

"In 2017, Farm Bureau worked really hard to make sure the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act included some tax reform to make the system more fair and friendly to Texas farm and ranch families," Laramie Adams, TFB national legislative director, said. "We worked to eliminate the death tax. We ultimately compromised and doubled the estate tax exemption from \$11 million per couple to \$22 million, and that allowed us to keep the stepped-up basis."

Now, with stepped-up basis under threat, TFB is urging congressional leaders to preserve existing rules for capital gains treatment, including the stepped-up basis. "This is very important to our

members and to agriculture. We've talked to our congressional leaders as we conducted farm tours across the entire state, trying to help them understand exactly how detrimental these tax changes could be to everyday Americans," Adams said. "We've expressed how critically important it is that we continue to work to abolish the death tax, but also ensure the stepped-up basis remains in place."

TFB has hosted over 40 congressional farm tours and visits so far this year and more are planned. TFB is hosting several upcoming tax roundtables for members to share personal stories with congressional leaders.

"Eliminating the stepped-up basis will have very real and negative impacts on family-owned businesses, the U.S. gross domestic product and job creation both immediately and in the long run," he said. "If these detrimental tax proposals go through, this will effectively tax farmers and ranchers out of business and prevent them from passing the land from one generation to the next. If Congress doesn't pay attention to this issue and continues to saddle farmers and ranchers with regulations and taxes, we will have a severe national food security issue on our hands when we tax them out of business."

supply every use and every season with this most beautiful, most wholesome and nutritious, most certain and profitable fruit."

Munson and his wife, Nellie Bell Munson, moved their young family to Denison in 1876 at the urging of Munson's brother, W.B. Munson was a lawyer and land speculator who helped establish Denison with the arrival of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad in 1872. He trumpeted the region's agricultural potential, and when T.V. arrived, he discovered eight wild grape varieties growing on the Red River's banks and bottoms. "I had found my grape paradise!" he later wrote.

Munson opened a commercial nursery, and each fall he would set out across the country in an effort to document every species of wild grape he could find. He scoured Texas, Indian Territory, Mexico, and nearly every state, collecting cuttings and sending them back to Denison by train. By his own estimate, he traveled some 75,000 miles on these expeditions.

"One of the things that I was struck by most in researching him was his absolute dedication to what he was doing," says Sherrie McLeRoy, an Aledo-based historian and writer who co-authored Grape Man of Texas. "Fortunately he had a very understanding family who weren't bent out of shape every time he disappeared into the woods or across the country hunting for more grapes."

Munson's fame grew in the field of horticulture as did his business, Denison Nursery, which expanded into one of the largest in the South. The nursery shipped to customers across the country - everything from fruit trees to Munson's patented "diamond scuffer hoe."

By that time, the phylloxera blight had brought European grape growers to their knees. The pest would eventually

destroy two-thirds of the continent's vineyards, including the majority in France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Remedies such as pesticides and field floods proved ineffective or impractical. Initial efforts to introduce American rootstock had failed because the new varieties withered in French soil. That added to skepticism among the Europeans, who were already wary because, decades earlier, American imports had introduced phylloxera in the first place.

Nevertheless, desperation drove the French to turn to the United States, where native grapes evolved to tolerate phylloxera. When a French delegation visited Munson in Denison, the Texas grape expert identified a few species of grapes found in Central Texas, especially the Bell County area around present-day Fort Hood, where the limey soil is similar to that of southern France. The Frenchmen who visited Munson covered 10,000 miles in their research trip across the country, collecting vines along the way. But ultimately it was the cuttings from the scrubby limestone hills of Texas that turned the tide of the vineyard blight.

While Munson's renown has faded with time, his legacy remains front and center in Denison. Through the efforts of Renfro and the W.B. Munson Foundation, Munson's 1887 home, dubbed "Vinita," has been restored. Munson lived with his wife and seven children in the 10-room Victorian Italianate home until his death in 1913. Visitors can see the cellar where Munson made his own wine and kept preserved foods, as well as the second-floor windows opening to a roof where the family slept on unbearably hot nights.

At Grayson College's West Extension campus, the Munson Memorial Vineyard preserves 65 of the 300 grape varieties Munson developed.

(Continued on next page)

# How the 'Grape Man of Texas' saved the French Wine industry

By Matt Joyce

When leading tours of Blue Ostrich, a winery and vineyard near Saint Jo, winemaker Patrick Whitehead likes to share the story of Thomas Volney Munson, a horticulturist from nearby Denison. Though many wine connoisseurs have never heard of Munson, wine historians consider his 19th-century research to be among the biggest influences on the beverage as we know it.

"I like to imagine that Munson rode right through the valley on horseback," Whitehead says, looking over his leafy vineyards and a sweeping view of the Red River Valley. "I don't know if he really did, but it's not out of the realm of possibility. So many of our guests come from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and they're always educated people, but they've never heard the story. And it happened right here in North Texas."

In short, Munson helped saved the French wine industry from a vineyard blight in the 1880s by sending Texas grapevines to fortify the Old World vineyards. It's a story that

resonates with contemporary challenges of globalization, disease, and science. It's also a story with enduring ties to Texas, where the wine industry grows bigger by the year; and to Munson's hometown of Denison, where Grayson College trains vineyardists and winemakers at its T.V. Munson Viticulture and Enology Center & Memorial Vineyard.

In the mid-19th century, French wine was an international phenomenon and big business, accounting for more than 15% of France's federal tax revenue. But in 1865, a root louse called phylloxera began wiping out the country's vineyards. Desperate for a solution, the French reached out to American botanists, including Munson, who was known for his pioneering documentation of native grapevines in Texas and the Southwest.

Munson found and sent specific disease-resistant grapevine cuttings to France, where farmers grafted their grapevines to the Texas roots - literally binding the two together - and crossed them with local plants. The tactics stemmed the

tide of phylloxera and saved a range of delicate French grape varieties, including cabernet, merlot, pinot noir, and chardonnay. Even now, 135 years later, France grows wine grapes rooted on the descendants of Texas native plants.

"In Europe they know more about Munson than people over here do, but their livelihood was dependent on those vines," says Roy Renfro, the retired founding director of the T.V. Munson Center and co-author of the biography Grape Man of Texas: Thomas Volney Munson and the Origins of American Viticulture. "Even the young people today still know about him. They have carried on the story, and when their parents and grandparents take them into the vineyards, they show them the vines."

Born in Illinois in 1843, Munson grew up on a farm and attended college in Kentucky, where he became interested in the idea of improving grapes. As Munson wrote in his 1909 book, Foundations of American Grape Culture, he began his life's work of experimenting with grape hybrids "so as eventually to

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### 2019 Year in Review Issue

We are entering a new year with new goals and dreams. The year 2019 was a year of growth and opportunity. We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy & Prosperous New Year!

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Congratulations to the graduates of Robert Lee High School for the Class of 2020. The graduates will be joining the workforce and higher education. The graduates are: [List of names]

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Supplement to THE OBSERVER/ENTERPRISE  
November 6, 2020

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