

LENNA HOBSON
RagApple Lassie Vineyards – Boonville, NC

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, Southern Foodways Alliance
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[Begin Lenna Hobson-1 Interview]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Thursday, August 14, 2008. I'm in Boonville, North Carolina, at RagApple Lassie Vineyards with Mrs. Hobson. She and her husband have Rag Apple Lassie, and Mrs. Hobson, if you would please state your full name and your occupation, please?

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Lenna Hobson: My name is Lenna, L-e-n-n-a Hobson. My husband is Frank Hobson, Jr., and together we are the owners, managers, gophers, and jack-of-all-trades at RagApple Lassie Vineyards, here in Boonville.

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AE: And may I ask you state your birth date for the record, please?

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LH: My birthday is May 21, 1944; and Frank's birthday is November 6, 1943.

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AE: And you all—you were sharing a little bit of your—of your history as a married couple before we started recording but just a quick story of how y'all met and came together before you started the winery here.

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LH: Frank and I have been married since October of 1995. We actually grew up knowing each other. My father was a high school principal in the mountains of North Carolina. In 1940 he developed a ruptured appendix, which was quite serious in those days. This was in the days before Penicillin. He was brought to the closest hospital, which was Elkin, North Carolina, which is about nine miles west of here. Frank's mother, Thelma Hobson, was an RN working at the hospital when they brought my father in. They did not think he was going to live; my mother was with him. They had no children, and my father was in the hospital for eleven weeks. Mrs. Hobson was his primary nurse, and she looked after him. And during that time, our families developed a friendship that continued until the death of both of our parents some years ago.

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Following that hospitalization, about four years later, Frank was born to his parents who were a generation younger than my parents, and I was born to my father and mother who had been married twenty-two years with no children, and we were born within six months of each other. So our parents decreed that we belonged together, and that it was thanks to Mrs. Hobson's good nursing care of my father that allowed us both to appear.

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We dated lightly in high school. Remember, we lived 100 years—100 miles apart. We both were involved in 4-H Club very heavily; you'll hear more about that later. And we would see each other at 4-H Club week, and I had actually spent a weekend in Boonville when I was like fifteen, and Frank had been to the mountains and spent a weekend at my home. You know, all this was arranged by our mothers. And then my parents, obviously, had retired and my father—my mother died first, and then my father, while I was still in college, so we lost contact with the Hobsons, so to speak. And then thirty-five years later, Frank and I reconnected—had not

seen each other in thirty-five years. Both of our spouses were deceased, and we both liked the adults the other one had become, and here we are together.

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AE: So you—you married in—in '95 and then tell me how—well, let's not talk about the winery yet. Let's talk about 4-H a little bit, and I know that Rag Apple Lassie is the famous cow that your husband raised in 4-H, but what did you do in 4-H?

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LH: We both were very involved in 4-H, and 4-H was very, very important to all rural youth, primarily over the United States, but certainly in North Carolina, where our experience was and is now coming back. That's an advertisement. I will say it. It's now coming back in the urban areas, which I find very interesting. But as youth growing up, 4-H was a part of school, and I became involved, you know, during the school year. And I—I was—I was involved in dairy; I was involved in public speaking. When I say dairy, I'm talking from the cooking side—food demonstrations and those types of things. I have lots of medals for that—for public speaking, for sewing and collecting. Frank was very involved in beekeeping and in dairy cows. They had a small dairy on the farm and so—and Rag Apple Lassie, who was his 4-H show calf, or she was a registered Holstein that was born on the Hobson Farm in Boonville. And when she was a day old, Frank's father looked at Frank—and his nickname for Frank was Buck—and he said, "Buck, this one is yours. You can raise and do with her—this is your show calf." And so she was Frank's huge, huge pet, and all the people here in Boonville still tell me they had dogs and cats for pets; Frank had a cow that followed him everywhere he went, followed him when he rode his bicycle. And when Frank was eleven years old and Rag Apple was like twenty months old, she

was the Grand Champion Show Calf in North Carolina at the North Carolina State Fair. And this was in 1957.

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AE: Do you know how he came up with the name RagApple Lassie?

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LH: RagApple Lassie’s name is like thoroughbred horses and everything; they take part from the sire and part from the dam. RagApple Mutual Devotion was a world-famous bull, apparently—excuse me—was a world-famous bull and still has her bloodline, still continues to this day, and so the RagApple Lassie name came from RagApple from the father and Lassie from the mother, and so we can take no credit for naming RagApple Lassie that name. It just turned out to be a very serendipitous name, but it was given by the registration authorities. I will tell you that we have had people—we’re situated very near Interstate 77, so we have had people come off of 77, you know, our little highway road signs that say *RagApple Lassie Tours* or whatever, we’ve had people from Wisconsin, from New York, and what is the other dairy state in the Midwest? Anyway, that recognize the name RagApple as being a major Holstein bull, and they say that has got to be connected to—and they come off the Interstate into our winery, and they walk in and they see all our cow boxes, and they go, “Oh, yes. It was a dairy bull.” They recognize it because they had the bloodlines on their very same farm. RagApple has been in the National Holstein lore since like 1927 or something.

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AE: That is most interesting. And so I wonder, your husband, Frank, his family, he's the third generation to be on this land. Can you give a little background of his family and—and their industry over the generations?

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LH: The property that RagApple Lassie is now situated on has been in the Hobson family for 100 years. Frank's grandfather, Bonson Hobson, came and bought, initially, 1,400 acres that extended from—we're at the northern boundary, if you will, all the way to the Yadkin River. And he had thirteen children, and so it was divided among, you know, each child got their portion of land, and it is largely still—the whole land is still largely in the Hobson family. Frank's cousins own other parts of it; there's really less than fifty acres that is owned outside of the Hobson family now, but it's owned by different branches of the family. So Frank's portion—and he has bought some from other cousins, and his father had bought some but it passed from Frank's grandfather to his father and then to Frank, and that's why we built the winery. Frank's worst nightmare was that his beloved land—which has always been a farm, had always been agricultural, and still is until this day. Now there are various Hobson homes scattered across the tract of land, but it is largely agricultural, primarily tobacco; that had been the cash crop on the farm from its beginning until the last two or three years—the demise of tobacco in the last two or three years has reduced down. We grow corn, wheat, soybeans, a small amount of tobacco and then our Plan B to help insure that this farm remained agricultural and didn't become a housing development was the planting of vineyards, and then we ended up building the winery.

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AE: Can you talk about you and Frank sitting at the kitchen table at home and—and—and brewing up this plan to start a winery?

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LH: As I said, building—planting vineyards was our Plan B because Frank and I were married in '95, and that's when all the rumbling about the demise of tobacco and the beginning of all the states filing the lawsuits against tobacco companies, so Frank realized immediately—and I have to back up and say, Frank has been a farmer all of his life, lived in Yadkin County, which is a rural farming county in North Carolina, all his life. But, to me, he's one of the very unique individuals from that county because in many ways he embraces change. He is not a character that sits around and says, "Oh no, look what *they* are doing to me." And so he had been aware that tobacco—the demise of tobacco—was looming, which had been a huge cash crop for not only North Carolina, but surrounding states, and he was constantly investigating or following any new developments in farming that might lead to something that would provide the economic value of tobacco so that this farm could remain agricultural and wouldn't be tempted to become a housing development at some time in the future.

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So with that bit of information, once the viticulture industry actually it began at Virginia Tech, a professor at Virginia Tech stated to someone in this area, he said, "I'm sure that you all can grow French *vinifera* [***vitis vinifera*, grape vines native to Europe and the Mediterranean**] grapes down there because they're doing well in Virginia. The industry is developing here, and you're on pretty much the same latitude we are. You pretty much have the same climates that we have. You really need to look into that." Prior to that time, all the energies in North Carolina and from NC State, which is our land grant university, had been directed toward Muscadine, which is in

every state; and we had a large Muscadine industry in Eastern North Carolina. So with that little push, you know, it just somehow took root and went from one winery—French *vinifera* winery that had been here in North Carolina, Westbend [Vineyards], which was the very first one, to today there are twenty-two inside the Yadkin Valley appellation, which is also something unique to this area, and seventy-two statewide. So it has developed quickly because all this happened—has happened since 1999.

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But backing up, I still maintained my career job that I had had [Director of Marketing and PR at Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital], and I came home one day and said to Frank, “I understand that Charlie and Ed Shelton—” and I happened to know them peripherally because one of their son was a friend of my son in college—“are planting a vineyard in Dobson.” And so we were having dinner and Frank said, “Well let’s ride over there and see what they’re doing.” And it was like ten miles, so we went over, and here were these little rows of the beginnings of a vineyard. And we wandering down through the territory, and here was a guy that they had brought in from Oregon to do this. So we looked and asked him some questions and talked to him a bit, and a couple days later I came home and Frank said, “Guess where I’ve been today?” He said, “I went back over and talked to the guy that is planting the vineyards at Shelton and—” and this was at Shelton Vineyards or what is now known as Shelton Vineyards. And I said, “Well, did you find out anything new?” And he said, “No, it’s just interesting—the process.” He said, you know—Frank said to me, he said, “Growing a grapevine can’t be any different than growing anything else but,” he said, “you know, I didn’t understand what would happen when it got up or how you put it on the trellis or how you approach that or—.” You know, he said, “I did a lot of research at the store—” this means his farm supply that he owns—“and,” he said, “there are lots of different varieties of grapes, there are lots of different clones, there are lots of kinds of

rootstock.” And because of the fact that he had the farm supply and represented—sold products for lots of different chemical companies. So Frank calls up all his chemical companies like Syngenta and Monsanto and all the different ones who supply, you know, the chemicals and herbicides for all the different types of farming and said, “Do you all do vineyard—do products for vineyards?” And they said, “Oh, yeah,” you know, “we have a vineyard industry that looks primarily in California.” And Frank said, “Well I need you to send me some information on that, or I need you to send me the rep. I need to talk to someone about vineyards,” and they did. So he started—in—in two weeks time, he had all this information that he had garnered from everywhere, and they had given him contacts about different things. So then he calls this guy in California that—a name they had given him about trellising, who was the trellis supplier for everything on the—the West Coast and anybody in the East Coast, like in the Finger Lakes or whatever that needed trellising was having to order it from—from Napa from a company in Napa. And so Frank said—Frank and this gentleman ended up in this long conversation and, interestingly enough, the trellising poles at that time were made in India; there was steel coming from India. They were shipped to the United States by—to Moorhead City by boat. This gentleman was getting them from the boat in Moorhead City and trucking them to Napa and then shipping them wherever he needed them to go.

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Well, because we had the farm supply business and all these different things, then—so Frank almost in a two-week time became the East Coast supplier for this guy. So they would come to Moorhead City, Frank would take possession of them, bring them to little S&H Farm Supply in Boonville, and then this guy would direct where they would go out to. But it gave Frank lots of information about trellising, and it gave him an inside person to talk to about, you know, there are many different kinds of trellising styles. He didn’t have the answer to that, you

know, how you chose one style versus another style. And so he just kept going with all these little process, so—. And all this had happened within three weeks time.

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So, soon I was—we were having dinner and I looked at him, and I said, “We’re going to plant a vineyard aren't we?” And he said, “Yeah, we are.” And I said, “Well how much are you going to plant?” And he said, “Well I don’t know.” He said, “The nursery person hasn’t called me back to tell me how many plants I can get and when.” And, typically, you have to order the plants a year in advance and pay—because they’re grafted to order. And they were going to work with him on some of the clones, and he had gone back to Virginia Tech, and they were going to tell him, you know, some of the varieties that they had recommended that he start with that he had—that were typically easier to grow, took less coddling, were a little bit easier to just grow, as opposed to some that were more temperamental and Chardonnay being one of those.

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So he got everything in place. This decision was made in 1999 that he was going to prepare. We had this one field that was exactly ten acres that was sort of isolated across the road from the rest of the farm, and he decided to plant that field to devote it half to Chardonnay, half to Cabernet Sauvignon, and he began preparing the land. And the farmer in him—and this is what’s very good—I’m very proud of his farming heritage, you know; he understood that you only have one opportunity. The life of a vineyard is 100 years, so you only have one chance to do it right, you know. We wouldn’t be planting this vineyard again and hopefully, our great-grandchildren would be harvesting fruit from this vineyard. So he started turning the earth. He sent his soil samples off to find out what amendments he needed to make, and he turned it with the really tall plows, the ones that are like, you know, go into the ground thirty-six inches, you know, and turned in all the nitrogen and calcium and phosphate and all the things that he needed

to do and had everything ready, planted the winter wheat crop over it, and then we planted our first vineyards in April of 2000. We planted five acres of each—took out the wheat crop, you know, and laid out the rolls—the rows—and planted the vines.

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At the end—in the fall of 2000—and, as you know, you drop all the fruit, of course; you just let the vines grow because you want their energy to go to root development and not fruit maturing—to maturing the fruit. Frank comes through, and we're having dinner and, he said, "You know," he said, "I'm really proud of my vineyards." He said, "They're beautiful." He said, "They're going to grow beautifully here." He said, "We're going to be able to grow grapes here." He said, "That's not a problem." He said, "I really think I'm going to get some more land ready." He said, "We need to order some more plants." He said, "I really think we should plant more next spring." And I said, "Well how many more are you going to plant?" He said, "I don't know," he said, "I've got to investigate it a little bit." He said, "I need to go talk to some of these other people coming up." He said, "We've go to see what kind of market is going to develop. We're going to," you know, "we don't want to plant more than we have a market to sell to." And he said, "I need to call Tony Wolfe." This is the Professor at Virginia Tech. He said, "I need to call Tony Wolfe again and see if there's a market up there for fruit for people to buy and bring in." And he said, "So we'll just see what the market will bear—will bear." And I'm sitting there and I said, "Well, have you ever given any thought," I said, "you know, if we're going to get into this—this way," I said—well, first I asked, I said, "How many bottles of wine does ten acres of—of grapes equate to?" He said, "Well I really don't know the answer to that because when you sell it, you sell it by the tons and rather than, you know, by the bottle." And he said, "But I'm going to look into it." And I said, "Well, have you ever given any thought—" I said, "If we're going to get into this in a big way, and if this is what you think is going to keep the farm

agriculture,” I said, “how about if we just go for broke and build a winery, and we’re in charge of our own destiny, and we’re not at the mercy of anybody?”

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And he looked at me, and he took one sip of wine. We were always wine consumers, just not wine makers. And he looked over the top of his wine glass, and he said, “If you’re waiting on me, you’re backing up. Get your shit together.” That was the decision; it was made in thirty seconds of time. And I said, “Great, end of conversation.” We enjoyed our—you know, we both kind of go back in our own minds and think about things for a bit.

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The next morning as Frank—I was up and I was getting dressed, and I was heading out the door for work, and Frank was leaving and he turned around and he said, “Are you going to have it together when I get home this evening, so I can see—so you can tell me about it?” And I said, “We’ll see.” **[Laughs]** But that’s—that’s literally the process, because we were looking for something and it just struck a nerve with both of us. And that was in the—that was approximately Thanksgiving of 2000. Within a week and a half—I have to back up and say, you know, and we use this: the stars lined up for us to do this. They truly did, and we have instance after instance after instance as proof. But within two weeks of that conversation between Frank and I, I received a phone call when I got home one day. I had a phone message to call Greg Snyder at UNC Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina. And I could not imagine, you know, what he wanted, but I return all calls. So the next day I called; he had left his classroom number. I called him and he started in—he was very soft-spoken, very professor-like and very meticulous in giving you details, and he started into this diatribe about how all senior design students were assigned the very same thing to design, if you will, for their graduating thesis; and because of the developing industry in North Carolina they wanted to design—assign a winery to everybody.

And so they were looking for someplace that had a large enough tract of land to allow up to fifteen or twenty different locations because they didn't want to limit, and they needed a commitment from that person willing to be able to share all their boundaries of their land, to (2) provide a map, and (3) and the most time—largest time requirement was that you would an individual client interview with each student as part of their process of developing—learning to develop a client relationship of your vision, what you were looking for, what you wanted, you know, all the limitations. He warned us, obviously, that they had no restrictions financially in their final design, but they needed to have these conversations with us, so we would have to have it, you know, fifteen or twenty different times and it would take two or three hours. Well I mean he didn't complete his sentence, and I said, "We will be happy to." And he really was expecting to have to convince us otherwise, I think. So he was very thrilled, and they brought the students and they ended up camping, and they still come and camp here. I mean we still have contact—so we have fifteen built-to-scale models of proposed wineries. Now some of them would cost more than any winery that has yet been built in North Carolina, which is very, you know—some of which are very expensive, so there were some very, very elaborate and some actually honored our vision. And the overriding thing that we shared with each one of them is that Yadkin County was a farming county. That, you know, Frank had lived here his whole life, that it was—had a 100-year history, so we wanted something that honored farming's history but also looked like it belonged in Yadkin County, as opposed to looking like that it was transplanted from another part of the—the world because this is where our heritage was. We didn't come in and buy the property, but we had roots here, so we wanted it to honor that—and it had to be affordable.

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And then we ended up hiring their professor, the very guy who had made the phone call to us in the first place, to be the end designer here. And he did a beautiful—you know, we picked

and chose the things that we liked or didn't like or could afford or not afford, you know, of the other things and sort of pulled them together and, hence, that's the design of our building. It was a school project for UNC Charlotte.

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AE: And so was this final design just implemented by the professor, or did he have the final design that y'all chose to—to build?

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LH: No, he made the final design. He, theoretically, is the architect for—for our building because, I mean, some of them were quite, quite elaborate and had lakes and had bridges and bridges over lakes and, you know, ponds with swans and, you know, big chateaus from the banks of the—the Rhine in Europe and so some of them were quite elaborate. And, in the end, I will have to say—and, of course, students had—had no restrictions and they, you know, most of them probably had been inside of a winery at some point in their lives that they had traveled but the—the practicality of it, you know, they had no idea how much space to allow for this. So they were building this vision, so to speak. And Dr. Snyder was wonderful because, you know, he could get down—we knew—had to figure out how much space we needed for storage, called case-goods storage in wine jargon, and how much you needed for production area, you know, where all our tanks are located and how much you needed for an aging wine cellar, and we had indicated that because we were in rolling hills, we—we thought we could go back into the earth some and it would, you know, be more economical cooling and keeping it the right temperature and be more like the caves, which we have in our wine cellar in the back. So, you know, he became the very practical person. But there's still lots of things—one of the neatest things that one of the students

came up with is our silo up front, you know, because silos go with farms, and you seldom go by a farm anywhere that doesn't have a silo someplace. So, you know, silo—and our silo is unique in that it has a staircase inside—a circular staircase, as opposed to being filled with grain—and it comes down into our aging cellar. So there are lots of neat little things like that, but it's still the greatest compliments we've been given is when people—we've actually had people come in and want to know if this was the dairy barn, you know, that we kind of renovated because it kind of looks like that.

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AE: And the—the silo out front is also painted like a Holstein cow, which is great.

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LH: I just had it done this year, yes. The silo now has Holstein spots on it, and that was just added this year, if you will. And, interestingly enough, I put cow spots on the [*Laughs*]—on the silo to pull people's eye over to the silo because, sort of, the silo is out from the building like forty feet, but it's kind of in front of the door. The door is not in the center. It's, to, you know to the far left side or the far east side. And even though it has pots of flowers by the door, and it has this arbor all around the door and has this logo and sign that says *Entrance, RagApple Lassie, Welcome*, you would be amazed how many people sit in our parking lot and want to know which—call inside to find out where the door is. So I thought they're not somehow picking up on this, you know. And that's when I added the arbor to do that. And so after three years, I finally puts spots on the silo, which are reminiscent of RagApple Lassie. We've got a lot of cute comments about that.

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AE: And this building, if we could talk about it in a little more detail, it's like a big pole barn and you walk in and—and you walk—when you enter the building, it's a catwalk and you can see the stainless steel tanks and everything. And can you talk about how you wanted that to be kind of how the visitor participates in what's going on here?

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LH: Yes, our—our entire building is metal, low maintenance, but it also looks like buildings on the farm. It's the same—it was to mimic the kind of material that's on silos, typically. And our building, I should tell you, this is a Butler building that's very familiar and very prominent throughout the South, but this is a custom designed Butler building in that the roofline, you know—. One of the things that I kept saying when Dr. Snyder proposed—he said, “Well, we could use the Butler building concept.” And I said, “No, they look like a hippopotamus is set on top of them. They don't have any, you know, roofline, so to speak. They're—they're a very shallow roof.” And he said, “Oh, we can change that.” So the Butler people became involved and, you know, we have the custom roofline, which gives it a different look, and then our building stair-steps down in, but it's because of the need. And then everywhere there is cement or concrete in this building is underground. So this wall to the—to the north, you know, gradually slopes down. In the area where you come in near the front door, it's almost totally underground on two sides, and then one side is open to the parking lot. And then our wine cellar is totally underground. So the building is a bit deceptive; it's a bit larger than it looks like at first when—when you pull into it. But this design came about, and it was actually Dr. Snyder's idea about what we refer to as the catwalk, which brings you in looking down on the tanks. But as soon as I saw it, we both said, “Absolutely.” And from our personal perspective, you know, and

in visiting things of the world, I like things that I can be a part of. Therefore, I prefer Zion National Park to the Grand Canyon because I feel like I'm in it, and it envelops me and I can participate in it, as opposed to looking down on it and saying, "Oh, that's awesome, but I'm not there."

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So that's the reaction that Frank and I had—both had to the catwalk, you know, because you could come in, you could look down, but then you came down this long staircase, and you were in it. And now five years later, we hear that all the time from people coming into the tasting room. They like the perspective of being able to look and look down on the tanks and then come down into and touch the tanks and be surrounded by them. So initially, our original building that we're now in and where everything is housed now was to have been two buildings. And all the construction work, which began in the spring of 2002, and the overriding thing the whole time had—it had to be ready to accept harvest in the fall of 2002. So there was just the seven month period of time that they had it, so all the energy and time was to be put in this one building and then a second building which was to go out—north from the silo, which would house the tasting room, was going to be done the next spring, because, you know, we were starting out small. We had a very small amount of wine, and we knew we could set up a tasting room inside the winery. Well here we are five years later, and we're still set out the same way and we keep—because I am so glad. You know, Providence—that's another way. Providence looked after us. We didn't build a second building the way it was initially laid out because everybody who comes in here now says, "Oh, I love it. It feels like a part of it. I can look and see a barrel, and I can look and see your wine stacked and—and we can see the tanks and we're in the midst of it—not something off in a distance."

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So, you know, we still don't exactly know when we finally get pushed out of here because of space how we will handle the tasting room, but it can be handled, you know, when they have to go out through a cement wall, but it can be handled. But it—that was Providence looking after us.

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AE: Uh-hmm. And so now down—down here, you have basically what amounts to a little living room next to your—your wall of barrels there and couches and rugs, and it's very homey and welcoming. And I wonder, just to back up a little bit, if—talking about the long history of—of wine making in North Carolina and the home wine making tradition and the fact that North Carolina was the biggest, from what I understand, producer of grapes and wine before Prohibition, that now to be in 2008 and be making wine and kind of carrying on that long tradition but with *vinifera* grapes, where do y'all see yourself fitting into that long history?

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LH: Well, you're absolutely correct. At the turn of the century, North Carolina was the single largest wine-producing State in the United States. Now remember, California didn't exist then, as far as wine making was concerned, nor Oregon, nor Washington. It was primarily centered on the East Coast, which was North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, the Eastern—where Scuppernon and Muscadine grapes were so prevalent. And the largest wine producing state fell under the heading of the wine that came from more like what's made in the Finger Lakes of New York now, the Concords and the Niagras and the Nobles, the American hybrids. So it was never the largest wine producing French *vinifera* state.

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And then—and but that was a large part of the economy at the turn of the century, but then World War I came into play and then Prohibition and then tobacco became king, so there was no need to go back and pick up the small pieces of that, because tobacco became such a king and such a cash crop and was providing, you know, cotton in the southern United States and tobacco here in the Middle Atlantic States, you know. The economy was doing beautifully, and world-class universities all over this entire area was being built with money that came from the tobacco industry and the cotton industry, so there was no need, you know, to look further. So then you fast forward to the '90s and the demise of tobacco, you know, when all the hoopla that is going on about it, regardless of the amount that it contributed to the economy, then, you know, people began to need to look further in order to keep, you know, their lands agriculture and to not be gobbled up with the urbanization of America, you know, and the—and the housing developments. And so it was very fortuitous that, you know, people realized that this area—that we had the microclimates, the latitude, the elevations and everything that would lend itself perfectly to French *vinifera* grapes. So then that has—that's why all of that being in place, I think, is what has given rise to the very quick evolution of grapes this time. I mean a lot has happened in North Carolina, and it's been absolutely incredible in less than ten years. You know, what it took twenty-five years to develop, we have done in ten. So, you know, I don't know if it'll be good or bad, but we'll be where California is now, you know, in half the time, also. Learning curves are always shorter.

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But I think this—it's providing a way—one, Americans still—the market for growth in the wine industry is absolutely phenomenal. When you take about—and I can't give you the exact statistics that are provable because you hear them, and you don't write them down, specifically, but, you know, if the average European who grew up and they put, you know, a

little bit of wine watered down in baby bottles all the way—you know, children grew up, it was—it was just a part of the culture of drinking wine. So if the average European person consumed five gallons of wine a month, the average American person was not consuming five gallons of wine a year. And that's still true in huge parts of America. You know, California is catching up a little bit, but it's still not at the European levels. North Carolina is still way beyond—I mean way below California and, as you know, Oregon and Washington have just now come into their own on the West Coast. So the growth opportunity is phenomenal and—as it is worldwide. You know, it hasn't been developing everywhere. I mean we now know about Australian wines, New Zealand wines, the South American wines. Good wines are coming from Chile and from Argentina, and none of these areas consumed wine the way the people, you know, in major parts of Europe grew up drinking wine. So I think the opportunity is there, and the opportunity for growth is phenomenal for a good long while. And in the wine industry information that comes out, Research Triangle area—Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill—the whole area is now the twelfth largest wine consumption area in the United States. That is huge when you compare—when, you know, what goes before that, which is San Francisco and Los Angeles and New York City and Chicago. I mean just the big areas, you know, to say nothing of the smaller. It has a lot to do with the rise of Research Triangle, and so many people are coming in from those areas into there who were very accustomed to drinking wine regularly. I mean, we have hundreds of people within twenty miles of us who don't consume a bottle of wine a month, much less with each meal. So the growth opportunity is phenomenal.

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The learning curve for this whole area has been—and my Chamber of Commerce speech is that, you know, our farm—we're in the exact same location the Hobsons have been for 100 years, and we certainly never had 600 people a week come here to watch our soybeans grow, to

stand beside a stalk of tobacco or to ooh and ahh about our corn, but they do that about our wine. So that tells the appeal that it has. You know, there are more and more wine drinkers, but in addition to that you have the mystique and the romanticism that just a winery, a vineyard, wine country—all of those things provide. I mean, you know, that—it has an appeal to people that’s bringing them—that’s bringing them here. So it’s absolutely incredible what it’s done for this area. I just never want us to get away from our farming heritage.

00:37:58

AE: Well how much—no, that’s fine—how much of—of what you do here today at RagApple Lassie do you think, from a marketing standpoint and who you are as a winery, how much of—of that story of saving the family farm, it being a centennial farm, and it being a tobacco farm, how much of that history is integrated into the story of the winery today and what is that—do you think that is—is helpful in who you are as a winery?

00:38:25

LH: It is integrated into the story of RagApple Lassie 100 percent—100 percent because we’re proud of our heritage, and that’s part of us. We have the—the good fortune, the good sense, whatever you want to call it—let me back up and tell you how we came to agree—it was a given between Frank and I—but let me tell you about our name. RagApple Lassie, as I told you, was the show calf and almost in the same conversation, two days later after the conversation that—when Frank and I said—I got up the next morning and I said, “Love—” my nickname for Frank is Love; his nickname for me is Precious, and so we have these kind—we said—we have this grand love affair. But anyway, I said, “Love, guess what we’re going to name the vineyard?” He said, “What?” I said, “RagApple Lassie.” I mean big old tears came in his eyes, and he said,

“Really?” I said, “It’s perfect. It’s perfect because she has the same heritage to this area that you do. She’s not a fantasy in any particular—she was born on the farm just like you were.” And he said, “Fine with me.” He loved it. We make a wonderful team because he never questions things like that, or he 100-percent supports me, and I do him.

00:39:38

I tossed that out to my sister for starters, and she said, you know, “You’re not going to use that name?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “Don’t you think that’s too cutesy?” And I said, “Let me tell you—.” Now let’s go backwards forty years. When I had just left in the ‘70s, and I was first in the workforce—I graduated from college in the ‘60s—there were—*Wine Spectator* was a tabloid. It was not the sleek magazine it is now. And heaven only knows, I was—I was at NC State and I don’t know how I came to be reading the *Wine Spectator* because I was not a wine connoisseur, but one thing that stuck in my head that I never forgot. It was right after California had just won the—the big wine tasting in France. And a writer, sort of tongue-in-cheek, in the *Wine Spectator* said, “Okay California, you’ve proven to me that you can make credible wine. I want to be taken to the rock where it’s engraved that every winery and vineyard in California has to be named after something geographical.” Now think about that. I mean all the places, even to this day, that are—River Ridge, Rock Valley, you know, all these—and he enumerated all these things and then he had dah-dah-dah or the august family name. He said, “Where is your creativity?” Well my MO my entire life from age one until this day is to come outside the box in some way. And for some reason that was—and in the middle of the night—all my epiphanies come at 3:00 a.m. I go to bed really tired, and I get up at 3:00 a.m. or wake up, you know, and I have these thoughts—anyway—was that this place should be named RagApple Lassie because she had the same heritage. I mean I had all the information. I thought that’s exactly what he was saying, you know. It shouldn’t be Hobson Vineyards or Boonville Vineyards; it should be

RagApple Lassie Vineyards. So I said this to Frank, and he said, “It’s fine with me.” Well then I tested it on a few people, starting with my sister, and they said, “You’re going to be making a huge mistake.”

00:41:40

Well the more I thought about it, the more determined I was, you know. Nope, I’m sticking with it. So I—I laid out all my concerns to Frank one night at dinner, and I said, “Are you with me?” He said, “One hundred percent. Press on.” So that’s how we came with the name.

00:41:59

Now, truly, that was one of our smartest decisions because people come in here—one, it brings people here. When people are going through the website or looking for, you know, www.northcarolinawines.org or all the other ways and they make their list, and you go through the list, I cannot tell you the numbers of people that say to me, “Well, you made the list because of your name. We know there’s a story there and we wanted to come and find out what the story is.” Or they recognized it being connected—a few people recognized it being connected to the dairy industry, as I told you. So it’s fascinating. It does, it helps bring people here. Then once they’re here, and they understand we’re the only winery at this point that’s owned by people who make their living farming and always have, you know, all the other wineries are people who are coming out of—industry captains coming out of industry or buying land, you know, and—and building wineries. And they have great wineries, but they haven’t always lived on the land or from the land as we have. And people really appreciate that. They also really, really appreciate the fact that this was our Plan B to hopefully keep it from becoming a housing development, because even the people who live in million dollar homes in the larger cities of our area or who come here, they still understand what’s happening to the land and what was a gorgeous farm fifteen years ago is now divided into tracts and filled with gorgeous homes. And so everybody

understands what's happening to rural America. It's—I am fascinated by that, and I never truly internalized that because I grew up in rural North Carolina, and we had a farm. We raised beef cattle. You know, I didn't physically live on the farm, but we had a farm where we raised beef cattle. I have such an appreciation for that, but you always think, "Oh well, when I go away to school or when I grow up, I'm going to live in a wonderful city, and I'm going to be sophisticated and cosmopolitan." And I cannot tell you, you know, to get out and find that that's really not what you want at all and to be able to appreciate rural America, and that it truly is our backbone makes you very proud. But I am also fascinated, and it gives me the greatest feeling in my soul to hear this from people that you would never expect to hear it from. I mean we are questioned about farming activities. There are people who come walking before our tasting bar, coming in the field between the winery and one of the vineyards alternates, because, you know, you rotate row crops, and it will have corn one year and soybeans one year and tobacco. People come in, and they're not sure what that is. They come in and bring in a piece of soybean and say, "What is this growing? Is that tobacco? I've always wondered what it looks like." I mean they make pictures of it. They bring it in. So the most sophisticated cosmopolitan—and I don't mean that as what we should strive to be, but the people who think that about themselves are still so totally enamored of actually what happens on the farm that there's a real appreciation for that.

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So I have learned to give into that. And that's one of the things, you know, I thought everything had to be a little bit slicker and a little bit smoother than it actually has to be, and the perfect example of that is, you know, we have people who wanted to go out on the farm. And so one Saturday, much to my chagrin—and I gave Frank holy hell over this, I don't mind tell you. He went to the barn and came back with the tractor, and you know what farm tractors look like, you know, and they're all aged; he came back with a tractor and a trailer—to me, both looked

pathetic—with bales of straw on it and said, “Okay, if y’all don’t mind getting on the straw bales, I’ll take you over and show you.” I mean these people were just like eating out of his hand and thought they had been given a great gift. They were perfectly happy to get on these bales of straw, you know, climb onto a trusty trailer pulled by a tractor with mud all over it and be driven all over the farm. And they came back in with, “Oh, I saw this and I saw this and I saw this.”

And I thought, you know, I guess people do relate to this. And if you’ve lived in a city and your child has never seen anything growing—and they would make their child’s picture standing up against a huge tractor tire, you know, that was taller than they were, or they—it was just fascinating. And so I’ve done a complete about-face that you do not have to be quite as polished as I thought it needed to be for people to relate to, and they really do relate to the ruralness and to keeping it a family farm. So yes, that has become one of my big marketing ploys. It didn’t start out to be, but it is.

00:46:35

AE: And your husband today, as you said, is out and about somewhere on the acreage, taking care of business and at the—the farm supply store. But may I ask you the percentage of—of acreage that is the vineyard and the percentage that’s—that’s farmed in row crops—tobacco and wheat and the like?

00:46:51

LH: I can't answer percentages, but I can tell you an acreage, how about that? We farm 500 acres. We have thirty-five acres in vineyards, and our thirty-five acres in vineyards will support, ultimately, 10,000 cases of wine. And that’s when the vineyards are producing, you know, at full percent. We’re still dropping a little fruit so that we don’t over-crop our vines and that we get

good root development because, as I said, the life of this vineyard is 100 years. We're currently producing about 6,500 cases of wine. So we have the—the vineyards in the ground to support that so the rest of the land—and most of it is farmable. There's some timbered land, but not a huge amount on this farm. And you rotate. So at any given year, you know, we will have a couple hundred acres and corn or wheat or soybeans, you know, and then you plant the winter cover crop. And when you harvest the wheat off, you know, you come behind it and plant soybeans, so you get the—you double crop the land that year, you know, and then you rotate it the next, and so it rotates among tobacco and corn and wheat and soybeans. That keeps down disease, and that also takes care of your land because what one crop takes out, another one puts back in, so best practice farming is crop rotation.

00:48:08

AE: And so then the—the vineyard and the winery is just one small prong on the wheel that is Hobson Farms?

00:48:18

LH: Yes, the—the vineyard and the winery, RagApple Lassie, hopefully, someday, will provide the economic support that will allow our heirs, our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to keep this farm agricultural. Right now corn, wheat, soybeans, and tobacco is what still, you know, provides the support and allows us to do this. I mean it—you know, building the winery, the whole process, the planting the vineyard and building a winery, you know, is not inexpensive at all. It takes a huge investment, and we put, you know, a lot at risk to do that, and it's like an eight- or nine-year curve before you lose the red and can get into the black ink.

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AE: And so do you foresee a day when the vineyards will consume more acreage that's part of your 500?

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LH: Not necessarily, because we made the commitment or decision—and I guess some of that will be made by future generations—we made the decision that we did not want to be much—you know, when we say a 10,000-case winery that you're going to bounce between 9,000, 10,000 or 11,000 or 12,000, depending on production. I mean, Mother Nature will control that to a degree. But for the next break in what you bring to the bottom line, you've got to jump 20,000 cases. I mean it goes in 20,000-case jumps, and when you get any larger than a 10,000-case winery, then you have a dog that's wagging your tail. And sometimes I think that's already true, but you know you're no longer—you're—you're part of a corporation then, and you lose the personal touch. Right now, our MO when people come in, you know—we always have a family member here in this winery. You never come here, unless you just hit here in a 10-minute set that there's not a family member. Today you met my sister and brother-in-law, and if Frank and I are off at something that we had to go to or some of the meetings or Boards that we're on, they're always here. Our son and his wife is here. We—we have a wine maker, our full-time wine maker [Linda King], a niece who is out helping bottling today, who is doing the Viticulture Knowledge Program at Surry Community College. But we very much believe in that. And people, when they come here, they know they're going—our heart is here and they're going to come in contact with a family member.

00:50:41

AE: Well here in the—the community of Boonville and in the—the county here, when you first had ideas on—on planting vines and starting a winery, did you meet any resistance at all in the community?

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LH: Yes, but a very small amount. This is a rural community. We're right in the heart of the Bible Belt, and Frank actually had three or four people, including an uncle, show up at the store and tell him his soul was being endangered, if he proceeded to plant a vineyard and make wine. And—and that was interesting. You know you're going to get a little bit of that. But I can also tell you, after we opened the winery—and we probably have neighbors that we can see their homes from here, who have never been in the doors here, but it's amazing how many people come up to us when we're in the community and tell us that they're proud of the tourism capabilities and what's happening in Yadkin County, and that it is helping provide other streams of revenue for Yadkin County. Because, you know, not only is farming—you know, we all raise our children and educate them to not come home and prime tobacco and do the hard, hard farm labor, so that's what's—actually, that very fact has given rise to a lot of farms to be for sale that other people have built vineyards on because there was no one to run the farms. And if you don't have an income—producing stream of income—it's very hard for people to own large tracts of land, pay the taxes, keep them from growing up and look after them properly. So people are—are understanding that and it really—it's absolutely amazing because these are very conservative people. They're wonderful people. They're not particularly well off—formally educated. They're very intelligent. They just don't have lots of formal education, but it certainly did not take them long to internalize that wineries and vineyards hadn't not nearly as much to do with drinking

alcohol as it did with the opportunity for economic development in their county and giving rise to all the auxiliary things that would spring up and the people that it would bring here in terms of tourism.

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And, as you know now, Yadkin County voted in for the sale of wine only two years ago, and many people thought that would never happen. They turned down beer, and they turned down spirits, but they allowed the sale of wine, which I thought was phenomenal because it was sort of their acknowledgement of—it was a—a non-verbal approval of what’s happening in the county and the opportunities that the tourism economic development aspect—you know, wineries are not huge employers of business, but if I have 600 people a week pass through our tasting room, they want to eat someplace, and they’re going to buy gas, and they’re going to shop, and they’re going to stop at interesting shops and if we have bakeries—or all the other things that are available.

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AE: So do you have an idea, with all the wineries that are in North Carolina today, if there are many or how many are former tobacco farmers?

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LH: Us. That’s succinct, but that’s true: us. Some of them are on former tobacco farms, but it was not the people that farmed. As I said, we are the only winery that’s owned by farmers.

00:54:09

AE: Wow. Well let’s talk about the wines, since we’ve got all this background now. Tell me about that first Chardonnay and—and Cabernet Sauvignon that—that came off the vine.

00:54:20

LH: Well, obviously, we thought they were divine. And they were good for your first wines, you know, [*Laughs*] and we got—and they’re aging nicely. Actually, our very first wines that came off, we got our—a very small harvest came in the fall of 2001 and a neighboring winery, RayLen, Steve Shepard, who was the wine maker there, made our wine for us, so that we would have wine to open the doors of our winery with, you know, that was going to be constructed by the fall of 2002. We didn’t have very much wine. I needed it to last as long into the year as it would, so we put everything in 550 [milliliter] bottles, rather than 750s. So I had a smaller bottle, and it was unique, and we pretty much—we made it for several months. Obviously, we didn’t have time to age wines very much, and they’re young vines, but they had great flavor, and they were very well received. And North Carolina, actually, even these self-appointed and self-acknowledged wine snobs, have given great credence to what’s happening in North Carolina. The vines are aging, the wines are just getting better, they have more strength of character, they have always had great flavor, great characteristics of the wine industry, great characteristics of each varietal and great strength there. We’ve never had really, really weak, weak wines, and so they’re going to come—they’re just getting better all the time with age.

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AE: And tell me what—what wines you offer now, in addition to those original two grapes that you started growing.

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LH: We have fifteen varietals in the ground and we have—that we bottle as varietals. We have a Pinot Gris. We have a Viognier that we currently are out of, but that’s part of our lineup; the Easter freeze a year ago took care of that. We came out with a new blend this year that’s very unique called Kaleidoscope Gold that’s primarily un-oaked Chardonnay, Viognier, Traminette, little bit of Pinot Gris—seven different wines in it. And then we have our wine maker’s signature wine, Chardonnay, and our Chardonnay is made very unique in that it’s truly aged and it’s new French oak, so it has a more golden color than most Chardonnays. It’s very creamy and buttery. Our Chardonnays turned many a non-Chardonnay drinker into a Chardonnay fan. Then we have Merlot, which is Frank’s favorite, and that is the sexpot of wines, and it’ll go with anything, but that’s always been Frank’s favorite. We have Cabernet Sauvignon, which has always been my favorite because we are both meat-eaters and like our good steaks, so the Cabernet Sauvignon—and then we added to that, we have a Syrah, which has all the great peppery characteristics—divine with lamb. We have the only Red Zinfandel at this point in North Carolina—grown in North Carolina because they initially said you were not able to grow Zinfandel in North Carolina and, you know, back to our farming heritage, you don’t tell a farmer he can’t do something. You know, as he said, “There’s probably a way, you know, we’ve just got to find out, or it may take a few extra songs in the morning.”

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Now I have to tell you, Frank has this little pickup, little Toyota—tiny, tiny thing. I mean it’s twenty years old, but it fits perfectly between the rows in the vineyards and between the roads in the tobacco field and everything. And so Frank can drive along, point of his point and click and, you know, touch the leaves out of both sides of the—of the cab, you know, and see what’s going on and see what needs to be done, and so he’s not going to part with that. And he

goes out and sings to his vines every morning in Put-Put, this is the name of the little pickup truck.

And then we added a wonderful Red Kaleidoscope this year, which is Mourvedre, a blend of Mourvedre, Cab Sauv and Cab Franc, and then we have three off-dries. And when I say off dry, I'm talking about they're made from French *vinifera* grapes, dry wines, but they have a softness in the mouth feel; they have a hint of sweetness. You stop the fermentation. You know, they're not sweet wines by Muscadine standards, but they have a hint of sweetness, which is great for the people who are just entering wine drinking or who like a little softer wine or like something, you know, after dinner. We have a First Blush, oh, which is a pretty blush-colored and you can name it—it can be reminiscent of whatever makes you blush. And then we have a Rockford Red named after this area, which is a classic Bordeaux Blend. It has four-percent residual sugar. And a Boonville Blanc, named after the town we're in, which is a sweetened Viognier.

00:59:03

AE: Now, since you've made the decision to plant *vinifera* and make all these wonderful wines and—and there are so many Muscadines grown in North Carolina; North Carolina has that history with Muscadine wine, and a lot of vineyards that are producing Muscadine wine. Has there been an interesting kind of level of education you've had to do to your buying public and people here close to—in—in and around Boonville to promote your *vinifera* wines?

00:59:34

LH: Not in and around Boonville. The world, absolutely. Muscadine, which has—which is a huge industry in North Carolina but our greatest obstacle—and I say this is not an objection in

any way—but our greatest obstacle was educating the public that North Carolina can now make credible French *vinifera* wines, as well as it's good Muscadine industry, which it's always been known for; because people associate North Carolina with the sweet wine industry, and that has been our largest obstacle, public perception and educational necessity. It truly has been. And we all must have to deal with that. Five years ago, with everybody who came through your doors. Now the perception is changing, and people are beginning to understand that there is a French *vinifera* wine industry in North Carolina, but it still gets addressed and needs addressing. You know, and the—the North Carolina Grape Council, which is something that was formed by the North Carolina Legislature about fifteen years ago with—for the development and promotion of the wine industry in North Carolina, and it is funded and supported by the excise taxes collected on wines in North Carolina. So and my husband is a member of that, and there are eleven members on the North Carolina Grape Council, and it initially operated under the Department of Agriculture. It has now been moved to the Department of Tourism, but it's very interesting because it began life with a budget of less than \$50,000. And it's now approaching \$1,000,000, so that shows how it's developed. And it still represents both arms of the grape industry in North Carolina, meaning French *vinifera* and Muscadine. The wine development and the highway road signs that you see now, *Discover North Carolina Wines* or *Experience North Carolina Wines*, that's a project of the North Carolina Grape Council. So great strides are being made in what's happening in North Carolina.

01:01:37

AE: So what do you say to the folks who didn't know that there was a wine industry or is a wine industry in North Carolina and then the folks who are used to just hearing about the sweet wine? How do you—how do you tell them what's going on here?

01:01:51

LH: It's—it's not so much, you know, having to explain. People come in and they raise their own comments because they're just constantly saying, you know, "I had no idea this was happening in our own backyard"—are still out when we're making sales calls or when we were at events you know—a benefit or something that a large organization. Brenner's Children Hospital at North Carolina Baptist is a perfect example, and they have a high-end event and they have like ten wineries that offer tastings of wines, and I'm still amazed at the number of people in Winston-Salem, which is less than thirty miles from us, that do not know how good the wines are or what's happening in North Carolina or knew there was a wine industry developing but assumed that it was still sweet wine. So there's still a huge, huge opportunity for education. But at the same time, you know, huge numbers of people are finding out each year. So it's just a process that you're going through, you know. Once—when they come to your tasting room, they're here for two reasons. One, they know we only have one out of every 500 people who come through the door that say, "I only drink sweet wine." Occasionally, you know, you have somebody who is looking for a Muscadine wine show up and literally leave without tasting, but that is so rare. So it's just an educational process and the more that we can—the more festivals we attend, the more benefits we do. And that's not to say this is not a you-all-come invitation because we are asked, in terms of donations or participations, and, literally, this is a conservative figure, fifty times a week. I mean everybody thinks it's no big deal to just give them one bottle of wine, or "Why you can't come pour tastings for my Bridge Club or for my Little Ladies Luncheon," you know? They want—the wineries are constantly being asked to provide the beverage for their entertaining to market yourselves, you know. We get this—and, in fact, I got a very creative one yesterday. I got an email of somebody who wanted to know, because they were

on a very tight budget, if we would not be willing in furnishing wine and come pour it, and we could put out our brochures and everything to all the guests at their weddings as a way to market ourselves. They wanted us to—to come to their wedding and market ourselves. That was the first for a wedding. **[Laughs]** So I mean, you know, every winery—that’s not just us. Every winery—we’re all together, and we talk about this. We are bombarded with requests for that kind of thing.

01:04:29

AE: How far afield is your distribution? Do you—do you have distribution outside of North Carolina?

01:04:37

LH: Basically, no. We are licensed in Georgia, and we’re licensed in Virginia, and we have just moved into the Atlanta area about two months ago, so ask me, you know—. And that was totally driven—we have a lot of people who come here—Georgia travelers are coming here, and when I say here, I’m talking about the Yadkin Valley and RagApple Lassie is one of them. A lot—and we have a lot of our Wine Club members who are in the Georgia area. And Georgia is very open; it’s a large wine consumption state, so we decided to take that and we have—we actually had to have a distributor there. We do our self-distribution all across North Carolina, and we’re licensed in Virginia just for the border counties—just around us—because right now our production, you know, is easily absorbable within the state of North Carolina. And that’s true of most—there’s some—some—a couple or three of the very large ones are licensed in multiple states, and most people are totally within North Carolina. And as the wine consumption grows—continues to grow—it will absorb more but there will become a time when North Carolina can no longer absorb all the production—the production of wine—and, you know, we will all need to—we

will—we will be stronger and we will have the kinds of wine and the case production that will allow us to cross state lines at that point.

01:05:54

AE: So what would you say is the future of RagApple Lassie?

01:05:59

LH: I hope it becomes a mighty force at the size it is, you know. And we worked very hard for this. We've put our heart and soul here; it is our baby. We've spent—I mean RagApple is something—that's the one thing in our marriage that Frank and I can say we have totally developed on our own, so we have great connection to it. We were very naïve in the amount of time it was going to take to do it. I'm talking about personal time, as in seven days a week, working ten hours a day. We were very naïve about that. We were very naïve about everybody that you've known from whatever life—you've always heard the stories about people who ended up with second homes in very exciting and lucrative vacation spots that suddenly had friends they didn't know existed, well that's true for the wine industry, you know, and they all think, you know, you'll be happy to come pour wine for their baby. And—meaning something they support—an organization they support or a cocktail party they want to have. So we were very naïve about some of the things like that, you know, that we've had to just sort of work our way through to—to establish guidelines. But we're very happy. We've been blessed with great publicity; we've been blessed with great awards. Every wine that we produce, except our two Kaleidoscopes that are brand new to us this year, earned at least two international awards. We were named finalist for Best New Winery in the United States by the Wine Appreciation Guild in San Francisco. We've been written up in a gazillion magazines. Copia, the large wine and food

education institute in Napa that Mondavi funded, now has an exhibit on its walls, *Wine Across America*, and we're there; we're the North Carolina wine. So we've been very—we have been very, very blessed—very, very blessed.

01:07:51

AE: Now, if and when you and your husband finally get a mind to retire, are your children are going to carry on the vineyard and—and also the farming?

01:07:56

LH: Our children will carry on the vineyard; they have great pride in that. We have four little grandsons nine and under that all love it, and so, you know, this was sort of for them. And they will do it, and all the others are involved in various aspects. As to the rest of the farming, no. And Frank and I hope—we're counting on having everything established firmly enough that, you know, growing corn, wheat, and soybeans will not be an issue for them, will not be a necessity for them because they don't even have the expertise to do that. But once the—the vineyard is established or then they can lease the land or rent the land, you know. Some farmers grow—use other people's land to grow things on and other people that are still farmers, they will have the wherewithal to not let it grow up.

01:08:53

AE: And so I have to ask you—now, I think, is—is a perfect time to ask about your necklace, which is from this centennial farm, from—from the dirt here, is it not? Can you talk about it?

01:09:03

LH: This necklace is my pride and joy. It's an arrowhead. And before I go there, I have to tell you one of my—one of the classic statements. I wear it all the time; it's my signature piece. It is a Clovis point, which is very unique. It's from the Clovis Tribe that was in Clovis, New Mexico. It's now extinct. There are only sixty-seven documented [Clovis point] arrowheads in the United States, only two found east of the Mississippi, and it was found right here where one of our vineyards was planted. It was found like twenty-five years ago, and Frank had—had it in his collection. He has gallons of arrowheads, and he has four or five that he knew were unique that he had the carbon test done on and, you know, the identification done. And so a year or so after we were married, it was in the wintertime, and we had gone to southern Florida, and we were at Key West and—and Palm Beach. And one of the jewelry stores had jewelry made from the Turkish spear points and coins from the Spanish Gallion. And me, who likes all big jewelry, was looking at some of that. It was raining that day, so we weren't pulled elsewhere; we were inside. And Frank was sort of taken, and I notice he even put his glasses on. I remember him doing that over the Turkish spear points. And they gave you a certificate of authenticity telling how old it was. And so—and he didn't say—when we went out—when we left and at dinner Frank said, “Did you like that jewelry?” And I said, “Oh, yes.” And he said, “Why?” And I said, “Oh, it was one-of-a-kind. Nobody would ever have anything like it.” And he said, “Well we might come back after—for our twenty-fifth anniversary.” It was all very expensive. And Frank knew at that time, and didn't say anything to me, but he had an arrowhead that was older than the Turkish spear points that—this arrow head has been carbon dated at 14,000 BC and he took—he came home—this was in January. He took it to the jeweler in Yadkinville, the only one he's ever done business with, had it—drew out on a napkin the design of how he wanted the bezel made and everything and told them he needed it by Valentine's [Day], so this was my Valentine's present.

And I wear it all the time. I was absolutely ecstatic. And it—it is, it's unique and it's—it's very special. But more than that—that—Frank, he honors the fact, you know—Frank is conservative. He would wear the same piece of clothing every day, and it would never occur to him that he should be dressed in anything else. He—he just doesn't pay any attention to those, but he honored that in me, how much I've always—I'm always off looking at something, jewelry or something, so he remembered that and he honored that and he honored the fact—picked up on the fact that I was taken by something that was one-of-a-kind and drew it out on the napkin and took it over and had it made for me. That makes it very, very special.

01:11:59

AE: It's a wonderful story, and it's wonderful that you wear a piece of this farm around your neck every day. It's really, really neat. Well I—we've been talking here for a while. I appreciate all your wonderful stories.

01:12:11

LH: It's on our label, too.

01:12:12

AE: It is on your label, the arrowhead?

01:12:13

LH: RagApple wears the—has the arrowhead on her little black cocktail dress. I have to tell you about our label. Can I tell you? Our label, you know, we shared that; we named it RagApple Lassie after Frank's show calf, and she was a black and white Holstein, obviously. But in the beginning, when I knew that she should not be—or I didn't want her to be a cow on four legs

behind a fence in a field. That was a bit more rural. I wanted to honor our heritage but take her up, so she would have broader appeal. So she, obviously, she has on the little black cocktail dress that all Southern ladies are known for. Everybody must have the perfect little black dress in their closet and she has her—her legs demurely crossed at the ankles like all our mothers told—keep your knees together and your—and your ankles crossed. She had on pearl bracelets, the bobbles that all Southern women have. And so when we reached all that point—she has a wine glass in her hand. So when we had gotten all that—and she’s swinging on the Carolina moon that was so famous in the Bing Crosby Story, and a new moon is a symbol of a new beginning, and a left-facing crescent, as opposed to a right-facing crescent, is good luck in Chinese. So I put as much of our heritage into that, and then on the back of the bottle we have the underlay of a tobacco leaf—across the—the back of our bottle. But when she was all through, we said, “She’s got—she needs a necklace on or something.” Well, you know what came with her when she was named Grand Champion was this big blue ribbon rosette thing, and I said, “No, that’s not quite right with a black cocktail dress. But the arrow head would be perfect because it came from the farm, just like she did.” So she gets to wear it in the V of her dress.

01:14:05

AE: How many times do you tell that story to people who come through? Because the original painting is standing on this wall right behind you, and I wonder how often you tell that.

01:14:13

LH: A gazillion times. Everybody that comes in, well, they want to know the name of RagApple. That’s—but I am amazed. I’ve always considered myself an observant person, and I don’t even—I am amazed at the number of people that just from conversation or meeting

connect what's on RagApple's label with the necklace around my neck, without ever saying anything. So it always ends up in conversation, but it's because, you know, of people being very observant about details.

01:14:49

AE: And do I remember from your website that a friend of yours painted that image?

01:14:53

LH: Yes, this was a lifelong friend and she—shortly after we made the decision that we were going to plant the vineyards—and she was—she was newly divorced and lots of times regularly, she and Frank and I—she would go with us to dinner on Friday night, and so shortly after we made that decision, you know, I said to her, I said, “Carol, guess what we're going to name the vineyard? We're going to plant a vineyard, and we're going to name it RagApple Lassie.” And she didn't even know the story. I mean she hadn't heard of RagApple at that time because we didn't have any of this going on. So we told her all that, and she said, “Oh, yes, this is great.” And so that night over dinner we started brainstorming, literally, what we could make RagApple look like. And about two days later, she called me and she said, “Is your fax machine on?” She said, “I've got something for you to look at.” And it's never changed.

01:15:48

AE: That's beautiful and a great story behind it. Well is there anything—we've talked about a lot. You've talked about a lot. You've done all the talking. But is there anything that hasn't come up already that you want to make sure to add or a word to end on?

01:16:01

LH: I'm sure I've given you way more details than you ever wanted to know. But you know, this—this has our heart and soul and this is something we're proud of, but we would do it all over again. I have never worked seven days a week before in my life. Frank is probably more used to that than I am [*Laughs*—nor had as little of personal time and we would still do it all over. I mean the validation we get back from the people who are supportive that this was our way of preserving the family farm, doing something agricultural, doing something that's of our own—and I will have to say, you know, your mind is always turning: Oh, we could do this, we could do that. You're always massaging your projects, you know, and changing them. Everything—everything in life is a work in process, and many times—I get up every morning, you know, and when Frank and I are talking, I say, “Love, guess what I thought of last night? I have this great idea.” Well at this point in time, he's a little bit gun shy of some of my great ideas, you know, so his standard comment—and he looks at me and he says, “How much is it going to cost?” Because I'm always telling him of something else I've come up with, you know, that we need to be—that we need to be doing. But we've had great fun with this; this is our baby. We would do it all over again and, as I say, we have—we have met many neat, neat people. We've had many opportunities come our way that were just really special for us that we'd never had without this so, no, this is great. And thank you for honoring that, and thank you for coming to ask our story.

01:17:39

AE: Well I'm—I'm pleased that you said yes to sit down with me, so thank you very much for your time. I've enjoyed visiting with you.

01:17:45

LH: Likewise. We appreciate it very much and come back and see us any time.

01:17:50

AE: Okay.

01:17:50

[End Lenna Hobson-1 Interview]

[Begin Lenna Hobson-2 Interview]

00:00:00

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans again for the Southern Foodways Alliance, and I just ended speaking with Lenna Hobson, but we started recording again to talk about the family home on the property that is a guesthouse now.

00:00:14

Lenna Hobson: Yes, when Frank inherited the property, there's this great home—it's great to us. It's sentimental, but it's also a nice home that was on the property that, obviously—and no one has ever lived in it but a Hobson. It was built for Frank's mom as a bride and in the late [nineteen] '20s and '30s. You would say it's a big Southern tradition, you know, that brides—that grooms typically built homes for their brides, you know, where they were going to be, and they moved to them and this is when they—where they came after they were married. And legend has it, and I'm sure it's true because we refer to her fondly as Granny Hobson, but Frank's mother, Thelma, she was so excited about having a new home, and this was in the era of the Depression. It was built on part of Grandfather's—Frank's grandfather's farm that we spoke

about earlier. And they went to Charleston on their honeymoon, and she talked Frank's father, Frank, Sr., into coming home from their honeymoon a day early so she could get moved into her new house. That's what—that's what—and it's a brick bungalow style. You hear people speak of the bungalow styles, but it's a brick bungalow style home that had an addition one time later. But Granny and Pa moved into it when they came home from their honeymoon, and they lived in it sixty-four years before the first one died. And Frank's mom just died in 2001, so they lived in the home forever. And Frank and I already had our home established, and we came up with the idea of we didn't have time to be in the bed and breakfast business, so we opened it—or I just furnished it as Hobson House, and it still has a lot of the original things in it. Not everything is original because, obviously, Frank has one sister and she—she got other property and then the other farm in Surry County, but then she got, you know, some of the furniture from it. But it has lots of family mementoes framed on the walls; it has pictures of Frank's family and Frank growing up. His grandfather, who was appointed to the DOT [Department of Transportation] in 1919 by the Governor of North Carolina, and we have all those framed certificates on the wall. We have the original house plan that was drawn on a sheet of plain white paper with pencil by Frank's father, with the measurements, and that's framed and on the wall. And Granny's calling card that all Southern ladies had in the 1920s is framed. So we have lots of things there from—from both of our heritage but it's a three-bedroom home, two-bath, full kitchen, dining room, living room, gathering room, so it has lots of space and we offer it as—as Hobson House and it's just a destination rental. You can come there and have all the luxuries of home and the space and the privacy you want and then visit all this whole area of North Carolina.

00:03:09

AE: And how—how many people have taken you up on that since you started doing it?

00:03:12

LH: As many as we could handle. I mean we—we do. It has a demand and—and if we need it or if I haven't had time to get it back together after the next one, you know, you call and it gets told it's booked. But, you know, it is—it is used quite a bit, and it's very nice. And—and it actually has become a gathering place for a lot of members of the Hobson family that live other places now, you know, and come back because we always have the reunions here. We actually have the reunions here at the winery because Frank is the only—out of thirty-four first cousins who remained on the farm and is a farmer, so coming back to Boonville and coming back to this property is homecoming for them. And even some of his uncles who are still alive, you know, that have all moved and lived in different places, but this is where the Hobson family began, so this is coming back home to them.

00:04:07

AE: Are his—his uncles surprised to see your success in the—the winery business and how you've kind of reinvented the family farm?

00:04:14

LH: I have to tell you, it's really interesting and made us both cry one year at a—a family reunion. One of Frank's first cousins—and I guess you would say they were always very competitive in that they were the same age; they both were outstanding athletes and won many awards for their baseball and basketball and football success. And—and a couple of them have PhDs in teaching universities, and one of them stood up and, you know, sort of made a toast to Frank. And he said, you know, “When we were growing up,” he said, “Frank was all the

rambunctious one, and he was the one who was always raising hell, and he was the only one of us that came back to the farm. And we thought he'd never amount to a hill of beans because we couldn't understand anybody wanted to be a farmer, although Frank—and took off—wanted to be a farmer, you know, when we all had these great ambitions.” And said, “Guess what? Frank is the one who put Boonville on the map, who has maintained the family heritage and has made us all proud.” And that's really very nice.

00:05:15

AE: Yeah, that's lovely—a lovely note to end on. Thank you, Lenna.

00:05:18

[End Lenna Hobson-2 Interview]