

LAST CRUSH

# ENVELOPE O

THE RETAINER

Open first. No code required.

Inside: a letter from your client, a newspaper clipping, a wine label, a map of the property, and a worksheet.

1904 West Kings Highway  
San Antonio, Texas 78201

October 23, 1989

Dear Detectives,

My brother Walter Brannock died sometime in the night of Friday, October 13, at the vineyard he built outside Blanco. On Tuesday the 17th the Blanco County Sheriff ruled it an accident. Carbon dioxide, they said. He leaned into the tank to punch down the grapes, the gas got him, and he fell in. They said it happens.

I taught eighth grade for thirty-eight years and I know when a story has been tidied up.

Walt did that punch-down on that same tank every night of every harvest for ten years. Three thousand nights, give or take. After the accident at that winery in Gruene in 1984 he put a fan in that room and a chain across the door and lectured everyone who would listen. He was many things, my brother, but he was not careless around Tank 4.

He telephoned me on Wednesday the 11th. He said, "Dee, I'm doing something big and half of them are going to hate me for it. I'll tell you Sunday." He never got to Sunday.

I am enclosing what I have. The clipping from the Blanco paper. A label from the case of '85 Reserve he sent me last Christmas, which I include because he was prouder of that wine than of anything except Cal, and because you should know what he made. A map of the place, which I traced from one he drew for me in 1982 and which I have tried to keep true. And a worksheet, for which I ask your forgiveness. Once a teacher.

Everything I have gathered is here, in envelopes, sealed. I wrote you a letter each time something new came to me and dated it, so you can follow me in order. I have put a four-number combination on each envelope the way Walt would have done it, and I will not tell you the numbers. Whatever you need to open an envelope is always in the ones that came before it. Walt locked everything, and every padlock on the place opened with the same four numbers: the year he put the first vines in the ground. Not the first vintage. He would correct you every time, and I could never remember which was which. You will work it out. Everything you need is in this envelope.

One more thing, for honesty's sake. In 1984 Walt put my name on a safe deposit box at Blanco National Bank and never told me what was in it or what the number was. I have not had the heart to go ask. If it becomes necessary, I will.

I have enclosed a check for your retainer. Find out what happened to my brother.

Sincerely,

Dolores B. Avery

# The Blanco County News

BLANCO, TEXAS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 1989

VOL. 87, NO. 42

35 CENTS

## Vineyard Founder Dies in Fermentation Accident

*Walter Brannock, 61, found in tank at Cypress Hollow after harvest party; sheriff cites carbon dioxide*

BY CAROLYN MABRY, STAFF WRITER

**W**alter "Walt" Brannock, founder of Cypress Hollow Vineyard on Ranch Road 165 and one of the first men to plant wine grapes commercially in Blanco County, was found dead early Saturday morning in one of his own fermentation tanks, hours after the winery's annual harvest party.

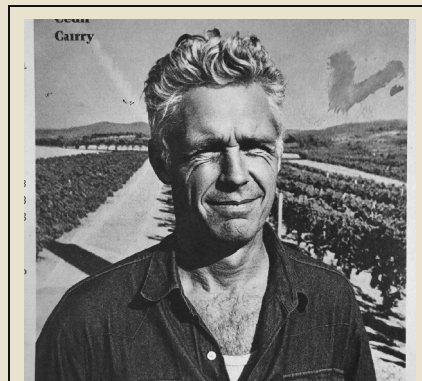
Blanco County Sheriff L.D. Purcell said Tuesday that the death has been ruled accidental. "Fermenting grapes give off carbon dioxide, and it pools in an open tank like water in a bathtub," Purcell said. "Mr. Brannock was performing a routine task alone late at night. He was overcome and fell. It is a known hazard in this business and it is a tragedy."

Brannock was discovered shortly after 6:30 a.m. Saturday by his son, Calvin Brannock, 34, the winery's assistant winemaker. Blanco Volunteer Fire Department responded. The Travis County Medical Examiner, which handles autopsies for Blanco County under contract, listed the preliminary cause as asphyxia.

A similar death occurred at a winery near Gruene in 1984.

Brannock was born in Blanco in 1928 and graduated from Blanco High School in 1946. He served six years in the United States Navy as a radioman, including two tours during the Korean conflict, and returned to run the family feed store on Main Street until selling it in 1975. He released Cypress Hollow's first vintage in 1979, at a time when, as he liked to say, "you could count the wineries in this state

on your fingers and have some left over for the bottle."



Walter Brannock at the winery's first crush, 1979. (File photo)

The winery's 1985 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon won a gold medal at the Lone Star State Wine Competition in 1988 and was served at the Governor's Mansion this spring.

Friends described Brannock as stubborn, generous and devoted to the vineyard. "He'd stand out there in Block C at midnight talking to the vines," said Bettye Teague, a neighbor. "Nobody worked harder."

Brannock is survived by his wife of 33 years, Ruth Cavanaugh Brannock; his son, Calvin, of Blanco; and his sister, Dolores Brannock Avery, of San Antonio. Services were held Wednesday at First Baptist Church of Blanco with burial in Blanco Cemetery.

Ruth Brannock said the winery would complete this year's harvest. "Walt would

come back and haunt us if we didn't," she said. Longtime vineyard manager Marisol Reyes is overseeing the remaining fermentations.

Purcell said the case remains open only pending routine toxicology results, "which we expect will confirm what we already know."

### WEEKEND WEATHER RECAP

A line of thunderstorms crossed the county Friday night ahead of a weak cold front. Rain at the Blanco gauge fell between **10:15 and 10:50 p.m.**, totaling **0.4 inches**, with gusts to 38 mph. Skies cleared by midnight. Saturday's high was 74, low 51. Outlook: dry through the weekend, chance of showers Tuesday.

### PANTHERS FALL TO JOHNSON CITY

The Blanco Panthers dropped a 21-14 district contest Friday at Johnson City, despite two touchdowns from senior back Trey Ochoa. Blanco (4-3, 1-2) hosts Comfort next Friday at 7:30 p.m.

### COMMISSIONERS TABLE ROAD BOND

Blanco County Commissioners Court voted 3-2 Monday to table a proposed \$1.2 million road bond until January, citing uncertainty over state matching funds. Precinct 2 Commissioner Dale Ferris said RR 165 resurfacing "cannot wait another year."

ESTATE BOTTLED

**CYPRESS  
HOLLOW**

VINEYARD

1985

*Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon*

TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Blanco, Texas



**CYPRESS HOLLOW VINEYARD**

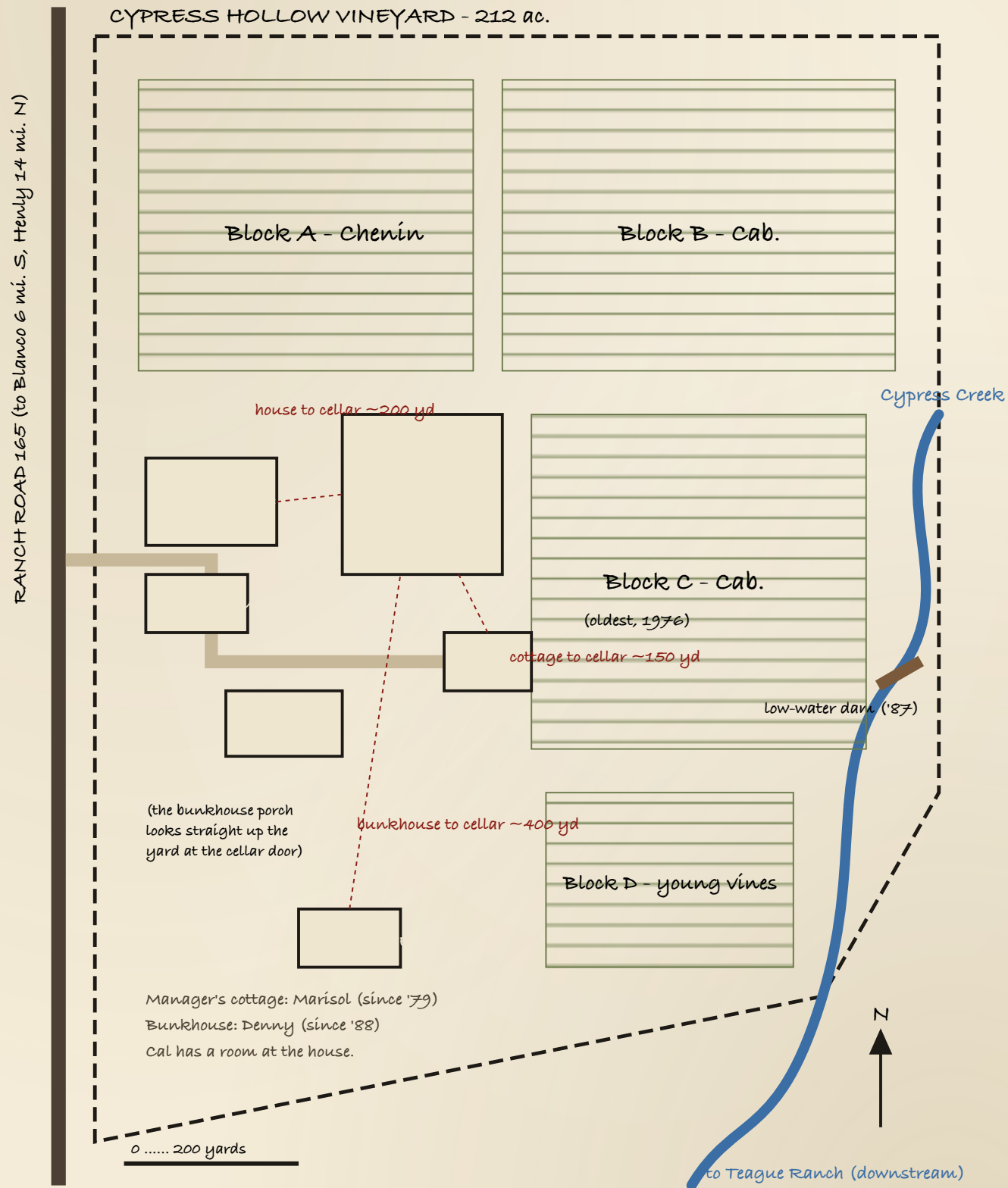
From vines planted on the Brannock homeplace in 1976. This wine is drawn entirely from **Block C**, our oldest Cabernet, picked by hand on **September 21, 1985 at 24.6° Brix**, fermented in open-top Tank 4 with twice-daily punch-downs, and aged twenty-two months in French oak.

Walt Brannock does the last punch-down of every night himself. He says the wine can tell.

ALCOHOL 13.4% BY VOLUME · 750 ML · CONTAINS SULFITES  
Produced and bottled by Cypress Hollow Vineyard, 4410 Ranch Road 165,  
Blanco, Texas 78606 · (512) 833-2202

GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.

Traced from Walt's 1982 drawing. Distances are his, paced off. - D.



# DETECTIVE'S WORKSHEET

One row per person. Fill in as you go. A suspect is not cleared until you can write down *which document* clears them.

| PERSON                                  | MOTIVE | MEANS / ACCESS | WHERE 11:00 - MIDNIGHT | CLEARED BY (DOCUMENT) |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ruth Brannock<br>wife                   |        |                |                        |                       |
| Cal Brannock<br>son                     |        |                |                        |                       |
| Marisol Reyes<br>vineyard manager       |        |                |                        |                       |
| Hollis Teague<br>neighbor               |        |                |                        |                       |
| Dr. Evelyn Sato<br>consulting enologist |        |                |                        |                       |
| Denny Pruitt<br>cellar hand             |        |                |                        |                       |

## TIMELINE, FRIDAY OCTOBER 13

| 9 PM | 10 PM | 11 PM | MIDNIGHT | 1 AM |
|------|-------|-------|----------|------|
|      |       |       |          |      |

## COMBINATIONS

| ENVELOPE 1 | ENVELOPE 2 | ENVELOPE 3 | ENVELOPE 4 | SOLUTION |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
|            |            |            |            |          |

Questions you must be able to answer before you accuse: **How** did he die (not the sheriff's version, yours)? **When**, to the quarter hour? **Who** could have, and who could not, and why not?

**DOLORES B. AVERY**

*Retired, Horace Mann Middle School*

1904 W. Kings Hwy · San Antonio · (512) 736-0418

DOLORES B. AVERY  
1904 W. KINGS HWY  
SAN ANTONIO TX 78201

No. 2231  
88-1104/1140

Oct. 23, 1989

PAY TO THE

ORDER OF Detectives (retainer) \$ 1,500.00

One thousand five hundred and no/100 DOLLARS

FROST NATIONAL BANK · SAN ANTONIO  
MEMO Walt

Dolores B. Avery