

HISTORY --- CARROLL COUNTY CHAPTER AMERICAN WINE SOCIETY -- 2018

Jack & Emily Johnston, Founders

We were asked to recount the history of the local chapter and alas, it would have been better if we'd thought to do this years ago. The American Wine Society itself was founded in 1967, and it was motivated and populated by amateur wine makers and grape growers for the most part. If there were local chapters then I couldn't say – there were none here at that time.

We joined up in 1970 or 71, not sure. At the time we lived in Silver Spring and there was no local chapter there – don't know if there is yet. I think there was a chapter in Baltimore, and about that time the National convention was held in Baltimore. Jack went alone, and I think there he met a number of other wine enthusiasts from the area. He continued to go to the Nationals alone (the next year or two I was saddled with a new baby and frankly had my hands full).

Then we moved to Carroll County, motivated by knowing Ham Mowbray, thinking we wanted to grow grapes, and bought the property on Deep Run Road because it was near Ham's place, a proven area for grape growing. This was 1978.

Not sure about the interim here but somewhere along the line we got the idea to start a chapter locally. This was 1980 and there wasn't a lot of protocol for it. When people joined the National they were given contact info for whatever chapter was local to them. Well, of course, there wasn't any chapter here – the closest chapter was in Baltimore -- so we were pretty much on our own.

Ham Mowbray was one of the founders of the National AWS and he lived in Carroll County. We knew him through the local AWS meetings, and the Regional meetings which were held at his winery (Montbray) in Silver Run Valley. He encouraged us to start a local chapter and he was present at our "founding" meeting in March 1980. Along with Max White (who just died in April 2018), Joe Wood and Al Kascur (who both died several years ago), and Phil Benzil. There were others present but we can't recall who they were. Maybe about 15 people altogether. Phil was our dentist and perhaps the only one of this group motivated by interest in wine, as opposed to wine making or grape growing.

I have checked with the National and they have no records of chapters from the early years of the organization, mostly because these would have been on paper. And probably because back then the National didn't really keep tabs on the chapters.

Over the years the focus of the organization has changed. The emphasis now is on the wine, not the making or growing of it, as was the original intent. Members are encouraged to spend their money becoming "wine judges," something we are not sure is measurable. But the notion of educating people about wine in general is a good thing, which is why we support the effort.

(And as an aside, the Montbray vineyard is still alive and well, under the care of Basignani Vineyards. And likewise Copernica Vineyards, our old place.)