
Jim and Betty Held Stone Hill Winery

By M. Karen Hubbard

The Stone Hill Winery was first started by Michael Poeschel, a German immigrant, in 1847. He started it on a hill overlooking the town of Herman, Missouri. He planted grape vines that he had brought with him from Germany, and carved huge cellars underneath the limestone hills. It is within those cellars that Michael made his wine. The name Stone Hill comes from these limestone hills. Within fifty years, the Stone Hill Winery became the second largest winery in all of the United States producing 1,250,000 gallons of wine each year.

On January 29, 1919, Prohibition started in the United States and lasted until December 5, 1933. During this time, alcohol consumption, including wine, was illegal anywhere in the country. It was because of Prohibition that the Stone Hill Winery failed. The grand cellars of the winery were used to grow mushrooms for many years.

Forty-six years after Prohibition was started, Jim and Betty Held bought Stone Hill. They moved into an apartment above the neglected winery with their four children. They had to plant new grape plants because none had been planted in forty-six years. It takes three to four years for the plants to produce fruit. While taking care of the plants, they had to fix up the buildings and buy the wine making equipment such as barrels, grape presses, tools, machines. They hired people to help with taking care of the grape vines, pick grapes, make and sell wine, keep buildings in repair, etc. With hard work they started the winery back up again and helped bring the wine making business back to Missouri. Stone Hill is the oldest winery in the state of Missouri and is still making wines to this day. It produces 245,000 gallons of wines annually with modern equipment and 157 acres of vineyards. They also buy grapes from other selected Missouri vineyards. In 1979, the Held's restored the former carriage house and horse barn into the Vintage Restaurant serving German food.

The Stone Hill Winery has won over 3,400 awards since 1993 including 194 in 2006, 155 in 2007, and 218 in 2008. Under the leadership of the Jim and Betty Held, Stone Hill Winery has gained national recognition:

- 1982 - Missouri's Small Business of the Year
- 1994 – Featured on the *Today's Show*
- 1995 – Featured in *Nation's Business Weekly* (after receiving an award honoring companies who “represent the true spirit of entrepreneurship in America”).
- 1996 – Held family named 1995 Wine Growing Family of the Year at the Wineries Unlimited 20th anniversary banquet in Lancaster, Pennsylvania
- 1997 – Received the Pioneer Award from the Department of Agriculture's Missouri Grape and Wine Program, recognizing the Held's for almost single-handed restoration of the Missouri wine industry after Prohibition almost destroyed it. Today, there are about sixty wineries in the state besides Stone Hill.
- 2001 – Featured on *The Early Show* on CBS

The Helds own two other wineries in different areas in Missouri besides the one in Herman. They own one in New Florence and another in Branson.