

Mission San Luis: Grapes & Wrath

By Julie Strauss Bettinger

Part 1 A Storied Land

"Seems like land gets sacred when people walk on it."

My mother had unknowingly expressed my fascination for Tallahassee's Mission San Luis property, portions of which were owned by my ancestors in the late 1800s. The land had been a source of superstition and intrigue for hundreds of years until the 1980s when a private owner quietly put it on the market. Bulldozers in the area had been coming up with mouthfuls of Indian remains for years and archaeologists suspected even more hidden treasures. They had been poking around the property on previous excursions enough to make a case for historical preservation. With a little more poking, they connected remnants to a centuries' told story involving one of the worst Indian massacres on American soil. The state quickly purchased the land to create a "living" museum.

The Mission starting receiving a facelift, regular PR and today on any given Saturday, adults and children, called "interpreters," roam the grounds dressed in period attire weaving tales about the 1700s.

Lost, though, was the more recent history when that very same ground, with two fresh springs running through it, was part of the San Luis Vineyard or *Chateau San Luis*. It made headlines from New York to Paris for producing wine of such quality it rivaled even the homeland of French immigrant Emile Dubois, proprietor.

Remnants of this vineyard era – from 1883 to 1907 – are scattered among the San Luis archaeological laboratory, the Florida Archives, State Library and personal papers from those with ties to the property.

Like the Mission's early excavators, digging and discovering, then bringing their findings back to the lab to piece together, I have been doing the same for about 20 years. I'm elated to discover another artifact to take back to my writing lab. I study it, hold it up to other remnants to see how it fits, and use it to better understand the Emile Dubois story.

As the state archaeologists who have been studying San Luis for 25 years discover, sometimes pieces are missing. For my work, this comes in the way of gaps created in my sources. For example, the U.S. Census changed criteria on what information they collected year-to-year – which prevented comparisons. I also discovered accounting ledgers from the vineyard that might have been useful, until I realized they were pasted over in later years by a young girl collecting helpful household hints and recipes. Early newspaper accounts on the vineyard are shallow as well.

Along the way I discovered I wasn't alone in my fascination for the land, located about three miles west of Florida's Capitol and one block north of the six lane West Tennessee Street. San Luis has been the stuff of legends for nearly four centuries – legends told by Native Americans, early explorers and modern day owners.

Two men charged with finding a suitable site for the territorial capital were the first to unearth the San Luis story. After spending four weeks in the wilderness, John Lee Williams from Pensacola and Dr. W.H. Simmons from St. Augustine, met in St. Marks the fall of 1823. Traveling inland, they began hearing tales about an old Spanish fort. They were told that Spaniards, aware of British forces invading the area, had evacuated the fort in the 1700s and laid trains of powder to burst their cannon.

Williams and Simmons hired an Indian guide to take them to San Luis for more of the story.

Abandoned due to superstitions surrounding it, San Luis had once been the principal village of the Apalachee Indians and the Spaniards' westernmost military, religious and administrative headquarters. A pair of Franciscan priests had been wildly successful in converting the Natives to Catholicism and the Indians were living peacefully with Spaniards, as they worked and worshipped together. Rich with agriculture and trade, the area was named "San Luis," in honor of Louis IX, the King of France, who was a third order Franciscan.

The Spaniards had chosen to build their fort on the San Luis hilltop because of its clear view of the countryside, but the entire mission extended to what is now the Florida Capitol complex.

When the British in other territories began to look at Spanish Florida as a target for expansion, they recruited Creek Indian warriors to assist them in their military conquests. In 1702, led by former South Carolina Governor James Moore, the British and their Creek allies initiated a series of attacks against the Spanish and the native tribes of North Florida, including those living in the poorly defended Spanish missions that spanned between St. Augustine and San Luis.

In a series of attacks in 1704, they completely destroyed the missions. Moore reported back to the South Carolina Legislature that he had destroyed all the people of four towns and was bringing back to South Carolina 300 Indian men and 1,000 women and children who had agreed to come voluntarily, and 325 men and 4,000 women and children as slaves.

The mission at San Luis was not captured by Moore and his Creek army but was evacuated by the Apalachee and Spanish before they arrived. The Spanish blew up the fort to keep it from being taken by the British.

From that time, the area to the east was named "Tallahassee," or "old abandoned fields," and because of its dramatic demolition, San Luis became legendary.

Reporting about the search for a capital, John Lee Williams wrote a letter to Territorial Governor Richard Keith Call that included a description of the fort site, calling it a "curiosity." In a journal entry, he later wrote:

The Indians preserved a superstition...which keeps them at an awful distance from San Luis. They say that the Spaniards, on quitting San Luis, buried their church ornaments, and with them some bottles of medicine (magic), which would prove fatal to them if they touched it. They avoided accompanying the whites there to show the property.

An Apalachicola newspaper account two decades later reported that there were "many laborers engaged in excavating the site of this old fort on a search after hidden treasures."

...There has long existed a popular belief that beneath the ruins of many of these old forts, lie concealed much of the wealth of the past age – large hordes of precious metals. This belief has been gathered from traditions current among the Indians, as well as from the few historical facts which remain, of the condition of the Spanish inhabitants who for more than a hundred years, flourished in this section of the country. That they were wealthy is evident from what remains of their dwellings, their orange groves, their extensive plantations...

And according to tradition, it was to the Spanish forts and settlements along the coast that they carried much of the blood-stained wealth which they had gathered by piracy...

The traditions current among the Indians all tell the same story...Before leaving the fort...they had warned the Indians that they had left behind them their "Great Medicine," and that it would be certain death for any Indian to enter the fort before the lapse of six hours from their departure. The Indians rushed in and the fort exploded.

We have been assured by old settlers, who came to the country when the Indians inhabited it in great numbers, that no one ... could be induced ... to approach within a mile of the old ruin, such was his superstitious dread of the mysterious power of the Great Medicine.

Shortly after Williams' 1825 account, San Luis had its first deed-bearing – though absentee – owner. It wasn't until 1855 that the property would have its first inhabitants since the mass evacuation in 1704.

Dr. Arthur M. Randolph purchased the fort property along with adjacent properties, creating an extensive plantation encompassing 816 acres during the antebellum period.

Married with nine children, Randolph was a physician, land surveyor and wealthy planter of corn, oats, hay and cotton. He was also the owner of 50 slaves who lived on the property.

Randolph built the first structures on San Luis since the 1704 destruction. He built a two-story frame house with ten rooms, "out houses" (wash houses, kitchen, etc.), an overseer's house, stables, corn cribs and gin house, complete with a screw press used to compress the ginned cotton into bales. Randolph also added a steam engine powered by hydraulic ram to mill the cotton and keep an abundant supply of fresh water from the on-site spring running to the house.

One of the most telling accounts of the land use during the Randolph era came from a black man born into slavery at San Luis in 1857. In an oral history interview, the nearly 80-year-old painted a picture of life leading up to Emancipation Day in Tallahassee, that he witnessed as an eight-year-old.

Just before the dawn of day, the slaves were aroused from their slumber by a loud blast from a cow-horn that was blown...as a signal to prepare themselves for the fields. The plantation being so expansive, those who had to go a long distance to the area where they worked were taken in wagons, those working nearby walked. They took their meals along with them and had their breakfast and dinner in the fields. An hour was allowed for this purpose. The slaves worked while they sang spirituals to break the monotony of long hours of work.

At the closing of the (Civil War), word was sent around among the slaves that if they heard the report of a gun, it was the Yankees and that they were free.

It was in May, in the middle of the day, cotton and corn being planted, plowing going on, and slaves busily engaged in their usual activities, when suddenly the loud report of a gun resounded, then could be heard the slaves crying almost en-masse, "dems de Yankees." Straightaway they dropped the plows, hoes and other farm implements and hurried to their cabins. They put on their best clothes "to go see the Yankees."

...The streets of Tallahassee were clustered with these jubilant people going here and there to get a glimpse of the Yankees, their liberators. It was a joyous and unforgettable occasion.

When the Randolph slaves returned to their plantation, Dr. Randolph told them that they were free, and if they wanted to go away, they could, and if not, they could remain with him and he would give them half of what was raised on the farms. Some of them left, however, some remained, having no place to go...

Records show that Randolph had actually sold San Luis to George H. Meginniss before slavery ended, but he continued living on the property and farming it until his death in 1867. It's likely that Randolph's widow, the former Laura Duval, and their nine children remained on the plantation, as Meginniss never lived on the property. Still, he retained ownership of San Luis

until 1881 – selling to investors who did not live there, either. They held it for two years before selling to Helen Bigelow Dodd of Boston, a 23-year-old associate of Frenchman Emile Dubois.

This was the start of the vineyard era at San Luis.

In June 1884, Dodd sold a portion of San Luis to Dubois and his business partner, Maximilian D. Berlitz, also of Boston. The 38-year-old Dubois sent for his wife and two children and the family moved into the Randolph plantation home with Dodd joining them as a "pupil," studying French, and as a tutor to their children.

Dubois, who was called "professor" because of his connection to the Berlitz School of Languages, was a pioneer in Florida horticulture. He arrived in Tallahassee in 1883, "with the intention of testing (Florida's) capability as a grape-growing country."

He first planted vineyards on the banks of Lake Hall, now the Maclay Gardens State Park, but quickly added San Luis. At the height of his venture, he had more than 100 acres planted in Leon County – the largest vineyard in Florida – was making over 6,000 gallons of wine annually and had regular wine customers in nearly every state of the Union. He was well on his way to generating an annual income of what would be in today's dollars \$1 million on wine sales alone. In addition, he shipped thousands of pounds of grapes all over the U.S. and had a burgeoning nursery; he was supplying about 65,000 grape vines to growers annually.

Trade publications sang his praises, "Professor Dubois is doing a great work for Florida and will hasten by many a year the fulfillment of her natural destiny of being a state of vineyards and wine presses."

In 1887, Dubois told readers of the *Florida Rural Home*, "I am satisfied that we can raise, right here, the right kind of grapes to make as fine wines ... as any on this continent and with my experience as a European wine grower, I may say far superior to the bulk of imported wines.

"I feel confident that the culture of grapes in Florida will, in the near future, if not supercede, at least go at par with that of the orange."

Dubois was also featured in local directories touting the growth and potential for vineyards and became the subject of travel writers visiting the area.

"He was like the Johnny Appleseed of Florida grape growing, spreading the good news," said Jeanne Burgess, vice president of winemaking for Seavin, Inc., which owns two wineries in Florida. "He was making more wine even than people make these days."

Like that American pioneer nurseryman who introduced apple trees to the Midwest, Dubois sent grape cuttings and tips for cultivation throughout the Sunshine State.

In 1889, he published an illustrated book, *Grape Growing and Wine Making in Florida*, detailing every branch of the business. He authored a regular column called "The Vineyards" in the statewide distributed *Florida Dispatch* (ramblings resembling the modern day blog) and traveled by train throughout Florida to promote grape growing.

Four years later, Dubois had gained enough notoriety among his peers nationally to chair the judging committee for wines and brandies at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, later publishing a book detailing his experience. In 1900 he won gold and silver medals for wines and a silver for brandies at the Paris Exposition.

Then, just as rapid as his rise to grape growing fame in the U.S., came Dubois' departure from public view.

He vanished – almost overnight.

History writers noted that Dubois' disappearance corresponded with Leon County's prohibition – the county went dry in 1904 – and have suggested that it was his reason for leaving. But further investigation challenges that theory. After all, local buyers represented only a fraction of Dubois' market, and the new laws didn't prohibit the manufacture and selling of wine, just its purchase locally. There also are indications that Dubois started his withdrawal well before the law was adopted.

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Part 2 Dubois is History

New interest in the Dubois story surfaced when modern day grape growers, including Jeanne Burgess, were seeking to name a new hybrid grape developed by the University of Florida (UF).

Created in 1968, a cross between a hybrid and the Cardinal table grape, "H18-37" (now Blanc Du Bois) was first cultivated in Tallahassee's Lafayette Vineyard, before the company moved operations to central Florida. Burgess and her employer, Gary Cox, wanted a marketable name – preferably one with a story behind it. She'd heard a little about Dubois, took his story off the shelf, blew off the dust and re-introduced it with the new grape.

Wine made from Blanc Du Bois has since won international awards, including double gold medals in 1998, 2001 and 2002.

Blanc Du Bois' biggest benefit is its resistance to Pierce's Disease (PD), a lethal grapevine affliction that for years kept Florida winemakers from growing European varieties and, in fact, is suspected of affecting Dubois' vineyards. Creation of this hybrid was a breakthrough as it showed that something other than the native muscadine could survive PD.

Retired UF Professor Robert Bates, who is writing *The History of Grapes in Florida and Grape Pioneers*, was involved in identifying Blanc Du Bois in the laboratory. He gives extensive credit to the grape's namesake. "DuBois' diligent efforts met with more success than those before him, and his influence extends to today," his report said.

Coming on the scene

Within days of his arrival from Boston October 1882, a 38-year-old Dubois started courting the press. A post-Reconstruction Tallahassee was hungry for alternatives to the cotton industry and eagerly accommodated this French immigrant willing to make an investment. As one newspaper stated, "The wine house is easier filled than the gin house."

Married with two children, Dubois traveled by train from Boston to Tallahassee, staying at the Brokaw House. He advertised to purchase a house and 10 to 50 acres of land in April of 1883. By May, he had acquired 27 acres on the south shore of Lake Hall, where he immediately planted 62 varieties of grapes.

That summer, he brought his friend Maximilian Berlitz for a visit from Boston and the two went into business together. The following year, the partners expanded to San Luis. That same year (1884), Dubois announced his plans to make an extensive wine cellar at San Luis.

Described as short and "kind of on the chubby side," Dubois' public persona was more scholar than farmer – his attire better suited for the office than the vineyard.

The son of a wealthy wine manufacturer in France, he appears in photographs and sketches with a white collared shirt, French cuffs, necktie and vest with jacket. His pocket watch is looped through vest buttonholes and reading glasses dangle below.

Dubois was blessed with a full head of hair – parted on the left and neatly trimmed – and carefully tended beard.

Unlike many subjects photographed in the early days, Dubois doesn't look suspicious of the camera or uncomfortable – instead, confident. One brow is creased with a look of concentration, but his eyes are softened with slight amusement. His posture is also assured and comfortable, with left hand resting on his leg, right hand hidden in a pants pocket.

Dubois' writings radiate that confidence, portraying his passion for grape growing and wine making...and a very determined man. He was as fastidious as the grapes in which he invested his life.

Referring to the native muscadine variety, he said he had made a scuppernong wine and liked it, but he could sell 40 gallons of a common wine to one of scuppernong. "Besides, it is very difficult to obtain all the juice of the scuppernong unless it is treated with water and sugar, and that is not wine. Just ferment the juice of the grape – that is wine."

The Florida Dispatch readily accommodated Dubois' contributions, including his four chapter, 15,000-word dissertation called, "The Grape in Florida: A Practical Treatise on Grape Growing and Wine Making in this State." It covered everything from classification and varieties recommended for Florida to starting a vineyard, pruning and training the vines.

Dubois frequently sparred in print with his contemporaries in the industry with whom he disagreed. In replying to a published opinion about a particular variety of grape, Dubois wrote, "I cannot say that I overlooked Mr. Steele's article...The fact is, that when I read it I lost my temper and tore your paper into pieces."

The balance of the piece shredded Mr. Steele's theories in classic Dubois fashion.

No one was above Dubois' correction – even the U.S. Government. In a book he self-published in 1900, he wrote, "Six years have elapsed since the World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago, and the Official Report, or history of this great international contest has not yet been published, so that no record is left of one of the most important events in the life of our nation...The Paris Exposition will open next year, and it will be difficult to realize the progress of the American wine industry during that period of seven years."

Dubois noted that foreign nations participating had extensive official reports, "and it is strange, to say the least, that our Government...should have neglected the publication of a similar document prepared by the Executive Committee on Awards."

The U.S. government *did* publish their own report a year later – perhaps nudged by Dubois. Portions of Dubois' version was included.

Thorns in the vineyard

Like a politician, Dubois maintained a high profile, which made him a target for those brave enough to take him on. One blistering account was read during an annual Horticulture meeting that Dubois attended. It seems a fellow member of the association believed Dubois was suggesting that viticulture in Florida was just starting to show promise since his arrival.

The author stated his purpose was "to vindicate the claim of the pioneers in this industry." He recorded names of grape growers and their experiences, then fired his final shot directly at the Frenchman: "The testimony of these witnesses fully justifies the conclusion that it is no new discovery that grapes can be successfully grown (in Florida and) Prof. Dubois' bantling of only 'two or three summers' is really a well grown lass, well along in her teens, having already passed to the shady side of sweet sixteen."

Not surprisingly, Dubois did not attend the next year's annual meeting, although his extensive report titled, "Grapes: New and Old Varieties," was read for the membership.

Only a few personal accounts of Emile Dubois have survived the last century. Among them was a story from my great aunt, Bessie Clemons, who grew up on the property adjoining Dubois and later lived at his San Luis vineyard house. She described him as "high strung" and quick tempered.

"When things didn't go to suit him, he'd pound on the table."

Dubois once advertised for a housekeeper in New York City and brought the woman down to help his wife. "She fixed pancakes for breakfast one morning...and put a stack of them on the table," Clemons said. "Well, he didn't want it that way and picked up the pancakes and threw them across the room."

The housekeeper quickly returned to New York.

Slow decline in 1890s

At the height of Chateau San Luis, meticulously lined trellises shot out in all directions from the old plantation home, which had an extensive wine cellar in the basement full of barrels to age the wine until it was bottled. There was also a large still to make brandy.

Dubois recruited his fellow Frenchmen to tend the vines, as he dictated, and hired unskilled laborers only at harvest. The men working for Dubois spread tarp on the ground when the grapes were ripe. They shook the vines so the grapes would drop, then picked out the stems and leaves. Grapes were then put through big presses to squeeze out the juice.

The last published report with details about Dubois' vineyard dates from 1890 and it put his fortune at 100 acres of planted vines – the majority at San Luis. He was traveling to other parts of the state as a consultant and was about to partner in a central Florida vineyard. His wines had been deemed worthy of the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, though they were not entered in competition because Dubois chaired the judging committee.

But something went terribly wrong in Dubois' plan for the grape in Florida. And all reports point to a vine disease – of epidemic proportions.

Though a founder of the Florida State Horticulture Society (FSHS) in 1888, by 1894, Dubois was no longer named on the grape committee and by 1897, he was no longer a member of the Society. He had all but disappeared from print, too, except for excerpts from previous published writings and recognition as Florida's first premium winemaker and viticulture pioneer.

The FSHS proceedings confirm the demise of grapes in Florida with accounts beginning in 1896. In 1897 the grape committee chair admitted he had no grape experience and in 1899 the Standing Committee on Grapes was combined with figs and kaki (Japanese persimmons). It continued to fizzle until 1908 when the FSHS grape line went dead.

According to census reports, wine production in Leon County significantly decreased as early as 1900, which would mean grapes had been affected several years prior, and by 1904, grape cultivation was only a fraction of its earlier levels.

In his treatise, *The History of Grapes in Florida and Grape Pioneers*, retired University of Florida professor Robert Bates explains the disappearance of this once-promising industry during the early part of the century.

It is clear what went wrong...Growers were experimenting with a number of vine management systems, in various soils, overcoming or at least handling many insect and disease threats. They were juggling a lot of variables, combining trial and error, gradually moving to a more systematic approach...Just about the time that the influence of one major grape cultivation variable – variety, rootstock, soil, location, insect attack, disease occurrence, etc. – was reasonably understood or at least felt amenable to control, something else cropped up to complicate the viticulture scene.

The undetected enemy which eventually caught up with even an astute grower like Dubois, and continued to baffle viticulturists five decades later, was Pierce's Disease spread by an insect called the glassy-winged sharpshooter.

Pierce's Disease affects any variety of grape, except the native muscadine, and has been the subject of grape growers and researchers since it was discovered in the 1950s. It's likely that Dubois, partial to grapes other than the more disease resistant muscadine, began experiencing vine decline throughout his vineyard beginning around 1894, following the Chicago Exposition. He still had inventory, as is evidenced by his 1900 entry in Paris, but was not producing at anywhere near his previous levels.

Dubois also experienced a personal setback in 1903. His son-in-law, Marius Beroud, died of a heart attack at age 36. That meant Dubois was now responsible for providing for his widowed daughter and four young children.

Another Frenchman, my great grandfather, Etienne Beroud (brother of Marius), was put in charge of Dubois' vineyards the fall of 1896, about the time of the decline. On Beroud's personal farm, which adjoined Dubois', he only grew scuppernongs – a muscadine and PD-resistant variety. After Dubois relocated to New Jersey, somewhere around 1904, Beroud and his family moved into the San Luis estate, where he continued to market wine under the Chateau San Luis brand. Since the county was dry, orders had to be shipped to neighboring Jefferson County (Lloyd) for pickup.

"(Prohibition) was probably the straw that broke the camel's back," for Dubois, said UF's Bates. "It was enough to disgust anybody."

Vine decline certainly didn't help.

Donald Hopkins, a professor of plant pathology at UF's Mid-Florida Research and Education Center in Apopka, said he also believes Pierce's Disease could have been a major factor in Dubois abandoning his vineyard. Hopkins, who is considered an expert on PD, said the first PD epidemics in Florida could go back as far as the first Spanish settlers coming to the new world. He found definite symptoms of PD – vines being robbed of their vitality and longevity – during the Dubois era as well.

Dubois formally cut the ties to the San Luis property in 1907 when he sold to an investment company and it appears he took his grape cultivation secrets much farther north. In 1910, a 67-year-old Dubois gave his occupation as a farmer in Cumberland County, New Jersey (Vineland area). In 1913, he and his daughter Laura made a trip to Lyons, France. This was about the time that the entire United States was embracing prohibition and it's likely that Dubois was beginning to feel a stranger in his adopted homeland. In 1916, a passport lists him as "director of the Berlitz School," with residence in Vineland, NJ and France as his destination.

There is no record of Dubois returning to the states after that trip.

Hauntings

After Dubois permanently vacated San Luis, it became known as "the haunted house." A series of absentee owners had the property until 1921. Dubois and the heirs of Helen Dodd sold 362 acres in 1907 to an investor, John P. Roberts, who transferred it to his minor daughter's name in 1913. After Roberts' death, on behalf of his daughter, guardians of his estate sold the property to Katherine L. Bradley in 1921. Bradley's bank foreclosed on the property in 1932 and the bank subsequently sold to James Messer around 1934. Messer sold various parcels off prior to his death in 1962. He tore down the Dubois home and built a new home in 1938 mirroring the floor plan of his previous residence on North Monroe Street in Tallahassee. Messer's widow lived in the newer San Luis home until it was sold – along with the remaining 49 acres – to the state.

A 1938 newspaper article titled, "Ghost of Old Fort San Luis, Who Used to Cause Spine Chills, Has Not Been Reported Lately," sparked interest in the property.

The "ghost" of old Fort San Luis which stirred the imagination of Tallahassee adults and brought gasps of awe from picnicking youngsters for more than a century apparently has decided to call it quits with civilization.

A mythical wrath which, tradition says, stalked among the ruins of the old fort ... seems to exist only in stories about the place.

The author of the article interviewed James Messer, who had just completed his mansion, and reported, "he hasn't been disturbed by midnight calls of ghostly visitors – but he is familiar with the stories."

Legend has it that a Spanish soldier grew tired of his wife, murdered her and threw her body in an old well. It was said that when the moon was in a certain

stage, the figure of the woman rose above the well and settled back slowly to her haven in the earth.

The more recent accounts attributed to "the old haunted house" were related to a story about Dubois' son, "who hanged himself in remorse over an unhappy love affair," according to Messer.

Newspaper accounts from the spring of 1885 first called the hanging at San Luis "a sad accident." Edmond Dubois, age 14, was found in a barn on a Sunday afternoon, one end of a plow line around a beam and the other around his neck. His feet were several inches from the ground and there was a grain barrel on its side nearby.

"It was the boy's custom to play on a rope suspended in the barn," the newspaper said. In a later report, the story had changed drastically, as the Sheriff and his Deputy "were in the saddle all night," pursuing Emile Dubois' hired hand, Henry Mann, stating that he "was not on good terms with the youth."

The 28-year-old Mann, married with a five-year-old daughter and three-year-old son, lived on the San Luis plantation and worked for Dubois taking care of the mules and tack, including the plow lines. A few days before the boy's death, Dubois had accused Mann of stealing corn and had forbidden him from accessing the barn unless he or his son were present.

Prosecuting attorneys tried to prove that Mann had first strangled and then hung the teenager in retaliation. The defense maintained that the death was either an accident or suicide.

All evidence against Mann was purely circumstantial – there were no witnesses. The jury relied mostly on testimony from Dubois, his wife and the boy's tutor, Helen Dodd. Dr. George Gwynn, who examined the boy after his death, stated that there was no sign of a struggle and that the marks on the neck were consistent with hanging and not strangulation. The barn was only 30 yards from the home and the defense made a case that if the boy had been threatened, he could have easily escaped or yelled for help.

"Few would allow themselves to be murdered without offering resistance," said Mann's attorney.

A week after the death, Dubois had some plaster castes made of footprints and the prosecutors tried to build a case that Henry Mann had been trespassing and made further accusations against his character by allowing Dubois to tell his suspicions about the stolen corn.

In the first trial, the jury found Mann guilty and he was sentenced to life in prison. Mann's attorneys motioned for a new trial, saying the verdict was unsupported by evidence, but the motion was denied. They appealed to the Florida Supreme Court charging errors, and the Supreme Court agreed on one of the errors – that the plaintiff's attorney had put Mann's character on trial by asking Dubois if he believed Mann had stolen the corn, which they maintained had nothing to do with the charge of murder, and that it was likely the testimony had prejudiced the jurors.

The lower court's decision was reversed and it was sent for a new trial. At the end of a second trial, Mann was again found guilty and this time sentenced to be hung. His attorneys motioned for a new trial and again were denied. They appealed to the Florida Supreme Court a second time. This time the decision was reversed based on the prosecution seeking the opinion of a witness as though he were an expert, and a new trial was ordered.

At the end of the third trial, Mann was found not guilty.

Setting the record straight

Messer's account of the Dubois era in the 1938 article – later corrected – stated, "After his son's death, the elder Dubois returned to France and died in poverty, a fruit peddler on the streets."

The correction, published in a subsequent issue of the newspaper, stated:

A subscriber calls attention to additional information on M. DuBois, prominent and colorful resident of Tallahassee and once proprietor of the site of old Fort San Luis here...M. Dubois did return to France after his residence in Tallahassee and he did lose a considerable fortune, our informant states, but he did not die in poverty...instead, after his return to France, he educated three grandsons, two of them for medicine...These three grandsons returned to America and are now in Philadelphia where two of them are practicing physicians and the third a hotel proprietor...we are glad to have this information.

The loss of his only son did not appear to have an effect on the progress of Dubois' vineyards. In fact, there were regular newspaper accounts of the growth of the vines, wine production and expansion of the business during and after the trials. Dubois enjoyed at least another 10 years of prosperity before any sign of decline of grape growing and wine making.

While Dubois' story has been greatly exaggerated over the years, the facts of his life are in no need of embellishment. It seems his story – like that of Fort San Luis – is one that will last for centuries. With the help of his modern day peers, and their now-famous hybrid grape, his contributions will likely be better understood.

In his history of grape growing in Florida, Bates asks, "So, what did these very early grape pioneers (like Dubois) accomplish?" His answer, "Quite a lot...Arguably, the developments of the 1920s and the momentum of the 1950s would not have occurred or been substantially diminished had it not been for these viticulturist and enologists pioneers..."

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