In comparison to the 6000 years of winegrowing history in Europe, the 400-year span of American vines and wines seems minuscule. But it should be remembered that most of the major development in the Old World took place during these same four centuries. Few modern-day European wine producers can boast continuous ownership of estate vineyards and cellars since before the 17th century.

The first wines in America were made more than 500 years ago by the Papago Indians who fermented the juice of the Saguaro cactus growing in what is now Arizona. Cactus wine is still made there, but demand for it falls far short of wine made from grapes.

This profusion of vines is doubtlessly what Leif Erikson found when he first visited the North American continent in the year 1000. The following passage comes from *The Discovery of America in the Tenth Century*, written several centuries ago by Charles C. Prasta:

\[
\ldots \text{A delightful country it seemed, full of game, and birds of beautiful plumage; and when they went ashore, they could not resist the temptation to explore it. When they returned, after several hours, Tyrker alone was missing. After waiting some time for his return, Leif, with twelve of his men, went in search of him. But they had not gone far, when they met him, laden down with grapes. Upon their enquiry, where he had stayed} \]

R. P. Vine et al., *Winemaking*  
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so long, he answered: "I did not go far, when I found the trees all covered with grapes; and as I was born in the country, whose hills are covered with vineyards, it seemed so much like home to me, that I stayed a while and gathered them." . . . And Leif gave name to the country, and called it Vinland, or Wineland.

An enchanting story, and convincing, too, as wild grapevines are still prolific along the coastline of eastern America.

**EASTERN AMERICA**

A ship's log kept by navigator Giovanni da Verrazano dated in 1524 made note of vines in what is now North Carolina—and the possibility of making wine from them.

French Huguenots settled in Florida during the mid-1500s and made America's first wines from some of the native grapes found there. This fruit was from the species *Vitis rotundifolia*, known today as the "Muscadine" varieties. These New World grapes must have seemed strange to the Huguenot winemasters, as Muscadines ripen their fruit by individual berries in small clumps, rather than in large clusters. Further, the flavor of Muscadines is very exotic when compared to the more subtle nuances found in the Old World *Vitis vinifera* grapes.

In 1565, Sir John Hawkins, a British admiral, reported on winemaking from the native Florida grapes during his visits there. It seems likely that the Florida wines met with little favor among the early settlers.

Further north, Captain John Smith wrote of his observations in Virginia during the early 17th century:

Of vines great abundance in many parts that climbe the toppes of highest trees in some places, but these beare but few grapes.

There is another sort of grape neere as great as a Cherry, they [probably Indian natives] call Messamins, they be fatte, and juyce thicke. Neither doth the taste so well please when they are made in wine.

Beauchamp Plantagenet, in a London-published text which described the colonies, made these observations of the native grapes:

*Thoulouse Muscat, Sweet Scented, Great Fox and Thick Grape;* the first two, after five months, being boiled and salted and well fined [clarified], make a strong red Xeres [Sherry]: the third, a light claret; the fourth, a white grape which creeps on the land, makes a pure, gold colored wine.

The "Great Fox" which Plantagenet mentioned was probably a variety of *Vitis labrusca*, a species that bears its heavily scented fruit in moderately sized clusters. Even in modern times, *foxy* is a rather loose organoleptic term used to describe the