

How pinot noir could bridge the 'rural-urban divide'

By **R.J. MARX**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

SEASIDE — May is Oregon Wine Month!
Why not?

Brian Doyle, the great chronicler of Oregon and parts beyond who died in 2016, wrote a whole book to Oregon wine, aptly titled “The Grail: A year ambling and shambling through an Oregon vineyard in pursuit of the best pinot noir wine in the whole world.”

Doyle is the Oregon author I most wish I had met, the former Portland Magazine editor, novelist and bon vivant. I’ve written about his lyrical writing before, best known here for his masterful novel “Mink River” which is in a class by itself in describing the inner life of a small Oregon coastal town.

I like to think we might have shared a glass together: we have so many dovetailing interests: Robert Louis Stevenson (he wrote a whole book about this author, whose “Treasure Island” was one of my favorite books, too).

He was a street basketball aficionado and a dog-lover who passionately believed animals could talk — in his books at least, if not in “real life.” With Doyle’s fulsome imagination, the lines were sometimes blurred.

Doyle employs plentiful adjectives, eschewing all rules and laws of grammar, “direct and straightforward and honest and blunt and powerful and quiet,” as Doyle himself described the boxer Sugar Ray Leonard. His book “Chicago” paints a loving memory of the city in 1978, a year I too inhabited it, and recall the sights, sounds and breath of the Windy City.

In “The Grail,” Doyle pays homage to the hills of the Willamette Valley, where is found the “best pinot noir wine in the world ... with the Cascade Mountains glittering snowily to the east and the Coast Range mountains rolling greenly to the west, with a hundred tons of purple-black grapes the size of fingernails roaring by like a murky dusty river.”

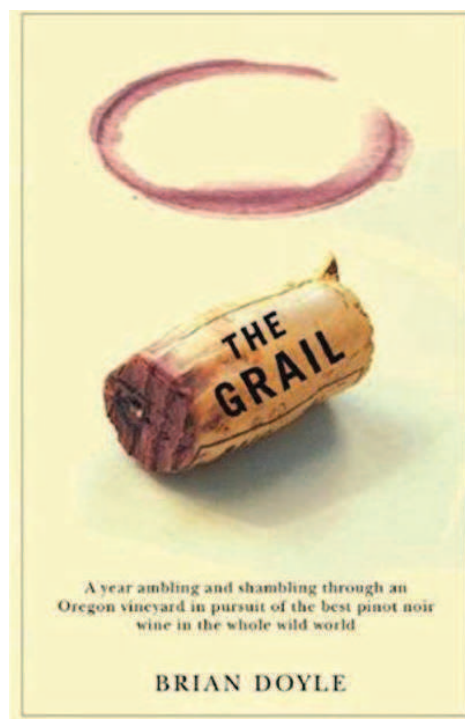
California pinot? Bahh, humbug. “Critics of some Oregon pinots have accused them of tasting like silage,” Doyle writes.

When the suffragette movement swept



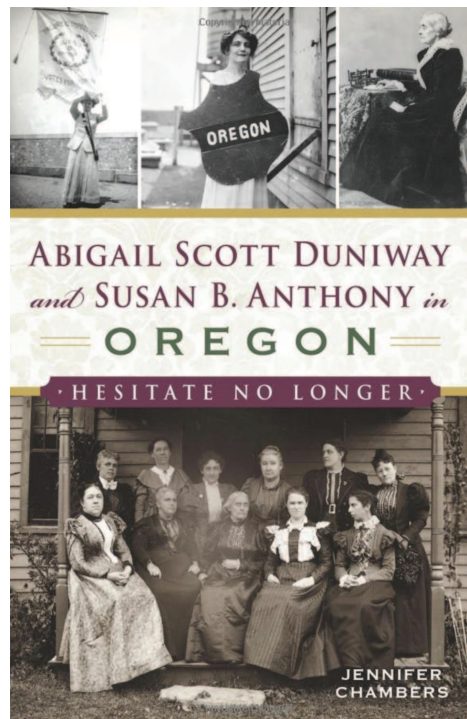
Photo by R.J. Marx

Westport Winery, one of the stops along Seaside's Wine Walk.



“The Grail” by Brian Doyle

the nation in the late 19th century, many women saw abstinence from alcohol as a cornerstone of the right-to-vote movement; these included the many thousands



“Hesitate No Longer” by author Jennifer Chambers chronicles the temperance movement’s history in Oregon.

of members of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and National Ameri-

can Women Suffrage Organization, whose passion for breaking the bottle was only exceeded by their passion for the polls.

But Oregon’s Abigail Scott Duniway, a leader in helping Oregon women win the right to vote, took a slightly different tack, Jennifer Chambers writes in a new book, “Abigail Scott Duniway and Susan B. Anthony in Oregon.”

Duniway was described in her day as “5-foot-6, stocky ... a forceful, logical platform orator, with a touch of sarcasm and a dash of humor that make her arguments effective. As an impromptu speaker she has few equals.”

Despite her idol Susan B. Anthony’s rigid temperance stance, Duniway earned the disapproval of members of the temperance movement by first recognizing the potential for alcohol abuse. “Too many cases of cruelty, crime and poverty have been traced to the saloon, to expect this conflict to cease until the saloon shall have reformed herself.”

At the same time she recognized the economic importance of “the production, transportation and sale of wheat, barley, hops, rye, apples, peaches, berries, grapes and cherries, from which intoxicants are made.” She offered consideration for the families dependent on these commodities, their sale and production. “Let the blame go to the drunkard, where it belongs, she said. “Let the drunkard’s wife have legal power to protect her home from the debauchery, just as the husband has the power, when so inclined, to protect it now.”

The blowback from the speech, Chambers writes, “was immense.”

Oregon stayed a wet state, at least until 1919 in Oregon and the nation with the passage of the 18th Amendment.

Wine production shut down but resumed in 1933, with Prohibition’s repeal.

According to the Oregon Wine Board, two Salem men John Wood and Ron Honeyman, founded Oregon’s first estate winery, Honeywood, in 1933.

Twenty-eight years later, Richard Sommer launched the state’s “modern era of winemaking,” planting riesling, gewürztraminer, chardonnay, semillon, sauvignon