

Chapter 9

Frank's Beans

(Sung), "Life is just a bowl of freakin cherries"

"Don't take it freakin seriously" -From a Peter Shickele joke on 5/4 time

(Original Lyrics Brown and Henderson)

Although 'Willard State Hospital for The Chronic and Indigent Insane' has long since closed its doors and been erased from collective memory as well as to some extent the hillside where it once lorded over a vast, though dysfunctional, fiefdom, having ceased to function entirely in its rechartered capacity for well over a decade now, the hum of it's therapeutic home industry workshops silenced, long ago converted into an extension of the New York penal system for low level repeat drug offenders, nevertheless, the Finger Lakes region as a whole, even today, retains a somewhat genial air of affable but adamantly socially productive schizophrenia and the ghostly echoes of the humanely confined insane still seem to resonate from the low limestone and slate hills of nearby Lake Seneca. The corresponding dual character of the region, itself split by a geologic fault line running down the east side of the lake had long ago been fashioned by the region's inhabitants into its two parallel distinctly divergent characters defined by grape growing and the business of shaping of young minds.

The lake was named after a great Iroquois chief Sanake who had fought with the British against the French in the French Indian wars at Fort Niagara. The name Sanake means 'killer of the fort' in the Seneca dialect. It also means, 'dog penis' in the Iroquois language which implies either that perhaps Sanake was somewhat less respected among the Iroquois than the Seneca or perhaps that he had destroyed Fort Niagara by peeing on it. The place itself was important therefore not because a bunch of wise cracking Indians once had their orchards and lived there, but because afterwards there was, (upon a time), upon this ground, was built a college that lasted one year, (the Ovid Agricultural College), and an insane asylum that lasted a hundred (Willard State Hospital).

Over the ensuing century, ever since the Ovid Agricultural College precipitously closed its doors in 1861, several other colleges and distinguished universities have grown up in the vicinity and some twenty five miles to the south one finds the bustling and mammoth Cornell University, financial and intellectual heir to the Ovid venture. Indeed the area in general has over the last century and a half become known as the cradle of the New York University system. The atmosphere which at first glance seems bucolic and in fact, once you get used to the presence of the occasional bunkered laboratory, actually is provides a welcoming vista to the hordes of unshaped as opposed to misshapen minds which flock there each fall, and if you must know, the original inhabitants of the area, as opposed to the intruding academics, have only two persistent enemies; Liberals and Snow; both, in this area, mostly white and both decidedly fluffy. Since there are among the academics also those of a decidedly fluffy caste, each has consequently, like the Seneca and the Iroquois long since developed the life skill of living side by side with the other along with their mutual enemies and without the necessity of peeing on them.

The locals when you come down to it are in fact generally acknowledged to have made the larger sacrifice, this of having to live 'cheek by jowl' with large numbers of highly educated, ineluctably self

involved people with whom they cannot converse for any length of time on a level meaningful to both parties and with whom in fact, if they did engage even in a narrowly defined discussion designed to avoid the unseen lurking depths of specialized knowledge would, most likely be proven wrong in any dispute in a particularly overbearing and superior fashion, one that would be quite enough to inspire anyone to drive their vehicle directly into one of the large snowdrifts which abound in the area for usually up to ten months out of the year (which in fact is what one winter I, in a fit of geologically induced schizophrenia myself did).

Willard State Asylum emerged from the ruins of the Agricultural College in 1865 when the good residents of Ovid guided by the paternal hand of the state legislator, farmer and inventor Ezra Cornell signed themselves on to a thirty thousand dollar mortgage on the suddenly vacant property offered by New York State. The asylum, the first of its kind in the state, was intended to accommodate mostly the indigent insane of Seneca and Tompkins County and the surrounding areas many of whom had already been driven slightly crazy (possibly by the proximity of liberals and snow) and others, even to the present day by the abundant dysfunctional geniuses and dog penises alongside whom they were doomed to live. In any event, the good citizens of Ovid were evidently extremely gratified to finally have a place within driving distance to park their crazies and not to look a gift horse, many of them also quickly found employment in Willard's suddenly humming workshop industries that grew up on the sprawling hillside as it came to be the largest employer in the region and it was not just these local residents that realized the advantages as day laborers from the surrounding counties found that they did not have to move, or at least not move far, in order to live out their years in a productive manner so long as they could put up with a cook's garden of variegated loonies that had been dosed in their frozen midst like a tirage into a good champagne.

So, in all fairness, the locals had far longer to accommodate themselves to the idea of living alongside a group of people whom they fundamentally despised and regarded as leeches on the public purse and on whom their incomes in the end relied than had the academics who had only found themselves in the dogpenisloonytune reaches of upstate New York in the search of tenure. Indeed it was all good practice for what was to come. That this mutual tolerance evolved therefore was not only a credit to those individuals, but also to the foresight of Ezra Cornell who had the singular genius to couple the birth of the academic institution with an agricultural outreach program and a first class nut house. So both these facilities housed in the buildings of Ovid had long since proved their worth in preparing those who gravitated there for what was to come. It facilitated the grafting of the necessarily more self involved and 'rococo' mental habits of the research community onto the smoothly glacial manners of the locals and more importantly, in the end, provided a template for somewhat less patently contrived means of conversation channeled through what was a common interests for both, namely agriculture, thereby making the entire dog penis and pony show far more palatable to all parties concerned.

Both these constituencies continued to evolve over the ensuing century, eventually organizing themselves into more formal structures; the local workers into a union called the SEIU which was an acrostic named after a game they used to play with the inmates of Willard called "I See You" and the Academics into what was more a fraternal organization called Les'AMIS or les académie des mandarines intellectuelles modeled after the post WWI Clarte' Society of French Intellectuals . With the Francophobia that attended the start of the second gulf war, and in keeping with the underlying minimalist purpose of the organizations this was changed to the more popularly palatable acronym, AIMS. Eventually even this was repudiated and reduced, regarded as too militaristic for what was

essentially a scholarly organization and with a nod to their by now offended French colleagues they settled on the more Cartesian, IAM.

Though by temperament and inclination notable ‘non-joiners’, the faculties of the university proved overwhelmingly eager to join and the resulting gaggle of intellectuals and academic mandarins as it provided them with collective persona within which they might confront the local population as a consistent entity. The locals, on the other, being notable ‘joiners’, membership, even in an organization with no conceivable purpose conferred a certain solidity of character. Being the most egregiously lax of the two at least as far as social skills the academics readily adopted this patently valuable compromise, eager to cultivate even a false sense of camaraderie, this mostly just so they could go to the Seven Eleven for cigarettes without inducing an existential or psychological crisis.

In short, eventually, albeit with the glacial slowness that characterizes the entire region, an unspoken accord, an underlying social convention of manners evolved which served both University and non-University residents of the region equally well providing a clear framework for mutual personal interaction and indirect but palpable economic benefits to both but which more importantly, in addition, maintained a strictly defined boundary between the two, so that the two distinct ‘personalities’ which had come to dominate the region might function reasonably side by side and independently while still giving the appearance of coherence on the whole. It was a mutually agreed upon semi-permanent state of functional schizophrenia.

This remarkably successful adaptation was, over the years, been informally codified into a transmissible set of informal social rules, a kind of social DNA. In keeping with the overly solicitous intellectualism of the most notable practitioners, it too has been given both a name and an acronym under which to function. This set of unwritten rules to which both groups subscribed themselves to was and is called ‘the innocuous convention’, and though there is no particular course by that name at Cornell University the other college which shares the hills above Cayuga’s Waters was in fact named after it, though IC has mistakenly by some been ascribed as being in fact as representing Ithaca College, its enduring commitment to innocuousness defies this ascription.

Without this social contract under which both parties lived amicably for many years there is little doubt that neither would have had the courage to step back from the precipice of mockery much less turn each other loose from the grip of their mutually ironic gazes. It was in short a form of detente that would survive the cold war and work to the satisfaction of both factions for many years thereafter.

On the other side of this heuristic equation/convention, having thus been forced to live in close symbiotic proximity for many years with IAM and without much else to do in the evening hours, the locals have honed the various social skills defined by the IC to a fine edge, perfecting the patina of polite and intellectually inoffensive patter polishing it to a fine velvety sheen. Even today, if one listens closely at the threshold of one of the many neat clapboard residences lining the streets of one of the university towns one may hear the whispered refrain ‘Have a nice day’ being repeated over and over, like a fierce mantra. Rather than providing an additional mental strain, this long acquaintanceship with the forms of convention has produced a hereditary social skill, (and is now even a source of local pride), indeed a means of sustainable self-preservation but one must admit that there has been a certain corresponding cost. The other part of this Faustian bargain is that

when the academics appear to be just way too crazy, the locals must pretend just not to notice. This second strategy seems to work equally well.

So, as a result, the lakes themselves and the surrounding slate hills and brief flat interstitial meadows that give way to the gentle slopes leading to those lakes are today bejeweled with excellent institutions of higher learning each brimming with all manner and variety of intellectual activity, and we find interspersed between, them the more practical vineyard operations that on the whole taken together, lend this region from south of Syracuse to North of Elmira all the air of a modern day Jeffersonian Athenian agritopia.

The Agricultural sub-station of Cornell University is located only ten miles from 'the Willard' as it was eventually known. in Geneva, perched somewhat tentatively at the head of Seneca Lake. It today gazes tranquilly over it's dual fiefdom like an aging matronly debutante with a vague but no longer biologically compelling interest in such matters as may fall within a rather dilettantish purview. In contrast to that latter institution the Ag station was by the 1950s an irreproachable bastion of sanity and utility in the midst of an otherwise purposeless and dysfunctional and slowly dying city, presenting a stark modernist and cheerfully salutary contrast to the morose ex-asylum buildings just down the lake whose busy workshops had long been abandoned. Like all of Ezra Cornell's projects however, it seemed bent on proving in the face of all evidence that the best defense against going cuckoo was to grow something, anything. Indeed, some decades earlier as the ice age of prohibition dissipated, leaving the area like the retreating glaciers denuded of some of its former salient features, small vineyards once again begun to spring up. Like charms in an invisible necklace of agriculture they surrounded the Lakes with Geneva as the, even then, slightly broken but obviously once elegant catch the growing of grapes reasserted itself as the dominant non-looney non-academic related activity. And as if to breach any further potential divide, the Cornell Cooperative Extension became the designated organ of aforementioned agricultural outreach seeking to once again meld the aspirations of the local population with the superabundance of ambient free floating knowledge.

Having been chartered late in the nineteenth century to act in concert with the local population to promote and improve the practice of agriculture in the State, the substation still serves as the premier contact point between the University and its environs and nowhere is the unspoken social compact, 'the innocuous convention', more in evidence than at the Geneva Agricultural Experiment Station and never moreso than in 1951, the year a strangely misanthropic character who fit neither of the carefully crafted stereotypes arrived on the scene to revolutionize the entire setup. It is therefore not surprising, given the history of the area, that it would attract to the shores of that lake some rather strange characters.

The Cooperative Extension's agenda for the local area which had been pursued from the early days of the century mostly concerned devising methods for increasing production of the barely potable jug wines being mass produced by Taylor or the production of a variety of grapes suitable only for juice or jellies. Indeed the grape jelly and juice concerns like Welch's had grown up alongside the vineyards. These latter enterprises focused on non-wine uses of grapes, due largely to the effects of prohibition had come to dominate the local economies and hence mostly the highly productive and hearty Concord and Delaware vines suitable for these products were widely planted on the broad loamy former cow pastures.

As longtime head of Geneva's grape program, Dr. Nelson Shaulis' efforts in promoting these varieties and their cultivation, therefore, fell well within his charter, pursuing as it were an inoffensive, industry supportive paradigm that seemed to mesh well with the local economics trying to maximize the production of the types of grapes for which there was a proven existing market. Grape juice, not fine wine was the predominant principal cash end-product, with Taylor still being the main buyer for relatively minor market in non-Concord juice, or grapes that would go into wine. Furthermore, Geneva did not regard as any part of its mission showing initiative in setting a different economic climate for viticulture and hence the environment within which they were constrained to operate, the status quo, was already well defined by the major economic concerns like the Taylor's and the Welch's, the largest buyers for the region's produce. Indeed, in view of the prevailing economic context in the Finger Lakes region at that time, (the nineteen fifties), the sub-station's policies were eminently sensible.

But, by the nineteen seventies, in the face of falling prices for grapes the smaller operations in the area, already marginally profitable were beginning to fold. Then the market collapsed altogether, as if the collapse had been engineered. It had been up to that point, widely accepted not only by the general public, but by the growers as well that high quality wines would never be produced in the region. The abundantly clear and indisputably noxious reason was the strong and singularly identifiable aftertaste of the Labrusca grape, the various Native American strains which were being almost exclusively cultivated by the area growers. While eminently suitable to a jelly which when combined with peanut butter between two slices of bread provided a healthy treat, the only wines still being produced from these grapes contained either the word "Boone's" or "Wild Irish" somewhere in the title and were usually prominently displayed in prominent public view only when a film noir moviemaker intended to portray the contents of a recently overturned garbage pail inhabiting an anonymous alleyway with to added charming fillip of implied vomitus in the immediate vicinity.

Thus while California nostrils were being trained to distinguish the hints of raspberry, pepper, tire iron and Belgian chocolate found in their Cabernets, various other appellations were being devised to describe the offensive sickly character of these sickly Eastern cousins which when vinified, were providing the impetus for introducing into the vocabulary of winetasting the descriptive terms; "Foxy", "Three Day Headache", "Black Snot Bug Juice" and "Manischewitz Jew Juice" as apt oenologic descriptors. Indeed, the euphemistic "Foxy" came to most succinctly characterize the distinctly Labrusca nose a term for which the more accurate descriptor, would be probably 'coyote pee'. Not surprisingly therefore, as it turns out, nobody who has not made a career of washing car windows with a shit stained rag, wanted to drink something that has overtones of coyote urine, no matter how "foxy" it might otherwise be.

Because the wines made from Labrusca or native American varieties carried this heavy 'nose', the reputation of most New York wines well into the 1970s, remained second only to Buffalo's reputation for cuisine (that is up until the advent of 'Hot Wings'). And Geneva sub-station it seemed was the last to be inclined to upset this particular apple, or grape cart as it might be. In the pre-Hot Wings, post-McCarthy 1950s era American society at large was still rank with the laissez faire form of the same unspoken social contract, the inertial innocuousness that in the microclimate of the Finger Lakes, as we have described also governed the University-non-University social relations. They were happy to let sleeping dogs, or coyotes, as the case might be, lie. But, just as

occurred in the society at large sometime in that impeccably starched and laundered decade, at some indefinable parallel point, the pendulum, which should have begun its long backward graceful swing towards meaningful intercourse, normalcy and reason began acting a little crazy, an unexpected vibration introduced to upset the social equilibrium if not the laws of physics themselves which were being violated wantonly and frequently. There was to be no simple predictable correction this time. The inertial tide of innocuousness, the infection of inoffensiveness continued to sweep in unimpeded in from the fringes, like a tsunami bearing the detritus of meaning as indigestible chunks in the milkshake chocolate wave, bearing, in the case of Cornell, into the very heart of the great University, an irresistible cargo of intellectual mediocrity, and Cornell finding it had a ready avenue for the vacuous tide of nonsense which now served as a conduit for this tide found it came dangerously close to infesting its core academic mission and decorating its innermost sanctum with soggy kitschy 'bric-a-brac' and 'tschockes', and like the poor grape growers on the lake found they were at wits end what to do,--(oh, my!).

To the trustees of the University at least, it was and had been abundantly clear that the vital and somewhat messy process of intellectual innovation required a less somnolent and sterile incubating environment than the society at large and so, as any organism might, the University and even while attempting to leave the enveloping social contract inviolate, took steps to protect itself from this infusion of mediocrity and it did so like any good grocer meting out a just measure of product by providing counterweights, hiring on such eminent lights as Vladimir Nabakov and others like the leftist economist Doug Dowd, intellectuals whose 'avant garde' credentials and reputations were unassailable having stood up remarkably well, like Reese's pieces, to the Dairy Queen milkshake wave of conformity, unfortunately, in a moment of panic hanging them in the window somewhat like Christmas ornaments was not really all that effective despite the fact that Douglas Dowd's complexion closely resembled that of Santa Claus.

However, no doubt to the University administrators' chagrin, it seems, instead of reversing the tsunami of 'blah', under this constant influence, the coterie of assembled 'avant gardists' finding themselves now assembled, conscripted as it were to rebuild a core sense of intellectual identity while still enveloped in the saran 'haveaniceday' social compact haberdashery shortly came to adopt this same ambient protective coloration, becoming at least stylistically inoffensive, resorting to sporting tweed jackets with elbow patches and pipes to simultaneously lend credence to their vaunted eccentricities (as job security), but also as camouflage to obscure themselves amidst the sudden cornucopia of somewhat banal intellects, introduced into their critical contemplations mostly by overeager grad students, thus in the context of the culture of superficiality which had been engendered, they became essentially useless as the poster boys of intellectual independence. As the flesh eating bacteria of intellectual conformity continued to eat it's way ever closer to the seat of ostensible intellectual ferment, the hill on the which Cornell situated high above Cayuga's waters, indeed seemed not high enough as the flood waters of the patently self satisfied Ozzie and Harriet mentality through the late 50's and early 60's as it lapped ever closer to its esteemed limestone portals and somewhat stinky vaulted chambers.

Because it is forced to in varying degrees by its charter, to be not just located in, but actually part of the local agricultural communities the Cooperative Extension was constantly exposed to the ambient cultural 'avian flu' and in the 1950s, it was open season for this 'flu'. As the least isolated and most exposed organ, the Cooperative Extension, the nasal passage of Cornell University was most virulently infected and consequently became the breeding ground for intellectual conformity, knuckling under to the grape juice cartels, as the agricultural intellectuals located closer to the heart

of the great University in Ithaca all looked on in helpless horror. But what, you may ask, does all this ‘drahmah’ have to do with either viticulture or the former nut house over on Seneca Lake? Wellll, I’ll tell ya’.

The point I am (admittedly, somewhat tongue in cheek) trying to make in a nutshell is that Cornell Geneva agricultural sub-station, mostly under the guiding hand of the aforementioned, esteemed and well-loved Professor Nelson Shaulis, had been, until the mid 1960s focusing almost exclusively on promoting an agenda that was not in the long run serving the interests of the vineyard owners of the area so much as the large commercial interests in their midst and this policy was like an acid eating away at the social contract, causing them to be driven slowly crazy despite the punctilious observation of the contract of protocol.

The cultivation of American hybrid and Concord grapes had become increasingly economically unviable as its only purpose, to supply the juice and jelly market, came under price pressure, with Welch’s controlling the price per ton, at one point driving it below four hundred dollars making it barely possible for the growers just to break even and then to make matters worse, Welch’ converted the juice arm of its cartel into a buyer’s coop, finessing its role of bully, leaving the farmers now with no one to blame but themselves for their plight.

The European and California wine industries were and are based on another variety of grape entirely than that which was grown in the Finger Lakes at the time, known as ‘Vinifera’. These were the classical winegrapes of Europe but unfortunately, this genus is far more sensitive to cold and disease than the American varieties that were acclimated to the conditions here in the Northeast. Therefore, it was the ‘conventional wisdom’ at the time, and one which the sub-station did nothing to dispel, that the harsh New York winters precluded any Vinifera at all from being grown here, limiting the viable varieties to the native not especially well suited for quality wine. The Coup de grace seemed to come in 1977 when Taylor, the major buyer for the non-jelly or juice grapes was acquired by Coca-Cola. This event proved especially disastrous for the smaller grape farmers with whom Coke would no longer deal individually.

In truth, even before this, the industry had been in rapid decline and by the late sixties already had been in deep trouble. Even for the larger producers, able to deal with Welch’s or Taylor individually, the price for the grapes in the region had been consistently driven further and further down and even with economies attendant on better production practices of the larger operations by then it was a marginally profitable proposition anyway. The exceptionally vigorous Labrusca varieties are often hard to control in the vineyard and one of Dr. Shaulis’ most notable achievement during his tenure in Geneva had been to come up with a trellising system that utilized this to maximize production through optimizing sunlight exposure. This was an innovative system and became known as the Geneva Double Curtain and it is still in use today, throughout the world in high vigor sites.⁶⁵ Its ostensible purpose was to increase production and therefore, theoretically, the profitability of vineyard sites composed of Concord grapes. Obviously in this new zero sum game this was seen for what it was economically, a somewhat naive pipe dream that the growers were less and less likely to tolerate kindly as providing them no real benefit in the face of falling per ton prices based on oversupply. With Welch’s no longer presenting a likely target, the growers were understandably directing fewer and fewer friendly glances in the direction of the Experiment Station.

65 In more modern, less self effacing times, trellising systems are most often named for their inventors like the ‘Smart-Dyson’ or the ‘Scott Henry’ system.

The recovery of the region from the effects of prohibition was slow and it was not until the 1950s that there was again a robust regional industry to speak of. It was in this era that began the tenure of Dr. Shaulis at the Geneva substation and the growers under his guiding hand settled into the comfortable niche that would carry them well into the 1950s as suppliers to the non-premium wine market and the juice and jelly makers growing mostly Concord, Niagara, Catawba and the other varieties known to be suited to the topography and climate. In the meantime, the more far-sighted economic realists of the region had not been asleep. Recognizing exactly how precarious this niche they had been maneuvered into was, they began lobbying for a bill in the state's legislature that would make it possible for the growers to take control of their own destinies. Finally, the year before the takeover of Taylor they managed to get a winery bill passed in the legislature that would make it easier for growers to go into business for themselves. This event, engineered partly by John Dyson and Mark Miller of the Hudson Valley, was in fact the culmination of a long campaign, more a revolution that had been initially bed by what was, to say the least, an extremely unlikely duo. It was through the efforts of an iconoclastic Ukrainian emigre with poor interpersonal and haberdashery skills and (possibly depth perception), and an idealistic, somewhat lonely French champagne expert inclined to bowties and natty sport jackets, that that industry was brought to the cusp where they would be able to benefit from this legislation in the open market. These two of course were, Konstantin Frank and Charles Fournier.

Gold Seal Winery or, Urbana, as it had been known was one of four New York wineries to survive prohibition. Charles Fournier arrived at Gold Seal shortly after repeal. Fournier, spare and tall, looked as if he would be right at home either in a Cornell faculty mixer or sitting trackside at Saratoga. He brought with him from France, for Gold Seal's use, some of the more recently developed French American hybrid grapes that were not only resistant to Phylloxera, but also far more cold hardy and disease resistant than the *Vinifera* grapes they had tried before and much more suitable for wine than the native cultivars.⁶⁶

When Konstantin Frank arrived there in the early fifties, he might have fit right in with the ambient 'cliffdiving-have-a-nice-day' mentality', except for the fact that he was in the habit of attempting also to push everyone off with him and, he was, at least as far as the surrounding intellectual community was concerned on the wrong side of the equation; an intellectual with manners burnished more by Stalin's rather than Amy Vanderbilt's view of steak knife etiquette. Having been a grape cultivar researcher in his native Ukraine, he moved to the area some eighteen years after Fournier and by contrast looked more like a protection money collector for the mob than an elegant tweedy professor⁶⁷ and as we have said, in the shallow soil of the Finger Lakes, appearances can be everything.

While in the Ukraine, Frank had begun experiments on certain *Vinifera* varieties to determine relative suitability for cold climates. What he had found interestingly enough was that there was that

66 It was these grapes that Dr. Frank was claiming were actually poisonous. Evidently, having introduced these varieties himself, Fournier could have taken offense. He must have been somewhat ambivalent about the future potential uses of the hybrid clones or he would not have entertained an extended conversation with a man who almost had been committed for asserting this so vehemently that it almost caused him to be institutionalized. Indeed in 1963 Philip Wagner, another pioneer of Eastern viticulture cautions Fournier about allowing his name to become associated with Frank's "he had the gall to push publicly for a legal prohibition of the hybrids." ALS, November 5th, 1965, Cornell Kroch Library, special manuscripts collection. Wagner to Fournier.

67 Many thanks to Scott Gibson of Dr. Frank's wine cellars for his contributions to this chapter.

there was in fact a great degree of variability in cold resistance within the vitis, this depending on the clonal character as well as cultivation techniques employed. Immediately after moving upstate, he began trying to replicate these trials and by the mid fifties having proved to his own satisfaction that Pinot Noir and Chardonnay could survive here, he boldly began proposing, (to anyone who would listen), that the growers in the area switch en masse to the high quality European Vinifera clones. He was not met with universal disdain, and as the grower's continued to watch helplessly as the prices for their Concord, Delaware and Cayuga grapes plummeted, he seemed like an unlikely, gruff Pied Piper calling on them to abandon the familiar "foxy" Labrusca grapes that had been the bread and butter of the region's economy for decades. Incredibly, he then went on to claim that the new French American wine hybrids introduced by Fournier as an alternative were in fact "toxic" to humans.⁶⁸ The beginnings of the parade came to an unexpected and embarrassed breathless halt as the Town bandleader, in the guise of the Geneva sub-station sensing an opportunity stepped back up to the podium to reassert their authority.

These comments, coming as it were from an outsider, someone with no American university credentials or experience, indeed his last job having been janitor in a Horn and Hardart's cafeteria in Manhattan, were met, not surprisingly, with derision and somewhat surprisingly, with defensiveness by the Geneva scientists. The varieties Frank was now publicly warning people against as toxic had been the basis of Fournier's Champagne business that he had developed almost single handedly at Gold Seal.⁶⁹ One might have suspected that Fournier also should have taken offense. He had been the premier advocate of the hybrids in the region proposing as a viable solution to the economic strait jacket the New York growers had found themselves in and despite his somewhat professorial demeanor, he was a heavy hitter in the industry. Something however had occurred that changed Fournier's mind, something that caused Fournier to come to look at Frank not as a potential threat as Geneva did, but as an ally.⁷⁰

"Retro-cross pollination",- "reverse lend lease",--these are the very descriptive and useful concepts that aptly characterizes the outcome of the University's attempt to maintain its intellectual credentials by importing those high profile avant-gardists in the early sixties. And look at the harvest they reaped! So who then can really blame the less visible Ag School professors at Geneva for not leading a *revolucion de niveau mental*, as the French would say, when Konstantin Frank had shown up waving a red flag of viticultural heresy, ready to storm the barricades while his countryman and fellow Russophile, Vladimir Nabakov, the author of *Lolita* was busy teaching Dostoyevskii to undergraduates in turtlenecks. Here, in the supposedly tamer arena of agricultural was a virulent

68 In October of 1963 Frank gave a lecture in Buffalo in which he called for the banning of hybrid grapes. This incensed the champions of the hybrids like Philip Wagner but apparently paradoxically did not disturb Fournier in the least.

69 There is some evidence that Fournier himself was somewhat conflicted about this. At the time a debate was raging in France about whether hybrids should be banned as it was suspected that they would ruin the reputation of French wine. Several less than rigorous experiments were undertaken to show that these were toxic among these, the feeding of hybrid wine juice to chicken and pigeons. There was as result an increase in birth defects. Certainly these could have been attributed to the alcohol content of the wine as easily as the genus but Frank continually cited these as evidence that the varieties were toxic. In a letter to Philip Wagner in 1982 Fournier states that Frank is finally calming down with his 'pigeon and chicken' stories. Thanks to Fred Frank his grandson for explaining this more fully.

70 Whatever Frank's foibles, it is clear that Fournier harbored a genuine affection for him. It can be discerned in his correspondence with Philip Wagner. When Wagner attacked Frank in his correspondence in 1963 there is a noticeable cooling of tone in Fournier's responses which become immediately almost strictly business whereas before there had been a personal tone.

imported strain of anti-conformity that had the potential to effect not just the reputation but more importantly the University-non-University status quo, to infect the very agar-agar medium in which the university blissfully floated with some untested strain of poorly dressed bacteria,--and thanks to Fournier, it had just jumped quarantine.

To understand the basis for Fournier's personal 'revolucion de niveau mental', a little further background is in order. Gold Seal winery had been one of four vineyards to not only survive prohibition but to go on to successfully buck the trend of essentially abandoning the hope of making a premium product by either being or, signing over as a contracted supplier to Taylor or to the grape juice/jelly companies. By following this independent path, they had by the 1950s become one of the major players in the region, a select group that at that time included also Widmer, Great Western and Taylor, but unlike its more pragmatic competitors Gold Seal was the only one of the big three to set its sights on a nationally accepted wine product.

Gold, Seal Widmer, Western and Taylor had been able to survive prohibition intact, by making 'sacramental wines' or converting temporarily to juice and jelly operations. Fournier's avowed goal for Gold Seal when he arrived in 1934 was now to produce a world class champagne from locally grown grapes. By 1950 it seemed for one brief shining moment that he had achieved this goal. Gold Seal Champagne Brut, made from Fournier's hybrids, took first prize at the California State Fair in a blind tasting. The following year California took the extraordinary step of barring out of state entries from competing at the fair. The reason given was that ostensibly the hybrids, on which the New York entries had been based, represented another category of wine entirely and it was 'not fair' to judge them against the champagnes made with vinifera. Ironically, it had been a similar blind tasting in France that had first established the upstart California wines as being in a class comparable to French Wines.⁷¹

Fournier before coming to Gold Seal had worked in France as winemaker for Clicquot-Ponsardin (Veuve-Cliquot) and was a master champagne maker and Gold Seal had essentially hired him to create an entire new industry for the area; Champagne. He had some moderate success and gained some market share but to attain an international or even national recognition he had to overcome the prejudices against New York products. The problems appeared insurmountable even to this somewhat incongruous looking pair of expatriates. Vinifera vines are highly susceptible to mildew and black rot both of which thrive in the humid Northeast. But this was not the only issue. The vines are also particularly sensitive, as Frank had discovered, not only to cold temperatures but to rapid temperature fluctuations. They are the blushing maidens of the grape world. If they subject to rapid extremes of temperature, instead of fainting, they were more likely to fall prey to some disease like crown gall, or even, die. This propensity for a perennial agricultural orchard product, is, putting it mildly, a disadvantage. They therefore did not seem at all like a good bet around which to base an entire region's economy. But Frank and Fournier were both aware of a crucial mitigating factor; that the deep glacial lakes that framed the Finger Lakes region (and from which it derives its name), served as essentially great heat sinks, damping the sharp fluctuations in temperature that could be so deadly to the sensitive vinifera, particularly to the sensitive graft unions. These deeply gouged bodies of water, never in living memory, had frozen over.

71 The French took no such similar step of barring California wines when they went head to head in competitions, much to their credit.

Frank had begun his experiments back in Odessa an area of Southern Russia that has a similar climate to that of upstate New York and he had succeeded there albeit only with certain Pinot Noir clones. Still, up until that point, all attempts to cultivate *Vinifera* going back to 1825 in New York State had failed and not just failed, but as those who recount the history of the viticultural region love to phrase it, 'failed miserably' to the extent that these trials were no longer even being attempted by the time Frank arrived. Nevertheless, Frank claimed, more than claimed, guaranteed, provided you used certain clones and followed certain cultural practices, *vinifera* would survive, even flourish here. The growers in the area had been told all along by the experts in Geneva on no uncertain terms that *vinifera* grapes could not be grown in the Finger Lakes, that they would never survive the harsh winters and even if they did survive they would not produce enough tonnage to make their cultivation economically viable. This was, as it turned out, merely a convenient fable. With Frank's help, Fournier was going to succeed and beat the California naysayers in their own backyard at their own game, with New York grown *vinifera*!

However Frank, now, no longer could be regarded by the Geneva substation scientists as merely a relatively harmless eccentric. They were at a lost as to how to deal with him. The scientists now regretted their initial tolerance. Frank was once again on Rosinante promoting his ideas rather forcefully and somewhat tactlessly to any that might listen and what is more now using scare tactics to discredit the hybrids which the Sub-Station had grudgingly accepted. En masse, with all the single minded ruthlessness that can underlie the academic fraternity, they now abruptly turned against him when they realized he was unabashedly serious about his theories and about his plan for replanting the entire Finger Lakes region to *vinifera* vines and that for the even more grievous offense of, 'ignoring the social convention'.

Frank in short, was rapidly becoming, at least in the minds of the Geneva scientists, the loud drunk that had gotten invited to the party to get it going, but shortly was proving a bore when the better heeled guests arrived. He was rapidly made aware of this with all the unspoken petulance at their disposal, of the fact that he was not fitting the model of laid back intellectual inoffensiveness they required from him, the time honored 'cliff-diving-have-a-nice-day' system, the 'sumum bonum' of University-non-University relations, he stubbornly refused to remain innocuous and with each attempt to accommodate him, like some virulent virus his criticisms only mutated into a newer more noxious strain. He seemed even not at first to understand that he had to that point merely been tolerated, not encouraged, or, given his personality, he had decided to just ignore these signals, in any event, he just barged blithely ahead apparently unaware or at least unaffected by the increasing antipathy he was generating particularly among those who considered themselves the 'intellectual avant garde' of the industry, those who had been advocating the planting of hybrid wine grapes, most prominent among these outside the arena of the substation being Charles Fournier of Gold Seal and Philip Wagner of Boordy Hill.

Though a doctor of enology in Russia, without American credentials, Frank was essentially unemployable by any major American academic institution. As far as Geneva was concerned, he was, based on his having worked at Horn and Hardardt's, barely qualified to provide a recipe for macaroni and cheese let alone a blueprint for future of the entire grape industry of the second largest grape producing region in the U.S. They were no doubt by the mid 50's hoping he would move to Bucks County Pennsylvania, open an antique store and leave them all the hell alone.

Curiously, the Ag Sub-Station itself by that time, through field trials, had already established the

viability of several *Vinifera* varieties for that soil and climate, yet they were stubbornly refusing to publicize this finding perhaps waiting for Frank to first disappear so they could claim the credit.²⁷ Frank, for his part, regarded them, somewhere in the recesses of his convoluted Russian brain still as just somewhat misguided colleagues but it now was becoming increasingly apparent to him that “being “right” indeed ranked as a less valuable commodity to these supposed ‘colleagues’ than “being liked” and he clearly was not liked. He had finally discovered the full contact version of Finger Lakes ‘cliff diving’ sports. But to him, the product of a state and education system structured around ideological social engineering, this was an inconceivably feeble state of affairs, at least in the context of a surrounding influential intellectual community,--if he was right (as he unquestionably was), it should matter little how offensive he was in making his point, he reasoned, but it was, as he was to coming to realize that the social contract held sway, that ruled, and it was a very different one then he had encountered before.

The scientists mostly, for their part were not inclined to respond when challenged by a mere vocally antagonistic ‘local’, they were in fact programmed only to respond audibly when mildly antagonized and then only in response to the almost constant presence in their midst of the mostly white and persistently more familiar twin enemies to most all upstanding residents of the Finger Lakes; liberals and snow.

Tact, it should be admitted, was never Frank’s strong point having spent his entire youth in an area where virtually all the farmland had been forcefully and (in the Ukraine, brutally) collectivized. In Frank’s mind, at least as far as grapes were concerned, Geneva sub-station, was essentially equivalent to Stalin’s apparatchik bureaucracy. They apparently had (at least in his somewhat peculiar view) the power essentially just to order everybody as a matter of social policy to convert to these varieties he advocated. When they refused to entertain his ideas, they were just being stubborn, worse, obstructionists! He had had sufficient experience with this type in Russia. Of course, this was not even a remotely true or fair characterization of them or the situation as a whole, but they did, through Cornell Cooperative Extension, exercise a great deal of influence and to a large degree their policies were evidently framed by and tuned to the self-perpetuating, self-actuating and self-fulfilling myths promulgated by the juice and jelly buyer cartels that had emerged from prohibition,-- , but this could not by any stretch of the imagination translate into Frank’s mistaken perception of the exercise of direct control over individual growers.

Even though the region’s industry was, it was clear by the time Frank arrived on the scene slowly being strangled by the juice and jelly co-ops, the academic mandarins would have never risked their very *raison d’être* by advocating an unproven, indeed, in their minds, a counter-proven, idea for which there was no clear market incentive or business model established.⁷³ Indeed they were so

72 In a footnote to an article by LJ Vance, in *State of New York – Department of Agriculture. Charles S. Wilson, Commissioner. Bulletin 79 (Part II). The Fruit Industry in New York State. Issued by The Bureau of Farmers’ Institutes and Compiled under the Supervision of the Director.* Albany, January, Vance claims that on visiting Frank in the mid-sixties that Frank showed him a copy of the Experiment Stations findings on *Vinifera* that supported his contentions and stating that it was frustrating that people attributed his success with them to ‘a green thumb’. My own recollection of the time corroborates this.

73 It was not until 1976 that a viable business model for premium wine growers came into being, with the passage of the Farm Home Winery Act that was championed by John Dyson of Millbrook and Mark Miller of Benmarl vineyards.

unfailingly convinced of this fact and their own 'rightness' as a matter of practicality that they now refused even to believe their own newest research which indicated vinifera cultivation was indeed feasible. It was the classic definition of insanity of being out of touch with reality. And then there was the nagging question; what if what Frank, the interloper, claimed was true? All their expertise was with American varieties. They would not only have to eat some substantial crow but relearn their entire business. This possibility, that Frank was correct, however at the time seemed somewhat remote even to his supporters. If he was correct, if he was not just a Pied Piper, why was there not a flourishing Vinifera industry already established in the Ukraine? There clearly was not.

Finally, probably to put an end to his annoying broadsides, the scientists at Geneva managed to get Konstantin a job at the experiment station,- as a janitor, the only position for which his American work experience qualified him. Instead of mollifying him this only incited him to more strident rhetoric. Using his new position as a soapbox platform, brandishing his mop and his bucket like a bully pulpit, Don Quixote with mop/sword in hand, he used his precarious position only to more effectively pester people about his radical viticultural ideas. This effort, (which would have been no doubt made even more clumsy and bizarre due to his lack of both English and mopping skills), was, for obvious reasons, increasingly ill-received, the sub-station's attempt at noblesse oblige had failed. In any event, he was soon fired from his janitorial position and this led to the final chapter in the long standing and well publicized feud between Dr. Frank and the Cornell viticulture department at Geneva agricultural sub-station which some say was in fact a short lived plan on the part of Cornell to find him a position at the only other major institution in the area they thought suitable to his personality, Willard State Hospital , the mental institution nearby on Seneca Lake and it was not a staff position they had in mind.

It is evident that the sub-station personnel were not the only ones guilty of self-serving propagandizing, --Frank's plan hinged partly, (he apparently thought), on his ability to convince people of the novel hypothesis that the French Hybrids were in fact poisonous.⁷⁴ Supporting this dubious conclusion, (arrived at by some researchers in France who were evidently funded by the traditional wine industry lobby there), only earned him additional enemies. Already intellectually 'persona-non-grata' as far as the Geneva scientists were concerned, his allegations were no longer taken seriously there. What is more, they believed that this peculiar collateral agenda was sufficiently bizarre that, left to his own devices he would sabotage himself and self destruct. Philip Wagner however, being the major grower and proponent of Hybrid grapes in the U.S. however could not afford to wait for this to occur and he now joined in vocally attacking Frank and his ideas.

Frank, having violated a basic tenet of the unspoken social contract, now had other things to worry besides being wrong. He had learned the hard way about the clause in the 'innocuous contract' that

74 It seems incredible to assume that a University trained scientist with solid credentials would make his allegation were there not research undertaken to back it up. It is possible that there was some research conducted on this thesis in the Ukraine. If such a research project did occur it would have been probably undertaken at the Tairov Institute of Enology and Viticulture which was formed as an offshoot of the Odessa Polytechnic from which Dr. Frank obtained his degree. The Tairov was not formed until 1931 but its ampelographic collection dates from 1905. As far as I can tell, from conversations with Michael Begelman, the Tairov never took an official position against hybrids, quite the contrary they have been very active in promoting and developing them. This apparently was Frank's own fixation and there is no extant evidence today backing Frank's claim.; Status of Grape Genetic Resources in the Ukraine, A.M.Avidzba, M.V.Melkonian, V.A.Volynkin, A.A.Poluliakh, S.M.Gorislavets. As far as I am aware, the only research undertaken was the politically motivated aforementioned one that took place in France.

says you ‘IGNORE EVIDENT ECCENTRICITIES’, that it in fact applied only to the academics, - it did not apply in reverse. He was now not only intellectually but socially as well an outcast. He was on the brink of becoming one those guys he had seen outside of Horn and Hardardt, berating the air with all the easily ignored self assurance of an old testament prophet. Still, as a kind of “left-handed” acknowledgement of his Russian university credentials (which by then they had been by then able to verify as at least plausible) and recognizing that in trying to get him committed perhaps, they had overstepped their bounds a wee bit, he was afforded notice, as a courtesy, of local gatherings of grape growers sponsored by the experiment station. It was at one of these that he met the aforementioned Charles Fournier, someone with whom, since he spoke French, he could at least attempt to be, not just convincing but, even charming and who was, it turned out was surprisingly receptive to his ideas.⁷⁵ Frank no longer felt like a cornered rat in an experiment gone mad, a feeling, thanks to the Geneva sub-station he had been apparently able to maintain without interruption since his tenure under Stalin.

Fournier had been hired on by the progressive management of Gold Seal primarily to create a premium sparkling wine product but with his unassuming practical yet innovative approach to all matters, this had elevated him to a position of more extended authority not only in the company but in the entire region. The astute Fournier however had come to the bitter realization through his own experience that so long as his ‘Champagnes’ were made from hybrid grapes that, while they might actually be comparable, or even superior in quality to California champagnes, he was presented with an insurmountable marketing nightmare (something which Frank’s dire pronouncements regarding the detrimental health effects of hybrids were obviously not helping) and hence the probability that his product would always be regarded more as an interesting oddity, than a world class wine. This second-class status was something he refused to accept.

Fournier cannily realized that Frank, a staunch advocate of the viability of the Pinot Noir grape for the region, one of the classic components of Champagne, if he was right, unlikely as that may have seemed to others, could be, at least partially, the solution to his problems. Thus, in what was a remarkably shrewd maneuver in response to what have been could easily have been construed as an uncalled for attack, he chose to support Frank and enlist him to aid his attempts to create a sparkling wine using the classic French components on the French model grown in New York State. Using locally grown vinifera grapes would enable him not only to create a world-class product minus the marketing headache for Gold Seal, California would no longer have an excuse to exclude New York sparkling wines from the State Fair and even if partially successful, a Pinot Noir component in the Champagne would lend it enough credibility to be have to be considered in the Champagne category in fact of any world class wine competition, not just as another ‘interesting’ sparkling wine.⁷⁶

75 Frank spoke not only Russian but French and German fairly fluently. Because of his evident Linguistic aptitude his persistent reluctance to speak English may have been intentionally calculated on his part to some degree.

76 The actual word ‘Champagne’ has since been banned for use by New York wineries as it is considered a regional appellation belonging to France rather than a wine category. Following is from Scott Gibson of Dr. Frank’s, “Champagne” can actually be used, so long as it is made with traditional champagne grape varieties (Pinot Noir, Pinot Menieur, Chardonnay), that the methode champenoise is used to produce it (which involves a second fermentation in the bottle, followed by a disgorging of yeast sediment from the bottle... an expensive and labor intensive process). We must also label the appellation in addition to the “Champagne” label - e.g. Finger Lakes, New York State, etc. You may wish to check on the details of the official legal agreements. In all fairness, though, many wine professionals still consider true champagne to be only from that region.

With this approach in mind, the only other major deterrent to producing high quality wines in New York, their high acidity as compared to California grown grapes, and this indeed could easily be turned to advantage as Fournier was well aware, the Champenois process traditionally requires grapes of unusually high acidity to stand up to the sparkling qualities, such as characterize the Pinot and Chardonnay clones grown in the relatively northerly Champagne region. Fournier consequently decided, for whatever reasons, to back the dark horse and in 1953 took the risky step of creating a new position expressly for Frank at Gold Seal; director of vineyard research, a position of sufficient prestige that Geneva could not afford to ignore him.⁷⁷ While hiring Frank, given his reputation as an uncompromising iconoclast was a gamble, it seemed neither of the two possible extreme outcomes had ever occurred to Fournier; that he would fail miserably or, that *Vinifera* would become the foundation of a new regionally based premium wine industry. He thought he was merely expanding the niche market for Champagne. The reason for this was probably not only the well known difficulties associated with growing it, but because there was no economic model to support a localized wine industry. He suspected intuitively he would not fail entirely because in his home region of Champagne the hardier varieties like Chardonnay and Pinot Gris routinely survived winter temperatures of below zero degrees Fahrenheit. He was acquainted enough by then with the vagaries of Finger Lakes weather to understand that the areas where weather was mitigated by the lakes was moderate enough to sustain the tender *vinifera*. In short, Fournier did not fully comprehend the extent of his influence and the fact that his efforts to create a sparkling wine in the French style with solid international credentials for Gold Seal (and possible Great Western, nominally their competitors), were indeed being watched closely and intently both by all the other increasingly unhappy growers in the region and the skeptical scientists at Geneva.

New York premium sparkling wine already had, largely thanks to Fournier's efforts, established a market niche of its own, distinguished from the other similarly marketed but putrid low priced offerings of the region and consequently did not suffer to the same degree from the same persistent negative connotations. In fact the objectionable acidic and musky qualities of the hybrid and Labrusca grapes were often somewhat masked by the natural carbonation a fact which Taylor and Great Western both had both used to build a fairly respectable sparkling wine business. While others had used this same characteristic to create other noxious concoctions the distinction was sufficiently clear in the minds of the public to maintain the premium category. So while the reputations of Gold Seal as well as Great Western already rested to a large degree on its sparkling wines they only lacked the 'apples to apples' to step up to a pedigree in the world market and this was the single hurdle that had still doomed them to a niche market. This was however, Fournier realized, partly thanks to Frank, now a potentially winnable battle for them, from not only the viticultural standpoint, but also the marketing standpoint as well and one from which they might emerge as players not just on a regional or even a national, but on a world stage.

The rest is, as they say, history. A successful collaboration was born, for Gold Seal and for Frank both and the first wines from *Vitis Vinifera* clones were released in 1960 and not surprisingly they shortly achieved widespread critical and popular acclaim. Frank however, having a naturally

77 To call this a teaming up is somewhat off the mark as this essentially was a gamble for Fournier, Frank would have never been accepted in the cliquish atmosphere of Eastern grape growers without the credibility he derived from the association with Fournier. If one examines the papers of Phillip Wagner it is apparent that it was only after investing in his own vineyard that he personally attracted some attention. There is a photo of him in 1963 and follow-up photos of the vineyard in 1967 and 1977. Phillip Wagner collection. Collection Number: 6928, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections. Cornell University Library.

somewhat impatient temperament and ever impervious to prudent advice, having proved his theories, wished to broaden his focus and now moved on to form his own vineyard/winery, which he then did in 1962, called Vinifera Wine Cellars on Lake Keuka which today is operated by this son Willy and grandson, Fred under the brand names Dr. Frank's and Salmon Run.⁸⁷

While the rocky relationship of Dr. Frank to Geneva has been the subject of perennial partisan interpretation, but what happened next is not open to interpretation and it would serve to broaden the success of Fournier's gamble from a company based marketing success to one that would revolutionize the entire region, indeed the state and eventually the entire East Coast. In 1976, the New York State legislature with the help and guidance of John Dyson and Mark Miller adopted the Farm Home Winery act. This law allowed small New York wineries to sell wine directly to the public from their premises for the first time. It was a landmark windfall to the industry, second only to the repeal of prohibition itself. Enabled now to sell premium wines at premium prices, direct to the public, the Geneva scientists watched in amazement as one grower after another in the area thumbed their noses at Welch's and Coke and followed suit planting hundreds, then thousand of new acreage on the new 'old' varieties. Eventually the sub-station scientists realized that their world had changed irrevocably,- and mostly due to the janitor from Horn and Hardardt.

Even today, the New York State wine industry still has not completely erased the unpleasant memory of the "foxy", aromatic and fortified concoctions that dominated production well up into the 1980's⁷⁹, but in fact the wines now being produced in the Finger Lakes and more recently Long Island rival those produced in California and France in both quality and increasingly in reputation. They have painted an economic success story unparalleled in the history of New York State and in fact Constellation brands, a New York based distributor recently acquired not only Gold Seal but the prestigious Robert Mondavi brand as well. Konstantin Frank has long been vindicated and Geneva has 'refocused' on supporting the burgeoning quality wine industry of the region, based largely on Vinifera clones (although of late, some rather interesting hybrids have been reintroduced by Geneva).⁰⁸

You can call this bad or good luck, but Frank was certainly one of these unlucky-lucky iconoclasts that survived in spite of, rather than because of themselves. Circumstances conspired such that his view of himself as an outsider formed a quantum superimposition rather than a diametric calculable Newtonian opposing force that could easily be cancelled out by another opposing one. Just as the hunting clan displaced the agricultural calendar based priesthood of Chaco, he was someone who, as an outsider, came to point out, a new way, a different angle just at the precise time when the old time honored methods had clearly failed. This was not a reflection on those methods so much as of the fact that serendipity can profoundly affect the fortunes of an entire people or group, (especially if there happens to be visionaries like Charles Fournier, attuned to hearing the modulations in the harmonies of the universe).

78 Dr. Frank was famously abrupt with those that less than fully grasped the concepts which formed his bedrock convictions. He was however, this way regardless of whether you were a PhD or just a field hand pushing a hoe. This predisposition has caused some to characterize him as 'gnarly'. It was, in fact, merely his pedagogical approach. He would have made a good computer programmer.

79 Despite the negative effect on the reputation of New York wine, these 'inferior' concoctions were a success financially, --so as long as we are in the last laugh category, in all fairness it should be noted that Constellation in 2004 bought Robert Mondavi winery for 1.4 billion dollars.

80 I am referring here to "Traminette", which I believe has high potential in this area a premium wine grape.

The Geneva sub-Station, either inadvertently, or through policy reinforced the local cultural predilections and prejudices to some degree in the same manner as the agricultural based high priesthood at Chaco Canyon in the 10th century continued enforcing, or trying to enforce increasingly outmoded agricultural knowledge. Once again preserving a hierarchy inextricably intertwined with the local environment and culture had become an end in itself. Ironically this too became the stuff of legend and just as the Anasazi looked to the new rites of the hunter clan the Geneva Agricultural station became the somewhat reluctant proponents and high priests of the new economic engine. Consequently, we can see even today, that, Dr. Nelson Shaulis, who was almost certainly wrong about the future of the industry, but, who had the proper credentials and required laid back demeanor is still locally revered and beloved, within the cloistered environs of the University (and somewhat less so in the community at large), is regarded as the father of the modern New York grape industry whereas Konstantin Frank is viewed as an almost biblically offensive outsider, a somewhat unwelcome prophet spouting predictions of hellfire and destruction. While great achievement is, in the end, undeniable, the fact that it not always coupled with an endearing personality is equally true.¹⁸

Konstantin Frank's grandson, Fred was in charge of the tasting room when my friend Michael Begelman and I arrived there at Dr. Frank's Wine Cellars in the summer of 1996. I actually knew Fred slightly, as a few years earlier I had bought some Cabernet Sauvignon vines from him just to see how they performed against the ones I had purchased from Herman Weimer.⁸² As we were sipping some barrel samples of the sweetish Russian varieties, Sereksia and Rkatsiteli, they were cultivating in non-commercial quantities in his then still modest, paneled tasting room, he generously related the following story about his Grandfather to us;

Ukraine was and still is, essentially, the breadbasket of what was the Soviet Union. Because most of the available metal in Russia by 1945 had been recycled as munitions and armament, there were and had been for a while, no parts for tractor repairs available. Hence, in the years immediately following the War, few, if any, tractors in the Ukraine's inventory were still operating. Twice before in the current century Russians had suffered an apocalyptic famine, once due to natural circumstances when the crop failed in the early twenties and the second time due to Stalin's policy of forced collectivization of the Kulak's farms in 1929. Now, another similar event appeared to be in the offing and in the summer and fall of 1945, there was again a critical need for grain ironically while the grain stood abundant in the fields, but there was no way to bring the crop in, no working machinery. Famine again loomed, this time cruelly in the face of a record crop that sat idle and mocking in the fields.

There was at that time, a joint Russian/American Jewish agricultural cooperative organization, Agarest, who hearing of this dire situation, had managed with somewhat limited resources, to locate two old Ford tractors that could be donated for use by the Ukrainian wheat farmers. In the fall of 1945 they had them shipped there to help bring in this crop. Dr. Frank at the time, though

81 To date, the only substantial public acknowledgement of Frank's work and the Experiment station's mishandling of the situation to be made by the Geneva Experiment Station personnel was a statement offered by Bob Pool, a research specialist.

82 These were on Riparia rootstock as opposed to the C3309 rootstock which was available from Weimer that year. Riparia produces a much less vigorous plant which for Cab Sauvignon is desirable as it is very vegetative. As far as cold hardiness I do not really see any significant difference between the two and indeed it is possible they are the same clone. It was very difficult to get accurate clonal information from the growers in the Finger lakes until very recently

essentially an academic, was appointed by the bureaucrats overseeing the collective farms in his area to be on the receiving end of this deal, this Jewish version of lend lease. When the tractors finally arrived, he immediately and perceptively realized that they were too low on horsepower for the immense task at hand. He decided that if the two machines could be made to work together in tandem, that this would produce sufficient horsepower to allow them to accomplish the grain harvest. Being firstly an innovator and only secondly an engineer, instead of setting them up side by side in tandem like a team of horses, he shackled them together one ahead of the other, like a dogsled team. The result was that the first tractor abruptly and ignominiously pulled the second apart in two pieces, the rear tractor still running but without the benefit of the stabilizing front end it started veering with the thresher in tow in the general direction of the onlookers who quickly dispersed. As Fred put it, his grandfather had the distinction of destroying half the postwar Ukrainian tractor inventory in a single afternoon and also would have destroyed half the Illustrious Glory of Ukraine Soviet Agriculture Committee if his luck had held. (In defense of the Geneva scientists, if they were even peripherally aware of this anecdote, it was not a particularly cogent argument for putting the future of the entire local wine industry in his hands.)³⁸

Frank, was never much of a success as a businessman. His son, Willy inherited a winery that was essentially in shambles. However, if one look at earlier pictures of Konstantin Frank he appears kind of grumpy and disgruntled. In his later pictures he just looks astounded. “God Bless America”, “Oh Say Can you See”. “Operaman. Bye, Bye.”

Rarely, but occasionally, some people succeed not in spite of the fact, but rather because they are their own worst enemies. The power of the myth of the outsider, the Anasazi-like ancient enemy, cannot be denied and it echoes powerfully inside the imagination and therefore outside the constraints of time and space. As my own parallel saga began, involving as it did a scion of a famous Weiner family unfolding above the ever discreet waters Cayuga Lake; one on lake Seneca, the next lake over, one also ironically concerning another famous Frank, was coming to a close.-The ultimate chaos underlying the institutional numbing of life had loomed large for me in the form of a smelly Willard Straight Hall just as the petty stratagems and threats of incarceration in Willard State Hospital for Frank, which, no doubt also had its very own identifiable institutional stink. Both tales it seems were punctuated with bouts of gleefully self-destructive behavior. However, no matter arrogant his personality, Frank patiently wrote line after line of grapes on the hills overlooking Lake Keuka, like Japanese Kanji, practiced in a notebook, based as much on faith and art as science. Like an echo invested with unspoken power walking across the hills, in the end, his story affected me and many others like me deeply. In both places, near either lake, nothing would ever be the same again.

83 This story is revealing for another reason. Stalin had dedicated a large portion of the pre-WWII period to deporting and killing the Ukrainian Kulaks whom he feared would transfer their loyalties to Germany without too much encouragement hence the inevitable conflict ensued. The tractors, after the war could not have arrived there without notification to and consent of local communist party officials as to their arrival and plans for their use. Frank’s position was that of a lab researcher, with apparently little field experience. Apparently not trusting this sudden windfall to the devices and loyalties of any remaining kulaks they had tapped Frank an academic to manage this resource, obviously a poor decision as it was a task for which he was evidently not well suited.