

“This is Our Wine, We’re Going to Drink It”: Exploring Newfoundland and Labrador Terroir through Berry Wines¹

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By: Ema Noëlla Kibirkstis

Abstract: Berry wines are a popular product in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Produced both commercially and at home, these wines are made from small fruits that thrive on this land. Wine has been an important import commodity since European colonization in the sixteenth century, and later an important homemade product. Through archival research and an interview with a local berry wine maker, this paper articulates the localized significance of berry wines using the concept of terroir.

Keywords: foodways; taste (food); terroir; alcoholic beverages; wine making; fruit wines; berries (fruits); Newfoundland and Labrador

During Spring 2017, I met up with a few friends to discuss our latest book club pick. We typically enjoy copious amounts of cheese, crackers, dips and, of course, wine. As we were nearing the end of our second bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon from Washington state, Michael Greening offered to open a bottle of his father’s homemade gooseberry wine. My own experience with homemade wine had been, to be polite, disappointing, but as soon as I tasted this beautiful pink liquid, I knew that this was a very unique product. Michael explained that his father uses local berries, and other Newfoundlanders in our group recounted how their own parents or grandparents have made berry wines before. As a “mainlander” (i.e. from mainland Canada), I was impressed that this was a common practice, and a delicious one at that.

Berry wines in Newfoundland and Labrador are commonly homemade, however they can also be found in Newfoundland Liquor Corporation (NLC) stores across the province. Berry wines are made commercially by Frozen In Time Ltd. in Whitbourne (2018-2020) and Auk Island Winery in Twillingate (2017-2020). Dr. Hilary Rodrigues opened Rodrigues Markland Cottage Winery, now Frozen In Time, as the first berry winery in the province in 1993, in the heritage-designated 1935 Markland Cottage Hospital.² The former Rodrigues website specified that the owner “began experimenting with old, traditional Newfoundland recipes for making blueberry wines.” The site also highlighted the importance of high-quality products, as the winery used “only the best quality berries, many of them growing wild, pesticide and chemical-free in our beautiful province.” The Frozen In Time wine pages (2018-2020) echo similar virtues, but the business supplements locally-grown berries with others from outside the province. Auk Island Winery, named in honor of the now-extinct Great Auk, is housed in the former Durrell’s Academy built in 1952. Its website explains that its berries are “picked by hand by local residents and made with love into wine.” Similar to Rodrigues’s, this winery’s website highlights that “Our wines are made from local fruits and berries grown in an environment free of pesticides and chemical fertilizers,” while emphasizing the health benefits of berries “rich with vitamin C and antioxidants.”

Both Rodrigues and Auk Island highlighted the historical buildings that they rehabilitated into wineries and the heritage of berry wines in the province. Also both indicated how "natural" the berries are through the use of words such as "wild," "local," "pesticide-free," and "chemical-free." Both wineries provided tours and tastings, and their advertising targeted potential tourists. Holly Everett, in her article "A Welcoming Wilderness," notes that berries play an important role in culinary tourism products in Newfoundland and Labrador due to the fact that they are a "low-risk culinary departure for many travelers" (2012: 50). The province's berry seasons are short, however jams, baked goods, and wines are available year-round in local shops and restaurants. They are, in fact, a subject of culinary tourism that Lucy Long defines "as the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an Other" (1998: 181). These berry wines allow tourists to experience Newfoundland and Labrador through their palates; they provide a "taste of place" not only of locally available wild fruits, but of a local tradition, heritage, culture, and people—is this not *terroir*?

Terroir is a modern term that originated during the Renaissance, deriving from the Latin *territorium*; originally, it simply meant "territory" (Lukacs 2012 quoted in Patterson and Buechsenstein 2018: 37). It was only in the 1900s that it came to encompass a vineyard's natural environment (ibid), meaning that "the particular, sometimes unique characteristics of a given site, as opposed to another either in close proximity or contiguous, could lead to recognisable if subtle differences in the aroma and taste of wines produced from the same grapes and by the same methods" (Bohmrich 1996: 33). The soil and climate of a vineyard directly impact the grape, so much so that the *terroir* might be discernible from the taste of the wine (that is, a discernable taste of place). *Terroir* has been useful in protecting specific products that are made in a certain region by assuring that they are regulated and not falsely imitated by products grown or produced elsewhere, through special designations such as *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) in France or *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* (DOC) in Italy. Though useful, *terroir* has often been oversimplified as simply relating to the natural environment, when actually conceptions and understandings of *terroir* are deeply entrenched in culture and necessitate human involvement.

Though "terroir" only became a buzz word within wine and food spheres in the twentieth century, the concept that things grown in different places taste differently (or better) has existed for millennia. Ancient Egyptians and Greeks demonstrated preferences for wines from certain regions (Bohmrich 1996: 33-34). Cistercian monks in Burgundy during the High Middle Ages grew monocultures of vines and acknowledged that the same grape varietal tasted differently on different plots, a practice most resembling today's *terroir* viticulture (Lukacs 2012 quoted in Patterson and Buechsenstein 2018: 37). In 2015, "The Climats, *terroirs* of Burgundy" were inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. As the UNESCO website indicates, "Climats are the product of natural conditions and the accumulated experience of winemaker expertise over almost two millenia. In an exceptional manner they reflect the ancient relationship of local human communities with their territories" (2015). Seminal books on the topic, such as James E. Wilson's *Terroir: The Role of Geology, Climate, and Culture in the Making of French Wines* (1998), might emphasize the importance of soil in creating *terroir*, but as food researcher Harold McGee and chef Daniel Patterson write, "If rocks were the key flavor of 'somewhereness,' then it would be simple to counterfeit *terroir*

with a few mineral saltshakers” (2007: 89). This intersection of the natural environment and the culture of place to create *terroir* has been minimally discussed in folklore and foodways scholarship (Whalen 2007, Davis 2019, Fournier 2010, cf. Trubek 2009), yet the interdisciplinary and holistic approach of folklore research lends itself well to study of the everyday use and expression of *terroir*.

Marion Demossier has conducted research on her home province of Burgundy for three decades, and in her article “Beyond *Terroir*” (2011: 695), she explains:

Using a rhetoric emphasizing *terroir* not only as a natural ecological concept, but also as a historicized and heritagized construction of place, the wine-growers create a suggestive and powerful image that can be passed on, narrated to, or consumed by a discerning group of consumers.

A similar rhetoric can be seen in the berry wines of Newfoundland and Labrador. Provincial berry wines are a historicized and heritagized product made from local wild berries that produce a powerful image of place to consumers. In what follows, I first situate berries, wines, and berry wines in the history and culture of Newfoundland and Labrador. Then I focus on the interview I conducted with Herbert Greening from Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador, who has been making berry wines at home for over thirty years. Pairing the natural and cultural environment of the province with the personal experience of wine making by my interlocutor, I will demonstrate a folkloristic approach to *terroir*.

Berries

Around 7000 BC, Maritime Archaic peoples, descendants of Paleo-Indians, began settling along the southern shores of Labrador. They eventually moved up the coast and crossed the Strait of Belle Isle to reach the island of Newfoundland around 3000 BC (Cadigan 2009: 13-14). As their designation indicates, the Maritime Archaic peoples relied heavily on the sea for their nutrition, in addition to wild game and, of course, berries (ibid). Centuries later, in 1001 AD, accounts of Norse expeditions detail their explorations and settlements on the northern coast of Newfoundland. Leif Erikson named the land Vinland after his German expedition member, Tyrker, who vanished from the party only to reappear with an interesting discovery (Kune, trans. 2001: 638):

“I have not been much further off, but still have I something new to tell of; I found vines and grapes.”

“But is that true, my fosterer?” quoth Leif.

“Surely is it true,” replied he, “for I was bred up in a land where there is no want of either vines or grapes.”

They slept now for the night, but in the morning, Leif said to his sailors: “We will now set about two things, in that the one day we gather grapes, and the other day cut vines and fell trees, so from thence will be a loading for my ship,” and that was the counsel taken, and it is said their long boat was filled with grapes. Now was a cargo cut down for the ship, and when the spring came they got ready and

sailed away, and Leif gave the land a name after its qualities, and called it Vinland, or Wineland.

Currently, researchers argue that there might have been issues of mistranslation or misidentification in the saga, as Newfoundland's northern climate would not have been suitable for grape vines, suggesting that the fruit in question could have been cranberries, currants, or other small fruit (Pinney 2007: 3-4, Fernald 1910: 20-23, Quinn 1977: 32, Large 2012: 2, Shortis 1913: 5). When Europeans began regularly frequenting the island beginning in the sixteenth century, their first-hand accounts report the vast quantity and diversity of berries and how they were an integral part of the diet of local indigenous peoples, such as the Beothuks (Marshall 1996: 294, de Gómara [1552-1555] 1885: 345).

Sheila Roberts's history and recipe book, *For Maids Who Brew & Bake: Rare & Excellent Recipes from the 17th Century Newfoundland* (2003: 77), explains that in the earliest European settlement times, housewives were chiefly responsible for "gathering and conserving fruits for the rest of the year." Roberts (2003: 70) cites a list of berries he found amid the descriptions of local geography, climate, and natural resources in John Mason's 1620 book, *A Briefe Discourse of the New-Found-Land*:

The Countrie fruites wild, are cherries small, whole groaues of them Filberds good, a small pleasant fruite, called a Peare, Damaske Roses single very sweet, excellent Straberries, and Hartleberries [blueberries] with abundance of Rasberries, and Gooseberries somewhat better than ours in *England*, all which replanted would be much enlarged.

Mason acted as governor of Coper's Cove, today's Cupids on the island of Newfoundland, from 1615 until 1621 (Heritage Newfoundland & Labrador 2000). Richard Whitbourne, an English colonist, recounts similar tales of Newfoundland in his book *A Discourse and Discovery of New-found-land* (1620), including, "Then haue you there faire Strawberries red and white, and as faire Raspasse berries, and Goose berries, as there be in *England*; as also multitudes of Bilberries, which are called by so me, Whortes, and many other delicate Berries (which I cannot name) in great abundance" (6). As for the Vikings' German friend, the rocky coasts of Newfoundland reminded Whitbourne of the grape vines grown in Spain and Granada. Because the grapes in Spain and Granada "make strong wine," he recalls (58), he surmised this new place could do the same. Over a century later, in a diary entry on August 14, 1794, Aaron Thomas, a seaman aboard the HMS *Boston*, writes of Newfoundland (1968: 140):

I have had occasion before, in more then one place, to mention how plentifull this Country is stored with Berrys. Nature has been abundantly gracious to this Country in particular. All Countrys has something to recommend them, China has its Teas, Lapland has its Reindeer, Ireland has its Linnens and Italy its delicious Fruits. Newfoundland has its Fish, and to that I may add it has its Berrys, which are gratefull to the taste and so abounding that Horses and Cows and Goats lie upon them when they are ripe.

Thomas lists hurts (whimberries), partridgeberries, stone berries (perhaps blueberries), raspberries, currants, and cranberries, to name a few. All three of these accounts³ prove that berries not only grew in the province, but were abundant.

Some centuries later, *Fat-Back & Molasses: A Collection of Favourite Old Recipes from Newfoundland & Labrador*, arguably one of the most distributed cookbooks of this province's cuisine, highlighted the continuing importance of berries in the province. Originally printed in 1974 and reprinted seven times, this compilation of recipes from around the province, edited by Ivan F. Jespersen and illustrated by his daughter Lorie M. Jespersen, gives us a glimpse into the on-going popularity of berry-picking and foraging—as in this example from the 1974 edition (30):

Come SEPTEMBER month the excitement of berry picking brings many Newfoundland families out to the marshes and hills. Bakeapples, partridgeberries, blueberries, squashberries, black berries, raspberries, marsh berries, wild cherries, gooseberries, red and black currants and sarsaparilla await the joyful families bearing flour sacks, pots and pails to harvest the crop.

Scattered throughout the book's many such descriptions, of course, are delicious recipes for berry jams, cobblers, crunches,⁴ grunts,⁵ squares, cakes, cookies, punches, and of course, wines. Roberts's collection includes recipes for strawberry jam, compote, and fool⁶ (2010: 77-84). Roberts's and the Jespersens' works are but two examples of countless recipe books from the province that use local berries within their pages. Berries act as a versatile ingredient loved by locals, and are frequently available in jams and baked goods at local shops, and as an ingredient in restaurant dishes.

Berries also find their way into local oral tradition, confirming Newfoundland's strong association with berries and berrypicking. Herbert Halpert, former English Professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland, founded the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) in 1968. Here, through his and his students' fieldwork, he amassed a diverse collection of provincial folklore, namely folk songs and folktales. In his *Folktales of Newfoundland: The Resilience of Oral Tradition*, co-authored with John Widdowson, Ellen Johnson retells a story from her youth in the 1950s titled, "The Old Woman Who Wanted to Pick Marshberries" (1996: 935-939).⁷ Halpert categorizes this tale as a variant of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther's "The Old Woman and Her Pig" (ATU 2030, see Uther 2011) and notes "the role of berries in the plot of this tale is unique to this subgroup . . . The marshberries in our Newfoundland example are a localization, as is the old woman's wish to go out to pick the berries; berry-picking is a common seasonal activity in the province" (1996: 939).

Fairylore in Newfoundland is also distinctly localized by integrating berries and berrypicking within the setting of fairy-related disappearances, legends, and customs. Peter Narvaez claims in his 1991 article "Newfoundland Berry Pickers 'In the Fairies'" that berry-picking places were good settings for fairy encounters, as they are liminal "zones of muskeg bogs, barrens, and marshlands on the inland geographic fringes of small communities" (338). Due to the fact that berry grounds can be remote, and that berry picking might be done in solidarity or in dispersed groups, Narvaez's sources were often told to use preventive magic against the fairies when going berry picking.⁸ If such

preventive measures failed or were not followed, berry pickers could be led astray, go missing, or encounter these mythical creatures, resulting in personal experience narratives or legends. Halpert's and Narvaez's examples demonstrate how berries and berry-picking are familiar themes in Newfoundland and Labrador's oral folklore.

Wine

Besides the rambling lists of fruits found on this new land documented by English colonizers, we also find a long history of wine consumption in the province, though not made with local berries. In his 1620 account, Whitbourne mentions use of herbs and flowers of the province, such as parsley and rose, to make "Beere, Wine of Aqua-vita" for medical reasons (7). In Peter Edward Pope's *Fish into Wine: The Newfoundland Plantation in the Seventeenth Century* (2004), berries during the period were popularly consumed and preserved with the help of sugar, but there is no mention of berry wines. Pope does state, however, that wine and other alcoholic beverages were used in the new colony as a way to face the harsh weather, particularly "spirits, sack, Bordeaux, and the red wines of the Atlantic islands" (398). Additionally, wine was used as a form of currency, as Newfoundland's "wealth extracted from the sea and the value added in making fish" was "returned to England from southern Europe, whether in specie or in the form of wine, fruit, oil, cork, or other goods" (91). In other words, England would trade Newfoundland fish, namely North Sea herring and Newfoundland cod, for French wine (91-92). Indeed, the triangular trade system extended to many Europeans, namely Portuguese, French, and Spanish, and a wide variety of goods were sold and exchanged within the province, such as salt, sugar, port wine,⁹ and rum,¹⁰ as well as slaves¹¹ (Pope 2014, Oostindie and Roitman 2014).

I searched The Rooms Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador and MUNFLA for earlier accounts of berry wines. I hoped, to no avail, to find some mention of fruit or berry wines from the plebiscite of the Prohibition Act in 1915 and in later additions and revisions. Prohibition restrictions included "the importation, manufacturing and sale of spirits, wine, ale, beer, cider and all other alcoholic liquors for use as beverages" (Prohibition Act and Liquor Control, File 271.A) which ultimately applied to any beverages over two percent alcohol by volume, and thus the ban of several "medicinal" products that were assumed to be used as beverages. Certain exceptions were made, such as for port wine, as this product was considered a transit item, meaning it was brought to St. John's to be stored and matured, and then be re-exported without local consumption (Prohibition Act and Liquor Control, File 271.B and File 271.F.1). Of the accounts of arrests in violation of these laws, I found no proof of the illegal production of homemade wine. Perhaps the seclusion of some of the infrequently visited outport communities, or the short period of prohibition (1917-1924), did not encourage thorough documentation. However, there was evidence of illegal beer and moonshine being made. In the 1920s, Prohibition laws became increasingly problematic, namely the realization that use of "dope"¹² and "moonshine" had not halted alcohol's consumption and abuse (Prohibition Act and Liquor Control, File 271.G). It became clear that Prohibition had led to the abuse of these homemade products, and so "in 1924 a new government under Walter Monroe repealed Prohibition and established the Board of Liquor Control, the precursor of the present-day Newfoundland Labrador Liquor Corporation" (Baker 2012: 267). The 1921 *Report of the Commission on the Prohibition Plebiscite Act* noted the increased arrests for drunk and disorderly behavior

since the 1917 prohibition, from 87 accounts recorded by police in 1917 to 276 in 1920 (272), claiming the data “makes clear that the use of dope or moonshine creates for more disorder than the use of ordinary liquor” (Prohibition Act and Liquor Control, File 271.G). Instead, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians had to order from liquor books to obtain a ration of spirits, wine and/or beer or stout every quarter.

Recipes and accounts of berry-wine making can be found in MUNFLA student papers dating as far back as the 1970s; some report homemade berry wines from early in the twentieth century (Hunt 1972: 6, Pike 1978: 7, Babb 1979: 6-7, Pynn 1979: 38). When researching this area, I noticed that berry wines might not only be categorized as wine, but also classified with homebrew (usually associated with beer) and moonshine (usually associated with high-proof distilled spirits). Searching through these recipes, it became obvious that these berry wines, technically “fruit wines” (Robinson 2015: 300), differ from grape wine in several respects. Fruits other than grapes tend to have higher acid levels that make the product bitter, so fruit wines require the addition of sugar to render them palatable. In addition, due to the lack of yeast found in these other fruits, the addition of yeast is also required. The addition of yeast and sugar to grape wine is common, but it is not as essential as it is for fruit wines. Additionally, though wine improves in flavor and value over years of barrel and bottle aging, “very few fruit wines improve with bottle age” because the “characteristic fruit flavours fade rapidly and most are best consumed well within a year of bottling” (Robinson 2015: 300-301). Though berry wines may be wine-like beverages, the etymology of “wine” is directly rooted in the Latin word for vineyard, *vīnea*, and therefore might render the term “berry wine” nonsensical to wine purists. Considering that the term “wine” might be solely used and understood by some as the fermented beverage made from grapes and, as noted above, considering that berry wines have been categorized as homebrew and moonshine, it is possible that the lack of mention of berry wines pre-twentieth century within the provincial archives and MUNFLA might simply mean it was known under another name.¹³ The constantly changing vernacular terminology and definitions of alcoholic beverages were equally noted in the many “beer” recipes found in MUNFLA, where the beer was not made with malted grain or boiled, as it commonly is today.

Many student papers at MUNFLA indicated that homemade wine and other homemade alcoholic beverages are an old tradition (Bennett 1978: 14-15), however I was not able to find any such documentation before the twentieth century. It could be argued that Newfoundland and Labrador received generous wine imports, particularly due to their trade history with France and Portugal, that would have been easily accessible through merchants. Thus there may have been no need to produce alcoholic beverages locally, and this explanation may account for the increased documentation of homemade alcohol during Prohibition. Or perhaps the activity was simply done regularly and discreetly enough not to warrant documentation—this subject is still unclear and worthy of further investigation.

Herbert Greening’s Berry Wines

Berries have been a source of nutrition for as long as humans have occupied land known today as Newfoundland and Labrador. Canada’s First Nations people used berries for both food and medicine (see, for example, Kuhnlein and Turner 1992).¹⁴ Norse and European colonizers enthused about the abundance of berries gracing the land,

confusing them with grapevines. Wine was an important import and economic resource for the colony, alongside fish. Oral tradition and archival records demonstrate that berry wines are a notable part of vernacular culture. These details are important because they construct a powerful image of the history and heritage of berry wines in the province. To quote the same article by McGee and Patterson, ". . . on the one hand with nature and the soil, through the mystery of plant growth and the miracle of fermentation, and on the other with man, who wanted wine and who was able to make it by means of knowledge, hard work, patience, care, and love" allowing for "the 'somewhereness' is given its meaning by 'someoneness'" (89). If you have ever had a sommelier or wine aficionado explain a wine to you, the soil might explain the earthiness and minerality of the wine, but often you hear instead about the estate that made the wine. The soil, history, and culture are filtered through a singular entity: the winemaker. This "someone" creates the terroir both physically and mentally, one reason why I would like to focus on my friend's father, Herbert Greening.

Herbert Greening was born in 1945 in Musgravetown, Bonavista Bay, on the northeastern coast of the island of Newfoundland. As a heavy equipment mechanic, he moved to St. John's in 1970 and then to Mount Pearl in 1983, where he still lives today with his wife Mary. They have two children, Michael and Greg. He retired in 2017 after working for over forty years. Today, he is the only one of his friends and family who continues to make wine from berries.

Greening explained that to make good wine you need clean and sterile equipment, temperature regulation, which Greening refers to as "procedures," and good ingredients. For example, Greening recalls making wine from sarsaparilla berries at a young age:

HG: When we were a kid, when we were growing up, seems like everybody, well not everybody, but a lot of the people I hung around with, especially the older guys, they were making wine, or trying to make wine but there was no procedure for them, because you drank the wine out of the same bottles that you brewed it in (laughing). That's if you got it to ferment and the bottles didn't break because no one ever thought about, well you know like when it ferments it's producing gas and that makes pressure in the bottles so if you don't vent it out, your bottles are going to break.

EK: Right, so they didn't do any airlocks or anything like that?

HG: No, not them, no my lord, no, no one knew what that was. So you just made it and if it produced a bit of alcohol and you got a little kick out of it, that was good. Spit the berries out (laughing). But that didn't, we didn't make too much of that because we always had to keep it hid from our parents because, of course, when you're sixteen or seventeen they don't want you making wine (laughing) or drinking it.

The lack of "procedure" explains the mediocrity of the wine from his youth. It took him two other attempts during his adulthood before he finally started to make wine regularly. He began when a friend from work invited him out to pick blueberries and make wine, "he did a pretty well, like a recipe for doing it and a procedure for doing it,

and his turned out good.” For those unfamiliar with producing homemade wine or other alcoholic beverages, significant emphasis is placed on hygiene and cleanliness, as a sterile environment ensures fuller control of the flavors of the final product; the inability to maintain a sterile environment will cause off-flavors and off-smells and can lead to poor quality wine (Robinson 366-367). This meticulousness is expected and monitored in wineries, however as some readers might have experienced in a friend’s lackluster first attempt at producing wine from a kit, oftentimes attention to detail is set aside in favor of making a cheap, high alcohol beverage.

Greening’s emphasis on “procedure” also extends to his everyday life and home. After agreeing to the interview, Michael had messaged me regarding his father’s concern that “apparently the basement is in a state and dad is embarrassed.” Upon my arrival, I noticed the basement clean and organized, everything had its place (Photos 1 and 2). When he showed me his winemaking notebook dating back to the 1980s, I noticed the handwriting was neat and that the book lay perfectly flat, without any creases or proof of use; it was as though the book was newly bought (Photo 3). The rest of his house had the same meticulousness: spines of the books on the shelves were aligned and each pillow was delicately placed in its spot on the couch. This precision allows Greening to keep track of his winemaking, improve the process if needed, and to remain consistent in the quality of his product.



Photo 1. Herbert Greening’s winemaking equipment placed on top of a large chest freezer. Mount Pearl, November 9, 2017. Photo: Ema Noëlla Kibirkstis.



Photo 2. Herbert Greening's clean carboys (used to ferment wine, top), filled wine bottles (bottom). Mount Pearl, November 9, 2017. Photo: Ema Noëlla Kibirkstis.

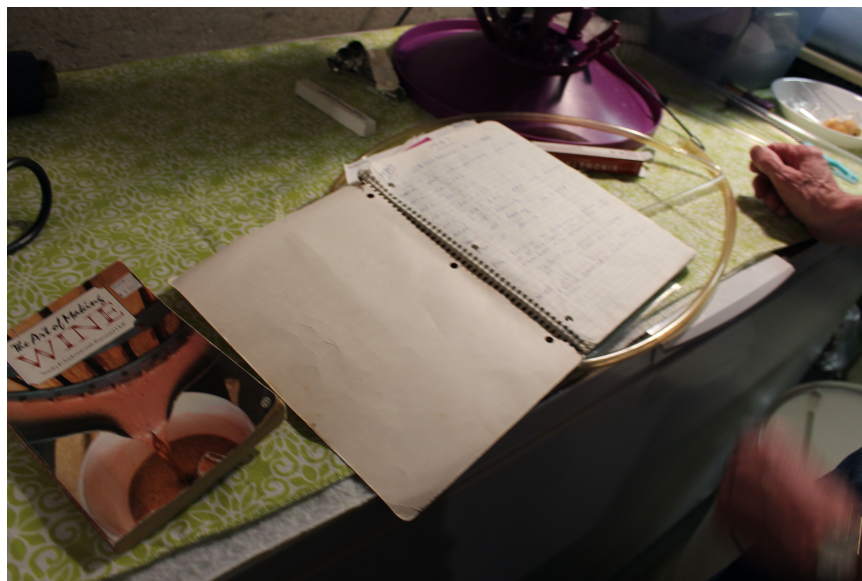


Photo 3. Herbert Greening's winemaking notebook. Mount Pearl, November 9, 2017. Photo: Ema Noëlla Kibirkstis.

Greening also emphasized that “good ingredients” are essential to making good wine. Over the last thirty years, Greening has used a wide variety of ingredients, primarily dogberry, gooseberry, and blueberry, though sometimes he uses other local products such as rhubarb, cherries, squashberries, and damson plums, and occasionally uses fruits from other parts of Canada, such as peach, chokecherry, and plum. His vast vernacular knowledge of berries is nuanced and extensive. For example, dogberries are best after the first frost, partridgeberries are a hardy fruit that can survive through most frost and snow, whereas blueberries tend to be more delicate. When prompted to explain how he picks a good berry, he emphasized that you can tell by the way the berry looks (“not withered,” “plump,” “juicy,” “good color”) and tastes (“sweet,” “good texture”). Though he used to procure the berries himself, he now relies on pickers who sell them from their cars alongside the road, a common sight during late spring and early fall. Good berries are essential to making a good wine:

. . . how the berry is, that’s how your wine is going to be. That’s going to influence the final product, you know. You need good berries and you need them ripe, and now I’m not like people who made them from, who grow the grapes and watch them, they got to pick them right at the, at the peak. You know it’s important to them, but I mean for me, for us I got a little wider range.

In addition to berries, Greening also uses spring water instead of tap water. He retrieves the water from a local source in Southside Hills, considering it “the best water around.” When the wine is ready to be bottled, he sweetens it with sugar and asks his wife to taste it, “I don’t even have to ask her . . . I can tell by her face.”

Unlike the carefully cared for vines of Burgundy, berries here are native and abundant on the rocky island of Newfoundland, as noted earlier. Similar to a *vigneron*, Greening chooses and picks his fruit at its peak and sources water locally because it directly impacts the quality of the wine. Each batch is taste-tested by his wife Mary to ensure a balanced product. With over thirty years of experience, Greening has been producing berry wines for his friends and family, a tradition that he remembers from childhood and that the local archives date back to the early twentieth century, but whose heritage ultimately dates back to the Neolithic era. With or without a designation similar to an AOC, when I had my glass of blueberry wine back in 2017, I appreciated the long history of berries and wine consumption in Newfoundland. Greening’s production of wine recalls a heritage of berry wine in the province, just as commercial berry winemakers Rodrigues Markland Cottage Winery and Auk Island Winery acknowledged on their websites. When asked if berry wines are important to Newfoundland and Labrador, Greening stated, “it’s probably not as important now because probably not a lot of people make wine,” and definitely not the younger generations. He explained that now there isn’t much reason to be making wine at home, when in the past there was:

You could only get, say, so much, so many bottles, I think it was two bottles a week or something. It’s all you could buy because you had to get your book stamped every time you went in. So, a lot of people used to make, make wine and make moonshine . . . to up their quantity of booze, . . . and people sometimes lived places where they didn’t have access to store bought, . . . a lot of the coastal communities, there was no liquor stores there, you couldn’t get it, if you came to

St. John's, . . . or if you went to some of the bigger centres, you could bring some home, but most people made, made their own wine and ran moonshine.¹⁵

His narrative was very similar to others encountered in the archives: that this is a tradition that began out of necessity because there was no other way to acquire alcohol legally.

These accounts recall a nostalgic past in which Newfoundlanders and Labradorians had to live off the land and "the berries serve as an iconic image of resourceful people living close to a bountiful, welcoming wilderness" (Everett 2007: 49). This nostalgia is very similar to that in French cuisine, as Amy Trubek explains in her book *A Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir* (2009). In France, *terroir* is often associated with the landscape through a "mythic past" of farms and farming in the French countryside, even though "the majority of the population has left both behind in their own lives" (14). Though Greening's berry wines might not be a renowned brand such as Veuve Clicquot or hold a famous designation such as the Champagne AOC, the story of berry wine in the province and Greening's particular production demonstrates a powerful relationship between taste and place. As Demossier writes in *Burgundy: The Global Story of Terroir* (2020: 34), the unique value of *terroir* is the ability to summon the place you are consuming:

The Burgundy region is charged with meanings which are derived from the wine that is produced there, but also from carefully chosen elements of its history which have been evoked to construct the place. The very mention of Burgundy conjures up images of monks, monumental architecture, gastronomy and great wines. It is an imagined rural idyll that consumers are drawn to.

Terroir isn't based on a principle of what tastes best or better, but rather what carries a significant attachment to a place. Greening's berry wines demonstrate *terroir*.

Conclusion

Exploring *terroir* in a non-commercial product such as homemade berry wine might seem pointless to some, as *terroir* is often used to sell and create an elite product (Demossier 2020; Hermansen 2012). However, homemade products are often compared to the high standards of commercial products to demonstrate their quality. When compared to commercial wine, Greening says he enjoys his own product better partly because of the satisfaction he gains from understanding "what it takes to . . . make a good glass of wine . . . I'm drinking this now and I know that I picked the berries . . . every step that I went through to get to this point." In addition, it's cheap and enjoyed as much if not more than anything store-bought. In one MUNFLA paper, George Pike tells his researcher and son, Stephen G. Pike, "I doubt you could tell the difference between the wine that I put up and the wine that you buy at the liquor commission" (1978: 27). Greening made similar statements regarding the taste of his wine, but emphasized how similar they look. Thanks to local stores, Greening is able to buy corks, labels, caps, and other supplies that make his own wine have the appearance of store-bought (Photo 4). He recalls giving a few bottles of wine to a friend who was returning to the Northwest Territories. When stopped at the airport and questioned about the wine and whether or not it was homemade, he was easily allowed on his way because the wine looked store-

bought.¹⁶ Homemade wine cannot be transported. Greening had a good laugh and took great pride in that.



Photo 4. One glass of gooseberry wine, a bottle of blueberry wine, and a bottle of gooseberry wine—all made by Herbert Greening. Mount Pearl, 9 November 2017.
Photo: Ema Noëlla Kibirkstis.

Terroir connects a product to a specific natural environment, which in turn allows for the higher price and prestige of fine wines with an AOC or other designation (Demossier 2011: 691). However that designation can purposefully undermine the important human factor in its authentication of geographical uniqueness. There is no doubt that geology and climate directly impact the grape—as with any other crop or livestock: chef and farmer Dan Barber feeds his chickens carotenoid-rich red peppers to achieve deep red, flavourful egg yolks (Jeter 2015); the distinguishably sweet and nutty “*pata negra*” *jamón ibérico* comes from pure-bred black Iberian pigs that feast on acorns (Jamon.com. 2020); the low-sulfur soils in Georgia produce the mild and sweet Vidalia onion (Vidalia Onions 2020). Grapes and wines are not unique in showcasing how different soils and places provide different tastes, how the French were unique in using arguments of terroir to create designations, allowing other foods to do the same. The terroir in France is as unique as the terroir everywhere else in the world.

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Notes:

¹ Adapted from a paper I wrote as a doctoral student for Folk 6770: Global/Local with Dr. Cory W. Thorne during Fall 2017 semester, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

² Since writing this article, Rodrigues Winery was sold to Marek Krol and renamed “Frozen In Time Ltd” (2018-2020). Rodrigues Winery’s former website address, <http://rodrigueswinery.com> was de-activated by mid-December 2020.

³ Though for centuries Europeans had arrived on the coasts of this province for the fisheries, berries were largely consumed locally and were not commercially traded until the local commercial fishing industry adopted mechanized processing technology in 1927 and commercial blueberrying emerged in Newfoundland in the 1930s, during a period of high unemployment (Narvaez 1991: 324).

⁴ I couldn’t find a formal definition of a “crunch,” but by the look of the list of ingredients and the process of making this dessert, it would seem to be most similar to a “crumble.” An article in *Canadian Living* explains, “Similar to a crisp, a crumble is a baked fruit dessert with a layer of topping. A crumble topping rarely includes oats or nuts, and is instead usually a streusel-like combination of flour, sugar and butter. However some variations may include oats and nuts. The topping is generally more clumpy than a crisp topping, but not as clumpy as a cobbler topping” (Kish 2015).

⁵ “Large pies called ‘grunts’ or ‘bangbellies’ were often cooked for dessert for supper. These were pies made in large baking pans, with a top crust and sometimes a lower one too—filled with blueberries or ‘apple jam’” (Downey 1971).

⁶ Though Robertson’s book does mention wines, beer, and other alcoholic beverages, no recipe or direct mention of berry wine is named (2010: 105-114).

⁷ Zita Johnson, daughter of Ellen Johnson, recorded this tale in 1967 as a student of Halpert’s. Ellen recalls her mother telling her the story sometime in the early 1950s in Renews, Newfoundland. When they visited MUNFLA on May 22, 1985, Ellen and Zita could not recall why “marshberries” rather than simply “berries” was used. Halpert notes that “marshberries” could likely refer to small cranberries (1996: 938).

⁸ “The most common forms of preventive magic used by berry pickers to protect themselves from fairy encounters were to turn articles of clothing inside out or to carry pieces of bread, breadcrumbs, or ‘fairy buns.’” (Narvaez 1991: 22).

⁹ Newman’s Port was aged in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1679 until 1998. The Newman Wine Vault can still be visited in St. John’s (Newman Wine Vaults 2016).

¹⁰ The province is widely known as a rum-drinking province including “screech,” “a variety of cheap, dark Demerara rum bottled in Newfoundland” (Kirwin et al. 1990: 442).

¹¹ Visual artist Camille Turner highlighted the role the province played in the African-Caribbean slave trade in her exhibit, *What Carries Us: Newfoundland and Labrador in the Black Atlantic*, shown during the 2019 Bonavista Biennale at The Rooms, St. John’s, Newfoundland (Blades and Turner 2019; Junaid 2019; and Turner 2019).

¹² Though stereotypically applied to narcotics, “dope” has also been used to refer to alcoholic drink (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2020: s.v. “dope, *n.*”); restricted online access through Memorial University of Newfoundland, November 18, 2020).

¹³ When editing and revising this paper, Summer 2020, I discovered “berryocky” or “berry ocky” mentioned in MUNFLA documentation as a type of alcoholic beverage made from berries, particularly partridgeberry (for example, see Metcalfe 1973).

¹⁴ Sadly, especially when it comes to food, there are a lot of resources by settlers on what First Peoples in Canada eat, but nothing from the primary sources themselves. I found locating sources that relate specifically to historical and contemporary uses of berries for food or medicine by Newfoundland/Labradorean First Peoples unfruitful, as well as finding documentation and testimony in their own words and from their perspectives. It

is representative of a bigger problem. For example, [Noémie Boulanger-Lapointe and team's](#) article (2019) discusses first-hand Inuit accounts of the importance of berries in their diets, but written by white people. It may be worth mentioning the increasing online presence of national organizations such as Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's "[A Taste of the Arctic](#)," based in Ottawa. A menu [by chefs Sheila Flaherty](#) and Kenton Leier (2019) features a variety of berries (see also, Braganza 2020).

¹⁵ Under the Excise Act, "No person shall possess a still or other equipment suitable for the production of spirits with the intent of producing spirits unless the person (a) is a spirits licensee; (b) has a pending application for spirits licence; or (c) possess the still or equipment solely for the purpose of producing spirits for the purpose or as a consequence of the analysis of the composition of a substance containing absolute ethyl alcohol" (*Excise Act, 2001*, c. 22. s. 61). A still is an apparatus used for distilling alcoholic drinks to produce hard liquor (such as vodka, rum, whiskey, etc.), and moonshine is an illegally distilled (or smuggled) alcohol.

¹⁶ Restrictions on the interprovincial transportation of alcoholic beverages for personal consumption is confusing within federal and provincial law. Though irregularly imposed, laws heavily regulate or have rendered it illegal (*Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act*; Mayer 2011; Zussman 2019). Residents of the Northwest Territories have higher taxes on their alcohol, so often purchase alcohol within other provinces to bring back home (Winkler 2018). Since homemade alcohol is not government regulated, typically it doesn't list alcohol content or otherwise on the label, making it more likely to be withheld at the border. Greening tells this story because his berry wine's passing as a commercial product at the border implies the higher quality of his production.

¹⁷ Most links first accessed by author during 2017 research phase. All links now posted, unless otherwise indicated, active and accurate as of final publication preparations in December-January 2020-2021.