

**L**ong before the days of Bargetto, Roudon-Smith or even Hallcrest, a charming history book devoted to Santa Cruz County contained these prophetic words: "The wine-growing interest in this county is only in its incipency. The day is not far distant when the stream of purple grape juice flowing from our hill sides will only be equaled or surpassed by the perpetual mountain streams dashing down the rocky canyons. Of the kind of wine now made the market is well supplied, and it will only be when the population of the State is much larger, or when we can successfully compete with France and Italy in quality of wine, that any much greater production of the beverage will be stimulated." That paragraph comes from Wallace W. Elliott's *History of Santa Cruz County*. The date of publication: 1879.

More surprisingly, a full six out of 50 pages of E.S. Harrison's 1890 brochure (which shamelessly extols the virtues of Santa Cruz County in rhetoric that can only be described as purple) are devoted to "Viticulture." In it the world-class quality of wines from Branciforte's Santa Cruz Mountain Winery, the Ben Lomond Wine Company and the Jarvis' Vine Hill vineyards are described in detail. Imagine the Gallic eyebrows arched first in skepticism, then in delight at the 1889 Paris Exposition when judges first tasted, then awarded honorable mention to a Grey Riesling (vintage 1886) submitted by the New World hamlet of Ben Lomond.

While the California wine boom of the 1970s has firmly secured Santa Cruz' place on the oenological map, our stake in winemaking has its roots in the previous century... and beyond. The first grapes planted for winemaking in our county were the Mission grapes planted by the Franciscan missionaries on the flood plain of the San Lorenzo River in what is now Harvey West Park. While nothing to give Old World vintners a restless night's sleep, those grapes fulfilled their religious function of providing wine for the padres' sacrament. It wasn't until the early 1860s, when the Jarvis Brothers bought and cultivated land above Scotts Valley — Vine Hill — that commercial winemaking in Santa Cruz County began.

**F**or the next three decades the hills came alive with the perfume of Cabernet Sauvignon, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Petite Pinot, Malvasia, Zinfandel, Muscadelle due Bordelaise, Chauche Noir and Grey Riesling grapes, planted, cultivated, pressed and fermented by the influx of immigrants from Scotland, Italy and Germany who settled in the Santa Cruz Mountains. From Northern Italy's Piedmonte district came family vintners who sowed the seeds of the Italian Garden vineyards, which flourished on acreage at Ocean Street Extension. In 1887 a consortium headed by John Jarvis,

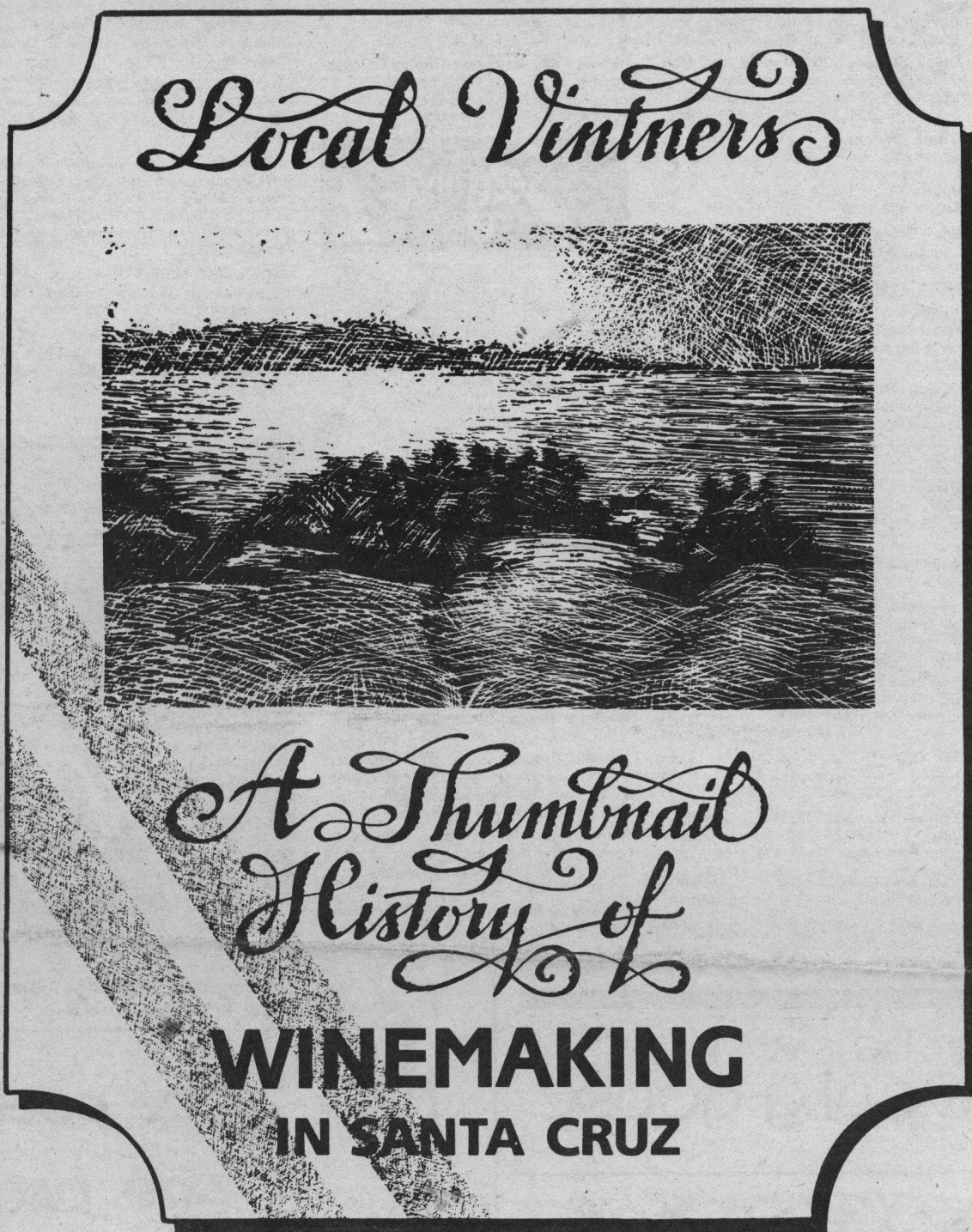


ILLUSTRATION: MOTT JORDAN

MARLOW DE VILLE

Henry Mel and German florist Emil Meyer founded the Santa Cruz Mountain Wine Company, whose fabulous underground storage tunnels (still slumbering beneath Branciforte Creek's Linden Street) were filled to 200,000 gallon capacity in 1890.

Through a series of unfortuitous incidents — the deaths of key figures in the local winemaking industry combined with national depression and Prohibition — the official chapter of commercial winemaking in our region closed until the 1930s. Shortly after Prohibition, Phillip and John Bargetto set up their winery in Soquel, producing varietal grape and outstanding fruit wines over a 50 year period. That tradition is carried on by the Bargetto family today.

Following 1934 research by University of California at Davis professors, which found the Santa Cruz Mountains an ideal climatic zone for viticulture, Martin Ray and Chaffee Hall pioneered the renaissance

of winemaking in our mountains. They were followed quickly by D.A. Beauregard. In a textbook example of recycling, these vineyards would

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all provide the fruits of contemporary wines, notably the use of Hall's fabled Hallcrest Cabernet Sauvignon grapes in the vintages now produced by Felton-Empire

Vineyards. Dan Wheeler (founder of Ridge Winery) and David Bruce both utilized and increased Jarvis' original Vine Hill plantings, and their work was in turn developed by Ken Burnap of Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard.

In the '70s new wineries, powered by new blood and evermore creative vision, sprang up, on and around those same hillsides that had bloomed with complex bouquets for the earliest winemakers.

During the past 15 years the ranks of Santa Cruz wineries have swelled to more than 20 thriving establishments that turn out, for the most part, small vintages of handmade wines with an emphasis on Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs and Cabernet Sauvignons. Heavily honored at the major competitions at Orange County, San Diego and Riverside, Santa Cruz wines have been served at the White House and selected to represent the *creme de la creme* of California winemaking all over the world.

This month the San Diego National Wine Competition awarded seven medals to five Santa Cruz wineries (chosen from a field of 1701 entries). Honored were Cabernet Sauvignons and Pinot Noirs from David Bruce, Frick, Bargetto and Roudon-Smith, with a Gold Medal and Sweepstakes award going to Devlin's Wine Cellars' 1981 Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon.

In 1972 Amdahl engineers Robert Roudon and Jim Smith kissed Silicon Valley goodbye and began experimenting with a few acres of Chardonnay grapes planted on the slopes above Branciforte Creek. The rest is history. The historic site, also at the head of Branciforte Creek, was originally planted by Jarvis in the late 19th century, then later planted by David Bruce, and purchased by Ken Burnap in 1974 for the fine red wines he produces at his Santa Cruz Mountain Winery.

When microbiologist Leo McCloskey of Ridge Vineyards joined Jim Beauregard and John Pollard on the site of Chaffee Hall's fabled Hallcrest Vineyard, Felton-Empire Winery began, immediately establishing itself as a leading producer of Chardonnays and Germanic-style Rieslings.

In 1976 Dexter and Valerie Ahlgren celebrated the first crush at their winery above Boulder Creek. And in 1977 Bill and Judy Frick began creating their handmade Pinot Noirs, Chuck Devlin brought his oenological training into commercial play, and the Vine Hill operation of Dick Smothers began making fine Gewurztraminers.

Even more recently, microbiologists Keith Hohlfeldt brought experience from his Paul Masson and Eagle Rock apprenticeships to David Bruce Winery. UCSC Chancellor Emeritus Dean McHenry bonded his Ben Lomond mountaintop McHenry Winery in 1980. That same year, young maverick winemaker Randall Graham started his Bonny Doon Vineyard, an establishment devoted to experimental vintages such as his bluish Vin Gris de Pinot Noir 1984, as well as LA County Fair gold medal-winning Clarets and Vin Rouges.

With its unique coastal location and the desirable chemistry of its steep mountain slopes, the Santa Cruz Mountains provide the perfect catalyst for the vintner's art. And there's no end in sight.

Surely Wallace Elliott, who in 1879 foretold the "stream of purple grape juice flowing from our hillsides," would be pleased.

**To increase your knowledge of Santa Cruz Wineries and their wines, we suggest that you carefully digest Michael R. Holland's excellent anthology, *Late Harvest: Wine History of the Santa Cruz Mountains* (available at Book Cafe and other fine bookstores), and then begin pilgrimages to our fine local wineries. Taste will tell.**