

THE FAIRCHILD WINERY

By *LeRoy H. Fischer**

When Edward B. Fairchild rode northeast from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Territory, on August 21, 1890, prospects for his future appeared promising. He was on his way to look over a 160 acre homestead relinquishment of prairie farming land located in Britton Township in the Southeast Quarter of Section Thirty-five, about six miles from his home and business in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City. Not only would this land be his to use for a nominal filing fee, but during the required five years of living on and developing it he would be engaging in his favorite work of fruit and wine production. Moreover, the homestead's black, red and sandy soil, together with the climate, seemed right for the growing of fruit, especially grapes. It appeared also that Oklahoma City would provide an ideal market for the fruit he would grow and the wine he would make. In a little while he turned up in Guthrie, the capital city of Oklahoma Territory, where he went to the United States Land Office to file a homestead claim for the quarter section tract he had recently viewed.¹

Fairchild's experiences told him he was doing the right thing. He grew up near Hammondsport, on Lake Keuka, in Steuben County, New York, an area noted for its fruit and grape growing, and also as a wine and champagne making center. His father, Stanley B. Fairchild, who came from an early New England family, was one of the first to introduce grape growing in Steuben County, and for forty years numbered among the leading horticulturalists of the state of New York. Though he successfully raised all kind of fruit, he gave special attention to grapes, and manufactured the product of his vineyard into wine. In 1862, he marketed 4,000 gallons of wine made from grapes raised in his vineyard. His son, Edward B., was born on December 31, 1842, and grew up in this environment and tradition. Thus Edward from childhood was familiar with the fruit-growing business. From the age of twelve, in 1854, to the death of his father about 1886, they were associated in the same occupation. Young Fairchild owned eighteen acres of fine vineyard, situated in the most productive fruit belt of New York state, and for several years dealt in buying and selling vineyards, for he was an acknowledged judge of their merits. Mean-

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¹ Fairchild Winery, Abstract of Title, Entry 2, George H. Shirk Collection, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Edward B. Fairchild, Homestead Application Number 7202, August 21, 1890, and Final Homestead Certificate Number 1838, September 20, 1895, United States Land Office, Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, Record Group 49, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

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Edward B. Fairchild before coming to Oklahoma City



Mrs. Edward B. (Caroline) Fairchild before coming to Oklahoma City

while, he married Caroline L. Van Voorhees, also of the Hammondsport, New York, area. She came of a prominent family of Netherlands background, was a talented landscape artist, attended Elmira College, Elmira, New York, a girl's school, and was an early editor of the Hammondsport *Herald*. To the Fairchilds two children were born, Walter L. and Caroline E. Walter, much older than his sister, graduated from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and traveled for a number of years for an electrical supply house of New York City.²

But the West beckoned to Fairchild, his wife and daughter, and in the late 1880s they settled in Kansas, where Fairchild engaged in a fruit and vegetable business. With the opening of the Unassigned Lands for settlement on April 22, 1889, in present-day central Oklahoma, Oklahoma Terri-

² *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1901), p. 575; Interview, Ultimus S. Conner, June 8, 1975, Shirk Collection; Interview, Ultimus S. Conner, May, 1974, Oklahoma Living Legends Library, Oklahoma Christian College, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Miriam Nelson to author, December 28, 1976, Shirk Collection.

tory had its beginnings. Fairchild came to Oklahoma City on April 22 from Kansas with a railway boxcar load of potatoes, which he sold to the local settlers. Instead of homesteading, he went into the restaurant business with M. S. Warner and operated the Grand Avenue Cafe, located between Santa Fe and Broadway.³

Several months later, in September, 1889, Fairchild was joined in Oklahoma City by his wife and seventeen-year-old daughter, Caroline. Mrs. Fairchild soon opened a bookstore at 104 Main Street and became a charter member of the First Presbyterian Church. In September, 1890, she began teaching in a grade school in Oklahoma City. Then tragedy struck. As she was about to call her students into the classroom following the noon recess on October 21, 1890, she dropped dead of heart disease at the age of forty-nine. She was characterized at the time as "a talented, cultivated lady, and none knew her but to love her. She was an exemplary Christian. . . . She was a general favorite in the city, known by the rich and poor alike. . . . She was of a sweet disposition, gentle, true and charitable." Fairchild never remarried.⁴

Meanwhile, Fairchild himself became a booster for the development of Oklahoma City, and vigorously backed the effort to obtain the right-of-way through the downtown business district for the Choctaw Railway Company, later the Rock Island Railway Company. Before a half century passed, Oklahoma City paid millions to convert this downtown right-of-way to the present Civic Center. The coming of the Choctaw Railway soon proved to be a detriment for the short-term growth prospects of Oklahoma City, for it drained off a substantial portion of its population. Many of the 10,000 or more people who inhabited it soon after the Run of 1889 moved to villages along the Choctaw Railway and to the surrounding countryside as new areas were opened to settlement. Ultimately the population of Oklahoma City touched bottom with only 4,000 persons remaining. Meantime, Fairchild's restaurant probably suffered from dwindling business. Coupled with this problem was his persisting desire to enter again into the fruit production and wine manufacturing business. His wife had long opposed wine production and, now that she was dead, he no longer felt her

³ "In a Reminiscent Vein," *Historia*, Vol. VIII, No. 4 (January 1, 1920), pp. 3, 4; R. W. McAdam and R. E. Levi, *The City Directory* (Oklahoma City: n. p., 1889), unpagged; *Smith's First Directory of Oklahoma Territory* (Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory: James W. Smith, 1890), unpagged.

⁴ Enumeration District Number 42, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Territory, First Territorial Census of Oklahoma, 1890, p. 456, Library Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; *Smith's First Directory of Oklahoma Territory*, unpagged; Mrs. J. B. Harrel, *Oklahoma and Oklahomans* (n. p.: n. p., 1922), p. 22; *Evening Gazette* (Oklahoma City), October 21, 1890, p. 3 and October 22, 1890, p. 3.



Fairchild's orchard and vineyard during the 1890s

restraining influence. She once had written a poem characterizing grapes as lovely fruit degraded into wine. Moreover, Oklahoma City continued to offer an excellent market for the fruit and wine he desired to produce.⁵

So it was that in the spring of 1891 Fairchild began the development of his homestead. His first task was to plow six acres of land to set out a vineyard, which he soon increased to a total of twenty acres. Next he dug a well. Then he commenced the construction of a small two-room "box" house, twelve by twenty-eight feet, with an iron roof, located on a gentle slope of his homestead. The box type construction for houses was typical of early Oklahoma Territory and the American frontier of this period. For a box house, the exterior wall lumber was applied vertically and the cracks between the boards were covered with narrow strips of lumber to keep out cold drafts. By way of comparison, frame house construction, the next stage of house improvement on the frontier, had exterior weather boarding applied horizontally. Fairchild's house had a "cold blast" heating stove made of sheet iron with a door large enough to accommodate a blackjack stump or log. The stove was efficient, for in about five minutes after adding additional wood it would be red hot. The house was unbelievably drafty and cold in winter, however, and this condition would cause the curtain separating the two rooms of the house to wave when the wind blew from the north.⁶

⁵ Angelo C. Scott, *The Story of Oklahoma City* (Oklahoma City: Times-Journal Publishing Company, 1939), pp. 137-141; Miriam Nelson to author, December 28, 1976. Shirk Collection.

⁶ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma*, p. 575; Testimony of Claimant, Fairchild Final Homestead Certificate Number 1838, September 20, 1895, United States Land Office, Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, Record Group 49, National Archives; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library.

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Fairchild also commenced breaking more sod on his quarter-section of homestead land in the early spring of 1891 for the purpose of developing an orchard of apple, peach, pear and plum trees. By 1897, he had 1,500 apple and 2,500 peach trees. Ultimately, his orchard covered forty acres, and he spared no means in testing and developing the resources of his land for fruit tree growing. He shared these experiences with his fellow citizens through the Oklahoma Territorial Horticultural Society, which he helped to found and for a year served as vice-president.⁷

About 1892, additional improvements were made by Fairchild on his homestead. In order for customers to reach the site of his winery, it was necessary to have an improved road from present Wilshire Boulevard. To accomplish this, he sought and obtained appointment as a township road commissioner. About this time, he needed additional labor to tend his vineyard and make wine. To house this help, he constructed another box house, twelve by sixteen feet, covered by a shingle roof and located south-east of his home. Soon he built a stable, fourteen by twenty feet, to shelter his horses, and a chicken house, ten by twenty feet.⁸

Now that Fairchild's grapes, planted in 1891, were beginning to produce, his next effort, likely begun in 1892 and concluded in 1893, was the construction of a wine vault after the pattern used by his late father in Steuben County, New York. This proved to be a pretentious undertaking, due to its size and the skill required for its construction. The site, on a gentle slope near Fairchild's house on the east, was determined by the existence of a free-flowing spring located at the head of a gully which drained it and the immediate area. Such a site was required to build the sides of the wine vault underground, accommodate its north-south orientation, make it possible to contour its ceiling for an insulating cover of soil blending into the slope of the hill, and to cause the spring to run through it for cooling purposes. The entrance to the vault, located on the south, centered in the gully.⁹

The wine vault itself, still standing, is constructed of roughly-hewn native sandstone, then available at some points on the surface of the surrounding land and in at least one nearby quarry. The floor of the structure

⁷ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma*, p. 575; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; "Irrigation in Oklahoma," *McMasters' Magazine*, Vol. VIII, No. 2 (August, 1897), p. 106.

⁸ Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; Testimony of Claimant, Fairchild Final Homestead Certificate Number 1838, September 20, 1895, United States Land Office, Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, Record Group 49, National Archives.

⁹ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma*, p. 575; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Historical Site Survey, Oklahoma City Historical Preservation Commission, December 21, 1973, Shirk Collection.



The exterior of Fairchild's Wine Vault during the 1890s

was originally of sandstone placed by nature, and was bordered by a drainage trough chiseled into the stone. In the sandstone floor to the immediate left of the entrance and about three feet beyond it is the spring well, three feet by four feet in width, and two feet in depth. The coping around it rises to a height of about one foot above the floor. The spring well itself is connected to both the drainage trough and the drainage pipes. The walls and vaulted ceiling, built on the old wedged mass principle, are approximately two feet thick. Soil packed on the ceiling and against the side walls made this type of construction possible and helped to preserve the structure. The interior floor dimensions are fourteen feet wide and forty feet long. The side walls are vertical for a distance of five feet and six inches from the floor, and at that point merge into the vaulted ceiling, which at its maximum height is seven and one-half feet from the original floor.

In the north wall of the interior of the wine vault are two niches, each eighteen inches wide, twelve inches high, thirteen inches deep, apparently designed not only for ornamental and storage purposes, but also ventilation, as small air shafts connect them with the surface. Near the north wall is a large air circulation ceiling vent, protected on the exterior of the structure by a small canopy of stone. A large doorway opening, three and one-half feet by six feet and three inches in size, on the south end of the wine vault is the only access, and is covered by a heavy door mounted on wrought iron handmade hinges. The spring water on the interior is drained to the

gully about sixty feet south of the entrance by two pipes under the doorway threshold and buried in the soil. Over the entrance Fairchild constructed a porch the width of the vault and extending to the south about twenty feet. This was designed as a working area and also provided shelter for visitors who came to drink wine. The porch contained a large wine press as well as a table, chairs and benches.¹⁰

Inside the wine vault, large barrels of 55 and 125 gallon capacity rested on heavy wooden beams. The barrels lining the walls were usually stacked only two high, but were ordinarily three high down the center because of greater room overhead. This arrangement increased storage capacity and made it possible to siphon from barrel to barrel, into bottles, or other containers. The below-ground level location of the vault, plus the flowing spring water, kept the temperature of the aging wine, as is required, at an acceptably constant level throughout the year.¹¹

Meanwhile, Fairchild enlarged his fruit orchard to 55 acres, located north of his house and wine vault, and increased his vineyard to 20 acres. Each year he produced 60 tons or more of grapes from which he made from 4,000 to 6,000 gallons of wine. He made a specialty of Delaware and Catawba grapes, from which he produced white wine, selling at thirty-five cents a quart. The Concord grapes he grew were converted to red wine, selling at twenty-five cents a quart. Fairchild always had an elaborate exhibit of fruit and wine each year in Oklahoma City at the Oklahoma Street Fair and the Oklahoma Horticultural Fair. He even won a number of premiums for his displays. On one such occasion, an observer said: "Connoisseurs of vintage pronounce his wines as unsurpassed in native products and the great, juicy exhibit of grapes were as tempting as the first apple to the original Adam." Fairchild never used more than a total of 75 acres of his 160 acre homestead for orchard and vineyard purposes. The remainder was used for pasturage and fodder crops for his horses. After the required five year period, he met all requirements of the Homestead Act of 1862, and on December 4, 1895, the United States government issued him a patent to his 160 acre tract of land.¹²

The vineyard and wine production, rather than the orchard, held Fair-

¹⁰ Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection.

¹¹ *Ibid.*; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library.

¹² *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma*, p. 575; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; "A Territorial Triumph: The Street Fair at Oklahoma City, October 10th to 15th, 1898," *McMasters' Magazine*, Vol. X, No. 1 (November, 1898), p. 13; Fairchild Winery, Abstract of Title, Entry 2, Shirk Collection; Record of Homestead Patent, December 4, 1895, Fairchild Homestead Papers, United States Land Office, Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, Record Group 49, National Archives.



The interior of Fairchild's Wine Vault during the 1890s

child's interest over the years. Part of the vineyard, a 6 acre plot, located about 100 yards southeast of the wine vault on the crest and east side of a small hill, the highest point on the Fairchild homestead, was the last one planted. Other sections of the vineyard were located southeast of this plot, likely on the south side of present Wilshire Boulevard. On the crest of the small hill, not long before the government granted the patent for his homestead, Fairchild constructed a reservoir about 60 feet wide, 100 feet long and 10 feet deep, for the purpose of irrigating his vineyard. The reservoir held about 60,000 gallons of water. He dug a well 150 feet deep and installed above it a pump and a windmill with a 12 foot wheel. With each stroke of the pump, a gallon of water would enter the pond. The water in the pond was reserved for drought periods to irrigate the vineyard and orchard by means of an extensive gravity flow system of ditches. The irrigation system was one of the earliest and most successful in Oklahoma Territory. Fairchild stocked the pond with both rainbow trout and black bass. Thus fish and fishing were readily available for Fairchild and his employees.¹³

Fairchild and his laborers gave careful attention to the vineyard. Arbors about ten to twelve feet apart were erected, consisting of posts extending

¹³ Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; "Irrigation in Oklahoma," *McMasters' Magazine*, Vol. VIII, p. 105.

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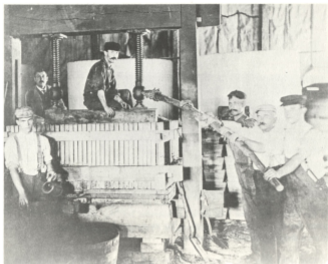


In the 1890s, Fairchild constructed a reservoir holding about 60,000 gallons of water for the purpose of irrigating his vineyard. A windmill pumped water from a deep well to fill the reservoir.

upright about six feet and strung with three equally spaced heavy smooth wires. This was done because grapevines, which grow from cuttings made from canes, require support as they climb by means of tendrils (curls), like most vines. The vines need assistance as they reach for each wire so that the tendrils can take hold. This process continues until the top wire is reached, where the growth bushes out to form an umbrella protecting the fruit from the sun and other weather. Vineyards need cultivation because grapes will not grow well in sod. Every winter, growers prune the vines to keep them compact and to regulate the fruit they will bear. A grapevine currently produces annually from fifteen to twenty-five pounds of fruit, varying because of soil, climate and care. Fairchild's grapes yielded about seventeen pounds per vine. He planted six hundred vines to the acre.¹⁴

At the Fairchild Winery, grapes were harvested by hand when they ripened. To protect each bunch, only the main stem was grasped. The pickers then placed the bunches in long, shallow picking boxes measuring four feet in length, a foot in width, and with sloping sides twelve inches wide on the bottom and fourteen inches wide on the top. A cleat on each

¹⁴ Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; "Irrigation in Oklahoma," *McMasters' Magazine*, Vol. VIII, p. 106.



A screw-type wine press similar in design and in use about the same time as Fairchild's

end of the picking boxes served as a means of lifting and stacking the containers. They remained in place because of the cleats while being hauled to the press at the nearby wine vault. A horse-drawn sled with wooden runners that glided across the soil provided the transportation. A load of grapes consisted of approximately eight-hundred pounds, the amount needed to fill the press.¹³

Fairchild's press was homemade. It was the screw type, little changed from the time of its invention by the Greeks in the second or first century B. C. The press itself, made of heavy reinforced oak lumber, was three-and-one-half-feet square inside and deep enough to accommodate eight-hundred pounds of grapes. As the grapes were loaded into the press, they were run between hand operated rollers intended to remove the stems. Both the stems and seeds of grapes contain high concentrations of acid, always ruinous to wine. The floor of the press was grooved to cause the juice to

¹³ Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection.

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run to the single outlet, which had a large container underneath to receive the juice. Then a slatted divider, made of strips of oak wood slightly less than half an inch apart, was inserted. Next two pieces of burlap cloth (first used as packing for furniture received by the stores of Oklahoma City), each the width of the interior of the wine press, and long enough to extend slightly above it, were laid crosswise over the slatted divider. At this point, the press was filled with grapes, and the burlap cloth folded over the fruit to form a kind of sack. Then a heavy lid, made of two-inch-thick oak lumber in three sections of equal size, was laid in place. If the lid had been made in one piece, it would have been extremely heavy and clumsy to handle. An eight-by-eight-inch oak beam was then placed crosswise on the lid. Two two-by-twelve-inch jack screws were next put in place between the beam across the lid and the stationary eight-by-eight-inch oak crossbeam at the very top of the press. An iron bar four feet in length was then used to screw down on the jacks, first on one side and then on the other, so as to bring equal pressure on the grapes.¹⁶

Meanwhile, juice ran freely from the opening at the bottom of the press. Even before the lid was laid in place, this began. This was known as free-run juice, located just inside the grapeskin, from which came the choicest wine. Fairchild carefully placed the free-run juice in separate barrels for this reason. Then pressure from the screw jacks brought a rush of juice, which soon abated, but renewed itself when additional pressure came. A hand pump in the juice receptacle below the press sent the juice through a rubber hose to a barrel in the wine vault, perhaps as far as fifty or sixty feet distant. After the flow of juice had quit completely, the press would be opened, the crushed grapes stirred with a grubbing hoe, and pressure would again be applied. Three or four additional gallons of juice would then flow from the eight hundred pounds of grapes originally inserted in the press.¹⁷

Fairchild's wine business prospered to the point that his wine was often not kept the needed year to complete the fermentation and aging process. Once the fermentation process had stopped and an additional period of time was allowed for settling, the wine was carefully siphoned from its original barrel into another free of all sediment. There the wine aged. Fairchild added thirty pounds of sugar to each fifty-five gallon barrel of red wine made from Concord grapes and twenty pounds of sugar to each fifty-five gallon barrel of white wine made from Delaware and Catawba grapes. Free-run juice from Catawba grapes, however, did not require the

¹⁶ William Younger, *Gods, Men, and Wine* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1966), p. 187; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection.

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addition of sugar because it was good enough, said Fairchild and his employees, to consume "just like you . . . drink good spring water." The sediment residue remained in the original barrel until it became vinegar or was previously discarded. Fairchild's problem was that he frequently sold his wine before it had properly aged in the second barrel.¹⁸

Bottling at the Fairchild Winery was anything but a systematic procedure. Conditions in Oklahoma Territory permitted this. Fairchild sometimes purchased new wine bottles but likely never had printed labels for the containers in which he sold his wine. Many of Fairchild's customers came to the winery with their own containers, for one of his purposes was to supply wine for family use. He frequently used old liquor bottles for his wine. These he collected from Oklahoma City saloons and from nearby residents such as a local dairy farmer. It seems that the farmer suffered from a lung ailment, and in despair took to drinking a quart of Planters Club daily. Every two week period Fairchild would collect fourteen of these bottles. Usually, the bottles containing wine from Fairchild were recirculated for refill.¹⁹

It was customary for many residents from Oklahoma City as well as the surrounding countryside to visit Fairchild's Winery to purchase a supply of wine or to drink it on the porch in front of the wine vault. Women from the brothel district of Oklahoma City, accompanied by their escorts, would often drive out to the winery in carriages to sit and drink at length on the porch. Fairchild usually told them to be as boisterous as they desired, but to act decently when other customers were present, or he would send them away. A well-known prostitute who often visited the winery was Big Anne Wynn. On one occasion, Big Anne and her escort consumed three quarts of wine and, without realizing the extent of their intoxication, started back to Oklahoma City in their buggy. Meantime, Big Anne became ill and, when the buggy hit a sharp bump only a short distance from the winery, she was thrown to the ground, badly scarred and scratched.²⁰

Twice a week, Fairchild would load his wagon with cases of Concord, Delaware and Catawba wine and make deliveries in Oklahoma City. Because he was the only quantity producer of wine in the Oklahoma City area, the many saloons of the municipality were his steady customers. In addition, most restaurants purchased his wine, as did numerous homes. Fairchild made deliveries much like milkmen of a later period. Because

¹⁸ Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection.

²⁰ *Ibid.*; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; Roy P. Stewart and Pendleton Woods, *Born Grown: An Oklahoma City History* (Oklahoma City: Fidelity Bank, 1974), pp. 20, 21, 59, 196.

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of his dependability and the quality of his product, business continued very good and a serious competitor never appeared.²¹

After a few years, Fairchild decided to take a case of his choice Catawba free-run wine and return to his old surroundings at Hammondsport in Steuben County, New York. He had not returned to the state of New York since he settled in Oklahoma City and vicinity. This would also be an opportunity to visit his son Walter and to see his friends of the early years. He soon located a wine taster where he grew up and asked him to sample his wine. The wine taster questioned: "What kind of grapes did you make this out of?" Fairchild replied: "Catawba." The wine taster responded: "I hate to say this, but we can't make this kind of wine in New York state." Fairchild questioned: "What do you think is the reason?" The wine taster answered: "Well, I'll tell you what I think the reason is—our season is too short. We have to catch our grapes when they're not dead ripe. Your grapes are dead ripe." With much satisfaction in his voice, Fairchild commented: "Yes sir, our grapes are dead ripe when they are pressed." The wine taster proffered: "Well, we've got more acid than you have, and that's why. I'll buy 3,000 gallons of that if you've got it. I'd like to make champagne out of it." Fairchild himself never made champagne because he sold even his choicest free-run Catawba wine long before the minimal three year period passed needed to convert it to champagne.²²

Somehow, Fairchild never enlarged his winery beyond the capacity needed to supply Oklahoma City and vicinity. His peak production was 6,000 gallons of wine annually. Although his product was uniformly considered of choice quality, he apparently lacked the entrepreneurial ambitions and other qualities needed to enlarge his operation for territorial or regional marketing. But in the Oklahoma City area he had the wine market largely his way. His was the only commercial winery in the vicinity. The Brewiller family nearby made a little wine from a few rows of grapes on their farm and sold it from their home at present Northeast Lake. A farmer on the west side of the city had two rows of grapes from which he sold wine throughout the year. He accomplished this by purchasing a barrel of wine from Fairchild when needed and selling it as his own. By this method, he circumvented buying a license to sell wine. The law was that if a person produced the grapes and made the wine, he could sell it without a license.²³

Fairchild had his personal problems. Although his earnings were considerable, he never seemed to have much money. When he delivered wine to

²¹ *Ibid.*: Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection.

²² *Ibid.*: Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library.

²³ *Ibid.*: Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection.

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Edward B. Fairchild in retirement in Shreveport, Louisiana

the saloons in Oklahoma City, friends would ask him to buy them a drink and have one himself. Soon he was buying for everyone present. He drank rye whiskey only and never consumed any of the wine he produced. After repeating this procedure throughout a day of deliveries, he returned home virtually broke and thoroughly intoxicated. Of generous nature, he usually loaned the little that remained to friends who regularly failed to repay him. Eventually, the excessive consumption of liquor caused Fairchild to develop serious stomach and liver ailments. At that point Fairchild went to New York City, where a physician performed surgery on him. After five weeks in bed on his back, he returned to Oklahoma City with the advice that he was never again to consume liquor if he expected to live. He never drank thereafter.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library.

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Fairchild's life was anything but comfortable at the winery. Although he worked daily at the winery, he continued to reside as late as 1894 at the family home at 414 North Broadway in Oklahoma City with his daughter Caroline, familiarly known as Carrie, and a relative, Mrs. C. F. Fairchild. But soon he lived alone on his homestead in the meager box house of two rooms. Then in 1898 a helper named Ultimus S. Conner, a young man of sixteen years of age from a farm nearby, moved in with him and worked steadily for him. They had a bird dog named Tack. Fairchild's son Walter brought the dog from the state of New York when coming to live with his father for a six month period while obtaining a divorce. The dog lived indoors during the winters and was capable of opening and closing the stove door to regulate the heat. Charles Main of Edmond was another of Fairchild's helpers for many years, although he worked only part time. During the grape growing and harvesting season he lived in the box house built especially to house laborers. Both Conner and Main continued to work for Fairchild until he sold his winery and homestead in 1907.²⁶

Throughout the years that Fairchild operated his winery, he never lost interest in the development of Oklahoma City. He kept astride of its politics and continued a staunch Republican. He acquired several lots in Oklahoma City from his debtors and for about a year before statehood moved to Oklahoma City likely to engage in the real estate business. As always, he remained gruff and opinionated. His business clothing and derby hat on his tall and slender body seemed much more appropriate in the offices and on the streets of Oklahoma City than they had those many years he insisted on wearing them from day to day at the winery.²⁶

Fairchild sensed that with statehood Oklahoma would vote the prohibition of liquor and wine. In preparation for this, when he returned to Oklahoma City about a year before statehood, he leased his orchard, vineyard and the remainder of his homestead to F. J. Feeney and Katherine Feeney for a year from January 1, 1906, to January 1, 1907. The Feeneys agreed to furnish all labor, teams and seed for the proper care of his homestead. They also agreed to market all products, plow the orchard once and disc twice during the spring of the year, and keep the vineyard clear of weeds and grass during the period to August 15, 1906. As rental, Fairchild received two-thirds of all grapes produced and one-half of all fruit. During this lease

²⁵ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma*, p. 575; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; *A Complete City Directory and Census of Oklahoma City* (n. p.: Barton and Lowry, 1894), p. 54.

²⁶ *Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma*, p. 575; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; Miriam Nelson to author, December 28, 1976, *ibid.*

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period, Fairchild employed Conner and Main to operate his winery, and continued thereafter to do so until Oklahoma statehood on November 16, 1907.²⁷

When prohibition came with statehood, Fairchild sold his homestead only two weeks later to H. J. and H. L. Flowers on November 30, 1907, for \$10,000. Fairchild was nearly sixty-five years of age at the time. He soon moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, to live with his daughter Caroline and son-in-law D. C. Richardson, once a prominent Oklahoma City lumberman. Caroline had worked as Richardson's secretary, and they were married in 1901 after he was divorced from his first wife. While still living in Oklahoma City, Richardson had purchased several thousand acres of timberland, including mineral rights, near Shreveport. Soon oil was discovered on this land, and the Richardsons moved to Shreveport about 1903. Richardson drilled the first oil well in Caddo Parish, Louisiana, and became a pioneer oil operator in the northern Louisiana oil fields.²⁸

Fairchild enjoyed living in retirement with his daughter and son-in-law. The Richardsons lived in suburban Shreveport at 2791 Fairfield Avenue, in an ample and comfortable home about five miles from the downtown business district. Almost daily Fairchild walked this distance going to and returning from playing chess with his friends. Other recreation included tending a large garden and fruit trees, which he especially enjoyed. He took unusual pride in his asparagus bed and lemon trees. He intermittently traveled to Oklahoma City to visit friends and went to New York City on occasion to see his son Walter.²⁹

After just over eighteen years of living in retirement in Shreveport, Fairchild died on his eighty-third birthday on December 31, 1925, of the infirmities of old age. His son had come to visit him during the Christmas holidays while the Richardsons traveled to Oklahoma City to see relatives. Fairchild's body was sent to Oklahoma City for interment beside his wife's remains in Fairlawn Cemetery.³⁰

Over the years, Fairchild's homestead changed ownership seventeen times, until a five acre tract containing the Fairchild Wine Vault and home

²⁷ Fairchild Winery, Abstract of Title, Entries 17 and 18, *ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Entry 23; Interview, Conner, Oklahoma Living Legends Library; Interview, Conner, Shirk Collection; *A Complete City Directory and Census of Oklahoma City*, p. 54; Miriam Nelson to author, December 28, 1976, Shirk Collection.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Warden-Hoffhine's *General Directory of Oklahoma City, 1910* (Oklahoma City: Hoffhine Directory Company, 1910), p. 407; *Shreveport City Directory, 1925-1926* (Dallas, Texas: R. L. Polk Company, 1925), pp. 323, 621.

³⁰ *Shreveport Journal* (Shreveport, Louisiana), December 31, 1925, p. 4; *Shreveport Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), January 1, 1926, p. 17; *Oklahoma City Times*, January 1, 1926, p. 13, cc. 3-4; *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), p. 12. The remains of Mrs. Fairchild were buried

THE FAIRCHILD WINERY



The exterior and grounds of the Fairchild Wine Vault before restoration

site was purchased by George H. Shirk, a former mayor of Oklahoma City and presently senior partner in a pioneer Oklahoma City law firm. Shirk is also president of the Oklahoma Historical Society, is a member of the board of trustees of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and is the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Long interested in the historic sites of Oklahoma and their preservation, Shirk reasoned from historical records that the Fairchild Wine Vault or its ruins could well be extant, and then set out to locate it. If it still existed, it would likely be the oldest structure within the present boundaries of Oklahoma City. When Shirk rediscovered it, the structure was completely extant and remarkably well preserved, despite the fact that it had received virtually no maintenance attention for more than sixty-five years. Shirk was able in 1973 to purchase the acreage where the Fairchild Wine Vault is located, restore the structure as a private historic site and beautify the location. No other original buildings on the

originally in the School Section Cemetery north of Oklahoma City but were reinterred in Fairlawn Cemetery on March 1, 1894. Records, Sexton's Office, Fairlawn Cemetery, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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Fairchild homestead remain standing. The wine vault is now within the boundaries of Oklahoma City at 1600 Northeast Eighty-first Street.³¹

Although structurally intact and sound, the Fairchild Wine Vault was delapidated and suffering from years of disuse when Shirk acquired it. Heavy undergrowth and large trees grew from the top and sides of the structure. Inside, the sandstone floor was covered with about four feet of mud and water. The drainage system under the threshold was clogged and water flowed over it. The original door and frame were missing. Inside and outside, much mortar had sifted from between the stone joints. Several courses of large facade stones, many of which were buried, had fallen into the area in front of the entrance. Generally, the entrance area contained about three feet more of soil and stone than when the vault was last used for wine fermentation and storage in 1907.

Restoration of the Fairchild Wine Vault was meticulous and time consuming. Using photographs of the middle 1890s of the exterior and interior, all stones were replaced and the masonry joints tuckpointed and restored to their condition at the time of construction in 1892-1893. Before a new three-inch concrete floor was installed, one inch of chat was spread and covered with a plastic membrane to accommodate the free flow of spring water and keep it from penetrating the concrete surface. The original drainage trough around the perimeter of the floor was carefully retained and continues to serve its initial purpose. The spring well was thoroughly cleaned, its original dimensions carefully preserved and reconnected with the perimeter drainage trough. The two drainage pipes under the threshold were replaced and extended for about sixty feet underground to the gully, as they were originally. A heavy wooden door frame and door, mounted on wrought iron handmade hinges, carefully simulate the originals. Modern additions to the wine vault are electricity, running water, an antique chandelier and an entrance patio of sandstone set in a concrete base. All restoration and modern improvement work was accomplished by E. L. Jordan, an Oklahoma City construction contractor.

Present interior furnishings and equipment in the Fairchild Wine Vault include a cold water faucet, a refrigerator and an antique French cast-iron hand-operated town pump mounted above the spring well. New England handmade rough-hewn furniture consists of one long table and ten chairs. There are seven large wine casks installed horizontally and three standing upright. At intermittent points, three half-log black walnut

³¹ Fairchild Winery, Warranty Deed, March 15, 1973, Shirk Collection; George H. Shirk Biography, *Who's Who in America, 1976-1977* (2 vols., Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1976), Vol. II, p. 2864.

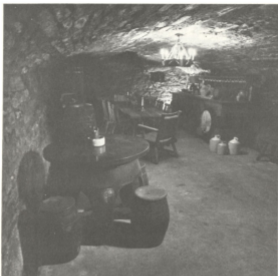
THE FAIRCHILD WINERY



The entrance to the Fairchild Wine Vault before restoration

benches parallel the walls. Near the entrance is a round table made of a barrel as are the four chairs surrounding it.

The grounds of the Fairchild Wine Vault have at present a modern water well housed in a one-story circular structure, also used for storage purposes. Another addition is a restored freight train caboose constructed in 1878 for the Burlington Missouri Valley Railway. Assigned Number 10 by its original owner, the equipment was acquired in the same year by the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railway and was reassigned Number 14107. The caboose is of special interest because of large oak beams used in the wheel assemblies instead of the conventional steel beams in use today. With the merger of the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railway into the Burlington Northern Railway, the caboose remained a part of that system until its permanent retirement in 1972. It now rests on a small sec-



The interior, furnishings and equipment of the Fairchild Wine Vault following restoration

tion of track just west of the wine vault and serves as daytime shelter and overnight housing for guests. The grounds have been beautified by native vegetation enhanced by modern landscaping. An ornamental wrought iron gate, large enough to accommodate vehicles, welcomes visitors to the wine vault grounds.³²

The Fairchild Wine Vault and grounds presently serve several purposes. They are used as a case study and laboratory in the restoration and development of a private historic site by the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Oklahoma Heritage Association, the Oklahoma City Historical Preservation Commission, the Southwest/Plains Field Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and also by the owner. They are at times included

³² Fairchild Winery Freight Train Caboose Records, Shirk Collection.



The exterior and grounds of the Fairchild Wine Vault following restoration

on historical and cultural conducted tours of Oklahoma City. They likewise serve as a meeting place for heritage-minded civic, historical and social groups, such as the Fairchild Wine Society.

Wide recognition has come to the Fairchild Wine Vault because of its historical significance. It was designated as a historic structure by the Oklahoma City Historical Preservation Commission on April 4, 1974, and recognized by the commission in ceremonies on April 25, 1976. It was also named to the National Register of Historic Places on March 13, 1975, by the Secretary of the Interior. Bronze plaques on the exterior of the wine vault relate its historical significance and indicate its recognition by the Oklahoma City Historical Preservation Commission and the National Register of Historic Places.³³

³³ Charles C. Goley to George H. Shirk, February 5, 1976, *ibid.*; Fairchild Winery Ceremony Invitation, Oklahoma City Historical Preservation Commission, *ibid.*; "National Register of Historic Places," *Federal Register*, Vol. XLI, No. 28 (February 10, 1976), p. 6008.

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The Fairchild Winery is historically significant as the major commercial producer of wine in Oklahoma Territory between 1891 and 1907. Fairchild proved that by utilizing the most modern horticultural and viticultural techniques of his time grapes could be successfully grown for commercial wine production in Oklahoma Territory. In addition, Fairchild brought to Oklahoma Territory, as a result of his early experiences in the state of New York, much knowledge of enology, the science of dealing with wine and wine making. Because of his training, experience and preference for earning a livelihood, Fairchild successfully supplied and virtually monopolized the commercial wine market of the greater Oklahoma City area during the territorial years. Had his enterprise and desire been greater, he could have supplied most of Oklahoma Territory with wine. But as it was, he also supplied much of the Oklahoma City market for locally produced fruit in addition to wine.

As a structure, the Fairchild Wine Vault was unique and distinctive in Oklahoma Territory. Fairchild built it using the wedged mass principle, identical to the flying buttress technique successfully utilized over many centuries in European cathedral construction. He banked sufficient soil against the outer arch on the sides and the top of the vault to preserve the rigidity of the arched construction. Architecturally, the vault is of much significance, for it is likely the oldest structure in Oklahoma City with its original configuration and design. In addition, the vault was probably the first structure in Oklahoma Territory using the wedged mass principle of construction.