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LISA BANLAKI FRANK

'THE BEST VINTAGE EVER'

New York's grape growers and winemakers extol the 2010 crop

A

BY DAVE POHL

s Frank Sinatra once sang: It was a very good year. Winemakers in every region of New York State are almost universally excited over the potential quality of the wines produced from the 2010 growing season. The entire state experienced an early spring and a warm, sunny summer with just enough rain. The weather couldn't have been much better. Many grape varieties ripened simultaneously, and most wineries began picking during the first week of September. It was an intense—but happy—harvest.

Growers in the Finger Lakes region were particularly ecstatic. Last September, the *Ithaca Journal* reported nearly unprecedented excitement for what, to many, already appeared to be a great vintage. Chris Stamp '83 of Lakewood Vineyards on Seneca Lake summed up their feelings, saying that "growing conditions this summer have been about as close to perfect as possible." In addition, pointed out Jim Trezise of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation, "the early harvest means less risk of a killing frost that shuts down the harvest."

This nearly ideal season could have been spoiled by the heavy rains that drenched the area in late September. Fred Merwarth '00, owner of Seneca Lake's Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard, reported that his vineyards were soaked with more than four inches of rain in just twenty-four hours. Fortunately, most of the grapes had already been harvested; what remained was largely Riesling and some red varieties. And those who let their remaining grapes hang a little longer were rewarded with a return to warm, sunny weather.

According to Merwarth, the grapes harvested in mid-October were generally

Dave Pohl, MA '79, is a wine buyer at Northside Wine & Spirits in Ithaca. He came to Cornell in 1976 to work on a PhD in sociology, but he was seduced by the wine business and has been at it ever since.

COVER IMAGE PROVIDED BY THE NEW YORK WINE AND GRAPE FOUNDATION

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Fred Merwarth '00

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clean, with flavors and sugars returned to pre-rain levels. Some of the Riesling grapes were affected by botrytis, a mold that causes dehydration and is responsible for the honeyed flavors of late-harvest Riesling. However, the flavor imparted by botrytis is not necessarily desirable in drier wines; to counter this, Merwarth says, "we sorted fifteen to twenty hours per day to separate botrytis fruit from the clean fruit that is used in the dry and reserve Riesling."

Over on Keuka Lake, there is also plenty of optimism. Fred Frank '79, owner of Dr. Konstantin Frank's Vinifera Wine Cellars, is very excited about the quality of the vintage. "Our grapevine buds opened two weeks early, which helped to extend our growing season," he says. "And the weather throughout the growing season was ideal, with a perfect mix of sunny days and adequate rainfall." How are the wines? "We have begun bottling the 2010 wines," reports Frank, "and we believe the quality is our best since the 2005 vintage."

Bob Madill, one of the owners of Sheldrake Point Winery, is likewise enthusiastic. He says that his vineyards on Cayuga Lake "experienced

more growing degree days [a measure of heat accumulation] than did Napa and Sonoma in California." He points out that the frequency of rain was about the same as 2009, a cooler and very wet year. "But in 2010," he says, "the rain came in shorter downpours, and soils do not absorb nearly as much water in heavy, short bursts, as it runs off. Couple that with the heat that promotes evapo-transpiration and our vineyards were not nearly as wet as they were in 2009."

Madill thinks the 2010 wines will be very appealing, noting that his Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris show great varietal character. The Riesling grapes, he says,

SHELDRAKE POINT VINEYARD



Bob Madill

BUMPER CROP

In 2010, New York State's grape production increased 32 percent over the previous year to 176,000 tons, about one-third of which was wine grapes. The state's wineries crushed 59,305 tons of grapes, an increase of 17 percent. The total value of the 2010 grape crop was estimated at \$68.4 million, a 44 percent increase over 2009 (a year with an unusually small crop) and a 19 percent increase over 2008 (a more normal year).

Source: The New York Wine & Grape Foundation

came in with lighter acid than 2009, and the resulting wines should provide a great deal of pleasure early on. He's also positive about the reds: "The Merlot shows full ripeness and concentration; the Cabernet Franc is well balanced, as is the Gamay."

"Balance" is a word that is heard often in discussions of the wines of 2010. Johannes Reinhardt, the German-born winemaker at Anthony Road Wine Company on Seneca Lake, sees balance as a defining characteristic of the vintage, describing the fruit he had to work with as "very promising, balanced, and good." He is particularly impressed by the reds, and he rates 2010 even more highly than 2007 for red wines, as a bit more moisture helped avoid "some of the cooked fruit of 2007."

Perhaps the most unbridled enthusiasm comes from grape grower extraordinaire Jim Hazlitt '60, who owns Sawmill Creek Vineyards and supplies the grapes for many of the area's best wineries, including Ravines, Red Newt, Hazlitt 1852, Damiani, and Atwater Estate. He describes the growing season as "ideal" and says that "winemakers could harvest when the grapes were perfect, when every variety was clean and ripe."

While producers in the Finger Lakes were particularly excited about their prospects, the outlook for other New York wine regions was also extremely positive. Both the Hudson Valley and Long Island had early harvests, although picking of some varieties in the Hudson Valley had to be delayed because some wineries did not have the space or labor to deal with the quantity of early-ripened grapes. There, the vintage was especially kind to white varieties; late-season rains created rot problems for some of the red-wine grapes.

Long Island had one of its earliest harvests ever, with picking of white varieties beginning in early September and reds in early October. This was quite a contrast to 2009, when some vineyards had grapes still hanging after Thanksgiving. Botrytis was a problem for some later picked reds such as Merlot, but even in those cases the overall quality of the fruit was reported to be high.

Jim Hazlitt predicts that many of the 2010 wines from New York State will score in the nineties in evaluations, making it the best vintage ever. When asked if this degree of excitement was truly warranted, Tim Martinson, PhD '91, of Cornell Cooperative Extension confirms that "it seems to have been a very good year and many people are very pleased." It will be interesting, indeed, to begin sampling the products of this seemingly singular year as they appear in the marketplace.

Cheers!

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FOCAL POINT

Ithaca's Finger Lakes Wine Center Welcomes Visitors to the Region

BY DAVE POHL

After many years of planning and fundraising, the Finger Lakes Wine Center opened its doors to the public last fall. Located at 237 South Cayuga Street in downtown Ithaca, it is bound to become a favored destination for both local wine lovers and those from outside the region.

Suzanne Lonergan, the Wine Center's executive director, sees it "as a gathering place for wine lovers, a place to socialize and at the same time learn more about the area's wines." She goes on to say that "Ithaca doesn't have many spaces that aren't bars where like-minded people can get together and share a common interest."

The nonprofit center—a collaborative effort of Cornell, community leaders, and the area's wineries—defines its goals as primarily educational. Its mission statement, posted at www.fingerlakeswinecenter.org, describes the center as "a meeting place to begin your exploration of the gorgeous Finger Lakes wine country, just beyond Ithaca's city limits." This is accomplished with an array of tastings, seminars, and classes.

The idea for the facility dates back to 2002, when its president, David Sparrow, MA '86, met with Fred Bonn of the Tompkins County Convention & Visitors Bureau and others to discuss the feasibility of such a center. "In 2001," Sparrow says, "the consulting firm Randall Travel Marketing concluded in its study of tourism in the Finger Lakes that a wine center was a good, workable idea and that Ithaca would be a good location for it. So we formed a task force to study the feasibility of a wine center, and we ultimately decided to take it on."

Funding was pieced together from many sources, including Tompkins County Tourism, three New York State grants, private money, and a loan from the City of



FINGER LAKES WINE CENTER



A gathering place: The Finger Lakes Wine Center offers tastings and educational displays for wine enthusiasts.

Ithaca. According to Sparrow, the process was "long and hellish," but well worth the effort. The Wine Center is governed by an eight-member board that includes winery owners, community members, and Tommy Bruce, Cornell's vice president for university communications.

Thus far, the Wine Center's classes have included sessions on food and wine pairing, home grape growing and wine-making, choosing wine for holiday meals, and explorations of single-grape varieties such as Riesling and Cabernet Franc. Visitors may also taste flights of wine organized around a single variety—on one recent day, the choices included Finger Lakes Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Riesling, dry Riesling, and Chardonnay. At any given point, twenty-five wines will be available for tasting. Each is available for sale, as is a selection of wine-related items and artisanal crafts produced in the region. The wines available for tasting are rotated, so a visitor can taste some new ones on successive visits—and there is always a knowledgeable person on hand to discuss the wines, answer questions, and disseminate information about the Finger Lakes and its wineries.

The building itself is quite beautiful—modern and sleek. A nicely lit central space houses a wine bar, a retail area, and various educational displays, including a large folding mural that illustrates and explains what happens from month to month in the vineyard and winery during the winemaking process. A dramatic map of the Finger Lakes region dominates one wall. It was created from forty-one digital photographs of an 1845 map in Olin Library; the photos were used to create eight polymer panels that were affixed to the wall.

The Wine Center has a private tasting room for meetings and smaller classes. It's also available for rental by local groups—in fact, the entire space can be rented. So far, notes Lonergan, more than twenty groups have used the space for events ranging from birthday parties, an award dinner, and a wedding rehearsal to Cornell departmental programs, corporate get-togethers, and even a book launch. On Thursday evenings, the Center turns into an Ithaca gathering place, with live music featured from 6 to 9 p.m.

Now that the Wine Center is up and running, its operating income will come from tasting fees, retail sales, rentals, seminars, and memberships, which are offered at various levels. The operation is still young, and the board is eager to see what this year's tourist season will bring. Visiting Cornellians should plan to drop in before heading out to the local wineries.



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WINE GUIDE

The New York Wine & Grape Foundation has updated its guidebook to reflect the ever-expanding wine industry in the state. The forty-page book includes detailed maps of every wine region, spectacular photos, and new sections on fruit wines and meads. To access the guide online, go to www.newyorkwines.org, then click on Information Station, Regional Guides, and New York Wine Guide 2011.



A LIFE ON THE LAND

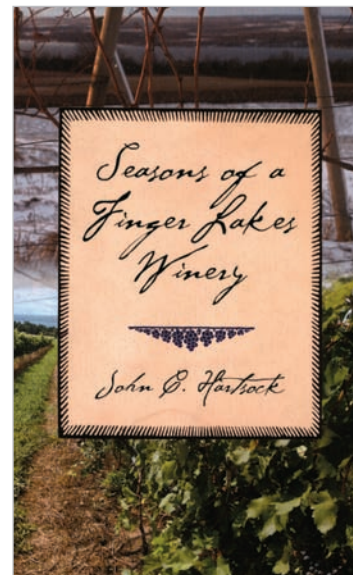
A season-by-season account of the winemaking process

Making wine is hard work. If you had the notion that being a winemaker was a leisurely life where you could sit on the porch, sip chilled Chardonnay, and watch the grapes grow, reading *Seasons of a Finger Lakes Winery* will disabuse you of that notion.

In this new book from Cornell University Press, author John Hartsock focuses on Gary and Rosemary Barletta, owners of Long Point Winery on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake. He weaves the story of their lives through a season-by-season account of a year at their winery, from preparation of the vineyard in winter through growing, harvesting,

crushing, and the stages of the winemaking process. And then there's marketing and selling the wine, so you can bring in enough money to do it all again the next year. It's tricky, difficult work—much can go wrong at almost any point, and even if everything proceeds more or less according to plan, what comes out of the bottle can be mediocre. In winemaking, as Gary Barletta laments at one point, "there's no such thing as perfection."

The French describe the combined effect of climate, soil, elevation, and other geographical features as *terroir*, an overarching concept that encompasses the many factors that come together in a particular place to shape a wine's taste and character. Another aspect, as Hartsock makes clear, is the personality of the



winemaker. His account of the Barlettas, while sometimes lapsing into sentimentality, enriches and enlivens what could have been a dry agricultural saga, providing brightness, flavor, and a strong finish.

— Jim Roberts '71

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FLIGHT TRAINING

Taste your way to wine expertise at the New York Wine & Culinary Center

BY SHANNON BROCK

Many Cornellians have fond memories of learning to appreciate wine thanks to the Hotel school's legendary Introduction to Wines course, taught by Stephen Mutkoski '67, PhD '76. Those looking to continue their wine education—without having to sit with a tray of wine glasses on their laps—need look no further than the New York Wine & Culinary Center.

Located in Canandaigua at the north end of Canandaigua Lake, the nonprofit center offers a wide variety of courses in pursuit of its mission to support the New York wine industry. Its classes aim to promote awareness and sales of wines produced in the state's five major growing regions: Finger Lakes, Lake Erie, Niagara Escarpment, Hudson River, and Long Island. The wine instructors have been selected for their knowledge of New York and world wines, engaging and entertaining presentation skills, and ability to make wine approachable—and all classes include interactive food and wine tasting in a comfortable amphitheater setting.

Beginner and intermediate wine consumers may select from a menu of one- or two-hour appreciation classes priced from \$20 to \$50. These sessions offer in-



struction in wine-tasting technique, major wine varieties, and food pairing. Some of the most popular include Wine 101, Wine & Food Flavor Pairing, Riesling Expert, and Wine & Chocolate Pairing. Enthusiasts can also enjoy a pairing lunch or dinner at the Center; themed dinners often feature a well-known New York winery, such as Dr. Frank or Hermann J. Wiemer, and offer multi-course menus designed to highlight the wines. Often, cooking demonstrations by the executive chef are part of the program, and wine-pairing commentary is provided by visiting winemakers.

Those seeking advanced or professional-level wine education can choose among several center-developed programs, such as an all-day New York Wine Camp or

PHOTOS BY WALTERCOLLEYIMAGES.COM



Higher education: Located in Canandaigua, the New York Wine & Culinary Center offers wine classes for everyone from beginners to industry professionals.

Wine Aroma Workshop, or enroll in the Wine & Spirit Education Trust program, an internationally recognized program in wines of the world delivered by certified instructors.

Professional development courses in wine knowledge, hospitality, and tasting-room management are offered specifically to New York wine industry employees, as well as to employees of stores and restaurants that promote New York wine. Hundreds travel from all over the state to attend, and classes are occasionally taken on the road to the Hudson Valley and Long Island. The Wine & Culinary Center also collaborates with Cornell's Enology Extension program to offer a popular advanced course in wine fault identification.

Many celebrity wine personalities have made appearances at the center, including Kevin Zraly, Andrea Immer Robinson, Oz Clarke, and Leslie Sbrocco. Other special events held annually include Rendezvous with Riesling, a walk-about tasting of the best Riesling wines from around New York; the Golden Nose, a consumer-judged wine competition; and the n'ICE Festival, a celebration of New York ice wines.

The Wine & Culinary Center, which opened in 2006, counts Constellation Brands, Wegmans, Rochester Institute of Technology, and the New York Wine & Grape Foundation as its founding partners. It is convenient to the Finger Lakes region and Rochester, and an easy day trip from Syracuse, Buffalo, or (of course) Ithaca. Wine courses, as well as a wide variety of hands-on cooking classes, are offered year-round; a complete listing of upcoming courses may be found at nywcc.com. Online registration is available and visitors are encouraged to register in advance, as many courses sell out. In lieu of taking a class, visitors may learn more about New York wines by enjoying a flight of wine in the tasting room or partaking of the Taste of New York Restaurant's pairing menu, offered at dinner each evening.

And, while the Wine & Culinary Center has a collection of fine stemware, feel free to dig out that black plastic case and bring your own glasses to relive those good old Introduction to Wines days.

Shannon Brock '99 majored in policy analysis in the College of Human Ecology. After a stint with Teach For America and several years teaching in urban public schools, she settled in the Finger Lakes to follow her passion for wine. She has been the wine coordinator at the New York Wine & Culinary Center since its opening in 2006 and is the lead wine instructor.

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BIG RED BOAST

CALS Grads Make the Difference for Long Island Winery

At Bedell Cellars on Long Island's North Fork, the big red boast isn't just about its critically acclaimed Merlot blend, Musée—the winery also employs several generations of Cornell graduates. From winemaker to sales manager, the roles run the gamut, and CEO Trent Preszler, MS '02, says it speaks to the diversity of offerings at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the breadth of skills its graduates acquire.

"The CALS degrees are not one-dimensional, and the students gain expertise in all aspects of the wine business," says Preszler, who received his master's degree in agricultural economics and is a PhD candidate in the viticulture program. "They become fluent in aspects of business and marketing, chemistry and botany, microbiology and sensory science. All those interests are then piqued and primed for when they enter a job in industry, and they are ready to contribute to a winery in a variety of ways."

Bedell winemaker Rich Olsen-Harbich '83 majored in plant science, national sales manager Adriana Coderch '10 in food science and enology, and social media specialist Steve Carlson '06, BS Ag '09, in food science and enology. In addition, former harvest intern Benjamin Riccardi

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'08, who majored in plant science and viticulture, went on to become the winemaker at Lamoreaux Landing in Lodi.

"We recruit from CALS because we know these graduates will have knowledge specific to our industry and our growing climate," Preszler says. "Many of them come from family farms or wineries and understand on an intimate level what they're getting into, and they aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and work hard."

Olsen-Harbich says Cornell has evolved a great deal since he graduated. There was only one viticulture course then, and he had to seek out professors and other collaborators to pursue his independent study on such topics as pruning weights, bud cold-hardiness, grafting, and the effects of sulfur dioxide on machine-picked grapes. He was one of the people who worked with former CALS dean Susan Henry to develop the four-year viticulture and enology degree program, launched in 2008.

"Over the years, Cornell has both led and responded to the needs of the wine industry," Olsen-Harbich says. "At times the University has been prodded by industry to delve deeper into topics and needs, while at other points the work done at Cornell has opened new doors and pathways otherwise unseen."

Known for the way he combines tradition and best practices with a bit of the avant garde, Olsen-Harbich credits Cornell with providing him with the scientific training to allow him to push creativity within the proper framework. "Much of what I do is somewhat frowned upon by the academic establishment—the use of indigenous yeasts, minimal intervention, and filtration, to name a few," he says. "That being said, the chemistry and biology of the process is empirical and important to understand as one goes deeper into the craft."

Owned by the film executive and art collector Michael Lynne, Bedell and its sister winery, Corey Creek Vineyards, encompass seventy-eight acres in Cutchogue and Southold that yield approximately 10,000 cases of wine annually. In addition to receiving recognition for the quality of its wines—the 2007 Musée recently set a new record for Long Island reds with an award of 91 points from *Wine Spectator* magazine—Bedell is a longstanding leader in the sustainable viticulture movement on Long Island and helped author the region's sustainability guidelines.

— *Stacey Shackford*

Stacey Shackford is a staff writer at CALS. This article first appeared in the January 2011 issue of *Ezra Update*. Used by permission.

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A BOOST FOR NEW YORK WINES

**Wine and vine experts
receive \$1.3 million
for research**

Unpredictable rainfall, overly fertile soils, new varieties, and a young industry—these are but some of the challenges in producing quality wine in the eastern United States. Cornell has been awarded \$1.3 million to address these problems in East Coast vineyards, wineries, and tasting rooms as part of a \$3.8 million grant from the federal Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI).

"This grant gives us the opportunity to collaborate with more than thirty of our colleagues to tackle the issues most important to the eastern U.S. wine industry," says Anna Katharine Mansfield, assistant professor of enology and grant co-investigator. "We hope that our work will lead to enhanced sustainability and economic vitality for the industry and help us understand consumer attitudes about regional wine."

SCRI grants are notable for their mandate to address complex problems in neglected crops using interdisciplinary research. Accordingly, this large effort led by Virginia Tech enlisted Cornell viticulturists, enologists, plant pathologists, economists, and extension specialists for projects affecting New York State and beyond, starting with the soil beneath the vines. "In the northeastern United States, soils that are high in organic matter and excessive rainfall can cause problematic vine vigor, resulting in high production costs and reduced fruit quality," says Justine Vanden Heuvel, assistant professor of horticulture. "We will be testing the effectiveness of cover crops to slow the growth of shoots, resulting in higher quality fruit."

Vanden Heuvel will also work with horticulture professors Ian Merwin, PhD '90, and Alan Lakso to dissect how light and temperature affect grape flavors and aromas—from bitter to fruity—in Riesling and Cabernet Franc. Plant pathology professor Wayne Wilcox will look at the cor-

New York Wine Trails

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Keuka Lake Wine Trail
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Seneca Lake Winery Association
www.senecalakewine.com

Canandaigua Wine Trail
www.canandaiguawinetrailonline.com

Lake Erie Wine Trail
www.lakeeriewinecountry.org

Niagara Wine Trail
www.uncorkanaturalwonder.com

Lake Ontario Wine Trail
www.lakeontariowinetrail.com

Thousand Islands Wine Trail
www.thousandislandsseawaywinetrail.com

Shawangunk Wine Trail
(Hudson Valley)
www.shawangunkwinetrail.com

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www.dutchesswinetrail.com

Long Island Wine Council
www.liwines.com

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Northside Wine & Spirits
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responding effects on disease incidence, so the project will produce comprehensive cultural recommendations appropriate to a grower's climate and target wine style. In addition, Lakso and colleagues from other universities will use modeling to develop decision-making tools for vineyard managers, from identifying good matches between a potential site and grape variety to how much crop they can ripen in a particular vineyard.

Mansfield's wine research will focus on the varieties and production methods common to the region. The ultimate goal is to develop recommendations that will improve wine quality through appropriate fruit processing. She will experiment with winemaking techniques to minimize the flaws in wines made from red hybrid grapes—the low tannins and phenolics that can make them seem thin on the tongue—and enhance the signature aromas of such regional whites as Riesling, Traminette, and Gewurztraminer.

"Ultimately, consumers will decide the future of the East Coast wine industry," says Brad Rickard, assistant professor of applied economics and marketing. "The economic component of the project will help to pinpoint the target consumers for East Coast wines and understand how they would respond to various marketing strategies." Rickard's goal is to experiment with different advertising approaches to see how they influence consumers' interest in—and willingness to pay for—wines made in the eastern United States.

Several Finger Lakes vineyards—including Hosmer, Anthony Road, Bedient, Swedish Hill, and Lamoreaux Landing—are collaborating by donating fruit or vineyard space. And during the five years of the project, the entire New York wine industry can expect to see new online resources funded by the grant. Extension associates Jodi Creasap-Gee, PhD '06, Chris Gerling '99, MS '06, and Hans Walter-Peterson will translate the research findings for growers and winemakers, with new how-to videos, podcasts, e-bulletins, and regular updates on the team's research results on the Cornell viticulture and enology outreach website: <http://grapesandwine.cals.cornell.edu/cals/grapesandwine/outreach/index.cfm>.

— Amanda Garris

Amanda Garris, PhD '04, is a freelance writer based in Geneva. This article first appeared in the *Cornell Chronicle Online*, January 17, 2011. Used by permission.



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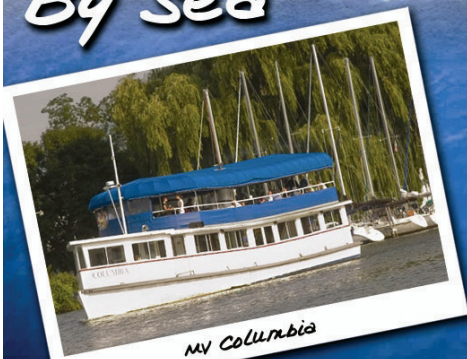
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