

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WINEGROWING IN VIRGINIA

The history of winegrowing in Virginia dates back to 1619, during the settlement of Jamestown. The Virginia House of Burgesses passed a bill called "Acte 12," which required each male landholder to plant a minimum of 10 vines for the future production of wine. The British were hoping to establish a thriving wine business to supplant their reliance on France for wine.

While other attempts were made in the ensuing years, it was Thomas Jefferson who next championed the cultivation of vines for the purpose of making wine. He said, (quote)" *We could in the U.S. make as great a variety of wine as are made in Europe, not exactly of the same kinds, but doubtless as good.*" In 1773 Jefferson formed the Virginia Wine Company. Its members totaled 25 prominent early American leaders, including George Washington and George Mason. They purchased shares at 50 pounds sterling to finance the business. The purpose was to cultivate vines to make wine. In 1773 Philip Mazzei, an Italian, came to Virginia with 1,000 grapevines and ten skilled indentured vignerons to grow grapes and produce wine along with other Mediterranean goods like olive oil. Thomas Adams met him and was going to provide him with a tract of land on his property in the Shenandoah Valley. However, they stopped first to see Jefferson at Monticello when Jefferson proposed giving Mazzei 2,000 acres adjacent to his property at Monticello at Colle to start a vineyard—essentially, pirating him away from Adams. While that experiment failed, it was the first serious attempt at creating a wine business in the new country.

There would be a series of other attempts during the several hundred years that followed. It was not until early in the 1970's several pioneers established six new wineries, and recovery in Virginia winegrowing began once again. In 1976 Gianni Zonin of the Italian winegrowing family Zonin convinced Gabriele Rausse to join him in establishing Barboursville Vineyards and winegrowing began to take off in the Old Dominion. Today there are over 300 wineries of various sizes in Virginia. The annual production of wine made from Virginia grapes is approximately one million cases. Validating the 400-year experiment to produce world-quality wines in Virginia.