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A GRAPE IDEA: COMPETITIVE COLLABORATION IS A WIN-WIN FOR REGIONAL ARCHIVES  
 BY RACHAEL CRISTINE WOODY, LINFIELD COLLEGE, & MELISSA SALRIN, WHITMAN COLLEGE



In the summer of 2014, Linfield College and Whitman College archivists teamed up to document the history of the Walla Walla wine industry. While collaboration in the archives isn't new, we the authors would like to offer our perspective on the benefits of such partnerships even when the institutions wish to acquire the same materials and work with the same donors. We believe this project can serve as a blueprint for other repositories that wish to document community history and/or work collaboratively with a competing institution. We will outline the

respective histories of our institutions and how we developed a programmatic interest in regional wine history, describe how we jointly embarked on this project and reveal what we believe to have been the benefits to both our institutions and our regional wine communities.

In 2011, Linfield College established the Oregon Wine History Archive (OWHA), a repository committed to preserving the story of Oregon wine. The initiative began out of a grassroots effort between Linfield faculty, the Library Director Susan Barnes Whyte, and the surrounding wine industry. Multiple projects were undertaken that brought the wine industry into curriculum and the Linfield student experience, providing students with valuable industry knowledge and hands-on experiential learning. Many of these initial projects had a foundation in historical documentation of Oregon wine, an industry coming up on many hallmark anniversaries that have those in the industry interested in capturing and preserving wine history. Out of these projects grew a desire to have a systematic method of capturing Oregon wine history, and further still a need for one physical destination to be the home of these materials. With the OWHA in place, the mission became to collect and preserve all aspects and regions of the Oregon wine industry.



Collecting a cohesive history representative of all aspects and regions of the Oregon wine industry is an ambitious vision, and one that the OWHA has approached cautiously and in phases. First was the establishment of collections and an online presence for wineries in the Willamette Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA), where Linfield is located. Within a year, the OWHA had acquired a dozen collections from the area that included some of the original wineries and organizations involved in the industry, such as ¡Salud! (a free health care program for vineyard workers), Oregon

Wine Board and the International Pinot Noir Celebration.

With the initial phase complete, the OWHA strategized on how to cover the other AVAs in Oregon. The OWHA received two grants from the Oregon Wine Board (OWB), one in 2013 to document Southern Oregon, and one in 2014 to document the Columbia Valley and Walla Walla AVAs. Fortunately, by late 2012, the OWHA had a growing list of regional repositories that either currently held or were planning to build similar collections: Douglas County Museum, the History Museum of Hood River County, Oregon Historical Society, Southern Oregon Historical Society, Southern Oregon University and Whitman College. With these partners identified, the OWHA teamed up with local repositories from each of the areas.

The OWB projects were called "The Southern Oregon Wine History Initiative" and "The Columbia and Walla Walla Wine History Initiative." Both projects had the same structure and deliverables: the archivist would travel with a Linfield student and stay one week in each of the areas: Roseburg, Medford/Ashland, Hood River and Walla Walla. During the weeklong stay the archivist and student would conduct 8-10 oral history interviews with key people in the industry. The interviewees were identified through preliminary research, collaboration with repository partners and in consultation with wine industry advisors. In addition to the oral history interviews, scanning of historical documents and photographs was done onsite and day-of photographs were taken. The archivist and student also met with each repository partner and spent time researching each of the local collections in order to conduct an informal survey of materials available regarding the regional wine history.

One of the OWHA's partnerships is with



Whitman College, located in Walla Walla, Washington. It is important to note that both Walla Walla and the Columbia Valley AVAs straddle state lines with wineries in both Oregon and Washington. Whitman's path to establishing a wine archives is complex and must be understood in the context of its larger historical development. Whitman College established its archives in 1907. Due to the integral relation between the history of Whitman College and the history of the Northwest, the Whitman College and Northwest Archives (WCNA) has collected regional history records for more than 100 years. These records reflect the strong pioneer tradition of the Walla Walla Valley. In fact, more than 120 of our 3,500 linear feet of records document the cultivation and harnessing of agricultural and environmental resources in the early- and mid-20th century. In the late 1980s, archivist Larry Dodd recognized the importance of documenting the burgeoning local wine industry. Working with Walt Gary of the Washington State University Extension Office, he collected correspondence and reports about the establishment of the Walla Walla Valley AVA.

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He contacted leading winemakers for donations of publicity materials or wine labels.

When Melissa Salrin was hired as archivist in 2012, Library Director Dalia Corkrum immediately tasked her with investigating steps needed to reinvigorate Whitman's efforts to document and preserve this important local history. Salrin argued that a Walla Walla Valley wine archive would lay the foundation for cross-campus collaboration. The archive would be a rich resource for both faculty and students interested in environmental studies, geology, sociology, history, art history, and visual culture. Partnerships with wineries could also lead to new cooperative programs such as more internship opportunities coordinated through the Student Engagement Center; ultimately, the initiative would foster strengthened ties between Whitman and the surrounding communities.

WCNA was fortunate to have the support of Dr. Myles Anderson, a distinguished local winemaker who was also the Founding Director of the Institute for Enology and Viticulture at Walla Walla Community College in 2000. Anderson emphasized the importance of immediate action given that the first generation of area winemakers was on the cusp of retirement. At Anderson's suggestion and with President George Bridges' approval, Whitman hosted a dinner in the spring of 2013 for local winemakers, faculty and other campus leaders to introduce the idea of a wine archive initiative. This event was held in conjunction with the campus visit of Eric Asimov, New York Times wine critic. Salrin attended several other Asimov events that weekend to generate support for WCNA's plan. In the summer of 2013, WCNA hosted a luncheon for 5 industry

leaders to continue the momentum. At that event we discussed our donation process and explored strategies for building the collections. That winter the Library Director and Archivist made site visits to view records and answer any additional questions. During these visits, the archivist emphasized the benefits of collaborating with professionally trained staff. These conversations turned to records management and the ways collaboration with the archives could lead to improved efficiencies and enhanced access to needed information.

WCNA's interest in keeping Walla Walla Valley records locally and the OWHA's interest in gathering the resources to document the wine industry throughout the state of Oregon might seem to forestall any collaboration between the two archives. And in fact, some members of the Whitman administration even expressed some initial reservations about this partnership. Salrin was able to allay these concerns by emphasizing Woody's collegiality and openness in sharing her strategies and resources with Salrin to develop the wine portion of the WCNA. From the beginning, the OWHA had been supportive of WCNA's interest in establishing an eastern Washington wine archives program, and it was especially easy to convince higher-ups of this goodwill given that Woody's record included fruitful collaborations with other peer institutions. We both firmly believe that mutual success would enhance both of our interests. While we each ultimately hope to grow our own holdings, we recognize that the records will be well served no matter where they physically reside. If at the OWHA, they will deepen understandings of the complexities and challenges of the wine industry in Oregon; if at WCNA, they will extend the region's pioneer story of agricultural innovation and achievement from the past century. Both are

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worthy narratives, and as long as the records are in an archive, both can be developed.

From a practical point of view, partnering with a local repository, as the OWHA did with WCNA, was valuable in several ways. It allowed for a more efficient allocation of resources for the project. While Woody's grant from the Oregon Wine Board provided funds for staff, travel, and equipment, each institution donated additional resources and time to ensure a successful outcome. WCNA benefited from the OWHA's previous partnerships with peer institutions and the OWHA staff was able to provide planning timelines and workflows. The OWHA had a well-developed promotional strategy that involved reaching out to local wineries through email, phone calls, and press releases announcing the partnership to document the local wine industry history. Although we engaged in several marathon phone conversations and email threads, the OWHA's experience and willingness to share templates meant WCNA was well prepared for the joint execution of the work plan.

While Woody set up interviews with wineries located on the Oregon side of the AVA, Salrin made arrangements for wineries based in Washington. We also shared responsibility for conducting the interviews: Salrin was in charge of the portion of the interview focused on historical context, development, and lessons learned while Woody focused her questions on larger themes of cross-state collaboration, varietals, and the future of the wine industry. This strategy reduced fatigue and enabled us to focus more on strengthening our knowledge of specific themes. Given previous interview experience, Linfield team members were in charge of setting up proper lighting conditions and maintaining equipment (e.g., checking batteries) for interviews. Students assistants

from both institutions focused on digitizing materials and transcribing interviews and documenting the behind-the-scenes process. Since each of our team members knew his or her roles we were able to set up, conduct interviews, digitize content, and tear down our equipment with great efficiency. This professionalism impressed our interviewees and also helped us stay on schedule.

More importantly, our united collecting effort garnered trust from the wine industry because it embraced collaboration, a trait that Oregon and Washington wine industries are already well known for. Through our joint effort, we sent a clear message that our repositories value the history of the regional wine industry. We emphasized in all of our communications with potential donors that they could choose where to deposit physical items; all oral history interviews and scans would be shared with both repositories to enhance access to these materials. This collaborative message was well-received by wine industry members who seemed delighted, even if at times surprised by our partnership. Again, we emphasized that our collaboration would ensure the preservation of their legacy and would also enhance the level of service we could provide. This emphasis on the benefits of partnership, echoing a thread of collaboration that runs through the Walla Walla Valley AVA, remains an important underpinning of our work with each other and with the industry. Both institutions focused on the preservation of the story of the wine industry rather than worrying about where records would be housed. As was the case with previous such joint institution collaborations, usually the donor would elect to deposit materials with the local repository (in this case WCNA) so that records could be housed with

similar local materials. As long as materials are preserved and accessible, the OWHA considers these programmatic efforts a success.

All digital materials acquired or created, including the oral history interviews were edited by the OWHA staff. Partner institutions that lacked skill or staff time to dedicate to learning video editing software appreciated this technical expertise. Portions of these materials were uploaded to [the OWHA's digital repository](#) and were sent in their entirety (raw and edited versions) to WCNA for inclusion in its institutional repository.

The OWHA and WCNA collaboration yielded 8 interviews and hundreds of digital scans. Overall, the OWHA's partnerships with local repositories have yielded 33 oral history interviews and hundreds of digital scans. These collaborations have worked to establish trust between partnering institutions, repositories, and the communities we serve — in this case, winemakers and grape growers. As the wine industry grows and evolves there will be more people to interview, deepening personal relationships between industry leaders and repositories, additional donations of materials, and additional opportunities for winemakers to impress upon their industry colleagues the importance of documenting their legacy.

As archivists, we understand that when building programs we must accession relevant materials and establish policies to ensure access and use of those materials. In this wine archive initiative we have worked carefully in all interactions with winemakers and grape growers to emphasize the value of depositing materials with us. By collaborating with archives, the wine industry benefits from permanent access to industry records without devote space and staff resources to maintain materials; perhaps most

importantly, they gain enhanced access to legacy materials for marketing purposes and non-current business records for understanding industry growth. While these records will be invaluable for future historians and scholars interested in researching the cultural and socioeconomic shifts the wine industry has brought to local communities, our interactions with potential donors has emphasized how working with us has immediate value for them.

Looking forward, we have discussed seeking funds to support another round of interviews; however, given WCNA's limited focus on the Walla Walla Valley, it seems such funding include other regions. We would like to explore a more systematic partnership; potential ideas include exploring joint programming. We would also like to provide a toolkit to others interested in exploring such community-based projects, in tandem with other archives or solo. We are interested in investigating new ways of promoting our jointly held materials, both to industry leaders and to researchers; such efforts might involve making interviews available in more publicly accessible sites such as YouTube. Through it all, the emphasis will be placed on promoting materials and making them as accessible as possible to interested users. Further, we imagine developing an archivist exchange program in which others interested in developing such programs could visit their institutions for an intensive week of training or learning. While the scale of our programs is different, both are committed to thoughtful and intentional growth of our respective initiatives. We each recognize that we have been able to achieve more through deliberate resource sharing and partnership than we could have alone. The success we've achieved thus far reveals the potential positive outcomes of collaboration with peers.