from varietals such as Niagara, Chardonnay and Riesling. **Widmer's Wine Cellars**, located at 1 Lake Niagara Lane, Naples, New York, holds guided tours and wine tastings daily. For information about one of the oldest Finger Lakes wineries call 1-800-836-5253 or visit their Web site at [www.widmerwine.com](http://www.widmerwine.com).

As the Finger Lakes wine industry was slowly recovering from the Prohibition Era, the Great Depression followed by World War II altered consumer demand for wine. As the wine makers of the Finger Lakes entered the latter half of the twentieth century, it became apparent they needed to rethink everything they had ever known about their product – including the grape itself. Up to this time the wineries of the Finger Lakes had relied entirely on the grapes native to North America, especially the Labrusca variety.

Two men may be credited with the revolution in viticulture, which revamped the wine industry of the Finger Lakes. Charles Fournier, a French vintner, came to work for Gold Seal Wineries of Hammondsport in the 1950s, with the goal to upgrade its champagne product, made with native grapes. Fournier's experimentation with French-American hybrids, combining hardiness in the vineyard with the taste characteristics of European wines, opened new doors for vintners of the region. At the same time, Dr. Konstantin Frank, a recent Ukrainian immigrant, became convinced that the vinifera grapes (Europe wine grapes) would grow in the Finger Lakes Region and set out to prove his theory. In 1962, Dr. Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars produced its first vintage from his vinifera vineyard.

These innovations in viticulture played a major role in the development of the next phase of the wine industry of the region. In 1976, New York State passed legislation which allowed for the establishment of small farm-based wineries. Enter the entrepreneur! The creativity and vitality that had characterized the early history of the wine industry was reborn. Today there are over 60 wineries operating in the Finger Lakes Region producing world class wines of almost every variety. Each one of these wineries has its own story.

While some wineries have grown into industries, smaller winemaking operations remain an integral part of the fabric of the Finger Lakes Region. John Brahm, III made the switch from a large winery to his own, small winery in the early 1990's. **Arbor Hill Grapery** mixes the production of great wines with its popular sauces and jams. Traminette was a new grape for the area, invented at the nearby New York State Experiment Station. Brahm seized the grape with passion and created his award winning Traminette wines.

The newest wineries in Ontario County are both on Seneca Lake, the fastest growing wine area in the region. **Billsboro Winery** is located on Route 14 South as is **Belhurst Winery**.

**Amberg Wine Cellars**, located on Routes 5 and 20 in Flint, midway between Geneva and Canandaigua makes wines in the German tradition. The founders, Herman and Ute Amberg, have developed the business and their son, Eric continues to grow it.

The wineries of the Finger Lakes Region of New York are riding the crest of the interest in and love for wine. The future of the wine industry will bring new wineries, new vintners, and new techniques for determining the best locations for planting vineyards. But some things will remain constant: the quality of the wine and the beauty and hospitality of the Finger Lakes Region.

### **Wine and the Finger Lakes Region of New York: A Perfect Match Resource List**

	<b>Phone No.</b>	<b>Website</b>
<b>Wine Trails</b>		
Canandaigua Wine Trail	1-877-FUN IN NY	<a href="http://www.canandaiguawinetrail.com">www.canandaiguawinetrail.com</a>
Cayuga Wine Trail	1-800-684-5217	<a href="http://www.cayugawine.com">www.cayugawine.com</a>
Keuka Lake Wine Route	1-800-440-4898	<a href="http://www.keukawinetrail.com">www.keukawinetrail.com</a>
Seneca Lake Winery Assn.	1-800-535-8080	<a href="http://www.senecalakewine.com">www.senecalakewine.com</a>
Lake Ontario Wine Trail	1-315-947-5965	
NY Wine & Grape Foundation		<a href="http://www.newyorkwines.org">www.newyorkwines.org</a>
<b>Tourism Agencies</b>		
Finger Lakes Visitors Connection/Ontario Co.	1-877-FUN-IN-NY	<a href="http://www.VisitFingerLakes.com">www.VisitFingerLakes.com</a>
<b>Wineries</b>		
Widmer's Wine Cellars, Naples, NY	1-800-836-5253	<a href="http://www.widmerwine.com">www.widmerwine.com</a>
Arbor Hill Grapery, Naples, NY	1-800-554-7553	<a href="http://www.thegrapery.com">www.thegrapery.com</a>
Amberg Wine Cellars	1-585-526-6742	<a href="http://www.ambergwine.com">www.ambergwine.com</a>
Billsboro Winery	1-315-789-9538	<a href="http://www.billsboro.com">www.billsboro.com</a>
Belhurst Winery	1-315-781-0201	<a href="http://www.belhurst.com">www.belhurst.com</a>
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