

Black Prince will steal your heart

Queen's film grad takes career turn with county winery

By Mark Bergin
Whig-Standard Staff Writer

England rejoice. After a wait of several centuries, your beloved Black Prince has finally become king.

Prince Edward, the eldest son of King Edward III, born in 1330, never succeeded to the throne, dying at the age of 45.

Prince Edward was known for his chivalry and generous use of wealth. He distributed gifts to people of any rank in life, from royalty to commoner. Also a fearsome military man, the prince's troops, using the longbow, twice defeated French forces who outnumbered them by more than double.

Likewise, the unpretentious Black Prince Winery is putting much larger foreign and major brands in their place. The Picton winery is producing award winning Ontario wines, from Chardonnay to Cabernet, fit for a king. They just won double gold in the Best of Category for their Vidal at the 2007 All Canadian Wine Championships, competing against about 850 wines from 140 wineries.

Geoff Webb, general manager of the winery, explained that when the winery was searching for a name suited to a county winery (in Prince Edward County), they reached into history and discovered something about Prince Edward many don't know.

"A lot of people don't realize the prince was also the ruler of Bordeaux and Aquitaine. That's great wine country," Webb said. "We adopted him as ours."

Webb explained the prince got his moniker because he was a fierce competitor in the joust – but he'd fight anonymously.

"If he'd showed up as king's son, no one would have fought against him," Webb explained.

Black Prince Winery was founded in 2001 with the combined investment assistance of Irish born Michael O'Donovan (1936-2005), whose family now lives in Cambridge, Ont., and the Opimian Society, named after a famed vintage, Opimian Falernian, of 121 BC, presided over by Roman consul Lucius Opimius.

The somewhat obscure, but highly influential, Opimian Society is a Canadian non-profit wine ordering



Mark Bergin/The Whig-Standard

Geoff Webb, general manager of Black Prince Winery, offers a history lesson with his award-winning Prince Edward County wines.

co-operative. The society has successfully been offering Canadians approachable wines from around the world that are not available through liquor boards.

"Approachable" means that they are priced between \$10 and \$30. There is great wisdom in the Opimian Society: members believe that wine should be judged by what's inside the bottle, not by the price or label. In the 1970s and

1980s, the Opimian Vineyard Trust invested heavily in California wines and in 1999 brought the money back to Canada.

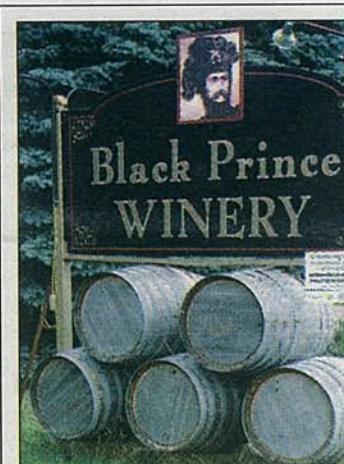
"Black Prince was born out of those funds," Webb said.

After Webb graduated from Queen's University in 1985 with a degree in film and communications, he was hired by the Opimian Society's John Sambrook to do a film series on wine.

"After the project ended, John suggested I stick around and learn about the wine business."

In the 1990s, though Webb had his own successful wine importing business in Toronto, he kept in touch with Sambrook. In 2001, Sambrook brought Webb on board to start Black Prince Winery at an old horse farm in Picton.

"After moving here, I got my education in agriculture," Webb said.



IF YOU GO

WHERE: 13370 Loyalist Pkwy., Picton.

DIRECTIONS: Take Bath Road west from Kingston. It becomes County Road 33, the Loyalist Parkway. Follow it to the end and cross over to the Isle of Quinte on the Glenora Ferry. Drive through Picton and Black Prince is along the Loyalist Parkway on the west side of town.

HOURS: Summer Hours, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

MORE: (613) 476-4888 or www.blackprincewinery.com.

"Winemaking is one thing, but first you have to get a crop out of the ground. I'm not the first to say this, but great wines start in the vineyard."

The last time I was impressed by a new wine was in the 1980s when I discovered Inniskillin. Since then, nothing's really made me sit up and take note.

Last week, I tried a Black Prince Cabernet Sauvignon. I couldn't believe my senses. I'm a red wine lover and Black Prince instantly defeated other grape troops.

My wife is an avid white wine drinker who generally detests the rebelliousness of red wine. She is, after all, a teacher. But trouble is brewing. I've never had to share the red wine in the household. Last week, I brought home a bottle of Black Prince Cabernet.

"This new wine is unbelievable, but you won't like it," I said. "It's got a bit of a bite. It's not like that sissy stuff you drink."

She tried a glass and raised her eyebrows after the first sip.

"This is amazing," she said. "I think I'll have some more."

I was aghast.

The Black Prince had won my wife's heart. **T**