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 Regional Oral History Office

California Wine Industry Oral History Project

Louis M. Martini

Louis P. Martini

WINE MAKING IN THE NAPA VALLEY

With an Introduction by
Maynard A. Amerine

Interviews Conducted by
Lois Stone and Ruth Teiser

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- Leon D. Adams *Revitalizing the California Wine Industry* 1974 (154 pp.)
- Maynard A. Amerine *The University of California and the State's Wine Industry*
1971 (142 pp.)
- Philo Biane *Wine Making in Southern California and Recollections of Fruit Industries, Inc.* 1972 (100 pp.)
- Burke H. Critchfield, Carl F. Wente, and Andrew G. Frericks *The California Wine Industry During the Depression* 1972 (79 pp.)
- William V. Cruess *A Half Century of Food and Wine Technology* 1967 (122 pp.)
- Maynard A. Joslyn *A Technologist Views the California Wine Industry* 1974 (151 pp.)
- Horace O. Lanza and Harry Baccigaluppi *California Grape Products and Other Wine Enterprises* 1971 (150 pp.)
- Louis M. Martini and Louis P. Martini *Winemakers of the Napa Valley* 1973 (94 pp.)
- Otto E. Meyer *California Premium Wines and Brandy* 1973 (71 pp.)
- Harold P. Olmo *Plant Genetics and New Grape Varieties* 1976 (183 pp.)
- Antonio Perelli-Minetti *A Life in Wine Making* 1975 (174 pp.)
- Louis A. Petri *The Petri Family in the Wine Industry* 1971 (67 pp.)
- Jefferson E. Peyser *The Law and the California Wine Industry* 1974 (71 pp.)
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- Edmund A. Rossi *Italian Swiss Colony and the Wine Industry* 1971 (103 pp.)
- A. Setrakian *A Leader of the San Joaquin Valley Grape Industry* 1977 (107 pp.)
- André Tchelistcheff *Grapes, Wine, and Ecology* 1983 (230 pp.)
- Brother Timothy *The Christian Brothers as Winemakers* 1974 (142 pp.)
- Ernest A. Wente *Wine Making in the Livermore Valley* 1971 (97 pp.)
- Albert J. Winkler *Viticultural Research at UC Davis (1921 - 1971)* 1973 (144 pp.)

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

Louis M. Martini

Oral history is at the best with Louis M. Martini. His account of his early life in San Francisco is full of verisimilitude--you know that he speaks the truth. His description of the 1906 earthquake could not be beat.

His precepts for making wine are still good: avoid high fermentation temperature, too much sulfur dioxide (as an antiseptic), excess metal and exposure to air, and use good varieties of grapes. He tells us how he made wine in pre-Prohibition days--first in San Francisco and later in Pleasanton, Lodi, Kingsburg, and St. Helena.

The picture of these early years is of a man who worked very hard, every day, and for long hours. The story also reveals that Mr. Martini has a sense of history. Events had meaning--at least in retrospect.

He also has a keen ability to evaluate people and processes. He reveals some interesting details of the past--the most interesting perhaps being that Schoonmaker at one time owned fifty-one per cent of the Almaden stock. The story of how his Moscato Amabile was developed is also new to me.

Not everyone would agree that some Italian wines "can compare with the best Burgundy and the best Cabernet" (from France). But Mr. Martini is certainly right that the finest reds in California are the product of Cabernet Sauvignon. He does not say, through modesty I assume, that he is today (1973) everyone's nominee as the "Grand Old Man" of the California wine industry.

Finally, Mr. Martini seems to have a wise philosophical outlook on life. Doubtless wine helped.

Louis P. Martini

The material on Louis P. is, of course, less extensive than that on his father but surely no less important because it reveals the significant changes taking place in the California grape and wine industry.

First of all, the active participation of rank and file members in the operation of Wine Institute is clearly revealed, especially his own participation.

Second, it shows how technology is now influencing viticulture as it already has enology. He notes, for example, the need for more micro-climate work and the possibility of new premium varieties.

Finally he has confidence in good sound wines and distinctive varietal wines. I can also applaud his belief that varietal-labeled wines should have a distinctive character.

The future of the Napa-Sonoma wine industry seems to be in good hands with thoughtful men like Louis P. Martini.

Maynard A. Amerine
Professor, Viticulture
and Enology

17 July 1973
101 Wickson Hall
University of California at Davis

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Louis M. Martini was born near Genoa, Italy, in 1887 and came to the United States in 1900 to join his father, who had established a clam, mussel, and fish business on San Francisco Bay. In 1907, after making their first wine and having it spoil, young Martini returned to Italy and took a special course in enology at Alba, as he recounts here. Upon his return, he and his father started making wine regularly. Since that time, with only brief interruptions, it has been his occupation.

In this interview he tells about his boyhood and his early years in San Francisco, his career as a winemaker before, during, and since Prohibition, and especially about the winery he established under his own name in the Napa Valley in 1933. It is told with charm and directness familiar to all those who, as Professor Amerine puts it, know him as the "Grand Old Man" of the state's wine industry.

The initial interview sessions were held in St. Helena, California, on October 31 and November 21, 1967, April 2, 1968, and June 19 and 20, 1969. Follow-up sessions to amplify and clarify certain aspects of Mr. Martini's recollections were held on May 8, July 22 and August 1, 1972. In the editing, material from the various sessions was rearranged for continuity, and certain specific questions were answered through correspondence.

After Mr. Martini, and several members of his family as well, had read and approved the final text, the interview with his son Louis Peter Martini was held on April 5, 1973. Born in 1918, he had worked in his father's winery off and on since he was a boy, studied enology at the University of California, Davis, and entered the family winery formally after World War II service. In his interview he added information to that contributed by his father, especially concerning the winery's recent development, and on his own career to date.

The Regional Oral History Office owes particular thanks to Mrs. Van Allen Haven of St. Helena for aiding in

many ways the arrangements for the interview sessions with the senior Mr. Martini and the completion of the final transcript in a period when he continued work in the winery and also had several intervals of illness.

Ruth Teiser
Project Director
California Wine Industry
Oral History Series

22 July 1973
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Red wine innovator Martini dies at 79

By TED APPEL
Staff Writer



Martini

Pioneering Napa Valley winemaker Louis P. Martini, the first American to bottle and sell unblended merlot — a varietal that three decades later is one of the most popular among

U.S. wine consumers — died Monday at his home in St. Helena only days after he was diagnosed with cancer. He was 79.

Though quiet and unassuming, Martini was an innovator who is considered to be a giant in the California wine industry by his peers. He took over the family-owned winery that bears his father's name and made the Louis M. Martini Winery synonymous with the top-quality California red wines of the 1950s and 1960s.

Martini was one of the first vintners to use stainless steel fermentation tanks, believing they would give him more control over the winemaking process. He was also one of the earliest winemakers to plant vineyards in the Carneros region of southern Napa and Sonoma counties, an appellation that is now recognized as one of the best places to grow chardonnay and pinot noir in California.

Among his other innovations, Martini pioneered mechanical harvesting of grapes on the North Coast, identified and propagated several grape clones still in use and began using varietal designations for his wines decades before it became the industry standard.

"He was a leader in our industry," fellow Napa Valley vintner Robert Mondavi said Monday. "He created a style of wine that is unique and very drinkable and very pleasant."

Martini was diagnosed with cancer just 12 days ago, a winery spokeswoman said. He died Monday morning at his home in St. Helena.

Fellow vintners lauded Martini as a visionary winemaker and a man from the old school, whose word was as good as a 100-page legal contract.

"I consider him one of the quiet leaders of the California industry's move into varietal wines," said Jess Jackson, owner of Kendall-Jackson Winery. "He was a true gentleman and a pioneer in the wine industry whose personal impact far exceeded that of his brand. He will be missed."

"Mr. Martini was an outstanding member of the wine industry," said Ernest Gallo, head of E. & J. Gallo Winery.

Born in Livermore, Martini grew up in Kingsburg, where his father had founded the L.M. Martini Grape Products Co. in 1922. The family moved to Napa Valley in 1933 just before the repeal of Prohibition, and his father renamed the company the Louis M. Martini Winery.

The younger Martini attended the San Rafael Military Academy and graduated in 1941 from UC Berkeley. He spent his senior year studying enology at UC Davis.

During World War II, Martini served in England as an ordnance officer with the 8th Army Air Force. When the war ended, Martini returned to the family winery as vice president and production manager.

He became winemaker in 1954, and was named president and general manager of the winery in 1968.

That year, Martini became the first American to bottle unblended merlot, a grape that had been used in blends to soften the edges of cabernet sauvignon and other red wines. Today, sales of merlot account for 10 percent of all table wine purchases in the United States.

"If we hadn't done it, somebody else would have," Martini said in a 1995 interview, displaying his characteristic modesty.

"He was so understated, really a humble man, despite being an icon," said John DeLuca, president of The Wine Institute.

Martini loved to get his hands dirty in the vineyards. He knew the vines and soils of his vineyards inch by inch, and he believed one

of his primary roles as a winemaker was to serve as a steward of the land.

"He spoke very lovingly of the stewardship of the land. His place on earth was to care for the land, and to leave it better than he found it. He certainly did that," DeLuca said.

Martini began to scale back his role at the winery in 1978, when he turned over winemaking duties to his son, Michael. In 1985 his daughter, Carolyn, took over as president and chief executive officer of the 175,000-case winery.

Martini contributed much of his time to the wine industry. He was an energetic member of the Wine Institute, serving as its chairman from 1977 to 1978 and attending lengthy subcommittee meetings as recently as a month ago. Martini was also a member and past president of the Napa Valley Vintners Association, running the group's first Napa Valley Wine Auction in 1981. He was a charter member of the American Society of Enology and Viticulture, and he served as the organization's president from 1956 to 1957.

Martini received numerous awards for his achievements.

Most recently, the state Senate Rules Committee approved a resolution this year commending Martini's selection as Winemaker of the Century by San Francisco Examiner wine writer Bob Thompson. In 1990, Martini was given the Wine Spectator Distinguished Service Award and the Society of Wine Educators' Lifetime Achievement Award. He received the American Wine Society Award of Merit in 1983, the American Society of Enology Merit Award in 1981 and the Wine Industry Technical Symposium's Leon D. Adams Achievement Award in 1980.

Martini is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; sister, Angiolina Martini of El Cerrito; sons, Michael Martini of St. Helena and Peter Martini of Seattle; daughters, Carolyn Martini of St. Helena and Patricia Martini of San Francisco; and four grandchildren.

Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Sept. 30, at the St. Helena Catholic Church, 1340 Tainter St. A celebration will be held immediately afterward at the winery.

Donations in Martini's memory may be made to the Louis P. Martini Endowment for Research, Department of Viticulture & Enology, University of California, Davis, CA 95616.

Napa Valley Wine Maker Louis Martini Dies at 87

Louis M. Martini of St. Helena, the grand old man of the Napa Valley's vintners, died here yesterday at Franklin Hospital. He was 87.

He left his pleasant St. Helena home against a hill at the end of Zinfandel lane to enter the hospital on March 1, and died from the effects of a stroke.

In his long and productive years, the modest Mr. Martini helped to bring a unique and distinguished character to the California wine industry.

His fine table wines are renowned and highly praised — even by fellow vintners. His products, from the Louis M. Martini winery, rate among the finest in the state, according to Guide for California Wines and acknowledged wine experts throughout the world.

"In all the years I've never tasted a bad bottle from Louis," said one recently.

In 1972, the American Society of Enologists honored Mr. Martini with its prestigious merit award.

Mr. Martini, the last of California's pre-Prohibition vintners, was born May 27, 1887, in Pietra Ligure on the Italian Riviera and came to San Francisco with his fa-



LOUIS M. MARTINI
Renowned vintner

ther, Agostino Martini, when he was 13.

He helped his father in his fish and seafood business until the San Francisco earthquake and fire and then started a small winery here.

By 1907 he realized he needed more training and returned to Italy to study winemaking.

He returned here to practice the knowledge he had painstakingly learned and worked for various winemakers, including the famous Secundo Guasti, foun-

der of the Italian Vineyard Co. at Guasti.

Later he built a winery and distillery at Kingsburg, in the southern San Joaquin Valley, and formed the L. M. Martini Grape Products Co., producing medicinal and sacramental wines, concentrates and brandy.

He sold his sweet wine plant when repeal came, and moved to the Napa Valley to establish the Louis M. Martini Winery on St. Helena highway in 1934.

Over the years, the modest winery he set up to produce high-quality table wines became a multi-million-dollar business with six vineyards encompassing hundreds of acres.

Mr. Martini, who was chairman of the board of the winery at the time of his death, is survived by his wife, Assunta, a daughter, Angiolina, a psychologist; a son, Louis P. Martini, president of the winery, and four grandchildren.

A Requiem Mass will be held at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at SS. Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco.

Interment will follow at St. Joseph's Cemetery in San Pablo.

Funeral arrangements are being handled by Halsted and Co., 1123 Sutter street.

BOYHOOD IN ITALY

Interviewer: Would you begin by telling where and when you were born?

Martini: I was born in Pietra Ligure, about thirty-five miles west of Genoa, on May 27, 1887. My father* was a shoemaker, a shoe merchant, and my grandfathers were sea captains. My father's father was skipper on a square-rigger that went from Genoa to England mostly, but all over the world. Both my grandfathers were Genovese.

My father came from an old family. The Martinis came from Florence to Genoa in the 1400's, and in the 1860's they went to this province, Liguria. Originally they came from Rome. The name Martini comes from Marte, Mars, the god of war. It goes back to Roman times. We have records back to 1600. It's very old, my family.

Interv: Was your family wealthy?

Martini: We were never a rich family, but well to do. My father had seven men working for him. He used to buy shoes made at the penitentiary, and the men finished them, and they would be sold at fairs in different parts of the country. The poor people would come from the hills to buy shoes, and sell fire wood and other things at the fairs. My mother had a little stationery store. But conditions were poor in Italy. My father came to this country to make a few thousand dollars and go back, but he

*Agostino Martini

Martini: found conditions bad here in California at the time too. He came in 1894.

Interv: When you were young, before you came to this country, what did you do?

Martini: I went to school. I proceeded very fast. By the time I was thirteen, I had had five years of elementary school and two years of private school. I missed one year when I was about twelve. I was sick with pneumonia and almost died.

Interv: Were you a good student?

Martini: I think I was. I was first in the class all the time. I was all right.

Interv: Did you enjoy studying?

Martini: No. I went to school but I didn't like it. I didn't study much. I just learned.

Interv: Were you interested in other things?

Martini: Fishing, serving in mass, holding the standard in processions, working.

Interv: You must have been a reliable boy.

Martini: Yes, I was reliable. I was a good son.

JOURNEY TO CALIFORNIA

Interv: You came here alone in 1900?

Martini: Yes. My mother and my sister and I were supposed to come, but at the first of the year my grandmother, my mother's mother, had a cerebral hemorrhage. She died in three months. My grandfather was eighty, and it was decided that my mother and sister should stay with him and that I should come over alone. They came later, in 1911.

Martini: I left Italy in October, 1900. My father's father took me to Genoa to embark on the Manila for New York. It was an old boat the Italians bought from the English. I came in steerage, and I remember I got a job washing dishes for the officers' table. Then somebody took something, and they didn't accuse me but they asked me about it. I said, "I didn't take anything." I was very sensitive, so I quit.

Interv: Did you know anyone on the ship?

Martini: Well, there were three or four paisani. But from New York we all took different railroads. At New York we went to Ellis Island. They gave me a big sack with one big baloney and two big loaves of bread for a dollar, to eat on the train.

I left Italy on the fourth of October and arrived here early in November. In those days it went slow. It took twenty-two days on the boat and seven days on the train.

Interv: How did you know what train to take?

Martini: My father had sent me a ticket, and they put a card on me, and put me on the train. I took the Lehigh Valley [line] to Buffalo, the Nickel Plate from there to Detroit, the Wabash to Kansas City, and then the Santa Fe to Richmond [California]. I took the ferry boat to San Francisco, and my father met me there.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and my father took me to the Fior d'Italia restaurant. It was the first decent meal I had. He ordered some vitello saltato. That was good! No more like that now. I remember very well. I ate with good appetite. Then we went home.

We used to live in the Bayview [district], at first in a rented house. My father was in the fish, clam and mussel business.

Interv: How did he happen to go into that business when he came here?

Martini: How? Well, when he came he couldn't find a job. Some relatives of my mother, who came from the same town, had come here and become fishermen, and he went fishing with them, and then he decided it was easier to dig clams.

Interv: By the time you arrived, was he doing well?

Martini: Yes, fairly well. He was managing to make a living. And then gradually he did more and more.

Interv: How did he happen to go to the Bayview district?

Martini: The fishermen, my relatives, were there, that's why.

Interv: Were there many Italians there?

Martini: Quite a few at that time. Lots of Genovese fishermen. For instance the father of Castagnola was a fisherman there. I used to go fishing with him.

Interv: When your father had first come to San Francisco, was he able to send you money in Italy?

Martini: Yes, and he gave me money to go to school.

EARLY YEARS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Martini: I didn't go to school after I came here. Well, I went for only three months. You see, the children weren't very friendly. I knew too much for them except English--history, everything, but I couldn't speak English. I was put in the fifth grade, then the second, then back to the fifth.

Interv: What school did you go to?

Martini: The Burnett School in Bayview. After three months I quit. I went to get some private lessons from an Italian. They were all right, but I couldn't learn. I learned more by myself. I read a lot, do even now.

Interv: You taught yourself to read English?

Martini: That's right. That's correct.

Interv: What did your father think about your not going to school?

Martini: Oh, he wanted me to, but I wouldn't go, so that was that.

Interv: What was your father's first name?

Martini: Agostino--August. I worked with him clam digging, fishing. My father never went fishing, only clam digging. By the time I got here he had three men working for him. He owned two boats and sent the men to fish in them. Gradually we got more men and dug more clams. At one time my father and I had thirty-five men digging clams, all over, from San Pablo Bay 'way down to Alviso. There were lots of clams in Berkeley, Sausalito, Tiburon, California City; the most were in San Pablo Bay. There is not one foot of San Francisco Bay that I didn't go to--not one single foot! Many times, of necessity, I went to look for clams all over, including Eureka. When I was eighteen years old I took a boat that went to Eureka in the night time. I remember it was pretty rough, and they gave me corned beef and cabbage and I got seasick. I have had no more corned beef and cabbage for the rest of my life.

Interv: How were clams dug?

Martini: With a shovel. You dig them and you turn them upside down.

Interv: Were they in the sand on the edge of the bay?

Martini: Oh, some sand, some mud.

Interv: And the mussels--

Martini: They were on the piers, some on Oakland and Alameda piers, and the Richmond Santa Fe piers.

Interv: Were they raked off?

Martini: No, you would go down and pick them off by hand. If they were too deep, we had a special tool like this [makes semi-circular motion].

Interv: Did you go to work with your father then and do that?

Martini: Yes, and I dug clams. About three days a week I used to go fishing.

Interv: What did you catch?

Martini: Smelts--three kinds of smelts--and sometimes striped bass, but there weren't many striped bass.

Interv: And you sold the fish and clams and mussels yourselves?

Martini: Yes, in the fish markets on Merchant Street between Washington and Clay.

Interv: You had to go all the way across the city?

Martini: I did. My father did, then I did too, with a horse and wagon. Sometimes it was through mud about knee-deep, and then my father and I helped pulling.

Interv: You always sold through the markets?

Martini: The markets and the Chinamen's stores. The Chinamen wanted fresh fish and they paid for them. They wanted either very good or very bad.

Interv: You always had buyers?

Martini: Yes, almost. Prices were sometimes high and sometimes low, up and down.

Interv: Because of the seasons or by chance?

Martini: Chance. We sold through wholesalers, and also through stores. And my father and I delivered to some restaurants. There were three-day markets, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Very few on Saturdays and Mondays. The market used to open at four o'clock in the morning on Thursday, and midnight on Friday--the wholesale fish market. But we got up at one o'clock to sell clams to the peddlers too. You had to get up early because it was not like now with ice and refrigeration [to keep the fish and clams and mussels from spoiling when they were held].

Interv: How much did a case of clams sell for?

Martini: Well, we paid the men 25 cents a bucket, and three buckets made a case. A case would be about six to eight cans, depending on the supply, and we'd sell them for 35 cents a can. The larger the supply the more clams all smashed inside the can.

Interv: These were in the shell?

Martini: Yes. Some were shelled. They were very hard to clean. We had six or eight men cleaning them on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Then sometimes when there was no market [demand] we'd feed them to the ducks.

Interv: Did you have a big yard there?

Martini: Oh, about a hundred and fifty by fifty. Some of the ducks we had laid two eggs a day. We raised chickens too. We didn't raise vegetables because we got them from the produce market. From about Eighteenth Avenue to Central and beyond, it was all Genovese vegetable gardens. Hard work. They started to work at six o'clock in the morning and worked until ten o'clock at night for \$25 a month

Martini: and board.

Interv: Clamming sounds easier than that, and brought more money.

Martini: We did make money. In the winter when clams were in demand we made as much as \$1,000 a week net. Some weeks, not all the time.

Interv: The city directories give three different addresses for you in the Bayview: 1310 Eighteenth Avenue South, 1191 Eighteenth Avenue South, and 1191 Revere Avenue.

Martini: It was two houses. My father rented one house, and then we built one. It is still there. It was on Eighteenth Avenue. They changed the name. Now it is Revere Avenue.

Interv: Did you attend opera in San Francisco when you were young?

Martini: Oh, yes. My father took me to the opera all the time, pretty nearly every opportunity.

Interv: Where was opera given then?

Martini: Oh, the Tivoli Opera House, the Central Theatre there on Eighth and Market, and the Alcazar. Then they built the Grand Opera House on Mission Street about Third. But I never went there. I used to go to the secondary opera, not the big one. Secondary was like Spring Opera now. When Caruso sang, we never heard him.

Interv: And you'd sometimes even go to the opera when you had to get up early?

Martini: Sure. Why not? When you're young, what's the difference: I didn't need sleep.

Interv: You said conditions were poor in California when your father came. Were they still when you were first here?

Martini: Oh, yes, very poor. I remember about six months after I came my father was feeding a lot of paisani. We had as many as thirty men eating in our place. They couldn't find work; there was no work. Most of them were fishermen. They had to eat. They were our friends, so we fed them. We were digging clams and fishing, and we had a lot of mussels. Once a day they would come down and eat. Large pots of clam chowder, fried clams, fritters, fried fish, roast fish, mussels, minestrone, everything.

Interv: Was this the noon meal?

Martini: Lunch. Twelve o'clock. The Italians eat their big meal, dinner, at lunch time. In the evening they have supper, cena.

I used to go to the butcher shop and buy meat from the neck for five cents a pound, and soup meat for nothing. We got milk from a dairy; lots of dairies around there. At the markets around Pacific and Battery you could get a whole gunnysack full of vegetables for twenty-five cents. Fresh vegetables, very good--not like now. They were operated by Genovese.

They'd say, "What do you want today?"

"Oh, some cabbage to make soup," and this and that.

"How many have you to feed today?"

"Oh, quite a few."

They'd give you a gunnysack full, and there would be cabbage, carrots, turnips, celery, potatoes. We bought stale bread from the day before, French bread from Massone on Grant Avenue.* Stale bread they took back from restaurants was two for five cents. They gave you a big sack, and then they'd

*B. Massone and Co., 1347 Dupont [Grant].

Martini: put some more in. They'd give us extra bread free.

Interv: Was everybody that generous in those days?

Martini: Well, they were all paisani, you see, from the same place, from Italy.

Interv: Who cooked?

Martini: My father.

Interv: Was he a good cook?

Martini: Yes. Oh, you know, wholesome.

Interv: The dishes had to be washed--

Martini: Who washes? [laughing] Nothing to it washing dishes if you're not too particular.

Interv: Just you and your father were living there then?

Martini: Yes. My mother came in 1911. My father returned to Italy in 1904 for six months.

Interv: Who kept house while he was away?

Martini: I did. [laughing] I must have.

Interv: And you ran the business too, at seventeen?

Martini: Yes, sure. Why not?

Interv: Your father must have had a great deal of faith in you.

Martini: Yes, he did. When he left we had three men, and when he came back he found me with seven. I had two horses and wagons instead of one, and three boats instead of two. One was a fairly big boat, a sail boat with an engine later.

THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE

Interv: You were here at the time of the 1906 earthquake--

Martini: Yes, the eighteenth of April, about 5:16 in the morning, 5:16 or 5:18. I was in the fish market on Merchant Street. I pretty nearly got killed. It came pretty strong, one fifty-eight seconds long, two undulatory and one oscillatory. Buildings were going up and down. You could see the tower of the Hall of Justice going up and down.

Interv: Were things falling down?

Martini: Yes. Not where I was. On the other side. All the bricks came down. You couldn't see anything, nothing but dust. Some buildings fell down but not the Montgomery Block. I ran from Merchant way up to Kearny, to Portsmouth Square; then I went back to my wagon.

I had an old horse, an old mare, Julia, about twenty, twenty-five years old, and just before the earthquake she began throwing her head. I said, "What's the matter, Julia?" Then for fifty-eight seconds it lasted. Nothing to do. Everything collapsed. The fish market half a block down between Washington and Merchant Streets came down too. The city was starting to burn. I started home. When I got to New Montgomery, I had the wagon full of clams, and people said, "Where are you going with that wagon?"

"I'm going home."

"Well, look, take us to the ferry."

"I've got clams there. I've got to take them back."

"How much are the clams?" "Oh, about \$50."

Martini: I accepted the \$50 and I made four, five trips to the ferry from the Palace Hotel. First I didn't want to take the money. Then I went to the Embarcadero to go home.

Interv: Was there a lot of debris in the streets?

Martini: No, not down on Third Street, Kentucky Street, Eighteenth Avenue South. I went home. Then I walked back into the city, about four miles.

Interv: Was there much damage in the Bayview District?

Martini: No.

Interv: Was your house damaged?

Martini: Only the chimney.

Interv: Could you cook then?

Martini: We cooked outside for about four days.

Interv: Did you fix the chimney yourself?

Martini: No, labor was cheap, you know.

Interv: Were you able to continue with your business operations?

Martini: For a few days, no. Then we did. We had six men working in San Pablo Bay, and they stopped digging clams. We couldn't do much for four or five days. Then we started again.

Interv: It must have been hard to get around the city with all the wreckage.

Martini: Oh, no. We knew where to go. And they cleaned it up pretty fast. They had lots of trucks [drays]. People had nothing to eat, and there were lines for food. It was shipped in from everywhere. They had boiled eggs, beans. Of course we didn't need any food; we had everything, chickens, ducks,

Martini: vegetables. We fed paisani again then.

Interv: Were you making wine by then?

Martini: No, we started after that.

Interv: But you continued in the fish business for some time?

Martini: A few years. Then there were no more clams and we could not work.

Interv: Was it pollution?

Martini: Yes, pollution and--well, the clam beds don't renew themselves. Once you take them out it takes time for them to come back, three or four years or more.

FIRST EXPERIENCES IN WINE MAKING

Interv: When did you first make wine?

Martini: October 1906. We spoiled it then.

Interv: Had your family made wine in Italy?

Martini: No--well, my mother and father made fifty, a hundred gallons; light, mixed home-made wine.

Interv: Was it good?

Martini: Sometimes; sometimes not.

Interv: So you had seen it made.

Martini: Not from a [real] wine standpoint, no.

Interv: Were you interested at all in wines as a boy?

Martini: No. I was more interested in fishing.

Interv: How did your father happen to try making wine in San Francisco?

Martini: Well, just an idea.

Interv: He was making enough money--

Martini: Oh, yes, lots of money. He was selling as many as a thousand boxes of clams a week.

Interv: Where did the grapes come from for that first wine?

Martini: The San Francisco markets, on Chestnut Street, and Broadway and Pacific. They were from Lodi mostly.

Interv: Did you make much that first year?

Martini: Well, a few puncheons. Some was good, some was poor, very poor.

Interv: Then late in 1906 you went to Italy to study wine making. Did your father think it was a good idea for you to go there to learn to make wine?

Martini: I didn't tell him I wanted to go to Italy to learn to make wine. I said I wanted to see my mother.

I tried to get into the University of California, to become a student of [Frederic T.] Bioletti, but I didn't have enough English and mathematics. So I got the money, bought the ticket, took the train and went back to Italy. My sister was betrothed to a civil engineer in Genoa. He introduced me to a professor at the University of Genoa. He asked me a few questions and then asked me to read a book on wine making. He said, "Read it once only and give me an answer. See what you can learn." So I read it and the next day I went to him and he said to wait at least four or five days. So I went back [again]. He asked a question. I was right. He asked me another question. I was right. So I was given an introduction to a school [of enology] in Alba. I was introduced to Professor Sostegni. They

Martini: accepted me as a guest student. I got acquainted with boys my age, about twenty years old, eighteen, nineteen. After six or seven months the professor said, "Do you want to stay? What do you want to do? If you want to stay I'll put you in a regular class."

"I want to make wine and sell it."

"If you want to make wine, you'd better go back to California and make your wine. You can make wine. Wine has four enemies: high temperature, too much sulphurous acid, metal, and air. Keep away from those and ferment it cool and you're going to make wine despite anything. You better go back to California and experiment by yourself and study." That was the end of it. I came back and planned to make wine.

Interv: So when you came back you started making wine properly?

Martini: Yes. You see, it is very simple to make wine, not as hard as some people think it is. You have to have common sense, and follow the instructions. So I made it properly, and I made good wine.

Interv: What did you tell your father when you came back?

Martini: I told him nothing. What should I tell him? I made wine.

Interv: Did it require any equipment your father didn't have?

Martini: First we crushed with our feet. Then we got a hand crusher. We put up a little barn and two 2,000-gallon tanks, and gradually we built it up. After that we built a winery with 60,000 gallons capacity, 70 feet long by 40 feet wide, behind our house in Bayview.

Interv: Did you make sweet wines at first?

Martini: Dry wines. I bought the sweet wines [to sell] from Lachman and Jacobi, Italian Swiss, some others.

Interv: So the first of your wine that you sold was that made after you had returned from Italy?

Martini: Yes. The first gallon was sold to a market on Polk near where the Sonoma Market is now.

I was still delivering clams and mussels. I'd sell the wine from my wagon, one gallon, five-gallon demijohn. The chicken man would say, "Is the wine any good?" He'd taste it and think it was pretty good and take a gallon. Then the butcher would buy some. One told the other. Next week they'd take five gallons each.

Interv: Where did you buy your grapes then?

Martini: In the markets in San Francisco, at Pacific, Chestnut and the Embarcadero at first. Then I went down to Lodi myself to buy.

I went to Stockton and got acquainted with a man named Alegretti. He had a grocery store, and he had a vineyard also near Stockton. One of his daughters married a pharmacist who had a vineyard west of Lodi. His name was Ghiglieri. They sold the grapes to me. I paid them cash. Everything cash. No money, no grapes. They shipped the grapes in freight cars. Alegretti introduced me to an old man, Sol Light, who had lived his whole life on the Linden road. We made an agreement, and I bought from him too. They liked me. They trusted me. I paid every nickel. I never tried to gyp anybody.

Interv: What kind of grapes were you buying?

Martini: Zinfandel, anything.

Interv: Mission too?

Martini: Mission (no more Mission now), Mataro, French Colombard, Malvasia, Tokay. I bought some from Bechman, Welch & Thompson in Lodi.

Interv: How were the grapes delivered in San Francisco?

Martini: By the Southern Pacific. Across the bay by boat, to spur tracks on Chestnut, Broadway and Pacific. They were picked up there. Later the cars went to the Union Stockyard in Butchertown.

After one year I started to sell grapes [in San Francisco] to everybody. I remember one morning twenty cars came in from Lodi. I sold one car to some Genovese. Twenty cases here, fifty cases there, et cetera. We sold to Italian gardeners, fishermen--the Italians who made wine. I had good grapes. We sold all we wanted.

Interv: What kinds of wines were you making?

Martini: We made white wine and red wine; put it that way. They weren't bad wines.

Interv: Did you do any bottling?

Martini: No, we sold in barrels and jugs. We sold to families. Later we began to sell to restaurants; not restaurants as you have today but boarding houses. A lot of people used to be served [at them] all the time, especially in the winter. They served two hundred or three hundred lunches, used lots of wine, two carloads, in barrels, a week. We sold to the Tivoli Hotel, on Dupont Street, and other Italian restaurants. Not the Fior d'Italia, though. They used to buy wine from Migliavacca in Napa. Later on I sold to the Fior, and other restaurants.

Interv: I guess everybody drank wine with his meals at the boarding houses.

Martini: They put the wine on the table. Good wine, light wine. Really light, like our Mountain Red now--even lighter.

Interv: What grapes was it made from?

Martini: Zinfandel mostly.

Later we rented a winery in Pleasanton.

Interv: Did you move your whole business from San Francisco then?

Martini: We made wine both places for a time.

Interv: What was the capacity in San Francisco then?

Martini: Oh, we used to make about ten thousand gallons a year.

Interv: In 1911, you said, your mother and sister came from Italy.

Martini: Yes. I couldn't go myself, so we sent them the money to come.

WINE MAKING AT PLEASANTON

Interv: That was the year you went to Pleasanton?

Martini: Yes. We rented a winery and vineyard in Pleasanton from a Mr. [G.P.] Spotorno. Spotorno was one of the partners in O'Brien, Spotorno and Mitchell. They were in the chicken business in San Francisco. A man by the name of Rossi had rented the vineyard. Then for some reason Rossi quit and went away, so I paid him for the crop that year and I rented the place myself.

Interv: What kind of a winery was it?

Martini: A small winery. It was already built. We put a few tanks in there to make ordinary wine and gradually got a little bigger. We made, oh, about fifty or a hundred thousand gallons of wine a year, or more. And we sold it ourselves in San Francisco.

Interv: How many acres of vineyard did you rent?

Martini: Oh, possibly seventy-five altogether. We bought some grapes from neighbors too.

Interv: What kind of grapes did you grow?

Martini: Oh, all kinds. Pinot noir, Zinfandel, some Cabernet,* and some Gewürtztraminer and White Riesling. Mr. Spotorno sent to France for some cuttings for me.

Interv: What kind of wine were you making?

Martini: Good wine. Red and white. Good wine.

Interv: Did you sell any to other wineries?

Martini: No. Some time later, yes, but not right away. In 1911 the price of wine fell to as low as six cents a gallon.

Interv: What did you do?

Martini: [laughing] I bought it! And afterwards I sold it for thirty-five cents.

Interv: Mr. Ernest Wente said he remembered your father as a jovial man. Were your families friends?

Martini: No, we were San Franciscans--well, really, we were Italian people, and we had a lot of friends in San Francisco, but not much in Pleasanton when I was there. I knew Mr. Wente, the old man.** When we quit in business there--we had to quit because we couldn't make any money--we sold a pump to him

*Cabernet Sauvignon

**Carl H. Wente

Martini: for \$50. They never used it and I bought it back for \$50 [laughing], and I finally sold it to a man in Mexico for \$250. The same pump!

Interv: Where did you meet your wife?

Martini: In Livermore. Assunta Boragni. She was born in Italy in Finale Ligure, near my town. She came here the year before I did with her mother and sister. Her father was here already. Her family lived in Livermore. Her father* had a liquor store before that in the City, a liquor store and a saloon. Saloons were very different then--clean. Their store was on Union Street. I met her in Livermore and after two or three years I married her, in 1917.

Interv: How long did you stay in Pleasanton?

Martini: Seven years. I saw I couldn't make any money. I was losing money all the time. So I decided to go to work. I looked for a job. Landsberg & Son was looking for a winemaker for Bradford at Glenvale, nine miles west of Galt. It was on the Western Pacific. They didn't pay me very well, but I went over there anyhow. I went there to Bradford three years, three seasons.

Interv: What sort of grapes did they grow there?

Martini: Bradford himself grew Tokay for table grapes. And they bought Zinfandel and they made chianti and burgundy. Then they made Tokay, but mostly dry wine. Sweet wine was mostly from Fresno, and it was very cheap.

Interv: You were just there in the wine making season?

Martini: Yes.

Interv: Was Bradford a good wine man?

*Peter Boragni

Martini: Bradford himself? No, he knew nothing about wine.

Interv: Was it a good winery?

Martini: Yes. I made good wine for them.

Interv: Was it a big winery?

Martini: Pretty big. A million gallons of wine or more made every year. Bradford had had a good Italian wine-maker, but he didn't have the spirit to impose his own conditions. He had a mechanic in there who called himself an engineer and didn't do what he was ordered. I told him to get out of there or I'd get out myself. I didn't spoil a single barrel of wine. And Bradford had never made any money in wine before. He sold a million gallons of wine to Schilling & Company. They bought a million gallons in barrels. It was shipped in tank cars furnished by the California Dispatch Line, a subsidiary of California Wine Association. They would sell it to everybody in large quantities, shipped to all parts of the United States in carloads of 120 barrels or tank cars.

Bradford cleared over \$50,000. That was the first year I went there. Schilling paid eleven cents per gallon.*

Interv: How did Schilling sell it?

Martini: In barrels. They would sell it to Italian and European families by the 50-gallon barrel. They would sell it in San Francisco and the mining towns, and ship it to New York, Philadelphia, Boston, 1,000 barrels at a time.

Interv: Why did you stop working for Bradford?

Martini: In 1918 I got the flu and had to quit.

The lease on the winery and vineyard in Pleasanton came to an end, so we rented a house in

*See also page 54.

Martini: downtown Pleasanton. They took me over there, called the doctor, and he said I was sick with the flu. Then he got sick. Later I got another doctor and he got the flu after one week. He said, "Mr. Martini, you're a very sick man, double pneumonia. But you will overcome it." He gave me a couple of pills, I don't know what. So after three days my regular doctor came; he looked at me and said, "Mr. Martini, you're going to get well." Then I felt sick. Before I didn't.

Interv: Did you recover pretty fast?

Martini: Well, not too quick. Took me about forty-five days.

Interv: Was this before your son was born?

Martini: Yes. Louis [Peter Martini] was born December 20, 1918. On July 15, 1923, my daughter, Angiolina, was born.

Interv: When you left Pleasanton, did your father continue the winery there?

Martini: No, he went back to San Francisco.

Interv: He didn't work any more?

Martini: No. In 1919, June or July, my mother and father went back to Italy.

Interv: And after that illness you went to look for a job--

Martini: It was a very hard time to get a job. In San Francisco I did all kinds of jobs. First I went to sell macaroni. Then I worked in a fruit market. Then I went to make ice cream for George Haas & Sons. I worked in a shipyard in Oakland in the Estuary. Then I went to Martin-Camm making jelly and jam. Then I went to sell macaroni again for another concern, and I was doing pretty good. Unfortunately I had to quit, for a reason I don't want to discuss now. Then I went to work for a saloon--for twenty-four hours [laughter]. Well,

Martini: it just happened that a lady tipped me fifty cents. I refused the fifty cents and I quit right there. That's a fact. From there I went to the Majestic Soda Water Company. I sold soda water.

WORKING FOR GUASTI

Martini: Then an Italian, Mr. Perrone, said Calafonia Malatti, was looking for a man to make wine for Mr. [Secondo] Guasti for the season. His winemaker, a man by the name of Candio, was in Italy and couldn't come back in time to make the wine. I said to Malatti, "You tell Mr. Guasti I can't afford to visit him; he must buy me a ticket to go there and back. I'll go down and see if I can take the job, yes or no. If I think I can do it I'll take it." I went to Los Angeles, to the office on Palmetto Street, and they took me to the winery and introduced me to Mr. [James] Barlotti, the manager. Mr. Guasti asked me if I thought I could do the job.

"Yes, I think I can."

"You know sometimes you will have to work hard."

"I work hard always. If I tell you I'll do it, I will do it." I did it. I came back for one day to take care of my family, leave enough money for them. We were living in the old house where the family had lived in Bayview. Then I went there and I ran the winery for three months. I was a very good worker. I worked eighteen hours a day. I came to work at seven in the morning and I stayed in the evening until all the work was finished. The foreman was very good, strong and fast. Between me and him we kept everyone going.

See, Mr. Candio was a very capable man, enologist, chemist, scientist. When he went to Italy

Martini: and couldn't come back, Guasti didn't trust the chemist, [Emil] Cherski, to be a winemaker. Cherski was a very good chemist but not a wine-maker.

I remember I stopped four days and didn't do anything. I didn't work. Barlotti said, "Why don't you do something?"

"When I'm ready to go, I'll tell everybody. If they don't like it, I'll go away."

I told them to follow my orders. The foreman, Brighella (that was his nickname; he was a tall, very capable Venetian)--I said, "Brighella, if you will do what I tell you, you will spoil no more wine."

I took over and they did what I said, and I never spoiled a single gallon. One hundred thousand gallons of wine was already spoiled. I knew why.

Interv: Why?

Martini: What happened is too hard to explain.

Interv: Carelessness?

Martini: Well, I wouldn't say carelessness. I think it was mainly not quite an eye to preventing. You have to be prompt, you know. Awake. I never stopped. I ran the still for them, everything. They had some good men there, very good people, but they didn't know what to do. I made at least 500,000 gallons in three months, and all was perfect.

Interv: What was Barlotti like?

Martini: A Sicilian. Little bit of a fellow. Very smart, very very smart; one of the most brilliant men I ever knew in my life.

Interv: What was Secondo Guasti like?

Martini: Very intelligent man--very intelligent. When I left after three months he gave me a nice dinner at Delmonico in Los Angeles and a \$100 present and thanked me.

Interv: Were you sorry to leave there?

Martini: He told me that when Mr. Candio came back he would put me on as second man but he could not pay as big a salary as I thought I should have. And it was too far away, in Cucamonga. Impossible, with a baby at home, eight months or one year old.

Interv: And this was when?

Martini: In 1919.

Interv: What about Prohibition?

Martini: We still could make wine in 1919. That was before it really came into force.*

Interv: Did you know in the beginning that you would be able to go on making wine through Prohibition?

Martini: Well, no.

Interv: So you went back to San Francisco from Guasti--

Martini: I met an automobile salesman, and soon I was selling cars. I sold one, a Premier, to an Indian prince, but another salesman robbed me of the commission, so I quit.

In the meantime I started to sell grape juice. And I made some in San Francisco and sold it.

Interv: For people to make wine?

Martini: Yes, naturally. In their homes.

*The Eighteenth Amendment was voted upon in 1919 and came into force on January 16, 1920.

MAKING GRAPE PRODUCTS IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

Martini: Then it happened that a man, a broker, knew some people who wanted to go into the grape juice business, so they hired me to make grape juice at a winery near Clovis.

Interv: Was that the first time you had worked in the San Joaquin Valley?

Martini: Yes. When I returned from Guasti, I looked at the valley and I liked it because it had a lot of promise. A lot of grapes. Rich country. (Still a rich country.) So I decided if I had a chance to go there, I would somehow. Then this man introduced me to Barnwell & Nelson, who had a small property and winery near Clovis. I made grape juice for them.

Interv: Not concentrate?

Martini: Not then; not for them.

Interv: How did you ship the grape juice?

Martini: In barrels. You put in a large amount of sulfur dioxide, S O₂, and it would keep for a certain amount of time. Then when they added air, it would ferment into wine.

Interv: Where was it shipped?

Martini: Chiefly to Seattle to a man named Joseph. By the end of the year we had 28,000 barrels. They wanted too much money. I convinced them to sell. We made \$28,000 net. Then one of the partners wanted to stay with him, but we couldn't come to terms. I had to take care of my family. So I went to work for Mr. [F. Y.] Foley. He rented a winery in Kingsburg and hired me to make wine, brandy and whatnot, and I made good.

Interv: He had a Prohibition Department permit for making wine and brandy?

Martini: Yes. Somebody had made wine there the year before. They didn't know how to make wine, and they lost a lot of money.

Interv: Was that the plant that was built by Italian Swiss Colony?

Martini: That's right. Then the California Wine Association took it over later.

BEGINNING OF L. M. MARTINI GRAPE PRODUCTS COMPANY

Martini: Foley took it over in 1921. He rented it from [Silas] Sinton and [Gus] Bray, and unfortunately he went bankrupt after about two years. They asked me what they were going to do. So we formed a partnership. I paid my own money and bought thirty per cent of the building, everything. Mr. Bray and Mr. Sinton had thirty-five per cent. Later Sinton and I bought out Bray.

Interv: Was it a good winery?

Martini: Fair. Not as good as it is now. I rebuilt it [pointing to a large framed photograph of the winery on the wall]. I was there for ten years, and I built it over gradually. Every year something. One part at a time. See [pointing to photo] there was nothing but a big shack in here.

Interv: In the center.

Martini: I took that out and put in this. I built this here, and this, and this, and I built my house over there and the garage. Here is the brandy warehouse.

Interv: At the far right. Where was the Brotherhood winery?*

Martini: Here. I built it for them.

Interv: That small building in the corner.

*Of the Brotherhood Corporation.

Martini: You see, they used to sell sacramental wines in New York. They had a big winery in Washingtonville, N.Y., and they wanted to get some wine making in California for sacramental purposes. They wanted their own winery. So we put up a building for them and we made wine for them there, about 75,000 or 85,000 gallons a year.

Interv: They were separate wineries, but you operated both?

Martini: That's right.

Interv: What name did you operate your winery under?

Martini: Martini Grape Products Company at first. Then L. M. Martini Grape Products Company. I knew at the time they would not stay in the wine business, so I told them to put my name on it. They were San Francisco capitalists. Sinton was with Sinsheimer and Company, and Bray with Bray Brothers. They were both grain, wheat and bean brokers. In other words, they had plenty of capital.

Interv: You were making sweet wines?

Martini: Sweet wines, dry wines, brandy, concentrates, syrup, everything.

Interv: Where did you sell them?

Martini: Well, concentrate, Chicago, New York and Canada: Toronto, Windsor; Niagara Falls; all over. We once sold a hundred thousand gallons in one day, \$100,000 worth.

We also had a storeroom in Brooklyn, at Bush Terminal, with a capacity of 185,000 gallons. I sold everything after six years for cash, wine, stock and barrels, everything. The reason is that I realized you cannot trust a New Yorker, shipping from here. So we got a good man to sell direct, and we were our own bosses.

Interv: This was for the Kingsburg winery?

Martini: Yes.

Interv: Did anybody ever try to buy your wines illegally?

Martini: During Prohibition? Bootlegging?

Interv: Yes.

Martini: They tried, but I never sold to them. Someone offered me \$175,000 for 100,000 gallons of wine. Cash. I said no. I didn't do it because I had two partners, and besides that I'm not the type to cheat anybody, and I don't gamble. I don't like that.

Interv: Was there any vineyard acreage with the winery?

Martini: No acreage. Only the winery. But I planted between Selma and Parlier, near Selma, twenty acres of Thompson Seedless and Alicante Bouchet. I bought it. I paid \$4,000, and then I sold it later for \$20,000, after I left there.

Interv: Were those the only grapes you grew while you were at Kingsburg?

Martini: Yes, but I bought from every grower. I bought a lot of grapes and I paid cash for them. If I couldn't pay cash, I wouldn't buy. Cash for buying and selling, nothing else.

Interv: Meanwhile, you had started this winery in the Napa Valley.*

Martini: I built here myself in 1933 personally, individually. Sinton refused to go in with me. I bought the vineyard in Sonoma, Monte Rosso, in co-partnership with Sinton, and bought him out later.

Interv: When did you sell the Kingsburg winery?

Martini: In 1940.**

*At St. Helena.

**The sale to Central California Wineries, Inc. was reported in The Fresno Bee of March 12, 1940, and the May 1940 issue of the magazine Wines and Vines.

Interv: So from about 1933 until then, you went back and forth from the Napa Valley to the San Joaquin Valley. It must be hard to run two wineries.

Martini: Why? Get good men, tell them what to do.

Interv: Where were you living?

Martini: Both places. I came here every ten days during the vintage, twice a week sometimes during the crushing season. Sometimes I drove here and did what I wanted to and went back there--eighteen hours a day.

For three years I worked part of the time for [Joseph] Di Giorgio, after we sold the Kingsburg plant. I worked about three days a week. He was having trouble with the wine making. He had conditions that made it impossible to make good wine. I told him, and he said, "Change them." I didn't change them--I modified them. I did the same thing as for Guasti before.

Interv: What was your situation at the time of Repeal?

Martini: I had a million gallons of wine on hand at Kingsburg and St. Helena.

Interv: How did you sell it?

Martini: I sold direct. I sold to everybody.

ESTABLISHING THE NAPA VALLEY WINERY

Martini: I built this winery just before Repeal. I bought the corner [property] here on the 14th day of June in 1933, and we crushed the wine in here in September. The year before, I made wine in Oakville. I rented a winery from Mr. Covick. It was originally owned by the French-American Wine Company. I made 40,000 gallons of wine there. Then I put up this

Martini: building and put the cooperage up and everything at one time. This is the original office. Next year [1973] we'll have a bigger one.

Interv: How did you happen to choose this place?

Martini: I liked it. I like the valley. There were a lot of wineries here before Prohibition. There was a big one over there where Christian Brothers is now.* Krug was there and Brun and Chaix had a winery in Oakville. And To Kalon was there. Tubbs** over there. A lot of wineries. Beaulieu was here, in a small winery; they built this one after Prohibition.

Interv: When did you first see this valley?

Martini: Oh, I came here to buy grapes from [John W.] Wheeler the year before Prohibition, and I used to buy grapes here to make grape juice.

You see, at Kingsburg I wanted to make good dry wine. I'm not interested in sweet wine as much. I recognized that you can't make good dry wine out of the local grapes in Fresno or Kingsburg. I bought some grapes from Wheeler and different parties here and in Sonoma and shipped them there and made dry wine--not too good. I recognized that I had to settle in a winery up north to make good dry wine.

I went all over Northern California, all over, with my wife and my son, looking at farms, everything. I liked the Napa Valley better than Santa Clara Valley or Sonoma. I was afraid, as early as 1932, that the Santa Clara Valley was going into houses and expanding into San Francisco. I decided there were more wineries here than Sonoma. So I decided to settle here.

*Greystone Cellars

**Alfred L. Tubbs

Martini: First I tried to buy the Krug winery. Mr. [James K.] Moffitt owned it. I agreed to pay \$5,000 to rent it, and I wanted an option to buy and not have to pay for the option if I bought it. He wouldn't agree to the option. It was 1932, and I wanted an option for a year so that if Prohibition was repealed I would buy it.

Then I decided I was going to buy the other winery [Greystone] where Christian Brothers is now, from Bisceglia [Brothers], who went bankrupt. But the price was \$55,000, and I didn't want to spend that much. I didn't have enough money. I didn't want to take a chance. My son was young. If something happened to me, then what? Then I was going to buy another winery here, Freemark Abbey, but the partners couldn't agree on the price. Finally I made some wine in Oakville, and then I bought this ten acres from the prune association. There were prunes in here. I bought it for \$3,000. Now [1972] it's worth \$3,000 an acre.

Interv: By the time you built this winery, you'd had building experience at Kingsburg--in fact you were building in both places at the same time!

Martini: Some there, some here. Same design.

Interv: You planned it and designed it.

Martini: Well, I did, but I had an architect, a man by the name of Fisher, young man in San Francisco. He came here and advised me about the bracing. I got a good man to built it; no contract. I did it my own way. I bought three carloads of reinforcing steel from Soule in San Francisco, for practically ten cents on the dollar. I bought the roof from a dog racing track in Southern California.

Interv: I believe that you went to Italy in 1934. Did you visit wineries?

Martini: No, I just went to see my people, my mother and father. When I was there I told them about Prohibition,

Martini: and they couldn't understand it. It didn't make sense to them. I knew during Prohibition that it wouldn't last. I felt it in my heart--I had a hunch.

Interv: But it lasted--

Martini: Thirteen years. Political.

Interv: When did you add the vineyard in Sonoma County?

Martini: In 1936. I bought it in copartnership with Sinton. Monte Rosso, 580 acres. It was at the time of the depression in the price of grapes, and the prorate. People got disgusted. I bought it from the Goldstein estate.* The winery's still there. We might use it. We need more room for storage.

When I bought the vineyard there were quite a few good varieties in there: Folle blanche, Semillon, mostly Zinfandel, and some Sylvaner. During Prohibition they had replanted some to poor grapes. But it was not very bad. We bought it on Wednesday, and we picked on Monday. We got 495 tons. There were twenty-seven acres of prunes, and we took them out. I began planting grapes in '39: Cabernet and Barbera, Johannisberg Riesling, and Sylvaner.

Interv: Right away the varietals for table wines--

Martini: Yes. Every year we take some vines out there, and replant, about five acres.

Interv: What do you have there now?

Martini: Cabernet, Pinot Chardonnay, and Gewürtztraminer, Chenin blanc and Semillon, and Zinfandel. Zinfandel does very well in Sonoma. It was planted eight by eight, but with the present tractors you cannot go through there eight by eight on a mountain.

*It was established in the 1880's by Samuel Goldstein and named the Mt. Pisgah Vineyard. See also pages 86-87.

Martini: So we replanted it in a contour and put it six by twelve. We reclaimed quite a bit of land there too. We have better tools than they used to. We take rocks away and move them out. It costs \$500 per acre to prepare the land [1969].

Now we spray for weeds. We used to have eight or ten men taking out weeds. The deer did a lot of damage to the young vines, so we put up a fence ten feet high. No more damage. Vines don't last long here in this land in the Napa Valley. In Sonoma they last longer. We figure some of the vines there are a hundred years old.

Interv: What's the difference?

Martini: Soil, I guess. I don't know.

Interv: How long will vines last here.

Martini: Well, about thirty or forty years is the maximum. If you take good care of them, they might last a little longer.

Interv: Do you think it's the chemical composition of the soil?

Martini: I don't think it's the chemical composition of the soil. I think it's the texture of the soil here: more compact. In Sonoma there is more gravel; it is more rocky. There's no hardpan; here there is a hardpan, but there the roots go down deep in the moisture. The land keeps the moisture. The vines are greener there. It is a very beautiful vineyard. It was not so before, but properly contoured now it is very pretty. It is planted to follow the steepness.

Interv: I know you have always been interested in the opera. But how did you happen to start entertaining opera people at Monte Rosso?

Martini: Oh, I met Maestro Gaetano Merola and Kurt Herbert Adler at the Fior d'Italia sometimes for lunch.

Martini: I said, "I'll give you a lunch at my vineyard some time." They said all right. They came. The first couple of times I paid for everything myself. Then they started paying for what it costs. Now naturally I can't do the cooking any more, and they have to hire somebody. At first there were twenty-five or thirty people. Now there are 200 or 300.

Interv: When the opera stars come, do they sing?

Martini: No. There was an agreement--no singing. I told them myself, for the opera people singing is work. Only one time they sang.

In 1943 we bought about 250 acres in Napa, near Carneros,* and my son has bought 140 acres, all Pinot,** about four miles from there on Los Amigos Road. We have approximately 110 acres of Pinot there, 100 acres of Zinfandel, 90 acres of Cabernet, and the balance Chardonnay, Traminer, some white (Johannisberg) Riesling and Chenin blanc. The grapes are good. The Napa vineyard makes very good wine, very, very good. The quality of the wine is the combination of temperature and soil and the index of maturity. The relation between sugars and acids and the low pH makes the difference. The lower the pH the longer you can keep your wine. Eventually we will have our Cabernet,*** as sold, not less than five years old, and Pinot not less than four years old. Then we shall have some outstanding wines.

Some may not come, for reasons of maturity or an act of God. You cannot have a 100 per cent perfect wine; no one can. But we pick the best and we can tell pretty well. We pick the best and set aside a certain percentage and look at it in one or two years. In two years if it shows promise we keep it longer, take care of it, age it about three or four years in wood. Then it goes in the bottle.

*It is southwest of the city of Napa on the Rancho Rincon de los Carneros land grant. It is known as La Loma vineyard. See also page 86.

**Pinot noir; see page 86.

***Cabernet Sauvignon

Martini: We keep it as long as we can. White wine should be at least two years in wood and red wine should be at least three years in wood--three winters, not less than two full winters. That means a summer, and as constant temperature as possible. Then it will purge itself and finish its secondary fermentation, and it's more rounded.

Interv: When did you start adding vineyard land here, near St. Helena?

Martini: A long time ago, '34. My present vineyard now over there I bought from a man by the name of Eccleson. I liked the place. Three hundred and fifty acres.*

Interv: Were there grapes growing on it?

Martini: Some grapes, yes. I replanted gradually.

Interv: You knew what you wanted to plant--

Martini: [laughing] Yes, I think I did. I brought a whole lot of grapes from Pleasanton, some from Wente.

Interv: Are you growing varieties now that you didn't even think of before Prohibition?

Martini: Well, see, they had good varieties before. Prohibition came along and they took them out and planted grapes that could be sold in the Italian market in New York and all over: Alicante Bouchet and so on. So when I bought the vineyard I started to replant. Everything.

Interv: Do you now supply a large percentage of your own grapes?

Martini: Between me and my son, yes. My son has bought some acres.

Interv: But you don't grow all--

*The Villa del Rey vineyard. See also page 86.

Martini: Not yet. Eventually, if we can.

Interv: I have a clipping here from The Fresno Bee about the sale of the Kingsburg winery in 1940, and it says that two million gallons of "vintage sweet wine" were included in the sale. Did you sell all you had?

Martini: No. I retained some myself. About 10 per cent, the best wine, I brought here.

Interv: Did you have a label at Kingsburg?

Martini: I had one but I didn't use it.

Interv: Just sold in bulk?

Martini: Yes, in tank cars and barrels to dealers in New York and Chicago and all over. We'd ship wine by the car from here; if they wanted it they'd take it, and if they didn't want it, we'd send it somewhere else. Sometimes they'd try to get it cheaper after it was there. Oh, no--we'd take it back. I remember one party had 200 barrels of wine. He said, "I can't use the wine." I said, "Well, if you can't use it I'll take it back."

"Oh, no, don't take it back. Give it to me for five cents less and I'll take it."

"Huh-uh. I'll take it back." And those 200 barrels, we brought them back. I was sore though. [laughter]

Then in 1940 or '41 we quit that. See, [Frank] Schoonmaker came here in 1940. He came down to my cellar and saw all my vats were marked with the varieties. (I was one of the first after Prohibition to make all my wine with the name of the grape and season.) So he began to get interested. I think the first time, he bought a Sylvaner. And then he wanted to get some Folle blanche. Well, since Schoonmaker liked the wine, we sold it to him. I like him. Very intelligent man. And he knows wine.

Martini: He has a good palate. He is a good writer, and he is a good promoter. He is idealistic, and very honest, but he is unfortunately not a very good businessman. He finally decided he'd work for somebody else, and he makes more money now by buying for somebody else than he could for himself.

Interv: He was responsible for your present label?

Martini: Yes. He insisted. See, Schoonmaker would come and buy a tank of wine and want me to put it in bottles for him. He said, "I want a label for you with your name." It should have the wine--white wine, Zinfandel, whatever--and where it's made, and who makes it. That's all. And who makes it is the most important. I could put a fictitious name on, but--well, my own name is best. I have never changed it. See, a man who buys wine wants to know the locality and the person. The locality can be sold, but the person is you. Mr. Paul Masson told me the same thing.

The label was designed by an artist at Schoonmaker's suggestion.

Interv: It's a very good label, I think, very handsome, and it's honest.

Martini: It's handsome and it tells what it is. No embossing, no this, no that. Just enough to indicate what is in the bottle. It shows a primitive producing mountain vineyard, and a wagon. It's an indication of modesty, in a sense, and the colors are nice and simple.

A fellow wanted me to change the label. I didn't want to change it. Somebody else, Parrott [and Company], comes along and wants me to change it. I say no--I change nothing. Some time I may make a different label, not to deceive anybody but to set aside a certain very special wine, like the Moscato for instance, so that you can tell right away what it is. Symbolic.

Interv: When did you stop selling wine in bulk?

Martini: Oh, I can't remember. Gradually. I sell some now, as far as that's concerned. Not very much. Maybe two per cent, or one per cent, or even less. Some people come around and want to buy ten barrels, but I don't want to sell it. They have to pay full price.

Interv: What happened finally with Schoonmaker?

Martini: Well, he bought more wine and more wine, and said he would pay for it when he sold it. Finally he owed quite a bit of money. I said, "I'm sorry, Frank, I can't extend additional credit to you forever." Then he was drafted. He was in Intelligence. Herman Wente and Tony Korbelt* and I bought him out--well, we didn't buy him out, we assumed his debits and credits. We paid everybody off. Almaden didn't want to come in, so we paid off what he owed them. Schoonmaker had 51 per cent of Almaden stock that we took over. [Louis A.] Benoist wanted to buy it. He offered me \$30 a share. I said no. We talked all the time, Wente and Korbelt and me. Finally Benoist got up to \$100, \$125 a share. I said, "I'll take \$150. Take it or leave it." I sold. [laughter] I'm not really sure if we sold the Almaden stock for \$125 or \$150 a share, or some figure in between. But that paid all our debits.

My idea then was to have the three of us go to New York and open under the name Estate Wine Producers of California. Ship the wine over there in bulk and sell it from there. Korbelt said yes. Wente said no. So we didn't.

*Schoonmaker also bought and sold Wente Bros., F. Korbelt & Brothers and Almaden Vineyards wines.

ORGANIZATIONS

Interv: May we go back a little into the Prohibition period? Do you remember Donald D. Conn, who organized the California Vineyardists' Association and Fruit Industries?

Martini: Yes, I remember him. I didn't get along with him. He wanted to buy me out with stock, you know, in Fruit Industries [Ltd.]. I said, "All right, I want so much money. You pay it and you take it." He wanted to give me so much stock. I said, "You give cash or nothing."

[K.] Arakelian and I, we didn't go in. We stayed out. They wanted us though. They begged me, and they said they were going to close me down. I said, "Well, close me down!"

Interv: Some people liked Conn, I judge, but a number didn't.

Martini: I didn't, anyhow. He was a promoter. Somebody hired him because they figured they'd do a lot of business. Ahh...!

Interv: Was he trying to organize things in advance of Repeal?

Martini: Oh, no, it wasn't that at all! They thought he had some influence.

Interv: I understand you were a leader in the Sweet Wine Producers Association in the San Joaquin Valley.

Martini: I started it myself. It must have been about 1933 or 1934, maybe before that. You see at that time they sold more sweet wine than dry wine. I always had faith in dry wine. I started the Napa Valley Vintners, and the Wine Institute too.*

Interv: We have been told that you were the real leader in the Sweet Wine Producers Association.

*For other accounts of the beginnings of the Wine Institute, see other interviews in this series.

Martini: Well, they thought I was anyhow. I don't know. The reason is that I have my own ideas, and I do what I want and I don't follow. They met and met and met and talked and talked and talked and did nothing.

Interv: And in 1932 you called a meeting at the Whitcomb Hotel in San Francisco.

Martini: That's right.

Interv: --to establish an association and--

Martini: To start the Wine Institute. Five of us agreed to put the first money up. There was Mr. [Sophus] Federspiel of Colonial Wine Company, the Rossi brothers* of Italian Swiss Colony, and [Georges] de Latour, myself and Cribari.** We put up \$500 right away to start it up and hire a manager. I didn't know what to call it--Grapegrowers' Something.*** Wine Institute was better. We agreed to put up \$1,000 later. Then we got heavy taxes at the end of the year. Then they got a man I didn't particularly like.

You see what happened, I realized at the time that you've got to have some kind of an association to get together, not to protect yourselves but to present a unified front, everybody together. So I invited them for lunch. Half of them paid for their own lunch, half I paid for. There were about 40 people: [Herman] Wente, John Daniel [Jr.], Tarpey**** from Fresno, Elmer Salmina, Charles Beringer, K. Arakelian, Mr. [A.R.] Morrow of the California Wine Association, and others.

Then they wanted [Harry] Caddow for manager, Caddow and Leon Adams; and I wanted somebody else. I said, "Why don't we wait? Why are we in a hurry?" Well, Rossi and Lee Jones wanted Caddow. They overruled me. Then [Burke H.] Critchfield took over and wanted to do everything himself. Well, I got disgusted and didn't join. The hell with it.

*Robert D. and Edmund A. Rossi

**Probably Fiore Cribari

***Grape Growers League of California

****Probably Paul Tarpey

Interv: But, according to the records, by 1935 you were on a Wine Institute committee that was working in Sacramento to fix equitable assessed values on wines.

Martini: That's right. The assessing. I can't remember the details.

Interv: And you joined the Institute finally in 1941, didn't you? And in 1944, as I understand it, you started the Napa Valley Vintners.

Martini: Yes, I started it. Me and John Daniel [Jr.], Martin Stelling, and Beaulieu, and one other. We got together. We were guaranteeing \$500 each. The Napa Valley Vintners was a good thing because it presented a united front; we could take the initiative. We met the first time at the Sulphur Springs Restaurant. There were ten of us; each of us paid \$200. Before anybody could join they had to be unanimously agreed upon. If we agreed, he had 30 days to pay \$200. That was the original plan, anyhow.

I remember one wanted to get in without paying his \$200. I said, "I'm sorry; I paid. If you're not going to pay you're not going to get in."

Interv: What does the organization do now [1969] primarily?

Martini: Discuss about law, labor relations--you know, noncommittal; you pay what you want, I pay what I want. We may discuss the size of the crop, the prospect of frost, what is the best thing to do and so on. I tried to promote more than that, but they wouldn't go for it for some reason. I wanted cooperative purchasing. We could purchase, say, 1,000 barrels or bottles or drums and bargain for it as for one, and sulphur, and lumber and cement for building, and so on. But they wouldn't do this. Some thought they would reveal their business too much.

Its main function is eat, drink and be merry. We meet monthly for business. We did buy something

Martini: together, a map of the Napa Valley. But we have a meeting at a restaurant at lunch every second Wednesday of the month. I was president for three or four years, but I didn't want to be elected again.

Interv: You were in on the brandy prorate of 1938.

Martini: The prorate? Yes. You see, we brought the grapes in here to make wine, and we bought cheaper wine for the brandy, see. That way I could do it. We made 2,000 barrels of brandy for them at Kingsburg. I'm pretty sure, and maybe more than four or five thousand barrels of high-proof brandy at Kingsburg for us.

Interv: Did you buy back any of your brandy afterwards?

Martini: No, but I found a buyer in Chicago that wanted to buy it. They did not want to sell it, but I could and I did sell it to him.

Interv: In about 1938 the Wine Advisory Board was established and was going to put on a three-year advertising campaign, and you protested by withholding your assessments.* Why did you do that?

Martini: Because they were going to do it the way they wanted to do it, and I didn't like it. I always felt advertising is only good for promoting something that is not up to the quality that people want [laughing]. People buy what they want, and make the market.

*The San Francisco Examiner, Sept. 28, 1940, reported that a suit brought by the state in 1939 against L. M. Martini and Silas Sinton for non-payment of assessments had been settled by their agreement to pay \$25,912.70.

MARTINI WINES

Interv: We should ask about your Moscato Amabile. When did you develop it?

Martini: 1936 in Kingsburg. It just happened. We had too much grape juice, Muscatel juice, and didn't know what to do with it. It was very good. We had crushed the grapes the 20th of December or somewhere in there, very, very late. We had maybe forty or fifty barrels empty from brandy--no brandy to ship, no orders. So we put the grape juice in the barrels, put some yeast in, put some cotton on top, and forgot them. It was very cold in December and they fermented very, very slowly. In the spring when I looked at them, you know [laughing] we had Moscato Amabile! It just came! Perfect. Full-bodied and perfect. A couple of friends came over and said what a wonderful wine.

Interv: It is a wonderful wine!

Martini: Yes, I think so. I like it, anyway.

Interv: Was it easy to make regularly after you'd made it by chance?

Martini: Well, "chance" isn't the word. But we have made it all the time since. Not every year, but most years, when we can get the right grapes. Now we buy the grapes over there [in the San Joaquin Valley] and ship them here. You need the heat, you need it to be warm and dry, and they have to be picked late in December. It takes about four years to make.

Interv: And you don't have any trouble.

Martini: Well, some years it's better than others. You can't help that.

Interv: Is your sherry production here--

Martini: Sherry I made in Kingsburg, and it just happened to come right there. See, I like imported sherry, Pedro Domecq La Ina--I like it very much. And I had about a hundred barrels of sherry very similar to it in my estimation that I made in Kingsburg. I studied that sherry. I compared it. I had plenty. So I took it to New York to Mr. [Paul] Garrett, an old man who knew sherry. I said, "What do you think of the sherry?"

"Marvelous. I'll buy it all."

"No, I didn't come here to sell it. I want your opinion."

"How much do you want?"

"I don't want to sell. I want to keep it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to age it."

See, to make sherry takes about seven years. So that's the sherry I made. I brought it here.

Interv: Do you use the solera system? Blend it?

Martini: All the time. Every year we made a new blend. The blend we use is seven years old to begin with. We blend it with the solera.

Interv: How old is the oldest?

Martini: God only knows!

Interv: Do you use a flor culture?

Martini: We did. Dr. [W. V.] Cruess made the first flor sherry culture for us, in two barrels. From there we propagated it. One time we made two 5,000 gallon tanks. Very beautiful. And then we decided we couldn't take a chance having the flor culture here. Now we buy it new and age it and blend it

Martini: ourselves. One concern in California produces flor culture sherry for sale in bulk. It's easier for me, because if you make it in the same winery as other wines, the flor might go all over.

Interv: Your sherry has a fine reputation.

Martini: That's because I know how to blend it and age it. I age it in small barrels, 50 and 133 gallon, for quite a few years.

Interv: Do you also make port here?

Martini: Yes, I make some port. Very old, very good. Also solera. The youngest is about four years old to begin. We leave it a long time. Just forget it.

Interv: You are known in the industry as a man who has experimented with wine production with great success. Have you also had some failures?

Martini: [Laughing] Everybody has failures! Naturally, naturally. When you cook you burn it sometimes, don't you? Wine's the same way.

Interv: I read that you had been interested in making chianti from the same grapes they use in Italy.*

Martini: No, we make chianti now and we call it California Chianti. It is made with different grapes, mostly Zinfandels, different varieties. Not Sangiovese. Italian grapes for some reason don't do well here, except Barbera. See, Chianti made in Italy is mostly Sangiovese, and Canaiola and Trebbiano and Malvasia. You can't do that here. You have to be in Tuscany to make Chianti.

Interv: You are, of course, really best known for your dry varietal wines.

Martini: I was the first in this country to produce varietals in quantity. Nobody else did. And I put

*Angelo Pellegrini, Americans by Choice. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956.

Martini: the vintage on. Each year's crop is different; if a person buys one and likes it and comes back for it, that avoids a mix-up.

Interv: Your Folle blanche--

Martini: I think Folle blanche is a very good wine. It's done only in this country. There's no trouble making it. It's not a big wine, but it's very, very good.

Interv: Are you one of the few who make it?

Martini: I think I am the only one.

Now they want quantity. We can't afford to plant too many vines. It takes a thousand dollars to plant an acre [1969]. And the price of land is very high.

GRAPES, WINES AND QUALITY

Interv: Where do you think the best wine grapes could be grown in California?

Martini: It's hard to tell. What is best depends on the varieties of grapes and the type of wine you want to make. One of the best places could be Cloverdale. There are some very good grapes on the Russian River. Also Trenton, and where Korbel is. But here it is even better.

Idealistically, I think the wine from the Santa Cruz Mountains is very good. Los Gatos, beautiful. But they're limited. Almaden used to make good wine at La Cuesta at the top of the hill, where Paul Masson is now. Almaden Vineyards now make a good wine at the top of the hill at Saratoga. Paul Masson used to own the two of them. I bought grapes from them both.

Interv: | Your best wines now come from the slopes of the Mayacamas, the Napa vineyard?

Martini: Well, yes, I would say that. There's no question that the Napa Valley makes better wine than the Sonoma Valley. I'm not sure why. Perhaps it is that in the Napa Valley you have more people who want to produce good wine, and in Sonoma many of them went out of business, and the heirs didn't follow up. I think the best wines, over all, going back in history, came from the west side of the Santa Clara Valley, near Mountain View, Saratoga. A long time ago. I have about twenty casks that came from the Mountain View Winery. They used to make very good wines, nothing but sweet wines. There were quite a few old wineries in the Sierra too.

Interv: What are the factors?

Martini: Oh, many. The combination of the soil and the climate. When the grapes reach a perfect point of maturity they should have stopped producing. The acid starts to decline, and they balance. Acid depends on climate. You cannot pick when you want. It depends on climatic conditions and on labor.

Interv: What would your advice be to a young wine man if he asked you what sort of varietal to plant in the Napa Valley?

Martini: You mean idealistically? Idealistically, I would say in California as far as we know today, Cabernet is the best. Pinot comes next for red. And Semillon and Johannisberg Riesling for the white--better than Sauvignon blanc, better than anything else. Chardonnay is hard to grow.

Interv: What about Gewürtztraminer?

Martini: We find that adapting Gewürtztraminer to climatic conditions is different in Sonoma than in Napa. We find that Sonoma is better than Napa. We do not get the aroma of Traminer as in Germany. There

Martini: are two varieties, the regular Traminer and the Gewürtztraminer. The white Traminer is very good, makes a wonderful wine, but it has no flavor. The other has a flavor that reminds you of the Muscat and then cinnamon, at the same time. It has a spicy flavor.

Interv: But you would say, in general, stick to the reds?

Martini: I think so. I would say the reds are more what people like. You get tired of whites. Besides, white will not keep as long, not keep as soundly as red. Unfortunately the combination of factors in this country is not propitious for producing the best white wines, as in certain regions of France and Germany. There is not as good white wine in Italy compared to France and Germany.

Interv: But red?

Martini: Some red is very good, just as good as the French if not better. I have tasted some red in Italy that can compare with the best Burgundy and the best Cabernet.

Cabernet is the best ager. Real Cabernet should take at least ten years to age; that's a minimum. But how can you keep a wine ten years when we sell 10,000 or 20,000 cases a year? How are you going to finance it? See, in order to keep wine for a long time you should have a temperature not to exceed 55 degrees. To go above 55 degrees takes some years out of its life.

Interv: The question of aging and quality--

Martini: Aging is not making wine. It is something else entirely. Wine is matured by aging, but it is not made by aging. Some wines don't improve with long aging. There is a limit, like people, like flowers, like anything else. Go just so far and that's that. Wine, to improve, must have the substance to be aged.

Interv: Do you export your wine?

Martini: Yes, a company in Rome buys some, and we sell to consulates and embassies, but not much.

Interv: Do you think the United States should import a lot of wines?

Martini: Why not? If that's what people want. I think there are some European wines not up to American wines. See, it's narrow-minded to think that American wines are in competition with French wines. French wine is French wine. If somebody wants it, why shouldn't they have it? I drink German wines. I drink Montrachet, Burgundy and Bordeaux. Champagne. I do not believe that California will ever produce champagne that will be equal to the French, or even the New York State champagne.

Interv: New York State?

Martini: The Finger Lakes district. And Ohio also makes some good champagne.

Interv: Made of American grapes.

Martini: Made of American grapes. They're good--I like them. A little foxy, but I like them. But you can't compare them to French Champagne. They're different, like anything else--pork and veal. If you like it, you like it.

Interv: It's often said that wines made by Gallo and other large producers compare favorably to the ordinary wines of Europe.

Martini: Well, it's a different type of wine altogether. See, we never make the same wine as is made in Italy or France or Russia or Germany because it's different land. It can be similar. It might be just as good, but it would be a different type.

I like Gallo. Very capable man, very good, very nice.

Interv: How do you like his winery?

Martini: I like it. Considering the size, he makes very good wine, very good. The best wine in such quantity. He only wants to make ordinary wine. I drank some at his own table recently. Very good. But you see, like anything else, if you go into quantity you can't be as selective.

CHANGES

Interv: Have there been many changes that affect your winery since you have been making wine? Better machinery?

Martini: Well, the basic principle is the same, but the machinery has changed.

Interv: Better?

Martini: Yes, better. Ah--actually, to make wine doesn't take machinery. It just takes good grapes and good fermentation. With machinery you just take a short-cut, that's all. See, years ago we had puncheons and shallow tanks that didn't need refrigeration. Fermenters about 10 to 12 feet diameter and 5 to 6 feet high staves. Heat escaped fast, no danger of spoiling. In the night time they'd cool off. Now you use big tanks and you have to cool the wine down or else you burn it up.

Interv: Is it better to make wine in big tanks for other reasons?

Martini: It doesn't make any difference. It's more economical.

Interv: How about filters?

Martini: Well, filters are needed sometimes to remove some solids. They have improved. We used to throw

Martini: the lees away. With the kind of filter we have now that we bought from Italy, we can recover 50 per cent. Solid, you know, just like a cheese. Then we throw them in the vineyard to dry; good fertilizer.

Interv: Has the use of diatomaceous earth for filtering been an improvement?

Martini: That's only a medium to filter. No difference.

Interv: What about crushers?

Martini: Well, they're more economical. They do more work. It doesn't matter very much. You can use your feet or a crusher--it doesn't make any difference.

Interv: Does irrigation make any difference?

Martini: No. Irrigation is only to give a certain amount of moisture to bring the fruit to a perfect condition.

Interv: Does it make any difference whether you flood or spray water?

Martini: I don't think it does. Water is water. The only thing is, if you spray you may get some trouble some time. But I think perhaps spraying is better.

Interv: Do you use spray to protect against frost?

Martini: No. Not yet. We move the air with machines and use heaters.

Interv: Are there any other changes that have been important?

Martini: I don't think so. You crush a hundred tons in an hour or ten tons in an hour--it doesn't make a bit of difference provided you have accommodation for the wine. The main thing is to bring the temperature to the proper level, and the proper level is 75 degrees for the red wine. For the white, bring it down to 40 or 45.

Interv: | Could you have stayed in business without these mechanical advances?

Martini: | Well, it depends on how large you want to get. When you're small, you don't need anything. Get the tubs, make the wine.

Interv: | But could you make money?

Martini: | That's another question: making wine, making money. It depends upon how you can work, how you can do something without a cut in quality.

Interv: | How big can a winery be and maintain high quality?

Martini: | Well, for me to make a statement about that would be to contradict and disagree with everybody [laughing]. So I'd better not make it.

PROMINENT CALIFORNIA WINE MEN

Interv: | May we ask you about a few of the men who were active in the California wine industry earlier? You knew A. R. Morrow.

Martini: | I remember him, yes.

Interv: | Did he have as great a capability for tasting as people say?

Martini: | Not as much as his reputation, no. He knew wine, but not as much as people say he did. He consulted with somebody else before passing on the wine.

Interv: | When they gave you the American Society of Enologists' 1972 Merit Award, they noted that you have a fine palate and a fine memory.

Martini: | I have a good palate, yes. I think I have anyhow. My cooking is pretty good, so I must have a pretty

Martini: good palate.

Interv: [You recall Sophus Federspiel?

Martini: Very well. He was a very assuming, an austere type of man, and handsome. Smart, but not a wise businessman. He started with Italian Swiss Colony. Then he was associated with [H. O.] Lanza. They made wine in San Francisco in a winery that I think [Claus] Schilling had earlier. They also had a winery in Elk Grove. I remember Schilling, big, imposing old man [making motion to indicate large mustachios]. When I made wine for Bradford* I took him a sample. He said, "Young man, do you make wine like that all the time?" I said, "I try to." He bought a hundred thousand gallons right away, bought everything I made there that year. One condition: "Don't put any white grapes in it." [smiling]

Interv: But you did!

Martini: I didn't say that [laughing]; you said it.

Interv: Did you know Charles and Clarence Wetmore?

Martini: Charlie Wetmore was manager of George West & Son winery in Stockton, a big winery, at one time. Very capable. Very good winemaker. I didn't know Clarence very well. He was a pretty good man. He started a winery of his own at Manteca, then sold it later.

Interv: Coming back to this valley--you knew Georges de Latour.

Martini: Very good man, capable, honest, ethical, a gentleman in every way. An elegant, patrician man, like all his family. He knew wine. He had a good palate.

When I was working for Foley, I sold Mr. de Latour 100,000 gallons of Muscatel wine for

*See also pages 20-21.

Martini: sacramental purposes.* But he had no grapes to make it from [laughter]. I said, "But, Mr. Foley, I've got to get the grapes somewhere. You've got the money from this man. I've got to have the grapes!"

He finally found me 400 tons of grapes. But before I got it I had to make four bottles of wine as a sample to take to Mr. de Latour. He liked it. Then I made the wine. He accepted me after that. Anything that I said was all right with him. I sold him brandy, concentrate, wine, everything. He never asked the price.

He had a man by the name of [Joseph J.] Ponti who used to make wine for him.

Interv: Andre Tchelistcheff is there now, isn't he?

Martini: Tchelistcheff came in 1938. Tchelistcheff is good; he's a chemist and a winemaker, a Russian raised in France. He went to school in Paris. He's a real enologist. He knows more than I do.**

*Georges de Latour's winery, Beaulieu Vineyard, had a Prohibition Department Permit to sell sacramental wines throughout the Prohibition period.

**According to Andre Tchelistcheff, he went to work at Beaulieu in 1938 and made his first wine there in September of that year. He was the winemaker and Ponti was general supervisor. Tchelistcheff retired in February, 1973.

THE PRESENT

Interv: Coming back to your winery here--your son, Louis P. Martini, has succeeded you as president and general manager?

Martini: Yes. In January, 1968. You see, I wanted to sell out my winery in 1940. I wanted to buy my partner's interest and sell it later. My son wasn't sure he wanted to stay. Then in about 1965 I could have sold for a lot of money. I asked him if he'd changed his mind. I said, "If I'm alone, I'll sell. If you want to take over, I won't sell." He said, "I'm going to stay." Then I didn't sell.

Now I can take time off any time. Louis does the work. I don't do much except from time to time. If he wants to buy a lot of grapes or something, spend too much money, he asks me what do I think of it. We discuss it. But I don't worry any more. I don't interfere with him. What he does, he does. But he asks me first.

Interv: Do you want to add anything more than that about him?

Martini: Well [laughing],--he's my son, and I can say I like him, I love him, and I think he does a good job. I think he does better than I do. He's very busy now. He has--let's see--seven vineyards to run now.

I have two grandsons and two granddaughters. One boy's studied geology in Sonora. The other's in the Army now. The girls are both very intelligent, and very beautiful.

Interv: Well, you've created a good family as well as a good winery.

Martini: I guess so. It's not to my credit; it's my wife's.

Interv: | Is there anything more you'd like to--

Martini: Well, I think that's about all I have to say.
I don't want to brag. Let somebody else brag for me.

Interv: | People do.

Martini: Some do, some don't. Some praise me, some knock me. The world's like that. No matter how good you are, some people are going to knock you. No matter how bad you are, some people are going to praise you. That's a fact. Human nature.

Interv: Was human nature acting up when you were fighting for the green belt zoning here in the Napa Valley? Was there dissention?

Martini: Yes. Some of the winemakers were for it. Some were not for it. I took an affirmative position. I think there should be a preserve.

Interv: It has kept your assessments low.

Martini: Not for that reason. [hitting the table with his fist] I want the grapes to be here! I like grapes. It's my business. And I think it's better for the valley.

LOUIS P. MARTINI

(Date of Interview: April 15, 1973)

THE NAPA VALLEY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVE

Interviewer: Since your father's interview ended with a mention of agricultural zoning, I wonder if you would begin with that subject?

Louis P. Martini: What would you like to know about it?

Interv: As I understand it, you were the leader of the campaign?

LPM: No. I don't think that's quite true. We supported it. Really, we didn't need any campaign. That was pretty well done by the government agencies, the [county] supervisors, and the planning commission.

We supported it by simply showing up at all the hearings and trying to neutralize as much of the propaganda against it as possible. That's really, I think, the main role that most of us did in it.

Interv: Who was against it?

LPM: Some of the old-time growers that had land and feared that the ag preserve would lower their land values. Some of the large companies like, at that time, Inglenook, and Allied Grape Growers and that whole group, were very strongly against it for the reason that I mentioned. They figured it would lower land values in the valley.

Interv: Has it?

LPM: No, it hasn't. Land values have gone up. But I wouldn't say that that's because of the ag preserve either. I wouldn't say it raised land values, but land values did rise after the ag preserve came in.

But there are more factors than that that make the values rise.

Interv: At least it didn't pull them down.

LPM: No, that's right.

Interv: Has it had any adverse effects since it went into effect in 1968?

LPM: No. I think there have been benefits in that you don't know what might have happened had we not had this type of zoning. I think there probably have been benefits. I think it has tended to preserve the value for grapes.

I don't think that lots of people would have invested as much in the valley in grape land as they did had it not been for some guarantee that it wasn't going to all turn into subdivision, or that they weren't going to have a subdivision next to their vineyard.

Interv: In the end the land can be sold for other purposes, but all back taxes have to be paid?

LPM: No, not in this valley. What you're talking about applies to the Williamson Act. According to that, if you contract with the county to hold your land in a preserve, they in turn assess your land on the basis of its productivity rather than on the basis of comparable sales. After a ten-year period of phasing out the contract, you have your land free again.

Except the land on the valley floor. The valley floor is zoned as an ag preserve. That's the zoning. That's a different situation than the Williamson Act.

Interv: So, if you ever wanted to take your valley floor land out of agriculture, you could not?

LPM: That's correct. In the valley outside of the incorporated areas of the city and a few other designated areas, you cannot take it out of agriculture. As a matter of fact, you can't create a parcel in the valley that's any smaller than twenty acres.

I think the ultimate effect of it can only be seen if it stays in force. It's shaky all the time because it's strictly up to the supervisors to keep it in force. But the ultimate effect is it simply keeps the whole valley from being divided up like Santa Clara County was. I think this is good. Maybe developers don't think so. [laughs]

EDUCATION AND WAR SERVICE

Interv: Thank you for explaining that. Now let me ask you about your own "vital statistics." When were you born and where?

LPM: I was born in Livermore on December 20th of 1918.

Interv: And your family left Livermore shortly after that?

LPM: No, my family wasn't in Livermore. My grandparents lived in Livermore, my mother's parents.* She was at her parents' house when I was born. My dad was at that time down in the valley, just working.

Interv: Then, did you come to live in San Francisco?

LPM: Yes, when I was very young, oh, two or three years old I guess. We were in San Francisco for a while. Then we moved from there to Kingsburg. Kingsburg is really the first place I remember to any extent.

Interv: You went to school there?

LPM: Yes.

*Mr. and Mrs. Peter Boragni. See page 20.

Interv: How long?

LPM: Well, I went through grammar school in Kingsburg. Then I went to San Rafael Military Academy for high school. Then to Berkeley for college.

Interv: Were you interested at all in wine making? In Kingsburg. You lived on the winery grounds, so you grew up with it.

LPM: That would almost disinterest you in it. [laughter] That's why I vowed that when I had my own home it was not going to be on the winery grounds.

Interv: Did you work in the winery at Kingsburg?

LPM: Yes, I did as a kid. I worked in the vineyards and the winery, doing whatever odd jobs were available at the time.

I remember when Prohibition was repealed in '34, and we were bottling and I was helping out in the bottling room down in Kingsburg. Up here at St. Helena I worked during summers when I was going to college, but mostly in the vineyards, mostly outside. Like hauling rocks for stone walls and that sort of thing.

When I was needed, I would come in the winery and do some work.

Interv: I think your interest since has been a good deal in the chemistry of wines, has it not?

LPM: I'm more interested in the wine making than I am in the cultural end of it, let's put it that way.

Interv: Did you work at all in the lab as a kid?

LPM: Not too much. A little bit. But most of the time, as a youngster, I was working outside. We never were really big enough to have much of a lab that kept anybody very busy. There wasn't that much work in the lab.

Interv: Did your father ever give you any formal instructions in wine making?

LPM: No. Do you mean a formalized kind of a quick course or something?

Interv: Yes.

LPM: No. I just kind of got it by osmosis.

Interv: Then you went to the University of California in 1937?

LPM: Yes.

Interv: And did you intend then to take courses in enology?

LPM: Yes. Well, the reason I went to Berkeley, and the reason I majored in Food Tech was that I didn't want to limit myself to enology, because I didn't know whether I wanted to come back into the wine business or not.

Food Tech was at Berkeley and enology was at Davis at that time. So, I completed my major courses in Food Tech by the end of my junior year, then I kind of held off on my electives until I accumulated them for my senior year. Then I went up to Davis and took all the enology courses as electives.
[laughter]

Because I didn't want to go to school for five years. I'd had enough school by the fourth year. I wouldn't have probably gone back.

Interv: Oh really? I thought there was an implication in something Dr. William V. Cruess once said that you might have gone into teaching.

LPM: No, it never was in my mind. Well, maybe teaching at college level would be all right. But anything under that wouldn't interest me one bit. [laughter]

Interv: I thought he said that you were interested in research and might have gone into enology at the university.

LPM: I was interested in research.

Interv: You were evidently one of his prize students.

LPM: I was really never an outstanding student when it came to getting grades. I was just quite average. I just really didn't like studying that much for grades, although I was interested in the production, and I was very interested in the chemistry. I just wasn't built to be a typical student.

Interv: Did you work in the pilot winery there at Davis?

LPM: Well, I did some research at Berkeley, and then I did some at Davis while I was still an undergraduate, in wine making. Well, the research at Berkeley was in yeast identification, I think. And the research at Davis was on a project on foaming in wines, which were giving some people problems.*

Interv: Who did you work with there at Davis?

LPM: Oh, it was Dr. [M.A.] Amerine at Davis. And at Berkeley I was working with Dr. Cruess.

Interv: Then you got out of college in '41. That was not a great year to get out of college!

LPM: That's what I say. This is why I didn't figure on that fifth year, because the service would have done something about it anyway. I came back here for about six months, and then the draft board started breathing down my neck. So I joined the Air Force.

Interv: And you served -- ?

LPM: Four years in the Air Force.

Interv: Mostly overseas?

LPM: Well, half and half. Half of it in Southern California, if that's overseas, [laughs] and half of it in England.

*The results were reported in a paper co-authored by Maynard A. Amerine, Louis P. Martini and William DeMattei, "Foaming Properties in Wine." (Ind. and Eng. Chem, 34:152-127. 1942).

Interv: You were a major?

LPM: Right.

Interv: Did you go in as an officer?

LPM: No, I went in as a flight cadet. And I started out in pilot training, but I got airsick and washed out. So, I went into armament and ordnance, and started out as a squadron armament officer, then ended up as a group ordnance and armament officer stationed in England.

Interv: The war was over by the time you -- ?

LPM: Oh yes. The war in Europe ended in May. Our unit was destined to go into the Pacific. Then before they could move us the war in the Pacific ended. So we got back the day before Thanksgiving in '45.

THE LOUIS M. MARTINI WINERY AND ITS FOUNDER

Interv: Did you come then back directly to work at the winery?

LPM: Yes.

Interv: I think your father indicated that there were times when you were not really sure that you wanted to stay at the winery.

LPM: Well, as a matter of fact, I wasn't even sure that I wanted to come back after I got out of the service, but I saw that he had a pretty good business going here and we had some land to plant into vineyards, and it seemed to me that with my training, if I could put up with working in the family situation it would be silly not to continue the business. So that's really the main reason I came back.

Otherwise I would have probably ended up as a career officer in the Air Force. I didn't mind it. I liked being in the Air Force. It didn't bother me a bit.

Interv: So you came back and decided to stay?

LPM: Yes.

Interv: And you've never considered leaving it?

LPM: No. I got pretty irritated a few times [laughs] but I never really considered leaving it.

Interv: I ask this in connection with your father's saying, in effect, that occasionally he thought that it was too great an investment to handle alone, and if you weren't going to continue it then it was too chancy for him.

LPM: Yes.

Interv: Let me just ask, for the record, in this connection, your father had an automobile accident in '62 or something of that sort?

LPM: Yes. Well originally he had a slight stroke in about '47. That's when he really started taking care of himself. Up to that time--we were married in '47, and when we were married he looked like a little blimp. He weighed about 230 lbs. [laughs] He used to eat like a horse, and never paid any attention to doctors or anyone else.

Well, he had a stroke not too many months after we were married. So he then started going to Dr. [Francis L.] Chamberlain, and he started to paying some attention to him. From then on his health has been quite good until he got in this auto accident where he got in the way of an oak tree.

In addition to some superficial injuries, it just shocked him and apparently gave him a bleeding ulcer. Then, his problem since then has been the doctor has been riding a kind of thin line between keeping his blood viscous enough to keep the ulcer from bleeding, yet fluid enough to keep clots from forming. Because he has a tendency of the coagulating of his blood. So this is why he's on so darned many pills.

LPM: They're trying to hold this narrow line between the two, and he's done very well, I think. But he follows his doctor's orders very rigidly. It's more discipline than he's ever done anything else in his life, I'm sure. [laughs]

Interv: It was said that before he started taking care of himself he had a terrible temper.

LPM: Oh, he always was hot-tempered, and still is. That hasn't really changed, but he doesn't exhibit it quite as dramatically as he used to. He physically can't. [laughter]

Interv: His memory is very good, his memory for things right now as well as the past. I met him unexpectedly in San Francisco and he remembered me immediately.

LPM: He has an excellent memory for people, for some reason. I'm the opposite. I never remember people. I could probably meet you in the street in three days and not recognize you. I just don't remember people's faces and I don't remember their names, but he does.

He'll come into the office and there will be a salesman that came two years ago and he'll remember him. Guys will walk in on me and I don't know who they are. They know who I am because I'm sitting where I'm supposed to be sitting, but I don't know who they are. [laughter]

INDUSTRY ACTIVITIES

Interv: Let's get on to your own career. By the '50s you had started to be active in the Wine Institute on some committees?

LPM: Well, I guess so. They started sticking me on them somewhere in the '50s. Actually, in the early '50s and before that I became more active in the American Society of Enologists.

Interv: You were president of it, weren't you?

LPM: I was president of it once, but a group of us started that back in about 1950. Really, one person had the idea and then he got a bunch of us together and started it.

Interv: Who was that person?

LPM: Charlie Holden. He was working for Peralta down in Fresno. He started the A.S.E.

Then--I guess this is normal procedure for the Institute--after you're in the industry for a while they start giving you more and more jobs. The first thing you know you're on a half a dozen committees. But you kind of get shoved into it. You don't do too much about getting into them.

Interv: One of your committees was the regulation committee, which you have been on since '56. That's for policy making?

LPM: Well, the board of directors really makes the policies. It's just one that reviews the laws and regulations, both federal and state, and makes any recommendations for issues or changes in them, or if they want a change, or if somebody in the industry feels that a regulation should be changed, they would take it to this committee to study it. Then it makes its recommendations to the board, and then the board goes ahead and tries to get the change into the regulations.

Interv: That keeps you working on problems doesn't it?

LPM: Yes. Well, the reason I got on that committee to begin with was that, to tell you the truth, I found out we were getting regulatory changes that the Institute had promoted that I hadn't even heard of. Because, not being on the committee, you never got the minutes of a committee meeting. So I just asked to be on the committee so I at least got the minutes. [laughs] I would know what was going on, and if they were trying to promote something that I didn't like I could go down and scream about it.

LPM: But then it's pretty interesting work, although it deals a lot with things that don't necessarily apply to us. They are applied to the industry, although they don't always apply to us. They deal with brandy as well as wines, and vermouth and flavored wines.

Interv: Then you were on the vinicultural research committee, chairman of that?

LPM: For a while. These chairmanships, they rotate around, so nobody gets stuck with one too long.

Interv: The wine quality committee, was that one that especially interested you?

LPM: Yes, well it's concerned with winery sanitation, and grape quality. In other words, grape inspection and grape quality. That interests me quite a bit.

Actually, any of these areas that involve production interest me. I try to stay out of the committees not concerned with production because they really don't interest me. And there's only so many you can be on, so you might just as well be on those that you're interested in and can do a better job, and know something a little more about too.

Interv: The "T.A.C." --

LPM: Oh, that's a large committee. The Technical Advisory Committee is made up of most of the technical people in the industry.* It works more as an information center for technical material for the Institute than it does anything else. But it's too big and unruly to serve as a working committee.

Usually, if you have a specific problem that you want some technical people working on, they'll appoint a small committee to do the work because the T.A.C. must have about eighty or ninety members in it by now, I imagine.

Interv: Is its work valuable?

LPM: Well, its work is valuable in disseminating information. What it does is that it holds three

*The committee was discontinued in mid-1973.

LPM: meetings a year. If you've done something particularly interesting in the winery, let's say a new piece of equipment that you're trying, or a new technique or something that might be interesting to the rest of the industry, you could report on it without making a real scientific project out of it. You could also report it to the American Society of Enologists but then you would have to have scientific documentation and it would be a much bigger project, whereas the T.A.C. accepts a much more informal type of presentation.

Interv: Does it work so that if you report you're trying something, somebody else is likely to try it too, and see if it works for them?

LPM: That's right. It's kind of a clearinghouse for information for the industry. Some suppliers that have a new technique for doing something might want to give a presentation. They might have a forum in which four or five people that had worked with the problem can talk about what they tried and whether it worked for them or didn't.

But it's different from the American Society of Enologists' conference and papers. Those have to be written up as pure scientific papers and you have to have your data, bibliography, and documentation, and everything else for the work that you did.

Interv: They publish a very good journal.

LPM: Yes, it is a good journal.

Interv: Your father was on the board of the Wine Institute.* And you've been on the board since '65?

LPM: You would know it better than I would. I don't remember. [laughs]

Interv: That's the right date. Does all this take a lot of your time?

*From 1951 to 1954 according to Wine Institute records.

LPM: It takes a fair amount. It takes, oh, I would say an average of two days a month, probably about two full days a month. It comes in clusters. One month you may go four or five days, and another month you don't have any meetings at all.

Interv: But in addition, do you have to read and study?

LPM: Yes. Well, that doesn't take too much time.

Interv: You've been on the Wine Advisory Board?

LPM: Yes, I'm on that, too.

Interv: That takes a little more time, then.

LPM: I'd say between probably, for winery activities other than our own winery--in other words, between the Wine Advisory Board and the American Society of Enologists and the Wine Institute--I probably average about three days a month. Some months it will be five days and another month it will be only one or something. But I think it averages about that.

CHANGES SINCE THE 1940's

Interv: The industry has changed quite a bit since you came into it in the '40s, hasn't it?

LPM: Oh, of course. It's changed a lot really. Well, in the first place it has a lot more money in it than it had in the '40s. There are just a lot of people that came in and put in an awful lot of money.

A lot of the production equipment has been tremendously improved. It's more efficient and really, I think, producing a better product than the things we had back in the '40s. And, of course, the big change has come in grapes. The varieties are the same, but we know much more about where to plant them now than we did then. And we're starting to get grapes from some of the more desirable areas.

LPM: Before, we used to plant everything on one ranch. If you had one plot of acres and you wanted ten varieties of grapes, you put them all on it. But you don't do that any more. You find out what grows best in that particular area, and you put it there. If you want to grow another variety, you go find another piece of land somewhere where that one will do better.

We're beginning to identify these areas which we didn't have identified, really, in the '40s.

Interv: This is beyond the region system?

LPM: Oh, you mean the weather climatic regions?

Interv: Yes.

LPM: Yes. Well, we still follow what Amerine and Winkler originally worked on;* the regions as a broad climatic area are still correct. But we've defined this broad climatic area now with regard to soil types and micro-climates.

We're beginning to learn quite a bit about what varieties do best in what soils and micro-climates. We're just starting to learn a little bit about-- whether you're on the north side of the slope or the south side of the slope, and this sort of thing.

Interv: That almost goes back to folk agriculture, doesn't it?

LPM: It may be folk agriculture, but it's true. [laughs]

Interv: Is much of it coming from university studies, or industry studies or -- ?

LPM: I think most of it is coming from industry studies right now. It's kind of a hit-and-miss system. Most

*Described in: Maynard A. Amerine and Albert J. Winkler, Grape Varieties for Wine Production, California Agricultural Experiment Station Extension Service Leaflet 154, 1963, and elsewhere.

LPM: wineries, I think, are also more interested in this type of an operation, and also with the recent increase in the number of small wineries--I mean really small wineries that sell only at the winery and so on--they have the facilities, and they can keep individual vineyards separate and individual lots separate.

We do it to the extent that we can, but we can't always do it all. If we can't hold an entire lot separate, we will hold part of it separate so we know what that location will do. That's how we've learned about these various locations, by then checking the wines later to see what they were like.

We may end up making them all into one blend--let's say all the combinations go into one blend eventually--but when we make it we try and hold each lot separate, from each farmer and from our own various vineyards, to see if there are differences. So that in the future if we go into that area we'll know what variety will do best.

We're slowly starting to delineate this.

Interv: Is there any movement underfoot at all in the industry to correlate this information? To get it from all the different growers?

LPM: Yes. There's some work being done now by the university on micro-climates. I don't think we're far enough along, as far as the industry is concerned. In other words, we're working an awful lot with opinions yet, rather than facts. If we try right now to get all the information together, we may get a lot of opinions together, and some of them may not be that strongly based.

Interv: Do you discuss any of these in the Napa Valley Vintners' meetings?

LPM: Oh, some of these things we discuss wherever we meet. This is typical talk for wine people.

Interv: You mentioned the equipment advances. What specifically?

LPM: Well, for instance, we're using--take twenty years ago we had drag conveyors, and these have been changed over to metal screw conveyors. We had just plain basket presses, and these have been changed over to Willmes type presses which are pneumatic. We've had all concrete fermentors and then we went to stainless steel fermentors with temperature control jackets, and this sort of thing that didn't exist at that time.

I'm not sure if a lot of them contribute to better wine making, but it contributes to a more efficient operation, and easier wine making.

FAMILY WINERIES

Interv: In this series of interviews that we've done, we've really gone from Prohibition to the conglomerates. That's what we could call the whole series.

LPM: That's just about right, yes. [laughter]

Interv: And yet there are quite a number of you still in family firms.

LPM: Well, there are new ones started too, yes.

Interv: Do you think the wineries are going to continue to go into the conglomerates, or will there always be a fresh supply of family firms or individual firms coming in? Can you tell now the trend?

LPM: I think there will be a fresh supply of individual firms coming in. If things don't get too expensive for them to come in. This is one of the problems with a small firm. I think a small firm can exist and do well providing it can sell a very high percentage of its wine retail. If it can do this, that's fine. Now, how many retail firms the population can support by coming up to their individual wineries and buying up their wine, I don't know.

LPM: If they sell wholesale and go through a normal distribution system like we do and most of the other wineries in the [Napa] valley, then they're going to have to sell a lot more wine. Then they're no longer a small firm. [laughs]

Interv: Well, two things that have been tried are the sales rooms like Brookside's, and the mail --

LPM: Well, I'm not sure that mail is that much of a savings because you can't mail wine. You've got to ship it, and freight is very expensive. By the time they get through with all of their expenses of direct mailing and everything, it might make a small difference but it's not going to make a big difference over normal channels of distribution.

Interv: What about the sales room approach?

LPM: Well, now you're restricted that you can only have one in addition to your winery. You know, when Brookside and Mills were first going, there were no restrictions. You could put out as many sales rooms as you wanted based on your bonded winery permit.

But since then it's been restricted. We can have a sales room at the winery and one other. That's it.

Interv: But those that already have them can keep them?

LPM: Oh yes, they can keep them.

Interv: But that, again, doesn't solve the problem?

LPM: No, that's right. See, as a winery we can't put up a retail store and sell our products too, because we couldn't have an interest in a retail outlet or even a wholesale outlet. We can do it ourselves, but we can't have an interest in another place.

Interv: Businesses like yours and Wente and Concannon and Mirassou--is the outlook good for all of you to keep on in your present position?

LPM: Yes, I think so. The only problems I can see on the horizon are things like estate taxes and this

LPM: sort of thing when it's handed down from one generation to the next. With the inflationary pressures and the really unrealistic values of wineries nowadays--and some of the sales of wineries, which have been far and above their real value.

It all depends upon what kind of an assessment procedure and appraisal procedures that the government takes. There is no way to prepare for something like this because it just came too fast.

The only reason I can see that some of the family firms preferred to go out (and I think this is probably why Brookside sold out) is the estate situation. They preferred to sell out and still run the place than to just sell out completely when the estate situation presented itself.

Interv: There's no way then to reorganize the corporation in such a situation, I suppose, among the family members?

LPM: Well, there are lots of ways of reorganizing, but if you do it by gift way, you've got gift taxes which are just as bad as the other. And for this you need cash.

As soon as you start appraising something nowadays, where the increase in value came so fast, it's way out of proportion of its real value. You've got a little wine here and inside of three years it's worth three times as much. And yet, you've got the same amount of wine, you've got the same tanks, you've got the same everything you had three years ago. Well, how can you protect against something like that?

You've got three times as much value on everything except money, and there's no cash around. [laughs]

GROWTH AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Interv: I suppose most of these changes that you've mentioned in the industry have been reflected in your company changes too, that you've built and added --

LPM: Oh, we try and add a little bit each year as we need it. We'd add some tanks or we'd add--like this project you can see out here now. We're building new offices. It started out as a three-year project. We were going to do one section (this section with restrooms and the employees' lunchroom) the first year, the tasting room the second year, and the offices the third year.

But it came out to a six-year project. We did one section and then had to wait two years to do the second because we needed some other equipment in between. Then last year we were going to do the office and then we needed some more stainless tanks for our fermenting room, so we got those instead. We're getting the office finally done this year.

Interv: The tasting room is certainly attractive. I guess most wineries now put some money into their tasting rooms.

LPM: Well, that operation pays for itself just on its wines that we sell. We hire quite a few guides and we use quite a bit of wine, but if you count everything, plus the wine that you sell at the plant, that's a self-liquidating promotional operation. It doesn't make a lot of money because you have pretty high expenses, but at least it pays for itself.

Interv: I suppose the advertising is good in a sense.

LPM: Yes. We'd do it even if we couldn't sell wine because I think it's a good way to promote.

Interv: You don't do a great deal of advertising?

LPM: We don't do any.

Interv: I see you have a leaflet.

LPM: Well, we have a new booklet that just describes the wine. And I think once in a while we may take an ad out in the local paper, or Wines and Vines more to support the publication than for advertising purposes. Otherwise, we don't do any.

I take a dim view of advertising. I feel that with a product like ours it really doesn't do you a lot of good unless you can go at it big, and by big I mean a full page in Time or in Newsweek or something like that every time so that the people see it. Unless you can go at it at that magnitude, then just to put a little ad in a magazine with many other ads doesn't do you much good.

Interv: If you were very successful, could you supply the market?

LPM: Well, we couldn't supply the market anyway. But some people feel that they should advertise whether they're short of the product or not. But we didn't even advertise when we were long on the product. [laughs]

Interv: Well, your winery, it seems to me, is amazing. I started hearing about it in the '30s. Now, I was at Stanford and I didn't know anything special about wines, but the prestige was immediate apparently, and among people who thought they knew. It was apparently known immediately.

LPM: How that was achieved I really don't know. But, what we have tried to do is-- Our philosophy is very simple: we try and make a good sound wine for the money that we ask for it.

On the varietal wines, we try to make them very distinctly varietal so that they're easier to identify. Otherwise there's no point in making a varietal wine.

We're far more concerned with not putting out a bad wine than we are with making an exotic wine. When we see the opportunity we will try and make an exotic one, but we don't get as hung up on that

LPM: as we do on making sure that nothing goes out of here not up to standard.

The other thing is, we try and maintain a realistic pricing on our wines, so that we feel that the person is getting some value for what they're paying. And this is getting tougher, too, every day because the price of grapes is going up. But we really think that our wines are worth the price we ask for them.

We've been told all the time that we're underpriced in the market. Well, my answer to that is I think perhaps there are lots of others that are overpriced. I don't believe that we're underpriced.

Some sales people think you lose prestige if you don't price up your wines to the top. Well, I think it's legitimate to ask for a high price for a wine if you really have something rare and unusual and in limited quantities and it's worth it. But if you're putting it out at any kind of volume and it doesn't have the age--even a wine that may end up great, but when you sell it it hasn't got the age and isn't all that great--I don't think it should be priced so much.

Interv: Your father told about the beginning of Moscato Amabile, but he didn't go into the problems you had. Didn't you pull it off the market for a time?

LPM: Oh, a number of years ago we had a problem with the fact that it has a small amount of dissolved carbon dioxide. And we were selling it as a still wine because it was not under pressure; it was in a tank that was not a pressure tank at all. Then we would just bottle it cold and it would retain some of this CO₂.

Well, the federal government took the view that if it had any CO₂ in it at all, it was subject to a sparkling wine tax, or a champagne tax. It was held off the market while we dickered on that one. We lost. From then on we had to pay the champagne tax on it. That was one of the reasons it was off the market.

LPM: Then periodically it's off the market simply because we run out, and the next batch isn't ready yet. This is the situation now. We've just run out.

Interv: The psychological problems of a family business--it seems to me that almost everyone we've talked to who had a family winery mentioned younger members who at least at first thought they wanted to be anything but winemakers. I guess this is the same in any family business...

LPM: If you look at the wine business there are quite a few families that continued. You can just start up in Ukiah and work on down. There's a lot of the young generation. Even the third and fourth generation are still in the business.

Of course, one of the problems would be true of any business: I think it's very difficult working with your parents in any type of business, no matter whether it's my kids working with me, or me working with my dad; you're a different generation, you're of different training and background, and you think differently, that's all.

It isn't so much the over-all philosophy. The reason, I think, my dad and I have been able to get along is our over-all philosophy and our goals in the winery are the same. It's the every-day operation that causes the irritation, of how to do something, not so much what to do, in the long run.

When you've started a business and built it up it's very hard to delegate responsibilities. You want to get in there and make sure. I guess this is true of all parents. They never have quite the confidence, no matter how old their kids get, that they can do it by themselves. [laughs] So, that all comes back to roost.

It's much easier, I think, to work in a family business once you're married and away and have your home than it is when you're living at home and then working in the business besides. Because then you never get away from it.

THE MARTINI FAMILY

Interv: Your own family--let's put it on the record.

LPM: We have four children.

Interv: What was your wife's maiden name?

LPM: Elizabeth Martinelli.

Interv: Did you meet her in college?

LPM: Well, that's a strange story. We were classmates at Berkeley. She was in Public Health, but I never knew her at Berkeley. Her brother-in-law, her sister's husband, and I were roommates overseas. So I met her after I came back. I didn't meet her earlier at all, although we took comparable courses. But, you know what Berkeley is like. [laughs] We were actually in some of the same classes, but different sections.

Interv: Then you married in...

LPM: We married in '47.

Interv: And your children.

LPM: Well, we have Carolyn, who is twenty-five years old now. She graduated from Scripps College in Claremont and is now back at Rutgers University doing graduate work in library science.

Interv: Good heavens! [laughing] And here she has this glamorous winery!

LPM: Well, she may end up back here yet. But, at any rate, she is now interested in those things. So that's fine.

Then there is Mike. He's twenty-three. He was at Fresno State majoring in viticulture for about a year and a half. He got himself all involved in the peace movement and didn't do very much studying, and also the draft came along. He came out about

LPM: number fifty on the draft and didn't want all that hanging over his head when he got out. So, he decided to join the Air Force. So he's a weatherman in the Air Force. He's in England. Now, when he gets out this October he'll have completed his tour and I assume he's going back to college at either Davis or Fresno and probably major in viticulture. I don't know whether he's interested enough to come back into the business or not, but when I think back to when I was his age, he's just as interested as I was.

The next boy is Pete, and he's twenty-one. He's going to Columbia Junior College now. He wants to go into wildlife management, and he'll probably go on to one of the state colleges for wildlife management later on.

The youngest daughter [Patricia] is a sophomore at Davis. She's nineteen. She wants to go into law. So, there they are.

Actually, they are all very interested in the business, so I don't exclude one or more of them coming back. I think some probably will.

Interv: So many people from outside the wine industry think it's glamorous and are dying to get into it.

LPM: It doesn't look that glamorous from the inside. [laughs]

Interv: One old-time wine man mentioned that people with a lot of money thought the wine business was glamorous and sometimes they came in and made it difficult for the regular wine people.

LPM: I think one thing that attracts people with a lot of money is the fact that it's apparently (I don't quite understand the economics behind this) supposed to be a good tax shelter. It seems to me that after the war when cattle were a good tax shelter everybody went into the cattle business and fouled that one up, too.

Interv: (Could Catherine take a photograph of you while we talk?

LPM: Sure.)

Interv: Well, I can tell it doesn't look like a good tax shelter from the inside.

LPM: No. I asked our accountants one time, "All these people are coming in and talking about tax shelters, how about you guys finding one for us? We're already in it." He said, "That's your problem. You're already in it. You have to have an outside income to use it as a tax shelter." [laughs]

Interv: Well, to get back to the rest of your family, your sister has a career of her own?

LPM: Yes. Her name is Angiolina. She's a child psychologist with the Richmond School District.

Interv: And she's never been lured into the wine business?

LPM: Oh, she worked in the office for a while when I was in the service, but shortly after I came back she went back to first grade teaching.

Interv: She's unmarried?

LPM: Yes.

Interv: Were there any older members of your family involved in the business?

LPM: Well, both my grandparents were in a way. I have only two aunts. One is in Italy, and her husband was an engineer. And the other one lived in Livermore with her parents until they died. Then she passed away here a few years ago. She was never involved in it.

But my grandfather on my mother's side* had a liquor store in San Francisco, and also had a winery in Livermore, on the ranch where I was born, actually.

My grandfather on my father's side, of course, he and my dad started in the winery in San Francisco. So they were both in the wine business, but not of the same magnitude.

*See page 20.

Interv: I don't think I asked your father if he had any brothers.

LPM: No. He has one sister. She's in Italy. On both sides we really have a very small family. My mother had one sister and she never married. My father had one sister and she married and had one daughter, and she has two boys. That's the extent of the family.

CALIFORNIA WINES IN WORLD TRADE

Interv: Do you think the wine industry is going to take any new directions here in California with relation to the European Common Market or world-wide trade or any -- ?

LPM: Well, of course everything that has been happening with regard to the foreign monetary exchange and the Common Market and so on is probably beneficial for our wine industry. I think we should start putting on foreign countries some of the restrictions that they put on us. I really think this is, right now, a one-way street.

Interv: What kind of restrictions do they put on us?

LPM: For instance, we can't send anything into Europe with generic names like burgundy or claret. We can't send even our varietals into France because they have a French grape name on them. Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot noir, they won't take those. The only thing they will take are coined names like Rubion, something [else] that somebody has made up.

And then you can't sell it. They have high tariffs. They have restrictions. They have quotas. It seems to me that we should start doing something about putting some similar restrictions on their wines, putting quotas on their wines and so on. Why let them flood our market?

Interv: Is there anything now in the situation that will

Interv: cause European consumers, or Oriental consumers for that matter, to want our wines rather than others?

LPM: Well, I don't know. But we should have an equal opportunity to compete. Right now they don't really know whether they want them because they haven't had a chance to try them. But I think we should have an opportunity to compete with them in these various areas.

Interv: We can supply enough, I suppose.

LPM: Well, eventually we will. This is an agricultural industry and it's going to get overproduced like any other agricultural industry sooner or later. It's just a question of time. We're planting grapes like mad and still haven't stopped. It will catch up with the demand, especially if these prices keep going up.

NEW WINE GRAPE VARIETIES

Interv: What about the implications of the new varieties adaptable to the larger areas in the state?

LPM: The San Joaquin Valley?

Interv: Yes.

LPM: Well, I think they're going to have the effect of reducing the standard varieties of the north coast counties because nobody up here that I know of is planting now very much, if anything, in standard varieties. All our new plantings are all premium.

If the Petite Sirah vineyards die off and even some of the Zinfandel vineyards die off, I think you'll find that these will be replaced by the new hybrids that will do well in the San Joaquin Valley. Because they get better production, and if they can make even a wine approaching what our standards do over here, we wouldn't be able to compete with them.

LPM: So far they haven't been able to make a wine approaching our premiums. But I think they can make a wine approaching our standard.

Interv: You mentioned Petite Sirah. Why is it that all of a sudden people have become interested in it as a varietal wine?

LPM: Oh, because somebody put it on the label. One outfit even sells Carignane as a varietal.

I feel, really, that unless a wine has a distinctive character and is desirable there's no point in putting it out as a varietal. We make our burgundy out of Petite Sirah, for instance, and what we now call burgundy we could call Petite Sirah. But what would be the advantage in it, really? It's not that distinctive a wine.

You can name anything you make up. You can make a varietal Thompson Seedless if you want, and it will be legal.

Interv: Does anybody have a good word for Mission grapes any more?

LPM: I don't think so.

Interv: That's too bad. [laughs]

LPM: Historically they sound great.

Interv: Are there new grape varieties being developed for premium wines, for districts like this?

LPM: There are. See, when Professor Olmo* hybridizes, he gets many seedlings. And he tries these in various areas, and one might pop up that does well in this area. In which case I'm sure they would retain it.

But the more immediate problem is to make a good red table wine grape for the San Joaquin Valley. That's a more immediate one than trying to improve these around here. In the process of doing that he's also attempting to improve these. Because you get quite a variation from seedlings with varying characteristics from any one cross.

*Harold P. Olmo

Interv: The university experiment station here at Oakville, is that an important one now?

LPM: Yes. Well, this is one place that they try a lot of these seedlings. They'll start them here and they'll make a little wine from them, and you can tell pretty fast whether they're in the ballpark or not. Then you either eliminate them for some cultural reason or balance or something else, or you retain them. If you retain them then you retain them long enough to make several batches of wine over a two or three year period and evaluate the wine.

Interv: Do you work with that?

LPM: Yes, the Wine Advisory Board tasting committee, we work in evaluating the wine once the university has eliminated them down to the final dozen or so.

MARTINI VINEYARDS

LPM: I don't recall whether in my dad's transcript he had a description of the various vineyards and when we acquired them.

Interv: Not completely.

LPM: I think just to go starting down the line--when we first started up here we started with this ten-acre block where the winery is. Then, about a year later, he bought the ranch where he lives now, which is the home place. That has about 100 acres of vineyard on it, and about 240 acres of mountain land.

Interv: That's in which direction?

LPM: Well, it would be just a mile and a half southwest of the winery here.

At the same time, when he first started here he was buying the grapes off the Monte Rosso Vineyard, which was then known as the Goldstein Ranch.* In '37

*See also page 33.

LPM: he bought the ranch from the estate. I think the acreage [in his interview] is correct.

Then in 1942 he bought part of the Stanly Ranch in Napa, which consisted of about 200 acres at that time. Then, that's about all the land we had until about--I don't recall the exact date, but it would be somewhere around '58 or '60--we added 40 acres to that Stanly Ranch.

Then in '62 I formed another company called Edge Hill Farms. That is owned completely by myself and my wife. Dad and this company had nothing to do with it. So, we bought 200 acres up in Healdsburg and started planting that.

In '62 Edge Hill Farms also bought another 60 acres in the Carneros district of Napa, which is about four miles from the Stanley Ranch. In '64 Edge Hill Farms bought a ranch in Chiles Valley, which we're just now getting around to planting. That's 950 acres total, on 200 of which we're planting grapes. The rest is just mountain pasture. Then just last year I guess, '72, we bought an additional 80 acres next to the original 60 in the Carneros district so we now have 140 acres down there. That's going to be all Pinot noir.

Chiles will be mostly Zinfandel when it gets planted. Zinfandel and probably Riesling as the other grape.

So now we have a whole complex of a little over a thousand acres that will be in grapes.

Interv: And quite varied.

LPM: Yes. Most of it is within about a 20-mile radius of here, but it's quite varied in climatic conditions and altitude and the nature of soils.

So we're going to put all the Pinot noirs down in the Carneros district. And the Cabernet is going to be here and in Sonoma primarily, and then also there's going to be some in Carneros. And the Chenin blanc and Riesling is going to be mostly in Sonoma, and the Chardonnay, Gamay and Gewürztraminer in

LPM: Healdsburg.

Interv: Where in relation to the city of Healdsburg?

LPM: Five miles south on Westside Road, just opposite from the Bishop Ranch, which is an Episcopal retreat over there. It's right between the road and the river.

Interv: I can see why your father said you were busy.

LPM: Well, I'm kind of busy running around and keeping track of everything.

Interv: I'm very grateful to you for adding all this. I do thank you very much.

LPM: Well, you're very welcome.

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