

The Amazing Story of Welch's Grape Juice

His pastor had been urging him to pursue it, but when he watched a friend sink back into a drunkard's life after tasting wine in the communion service, Dr. Thomas B. Welch was finally motivated to develop a non-alcoholic wine.

Dr. Thomas Bramwell Welch (1825 - 1903) was the communion steward of the Methodist church in Vineland, New Jersey. The son of a Methodist minister, he himself studied to be a minister. However, due to voice problems, Welch decided to become a medical doctor and later a dentist. At the time, unfermented wine (grape juice) was not available year around for use in communion. (From history we know that unfermented wine was widely used and preserved in ancient times. William Patton in his classic book, Bible Wines and the Laws of Fermentation (c.1870), documents four methods of preserving grape juice in The Bible times. Apparently, these methods had fallen into disuse.) In 1869, Dr. Welch began to experiment in his kitchen with concord grape juice, using the pasteurization techniques developed by Louis Pasteur just four years earlier. He soon perfected a process for preserving grape juice and began marketing it with the label Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine. He produced it with the thought of providing churches with an alternative to alcoholic wine, never envisioning a beverage for the general public. His son, Dr. Charles Welch, envisioned greater things and bought the business in 1873. Charles said that the company was born," out of a passion to serve God by helping His church to give communion [as] 'the fruit of the vine' instead of 'the cup of devils'."

In 1893, the grape juice business really took off when samples were given out at the Chicago World's Fair and the name was changed to "Welch's Grape Juice." Today, Welch's is a \$650 million (U.S.) a year business.

Welch's Grape Juice made worldwide headlines in 1913 when Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, gave a formal state dinner honouring the retiring British ambassador. He served Welch's Grape Juice instead of fermented wine. Bryan was a dedicated Christian who once ran for U.S. President and who also defended successfully the teaching of creation at the "Scope's Monkey Trial" in Dayton Tennessee. Worldwide headlines were made again in 1914 when Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the U.S. Navy, forbade the use of alcoholic beverages aboard navy ships and substituted Welch's Grape Juice in their place.

Thomas B. Welch proved the truth that, "*I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13) and his son, Charles, demonstrated the Truth, "*where there is no vision, the people perish*" (Proverbs 29:13). The next time you see "since 1869" on the Welch's Grape Juice label...well, now you know the rest of the story.

Pastor Dave Harness Sr.