

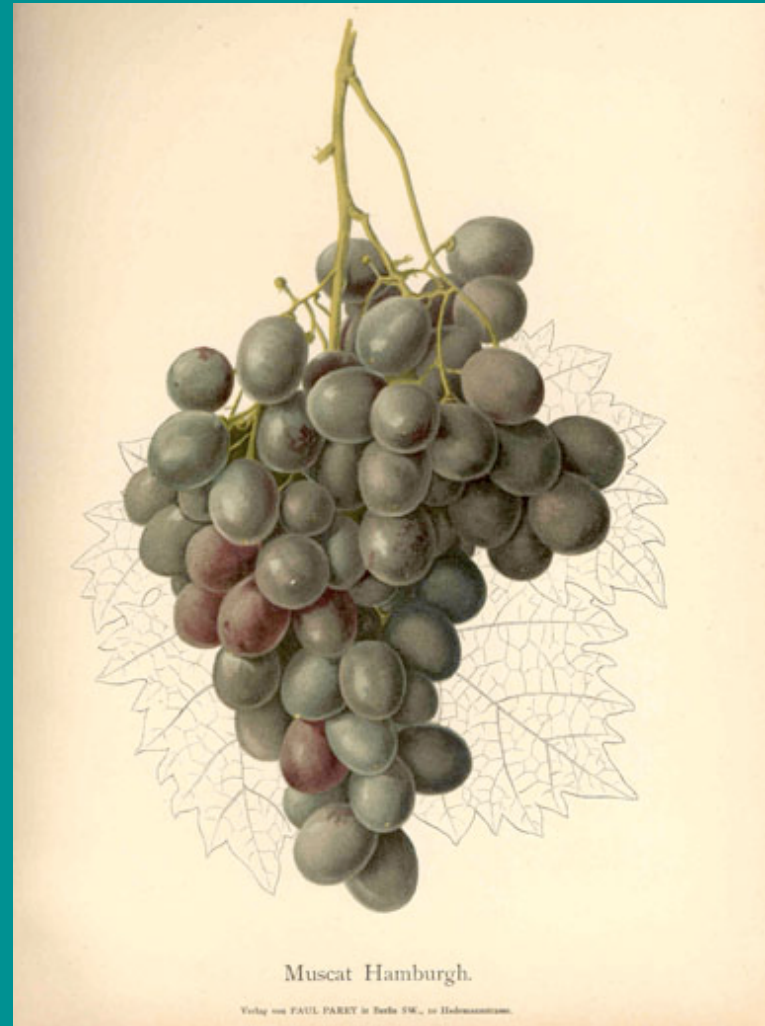
# “The Best Luxury of All”

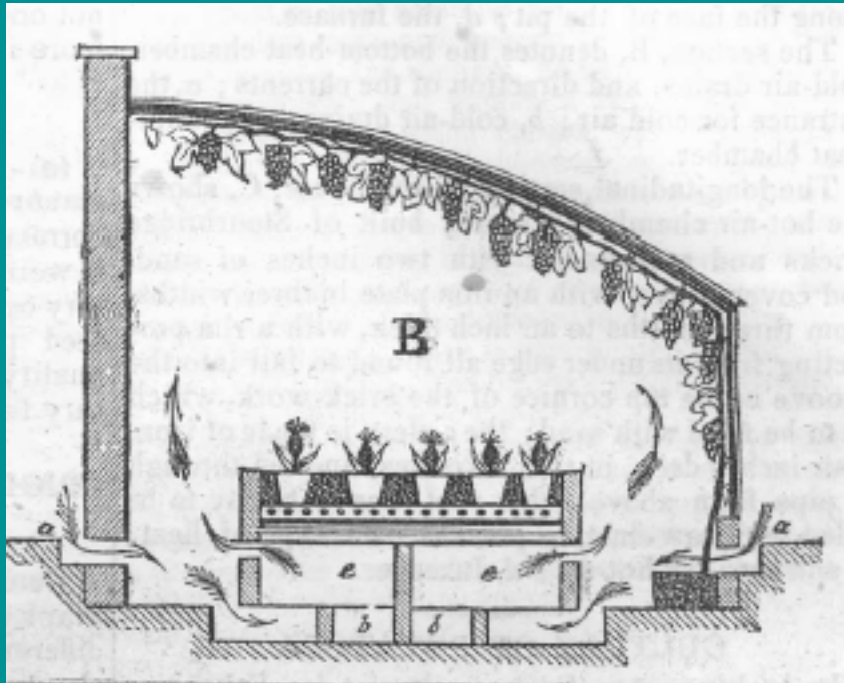
“Look what those enormously wealthy Victorians, who could afford anything they wanted, spent their money on! They built greenhouses and then went to even more expense heating and staffing them so they could enjoy what they acknowledged to be the best luxury of all - fresh homegrown fruits, vegetables, and flowers every month of the year.”

Eliot Coleman, “The Four Season Harvest,” 1999

In mid-nineteenth century New York State, no fruit was more prized than the grape. The only varieties grown outdoors were Isabella and Catawba grapes; the familiar Concord was not introduced until 1860.

A favorite table grape of the era was the Black Hamburg. This variety cannot survive freezing temperatures.



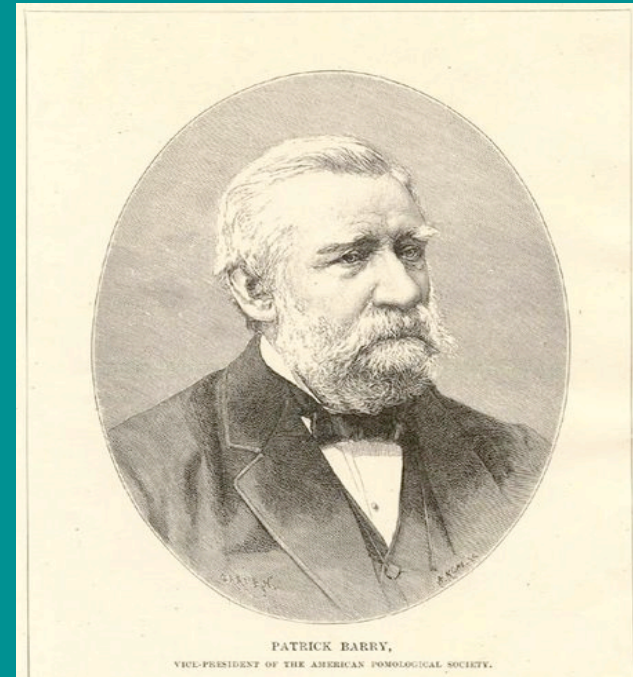


Plan of a vinery from the “American Agriculturist” of April 1847. The vinery was heated by a flow of warm air (arrows) from a small external furnace that used very little fuel.

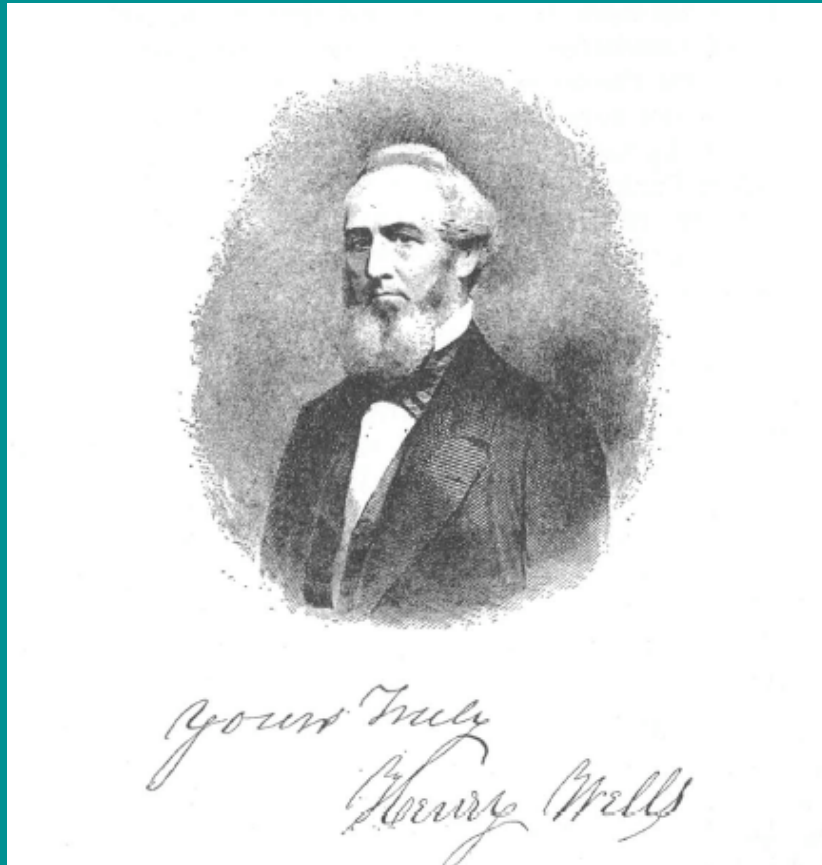
Grapes like the Black Hamburg that are sensitive to freezing temperatures were grown in “vineries,” greenhouses designed especially for grape culture. Combining outdoor-grown varieties with those grown in unheated and heated vineries offered an exceptionally long season of choice fresh fruit.

In 1851, Patrick Barry (right), noted Rochester horticulturalist, advised businessmen to add vineries to their home gardens and orchards.

H. L. SUYDAM, Esq., is the next neighbor to Capt. DAKIN, and is worthy of being so. His garden presents the same form and a similar arrangement. His improvements are not complete, but he is pushing them forward vigorously. We found him draining his garden and fitting up a very complete little cold vinery about 30 feet long and 12 feet wide. We might point to these two gardens as models for business men who reside on small city and village lots.



“We found [Mr. Suydam of Geneva NY]...fitting up a very complete little cold vinery about 30 feet long and 12 feet wide. We might point to these two gardens as models for businessmen who reside on small city and village lots.”



In the same year, businessman Henry Wells (left) purchased part of John Morgan's farm, just south of Aurora, and began planning a home of his own, which he called Glen Park.

Glen Park is about a half mile south on Rte. 90, on the Wells College campus.





Henry Wells' design for Glen Park (1851) incorporated not just one but two vineries, one heated and one not, as well as a round or octagonal greenhouse.



An early photograph from an upper floor of Main Building shows the “cold” (unheated) vinery.





A view from the tower shows the top of the circular greenhouse as well as the “cold” vinery.



A little more of the circular greenhouse appears between Glen Park and the barn in this view through the orchard.



The heated vinery was probably near the greenhouse, which was also heated. It does not appear in any photos currently known.

Vineries under expert care yielded an astonishing amount of fruit. This stereo view shows the interior of an Aurora vinery of the same era, that of Henry Morgan.



Henry Morgan built Taylor House, the pillared house across from the Aurora Inn. His gardens and greenhouses, almost certainly including this vinery, stood where Wallcourt, the large brick building to the left of Taylor House, does today.





Circa 1910

The Glen Park  
vineries did not long  
survive Wells himself,  
who died in 1878.  
The last glasshouse to  
go was the round  
greenhouse, still  
yielding delicious  
Meyer lemons in 1909.

Over this time, and in the years that followed, it became easier and cheaper to bring in out-of-season fruits by train and truck than to hire experienced gardeners and repair fragile glass buildings.

Today, however, there is renewed appreciation of “the best luxury of all - fresh homegrown fruits, vegetables, and flowers.”

“What a pity that every citizen whose means would justify it, does not make such home as this. What comfort there would be and what a charming town it would make.”

Patrick Barry, 1851

“If you have a little sunny space in the backyard, and the desire to grow a garden, you can eat like the Victorian millionaires.”

Eliot Coleman, 1999