

Woman finds song in wine

Ventfort to host sampling Saturday

By **CLAIRE COX**

LENOX — Pouille-Fuissé is being sent from a French vineyard for a wine tasting at Ventfort Hall on Saturday, Sept. 16, but it will have an American flavor.

The wine is being provided by a chateau that is now the home of a hometown Berkshire girl who married the vintner's son.

Kerrie O'Brien (daughter of Nora O'Brien, a Realtor and member of Ventfort's board of directors) and Xavier DeBoissieu were married at LaVernette, his family's estate, on July 1 in a ceremony attended by 350 guests. Both work in the vineyards of the Chateau de Lavernette, Domaine De Boissieu, where wines have been produced since 1596.

If all goes well, wines Kerrie O'Brien helped to produce that were served at the wedding also will be offered Saturday at a wine tasting in Ventfort Hall's Billiard Room from 4 to 6:30 p.m., following the annual Lenox Tub Parade of gilded age buggies.

The program will feature a video provided by the DeBoissieus, a 12th-generation wine-producing family, with commentary by Mark Olshansky and Ian Dick, wine afficiandos.

O'Brien, a graduate of Lenox High School and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, had planned to become a doctor until she traveled to California in 1995.

After visiting a vineyard where she observed a team of wine makers, she decided to go for the grapes instead of the scalpel and started learning laboratory techniques required for making fine wine.

"I met a lot of very wonderful people that have given me a lot of education and support, and I continued to take classes and started on research projects while I was being trained to become an oenologist," she said in an e-mail message from Lavernette. "I have learned about wine by working in the wine industry, traveling to wine regions and through tastings."



Hitty

◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

inspired by Hitty that her father made for her when she was a child. Alice White Winton, who lives in Lenox, still has a first-edition copy of "Hitty" that her mother read to her when she was a first-grader. Winton said she enjoys rereading the story, which she has read to her children and grandchildren.

Barbara Allen, curator of the library's historical collection, said in a recent interview that nothing was known about Hitty prior to her adoption by Field and Lathrop.

"The doll, as an artifact and piece of folk art, has a character that comes through in the book," Allen said. "They caught and humanized that because she is kind of a feisty little character, while on the other hand, she is little and old-fashioned. Rachel picked up on that and built it into a wonderful adventure story. The fictional Hitty winds up in an antique store, which is where the doll wound up. It ties it all together."

Allen said there is only one "Hitty: Her First 100 Years," which is now available in paperback, but there have been "take-offs" by other writers. Variations have been published in Swedish, French, Dutch and Chinese.

The doll has been given to the

library by a Lathrop cousin, Roger Linscott, a retired Berkshire Eagle editorial writer who lives in Lenox.

"Roger knew we had a big archival collection on the Fields and objects relating to them," Allen said. "We have a letter by Rachel Field, and we have acquired Field's typescript for the book with handwritten notes."

Linscott's daughter, Wendy Linscott, a Great Barrington attorney who will participate in the seminar, said her father and his siblings inherited the Lathrop estate. The Linscotts found Hitty in a box in Lathrop's cellar.

"Among the important assets of the estate were the doll Hitty and her personal possessions," Wendy Linscott said. "There was furniture. She had a change of clothing, a little basket, a locket and furniture, all of which came into my father's possession. He decided to give it to the library because of the connection with the Field family in Stockbridge. I was lucky enough to have Hitty living in my house for a few weeks while we were ensuring that everything was in order for her to be donated to the library."

She added, "It's a wonderful story, and I must say it wasn't until we came into possession of Hitty that we began to realize what a cult following she had, really worldwide, but particularly in this country. We learned how many Hitty fans there were out there. Doll

magazines had been running big stories asking, 'Where is Hitty?' 'What's happened to Hitty?' She was missing in action for years because she lived a very quiet life in a box in the Lathrop house down in Falls Village, Conn."

The seminar will end with walking tours of the "Field Family of Stockbridge."

"The Field family is all over Stockbridge," Allen said. "It is an amazing family. It began with David Dudley Field, who came here in 1819 from Connecticut to be the fourth minister of the Congregational Church. He had 10 children. Two Fields were Supreme Court justices. Cyrus Field was responsible for running the transatlantic cable. David Dudley Field Jr. was a lawyer on amazing cases. As the owner of a large part of Monument Mountain, he made sure it was taken care of for nature lovers."

Rachel Field was the niece of Matthew Dickinson Field. Thus Hitty became part of the Field family. She is on display with her belongings, still wearing the dress she had on when Field and Lathrop found her.

Allen reported that the clothing, including a hoop skirt, has been cleaned and preserved.

"Her laundry bill was \$2,200," she said.

The fee for the three-day seminar is \$120. Information and a schedule of events: 413-298-5501.

Wine

◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

She said Xavier was the most wonderful of those she met in Napa Valley, where he was checking out California wine making. The pair were together again later in France after Kerrie had gone to Argentina to work on a wine research project.

She arrived at Lavernette in 2005 to join the DeBoissieus in their pursuit of excellent wine. Members of the family's 12th and 13th generations are now working together.

Some of the fruits of what O'Brien is learning at her husband's side will be offered at the Ventfort Hall party, where guests will sample some of the vineyard's "most recent vintages."

Among them will be the 2005 Beaujolais-Villages Ros, the 2005 Beaujolais-Villages and a 2005 Pouilly-Fuissé.

"We are trying to get them to Massachusetts for the Ventfort Hall tasting," O'Brien wrote, "but our distributor in Massachusetts has been rather difficult about the whole situation. We are doing our best and hoping that the wines that we would like to present will be able to be presented ... We are also trying to send the Cremant de Bourgogne, which was served at the wedding. I didn't make it, but it's very fun to have bubbles at a party."



COURTESY PHOTO
Kerrie O'Brien

A special wine described by O'Brien in a letter to "dear friends" is Liquid Love, "an expression of spring in bloom." It was the first vintage wine she and Xavier made together in the cellar at Lavernette.

"The de Boissieu family worked together to help create wines of the highest calibre and had a lot of fun doing it," O'Brien wrote. "We look forward to sharing the fruits of our labor with you."

Tickets for the wine tasting are \$35 per person with reservations, \$45 on the day of the event. An afternoon Victorian tea will also be available to the general public. Those who attend the wine tasting will be welcome to share tea at no extra cost. Information and reservations: 413-637-3206.