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The Rossi twins, about 1906. Robert D. Rossi, left, Edmund Rossi, right. Photograph courtesy Edmund A. Rossi.



Group at Asti, California, about 1894. Standing, left to right: Kucich, foreman of the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony cooperation department; Louis Profumo, manager of the organization's New York office; and Dr. G. Ollino, one of the founding members. Seated: Robert D. Rossi, Ettore Patrizi, editor of the newspaper, L'Italia; Edmund A. Rossi, and Andrea Sbarboro. Photograph courtesy Edmund A. Rossi.



Andrea Sbarboro, about 1915. Photograph courtesy California State Library.



Pietro C. Rossi. Photograph courtesy Wine Institute.

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EDMUND A. ROSSI
Family of vintners

A Mass for Winemaker E. A. Rossi

A Mass of Christian Burial for Edmund A. Rossi, a member of a pioneer California wine-making family, will be offered at 10 a.m. tomorrow (Friday) at St. Edwards Church, 3520 California street.

Mr. Rossi, the son of the late Pietro Carlo Rossi, one of the founders of the Italian Swiss Colony Winery, died Tuesday at a Pacifica convalescent hospital. He was 86.

At the time of his death he was the oldest alumnus of the University of San Francisco.

Mr. Rossi was president of the Italian Swiss Colony Winery for 27 years.

He was one of the founding members of the Wine Institute in 1921 and served as a director there until 1947.

He also played a vital role in the inception of the California Wine Advisory Board and served as its manager for 12 years, until 1961.

When he retired, he was honored for his "outstanding and unselfish personal contribution to the advancement of the wine industry" by the American Society of Enologists.

Mr. Rossi, a man of wide cultural interests and was a sustaining member of the San Francisco Opera Association, the Leonardo da Vinci Society and the San Francisco Wine and Food Society, of which he was a charter member.

He was also a pioneer member of the Cenacolo Club.

Mr. Rossi's wife, the former Beatrice Brandt, died in 1955.

He is survived by a son, Edmund Jr. of Healdsburg; a daughter, Yvonne Dolan of Oakland; a brother, the Rev. P. Carlo Rossi, S.J.; five sisters, Sister Aimee Rossi and Sister Olga Rossi, both of the Sacred Heart Order, Beatrice Torrens, Albina Wall and Eleanore O'Donnell and by six grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

The Rosary will be recited at 8 o'clock tonight (Thursday) at the Memorial Chapels of Carew & English, Masonic at Golden Gate avenue.

The family prefers memorial contributions to the San Francisco College for Women or to the University of San Francisco.

Edmund Rossi, ex-chief Italian Swiss Colony

Edmund A. Rossi, president of Italian Swiss Colony Winery for 27 years, died Tuesday. He was 86.

The son of the late Pietro Carlo Rossi, one of the founders of Italian Swiss Colony, Mr. Rossi followed in the family tradition.

He was a founder and a director of the Wine Institute, the trade association of California wine growers. He was also instrumental in creating the California Wine Advisory Board, where he served as manager for 12 years.

During and after his long career, Mr. Rossi received numerous awards including: a merit award from the American Society of Enologists, a professional winemakers organization; the Christ the King award from St. Ignatius College Preparatory, and accolades from the Cenacolo Club for his "outstanding character as a family man, citizen and businessman."

Until his death Mr. Rossi was the oldest alumnus of the University of San Francisco.

Mr. Rossi outlived both his wife Beatrice Brandt Rossi, who died in 1955, and his twin brother, Robert D. Rossi, who was managing executive of Italian Swiss Colony Winery.

He is survived by his son, Edmund A. Rossi Jr., a daughter, Yvonne Dolan, one brother, Rev. P. Carlo Rossi, S.J.; five sisters: Torrens, Albina Wall, Eleanore

O'Donnell, Sister Aimee Rossi and Sister Olga Rossi; grandchildren Christine, Therese and Brandt Rossi and Paul, Anne and Peter Dolan and great-grandchildren Jason and Edmund Dolan.

The Rosary will be recited today at 8 p.m. at the Memorial Chapels of Carew & English, Masonic at Golden Gate Ave. A Mass of Christian Burial will be offered at 10 a.m. tomorrow at St. Edward's Church.



Edmund A. Rossi

Photograph courtesy
The Wine Institute,
circa 1960.

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Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user. The legal agreement with Edmund A. Rossi requires that he be notified of the request and allowed thirty days in which to respond.

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(For Wines and Grapes see page 103)

PREFACE

The California Wine Industry Oral History Series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated in 1969, the year noted as the bicentenary of continuous wine making in this state. It was undertaken through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, and under the direction of University of California faculty and staff advisors at Berkeley and Davis.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and wine making that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some wine making did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years (as yet treated analytically in few writings) will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of in many cases unique materials readily available for the purpose.

Three master indices for the entire series are being prepared, one of general subjects, one of wines, one of grapes by variety. These will be available to researchers at the conclusion of the series in the Regional Oral History Office and at the library of the Wine Institute.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the Director of The Bancroft Library.

Ruth Teiser
Project Director
California Wine Industry
Oral History Series

1 March 1971
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

Edmund A. Rossi was associated with four distinct phases of the California wine industry: the pre-prohibition winery at Asti, Prohibition operations there, wine distribution after Repeal, and Management of the Wine Advisory Board. In all of these activities he exercised considerable influence.

Before Prohibition Edmund Rossi and his twin brother, Robert, were associated in managing Italian-Swiss Colony at Asti. Mr. Rossi remembers and recounts many of the details of their operations. During Prohibition the extensive vineyards of Italian-Swiss Colony were maintained. Grapes were shipped to markets all over the United States. Later grape concentrate was also produced.

Following Repeal Italian-Swiss Colony had very wide (perhaps the largest) distribution of its brands throughout the country. In 1942 the winery and vineyards were sold to National Distillers. The price is not given.

After a few years of retirement Mr. Rossi became the General Manager of the Wine Advisory Board. He remained in this position for twelve years and has been permanently retired since 1960.

He gives many details of the California grape industry during Prohibition and also of the early organization of the Grape Growers League of California, of which the present Wine Institute is the descendent.

Mr. Rossi at eighty-two is still active in the San Francisco Wine and Food Society, of which he is now the senior member. His friends know him as a good judge of wine, a gourmet, soft spoken and with a sense of humor. Those who worked with him will remember his unfailing courtesy and politeness.

Maynard A. Amerine
Professor, Viticulture and Enology

16 March 1971
101 Wickson Hall
University of California at Davis

ERRATA - Rossi

<u>Page and line</u>	<u>Error and correction</u>
iii, para 4	not 'a few years' but "a few months" not 'General Manager' but "Manager"
5, l. 9 from bottom	not 'that's his wife' but "that's his mother, the wife of Andrea Sbarboro"
15, l. 15 from bottom	not '1905' but "1900 or 1901"
17, l. 5 and 6 from bottom	'Malesano' should be "Malesani"
69, l. 13 from bottom	not 'the son of one of my sisters' but "some of my sisters"

INTERVIEW HISTORY

The letter asking Edmund A. Rossi to record his recollections for this series was sent to him on March 26, 1969, the Regional Oral History Office being unaware that Mr. Rossi was then in the hospital following a serious automobile accident injury. The interview was delayed until he had recovered, some weeks after he had returned to his home. It was held in four sessions on June 4, June 11, June 20, and July 9, 1969, in the home in Pacific Heights, San Francisco, which Mr. Rossi and his family had built and occupied since the 1920's.

Mr. Rossi spoke slowly and thoughtfully for the most part but occasionally, when discussing facts or events about which he held definite opinions, fast and assertively. Both firmness and tact were evident. His interest in the wine industry and the pleasure he took in recalling the past were manifest.

In the initial transcript of the tape, the interviewer deleted a few repetitions and some questions that failed to elicit recollections. The transcript was then taken to Mr. Rossi on December 3, 1970, and the editing explained to him. Later he read it over and made some notes. On January 13, 1971, in consultation with the interviewer, he made a few corrections and additions, all with meticulous regard for correct detail.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer

22 March 1971
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

(Interview #1 - June 4, 1969)

THE FOUNDERS OF THE ITALIAN SWISS AGRICULTURAL
COLONY

Teiser: Do you know this pamphlet, The Story of Italian Swiss Colony? It was published in 1967, I presume by United Vintners.*

Rossi: United Vintners.

Teiser: If it is accurate we can rely upon it for some facts.

Rossi: I think it's pretty accurate. [Looking at pamphlet] Now, for example, you can't question the time that Andrea Sbarboro came here to California. You can't question that he got into the grocery business. And that he established a sort of savings and loan society.

Teiser: Yes. What sort of a man was he? What was he like personally when you knew him?

Rossi: Well, he was not a technical man. He was more of a front man, you might say. What I mean, he liked to be before the public. He enjoyed making talks, speeches. He wasn't a technical man, from the wine industry standpoint. That depended strictly on my father.

Teiser: Did Mr. Sbarboro himself ask your father** to come in?

*See Appendix.

**Pietro C. Rossi

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: How did they know each other?

Rossi: Well, it might have been through this Dr. G.* Ollino. Dr. G. Ollino was here in San Francisco and was close to my father.

Teiser: Who was he?

Rossi: He was a physician, bachelor physician, and came from Italy. And he made up his mind that after a certain number of years he would retire back to Italy, even though his health was in good condition, which he did. And the fact of the matter is that he had retired back to Italy before his inactive days, and both my father and mother and the rest of us saw him in Italy after we went back there. He acted as a sort of chaperon, guide, you know, through the towns of Italy during both the trip my father took with my eldest sister and another one my brother and I took with him and my mother and sisters after we got through the university in 1909, before we got into business.

Teiser: I see. And Dr. Ollino was back in Italy then?

Rossi: Back in Italy.

Teiser: I read somewhere that he had sent cuttings to Italian Swiss Colony.

Rossi: Yes, that's right. Of course I don't know now... because they say about cuttings from Spain and all of that. Well, that might have been exaggerated a little bit from the different countries. But there's no question about it, he did send cuttings from Italy. As far as having gone to other countries, I wouldn't vouch for that. But you can say cuttings from Europe, without being specific about the nations or the countries from which they came.

Teiser: And he was a friend of Andrea Sbarboro's?

Rossi: Well, he was more a friend of my father's. He was from that part of the country that my father came

*Giuseppe Ollino

Rossi: from. Piedmont.

Teiser: Mr. Sbarboro remained...what?

Rossi: Secretary.

Teiser: Secretary of the company all through?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: This you would know as a matter of family tradition, I suppose: Was it actually Mr. Sbarboro whose idea Italian Swiss Colony was?

Rossi: Yes. Agricultural Colony.*

Teiser: But, as I understand it, it didn't quite work out.

Rossi: It didn't work out as he originally intended it.

Teiser: How did it change?

Rossi: Well, you can say this, that they were going to sell shares on a small installment basis, but these people, immigrants, didn't have even those few dollars to put aside out of their savings. And so, anyhow, it was a matter of years and years before they could expect to get any return out of it. And they couldn't be expected to live on future prospects, because they were poor; they were immigrants.

Teiser: Was the idea that they should go up there and work in the vineyards?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Did they?

Rossi: Oh, they did.

Teiser: They actually went from San Francisco up there?

Rossi: Because then they became employees, nothing more. Nor less.

Teiser: So the ownership of the company....

*The original name was Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony.

Rossi: Was stockholders.

Teiser: Did some of the officers own stock?

Rossi: Oh yes. Andrea Sbarboro. My father. My father was one of the principal stockholders eventually.

Teiser: Was Mr. Sbarboro a good manager, good businessman that is?

Rossi: Well.... I think that he depended on others. He had a son, who is still alive, who was very smart and shrewd. And he really ran the bank,* his son did, Alfred. He's 93 years old now.

Teiser: Was Mr. Sbarboro active in the actual management of the Italian Swiss Colony?

Rossi: No. When it was a question of making a talk, he'd be there. He enjoyed entertaining. And making talks, especially when it came to the time [before] Prohibition. He led the fight against Prohibition. I was trying to locate here the number of shares that these different people that you have on your list** owned.

Teiser: Dr. Ollino became a shareholder, too, then?

Rossi: Oh, yes. He was a vice-president.

Teiser: Mr. Sbarboro, as I understand it, left the industry entirely at the time of Prohibition?

Rossi: Yes. Well, no. After my father.... You see, in 1911, my father was killed by a horse on the ranch, and he was one of the principal stockholders. Now my twin brother*** and I [had been] with him two years, learning the wine business from him.

*Italian-American Bank.

**Andrea Sbarboro, Mark J. Fontana, Dr. Giuseppe Ollino, Henry Casanova, Dr. Paolo de Vecchi, Stephan Campodonico, M. Perata and L. Vasconi. These were so-called founders of Italian Swiss Colony. For others, see p. 5.

***Robert D. Rossi.

Teiser: You'd been there since 1909?

Rossi: 1909, yes. And when my father died, he had practically all his eggs in one basket, which was not good for his family of ten children and for a widow. So we had the opportunity of selling out. Now at that time already half of the ownership of the Italian Swiss Colony was in the hands of the California Wine Association, since 1901. In 1901, there was formed an Italian Swiss Colony holding company, which consisted of 50 per cent of the stockholders of the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony and 50 per cent California Wine Association holdings. Now when my father died, two or three years afterwards, we wanted to put ourselves--the family particularly--in a better financial situation, where we weren't depending on one source of income, and we sold out--the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony stockholders sold out the other 50 per cent to the California Wine Association. And my brother and I went to work for the California Wine Association.

Teiser: Had most of the stock of the original shareholders by then come into your possession?

Rossi: Oh, no, no. They still held it as far as I know. Mr. Sbarboro was the second largest individual stockholder. My father was the largest. Dr. Ollino held some shares. Vasconi was not a stockholder. He was the superintendent at Asti. Somewhere I came across an item that said the number of shares that were originally issued to the founders: [Reading] "Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony was incorporated March 10, 1881, with 300,000 shares authorized. The incorporators held 858 at par value \$60, giving original capitalization of \$51,480. The following are the directors and shareholders: Henry Casanova, 50 shares; Mark J. Fontana, 50 shares; Nellie T. Fontana"--guess that was his wife--"10 shares; M. Perata, 10 shares; A.E. Sbarboro, 50 shares; Mrs. Romilda Sbarboro"--that's his wife--"10 shares; G.B. Cevasco, 25 shares; B. Frapolli, 50 shares; A. Daneri, 20 shares; V. Ravenna, 5 shares. The balance of the shares were to be sold to employees through monthly wage deductions. Few employees desired this, however, thus ending the founders' wish that the organization would be a cooperative venture."

Teiser: I see. Could you then give your personal recollections of each of these shareholders as you remember them?

Teiser: What sort of people they were?

Rossi: Oh yes.

Teiser: What did Mr. Sbarboro look like?

Rossi: He was bald. And rather heavy-set. Very pleasant personality, affable. And smooth talker, very polished. My father was purely the business man. He never made talks.

Teiser: Your father was certainly a handsome man.

Rossi: Yes, he was. But he had the technical knowledge, my father did, and being a druggist and a chemist, he was well-qualified to take on the responsibilities of wine making.

Teiser: There is still a Rossi drugstore in San Francisco.

Rossi: Well, we have no connection whatsoever. You see that was not my father's. It was my uncle.

Teiser: Oh, what was his name?

Rossi: D.P. Rossi.* There was the difference between night and day between my father and his brother. They both came out of the same town in Italy. But my father was a family man and his brother was a bachelor, an artist sort of. He liked to play the harp. And he had an apartment over his drugstore two blocks away from my father's drugstore.

Teiser: So there were two brothers who had two different drugstores; I see.

Rossi: They didn't get along. They had nothing in common. They simply had nothing in common. When my uncle got sick and was like to die, my mother was good enough to take him into our house, and he died in our house. That was after my father passed away. But he was, as I say, a bachelor with his cronies. Music, art, things like that.

Teiser: And he had no interest in Italian Swiss?

*Domenico P. Rossi.

Rossi: No. So when my uncle died, his partner, or one of his clerks and Dr. Sartori,* asked our family if we had any objection to their incorporating themselves as the Rossi Drug Company, which we didn't. So that's the present owners of the Rossi Drug Company. But we have never had any interest in that one there. As I say, strictly on the part of my uncle, not on my father's side.

My father got out of the drug business completely when he had to take over complete charge of Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony. Well, now here you can see how in the beginning here they issued 858 shares. Eventually of course there were more than that.

Teiser: Who was Mark J. Fontana?

Rossi: He was the California Fruit Cannery's Association.

Teiser: How did he happen to be interested in Italian Swiss Colony?

Rossi: He was in the Italian colony.

Teiser: Was he active in Italian Swiss?

Rossi: Oh yes, he was the first president.

Teiser: Do you remember him?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: What was he like?

Rossi: He was a very small man. Handing out cigars all the time. Nail in your coffin if you smoke cigarettes. Every cigarette was a nail in your coffin.

Teiser: But not a cigar?

Rossi: Not a cigar, no. He used to smoke one cigar after the other. Now, I have very fond recollections of Mr. Fontana because, you see, after my father died, he became president again of the Italian Swiss Colony for a few years.

*Henry J. Sartori, who married a daughter of Andrea Sbarboro.

Rossi: And I at that time was still living up at Asti. I was ten years a resident of Asti, from 1909 to 1919. I was in charge of the winery. And after my father died in 1911 and Mr. Fontana became president, he used to come up and occasionally visit me for a weekend, which was fine with me because everything I did was fine. He never criticized me. I was on my own. And so I was glad of his visits because he always went away happy. And so then afterwards in 1914 when Italian Swiss Colony was completely taken over by California Wine Association, my brother and I went to work for the California Wine Association under the aegis still of Italian Swiss Colony, but it was owned and directed by Mr. [A.R.] Morrow, general manager.

Teiser: I want later to ask you a good deal about that period.

Was Mr. Henry Casanova very active in the....

Rossi: No.

Teiser: He was a shareholder but not a participant?

Rossi: That's right.

Teiser: Who was Dr. Paolo de Vecchi?

Rossi: Dr. de Vecchi* was a surgeon in San Francisco, who then retired.... Who went to live in New York, and he died in New York. His family lived in New York.

Teiser: Was he active?

Rossi: No, just a shareholder.

Teiser: Did he have a son who later was interested in Italian Swiss Colony?

Rossi: No. He had two sons, but they weren't interested. Well, he had two sons and one daughter, Marguerita. She never married. We used to know them very well. Of course they had a summer home up there [at Asti], and that was near our summer home, right down the road from us.

*Although his name appears frequently as "De Vecchi," according to Edmund A Rossi, it was actually spelled with a small d, "de Vecchi."

Teiser: Mr. S. Campadonico?

Rossi: I don't remember him.

Teiser: And Mr. Perata?

Rossi: Mr. Perata was another small.... Well, these were names that were well known in the Italian colony. Frapolli was a well-known name in the Italian colony.

Teiser: Frappoli was a wine merchant, was he?

Rossi: I think so.

Teiser: It seems to me that the Bancroft Library has some letters which I gave them not many years ago, Mr. Frapolli's correspondence with other members of the wine industry, ordering wine and so forth. In Italian. He was in San Francisco, wasn't he?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: He's the same one, then.*

Rossi: Cevasco** was a salesman.

Teiser: Did he remain active in the company?

Rossi: No. Well, yes. He retired to New York and he was a salesman in New York. After my father opened a New York office, he sent him back there. After they had established headquarters in New York. So he worked as salesman in New York. He was a good salesman too. I knew him well.

*Langley's San Francisco Directory of 1881 lists:
"Frapolli, B. & Co. (Baptista Frapolli), native
wines, 710 Samsome."

**Giovanni B. Cevasco.



The Rossi twins, about 1906. Robert D. Rossi, left, Edmund Rossi, right. Photograph courtesy Edmund A. Rossi.



Group at Asti, California, about 1894. Standing, left to right: Kucich, foreman of the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony cooperation department; Louis Profumo, manager of the organization's New York office; and Dr. G. Ollino, one of the founding members. Seated: Robert D. Rossi, Ettore Patrizi, editor of the newspaper, L'Italia; Edmund A. Rossi; and Andrea Sbarboro. Photograph courtesy Edmund A. Rossi.



Andrea Sbarboro, about 1915. Photograph courtesy California State Library.



Pietro C. Rossi. Photograph courtesy Wine Institute.

THE ROSSI AND CAIRE FAMILIES

Teiser: Were there any others of the founders that you recall?

Rossi: Well, there was also someone not mentioned here, Adrian Merle, who was a relation of Justinian Caire. He was an original stockholder and a director of the agricultural colony. His son, A.J. Merle, a cousin of my mother's, later became a heavy stockholder in our reorganized company, Asti Grape Products Company. He bought out Mr. Prati's* mother-in-law's interest. He was a director of Asti Grape Products Company.

Teiser: Well, that I think brings us to your father. A good deal has been written about him, but I know that there's a great deal of family recollection that you have, and personal recollection, of him. You mentioned that he was born in...

Rossi: Piedmont. He was a graduate of the University of Torino. In pharmacy. He was one of the youngest graduates in the university.

Teiser: Had his family been in the wine business?

Rossi: I don't know. There's some reference to that, but I question it.

Teiser: His family must have been fairly well-to-do to send him to the university.

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Do you know anything about his parents?

Rossi: Well, we used to have pictures around, but he came to this country because he didn't get along--you see, his mother died, and his father remarried, and he didn't get along with his stepmother, so the two boys left Italy to come to America. And they had an uncle here.

Teiser: What was his name?

Rossi: Zabaldano.** Maybe that might have been an inducement

*Enrico Prati

**Alexander Zabaldano

Rossi: for them to come here. He was in the drugstore business too, Zabaldano, their uncle.

Teiser: In San Francisco?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: So they came directly here?

Rossi: They did. Came directly from Italy to San Francisco. Well, that was something in those days, you know, because most of the immigrants got stranded in New York, and it took the hardier individuals to come all the way to the Pacific Coast. More energetic, and those maybe who had more means, education, and so forth.

Teiser: Do you know about what year it was?

Rossi: 1875.

Teiser: Then he met your mother here?

Rossi: Yes. My mother was the daughter of Justinian Caire. She was born in San Francisco.

Teiser: Very interesting family on both sides, then, that you have. Do you know what year she was born?

Rossi: Well, now let's see, she was around 55 when she died, and she died in 1917.

Teiser: What was her name?

Rossi: Amélie. With the accent. Amélie Caire. Her mother was a Genovese, Italian. He came in 1850, my grandfather, around the Horn, with a cargo of merchandise on a sailing vessel, cargo of merchandise for the miners. I think it took him six months to get here from France. Around the Horn.

He started himself in business in San Francisco, then the year afterward he went back to Italy to get married. And when he came back, they came across the Isthmus of Panama. Or was it that other route down there, Central America? Tehauntepec. That took a lot of energy on my grandmother's part to make that trip. She was a hardy individual.

Teiser: Do you remember Justinian Caire?

- Rossi: Oh, yes. They used to live in Oakland, you see. And my brother and I used to spend weekends there at my grandmother's and grandfather's.
- Teiser: What sort of a man was he?
- Rossi: He was a rather stern fellow. And he was.... He met with an accident too, on Santa Cruz Island. He was thrown from a horse, and he became an invalid, became crippled. So that he died in his home from a stroke. At Eighth and Harrison. They lived at Eighth and Harrison, well, near where Chinatown was, the Chinese section of Oakland. They had almost a square block of land there. Half a square block there. They had a big garden, front garden. I remember that very well, as I say, because I used to spend the weekends there when I was a schoolboy.
- Teiser: When your father came to San Francisco, he must have brought a little capital with him?
- Rossi: Capital, yes. Because he became a partner with a man by the name of Steylaars* in the drug business. He had a partner in the drug business at the corner of Columbus Avenue, which was called Montgomery Avenue, and Dupont, now Grant Avenue. Right where the topless joints are now. It was where Dupont turns into Columbus Avenue. And he was there all these years. I remember going to that drugstore very, very well.
- Teiser: Was it on the triangular lot?
- Rossi: On the east side of the street.
- Teiser: Did he continue operating the store after he went to Italian Swiss Colony?
- Rossi: Yes, until it became too much. Then he had to give up his drug business and devote himself completely to the wine business.
- Teiser: I'm amazed that he was able to keep them both going at all.
- Rossi: Well, he used to spend all his weekends up at the vineyards.

*Charles L. Steylaars.

Teiser: That was 1888 that he took charge of the winery. Was that the year you were born?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: How many children were there in your family?

Rossi: Well, my mother and father had 14, but never more than ten because four of them died as young children. In those days, you know, they used to get children's diseases and they didn't last. So four of them died young.

Teiser: Of those who survived, who was the oldest?

Rossi: Mrs. Gherini. Mrs. Ambrose Gherini. She has four children surviving her. Two attorneys and two daughters.

Teiser: What was her first name?

Rossi: Maria. Maria Gherini.

Teiser: And who was second of those who survived?

Rossi: My brother and I.

Teiser: Oh, the twins. You and Robert.

Rossi: Yes. And then my sister Esther. She never married. She sort of took care of the family after my mother died. She only died about a year or two ago. And then two nuns, Sacred Heart nuns. M. Aimée Rossi and A. Olga Rossi. They hold Ph.D.'s, one in education and one in languages. Aimée has a Ph.D. from Stanford, was Dean of Studies at San Diego College for Women. Olga was in charge of public relations at San Francisco College for Women at Lone Mountain. And she's in languages, got her Ph.D. at Cal. With my brother, the Jesuit priest who became a Ph.D. at Cal, too. He's now head of the department of languages at U.S.F.

Teiser: And he was named for your father?

Rossi: Yes, P. Carlo Rossi. And then I have three sisters that married eventually that live in San Francisco, all widows. Beatrice Torrens. And Albina Wall. It

Rossi: was her son, Dr. Wall, that operated on me.* And then Mrs. Eleanor O'Donnell. Her husband was the general counsel for Stauffer Chemical Company.

Teiser: Well, you certainly have a distinguished family.

Rossi: Yes, they all did well.

Teiser: Going back to your father. He was a druggist, but how did he happen to know about wine?

Rossi: Well, Italians, you know, all drink wine, and it might have been that he'd had some connection with the grape industry in Italy. I don't know about that. And then, being a chemist, you know. Because my father got into the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony in '88, and it was established in '81 and '82. But they put out some vineyards in '81 and '82 and '83. They got their first crop in '87. That's when they determined to put up a building, in '87. The building is still there. But they had an Italian winemaker, was supposed to be an expert, but he made vinegar instead of wine.

Teiser: What was his name?

Rossi: I don't remember. So it was then that they went to my father and got him to take over. So they made him president and winemaker and everything from then on.

Teiser: He must have been an outstanding man to...

Rossi: Yes, he was very energetic and enterprising. There again it was the difference between him and his brother. His brother was perfectly satisfied to remain up in North Beach with his cronies. He never learnt the English language well. Whereas my father talked like an American. Yes, he talked English without an accent.

Teiser: Oh, he did? That is unusual. He must have made quite an effort.

Do I remember correctly? You were born in Oakland at your grandparents' house?

*Dr. C. Allen Wall. Mr. Rossi had recently had an accident and required surgery.

Rossi: Yes, at my grandparents' home. It was my mother's family.

Teiser: Were your parents living there at that time?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: Your mother went there?

Rossi: She just went there for the event.

Teiser: Where was your family's residence at that time?

Rossi: In North Beach. On Union between Powell and Mason. We were right in back of the Russian Church. The Russian Church's garden in the back adjoined our garden in the back. It used to kind of scare me, Easter services you know because they used to have their--I was a little boy, you know. They'd have their services at night, ten at night, you know, and you'd hear this. And to me, five and six years old, you know, it scared me. Because my room was right in back of the house adjoining the garden. We lived there until 1905.

Teiser: So you spent your whole boyhood there?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Where did you go to school?

Rossi: St. Ignatius High School.

Teiser: Did they have a grammar school there also?

Rossi: Well, no, we went to St. Brigid's, Van Ness and Broadway. We went there for the first few years of grammar school and finished grammar school at St. Ignatius, then finished high school, and university at St. Ignatius College.*

Teiser: Did you, by the time you got into school, think you were going to be in the wine business? Were you interested as a youngster in wine, at all?

Rossi: Well, we used to go up to the vineyards. We spent

*Later the University of San Francisco.

- Rossi: our vacations up at the vineyards, you know. We had a summer home up there. That is to say, the company had a home that we occupied until--well, in 1905 we built our own home. My father built a family home in 1905. Which is still there. Half is owned by me and half by my brother's two sons.
- Teiser: I wanted to ask you about your own family. You have two children?
- Rossi: Two. Each of them have three children. I've got six grandchildren.
- Teiser: What are your children's names?
- Rossi: Yvonne is my daughter. Yvonne Dolan.
- Teiser: And her husband is?
- Rossi: Paul Dolan, Jr. Paul E. Dolan, Jr.
- Teiser: And your son?
- Rossi: He married a girl that lived in Portland, Gerardine Doyle.
- Teiser: And he's Edmund A. Rossi, Jr.?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: And he's with Italian Swiss Colony?
- Rossi: United Vintners; Heublein. He's vice-president in charge of research.
- Teiser: What year were you married?
- Rossi: 1924.
- Teiser: And your wife's maiden name?
- Rossi: Beatrice Brandt. Her father was an engineer from London.
- Teiser: And she died some years ago?
- Rossi: Oh, yes, in 1955.
- Teiser: Did your father continue maintaining his residence in San Francisco after he became active in the winery?

Rossi: Yes, because after we left North Beach, we went out to Vallejo and Fillmore. No, I'll take that back; we went out on Vallejo and Octavia. And Laguna; in that block. On, now I'm getting a little bit behind time. Because.... When was the fire and earthquake? 1906. Yes, well, we were already out on Vallejo and Octavia, and we lived there about eight or ten years. We had a home there. But then it wasn't big enough for the big family. That's why we moved out there on the southwest corner of Vallejo and Fillmore, where now there's that swami temple.

Teiser: Did your father spend much time at Asti?

Rossi: Every weekend.

Teiser: But the offices of the Italian Swiss Colony...

Rossi: Were in San Francisco.

Teiser: So he mainly stayed here at the offices?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

WINERY CHANGES AND EXPANSION

Teiser: Who did he have in immediate charge up there?

Rossi: Superintendent. Vasconi was one. And then a fellow by the name of Allegrini after Vasconi died.

Teiser: What was Allegrini's first name?

Rossi: Julius, I think.

Teiser: Was he a technologist?

Rossi: Well, he was a vineyardist. But then he had Giulio Perelli-Minetti as the winemaker, you see. And then he had a man by the name of Malesano later on. After Allegrini died, Malesano was the superintendent of the vineyard.

Teiser: But Perelli-Minetti was the winemaker throughout a long period?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Did he leave because...

Rossi: They went to form their own company. That's what gave me a chance. It was fortunate for me he did. It happened while we were on this trip to Europe, my brother and I, after we graduated. We were on this trip to Europe* when we got word that there were three or four of them in the company who were going to form their own company, and Perelli-Minetti was one of them. And he was going to compete, you see. But it gave me a chance to assume responsibility under my father that I wouldn't have had if the man hadn't quit. So it developed me. I became winemaker.

Teiser: I heard the story from Mr. Antonio Perelli-Minetti who said his brother and two of the other men were fired by Italian Swiss Colony. He apparently thought it was reasonable of your father to fire them.**

Rossi: He fired himself!

Teiser: Oh, did he? I thought they were fired.

Rossi: Oh, no, no, no, not at all. I was with my father in London when we got the news and had to cancel our steamer reservations and make new ones so as to get home a week sooner. My father didn't fire them. My father's assistant, Mr. Federspiel, may have fired them, but my father didn't; we were done out of a week's visit in London. They quit to form the California....

Teiser: Anglo-California Wine Company.

Rossi: My father's nephew was among them.

Teiser: Oh, he was? What was his name?

Rossi: Mario Tribuno.

Teiser: How was the Tribuno family related then?

Rossi: Through my father's family.

*In 1909.

**See A. Perelli-Minetti interview in this series.

Teiser: Somebody uses the Tribuno label for vermouth now.

Rossi: Well, that's Tribuno's son. He's got his office in New York. And he sells through 21 corporation.

Teiser: That's it--"21" Brands. It must be manufactured for him....

Rossi: Perelli-Minetti manufactures it...or produces it. We don't like the word "manufacture." Produces the basic wine. And Jack Tribuno, the son, supplies the formula for the herbs, supposed to have a secret formula. And he's very active. Jack Tribuno is the one that's running it. Mrs. Tribuno is still alive, Louise Tribuno; lives out on Long Island.

That's profitable business they have, the vermouth. Good distribution.

Teiser: After your father took over Italian Swiss Colony, I gather that they continued to build more wine making facilities at the winery. Was he in charge of that, and everything of that sort?

Rossi: Yes. Not only that, but they bought land in Madera, in the San Joaquin Valley. The Italian Swiss Colony had several wineries in the San Joaquin Valley. In fact, one of the principal things that he wanted to find out when we went to Europe in 1909 was how to make table wine in a hot country. You see? And there's where he was ahead of the industry, because in 1905 in France they were talking about the pure yeast culture method and sulphur dioxide method of making wine.

That was one of the modern techniques that was of the greatest value to the quality of California wines. Because when we were in Paris we got acquainted with equipment manufacturers and people that had connections with the wine industry, and my father made arrangements to buy the sulphur dioxide in the various forms that it came in. Came out of Germany in the form of potassium meta-bisulphite, and it came out of France in a liquid sulphur dioxide in gas form in drums, and he bought some right then and there and sent it back home and we got it as it arrived September first--just at the beginning of vintage season. And that was 1909, the first time we went to work my brother and I. The first thing I did was to put into

Rossi: fermentation practice the use of the sulphur dioxide together with pure cultures, and did that among the company's different wineries. I had to do it surreptitiously because at that time Dr. Harvey Wiley was death on the use of sulphur dioxide.

Teiser: Who was Dr. Wiley?

Rossi: He was the head of the federal department in Washington--Pure Food.

But the action of the sulphur dioxide was to control the wild yeast on the grapes. You see, the grapes have yeast on their blooms--and there are good and bad yeasts. Now the wild yeasts are the ones that develop first when your grapes are crushed, and if you use sulphur dioxide in limited quantities you'll sort of inoculate the wild yeast until the good wine yeast can take hold, and by that time the good wine yeast has performed its action of fermenting the sugar of the grape and you've got a sound fermentation. Well, my father was the first to establish that on a commercial scale.

I remember after the California Wine Association took over and I became district manager of the wineries of the California Wine Association and of Italian Swiss Colony in Napa and Sonoma counties--I got the California Wine Association wineries to use the sulphur dioxide method. I'm the one, not Mr. Morrow, because he really wasn't up to it yet. This was 1914. And when I submitted the samples of the wine that had been made on the fifteenth of October in the different wineries under my jurisdiction, he complimented me. I never told him one of the principal reasons why the wines were so good. They were excellent! Sound fermentation, beautiful color, fine flavor and all that.

He never knew what was one of the contributing factors, because the grapes, at the same time, they were handled in the proper way. They were sound. The wine was sound really. I was complimented on it because of the quality. I used to ship this sulphur dioxide from the winery at Asti where I was, and used to ship it out as cleaning solution to different wineries. But then it became standard procedure in the wine industry to have pure cultures and the sulphur dioxide method of fermentation.

Teiser: Under your father's directions quite a number of other premises were acquired, were they not?

Rossi: Yes, the Madera was the principal one, Lemoore, Kingsburg.

Teiser: Did the Italian Swiss Colony build the Kingsburg Winery that is now the Roma one that Louis Martini had in the meantime?

Rossi: I don't know that they built it, but they used to operate it with a man by the name of--uh--he was superintendent, I remember.* I remember him. And Louis Martini eventually got it after Prohibition came.

Teiser: What was the Brotherhood Winery?

Rossi: In New York.

Teiser: Was there a plant here that produced for it?

Rossi: I think so.

Teiser: Which was that?

Rossi: Maybe, it might have been Kingsburg. It might have been. Paladini was the man's name at Kingsburg Winery, and that was owned half by the California Wine Association, but my father operated it for account of half California Wine Association, half Italian Swiss Colony. My father had charge of operating it.

Madera was built by Italian Swiss Colony. That's a big place. Now it's terrific.

Teiser: Is it still part of Italian Swiss Colony?

Rossi: Yes. They're making twenty million gallons.

Teiser: I have here in a list of about 1912 that it was making three million gallons. It has Asti at four million, Cloverdale at five hundred thousand. Fulton--what was at Fulton?

*Paladini. See below.

Rossi: About the same--a half million.

Teiser: Where is Fulton?

Rossi: Five miles north of Santa Rosa.

Teiser: Had Italian Swiss Colony built that?

Rossi: Well, they operated it--my father did. A fellow by the name of Carlo Colabella was the superintendent.

Teiser: And one in Sebastopol.

Rossi: Yes. That was owned half by California Wine Association.

Teiser: And at Clayton?

Rossi: That was a small place--a vineyard in Contra Costa County.

Teiser: And Lemoore, was it a big one?

Rossi: Yes. They made Muscat wine there.

Teiser: Was it owned entirely by Italian Swiss Colony?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: And was it established by your father?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: And Kingsburg was rated here at a million. And one at Selma.

Rossi: Selma, yes; well, that was mostly brandy operation.

Teiser: And in San Francisco?

Rossi: That was a storage and a shipping point.

Teiser: And in New York?

Rossi: That was a shipping point. My brother was in charge of the San Francisco plant after we got into the business.

Teiser: Did you age wine in San Francisco?

Rossi: No. In and out.

Teiser: And the same in New York?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: I have read about your father's interest in champagne making and...

Rossi: We looked into it in 1909 when we went to Europe. Through a manufacturer of champagne machinery in Paris, we got into a connection with Charles Jadeau in Saumur, and invited him to come to California. That is incorrectly stated,* that he came to Rheims. He did not. Charles Jadeau was in Saumur, which is a district where they have cavalry in France. They used to have. And it's a nice wine district, very well known, and they make sparkling wine, vin mousseux, but they're not allowed to call it champagne there. But the system of fermentation is the same. This man came [to California a few months later] in 1909, Jadeau, and we built a champagne plant up at Asti. And he really made a very good sparkling wine. But in France they don't allow wine that is made outside the Champagne district to be called champagne even though it's fermented the same way that it is in the Champagne district. And the French people are sore at the United States people, the New York people, for calling our wines California or New York champagne. They'd rather that we just called them sparkling wines.

Teiser: Did Mr. Jadeau stay here then until Prohibition?

Rossi: Until Prohibition.

Teiser: And you continued making...

Rossi: I worked with him.

Teiser: Was he a chemist? Or a winemaker?

Rossi: Oh, he was a winemaker. He had his own little plant in Saumur.

Teiser: And he just gave it up and came here?

Rossi: Came here, to California.

*In The Story of Italian Swiss Colony; appendix.

Teiser: What did he do when Prohibition came along, go back to France?

Rossi: Back to France. By that time he was an older man. He was ready to retire.

Teiser: What was he like personally?

Rossi: Well, I had to talk French to him, you know, because he didn't talk English. He was a typical Frenchman, you know, from the country. Small businessman, I guess.

Teiser: But a good champagne maker?

Rossi: Yes. Fact of the matter is that when they had those riots in the Champagne district of France due to the fact that the champagne makers of France were bringing in grapes from outside the district and turning it into champagne, you see, which they didn't want--firm by the name of Ayala Brothers, two brothers, had their factory destroyed by riots, and they came to look the situation over in California to see whether they'd want to get interested in making California champagne. And they came up to Asti; I was with them. And they got ahold of Jadeau on the side and as one Frenchman to another, they said, "Is there any foreign wine in this champagne we've just tasted?" You see?

Teiser: That was a compliment.

Rossi: Yes. I learned to make champagne under Jadeau.

Teiser: Is it more interesting than making a still wine?

Rossi: Oh, yes. More difficult.

Teiser: What kind of grapes did you use for it up there?

Rossi: Well, you have to use a blend. You have to kind of work around to get this quality in the wine and that quality, a certain amount of tartaric acid and a certain amount of flavor and things like that.

Teiser: What was your main champagne grape there?

Rossi: Well, there was some Riesling and some French Colombard and Golden Chasselas and Pinot. It was a blend. Champagne's going like a house afire in California today. They haven't got enough grapes.

Rossi: They really haven't got enough grapes in California to make champagne. They have to make them out of different varieties than the typical champagne grapes. That's between us. My son* tells me that they just can't produce enough.

Teiser: What are their labels now?

Rossi: Lejon. Lejon was taken over by National Distillers just before they bought us.

AFFILIATION WITH THE CALIFORNIA WINE ASSOCIATION

Teiser: One thing I've read a little about that I think must have been very interesting: in the '90's, California Wine Association was so dominant that the California Wine Makers' Corporation was established. Was your father the...?

Rossi: One of the prime movers of the California Wine Makers' association. And Henry J. Crocker. He had a summer home opposite Asti up in the hills.

Teiser: He had not been interested in the wine industry before?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: But became interested because of this situation?

Rossi: Yes, I imagine.

Teiser: How large an organization did it become then?

Rossi: I don't think it operated too many years. Apparently they didn't succeed.

Teiser: Do I understand correctly that the California Wine Association was dominating the market?

Rossi: Yes. Well, they and others, like Lachman & Jacobi.

*Edmund A. Rossi, Jr., vice-president and director of quality control at the Italian Swiss Colony winery, now owned by United Vintners, a subsidiary of Heublein, Inc.

Rossi: Lachman & Jacobi was quite a big strong factor.

Teiser: Did they get together to set prices and so forth; was that how it worked?

Rossi: I imagine they must have done something like that because in those days they didn't have the anti-trust laws like they have today.

Teiser: I think at one time the California Wine Association was said to be controlling more than half of the market.

Rossi: Half, yes. They had forty wineries.

Teiser: Someone told me that the California Wine Association was said never to have made a great bottle of wine and never to have made a bad bottle of wine.

Rossi: Might have been.

Teiser: Was that a joke that was well known?

Rossi: Well, really, the California wine is good. It's hard to find a bad bottle of California wine.

Teiser: I think the idea was that the California Wine Association had stabilized the quality. It didn't attempt to make very fine wines, but it did make good wines.

Rossi: Standard quality. An average higher than the average of France.

Teiser: At that time?

Rossi: I think so. I think the average quality of California wine today is better than the average quality of French wine, especially now since they can't import the Algerian wines. Or that they don't. You see, France had to import Algerian wines to blend with the Midi wines of the south because the Midi wines of the south didn't have enough alcohol in them, enough sugar in the grapes. So they used to import millions of gallons of Algerian wines.

That's why my brother and father and I went to Algeria, find out how they were making table wines in Algeria in the hot climate that resembled the Fresno district. And that's where we learnt that they used.... In Algeria in that hot climate where they

- Rossi: have the sirocco winds and all that, they use attemperators to control the temperature of fermentation. Because fermentation causes heat and heat can get too high in hot climates, especially in climates of hot winds.
- Teiser: Some kind of refrigeration?
- Rossi: Yes. Now, my father was one of the first to establish a refrigerated system up at Asti.
- Teiser: Did they use refrigeration then, after, at Madera?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: And at Lemoore?
- Rossi: Yes. And up at Asti, too, you see. Now especially it's important because they make table wines a great deal in the [Central] valley now because they have to; they haven't got enough wine grapes in the northern districts to take care of the demand. Now they make an awful lot of table wines in the valley, the central valleys, Fresno, Stockton, Lodi, places like that. Because Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino Counties and places like that can't produce enough table wines to take care of the demand.
- Teiser: So the California Wine Makers' Corporation finally wasn't successful and the affiliation with the California Wine Association was effected, is that it?
- Rossi: That's right.
- Teiser: Do you think that your father felt defeated when it seemed necessary to join the California Wine Association in 1901?
- Rossi: Oh, no. Oh, no.
- Teiser: The two companies continued operating independently?
- Rossi: Well, yes, because.... In my father's day they operated independently because they weren't owned by the California Wine Association. Italian Swiss Colony was only half owned, and they were great competitors. They competed. It was only after Italian Swiss Colony was completely sold out after my father's death that California Wine Association owned Italian Swiss Colony completely. And while for

Rossi: years they operated separately, still there was a close affiliation there that didn't exist before.

Teiser: So at the time of your father's death it was still independent?

Rossi: Yes. Oh, yes.

Teiser: You said they were making some brandy, too?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Was that just a normal part of being in the wine business or was it...

Rossi: They had to make brandy to make fortified wines.

Teiser: Did they market it also?

Rossi: Oh yes. Madera brandy was very well known. They made grappa too, you know. Out of pomace. They were one of the very few firms in California that made grappa. Because it's difficult to make.

Teiser: Is it?

Rossi: Well, you have to have special stills. And there's only a certain limited demand for grappa anyhow. Among the Slavonians. Certain amount among the Italians, but less so.

Teiser: I tasted it only once, and that shortly after Repeal, and it was awfully fiery.

Rossi: Yes, it is.

Teiser: Young, isn't it?

Rossi: Yes. And a high aldehyde. It had a bite to it.

Teiser: I think I was asking someone what happens when you have wine that turns too bad to market. He said, well, you can put it into brandy.

Rossi: You can do that.

Teiser: Did Italian Swiss Colony put its failures into brandy?

Rossi: No, I wouldn't call it failures because they weren't exactly failures because there's so much demand for

- Rossi: brandy that there wasn't that much wine that failed.
- Teiser: I see. There wasn't enough to supply?
- Rossi: No.
- Teiser: So it wasn't just a by-product?
- Rossi: No. No. No. The fact of the matter is that half the market was fortified wine and you had to have a lot of wine to make brandy for fortified sherry, port, tokay, muscatel, Madeira.
- Teiser: I was interested in the Italian Swiss Colony "tipo" wine. Where did the name come from? Oh...this is an article explaining it? "Wines of Asti," in the Wine Review.* What does the word t-i-p-o mean?
- Rossi: It means "type." Type of chianti. My father called it "Tipo Chianti," to be honest, and then competitors began saying Tipo this and Tipo that for competition. So my father registered the name "Tipo" just by itself.
- Teiser: You said that more than half of the gallonage went into sweet wines?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: Much more?
- Rossi: Well, you see, it takes twice as many pounds of grapes to make one gallon of sweet wines as it does to make table wine. More grapes went into sweet wine than table wine.
- Teiser: But did more table wine come out than sweet wine?
- Rossi: I think it used to be about 50-50. And then it got 'way down, 25 per cent - 30 per cent [table wine] after Repeal. And now its coming back to 50-50.
- Teiser: Were Italian Swiss Colony wines all bottled and labelled?
- Rossi: No.

*Issue of May, 1939.



Bonfort's Wine and Spirit Circular

*Mayor Rossi of San Francisco presents
Tito Schipa, the famous tenor, with a
case of California Tipo Wines*

Mayor Angelo Rossi (right; no relation to the Rossi family of Italian Swiss Colony) presented raffia-covered bottles of Tipo wine to tenor Tito Schipa for this 1934 publicity photograph.

Teiser: Some sold in bulk?

Rossi: Good deal. Most of it.

Teiser: And then went out under other labels?

Rossi: Yes. We had a good reputation. Used to always get a just a little bit more than the average market. That's how we kept the name on a high level. My brother and I were always very particular about that, and after Repeal, you see.... You see, during Prohibition, we marketed grapes, grape juices and grape concentrates under the name Asti Colony and kept the name alive. And we used to ship the grapes under Asti Colony. And talking about modern methods of wine making, whenever we shipped a carload of grapes, we used to include a certain number of packages, cartons with four ounces of this potassium meta-bisulphite, this sulphur dioxide. One package for a ton of grapes. If there were twelve tons of grapes in a car, there were twelve packages and we'd say to use one package per ton of grapes. The result was that those who did that didn't fail to make a good wine. They'd give credit to the grapes. Well, naturally, the grapes had to be, first of all, good. But you can make a poor wine out of good grapes. But if they used the sulphur dioxide, it couldn't fail; just couldn't fail.

THE ROSSI TWINS

Teiser: Let's go back then to your own biography. You graduated from U.S.F. What did you study there?

Rossi: It was just a liberal course. An academic course. And then we* went to U.C. and took chemistry and viticulture and wine making and enology.

Teiser: What year did you go there?

Rossi: '09. We only stayed there one year, but we were

*Edmund A. Rossi and his twin brother, Robert D. Rossi.

Rossi: fortunate to get a degree out of there. They didn't want to give us a degree but we managed to wiggle it out of them. They wanted us to stay two years.

Teiser: Did you work hard?

Rossi: Yes, but you see, we wouldn't have gone back a second year because my father was anxious to get us in the business. We got enough out of it so that we were able to apply what we learnt in Europe very satisfactorily. And, as I say, what we learnt theoretically and then learnt practically in Europe constituted the biggest single factor, I think, in the development of quality table wine in California. Because this pure culture method of fermentation and sulphur dioxide was just revolutionary. And they were just starting to talk about it in the laboratories in Marseilles and places even in Europe it wasn't generally accepted. It was only years later.

Teiser: Had your father heard about it before he left here?

Rossi: Yes. Yes. We had come across it at the University. My brother and I picked it up at the University.

Teiser: So it was known here but not used.

Rossi: Not used. It was just a new theory.

Teiser: Whom did you work with at the University?

Rossi: Hans Holm. And Professor [Frederic T.] Bioletti, mostly. Bioletti and Holm in the enology department.

Teiser: That was before Dr. William V. Cruess' time?

Rossi: Dr. Cruess was doing post-graduate work there at the same time at a desk opposite us. We were the same year.

Teiser: He was in zymology?

Rossi: Yes, well, that's what they call it. Hans Holm was teaching zymology, the science of fermentation.

Teiser: Did you know Dr. Cruess well?

Rossi: Not well, just...

Teiser: You were all working hard probably.

Rossi: Well, he was good. Better than we were.

Teiser: Well, he'd been specifically trained.

Rossi: That's just it, you see; we were there only for post-graduate work. We were there to pick up whatever we could in the way of knowledge so as to apply it wherever we could in a practical way because we weren't going to be given that much more time to prepare ourselves. My father was too anxious to get us in the business, which was fortunate, because that was the way things happened, that he was killed. We got two years of experience with him, which we wouldn't have had if we had continued our studies. And we would have been at a disadvantage in order to get established, because when he passed away we were able to carry on until such time as we were able to sell out and establish ourselves on a new basis.

Teiser: How long were you in Europe?

Rossi: Oh, just about three or four months. The whole trip took three and a half months.

Teiser: And you were in France, Algeria....

Rossi: We went to Bordeaux, Algeria.... Algeria was one of the most interesting things because we were there for a specific purpose, to learn how to make table wines in a hot climate. And then at Bordeaux we found out the way they make Bordeaux wines, and in Paris we found out about the sulphur dioxide methods and things like that.

Teiser: When did you come back to this country, then?

Rossi: September first.

Teiser: 1909. And you immediately went to work at Asti?

Rossi: Day after I got home.

Teiser: Let me ask, by the by--you must have gone to Asti all through your childhood from San Francisco--when you were a little boy, how did you travel?

Rossi: Train. Northwestern Pacific. Took three and a half, four hours.

Teiser: Where did you catch the train?

Rossi: Sausalito. Tiburon.

Teiser: You went over on the ferry?

Rossi: To Tiburon first, then Sausalito later.

Teiser: And that was what your father did every week end?

Rossi: Every week end. That's right. Until the days of automobile. But even then he used to take the train.

I used to come home after I got to work, every other week, you know, spend the week end. I was bacheloring up there you know, living alone, but I'd come home every other week. But I used to pay strict attention to business. I had no social life up there at all except entertaining customers. Otherwise I had no social life.

Teiser: Didn't go down to Healdsburg?

Rossi: No, very little.

Teiser: Did you know the people at Simi. The Simi brothers?

Rossi: Well, I knew who they were. Fred Haigh, you know. And his wife's family. They still have a nice winery there.

Teiser: The daughter, Vivien, died recently, and Mrs. Haigh's still running it.*

Rossi: Is that so? There isn't very much left, I don't think.

Teiser: They still make wine.

Rossi: They do?

Teiser: And four or five years ago the daughter was making new plantings. They just liked it.

Rossi: Well, it's hard to get away from it.

Teiser: In 1909 then you went to work at Asti, and your brother went to work in San Francisco, is that right?

Rossi: San Francisco, that's right. [Giulio] Perelli-Minetti used to take care of Asti and San Francisco. So San Francisco was without a head. And my father put my

*The Simi Winery was sold in May, 1970, to Russell H. and Betty Jean Green.

Rossi: brother in charge.

Teiser: And what was your official title?

Rossi: I was superintendent of the winery.

Teiser: How many acres of vineyard did you have around that winery at that time?

Rossi: Fifteen hundred.

Teiser: Was that good wine grape land?

Rossi: Well, I'll put it this way. It was good wine land, but poor for quantity, in inverse ratio. The higher the quality, the poorer the crop. But that's just it, you see; thin soil, but it wasn't irrigated and it was awfully difficult to make it pay. But then you got the quality.

Teiser: How old was your father when he died?

Rossi: Fifty-six. Prime of life.

Teiser: In an accident.

Rossi: Yes. One Sunday morning. He'd just finished breakfast. Went down the road. The stableman came with the horse that he wanted to try out. The horse began to get skittish, one thing and another, my father got nervous, went to jump, and he fell on his head. That was it.

Teiser: He was mounted? He was on horseback?

Rossi: No, he was in a little carriage.

Teiser: Well, it was fortunate that you and your brother by then had had experience.

Rossi: Experience. Yes, it would have been a different story if we hadn't. Because we were able to carry on, you know, without my father's management.

1911 TO PROHIBITION

Teiser: It has occurred to me that 1911 was a year of great crisis for all of you--the year of your father's death. What had your position been in 1909, when you entered the business?

Rossi: To start with, superintendent of the Asti winery.

Teiser: And you continued in that until 1911?

Rossi: Well, until 1914.

Teiser: I thought that there was some indication that after your father's death, you had been given broader responsibilities.

Rossi: Well, I was on my own up there, whereas before I was under my father.

Teiser: "General superintendent of wineries" I have as your title after your father's death. I suppose it was just what you had been before, was it?

Rossi: Well, maybe...I actually did assume greater responsibility because my father was always present to veto or approve any decision made prior to 1911.

Teiser: Then I came across something about a real estate dealer named Marcellus Kriegbaum who brought suit about a commission due him in 1911.

Rossi: Yes. That's correct.

Teiser: I wasn't so much interested in the problem of the suit as the indication of the properties that had been acquired. You remember about the suit, do you?

Rossi: I remember, in general, that he had brought a suit, but the details I'm not too familiar with.

Teiser: Well, according to a newspaper account, he charged that California Wine Association and Italian Swiss Colony were attempting to corner the wine market of the entire state and control it, and that Italian Swiss Colony was owned by the California Wine Association--and apparently that had not come out yet. This was in May, 1911. There was an article in the San Francisco Call on May 8th, 1911. Apparently, it had not been made public that...

Rossi: No, no, I guess not. That was before my father died.

Teiser: Yes. William Hanson, secretary of the California Wine Association, said that it held 50 per cent stock ownership of Italian Swiss Colony. As you mentioned earlier.

- Rossi: That was correct.
- Teiser: But he said that they were not at all in the same organization so far as marketing went.
- Rossi: They were absolutely independent one of the other.
- Teiser: Hanson said they were great rivals.
- Rossi: They were. Competitors.
- Teiser: Kriegbaum was filing suit against your father and all the other directors of the Italian-American Bank. He said that he had had an agreement to handle the sale of several vineyard properties to the California Wine Association. Then the board of directors of the Italian-American Bank decided that they would be sold to Italian Swiss Colony instead, and thus they avoided paying him his fee, his commission. I suppose it didn't come to anything, did it?
- Rossi: Apparently not.
- Teiser: You would have inherited the problem if it had continued, wouldn't you?
- Rossi: Yes. I think it must have been dropped for some particular reason. I can't recall the details.
- Teiser: The properties were named....
- Rossi: Oh? Were they named?
- Teiser: Yes, and I thought I'd like to ask you about each of them. There was Mount Diablo Vineyard of 600 acres, owned by California Consolidated Vineyard Company.
- Rossi: Well, I knew that property existed and was bought by Italian Swiss Colony.
- Teiser: I believe they also bought some wine at the same time, did they?
- Rossi: Yes. Well, the inventory of wine went with the property.
- Teiser: Who had owned that property?
- Rossi: I don't know.

- Teiser: I think somewhere a name of an earlier owner is given. T. Froelich.
- Rossi: I think he was a director of the California Wine Association. There was a Mr. Froelich connected with the California Wine Association. I don't know if it's the same one, or not.
- Teiser: The Mount Diablo Vineyard, where was that located?
- Rossi: Clayton.
- Teiser: Was it a good vineyard?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: What kind of grapes?
- Rossi: Table wine grapes. They were good quality.
- Teiser: Then, the Brookside Vineyard. Doesn't say where that was.
- Rossi: That was near Concord. That was only a vineyard, and the grapes used to be brought to Clayton, to the Mount Diablo Winery.
- Teiser: Did it have a big capacity?
- Rossi: Oh, I think it had nearly a million gallon capacity. Half a million to a million. More likely half a million.
- Teiser: I was confused about Brookside because that's now the name that Mr. Philo Biane's winery uses.
- Rossi: No connection.
- Teiser: Then there was the Bernard Vineyard, 150 acres.
- Rossi: I'm not familiar with that, at all.
- Teiser: And the Portola Vineyard of 70 acres.
- Rossi: I'm not familiar with that either. They never owned it.
- Teiser: Well, apparently they were considering buying all these properties.

- Rossi: They didn't apparently, because I would have known about it. Brookside I knew was owned by Italian Swiss Colony, but as far as the Portola and Bernard, I'm not at all familiar.
- Teiser: There's another called the Theresa Vineyard of 40 acres.
- Rossi: Same way. I don't remember that.
- Teiser: The total value of them all was said to be \$500,000. I suppose some of them were bought and some were not.
- Rossi: Did that include the winery?
- Teiser: Apparently so. Yes. I was interested in the directors of the Italian-American Bank. Your father was one and I suppose had been for many years.
- Rossi: He was vice-president.
- Teiser: And Mr. Fontana. And C.A. Malm. I think his name has been mentioned.
- Rossi: He was one of the original stockholders of the Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony.
- Teiser: Was he Italian himself?
- Rossi: No. He was more German than anything else, as I recall. His family lived on Steiner near Jackson. They had a home there for many years. They were in the luggage business.
- Teiser: Mr. Fontana, of course. And then there's A.J. Merle.
- Rossi: A.J. Merle. Well, he was the one that eventually bought an interest in the Asti Grape Products Company that was effective during the Prohibition years.
- Teiser: And Luigi de Martini?
- Rossi: That was the L. de Martini Supply Company, candies and sweets, wholesale.
- Teiser: And Henry J. Crocker, whom you've mentioned.
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: And Henry A. Sartori.

- Rossi: Dr. Henry J. Sartori, son-in-law of Mr. A. Sbarboro, president of the Italian-American Bank.
- Teiser: And Ambrose Gherini?
- Rossi: My brother-in-law. He married my eldest sister.
- Teiser: And Alfred E. Sbarboro.
- Rossi: Mr. A. Sbarboro's son, who was actually running the bank. [Laughter]
- Teiser: And "Rhoma" A. Sbarboro.
- Rossi: Romolo A. Sbarboro was a son also of A. Sbarboro. These were the directors of the bank, you say?
- Teiser: In 1911. And most of them had wine interests then?
- Rossi: Wine interests and banking interests through Mr. Sbarboro's connections.
- Teiser: Was a member of your family married to a member of the Sbarboro family?
- Rossi: No. No relationship.
- Teiser: Who owned major interest in the company at the time of your father's death?
- Rossi: Well, 50 per cent of it was California Wine Association. The largest individual stockholder was my father.
- Teiser: And you continued operating it until....
- Rossi: Well, California Wine Association, with Prohibition coming on in 1918, began selling properties, and they contemplated selling Asti too, 1919, 1920.
- Teiser: They had by this time become full owners of it?
- Rossi: Oh, yes; 1914 they became full owners.
- Teiser: But you were continuing to operate it?
- Rossi: I continued to operate it. I was superintendent.
- Teiser: You worked with Mr. A.R. Morrow then?
- Rossi: Yes, since 1914 I was under Mr. Morrow.

Teiser: What sort of a man was he?

Rossi: Oh, very capable. He was general superintendent and then became general manager. Mr. Fontana was president of the California Wine Association afterwards. And Mr. Morrow and Mr. Fontana used to work very closely together, especially during the years right prior to Prohibition.

Teiser: I keep hearing from a variety of sources that Mr. Morrow had very acute taste. Is that right?

Rossi: Oh, yes. Yes. He was a wonderful wine taster.

Teiser: Was he very anxious for high quality?

Rossi: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He knew the wine business beautifully.

Teiser: Was he a good business manager, too?

Rossi: Yes. Yes. I got along very well with him.

Teiser: And your brother too?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Your brother continued in charge here in San Francisco?

Rossi: Yes.

ASTI GRAPE PRODUCTS COMPANY AND THE C.W.A.

Rossi: In 1919 they wanted to sell Asti. And Mr. [Enrico] Prati and his family (that's explained in some of the literature) wanted to buy it out on time, and break it up into 40 acre lots, you see. But before that time came, before they made financial arrangements and all that, and my brother got back from the First World War, and he and I went to them and said: well, you're trying to finance this. It's going to not be easy for you to do it and instead of eventually breaking it up, let's form a company and ship grapes, make grape juices. And we'll help you to finance this. So we formed the Asti Grape Products Company. And I became president of the Asti Grape Products Company. This was April, 1920.

Teiser: Who were the other officers of it?

Rossi: Well, for the first few years, my brother was secretary and vice-president. And Mr. Prati was vice-president in charge of production. And that's about what it amounted to for the first few years.

Teiser: Did your headquarters remain in San Francisco, or were they in Asti at that time?

Rossi: No, I moved to San Francisco.

Teiser: Who was in charge up there then?

Rossi: Prati. He was a director of the company. Then we later on got the Di Giorgio fruit company, the Earl Fruit Company, interested. That was prior to--just prior to Repeal, I guess it was.

Teiser: Yes, I notice there was a Di Giorgio member of the board of directors. Which Di Giorgio was that?

Rossi: Joseph. He was the president and director of the Earl Fruit Company. And they owned a 37-1/2 per cent stock interest.

Teiser: And you were shipping fresh grapes?

Rossi: And making grape juices and grape concentrates.

Teiser: How did you learn how to make concentrates?

Rossi: Oh, well, with a vacuum pan.

Teiser: It was not anything you had done before though?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: Before Prohibition who were your main customers for bulk wines?

Rossi: Well, you mean, in my father's day?

Teiser: Yes.

Rossi: Oh, everybody. Wholesalers in every town.

Teiser: Would you sell in small quantities?

Rossi: In barrels. Fifty gallon barrels. Eventually in tank cars.

- Teiser: Oh, in tank cars in your father's day?
- Rossi: Yes. Mostly barrels, though.
- Teiser: But local wholesalers.
- Rossi: Yes. In the cities. We used to ship by water in 50 gallon barrels to New York through the Panama Canal.
- Teiser: Did a large percentage of your wines go east?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: Then during Prohibition who were the customers for the grape juices and concentrates?
- Rossi: That, see, I had to develop. That was work. That you had to ferret out, and induce people to get into it. We sold grapes more easily.
- Teiser: But what kind of people were your customers for the concentrate and juice?
- Rossi: Well, it wasn't too heavy a business. It required a lot of work, detail work. It never amounted to a big, big business. Grapes were more important.
- Teiser: And those were just the grapes from the acreage at Asti?
- Rossi: No, we bought grapes too, neighbors' grapes. It was a risky business. Oh, yes.
- Teiser: You must have felt all along, though, that Prohibition wasn't going to last?
- Rossi: Well, we were gambling on that. It was a gamble all right. Because it took capital all the time, putting hands in your pocket.
- Teiser: You must have felt very loyal to the business to work that hard and put in that much faith and time and effort.
- Rossi: Yes. Well, that's all we knew.
- Teiser: Did you ship many grapes to San Francisco?
- Rossi: Yes.

- Teiser: Someone told me about the big wineries in apartment house basements here. Did you know about those?
- Rossi: Yes, people used to.... We used to have a plant at Broadway and Davis, where we'd crush the grapes that they'd buy and then they'd deliver them home in kegs and ferment them. We did the crushing for them.
- Teiser: Did you sell to the scavengers association?
- Rossi: No, I didn't.
- Teiser: These just went to the individual homes?
- Rossi: Yes, family. We had French, German, Italians. I used to call on them at home.
- Teiser: Did you help them bottle their wines the way Fruit Industries did?
- Rossi: Yes. Well, we had two or three men that did that on their own.
- Teiser: That really was a hard way to market wine, wasn't it?
- Rossi: It was.



Edmund A. Rossi
January 13, 1971

Photograph by Ruth Teiser

(Interview #2 - June 11, 1969)

[A copy of a list of California Wine Association stockholders as of February 23, 1917 (from the Association's Minute Books in the library of the California Historical Society) was left with Mr. Rossi to look at following the first interview.]

Rossi: I looked at the stockholders list of the California Wine Association and there wasn't anything of particular interest. I recognized the directors because I served on the board of directors after my father died. He'd been a member of the board of directors of the California Wine Association, so after he died, they made me one.

Teiser: That was the time they were liquidating the properties though?

Rossi: Even before. Even before, because....

Teiser: 1911?

Rossi: 1911 they weren't.... The threat of Prohibition wasn't imminent enough. It was only four or five years later that they made up their minds they would start liquidating some of their properties.

Teiser: Did you have anything to do with Winehaven?

Rossi: My only contact was I used to go over there to the board of directors' meetings. The official home.

Teiser: Was it a very good winery?

Rossi: It was a practical winery. It was a large, sprawling plant, and they had big capacity for storage. Used to go over there in a schooner that they owned.

Teiser: From San Francisco?

Rossi: San Francisco, yes.

Teiser: That was really going to a directors' meeting in style!

Rossi: Well, they used to bring wine over from Winehaven to San Francisco.

Teiser: Oh, the schooner had a practical purpose.

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: I guess it was easier to ship in it than on the railroad?

Rossi: I suppose so.

Teiser: Was it a big boat?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: So you were a member of the board of directors during the period of liquidation. And that was how you knew immediately when they decided to sell the Asti property.

Rossi: Yes. Well, not only that, but I was superintendent of Asti at that time.

Teiser: So you knew it from both points of view?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Did they offer you the first chance at it? Or did you simply...

Rossi: No. No, I had been approached, I guess, by Mr. Prati and his family. I helped him begin negotiating the details of the proposed purchase and sale, and that's how I knew that the proposed buyers had in mind to subdivide the property, because that was about the only thing they could do on their own. That's when my brother and I offered to establish a business shipping grapes and making grape concentrates and grape juices.

Teiser: Was there someone else interested in it?

Rossi: No. Just Mr. Prati's in-laws.

Teiser: Tell me a little bit about Mr. Prati. Where did he come from?

Rossi: I think it was Rome. His family I think came from Rome. He was a very energetic fellow, very energetic, full of vitality and ambition.

Teiser: How did he happen to come to Italian Swiss Colony?

Teiser: Do you know?

Rossi: His older brother had preceded him. And his older brother went down to South America. I think he had another brother down there in the Argentine. Because that's where he lived the rest of his life. In the Argentine.

Teiser: What had the brother done?

Rossi: Well, he'd been the foreman of the vineyards.

Teiser: Do you remember his first name?

Rossi: Olinto. And Mr. Prati, our partner, was Enrico.

Teiser: About when did he come then?

Rossi: Enrico Prati? The same day my brother and I went to work, first of September, 1909.

Teiser: Just by chance?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Was he a contemporary of yours? About the same age?

Rossi: About the same age.

Teiser: And what was his first job there?

Rossi: Sub-foreman under his brother.

Teiser: I see, and he worked his way up through....

Rossi: Up through. That's right.

Teiser: So between 1911 and 1920, he must have gathered some capital if he had been interested in buying the property; is that right?

Rossi: Well, it was mostly he was depending on his in-laws I guess. His in-laws owned the winery and the vineyard two miles south of Asti. Good vineyard.

Teiser: Who were they?

Rossi: Seghesio.

Teiser: Did it have a name?

Rossi: No, no. Seghesio vineyard. Seghesio winery. The old man, Mr. Prati's father-in-law,* he used to be one of the original laborers at the vineyard when it was established. At the Asti vineyards when they were established.

Teiser: And then he went and established his own?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: And he had done well enough to help his son-in-law...

Rossi: He had died by that time. It was the mother-in-law that had a good business head. Eventually she sold out her interest though because, being very conservative, they were always afraid of debts, borrowing, loans. So a third cousin of mine bought out their interest. A.J. Merle. He was a man that was well-to-do, retired.

Teiser: Didn't take an active part in the business?

Rossi: Just a director of our company, Asti Grape Products Company.

Teiser: Under what terms did you buy it from California Wine Association? Did you have to give them all cash? Or were you able to pay it off--

Rossi: We paid it off. Mr. Prati couldn't have done it. That's why we suggested to him that we, my brother and I, get an interest in a property as we set it up, a corporation. \$240,000, I think we originally put up.

Teiser: It was a lot of money for that time.

Rossi: It was. \$60,000 apiece. Originally, I think, it was \$200,000. \$50,000 apiece. Then we went up to \$60,000 apiece, four of us.

Teiser: That was the initial payment?

Rossi: That was the initial and final payment.

Teiser: Oh, that was the total. How long did it take you to pay it off then?

Rossi: Oh, not too long.

Teiser: That was quite an enterprise for a group of young men,

*Edoardo Seghesio

- Teiser: wasn't it? In a period that wasn't exactly....
- Rossi: We were banking on Repeal. Big chance. A big chance.
- Teiser: How did it happen in 1924 that the matter came up of getting back the Italian Swiss Colony name?
- Rossi: Well, because those first four or five years following Prohibition, Italian Swiss Colony wasn't operating as a corporation. Business being done was one of liquidation. And at that time, as I suppose even today, you had to pay franchise tax, annual franchise tax, and they weren't using the facilities and name of the company, Italian Swiss Colony, so they decided to disincorporate.
- Teiser: The decision was made by California Wine Association?
- Rossi: That's right. California Wine Association. And I was on the board of directors and I knew what was doing. And Mr. Morrow, and Mr. Fontana, who was then president of the California Wine Association, both felt that the Rossi family connections were entitled to use the name if anybody was. And as they weren't going to use it, we changed our name.
- Teiser: You continued on the board of the California Wine Association for some time then?
- Rossi: Well, I might have continued... Oh, yes, I did continue because they changed the name afterwards to Calwa Corporation. And I was still on the board of the California Wine Association.
- Teiser: Did you have some shares in it, too?
- Rossi: Yes. I notice that I'm on the list of stockholders.
- Teiser: Oh, yes, that's one of 1917, isn't it. I was interested in that list of stockholders because so many people who had no direct connection with the wine business seem to have bought shares.
- Rossi: Well, it was on the market, in the stock exchange. It was listed.
- Teiser: I think your father's estate is represented.
- Rossi: 372 shares, estate of Pietro Carlo Rossi, on one of the lists. I don't know what particular year this was.

Teiser: 1917. Do you think some of the other people had bought into it because they just wanted to support a California enterprise?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: They just went in it because it was a good investment?

Rossi: It was strictly a business deal. One of the biggest stockholders was E.S. Pillsbury, the attorney. He was the attorney for the California Wine Association.

Teiser: How did he happen to own so many shares?

Rossi: Well, he took a very active interest following Prohibition. During the liquidation of the California Wine Association, he took a very active interest. He was a very shrewd man. I remember--this is rather comical. He used to inveigh against telephone bills. He had a particular gripe against mounting telephone bills, long distance calls. In other words, he figured that quite a few calls could be supplanted by correspondence. Mr. Morrow felt that the telephone was handy to get a decision fast and put the matter out of your mind. It was rather amusing because at board of directors meeting he used sometimes to bring this matter up.

Teiser: Was the Crocker Bank represented there among the stockholders? Some other banking families were, I thought, but perhaps they weren't prominently represented.

Rossi: Well, there's a stockholder here by the name of Charles H. Crocker. 850 shares.

Teiser: But they didn't take an active part in the management?

Rossi: No, oh, no. There was nobody on the board of directors during my time by the name of Crocker. Those that I do remember were C.O. G. Miller. He was quite a stockholder.

Teiser: Was he active in the organization?

Rossi: Very active.

Teiser: What did he do?

Rossi: He was quite active. He...

Teiser: Took part in the board's decisions?

Rossi: That's it. M.J. Fontana was a big stockholder.

Teiser: So you continued to participate in the affairs of the California Wine Association for some time?

Rossi: Well, I was close to the management. And district manager for Napa and Sonoma counties.

Teiser: Were you involved in it later when it became part of Fruit Industries?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: By then you had ceased connections?

Rossi: Yes. Oh, yes.

PROHIBITION PERIOD ACTIVITIES

Teiser: Someone mentioned to me the Pioli Brothers....

Rossi: Well, they were old-time employees prior to Prohibition up at Asti.

Teiser: Why were they of interest?

Rossi: Well, one of the two brothers lived in San Francisco and was well known among the Italians, and so we had him as a salesman for our grapes that we brought during the years of Prohibition to San Francisco market. And he was our salesman.

Teiser: What was his first name?

Rossi: Astolfo. The other brother used to be housekeeper for me for a while when I lived up at Asti as a bachelor.

Teiser: What was his name, do you remember?

Rossi: No, I don't remember.

Teiser: Worked in the winery, did he?

Rossi: No. No. In later years he retired to a property up

Rossi: in Sonoma County up around Healdsburg, one of the valleys around Healdsburg.

Teiser: Perhaps it was the one in San Francisco who was known.

Rossi: Yes. He was connected with our selling of grapes in San Francisco market for quite a few years. And then he used to also help make the wine out of grape juice that.... People used to buy the grape juice in barrels from us and Mr. Pioli used to go to their house and see that it fermented right.

Teiser: What facilities did you maintain in San Francisco through these years?

Rossi: Well, during the Prohibition era we built a corrugated iron building and office at the end of Broadway, where we put up a crushing plant.

Teiser: You mean near the waterfront?

Rossi: Waterfront. See, we brought the grapes into the San Francisco market on the waterfront, and then people who bought their grapes from us or from others would bring them over to our plant if they wanted. And we supplied the crushing facilities and the containers for home delivery. We'd lend them the containers. They were 15 or 20 gallon barrels with handles on them so they could dump them into their barrels or tanks at home. In the case of white grapes, we'd press the grape juice out of it. In the case where they were going to make red wine, we'd just crush their grapes and deliver the pulp and everything except the stems. We maintained the plant all through the years of Prohibition, those 12 years, in San Francisco.

Teiser: How did you ship your grapes down? By railroad?

Rossi: Yes. Sold them right off of the tracks. That's where Pioli came in because he used to make his headquarters in the particular cars of grapes that we were selling.

Teiser: I see; sold just right out of the cars.

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Had you offices, too, in San Francisco, at that time?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Where were they?

Rossi: Well, for a while there, we were at 216 Pine Street. Prior to that, we were at 12 Geary.

Teiser: Had you earlier had any storage facility in San Francisco? Before Prohibition?

Rossi: Oh, yes. Had it on Greenwich Street. There we had a million gallon capacity. That's a building that my father put up.

Teiser: Is it still standing?

Rossi: Still standing. Battery and Greenwich. Went through the fire.

Teiser: Did you use it for storage, or blending, or...?

Rossi: Both. Mostly for in-and-out though. Delivery by boat to eastern markets.

Teiser: What year was it built, about?

Rossi: Oh, I think it was around 1903 or '04.

Teiser: And did you then dispose of it at the time of Prohibition?

Rossi: Well, at that time, we belonged to the California Wine Association, and they disposed of it.

Teiser: Over the period of Prohibition, did you plant any varieties of grapes that ship well instead of those that specifically make good wine?

Rossi: No. No. We had the wine grapes, the real wine grapes at Asti in Sonoma County that made the best wine.

Teiser: Were you able to ship those grapes well during Prohibition? Or didn't you ship them as far as some others did?

Rossi: We shipped them all over. One of our principal markets was San Francisco though. We did ship to Chicago and to New York and eventually to those who represented our wine business in New York, Gambarelli & Davitto. They were eventually bought out by the National Distillers Corporation, but they were our

Rossi: representatives in New York that we trusted implicitly. We gave them a lot of credit. I may say we always shipped them on open account. And they saw us through bad times too. They saved many a precarious situation for us back in the New York market when grapes went to pieces in prices and it was almost difficult to get the freight money out of it. So they eventually put the fresh grapes in storage. And we were fortunate there too because the storage people trusted them and eventually they got every last dollar that was coming to them, but it took sometimes maybe three or four years before we completely paid off the storage charges.

Teiser: It must have been a gamble.

Rossi: It was because Gambarelli & Davitto would buy new barrels and take the fresh grapes out of boxes to be shipped in and put them in barrels and put the barrels in cold storage and freeze them solid, keep them for years--two or three years sometimes before they liquidated the inventory.

Teiser: Did other people do that, or were they...?

Rossi: No, they were the only ones that did it.

Teiser: Did it work well?

Rossi: It worked well because it saved the situation for us. We were able to pay off all the storage charges and keep the name alive.

Teiser: And the grapes were perfectly usable after?

Rossi: Yes. We had put in sulfur dioxide. There again.... I talked to you about that the last time.

Teiser: Yes. That held them stable.

Rossi: That held them, yes.

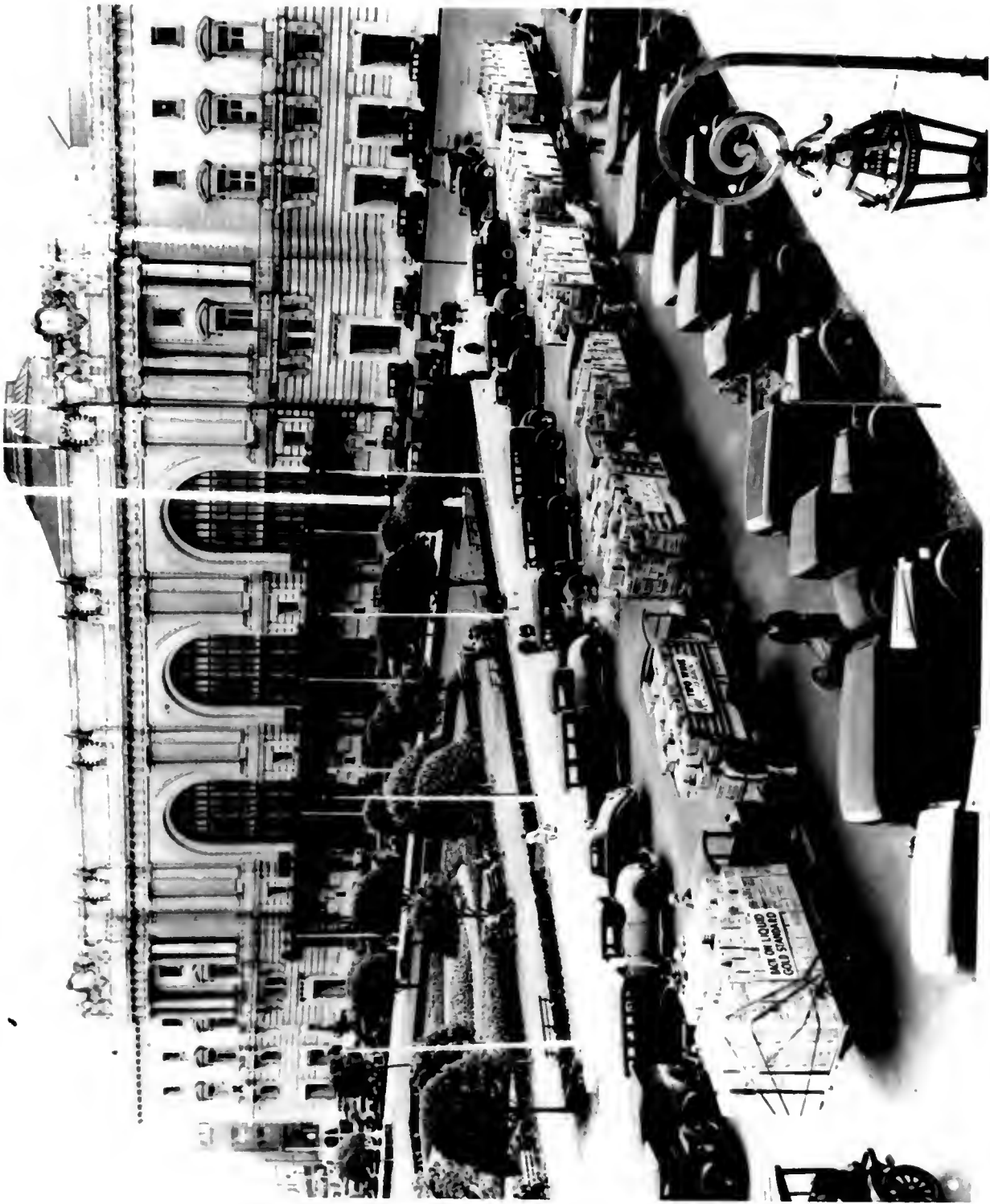
Teiser: Then what would they do when they took it out of--

Rossi: Home-made wine.

Teiser: They crushed the frozen grapes as they took them out of storage?

Rossi: Yes. That really was a venture. That was a real

- Rossi: venture. And Gambarelli & Davitto did that for us. It was essential that we trusted them, because if we hadn't they'd have sacrificed and dumped the grapes and we'd have got nothing out of it. They were honest.
- Teiser: What varieties of grapes were these?
- Rossi: They were good grapes. Zinfandels, Carignanes, Petite Sirahs. They were excellent wine grapes.
- Teiser: And you continued in association with Gambarelli & Davitto until 1942, was it?
- Rossi: Well, yes, because they handled our wine after Repeal.
- Teiser: Who were the principals in Gambarelli & Davitto?
- Rossi: Originally Miss [Victoria] Gambarelli, who had been secretary to V. Langmann; she made a connection with [Bernard] Davitto, and they acquired V. Langmann & Company.
- Teiser: What did you people in the wine industry drink during Prohibition? Did you use your 200-gallon family allowance?
- Rossi: [Laughter] Not the 200 gallons because that was quite a bit. But we did make a certain limited amount out of the grape juice and grape concentrate.
- Teiser: In your home?
- Rossi: No.... Oh, yes! Oh, it had to be in your own home.
- Teiser: Was it good? Could you make good wine at home?
- Rossi: Oh yes. If you knew how, you know. You had to know the techniques.
- Teiser: What about the power of gangsters in the industry here during Prohibition?
- Rossi: Well, in California, we personally did not have any contact with them or any disturbances with them.
- Teiser: No winery in California?
- Rossi: Well, I wouldn't say. I said, our own. Oh, there's no doubt that there was a lot of illegal traffic in



This Italian Swiss Colony publicity photograph, arranged by Leon Adams, carried the following caption: "December, 1933 - Italian Swiss Colony wines returned to retail store shelves and restaurant wine lists in San Francisco as Prohibition ended. This parade of drays loaded with Tipo Chianti paused in Civic Center of the nation's wine capital promising 'free delivery' to thirsty San Franciscans." Photograph courtesy California Historical Society.

- Rossi: alcoholic beverages, wine included. But they didn't worry so much about the wine end of it, you know. It was mostly stronger liquor that was popular.
- Teiser: I had understood that there were some gangs that got wine from some of the wineries. This is not familiar to you?
- Rossi: No, I'm not familiar with it. No, the only thing is that quite a few of the wineries had connections with people that would supply sacramental permits, or medicinal permits.
- Teiser: Did any of the California wineries make brandy during Prohibition that you know of?
- Rossi: Well, they made brandy because they made sacramental wines, sweet wines, and they had to have brandy for these sweet wines. Fortified wines.

INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PRORATE

- Teiser: There's been much discussion of the California Vineyardists Association.
- Rossi: Donald Conn was manager. My brother opposed joining California Vineyardists Association.
- Teiser: Why?
- Rossi: Wanted to be independent. And we did maintain our independence, fortunately. Because eventually they went out of business. And we still maintained our identity. So my brother was right.
- Teiser: If you had gone into it, what would you have had to do? Was it that tight an association that you would not have been able to operate your own way?
- Rossi: I think so.
- Teiser: Why? Because of price controls?
- Rossi: No. No. Nothing of that type, I don't think. Well, we remained small and independent. I think that Fruit Industries became a part of it.

Teiser: A lot of vineyardists became a part of it, and I thought I saw that Italian Swiss Colony had a contract with it in 1930.*

Rossi: It might be.

(Interview #3 - June 20, 1969)

Teiser: Did you consider Fruit Industries an important factor in the industry in the early 1930's?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: I guess Walter Taylor came in about then, didn't he?

Rossi: Have you talked to Walter Taylor?

Teiser: No, I haven't. Do you think I should?

Rossi: Well, he was well-posted, especially in Donald Conn's day. He came out of George West and Sons, too, I think. He could give you a slant on him, on George West. He [Taylor] was active in the industry. He spoke for Fruit Industries, always.**

Teiser: I've seen articles by him on the wine industry from the point of view of Fruit Industries. Were his ideas sound from, say, your point of view? He had definite ideas on marketing, I think.

Rossi: Well, he was a little inclined to be critical of things. I don't know that he was always right though. [Laughter] I mean, whether he carried his weight is another thing.

Teiser: He was very strong for stabilization programs, was he not?

Rossi: He was.

Teiser: And there were those of you who were not?

*Under "Miscellaneous County Acreage Holders," Membership List, California Vineyardists Association, August 15, 1930, in Wine Institute library.

**Mr. Taylor declined the Regional Oral History Office's invitation to be included in the wine industry interview series.

- Rossi: That's right. Have you ever gotten a slant from Mario Perelli-Minetti?
- Teiser: Not Mario, no; his father.
- Rossi: He'd be more likely to give you a better slant than his father. Because he was managing Fruit Industries.
- Teiser: Has the industry, in your experience, been split between those who wanted heavy cooperation and those who wanted to be independent?
- Rossi: Oh, I don't think there was an out-and-out program set out by anyone in particular. They took up these problems as they came up, without being just adamant about their viewpoints.
- Teiser: I believe the last attempt at a stabilization program was the so-called set-aside, which people apparently felt strongly for and against.
- Rossi: Well, there, that was one instance where they did feel strongly one way or the other.
- Teiser: Why did those in favor, favor it? And why did those who felt they disliked it, dislike it?
- Rossi: I suppose those that didn't have distribution and outlets maybe felt they were in a better position to acquire them than if they were restricted to certain operations.
- Teiser: Those who had less were less willing to be restricted?
- Rossi: That's right.
- Teiser: It's interesting that with all the attempts at organization there's never been any really tight single control.
- Rossi: No, there hasn't been anything in the way of a, you might say, real anti-trust operation. The government did get after the industry, and I think rather unfairly-- I mean, it wasn't well-founded, the accusation--although the industry had to rather give in to the government viewpoint. I felt that it didn't have a solid basis in fact. So that you're right when you say that they didn't have any solid program of control.
- Teiser: What was the point at issue?

- Rossi: That they were forming one of these control programs to really control.
- Teiser: When was that?
- Rossi: In the early '40's maybe or the late '30's.
- Teiser: I suppose the prorate was about the only thing that cut right through the industry.
- Rossi: Well, the people were for prorate, I think, as a rule. That seemed to have worked out all right.
- Teiser: Did you know Donald Conn?
- Rossi: Yes, I knew him.
- Teiser: What kind of a man was he?
- Rossi: Very... Well, he was a promoter. He had been an employee of the Railroad Associations of America, and he was a fine promoter when it came to that, you know. No doubt about that. And he was instrumental in forming this California Vineyardists Association.
- Teiser: Did you ever hear that Mr. Hoover was somehow in favor of it?
- Rossi: No. I don't know if it was because...I think Mr. Hoover's family had a vineyard in the Fresno country. The sons particularly had a vineyard; raisin business.
- Teiser: Whose interests did you feel Mr. Conn had at heart?
- Rossi: Oh, I don't think anybody's in particular. I think it was just a question that he wanted to get everybody in it so as to have a big organization. I don't think he had any other interest than that [laughter]. You know, a promoter always wants everybody to go along with it, and he was a promoter.
- Teiser: It was said that it was an attempt to establish an orderly marketing system.
- Rossi: Well, that might have been.
- Teiser: But you wanted to market on your own?
- Rossi: Well, we always more or less went our independent way.

- Teiser: The California Vineyardists Association was instrumental in getting a loan from--was it the Federal Farm Board?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: For Fruit Industries. Do you remember something of that?
- Rossi: Yes, I think so. I think Perelli-Minetti's family was connected with them at that time.
- Teiser: It seems to me that organization, Fruit Industries, generated so much heat!
- Rossi: Yes. [Laughter]
- Teiser: Another thing that's been said, and perhaps you have some thoughts on this, was that Mr. Harry A Caddow was an associate in some way of Mr. Conn....
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: ...and that the Wine Institute developed somewhat from...
- Rossi: No, that wasn't so. The Wine Institute is the result and successor of a couple of other organizations that preceded it, whose origin I was partly responsible for.
- Teiser: Could you tell about it?
- Rossi: Because in October, 1932, just a year or so prior to Repeal, I joined with about six or eight others in the wine industry of California to form the Grape Growers League of California, among whom were E.M. Sheehan, who was a vineyardist near Sacramento I think. Among others were the de Latour vineyards represented by a gentleman named St. Amant,* who was vice-president of Beaulieu Vineyards, and Mr. Horace Lanza, and Henry Koster of the California Barrel Company. The first week of December, 1932, we went back to Washington to meet with our attorney that we had hired, by the name of Marion de Vries, Judge

*W.L. St. Amant.

Rossi: Marion de Vries. And we got quite a bit of publicity on it because at that time they were trying to liberalize the Prohibition law so as to permit the sale of wine as being non-intoxicating in fact; that was our argument. Eventually, we appeared before the Ways and Means Committee--and strangely enough it's still the same head of the Ways and Means Committee today--

Teiser: Who was that?

Rossi: Mills.* I think he was a member of the committee. And I appeared and gave a talk on the chemistry of wine making to explain to the committee what wine really was. Mr. Lanza gave a talk on some other, legal phase of it I think it was. And Mr. St. Amant on some other phase of it. But this little group of us constituted the high-sounding name of Grape Growers League of California. And we hired Harry Caddow as our manager. So he went 'way back too. I don't know whether Harry Caddow went to Washington with us, but we put him on our payroll, a small salary because we were just organizing. I think we originally put up \$500 apiece personally to form this organization. Then eventually that became the Western Wine Producers Association, and eventually that was changed into the Wine Institute. That's the beginning of the Wine Institute.** It's an outcome of the original Grape Growers League of California. We appeared on December 6, 7, 8, 1932. We got a review in the New York Times. It was reported. It's in the Congressional Record.***

Teiser: What effect did it have, your appearing before that committee, in the long run, do you think?

Rossi: Well, it kept the wine industry of California before the public. We were trying to prove to this Congressional committee, Ways and Means Committee, that in the way wine was normally consumed in wine

*Wilbur D. Mills.

**See also pp. 77-79.

***See: U.S. Congress, House Ways and Means Committee. Prohibition. Modification of Volstead Act. Hearings. 1932. Y4.W36:V88.

Rossi: drinking countries, it wasn't intoxicating in fact because they consumed it with food, so that it didn't have the same effect. That was the argument that the beer people used back there before the same committee, and they won out because they were allowed to sell for a limited number of years 3.2 per cent beer as being non-intoxicating in fact. We wanted to try to get wine in the same classification as long as it didn't have more than 12 per cent alcohol, table wine. We weren't plugging for dessert wines, fortified wines; we were just trying to get table wines defined as being non-intoxicating in fact.

Teiser: It seems to me Dr. Maynard Joslyn mentioned an attempt to produce 3.2 per cent wines.

Rossi: We did. Asti Grape Products Company through Mr. Prati did actually produce 3.2 per cent wine. It was quite palatable.

Teiser: What grapes did you make it out of?

Rossi: Well, we had to dilute it, you know.

Teiser: How did you stabilize it?

Rossi: It was carbonated, I think.

Teiser: Did Dr. Joslyn say you sold it through Mission Dry Company?

Rossi: Maybe for a while.

Teiser: Did you sell it under your own label for a time?

Rossi: Yes. We sold it under our own label. It didn't last very long though.

Teiser: Sounds like a pleasant beverage.

Rossi: It was pleasant. It was a good substitute for what you couldn't get. Yes, it was a good substitute. Mr. Prati was responsible for it.

Teiser: Back to your organization, how did you happen to know Mr. Cadow?

Rossi: I don't know whether it was because of connections with Mr. Leon Adams of the Pacific Advertising staff

Rossi: that did some promotion work for us at that time... Might have been through Mr. Adams because Mr. Adams was so many years connected with the wine industry under Caddow that it might have been a personal acquaintance there. Mr. Caddow came out of the railroad business, too. He was an agent in the San Joaquin Valley. Employee of Southern Pacific in some town in the San Joaquin Valley, I think.

Teiser: Mr. Adams had been down there, hadn't he?

Rossi: I don't know.

Teiser: He told me that he worked on a newspaper in Fresno for a few years.

Rossi: Well, his partner in the Pacific Advertising staff was Bob Smith. Robert L. Smith. We hired Mr. Adams in 1932 at the time I went east to appear before the Washington committee. I remember Mr. Adams was trying to build my image up [laughter]. He had charge of the advertising and public relations work at the time that Repeal came, and we made a shipment of a trainload of wine to market.

Teiser: And he got a good deal of publicity for it?

Rossi: Oh, yes. Yes, that was his first contact with wine was through me. Yes. He's done very well.

Teiser: He's a very articulate spokesman.

Rossi: Well, he knows what he's talking about. He's learnt authentic information. So whatever he writes in his books is pretty authentic.

Teiser: How did you and Mr. Lanza happen to get together in the Grape Growers League? You come from quite different segments of the wine industry.

Rossi: Well, might have been that he was making grape concentrate up at Ukiah. At that time I think he might have been connected with the Tribunos and Victor Repetto, that winery in Ukiah that they acquired. Mr. Lanza had come out from western New York state, from Fredonia, I think it was.

Teiser: Mr. Repetto is still in this area.

Rossi: I was with him last night. We attended our annual

Rossi: meeting of an Italian cultural club we both belong to.

Teiser: He's no longer in the wine business at all?

Rossi: No, he's retired. I think he sold out to the Tribunos.*

Teiser: Did your organization then work toward Repeal from 1932 on?

Rossi: Well, we got Repeal within a year after that.

Teiser: Oh, yes, of course.

Rossi: We were trying to break in again ahead of the official declaration of Repeal.

Teiser: You knew it was coming?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Had Hoover ever indicated that he was in favor of Repeal?

Rossi: No, it was Alfred Smith. Hoover called it the noble experiment. I don't think he had anything to do with Repeal.

Teiser: You were really paving the way for the transition to Repeal?

Rossi: Oh yes. We saw the light, at that time, between Roosevelt and Al Smith that eventually Repeal would be a fact.

REPEAL TO 1942

Teiser: What did you do at home with Italian Swiss Colony? What moves did you make to take advantage of the coming Repeal?

*Mr. Renetto was subsequently interviewed in this series.

Rossi: Well, we began to acquire some wines in the way of fortified wines because we were in the dry wine district, Sonoma County at Asti; we hadn't acquired a winery down at Fresno as yet. We eventually acquired the La Paloma Winery, which belonged to M.F. Tarpey and Sons. We bought that. My brother was instrumental in getting that deal through.

Teiser: That's the one at Clovis, is that right?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: What was the history of that winery? Had it been started before Prohibition?

Rossi: Well, yes, 1912, I think.

Teiser: Who was Tarpey?

Rossi: Well, it was a well-known family in California. Democratic background. He had a brother by the name of Paul Tarpey. Brother or first cousin. We used to do business with Paul Tarpey in the way of buying wines from others, getting ready for Repeal, because we didn't make wine during the 12 years of Prohibition.

Teiser: You didn't carry any over?

Rossi: We only carried over some dry table wine.

Teiser: Did you carry over much?

Rossi: Oh, I don't know. We had 100,000 gallons or 200,000 gallons, something like that.

Teiser: Did it come through all right?

Rossi: Well, we eventually used it. Eventually we blended it up with new wine.

Teiser: You must have taken good care of it.

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: You maintained your cooperage in good shape all through?

Rossi: That's right.

Teiser: That must have taken a lot of work and a lot of faith.

Rossi: It was a gamble.

Teiser: So you started buying some sweet wines. What else did you do? Did you add to your facilities or did you reconstruct any, or were you all ready to go?

Rossi: Well, we were ready to go.

Teiser: You must have increased your capacity?

Rossi: Yes, we increased our-- Well, we acquired this La Paloma Winery.

Teiser: Did you acquire Shewan-Jones, too?

Rossi: No. That was afterwards. That was National Distillers that acquired Shewan-Jones.

Teiser: After they acquired your company?

Rossi: Yes. Well, no, maybe they acquired Shewan-Jones later. But about the same time.

Teiser: La Paloma then you operated?

Rossi: We operated. We did a big job down there because we put in big redwood tanks and cement tanks.

Teiser: How large a capacity did it have?

Rossi: I think we built it up to about two million gallons.

Teiser: And how great a capacity did you build up at Asti?

Rossi: I don't know. I think that went to seven or eight million gallons.

Teiser: What was it just before Prohibition?

Rossi: Well, we didn't really increase the capacity very much at Asti. What we did was before Prohibition. Because we put in the first cement tanks that were built in California, storage tanks.

Teiser: Were they lined?

Rossi: No. There were only one or two tanks that were lined. With glass. But we treated them with silicate. And that closed the pores, but there was no particular lining. They use steel a great deal now.

Teiser: What was the tank up there known as the biggest wine vat in the world?

Rossi: That was, yes, 300,000 gallon tank.

Teiser: When was that put in?

Rossi: '97, I think. 1897.

Teiser: What material was that?

Rossi: Cement.

Teiser: That was the first cement one?

Rossi: Yes. This was underground.

Teiser: Whose idea was that? Your father's?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Why underground? Cool?

Rossi: Cool, I guess. At that time, you see, there was a big crop, and the company didn't have money to pay cash for it, so they just offered these facilities. After they got promises of delivery, they went ahead and built the underground tank. It's been used all the time.

Teiser: Still?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Not still the biggest in the world, I suppose.

Rossi: Well, it's been divided up into three sections now.

Teiser: What kind of wine is it used for?

Rossi: Red wine. Red table wine.

Teiser: A blended wine?

Rossi: Yes. Although eventually I don't know that we didn't use it for port, things like that, you know, but I think it was mostly for red table wine.

Teiser: Most of your cooperage, though, was redwood?

- Rossi: Redwood.
- Teiser: Large and small, both?
- Rossi: Mostly large. Comparatively large.
- Teiser: What size is that?
- Rossi: 15,000 to 40,000.
- Teiser: Who supplied your cooperage? Any one company, or...?
- Rossi: Well, there was a firm by the name of Heger & Company, I think it was. Well, that might have been the manager's name. I forget the official title of the company. I think they did most of the work.
- Teiser: Who supplied your equipment?
- Rossi: Healdsburg Machine Shop.
- Teiser: Did they supply you with a good deal?
- Rossi: Well, that was before the days of the Valley company* down at Fresno. The Healdsburg Machine Shop. One of the earliest in northern California.
- Teiser: I've heard the name of the people who owned it, and I can't remember.
- Rossi: Scalione was one. Ferrari. He's still alive. He's an old man. Those are the two names I remember. There were three in the firm.**
- Teiser: Someone suggested that we interview Mr. Ferrari. I suppose he would have a long memory of the industry.
- Rossi: Yes. He's still active. Someone said he was still very much around. I once in a while go up to a dinner that the local association gives in Sonoma County, and he's generally there.
- Teiser: Was his company an important factor in the wine industry?

*Valley Foundry and Machine Works.

**Cesare Rafanelli, Mario Scalione, and Abele Ferrari.

- Rossi: Oh, not to that extent.
- Teiser: Did you make any of your own equipment there at Asti?
- Rossi: No...no.
- Teiser: Where did you get your corks in the first days following Repeal?
- Rossi: Oh, I guess local suppliers. I used to get them from Portugal and Spain.
- Teiser: Was there a good supply?
- Rossi: Oh, I think so.
- Teiser: Now, I understand, it's not easy to get good corks.
- Rossi: Well, they don't use them much. They don't use corks very much. Use caps.
- Teiser: Was there any problem of getting good bottles at first?
- Rossi: No. Well, there was in the Tipo bottles, the Tipo Chianti bottles.
- Teiser: Those were to your own special mold, were they?
- Rossi: Well, we used to import them originally. My father imported those from Italy. Straw covers. From Florence and Fiesole. And then at the time of the Second World War, Mussolini put an embargo on the export of these flasks. He thought we were pirating to use his bottles to put out a wine that competed with an Italian wine. So Mr. Prati had to become ingenious and develop a substitute. We got Owens-Illinois to make the bottle. First we tried to get it out of Mexico, but they were so un-uniform, you couldn't depend on them.
- Teiser: You were using filling machines by then?
- Rossi: Yes. So Mr. Prati got Owens-Illinois to supply the bottle. He got Zellerbach Paper Company to supply-- was it Zellerbach Paper Company? Anyhow, there was somebody who supplied a substitute for the straw, and there was cellophane wrap and a plastic base. So that we had just as fine a looking, attractive package as we had previously imported from Italy.

Teiser: So when you went back into the business of wine making--with great relief I'm sure--then you said that the Di Giorgio interests came in. Did they give you capital for getting back in?

Rossi: Well, what happened was they gave us a million and a half gallons, I think it was, of fortified wines.

Teiser: Where did they get it?

Rossi: They produced it. They had a winery down there at Bakersfield. Delano. So we used to buy originally from him. But then you got into bigger quantities, and Di Giorgio didn't have an outlet for his surplus grapes, so he'd make wine with it, but he didn't have an outlet for it, so we went to him and offered to give him an interest in the company if he'd supply the wine to us. Well, it worked out all right for him because afterwards we sold out at a good profit and he made a good profit on his stock.

Teiser: Did you bring in any other new interests or people at that time?

Rossi: Well, I got my own family to, yes. Well, they came in ahead of Di Giorgio. Di Giorgio was the last to come in. When we saw Repeal coming, and this was in Prohibition days still, we sold a minority interest to the son of one of my sisters and to Mr. Sbarboro's family, some of Mr. Sbarboro's family.

Teiser: They wanted to come back into the company?

Rossi: Well, it was on a limited scale. Di Giorgio was a pretty substantial block. A 37-1/2 per cent interest.

Teiser: And the members of your family, then, held the rest?

Rossi: And Prati, of course. We were on a sort of 50-50 basis with the Pratis and the Seghesios.

Teiser: Then, as I remember, your own label became very strong during the 'thirties.

Rossi: Well, it had a good reputation.

Teiser: Were you supplying bulk wines, too?

Rossi: We were supplying bulk wines mostly.

Teiser: But you must have built up your own label considerably.

Rossi: Well, yes. And we'd always get a little bit more than the average market for quality and our reputation. Italian Swiss Colony is now the principal brand that United Vintners features.

Teiser: You continued shipping to New York, Gambarelli & Davitto...

Rossi: Mostly New York and the eastern seaboard, and a little bit in Chicago. We had our own office in Chicago.

Teiser: This is a general industry question: During those years immediately following Repeal, I remember there was a good deal of to-do about wineries which had borrowed money from banks (maybe just against current expectations, not long capital loans) having their wines forced onto the market young.

Rossi: Oh, I don't think there was any particular difficulty about that. I think it was probably the first years after Repeal that you didn't have capable winemakers.

Teiser: Did all the people from the University come around then...

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Did they help you?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

Teiser: Did they also get you to help them and to give them information that they had, in effect, forgotten?

Rossi: No, they really hadn't forgotten particularly. Because [William V.] Cruess was always there and Cruess knew the score. It was Cruess who was the principal man at the University and Cruess knew the score.

Teiser: Dr. Maynard Joslyn was with him a great deal.

Rossi: Shortly afterwards. Cruess I think was the first.

Teiser: What kind of help did you need at the time that they could give you?

Rossi: Well, I think maybe in stabilization of wines. That

- Rossi: was one of the principal problems that the industry faced, stabilization of wines.
- Teiser: It was the Berkeley Yeast Laboratory that had a part in the whole program?
- Rossi: Well, Berkeley Yeast Laboratory supplied the culture, pure cultures. A man by the name of Fessler. He was a technical man, too. He had quite a bit to do, Fessler did. Julius Fessler. He's still alive. He lives in Oakland, near Piedmont. He was a great help to the industry, Fessler was.
- Teiser: Before Prohibition, had people simply kept their own cultures?
- Rossi: They didn't use them.
- Teiser: Just what was on the grapes?
- Rossi: Yes. Before Prohibition they didn't use them, except what we found out in 1909. You see, prior to 1909 when my father introduced this on a commercial scale.... Well, the fact of the matter is, they hadn't known very much about it in France, either. Was developed at Montpellier in France in the early part of the century. We imported it in concentrated liquid form. As I said, that was the biggest advance in California wine making from the quality standpoint, use of pure cultures and sulfur dioxide.
- Teiser: Did people who were starting wineries, and hadn't had experience in the industry, come and ask you questions at that time?
- Rossi: Not particularly.
- Teiser: Did you bring in any technical people at that time that hadn't been with you before?
- Rossi: No.
- Teiser: Did you immediately start shipping east?
- Rossi: After Repeal? Yes.
- Teiser: And found a reasonably good market?
- Rossi: Yes.

- Teiser: Someone said that California wines had at first a rather poor reputation in the eastern markets because so many of them spoiled in transit.
- Rossi: That's it. The quality the first few years of Repeal wasn't particularly good.
- Teiser: I would think it was amazing it was good at all.
- Rossi: That's right.
- Teiser: There weren't so many of you who had had the courage to stick with it for all those long years.
- Rossi: Well, that was true, that was true. People got out of the wine industry.
- Teiser: Your operations at Italian Swiss Colony, then after Repeal, did they continue growing?
- Rossi: Well, we began to expand our production, yes, in the late 'thirties.
- Teiser: With the acquisition of still other...?
- Rossi: No, we didn't acquire properties except La Paloma Winery. That's the only big property and the only outside property we acquired.
- Teiser: You expanded the facilities you owned then?
- Rossi: That's right. Those two big wineries, Asti and La Paloma Winery at Clovis.
- Teiser: Did you invest in more acreage?
- Rossi: No.
- Teiser: You bought more grapes?
- Rossi: Bought more grapes or acquired more wine.
- Teiser: By the end of the 'thirties was Roma still the dominant winery? Or had you come up to...?
- Rossi: No, no. No, they were always dominant.

WITH NATIONAL DISTILLERS, 1942-1947

Teiser: I believe it was in 1942, then...

Rossi: We sold out to National Distillers.

Teiser: What were the factors?

Rossi: Well, the factors were that we got an offer.
[Laughter]

Teiser: Why do you think they made the offer?

Rossi: Because they couldn't get grain for whiskey. And they wanted to have the appearance with their distributors to keep them happy. So they got into the wine business. And then there's also alcohol, which was wine, so most of their distributors got into the wine business. And they offered us a fair return, a fair price for our plants, so we sold out.

Teiser: Why did they choose you?

Rossi: Well, we had a good reputation and fair volume, and we were willing to sell.

Teiser: At the time of the sale then, you and your brother remained in executive positions, did you not?

Rossi: For five years. Not quite five years. We didn't have a contract.

Teiser: Oh, you didn't?

Rossi: No, it was a day-to-day proposition.

Teiser: My word, you must have trusted them.

Rossi: Well, they wanted to make that a condition of sale and purchase, back in New York. And I was back in New York, and I said, "As far as my brother and I are concerned, we don't want a contract. Let's get along. If we have a contract, and we don't get along, what's the use?" I said, "But I think we ought to get along if we're happy and you're happy. And if we're not, well, what's the use of the connection?" So it lasted four years and nine months. On a day-to-day basis.

Teiser: I've heard it said that the whiskey people didn't know

Teiser: enough about the wine business to run it.

Rossi: That was pretty nearly right. That is, you don't run the wine business like you do the whiskey business. Because the profits are not there in the wine business. In the wine business you work with pennies, and in the whiskey business you work with dollars.

Teiser: Didn't they know that before?

Rossi: No.

Teiser: And nobody thought to tell them.

Rossi: [Laughter] Well, once or twice I was good enough to tell them, "We don't do it this way in the wine business." For example, they wanted to give a brand name to every different product. Port, sherry, muscatel, tokay, Madeira, different name for everything. I told them, "Your name is Italian Swiss Colony. Then you put the word 'port,' 'sherry,' 'muscatel.' And as long as it's Italian Swiss Colony sherry, that's enough!"

They found out after a while. Then they came to the viewpoint that the name Italian Swiss Colony was the brand name. You only had to advertise one brand name instead of half a dozen or a dozen.

Teiser: Were they satisfied with the kind of wine that you made, or did they want you to change the wines?

Rossi: No, the wines were all right.

Teiser: Did they understand your production cycle?

Rossi: I think so. At least the man that was in immediate charge of the wine division, who was, you know, the director of the wine division from a policy standpoint, even though they didn't operate directly themselves the day-to-day operations.

Teiser: Did they have anyone out here?

Rossi: Eventually. After we got out, yes.

Teiser: But not before?

Rossi: Well, yes, there was General Deane. General John R. Deane.

Teiser: What had happened to Mr. Prati?

Rossi: Oh, he was kept on as production manager.

Teiser: After you left?

Rossi: Yes,* they didn't have anyone in the production end of the business. And they kept Mr. Prati. He was capable. But from the executive standpoint, they wanted their own people after four or five years.

Teiser: General Deane came though before you left?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: He had no experience in the wine industry, did he?

Rossi: No. But he was sort of representing National here.

Teiser: Was he a good executive?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: How did you happen to leave? You and your brother?

Rossi: We were asked to resign. [Laughter] They would have kept one of us, but we decided to both resign. We had worked together all our lives. They didn't want too many executives. So we resigned. After four years, nine months. Well, after all, they owned the company, they could do as they pleased. We refused a contract.

Teiser: Well, it didn't work for them very well, did it?

Rossi: Oh, I wouldn't say...

Teiser: Oh, did it?

Rossi: Oh, yes, they got along all right. Only thing is, eventually they found out they felt they didn't belong in the wine business, the whiskey people.

Teiser: Now they're all taking another look.

*In 1951 Enrico Prati left to become a founder of Martini & Prati Wines. He died May 25, 1952.

- Rossi: That's another thing today, they're getting back into it. Well, days of conglomerates, you know. [Laughter] Heublein has just bought out BV.*
- Teiser: So I see.
- Rossi: Must have made a very good offer.
- Teiser: Heublein now owns...
- Rossi: Italian Swiss Colony. Well, that is [now owned by] United Vintners. United Vintners had already effected their last acquisition, the Inglenook Vineyards, by the time they sold out recently to Heublein. They're a quality house, the Heubleins.
- Teiser: I hope they'll...
- Rossi: They'll maintain the quality. It's an indication that they will when they buy out these best brands. I think they're going to try to keep the Inglenook brand at a high level.
- Teiser: I wonder if they'll be using just grapes from that area.
- Rossi: Well, the estate-bottled will be Inglenook one hundred per cent. At a dinner of the Wine and Food Society board of governors, Professor [Maynard] Amerine was asked that question, whether he thought they would maintain the quality, and he said unquestionably yes. I was glad to hear him say that. He's just resigned from the board of governors of the Wine and Food Society because of taking his sabbatical.

THE WINE ADVISORY BOARD AND THE WINE INSTITUTE

- Teiser: After you left National Distillers, you then went immediately to the Wine Advisory Board as manager?
- Rossi: Well, yes, because we retired on the first of October, 1947. And I was offered this position with the Wine Advisory Board in November, 1947, but actually did not go to work for them until the first of January, a month and a half later, because I wanted to become familiar with the operation in an informal way. So I worked without pay for a month and a half, just to

*Beaulieu Vineyard

Rossi: get acquainted with the operation, feeling I could do better if I wasn't under pay than if I supplanted the manager I was replacing.

Teiser: Who was he?

Rossi: A Mr. Jackson.*

Teiser: And you had been instrumental in the formation of it?

Rossi: Oh, yes.

(Interview #4 - July 9, 1969)

Teiser: Perhaps you could recapitulate the sequence of events that went into the formation of the Wine Institute. You said before we were taping that you and your brother perhaps had gotten Leon Adams interested in the Wine Institute.... Or how did it go?

Rossi: No. The Wine Institute was the result of a small organization formed right prior to Repeal. We had hired Mr. Adams and his partner, Robert Smith, in a public relations job. And Leon Adams became very much interested in the wine industry of California. In fact, every time I see him almost, he refers to me as "my tutor."

Teiser: You tutored well.

Rossi: Well, I gave him a few basic ideas and he fast surpassed my knowledge. And from then on, he became very closely associated with the wine industry of California, because when I became manager of the Wine Advisory Board on January 1, 1948, he was a fine man to work with because he was so enthusiastic.

Teiser: At the time the Wine Institute was formed in 1934, you were one of the first...

Rossi: ...organizers. As I say, the Wine Institute is the aftermath of an organization of about eight or ten wine people who went to Washington to try to get table

*Eugene Jackson

- Rossi: wines declared non-intoxicating in fact, so that it would qualify as a legitimate product to sell even though table wines had at that time 12 per cent alcohol.* Our argument in that regard was that a beverage is either intoxicating or not, according to the manner in which it is customarily used, and table wine was not generally sold in bars; it was sold mostly for home wine use at table or in restaurants with food. Now when you use alcoholic beverages of a mild alcoholic volume, you generally don't go for the alcoholic effect on the system but more as an item of enjoyment, making food more appealing. And also in a medical way, it has its virtues. So this Grape Growers League of California in a year or two expanded its ambition and appeal by gathering in a wider segment of the industry. I think it became at that time the Wine Producers Association, something like that, I can't remember exactly the technical name we operated under. And the Wine Producers Association then also expanded, in turn, to the Wine Institute. But more or less it was the same people.
- Teiser: Who were those people, principally?
- Rossi: Well, the original members that constituted the Grape Growers League were small organizations like Beaulieu Vineyard, Lee Jones, a gentleman by the name of Edgar M. Sheehan who was a vineyardist near Sacramento. Of course there was Italian Swiss Colony.
- Teiser: Were you and your brother both active?
- Rossi: Oh, yes. We were very active. And Mr. [Sophus] Federspiel, who in my father's day had been my father's assistant manager of the Italian Swiss Colony. And H.O. Lanza, who had recently come to California. He came out of Fredonia, New York. He was an attorney.
- Teiser: He's one of the few who came from out of state, isn't he?
- Rossi: Yes. He's still alive.
- Teiser: I have interviewed him.
- Rossi: The Wine Institute was a voluntary organization and

*See also pp. 60-61.

Rossi: had no legal standing, compulsory membership, so it didn't quite measure up to potentialities of cooperation of an industry.

Going to the formation of the Wine Advisory Board, when the Agricultural Act of I think 1934 was passed in Sacramento to favor agricultural industries, we recognized that this was an opportunity for the wine industry to form an organization that could avail itself of the so-called police powers of the State of California. By police powers, I mean that it could be made compulsory on every member of the wine industry if, after a public hearing, the director of agriculture could find legitimately that it was to the advantage of all members of the industry even though they might not agree to it voluntarily. So the director, after the first hearing, did so find that it was to the benefit of the members of the wine industry, and it became effective.*

Teiser: About how much of the industry had the Wine Institute itself represented?

Rossi: Voluntarily? Well, I would say at least half, but that wasn't enough.

Teiser: No. I believe the members of the industry voted, did they, on the marketing order for the Wine Advisory Board?

Rossi: Oh, yes. On the wine marketing order, certainly. It had to be, under the law.

Teiser: Did you do some campaigning to get up industry support?

Rossi: Oh, sure did.

Teiser: How did you do it?

Rossi: Oh, just by arguing. We had to educate the American public to the proper use and knowledge of wine.

*"A Marketing Order for Wine, under the California Agricultural Marketing Act of 1937, was placed in effect on October 24, 1938," according to Outline of Recent Stabilization Plans in the California Grape Industry, a typewritten Wine Institute report, a copy of which is on deposit in the Bancroft Library.

Teiser: You sold that idea to the winemakers?

Rossi: To the winemakers, that's right.

Teiser: Was there much opposition?

Rossi: Oh, a fair amount of opposition. They went to court about it.

Teiser: Who went to court?

Rossi: The members that were in favor of it. Because some members of the industry, a minority, in numbers particularly a minority, refused to pay the dues. They agreed to put the funds representing what would be compulsory dues in a special fund pending the determination of the constitutionality of the agricultural code provisions that bound all members of an industry when 65 per cent of an industry, either by volume or by individual numbers, voted in favor of it. Provided that the director of agriculture found that it was to the good of the entire industry.

Teiser: Who were those that opposed it?

Rossi: I think Mr. Gallo's organization was the principal one.

Teiser: There were others?

Rossi: It was a minority, by numbers.

Teiser: I suppose it was by volume as well, wasn't it?

Rossi: But they had to be a certain number by volume and by numbers.

Teiser: Hadn't Mr. Gallo been a member of the Wine Institute?

Rossi: I don't think so.

Teiser: Because he's quite a loyal member now, isn't he?

Rossi: Oh, yes. I guess he's in favor of it now. There were a few that would have spent considerably more in the way of dues so as to accomplish more quicker. But...

Teiser: There are some that would rather spend more?

Rossi: At that time. Particularly in the beginning. He eventually had to conform, but always voted for a moderate assessment.

Teiser: Gallo?

Rossi: Yes. He figured he could best spend his money in his way.

Teiser: I suppose it's more to the advantage of a large company establishing an individual brand to spend less with the industry and more for itself, is it?

Rossi: For the immediate present it would have been, but.... Immediate results. But I was always one in favor of a larger assessment.

Teiser: Were there any other notable industry members who were not enthusiastic?

Rossi: No, I don't think so. I think it was pretty generally accepted.* As I say, I figured there was so much work to be done in the way of education, and there was such a limited amount of dues available for spending on public relations advertising. However, half a loaf is better than none, and quite remarkable results were obtained.

It shows up now in that table wine usage has come so far up as compared to sale of dessert wines. Used to be that dessert wine sales were much higher than the table wine sales, and now it's almost 50-50. And there's no doubt that before long the table wine business will surpass the dessert wine business.

Teiser: In the San Joaquin Valley, as you probably remember, there was the Sweet Wine Producers Association. I think I heard that its members were in favor of the Wine Institute.

Rossi: Oh, yes. Mostly. Because they needed almost more educational results than the table wine people.

Teiser: Why?

*The marketing order "received the written assent of nearly 90 per cent of the industry." Ibid.

Rossi: Well, they had less of a background of cooperation in the history of the wine business prior to Prohibition.

Teiser: That was one of the early efforts like your Grape Growers League?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Was it similar to that, would you say?

Rossi: Yes, I imagine. But that came later. The original set-up was the Grape Growers League of California. Big sounding name, but few people involved, and people with imagination.

Teiser: Were the Wentes involved in that?

Rossi: Oh, yes, but they were a small factor.

Teiser: I wonder if the small companies didn't really gain more by the Wine Advisory Board than the large?

Rossi: They did. The small wine producers gained a good deal more proportionately for what they contributed. But the bigger factors realized that the image of the wine industry was enhanced by the spreading of the knowledge of the use of table wine rather than by that part of the business that depended on people using dessert wines more for the alcoholic content of the dessert wine and the reasonableness of the price.

Teiser: I think I heard somewhere that in the early days, the Wine Advisory Board public relations campaign stressed the small wineries more than the large because it was trying to create an image of quality. Am I correct?

Rossi: That's right. That's right. And the fact of the matter is that the president of the Wine Institute, I guess, was generally a small factor in the industry, and even in the Wine Advisory Board program, the industry has seen fit to keep as its president or chairman, rather they call it, a so-called small grower like Mr. Mirassou,* who's been 15 years, I think, chairman of the board.

*Edmund A. Mirassou.

Teiser: And much of the informational material that was given out was stressing the smaller wineries?

Rossi: Yes. Well, stressing the beverage that had a higher image.

Teiser: The book by Frank Schoonmaker and Tom Marvel American Wines,* must have been a kind of landmark. Did you view its publication as an important step for the wine industry in California?

Rossi: Well, Schoonmaker, I think, came lately. He was representing foreign wines more than American wines. That was his business, importation of foreign wines. And it was only after American wines, following Repeal, had improved their quality to the extent that the quality was really superior, you might say-- American wines were beginning to make an impression on the consuming public--that he had to take a position. He couldn't continue to say that the wines were no good. For a long time there, the importers in America and the exporters in Europe were downgrading American wines, and it got to the point where the tests were made blindfolded, not exactly blindfolded but without labels on the bottles; we began to prove that the average American public didn't know much difference, couldn't on a blind test say unequivocally this is domestic American wine and this is foreign because of the fact that the foreign wines are supposed to be so much better. Well, that isn't true. One has to be absolutely prejudiced to make statements like that today.

Teiser: Have there ever been any wine industry tastings of the kind that the canning industry has in its annual cuttings?

Rossi: No, not to that extent, other than taking part in the California State Fair exhibit of California wines when the public is invited to participate in the tastings without cost.

Teiser: I was thinking of the aspect of the Cannery League cuttings where they just buy cans off the grocers' shelves and open them, and the industry, not the public, examines them. It's kind of a brave thing for an industry to do.

*New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941.

Rossi: Well, to a certain point it's also a brave thing for wine industry members to participate in the State Fair awards.

Teiser: Yes. At one time though there was criticism of entries that they said were wines that were not the ordinary purchasable wines.

Rossi: Well, that is true to a certain extent, because the test tastings were made not so much to prove that the ordinary table wine was high quality but to prove that the possibilities were there if the industry wanted to avail itself of the possibilities that existed in the soil and climate of California. And that's why you did not have to have a big quantity, commercial quantities available to prove the point. Fact of the matter is that there were two general classifications, the higher classification, and the bulk classifications. By bulk classifications I mean wines that were exhibited with a stated minimum quantity, and it was set pretty high. But the other classification was available to those who had only minimum quantities of certain grades and varieties of wines.

Teiser: You were on the board of the Wine Institute from the beginning. What were its initial efforts?

Rossi: Well, the Wine Institute went more for protesting legislation, unfavorable legislation. And its public relations....

Teiser: Was Mr. Jefferson Peyser with the Wine Institute?

Rossi: Yes, right from the very beginning. He was right from the very beginning.

Teiser: Who was the first manager of the Wine Institute?

Rossi: Harry Caddow.

Teiser: And was Mr. Leon Adams with it in the beginning?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: What was his position then?

Rossi: Assistant manager.

Teiser: His job was public relations?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: What was Mr. Caddow's, the same?

Rossi: Yes, but Mr. Caddow was concerned a great deal more than Mr. Adams with legislation. Educating the legislators. The Wine Advisory Board was educating the consumer. Both were necessary.

Teiser: So the Wine Advisory Board was established in '38, is that right?

Rossi: '38, yes.

Teiser: It must have been a difficult task to get it established in a period of economic stress.

Rossi: Necessity is the mother of invention.

Teiser: But it was a time when it was hard to give up a dollar.

Rossi: That's right. That's right. That's why I felt that even if it hurt, there was more to be accomplished by taking a little less profit. It didn't make too much difference, to my way of looking at it, because everybody was paying his pro rata. It wasn't as if one was gaining an advantage that the other didn't have. Except that those who were more affluent could afford to go their own way more easily than those who were smaller and had limited capital. And my position was that in the long run, those with more capital could develop their business faster and grow much more strongly established if they still were able to sell more wine through cooperative efforts.

Teiser: One of the other big wineries of that period was Roma. Were they for...

Rossi: I think so.

Teiser: They were in support of the Wine Advisory Board?

Rossi: I think so. Maybe they weren't as enthusiastic, but they didn't oppose it.

Teiser: When it began, who was the manager, first? Who was the first manager of the Wine Advisory Board?

Rossi: That was Mr. [Eugene] Jackson.

Teiser: He stayed until you came in?

Rossi: Yes. I became manager January 1, 1948.

Teiser: Had he had a background in the wine industry?

Rossi: No, I don't think so.

Teiser: What was his function?

Rossi: Well, he had a crew of men out in the field like, subsequently, I did too.

Teiser: What they were doing?

Rossi: Well, when I came, we stressed the educational features.

Teiser: Had he been doing that?

Rossi: Yes.

PROGRAMS AND FUNCTIONS

Teiser: Did you change anything from the way he'd been doing it?

Rossi: Well, yes. I think one of the principal changes that came about after I came in was that I felt it was more necessary to reach the general public economically by giving out leaflets rather than booklets. I mean leaflets that cost you one cent apiece instead of something that cost you ten cents, twelve cents, fifteen cents apiece. You could reach more people. Educational material that cost little enough that you could just take a chance on wasting a certain amount because we were reaching a much bigger public.

Teiser: I think I know the leaflets that you mean. They were very well designed.

Rossi: Yes. And then they were very generally used at tastings and lectures. Before, they had recipe booklets. Well, that appealed only to people who knew something about it already. The booklets. But

Rossi: here you had to get the interest of people who didn't know anything about wine. And you had to take a certain element of chance of wasting say half of what you...but it wasn't that much. I remember the first big change that came about. I don't remember if I mentioned this to you before ~~nor~~ not. That the first leaflet I got out was one on cheese and wine.

Well, the reason was that some people who don't like wine, like cheese, and some people that don't like cheese, like wine. So we figured that there must be something in the combination that had its appeal, general appeal. And the only question was of reaching that particular public. And we got out meat and wine, fish and wine. The same thing with fish. Use white wine for cooking fish. Lot of people don't like fish, but maybe with wine they'd like it.

Teiser: Then your organization was receiving funds from the whole industry. Were you hiring the Wine Institute to perform some functions for you?

Rossi: Yes. In fact, the principal functions of the Wine Institute were supported financially by the Wine Advisory Board, because the Wine Institute preceded the Wine Advisory Board program by a few years and had established itself. And from a legislative standpoint, the Wine Institute represented more than the Wine Advisory Board. And the personnel of the Wine Institute was immediately available to expand its operations.

Teiser: Did the relationship between the Wine Institute and the Wine Advisory Board change?

Rossi: No. It was pretty well stabilized.

Teiser: You didn't change it in any way?

Rossi: No. It was felt that they could have more freedom operating as Wine Institute in legislative matters.

Teiser: And your field men, so-called, what functions did they serve?

Rossi: They held wine tastings, gave wine lectures.

Teiser: How did you find men to hire who could do that?

Rossi: Well, you had to educate them. Bring them in, and

Rossi: teach them. They did a good job.

Teiser: How many had you, doing that kind of work?

Rossi: Oh, 15 or 16.

Teiser: Did you work rather closely with the University in any ways?

Rossi: Not particularly. That was more the function of the Wine Institute. But 80-90 per cent of the funds that were spent by the Wine Institute were under contract from the Wine Advisory Board. There would have been no Wine Institute if there hadn't been a Wine Advisory Board. In the long run. In the beginning, yes, it might have lasted, but it would eventually have broken up because they couldn't have had a Wine Advisory Board in a program that was purely voluntary.

Teiser: And its funds kept growing as the industry grew and as inflation grew?

Rossi: Not necessarily. I don't think that its present budget is any bigger than it was ten years ago because they reduced the assessment per gallon.

Teiser: What was the assessment when you came in?

Rossi: Three-quarters of a cent a gallon for table wine sales and one and a half cents a gallon for dessert wine sales. Then it went to one cent and two cents. Now it's back again to one cent and one and a half cents.

Teiser: Is there any other way that could have been levied?

Rossi: Not that I know of.

Teiser: No other was suggested?

Rossi: No, couldn't have been because the profits on wine sales were minimum, in pennies. And that sometimes made the difference, especially before brands had become established and advertising budgets for brands became sizable. Before it was levied on bulk sales more than on case good sales.

Teiser: Did you work with individual wineries in their promotion programs?

- Rossi: No. Unless it was programs that benefitted the whole industry. Although I'll qualify that. There were those members of the wine industry who appreciated the cooperative efforts more than others, and naturally we'd work with them, more by accident than by design because the same programs were available to anyone who wanted to avail themselves of the programs we were trying to put over. Some were more willing to cooperate.
- Teiser: Who were the members of the industry who were particularly cooperative in those programs?
- Rossi: Well, our own organization was very cooperative, Italian Swiss Colony, and naturally the smaller producers. They were always ready to cooperate because they were getting quite a bit for the small amount they were contributing. But that was by design, too. The larger factors appreciated the part they were playing in establishing an image for the wine industry.
- Teiser: Herman Wente, was he active?
- Rossi: Yes. He was active and he cooperated well though his volume did not represent any sizable amount of money. But he had a fine reputation.
- Teiser: You were then manager of the Wine Advisory Board from 1948 until '60?
- Rossi: Until July 1, '60.
- Teiser: You decided to retire then?
- Rossi: Yes. I quit work then.
- Teiser: Looking back on that period, what do you think was accomplished?
- Rossi: Oh, I think the educational work was responsible for the whole thing. You had a program that--I'll be perfectly frank with you--the members of the wine industry didn't realize how good it was. I've always said they didn't realize how good it was.
- Teiser: You had some advertising help, didn't you?
- Rossi: J. Walter Thompson [Company].

Teiser: And did Mr. Adams have a hand in the preparation of material for you?

Rossi: I don't think so.

Teiser: You mentioned working with him.

Rossi: Yes, well, I mean to say you couldn't be in the wine industry if you didn't cooperate with the others in it to get the best advantage because there was so much to be done.

Teiser: Was it the Wine Institute that got out press releases?

Rossi: Yes, under contract. From us.

Teiser: And you handled the advertising direct?

Rossi: Yes. And the field work. Except in the facets of legislation when we had dealings with legislators to educate them.

Teiser: The assessments were handled by the Department of Agriculture?

Rossi: The assessments were banked by the Department of Agriculture.

Teiser: You never knew then from one year to another what your next year's budget was going to be, did you?

Rossi: Well, it was pretty uniform.

Teiser: You knew about what the sale would be?

Rossi: Yes. Because one of the principal troubles before I got in there was that they didn't know from year to year just what they would have available for spending. And so having managed the finances of our own company, that bothered me. And I always was very conservative in budgeting activities so they always had quite a fairly sizable surplus. We didn't have deficits.

Teiser: And you used the surplus of one year, the next?

Rossi: Yes, we were always, if anything, half a year ahead of the spending.

Teiser: So that if there were variations in the market, you were protected.

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Were the assessments collected annually?

Rossi: Monthly.

Teiser: And banked for you every month?

Rossi: Yes. We had a yearly budget, though. And naturally we were conservative. I was conservative in expenditures because there's nothing so bad as to propose to do something and then not do it. So, as I said, there was always an ample surplus to take care of what ever was budgeted.

Teiser: Did you do any work with people outside of California? Were your field men....

Rossi: All over the United States.

Teiser: Did you travel all over the United States?

Rossi: Myself too. Yes. Well, it was good to have that type of activity, to see the boss, who had been in the wine business himself. It was quite long, 12-1/2 years.

Teiser: I imagine that your experience was a factor that is impossible to evaluate.

Rossi: Yes. Because your field men always boosted you up farther. I don't know whether they always believed what they said. [Laughter]

Teiser: Well, I mean, for the whole industry to have some one who had long experience in it.

Rossi: Yes, well, it is an advantage, there's no doubt about it. No doubt about it.

Teiser: Are there aspects of your work and experience that we haven't covered?

Rossi: No, I think you hit the nail right on the head two minutes ago when you said it's an advantage to have a part in establishing an industry and then actively connected with the promotion of it. Because then when

Rossi: you are out of the industry personally you could look at it a little more impartially and with a certain amount of prestige because of your past connections.

Teiser: Did you regret retiring?

Rossi: No. I was tired.

Teiser: Must have been a demanding job.

Rossi: Yes, and then people have different ideas, and so, say, well, I've had my day, I guess. Like these young people today figure they have all the answers. Well, they think they have all the answers. Maybe they're right; who knows?

Teiser: Well, it must be a great source of satisfaction to you now to see the industry going ahead in much...

Rossi: Oh, it certainly is. It certainly is. Because I was always for cooperating with the others. It was a fortunate act, you know, that agricultural code. They couldn't get cooperation in non-agricultural industries, because they would be accused of anti-trust. This took it out from under the threat of anti-trust, being an agricultural industry.

Teiser: Puts it in a very favorable...

Rossi: Position, that's what I say. People didn't appreciate what they had.

Teiser: Was it necessary for you to build up a case that wine was an agricultural industry or was that pretty much accepted?

Rossi: Well, no, that was a perpetual argument we used to have to keep before the public. That was one of the Wine Institute's activities.

Teiser: But did you have trouble establishing that with the State Board of Agriculture?

Rossi: No. No.

Teiser: Or the courts? That was not contested in the courts?

Rossi: No. They had special programs for wheat and tobacco. How could they refuse it to the wine?

- Teiser: What year was it, do you remember, that the courts upheld the marketing acts, or the protests were dropped?
- Rossi: I don't know.
- Teiser: I presume you didn't think it was going to be declared unconstitutional.
- Rossi: No. No. If it had been resisted by a great deal of the public and the trade.... Let me put it another way: One of the reasons why I guess there wasn't too much resistance to the program by the state was that it didn't cost the State Treasury any money because it was all industry money that was being put out for advertising and public relations. The only thing that it cost the state was maybe five per cent for administration of the general program, but no sizable amount because there was just a certain amount of overhead in Sacramento and that's about all. Otherwise it was all industry money that was being spent.
- Teiser: And the hearings themselves were not of any particular significance, you indicated. It was the voting, I presume, that was?
- Rossi: That's right.
- Teiser: Was Mr. Setrakian against this? Or did he take a stand?
- Rossi: Oh, I think he was for it. How could he be otherwise? He was operating a raisin program. I think it was a particularly fortunate program, myself. It wouldn't have lasted all these years if it didn't carry a certain weight. You see, that's 30 years. That's a long time. And there was only a short interval of a few months, I think, where they had some trouble. They went to a one-year program instead of a three-year program and then eventually went back to a three-year program.*
- Teiser: What was the trouble that made them make it that short?
- Rossi: Oh, a difference of opinion about the advantages of it by a minority.

*The one-year program was in 1947-1948.

Teiser: Advantages of the whole program? Or aspects of it?

Rossi: Oh, aspects of it. If any aspect of it is strong enough to thwart an overall program, it doesn't make any difference whether it's one reason or another is the cause of it.

Teiser: Was there a special aspect that was objected to?

Rossi: Well, it was probably that the table wine people weren't paying their proportionate [share]. On the basis of a ton of grapes used, they actually were. They were paying as much for a ton of grapes. Because the assessment generally was twice the table wine assessment for dessert wines. Of course you only get half as many gallons of wine out of a ton of grapes when you make dessert wines. Generally 160 gallons of table wine per ton, and generally 80 gallons of dessert wine per ton, more or less. That's generally the formula.

Teiser: So they were finally convinced?

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: It was the sweet wine producers who were protesting?

Rossi: Well, what happened was this, the dessert wine people went into the table wine business and the table wine people went into the dessert wine business, so there really wasn't that division of opinion any more.

Teiser: I guess that was after they decided they could grow table wines in the Central Valley?

Rossi: That's right. Not as high a quality, no, but passable.

Teiser: There are very passable wines made there don't you think?

Rossi: I think so.

Teiser: There are some people who say you can grow just as good wines any place...

Rossi: That isn't so.

Teiser: ...if you know how to handle them.

Rossi: Oh, you could a passable wine quality, standard quality, but not as good as all districts.

OVERVIEWS

Teiser: Who are the outstanding wine industry men you have known?

Rossi: Oh, I've known them all.

Teiser: Who among them have seemed outstanding?

Rossi: Oh, I'd say all those that are well-known today. Same ones. It hasn't been changed. Hasn't been changed, except Mr. Gallo has come right up. I think he's appreciated the deal. More than he did in the beginning. What cooperative effort has meant. And he has established a good reputation for quality. And that's good. He has tried to make a product that would appeal to the American taste more than to the traditional connoisseur. The average American taste would not appeal to the traditional wine drinker of old. I use the word "traditional" in quotes because even the foreign wine standards and appeal is different today than it was 20 years ago, prior to Prohibition particularly.

Teiser: How does it differ?

Rossi: Well, for example, we have different standards of living, we have different tastes today. When people worked long hours, especially in the field--and the field workers were mostly foreigners, either Czechs or Slavs or Latins or Greeks--and they were more of an agricultural economy and worked hard, long hours. Well, they made wines that had a lot of tannin for example. They could handle the tannin and digest it, whereas American people wouldn't go for that. And Mr. Gallo recognized that and he made a wine of a different type than the traditional wine. You can see today the foreign wines mature much quicker than the old traditional foreign wines.

Teiser: Those made in Europe?

Rossi: Yes! They're changing them. They're changing the

- Rossi: quality of their wines. The old traditional wine drinker would consider maybe the foreign wines that are being put on the market today second grade. Personally, I think it's better. Because they don't have as much tannin as they used to have before. And they mature quicker. And particularly today when everything costs so high, they can't tie up their capital to the extent that they used to tie up inventory.
- Teiser: California wines, are they held for a shorter period than they were say 15 years ago? Are they aged less?
- Rossi: They are aged, I would say, no more. No more. Personally, I like a kind of wine that's got a new taste. Particular wine I'm drinking now is a comparatively new wine, and it has a very fine appeal, and I like it. For everyday use, I prefer it to the old wines.
- Teiser: What is it?
- Rossi: Burgundy.
- Teiser: Whose?
- Rossi: I won't say.
- Teiser: They are finding an advantage in bottling white wines young?
- Rossi: Yes. They've developed a technique through the universities of getting a higher quality. You hear so much the old wines, pre-Prohibition wines, were so much superior to the wines of today. That isn't so. Today's wines are better, if anything, than the old wines. We used to have a lot more trouble in preserving a clear wine, for example.
- Teiser: The trend to wines in bottles rather than in bulk-- has this been good, do you think?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: You think more wine should go out in bottles?
- Rossi: Yes. Well, nearly all of it goes out in bottles. Except those who buy in tank cars and then they do their own bottling. They eventually sell in bottles too.

- Teiser: I remember when we could take a jug down to one of the little wine shops here in San Francisco and buy from a barrel.
- Rossi: Yes, that's very true.
- Teiser: Who was behind the legislation to stop that?
- Rossi: Well, I think maybe one of the principal ones to stop it was Roma, because they figured they could get a higher quality to the consumer if the consumer bought it in the original package.
- I must confess that I felt for a while there that you could develop the business quicker by featuring bulk sales. But I changed my mind. You can get a better product buying the original package.
- Teiser: Wasn't a law passed that...
- Rossi: In certain states.
- Teiser: In California?
- Rossi: Yes.
- Teiser: It seems to me that it's no longer possible to buy in bulk. For the consumer.
- Rossi: Oh. I think you can. But it just doesn't pay any more. The American people don't want to bother with it. You have the bother of the large containers, what to do with them, you know, how to dispose of the barrels or kegs. People who want a larger quantity can get a case of four one-gallons quite reasonably. And then they can bottle their own gallons. I do it. Gallons or half gallons. When you use a certain amount, it pays.
- Teiser: You have seen the national corporations come into the wine industry. Do you think that has changed the character of the industry so far?
- Rossi: No.
- Teiser: And you say that you don't expect it to?
- Rossi: I don't think so. The very fact that they're getting in and staying in, or getting in and getting out and

Rossi: then coming back again.

Teiser: Maybe they learned something.

Rossi: Yes.

Teiser: Do you think they did, earlier?

Rossi: Surely. People are going in for moderate things.
And wine is a moderate beverage.

APPENDIX

T H E S T O R Y O F

I T A L I A N S W I S S C O L O N Y

By
ITALIAN SWISS COLONY
Asti, California

written by
Vincent Vandevent

San Francisco, in 1880, was a sober town. The great depression of the seventies had crippled its business and thrown thousands of its people out of work. The unemployed, in their desperation, had turned to radical leaders who at one time threatened the city's destruction. Now recovery had begun and the era of radicalism had passed.

But the scars remained and so did many of the unemployed. Among them were hundreds of Italian and Swiss immigrants who had been lured to California by the glowing promises of steamship agents. The plight of these immigrants attracted the attention of Andrea Sbarboro, a leader in the city's Italian colony. Out of his interest grew an institution which has become a business landmark in California.

Sbarboro had come to San Francisco in the early 1850's at the age of 13 and went to work in his brother Bartolomeo's grocery store. In 20 years he had acquired his own store and became moderately successful. Then the banking collapse brought on by the panic of 1873 opened a whole new career to him.

Constriction of credit resulting from the financial crisis had encouraged formation of mutual loan associations through which members might finance their own needs. Sbarboro organized and became manager of such an association in 1875; it was the first of five that he founded, which handled \$6,500,000 in receipts and financed the building of 2500 homes in the San Francisco area.

The grocer-turned-banker, conceived the idea of applying the building and loan principle to the problem of the jobless immigrants. The bulk of them, Sbarboro knew, were peasants whose best hope of success lay in returning to the land. There was plenty of good land in California. All that stood between the immigrants and the land was money. Sbarboro set out to get the money.

He went to the friends who had helped him launch his mutual loan association and made a proposition. Let each of them contribute a little each month to a fund with which to buy a tract of land to be worked by the immigrants. Let each immigrant contribute at least \$5 a month from his wages to the fund. After a set period of years let each immigrant use his accumulated contributions plus any dividends to buy a portion of the tract, thus liquidating the project and paying off the original investors.

Sbarboro's friends agreed and by-laws were drawn up providing that "This association shall be known as the 'Italian Swiss Agricultural Colony' and its objects shall be to buy and sell agricultural lands for colonial or other purposes, or to cultivate the same...." All permanent employees were to be members of the association and preference was to be given to Italians and Swiss immigrants who either were or intended to become American citizens.

On March 12, 1881, the Colony was incorporated and Italian and Swiss businessmen in San Francisco subscribed 2,250 dollar-a-month shares. Among the leaders of the original corporation, in addition to Sbarboro who served as secretary, were M. J. Fontana, president; Dr. G. Ollino, vice-president; Henry Casanova, treasurer; Dr. Paolo De Vecchi, and Pietro Rossi. There were nine elected directors. After \$10,000 had been accumulated, Sbarboro and two of his associates, M. Perata and S. Campodonico, began surveying likely sites for the Colony. More than 40 sites were examined before they settled on a 1500 acre tract of pasture land in Sonoma County, 90 miles north of San Francisco.

The land, situated on gently rolling hills in the Russian River Valley, was ideally suited to vineyards, and the Colony's directors had the growing of grapes in mind since most of the immigrants had been vineyardists. The countryside reminded them of Northern Italy, where most of the immigrants had come from, so they named their tract Asti, after the region in Italy.

The Colony paid \$10,000 down on the land and agreed to pay off the \$15,000 balance in thousand-a-month installments from their subscription income. Sbarboro set men to work clearing the hills of trees, and one of the Colony's directors arranged to import grape cuttings from Italy, France, Hungary and Germany.

When the land was ready for cultivation, Sbarboro invited the city's jobless Italians and Swiss to a mass meeting. He explained the purpose of the Asti project and made the men an offer --- for each of them, board, room, wine for personal use, and \$35.00 a month in return for his labor. Each would be required to subscribe at least \$5 a month for five shares of stock, thereby building his equity in the land. In the end, each man would be an independent farmer, having acquired his land on the installment plan.

To Andrea Sbarboro's surprise, the suspicious peasants refused his offer. The Colony's directors explained it several times over without success. No man would take a chance, though they all expressed a willingness to work. Not one took the chance which would have given him a retirement income of at least \$60.00 per month for life, only 25 years later. Sbarboro little dreamed at that time, that, 75 years later his original plan for the land would finally become a reality and the Colony would in fact become wholly owned by the growers and producers of the grapes.

Having already bought the land, the directors decided to go ahead anyway. They agreed to keep up their monthly subscriptions and operate Asti as a private venture. Several hundred jobless immigrants were set to work planting grape cuttings and building living quarters for themselves. Various parts of the new vineyards were named after certain sections or towns in Italy.

By the time the vineyard matured and the first big grape crop was ripening, the price had fallen from \$30 to \$8 a ton, which was less than the cost of production. Threatened with ruin, the Colony's directors made a momentous decision. They decided to "store" their perishable crop by turning it into wine.

A \$10 assessment was voted on each of the Colony's 2250 shares, and with the \$22,500 thus raised, a stone winery of 300,000 gallon capacity was built in 1887. The Colony's first grape crush was also its worst--due to mishandling, the wine turned to vinegar.

After seven years of subscription, the Asti Colony was still apparently a failure, but Sbarboro's friends stood by him. Pietro Rossi, a San Francisco druggist who had studied winemaking in Italy, was sent up to take charge. From the day of his arrival in 1888, the Colony dated its success, though it had to undergo one more crisis.

The first wines Rossi turned out proved to be excellent and the directors could at last foresee some return on their investment. But they reckoned without the fluctuations in the wine market. The wholesale price offered for Asti wines proved to be as far below a profitable level as the price offered for Asti grapes.

The Colony gambled once more. They had already gone from philanthropy to farming to winemaking, so they took one more step and became their own wholesalers. Italian Swiss Colony opened offices and wine vaults in San Francisco, Chicago, New Orleans and New York and set out to market their wine direct to the retail trade

*- dividend declared
April 7,
6
A. Rossi)*

Asti wines caught on immediately and Sbarboro, Rossi and their associates pushed ahead with a program of expansion, buying more land and making more wine. During the first 16 years all profits were ploughed back into improvements and additions and the stockholders, carrying out the cooperative principle did not pay the first dividend to members until 1897. By that time the organization had agencies in scores of American cities and more than a dozen foreign countries.

Asti had become an established community with its own post-office, railroad station, school and church. Its laborers, most of them Italians, had built homes and raised families around the winery. The directors, proud of what had been accomplished, began to build summer homes in the valley and to make a social center of Asti.

No West Coast visit by members of Europe's nobility was complete without an inspection of Asti and an outdoor banquet of stunning proportions with Sbarboro playing host. The winery's guest book was studded with the names of great personages from Europe as well as the United States.

Andrea Sbarboro's summer home at Asti exceeded all the rest. On a trip to Italy, he had visited Pompeii and seen the famous Casa de Vetti. He secured a copy of its floor plan and duplicated the Pompeian villa on the banks of the Russian River.

Then Sbarboro added a characteristic personal touch, he installed an elaborate underground sprinkler system. Its purpose was to sprinkle not his trees but his guests, for Sbarboro was an inveterate practical joker. The grounds of the estate became a maze of hydraulic boobytraps for the unsuspecting.

One of the sprinklers was hooked up within a stone grotto equipped with hammocks. The guests who flopped down to rest in the wrong hammock automatically gave himself a shower. Sbarboro loved outdoor banquets during the summer at which it was possible to shower his guests while he sat dry and roaring with laughter at the head of the table. Frequently his sons arranged the setting so that Sbarboro himself was doused.

The treacherous sprinkler system at Asti was obviously copied from one built by Marcus Sittich, Archbishop of Salzburg, at his 17th century palace in Hellbrun Gardens, and which was fed by 116 underground springs. Sbarboro, however, had improved on Hellbrun for the Archbishop's sprinklers had to be turned on by hand, while the banker's operated by pressure valves.

In the course of becoming one of the world's largest wineries, Asti had not sacrificed quality. Within four years of the time that Pietro Rossi took over the winemaking for the Colony, it had won its first gold medals in competition. Many of the awards came from American fairs and expositions, but the ones that pleased the directors most were those won in competition with European wines abroad.

Prejudice against American and particularly California wines was strong in Europe and such exhibitors competed under a heavy disadvantage. Despite this, Asti wines won gold medals at Genoa in 1892, at Dublin the same year, at Bordeaux in 1895 and at Paris in 1900. Diplomas of honor were conferred upon the Colony's wines at the original Asti in Italy and at Turin in 1898 and at Milan in 1906.

Then, in 1909, Pietro Rossi undertook an experiment which resulted in one of Asti's greatest triumphs. Having noted an increase in sparkling wines sales, he decided it was time to expand the Colony's champagne production. In the course of a visit to France with his twin sons, Rossi stopped off in Rheims, in the heart of the champagne country. ~~There~~ he met Charles Jadeau, a noted champagne maker, and persuaded ~~him~~ ^{in Paris} to come to California.

When the news of Jadeau's departure became known, reaction in France ranged from outraged indignation at Jadeau for his desertion to ridicule of Rossi for thinking he could duplicate French wines. The Paris newspaper, Le Petit Journal, devoted a long editorial to the subject. "The Americans are wrong," the paper wrote, "when they think they can do everything better than anyone else, and that nothing is impossible to them. The fact is that there are still in this world many, many things which they can never achieve. For example, they have not been able to manufacture champagne or even produce a sparkling wine that suggests the champagne of France."

This, the editorial continued, was not for lack of trying. Americans had imported the methods, the grapes, the yeast and done everything possible to duplicate champagne, even to luring over champagne experts "by spanning the ocean with a bridge of gold." But despite these efforts, "The champagne of California has turned out to be frightfull sour wine, only fit for German troopers". "Alas," Le Petit Journal concluded, "The imitators of champagne have forgotten one important thing, the soil of France with its subtle sorcery."

not Rheims
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Jadeau
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a plant for
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The town
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Sauv
(E. A. Rossi)

Rossi ignored the blast and returned to California, with Jadeau. He unfolded his plan to the Italian Swiss Colony's directors and they authorized the building of a new champagne plant with the finest equipment obtainable. A blend of Asti's finest white wines was made by Jadeau and 150,000 bottles of champagne were laid down in the Colony's cellars.

A year later, a few experts were invited from San Francisco for a tasting. Rossi and Jadeau anxiously opened a few bottles. The wine had all the sparkle and flavor they had hoped for, and the experts pronounced it excellent. The Colony's directors ordered production expanded once more, and put their champagne on the market under a new label, GOLDEN STATE EXTRA DRY.

Convinced that he had something to show skeptical Europeans, Rossi decided to exhibit his champagne at the international exposition in Turin, Italy, in October, 1911. With Sbarboro's encouragement, a selection of Golden State was made and sent off to Europe.

The judges at Turin, among the most celebrated connoisseurs in Europe, were noted for their prejudice against American wines, but they promised an impartial decision. After seven days of tasting and arguing together, they finally announced their judgment. GOLDEN STATE had been awarded the Grand Prix, the highest award possible, and the first time a California wine had been so honored. Perhaps the crowning success of all came with the admission by Le Petit Journal that "The sun DOES shine just as gloriously in California as in France."

Pietro Rossi never lived to learn that his new champagne had been so well received. While riding near his home at Asti, he was thrown from his horse and killed on October 9, 1911. The news of the award at Turin did not reach California until late in the month of October.

With the death of Rossi, one of the two great figures in the development of the Italian Swiss Colony had been removed. The management of the winery itself was carried on by Rossi's twin sons, Edmund and Robert, who had learned winemaking from their father's example. Andrea Sbarboro, then head of the Italian American bank in San Francisco, remained secretary of the Colony and split his efforts between banking and promoting the wine business.

Sbarboro, during the first decades of the twentieth century, found himself and his Colony confronted by an enemy of imposing size--the national prohibition movement. The movement, though aimed primarily at eliminating drunkenness, posed an obvious threat to Asti and to Sbarboro's way of life. He counterattacked with a barrage of speeches, pamphlets and appearances before congressional committees.

Whatever the earnest women of the temperance movement may have thought of him, Sbarboro considered himself a true temperance advocate. He proclaimed his eagerness to end drunkenness from every available rostrum. But his method lay in converting the hard drinker to light wines while the prohibitionists sought to impose temperance by drying up all alcoholic beverages.

To prohibit the use of wine through prohibiting the use of all alcohol struck Sbarboro as insane. He sincerely believed, and produced the word of learned authorities to prove, that wine was beneficial to health, an aid to digestion and a necessary ingredient of the good life.

He argued that those states which already had prohibition suffered more from drunkenness than they had before, and that therefore prohibition was no easy road to temperance. He suggested that America could achieve temperance overnight by switching from whiskey to wine and, incidentally, by cutting out tea and coffee.

Sbarboro's cure for the chronic drunk was unique. Every arrested drunk was to be sentenced to 30 days in jail and served light wines with his meals. Upon his release, Sbarboro believed, the fellow would be converted to temperance and an appreciation of wine, and would henceforth abstain from hard liquor. Backsliders were to be given 60-day sentences and the same therapy.

He advocated following the example of France and Italy and providing every man in the armed services with a daily wine ration. The wine-drinking countries of Europe, he argued, had little drunkenness, and America should learn from their temperate example. He cited passages from the Bible to prove that wine was the favorite drink of the prophets and often he declared his belief that biblical evidence proved the Deity was not a prohibitionist.

crusade

In his appearance before Congress, Sbarboro was fond of declaring that if his crusade succeeded he could die happy and have engraved on his tombstone the epitaph----- "Here lie the bones of Andrea Sbarboro who first sowed the seeds in the halls of Congress which removed drunkenness from the United States." The seeds, of course, were; Down with prohibition and whiskey, up with wine and temperance!

He once scandalized a WCTU deligation at a congressional hearing by a well meant suggestion. The women, he said, might best insure against their children growing up to be drunkards by starting them off in the highchair with a tippie of half wine and half water.

Whiskey distillers resented Sbarboro's method of fighting prohibition at their expense and even attempted a boycott of Asti's products. Others were amused by his crusade, but not the temperance forces. For whatever his logic or the merit of his arguments, he was three times credited with defeating national prohibition bills before Congress.

Sbarboro, of course, was only fighting a delaying action and he himself finally realized it. On the eve of World War I he withdrew from the wine business, convinced at last that national prohibition was coming to America. Within three years prohibition arrived and the Colony's operations were brought to a halt. Sbarboro died in 1923 at the age of 83, presumably of influenza, but possibly of disgust at the sight of his beloved Asti meekly bottling grape juice for teetotalers.

In 1920 Pietro Rossi's sons, Edmund and Robert, together with Enrico Prati, who had worked up from the ranks of Asti's laborers, revived the Italian Swiss Colony. They kept it going throughout the prohibition era by selling grapes and grape juice. Then, a decade after Sbarboro's death, came repeal. The Rossi's and Prati plunged into a program of expansion which, within a few years, returned Asti to the ranks of the world's largest wineries.

Along with this growth went a strict adherence to the traditions of quality Pietro Rossi had originally established, traditions which have won the Colony more awards for excellence than any other California vintner.

With the coming of World War II, governmental needs for alcohols for defense purposes were increased tremendously. In order to insure a continued source of alcohol for beverage purposes, many major distilling companies began to look towards the wine industry with its abundant potential. One by one, most of the larger wine companies and many of the smaller ones were leased or purchased outright by these large and wealthy distilling interests. In 1942 the Rossi's and Prati sold Italian Swiss Colony to National Distillers Corporation, who continued to operate it until the war was over and won. During this regime the great LA PALOMA winery at Clovis, California, (near Fresno) was purchased and added to the growing Italian Swiss Colony as was the well known S & J (Shewan Jones) winery at Lodi, California. Addition of these two wineries, both located in the heart of the finest sweet wine grape producing region of California, was to allow the company to concentrate its production efforts in the area in which the grapes were grown. It had been the practice in the past to ship the varieties of grapes which were grown in the central valleys to Asti in gondola cars to be crushed and made into wine there. Now it was possible to efficiently produce only table wines in the great Asti winery which is located in the heart of the table wine grape growing area, and sweet wines in the Lodi and Clovis wineries, which are in the dessert wine grape belt.

By the early 1950's the California wine industry could foresee the probability of tremendous post-war growth. The large distiller owners, however, had come to realize that the production and merchandising of wine was not particularly akin to similar functions of the distilled beverage field and in spite of the optimistic future of wine, the distillers, for the most part, decided to limit their activity to their traditional specialties and offered the wineries up for sale. It is possible that they had come to understand better Andrea Sbarboro's philosophy of temperance with moderate use of wine during their few short years of association with the wine industry. In 1953 National Distillers sold ITALIAN SWISS COLONY to an organization of vintners which was known as UNITED VINTNERS INC. United's history dated back to 1886, when it was established by Rafello Petri with the purpose of buying and selling wines, and over the years it has experienced growth and expansion similar to that of the Colony to the point where, by 1953, it was the owner of several large wine companies in the large sweet-wine producing central valley of California.

United Vintners had been closely associated with the establishment in 1951 by 240 grape growers, and the subsequent rapid growth of a grape growing cooperative called ALLIED GRAPE GROWERS. Between the years of 1954 and 1959 United Vintners sold or leased several of its plants to the cooperative which was destined to become the largest producer and merchant of wine in the entire world.

Final culmination came on September 1, 1959, with the outright purchase of all holdings of United Vintners by ALLIED GRAPE GROWERS, which by then had grown to include almost 1300 grower-members. This transaction gave the growers complete ownership of all the former United Vintners wineries and bulk storage plants which had a total capacity of about 55,000,000 gallons and a weekly grape crushing capacity of 45,000 tons. It also gave the growers sole ownership of all wine brands and labels formerly owned by United Vintners as well as the large specially constructed ship, the S.S. Angelo Petri, which could carry 2,500,000 gallons of wine in its stainless steel tanks plus 1,500,000 gallons of other types of liquid cargo.

The wineries located at Asti, Clovis, Lodi, Madera, and Escalon, the storage plants located at Stockton, Newark, Houston and Chicago, and the bottling facilities in Chicago and Newark all came under the ownership of the grape growers, and thus was finally realized the original dream of Andrea Sbarboro, over 75 years after its inception, whereby the growers of the grapes would be the sole producers of the wines which bring fame to ITALIAN SWISS COLONY. Today, following expansion of certain of the above wineries plus subsequent purchase of wineries located at Reedley and Oakville, ALLIED GRAPE GROWERS are the world's largest grape and wine growing cooperative and have a total storage capacity of over 80 million gallons.

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ASTI & TURIN, ITALY, 1906.
GRAND DIPLOMA OF HONOR.

San Francisco, Cal. April 24, '08

Mr. Frederick J. Taggart

San Francisco, Cal,

Dear Sir:-

On the occasion of the coming of "The Fleet" with its attendant festivities, we believe the time opportune for one and all to show their loyalty and patriotism by using only CALIFORNIAN products in the entertainment of our distinguished visitors during their stay in this City.

King Victor Emanuel of Italy, recently at an official dinner given at the Quirinal in honor of the Diplomatic Body, put into force his decree that henceforth only Italian Wines should be offered at his table. A like policy has been adopted by Emperor William of Germany.

Let us, likewise, be loyal and show our distinguished guests that the "CALIFORNIA WINES", as recognized by connoisseurs, are equal, if not superior to the imported article.

Our famous TIPO Chianti, Red and White, and our other numerous varieties of table wines, as well as our delicious Champagnes, "ASTI SPECIAL DRY" and "SPARKLING MOSCATO", produced in our celebrated Vineyards at ASTI, CALIFORNIA, may be obtained from all firstclass grocers, wine merchants, clubs, restaurants, hotels, etc. and, we assure you, can be served with pride to the most distinguished guests.

We sincerely trust that when designating the Wines to be served at table on these festive occasions, that your selections will be confined to Native productions, thus proving your loyalty to CALIFORNIA and spreading our fame abroad in the land.

Anticipating your favorable action and soliciting your valued patronage, through any of our distributors above referred to, we beg to remain,

Yours very truly,

ITALIAN-SWISS COLONY,
GRAND PRIZE AWARDED AT MILAN EXPOSITION, 1906. P. C. ROSSI, Pres.

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Ruth Teiser

Born in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since.

Stanford, B. A., M. A. in English; further graduate work in Western history.

Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history and business and social life of the Bay Area.

Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle since 1943.

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