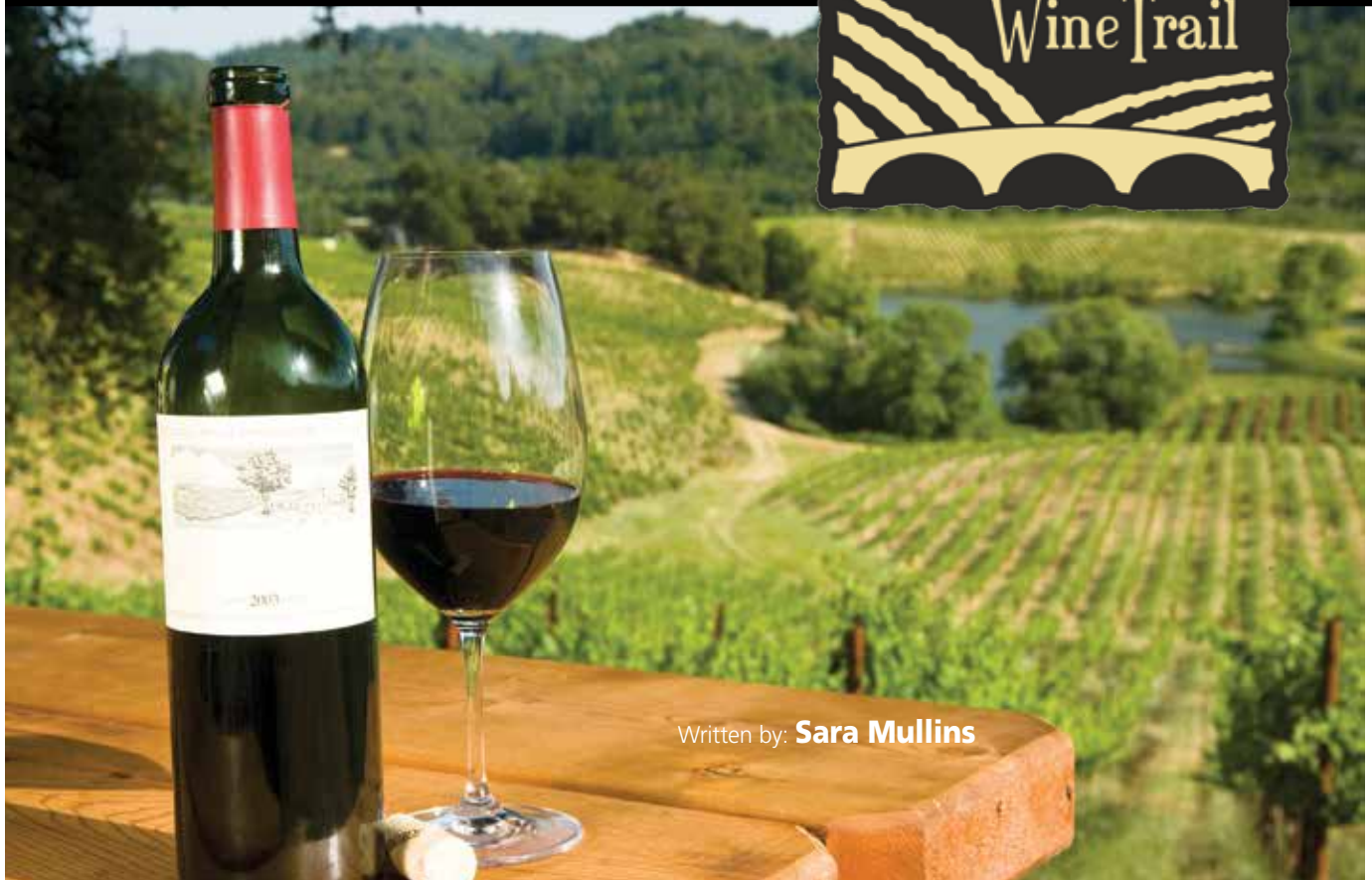


Touring the

Washington County, Maryland



Written by: **Sara Mullins**

In an area best known for Civil War history, vineyards laden with grapes are transforming the landscape of Maryland's Washington County and western Frederick County into a new "terroir." This French term refers to the soil and climate that give grapes used for wine-making their distinctive flavor and aroma. The Antietam Highlands' permeable, lime-rich soil and elevation climate with warm days and cool nights make it especially well suited for growing European wine grapes. By April 2013, four local wineries joined forces with the Washington County Board of Commissioners to officially launch the Antietam Highlands Wine Trail, the sixth of Maryland's wine trails. A fifth winery will soon join them, with more expected to follow.

The wine trails of Maryland were designed as self-guided tours. But Clear Springs residents Burma and Dale Miles of RoadRunner Services came up with another option after visiting the Antietam wineries: why not offer a guided winery tour? After Burma and Dale got a thumbs up from the wineries, they proposed the idea to the Hagerstown-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

By September 2013, RoadRunner Services began offering Antietam Highland Winery Trail tours in 14-passenger touring buses with large windows for optimal viewing. Rear storage space with a cooler and bubble wrap allows passengers to transport their wine purchases. Pickup services are available in Hagerstown or Frederick. Reservations are required for the six-hour tour, available on designated Saturdays listed on the RoadRunner web site.

Currently, RoadRunner's Antietam Highlands Wine Trails tour includes four wineries: Knob Hall, Red Heifer, Orchid Cellar and Distillery Lane Ciderworks. Also included is a visit to Wilson's Store in Clear Spring and time for lunch and a bit of poking around in Boonsboro. This schedule is subject to change, depending on winery availability.

First up is Knob Hall Winery, nestled alongside St. Paul Road near Clear Spring. Richard "Dick" Seibert and his wife Mary Beth established the winery in 2007 after planting 30 acres of vines on the 175-acre farm that has been in Dick's family for about 200 years. After years of living and working in the Washington, D.C. area, the

couple was ready for a change. Dick currently serves as president of the Maryland Wineries Association. Mary Beth is Knob Hall's wine-maker.



Knob Hall's tasting room is located in the farm's impressive bank barn, constructed with exposed posts and beams around 1860 with wood and stone from the property. Visitors making their way to the tasting room will likely be greeted by chickens, dogs and perhaps a random peacock. The chickens and guineas help control insects that might otherwise damage the vines. Wine swans and bottle trees add a festive flair to an outside seating area by the barn's entrance. Inside the entryway is a table laden with an impressive array of wine bottles festooned with multiple awards. A blackboard to the left lists upcoming events: "Women Who Wine. Wine Down Fridays. Learn to Wine." Four stacked oak barrels form a wall to the right that separates the entry from a large dining area available for special events. To reach the wine tasting counter, visitors pass by a cozy lounge area furnished with comfy furniture and low tables.

As a designated estate winery, Knob Hall bottles and labels wines onsite, with 97 percent of its wines containing only grapes grown in its own vineyards. Their 43-acre vineyard now produces an impressive list of 18 varietals. Knob Hall offers a wide range of classic and "fun" wines differentiated accordingly by labels Dick has designed, with the classic vintages displaying Currier and Ives type images of the farm in muted hues, in contrast to bold, contemporary labels for the sweeter wines.

"Jealous Mistress put us on the map," says Lois Stahl, tasting room manager. The best-selling Gold Digger is a sweet white variety. Those who prefer dry wines can choose from wines featuring classic grapes like chardonnay or merlot. Prestige, their premium Bordeaux-style wine, won Best in Show in the 2012 Maryland Winemasters' Choice competition. Knob Hall's Rosé Reserve won the 2010 Maryland Governor's Cup Best in Class and Gold Medal. Knob Hall offers a Wine Club featuring discounts, regular wine shipments, admission to special events and other perks.

The next wine tour stop is not a winery. "It's the best kept secret in Washington County," says Burma. "Wilson's Country Store is the biggest treasure in the area, like going back in time." Located in Clear Spring on the National Pike, otherwise known as Route 40, the RJ Wilson & Son Old Country Store was established in 1847 as a general store, post office, and feed store. Rufus ran the store until he died of pneumonia in 1883, followed by his son John who continued the family business until 1919. The Martin family ran the store for the next 50 years. And then Wilson's Country Store closed in 1975. Lewis and Francis

Horst, owners of Hagerstown's Horst Milk Transfer Company, purchased the property in 1984 and painstakingly restored the store, complete with merchandise, with their own funds. It is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Stepping inside is like entering a time machine into the 19th century, with smells and sights evoking a nostalgia for a simpler time. A pot-belly stove sits near the front door, offering warmth and comfort to an area near the front window where old vets sit and swap war stories. Proprietors Patty Barnhart and Bonnie Mills greet visitors from the long counter to the store's right, where they point out a multitude of memorabilia in every direction and encourage visitors to explore and ask questions.

It could take several years to explore everything in the store. A sampling includes more than 100 jars of penny candy, display cases with retro toys, gloves, and handkerchiefs, tonics and old-time medicines, block cheeses and seasoned sausages and Frostburg Bologna expertly cut and wrapped by Patty and Bonnie, an impressive oak freezer case with intricately carved trim. If that's not enough, visitors can venture into the adjacent antique shop that was the feed store in a former life. And there's even more upstairs in Patty and Bonnie's BitterSweet Memories Home Décor, a shop offering "country, primitives, and colonial décor and finishing touches" according to the shop's Facebook page. Strains of old-time gospel music, sung in four-part harmony, accompany customers browsing through the shop's wares.

It's time to get back in Burma's bus to visit Red Heifer Winery near Smithsburg. Located in the foothills of



A cluster of grapes at Knob Hall Winery.
Photo by Lance C. Bell



the Catoctin Mountains, Red Heifer sits upon a sloping hillside at about 1500 feet. Its elevation, southeast orientation and climate during the growing season (warm summer days, cool summer nights and a constant breeze) create an ideal environment for viniculture.

Owned and operated by Kevin and Yvonne Ford, Red Heifer Winery is a 20-acre section of the 100-acre Red Heifer farm that has been in Kevin's family since the early 1940s. The winery's name comes from a bit of family folklore regarding the farm's purchase. Kevin's great-grandfather set out to buy some farmland in the fruit-growing region near Smithsburg. An old farmer had some acreage that looked promising. Kevin's great-grandfather noticed a single red heifer grazing peacefully on the property. The haggling over price began. Finally it came down to "throw in the red heifer and I'll buy," says Kevin of his great-grandfather's purchase. Kevin's 88-year-old grandmother still lives on the farm and enjoys chatting with winery customers.

Red Heifer Winery has been open since November 2012. Its first vines were planted in 2010. "We sold out of wine in our first year," says Yvonne, from a harvest yielding four tons of grapes that produced 3,000 gallons of wine.

Opening a winery was a long-term goal. The couple had done research on the business of wineries while Kevin was employed as a draftsman and Yvonne worked as a special education teacher. "Kevin went off the deep end after losing his job," Yvonne says. "He immediately joined a wine growing association and started drafting plans for the winery." Working as the project's general contractor, Kevin designed and built the house, with the tasting room located below at ground level.

Visitors to Red Heifer can enjoy picnics with a mountain-side view on the patio outside the tasting room. They will likely be greeted by at least one of the Fords' three Treeing Walker Coonhounds that help keep deer and bear away from the vineyards. Inside, a selection of sweet and dry wines using mostly Chambourcin, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes are available for tasting and purchase. Kevin and Yvonne use their own grapes for most of their wines. Best

sellars include Red Heifer Red, Sweet Heifer, and Catawba. The Edna Mae Chardonnay, named after Kevin's grandmother, sports a label with an elegant heifer wearing a necklace and sunhat.

It's time for an hour and a half lunch break in Boonsboro, a small town founded in 1792 by cousins of Daniel Boone. Burma usually stops at Dan's Restaurant & Tapouse, featuring 24 craft beers, wines, and local foods in season. The restaurant's owner is the son of Boonsboro's most famous resident, best-selling author Nora Roberts. After lunch, passengers can visit Turn the Page Bookstore, owned by Nora Roberts' husband Bruce Wilder, where

they'll find assorted gifts along with books featuring local history, and, of course, books by Nora Roberts, including those she's written under the name J.D. Robb.

Now it's on to a very different tasting experience as the RoadRunner bus heads to Middletown to visit Maryland's first premier meadery. Orchid Cellar Wineries is owned and operated by Marzanna and Andrzej Wilk, natives of Poland who combined their homeland's rich mead-making traditions, Andrzej's skills as a chemist, and ten years' experience in making their own mead before opening in 2006. Their son Andrzej Jr. is now the official Orchid Cellar mead maker. Marzanna's and Andrzej's love of orchids prompted the choice of name for the winery.

Mead is likely the world's oldest fermented beverage, made of honey and water with yeast. Because honey is antibacterial, no additives, sulfites or preservatives are needed. Conse-

quently, mead has a long shelf life.

Orchid Cellar blends honey with juices from grapes grown in vineyards adjacent to the owners' home

and tasting room. A patio near the entrance offers a scenic hilltop view and perfect location for a picnic.

"Mead is having its moment," says Dan Kennedy, Orchid Cellar's tasting room manager, noting the growing popularity of this ancient beverage once brewed by monks. In a nod to mead's popularity during the Middle Ages, all



Orchid Cellar's "Archer."

Photo by Paul Abruzzo



Orchid Cellar meads feature names of medieval professions. Each mead features a specific flavor: apple, grape, mixed berries, vanilla, herbs and spices, and chili peppers. Orchid Cellar offers a Wine Club for those interested in receiving regular shipments of discounted wine.

Three Orchid Cellar meads — Hunter, Castellan and Lumberjack — won awards in the prestigious 2014 Mazer Cup International mead competition held in Denver, Colorado.

Orchid Cellar also makes a Merlot and plans to offer additional wines. Future plans include the construction of a new log cabin tasting room above the winery cellar.

“Making mead supports bees and bee culture,” Dan says. In a time when bee colony collapse threatens not only the production of honey but also the pollinating of agricultural crops, this is welcome news.

Distillery Lane Ciderworks

Bees are especially partial to apple blossoms and play a critical role in cross-pollinating apple trees. This natural process is critical at Distillery Lane Ciderworks, the final destination of RoadRunner’s Antietam Highlands Wine Tour. Maryland’s first licensed cidery, the Ciderworks sits on 95 acres in Jefferson, just outside Burkittsville, where a nine-acre orchard with 3,000 apple trees provides the juice for their European-style hard ciders and fresh cider. Many are colonial and heritage varieties from Europe.

“The apple was a symbol of the successful American homestead,” says Jacqui Goetz, who is responsible for marketing and other cider-related duties. Although the Ciderworks property was never used as an orchard, it has turned out to be well suited to apple production. Once known as “The Encampment,” the farm was used during the Civil War as a camp for Union soldiers.

Motivated by their love of hard and fresh ciders, Rob Miller and his wife Patty Power, bought the farm at auction in 1998, began renovations and moved into the farmhouse in 2001. Their first batches of cider were produced in 2006, and by 2008, the cider house was ready. Home cider brewers began showing up with their own batches to share with Rob and Patty. One was Tim Rose, a geologist who works with the Smithsonian Institution. Tim started helping them make hard cider and ended up being hired as the cidemaker. The Distillery Lane name reflects the area’s history as a place where distilleries once flourished.

“Hard cider falls between wine and beer,” Jacqui says, explaining why the cidery has a winery license. Before
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Leave the Driving to RoadRunner Services



When most people retire, they settle back into a more relaxed lifestyle. Not Burma and Dale Miles of Clear Spring, Md. After realizing a transport service was needed in the Hagerstown – Frederick area, they established RoadRunner Services, LLC. Ted Atkinson, a Baltimore native who moved to Hagerstown in 1996 after retiring from the construction industry, helps Burma and Dale as needed for driving.

Burma especially enjoys driving senior citizens. “I love talking to them. They’re a wealth of information.”

RoadRunner offers a full range of transport services:

- Door-to-Door transport to BWI, Harrisburg, Dulles and Reagan Airports, the Baltimore Cruise Terminal, Amtrak stations and other destinations.
- Medical transport for appointments, tests and outpatient services. Drivers remain with clients for the duration.
- Ground transportation by appointment to meet a wide range of needs, such as grocery shopping, running errands, dining out, or returning students to boarding school or college.
- Antietam Tours, including 3 to 6 hour battlefield tours with certified guides, and the Antietam Highlands Wine Trail 6-hour tour.

“People think my name comes from the Burma Shave road signs or after the country in Asia,” says Burma, a retired music teacher with a degree from the Shenandoah Conservatory of Music. “The name came from my mother’s side of the family.”

Dale was born and raised at the Clear Springs farm that has been in his family since 1911, and is the place he and Burma call home. A Vietnam veteran, he is a retired correctional officer after 20 years’ service with the Maryland Correctional Institute in Hagerstown.

When they’re not behind the wheel or spending time with their son Joshua and his wife Angela, Burma and Dale enjoy time down on the farm. “We’re still restoring it,” Burma says. “We’re *always* restoring it.”

For more information, visit RoadRunner’s web page at www.roadrunnerservices.com, visit their Facebook page, or give Burma a call at **301-573-1930**. She’ll be happy to talk with you.

Prohibition, the term “cider” referred to fermented apple juice containing alcohol that is now known as hard cider. The non-alcoholic cider is treated with UV light rather than pasteurization to ensure quality and longer shelf life. Distillery Lane’s hard cider is naturally fermented. All ciders are estate grown, produced and bottled. The operation began with two varieties and now offers between 10 and 12. The semi-sweet Celebration Cider is the top seller. Other notable ciders include Kingston Black, made from its rare namesake apple; Jefferson, an off-dry cider made from the noted statesman’s favorite Newtown Pippin apple; and Heritage Cider, specially blended for Mount Vernon and featuring George Washington’s favorite Roxbury Russet apple. This cider is available for purchase at Mount Vernon.

Distillery Lane welcomes the public for a variety of apple-related events and self-guided tours. Cider-making classes are offered according to a schedule posted on the Distillery Lane web site. Plans are in the works for an outdoor patio.

And now the Antietam Highlands Wine Tour has come to an end, and it’s time for the RoadRunner bus to return to the pickup areas. It’s been a full day of wine and scenery and history — and a lot of fun.

Note: Wineries on the Antietam Highlands Wine Tour are generally open Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m., with some wineries open at designated hours during the week. More information is available at www.marylandwine.com/wine-trails or at each winery’s web site.



Celebrating Wine and Art at Deep Creek Lake

This year’s Deep Creek Wine & Art Festival marks the 10th anniversary of one of the region’s most popular fundraising events. Set for September 5-7, the weekend following Labor Day, this year’s Festival at the Garrett County Fairgrounds will benefit the Garrett Lakes Arts Festival and HART for Animals, Inc.



“The Festival has grown, but maintains its grassroots character,” says Paula Yudelevit, Festival co-chair. “We hold the Festival at the Garrett County Fairgrounds to keep it folksy. The Fairgrounds represent Garrett County.”

Those interested in making the most of the weekend can wine and dine Friday evening at a Wine Pairing Dinner, enjoy the Saturday Festival and finish the festivities with a Sunday brunch at their choice of participating restaurants. Lodging specials will be offered as well.

Saturday’s Festival will run from noon to 6 p.m., with plenty of food, live entertainment, a silent auction and children’s activities. The works of more than 30 local and regional artists will be on display, with a wide range of selections including furniture, jewelry, sculpture, paintings, photography and more available for purchase. Food artisans including Firefly Farms, DeBerry Farms, Deep Creek Sweets and more will offer their tasty wares for sale.

And then there’s the wine, including a wide range of vintages from more than 200 wineries. To accommodate all that wine, the Exhibit Hall will be transformed into an enormous wine store. The 2014 wine list will be posted on the Festival’s web site a week before the Festival. Wines can be purchased on site or online.

“We’ll have scanners and lots more volunteers to help with wine purchases,” says Paula.

Wine Tasting Tickets cost \$25/person and include tastings, a wine glass, entertainment, and activities. Tickets to the Festival with no tastings cost \$10/person. Children are admitted free. Wine tastings and a Friday Wine Pairing dinner are available at additional cost.

New this year is the Premium Wine Tasting Room. This add-on fee allows wine lovers to taste premium wines selected by the wineries while enjoying live entertainment and light fare. Wines can be purchased in the tasting room for pickup at a designated area.

For more information, visit the web site at www.deepcreekwinefest.com