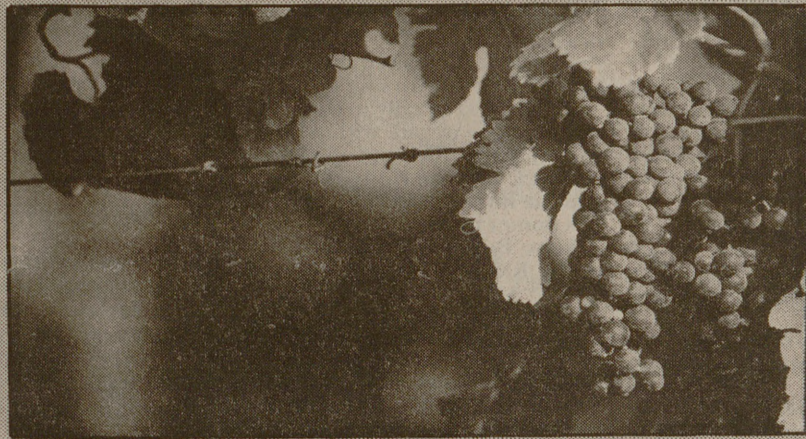
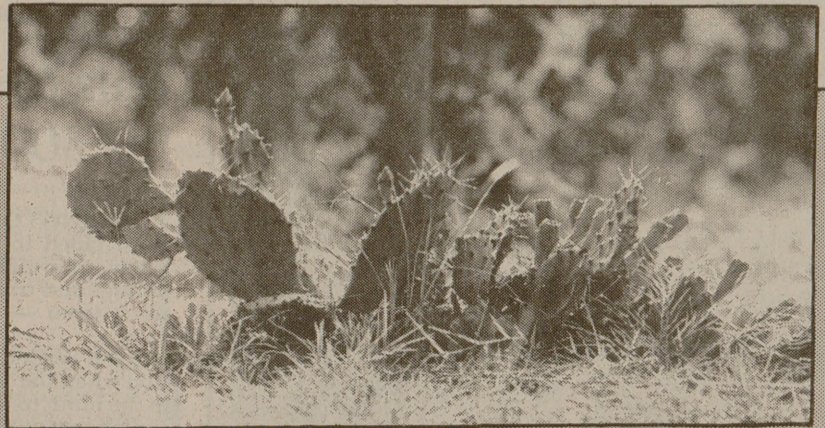


Messina Hof TEXAS



WINE



Curtis Schoesson, winery assistant, loads grapes into crates to be taken for processing.



A&M graduate student George Kleynhans, a mechanical engineer from South Africa, picks grapes.

Messina Hof's vineyards possess a ripe history and offer Saturday's visitors a chance to stomp fruits into wine.

Located off Highway 21 on Route 7 in Bryan, the Messina Hof showroom has been home to nuns, an ambassador, a military academy and endured a fire and rumors of ghosts and buried treasure.

Built in 1901 by the Ursuline sisters, the house, which has since been relocated and serves as Messina Hof's showroom, was located on what is now Ursuline Street.

It was used by nuns until the late 1920s when a fire badly damaged one of the house's wings. One nun died in the fire and was rumored to haunt the home for some time.

After the fire, the house was purchased by William Howell Jr., a former U.S. ambassador to France. Howell was believed to have hidden treasure somewhere in the home.

After Howell suddenly died, the home was sold in 1952 to local military boarding preparatory school Allen Academy.

The home was used as classrooms for the school until the mid-1970s. The home then was bought by Paul and Merrill Bonarrigo, who wanted the home because of its uniqueness and abundant history.

To help preserve historical sights, the home was dismantled and rebuilt to resemble the original home. It now is the Messina Hof visitor center.

The Bonarrigos now are known as pioneers in the Texas wine industry because they planted the vineyards of Messina Hof in 1977.

The estate vineyard encompasses 40 acres and produces all types of wines, ranging from sweet, dry, red and white and cabernet.

About 15 spaces remain for anyone interested in helping harvest grapes Saturday.

Spaces will be given on a first-come first-served basis. Participants are asked to arrive at the vineyard at 6:30 a.m. Saturday.

A food and wine pairing and tour of the cellars will follow the harvest.

"There will also be a grape stomp afterward for those who like 'grape-dancing,'" Mike Cooper of Messina Hof said.

Messina Hof offers tours starting at 1 p.m. Monday through Friday, and at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

Sunday tours start at 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Private tours also are available.

For more information about Messina Hof or the harvest Saturday, call Mike at 778-WINE (9463).

Story by James M. Love Photos by Eric H. Roalson