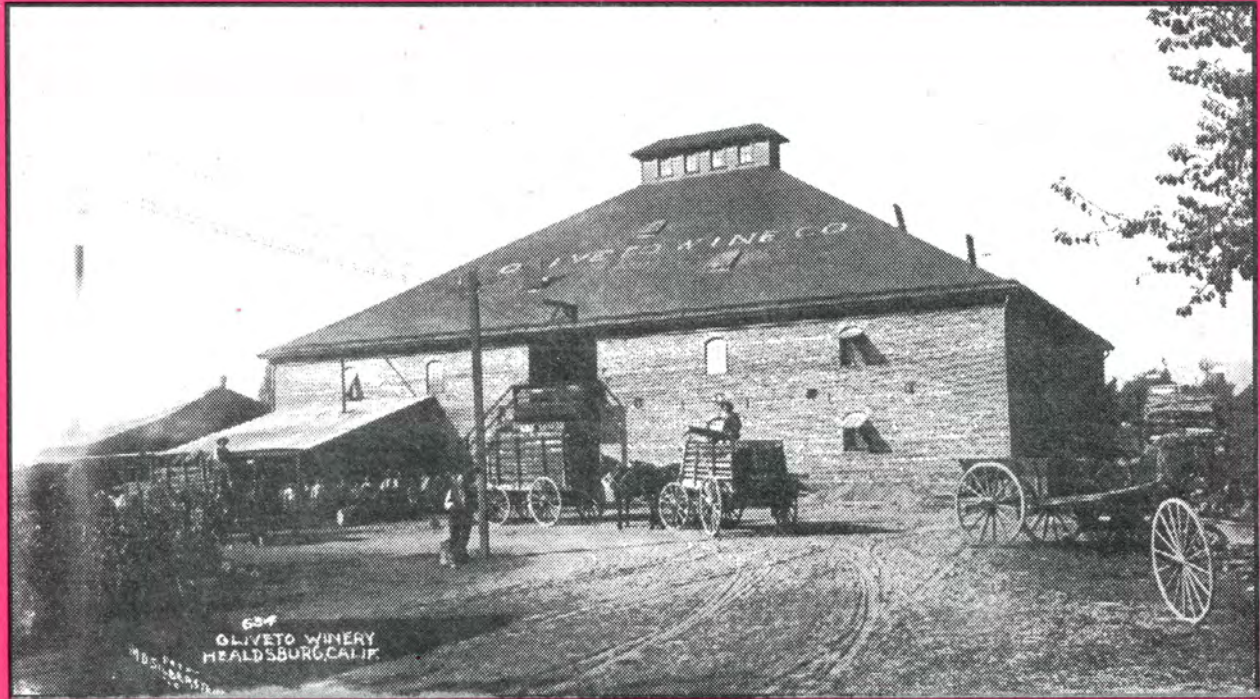




RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society



Oliveto Winery, circa 1910
Mervyn D. Silberstein Photo

"A Jar In The Ground": The Story of Healdsburg's Early Italian Wine Families

by Marie Djordjevic

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Over A Barrel: The Life of Lidio Bellagio, Healdsburg's Master Cooper

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The Foppiano Family and Their Homes

by June Maber Smith

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Also in this issue:

Early Wine History *by Marie Djordjevic*

Il Giuoco delle Bocce and Artifacts



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RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

*The Official Publication of the Healdsburg
Museum and Historical Society*

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IN THIS ISSUE

In keeping with the new exhibit curated by Marie Djordjevich, this issue is devoted to the Early Italian Wine Families who settled in this area bringing their knowledge and know-how with them from the "old country".

To start off our very capable curator Marie brings us a brief early history of the wine industry in Northern Sonoma County and then, in her feature article, gives us histories of the Italian families who dominated the wine scene, names very familiar today - Simi, Scatena, Oliveto, Seghesio, Nervo and Pedroncelli. You'll find this an interesting and fascinating account.

Our assistant curator Holly Hoods gives us a fascinating history of the art of barrel making - cooperage - through the history of Lidio Bellagio and his family. She told us that her interviews with members of the Bellagio family were extremely satisfying.

A history of a family through their homes can give you a good insight into the family and its history. June Maher Smith does this in her well researched and written article, The Foppiano Family and Their Homes.

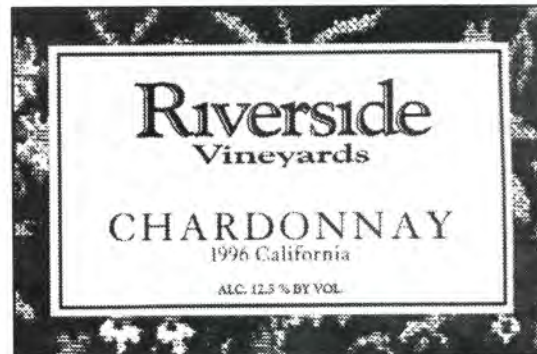
An interesting artifact will be found on page 3 - the 1923 Application for Approval of Bonded Winery or Bonded Storeroom Premises from the estate of Isabelle Simi Haigh.

And lastly, there is a brief history of the game of Bocce - Il Giuoco delle Bocce, a favorite pastime that the Italians brought to this country and enjoy, more than ever, today.

Arnold Santucci
Editor

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Document

Application for Approval of Bonded Winery or Bonded Storeroom Premises
HMC #321 from the Estate of Isabelle Simi Haigh

Bonded: subjected to or secured by a bond or bonds; placed in a bonded warehouse

Bonded warehouse: a warehouse, certified by the government and guaranteed by a bonding agency, where taxable or dutiable goods may be stored, with payment of the tax or duty deferred until the goods are removed.

(thanks to Charlotte Anderson for her research)

Prohibition was a constitutional amendment that looked to solve societal problems through the banning of alcohol. On October 28, 1919 the Volstead Act made it illegal to produce or sell alcoholic beverages. In 1920 the 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution made Prohibition the law.

Wineries had difficult choices to make when Prohibition took effect. Wait it out (with the 1919 harvest in their tanks)? Give up? Sell illegally? Dump the wine? All of the above were chosen at one time or another. Some wineries sold grape juice or made wine for sacramental purposes. Some converted vineyards to orchards. Some closed altogether. Some dumped their wine, while others held onto it.

As an added outrage, the wine in storage could not be sold, exported or given away, but it was taxed. Wineries had to become bonded.

Prohibition did not work as intended. Alcoholic beverages were still being made, crime and corruption among enforcing agents was high. Sentiment for Repeal spread. On December 5, 1933 the 21st Amendment repealing Prohibition was passed.

PERMITS	PERMIT NO.	REGISTER NO.
Winery	A-479	2332
Storeroom		

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF BONDED WINERY OR BONDED STOREROOM PREMISES
UNDER THE INTERNAL REVENUE LAWS**

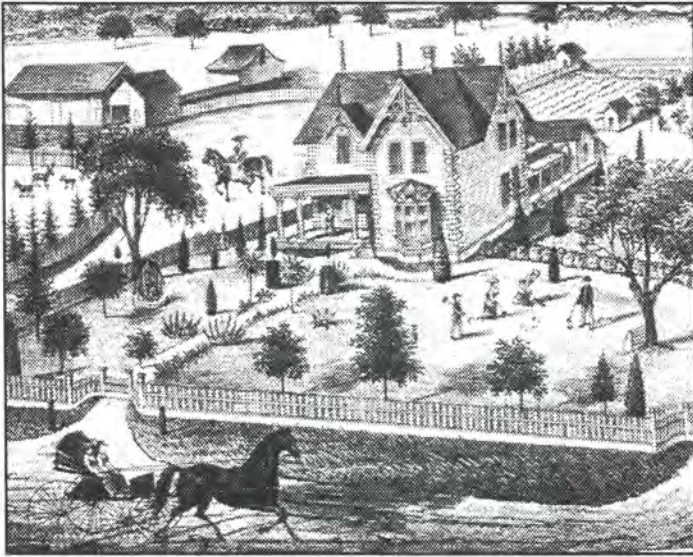
To THE PROHIBITION ADMINISTRATOR,
21st Administrative District,
San Francisco, Calif.

The undersigned: Fredrick R. Haigh

of Healdsburg, Calif. (Other address) _____
having filed bond on Form 1530A in the penal sum of \$ 1000, dated 1-19-23,
and application for permit under the National Prohibition Act to operate a Bonded Winery
at Bonded Winery 2332 1/2 miles north of Healdsburg, California on Redwood Highway
hereby makes application for approval of said premises under the Internal Revenue Laws.

Description and size of the lot or tract of land on which the bonded winery or bonded storeroom premises are situated: Lot of approximately two acres bordering N.W.P. R.R. and about 150 ft. from Redwood Highway.

Size and description of all buildings on the bonded premises, purpose for which used, and material of which constructed (describe each building separately):
Winery approximately 200 ft. by 125 ft. Built of stone and concrete and roofed by shingles and roofing. For manufacturing and storing wine.
Loading platform 200x24 ft. Crusher room 20x24 ft. Press room 50x60 ft. galv. iron
Distillery building 40x60 ft. wood frame and shingled
Scale house 6x10 ft. wood frame and shingled
Cil Tank, 12x12 ft. concrete.



Riverside Farm, purchased by Giovanni Foppiano in 1896 from Frank Schmidt.

The Foppiano Family and Their Homes

by June Maber Smith

Giovanni (John) Foppiano and his descendants acquired or built at least four different houses near Healdsburg. Giovanni, born in 1844, came to America in 1861 from Genoa, Italy. His dream was to find gold in California. However, like so many others, he was unsuccessful and moved to seek his fortune in other ways. He was in the fruit business in San Francisco and also had a garden in San Jose. When he first came to Healdsburg in 1873 he grew and sold vegetables. Giovanni married Rosa Rosasco in 1877 and they became parents of ten children. As time went on, he acquired more land and began his winery operations.

The site of the present Foppiano Winery is part of the Sotoyome Rancho grant made to Henry Fitch in 1847. An 1856 deed shows the property in the name of Levi C. Frisbee. Eight years later the land was called Riverside Farm and was the residence of R. Abbey. In 1877 Ina B. Miller owned the land and operated Riverside Farm as a "resort for tourists." *The Healdsburg Enterprise* tells us the grounds contained "rare plants and shrubbery which she brought from Washington D.C."

Giovanni purchased Riverside Farm in 1896 from Frank Schmidt. (There is mention of a winery with boiler on this property in 1877. An 1889 deed lists the winery and states it was leased to W.J. Hotchkiss and A.R. Galloway.) Louis A. Foppiano, Giovanni's oldest son, soon became involved in the family winery.

In 1900 Louis A. became responsible for delivering the family's wine to accounts in the Italian North Beach area of San Francisco. Six years later he married Mathilda Canata, the daughter of one of his North Beach customers. The couple lived in the stately

Riverside Farm house. Their son, Louis J. Foppiano, was born in this house in a room that currently serves as part of the winery office. Two office walls are remnants of the original handsome residence. This is the office now occupied by Louis J.'s son, Louis M. Foppiano.

Another parcel of land just south of the winery site was purchased by Louis J. Foppiano in 1945. This land included a home built in 1875 by Israel Cook, a miner who settled in Healdsburg. Frank Schmidt acquired this property and established a winery here in 1889. James Cummiskey, founder of the Sotoyome Vineyardist Association, purchased the parcel in 1914. The Foppianos closed the Sotoyome Vineyards winery in 1950 moving the tanks and other equipment to their present winery, which was built in 1937. Louis J. and his wife, Della, built their modern home in 1962 on the site of the old Sotoyome Vineyards winery. (The lumber salvaged from the dismantled winery provided enough material to build three homes.)

Louis M. Foppiano grew up in the Israel Cook house, where he and his wife Helaine now reside. Although this home has been remodeled, it appears to have some of the original structure. For instance, the dining room was probably originally a porch.

The family patriarch, Giovanni, built an elegant 12-room home for himself and his wife in 1899. It is the Queen Anne style house at 97 Kennedy Lane, Giovanni died in this home in 1922 and Rosa died in 1927. The family owned this property until 1944.

There is yet another Foppiano house near the winery. This is the Craftsman style home facing Old Redwood Highway in front of the tasting room. It was built in 1918 for Louis A. Foppiano and inherited by his daughter, Rosalind Foppiano Consiglieri, in 1925.

The Foppiano family is still very much involved in the winery operations. Louis J. Foppiano, Giovanni's grandson, is now president of Foppiano Vineyards and is at the winery daily. Louis M. Foppiano, Giovanni's great-grandson, is general manager. His sister, Susan Foppiano-Valera, is the hospitality manager.

Even though the old Riverside Farm home is no longer standing, the Foppiano Vineyards' Riverside label reminds us of the past history of this productive property. ***

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A Brief Early Wine History of Northern Sonoma County

by Marie Djordjevic

Early Viticulture

The Spanish mission padres cultivated grape vines in lower California starting in the 1700s. Using the inferior Mission grape, they made wine for sacramental purposes. The Mexican government took control of California from Spain in 1812 and the last of the missions - Mission San Francisco de Solano in Sonoma - was built. In 1834 the mission system was secularized, and vineyards fell into neglect. In Sonoma General Mariano Vallejo took over the mission vineyards and proceeded to cultivate the vines. He made red wine with newer Mission grapes.

In 1812 the Russians established a permanent settlement - Fort Ross - north of San Francisco (30 miles north of Bodega Bay, 13 miles northwest of the mouth of the Russian River). They brought European vines with them to cultivate, and by 1817 they had a flourishing vineyard. These were the first grapes grown in Sonoma's soil.

The Count

The California wine industry got its start in the 1840s when Count Agoston Haraszthy, fleeing Hungary for political reasons, came to America. Once here he laid the foundation for a thriving industry with his vision, experimentation, scientific approach and persistence.



Making his way across the country, he found himself in San Francisco where he met General Mariano Vallejo, who invited him to Sonoma. When Haraszthy saw the Sonoma Valley, with its rich soil, sunshine and hills he knew he had found the right place to grow his vines.

In 1857 his first wines were ready, and their quality exceeded his expectations. He built the stone Haraszthy Cellars next to a hill, with tunnels reaching 100 feet inward to provide a constant cool environment for storing wine. He named the winery "Buena Vista". He started with 16 acres and by the mid 1860s he had 6,000 acres. In 1858 his wines took first prize at the State Fair. At the request of the California State Agricultural Society he wrote a treatise entitled, *Report on Grapes and Wines in California*, published in 1859.

Haraszthy believed in the pre-eminence of wine made from imported varieties. His many lectures and articles impacted the California wine industry. In 1861 he was asked by Governor John G. Downey to go and find cuttings which could be grown in California. Haraszthy planned a European vineyards and wineries tour in order to trans-

form California's "primitive viticulture into a giant industry with worldwide sales and unexcelled variety of unexcelled wines." Before he left he contracted with Harper and Brothers to write a book about the tour.

While on tour he, along with son Arpad, corresponded with governments and scientific societies. They visited vineyards and wineries in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Switzerland. They filled up dozens of notebooks with customs and procedures. From countries he had not been able to visit he asked U.S. Consuls to send him cuttings and information (i.e. Greece, Portugal, Egypt).

He purchased 100,000 vines of at least 300 varieties. Sonoma County experienced a "grape rush" due to the better wines made from European varieties. People from all over California came for cuttings. Back in Sonoma, Haraszthy settled down to write his book. Published in 1862 it was called *Grape Culture, Wines and Winemaking*. This book, a report on the European process, became the bible for California vintners for the next century.

Within 20 active years Haraszthy had helped to increase California's wine production fifty fold, with continuous quality improvements. His influence was felt throughout the industry.

The Italians Arrive

When Italian immigrants began arriving in the West in the mid to late 1800s, California was growing by leaps and bounds. California was now a state in the Union; the Gold Rush had caused an influx of people; the railroad was being constructed; and towns were springing up everywhere. There was a need for laborers and the Italians were willing workers. They worked in the lumber mills and canneries; established groceries, bakeries and bars. Many had agricultural/farming backgrounds and once here they grew vegetables to sell, went to work for established ranchers and farmers, and eventually many succeeded in attaining their own ranches and successful agricultural and viticultural businesses. ❦❦❦



Buying from Ed Passalacqua grocery wagon. Passalacqua's vegetable gardens were in the Ward Street Italian district. Circa 1905



"A Jar in the Ground": The Story of Healdsburg's Early Italian Wine Families

by Marie Djordjevich

By the year 1885 large numbers of Italians began to leave Italy - due to economic depression and the political situation of a newly unified Italy - and arrived and settled in Sonoma County. While a significant amount of these immigrants became involved in many different occupations (i.e. growing and selling vegetables; running and owning grocery stores, bakeries and restaurants; working in all aspects of agriculture), there were a significant number who brought with them their grape growing and winemaking skills and started fresh in a new land.

The Italian immigrants coming to Sonoma County dreamt of a better life for themselves and their families. These dreams included land of their own, for land meant wealth and security. They worked hard to earn money to purchase land, often putting the money into a jar (or coffee can, or the like) and burying it in the ground. They did this to show the land how valued it was, so that some day it would give back in abundance.

Immigration and a Dream

"Oh my! All the Italians come over cause this was a land of gold. You would come over, and you would find gold in the streets, but they found out different. The Italians really worked hard for what they had, believe me." (Lillian Tedeschi Bagnani)

Between 1880 and 1914 nearly 4 million people left Italy and came to America. This mass migration of Italians to America came after a struggle to unify Italy: for over 100 years revolutionaries fought to break the grip of wealthy landowners on the impoverished peasant class. By the 1880s land reform attempts had failed and a series of droughts had devastated the crops - near starvation occurred in some regions. Thousands of people were driven by famine and poverty to leave their home for a new world and new opportunities.

Most of the first Italian immigrants to arrive came from the rich farmland areas of northern Italy - Tuscany, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy. A large population of Italian immigrants ended up in San Francisco, where they set up their own communities. A gradual migration of Italians to Sonoma County occurred with the realization that the area around Healdsburg was very similar to their Italian homeland, both geographically and climate-wise. Healdsburg was the ideal place to either put their viticultural skills to use - or to learn how.

There were many Italian families and individuals that came and worked in and contributed to the Sonoma County wine industry before Prohibition. Here are a few of their stories...

Andrea Sbarboro, Pietro Rossi, and Italian Swiss Colony

Sbarboro

"It has been said that the men who are the most loyal to the land of their birth and to their countrymen are the ones who show the deepest love for their adopted country and in whose minds patriotism is ever united with humanity and brotherly compassion."

In 1839 Andrea Sbarboro was born in Acero (50 miles from Genoa), Italy. In 1844 his family immigrated to the United States, and settled in New York. When he was 13 his parents went back to Italy, but he made his way to San Francisco to stay with a brother. Together the two of them built up a flourishing grocery business.

Sbarboro wanted to help out his newly arriving countrymen. He organized many Mutual Loan Associations, and many people (over 2500) were able to secure homes for themselves and their families through these associations. Still wanting to do something to aid his fellow countrymen and help them with employment, he conceived the idea of a colony cooperative, based on the principles of the savings and loan industry. The original investments would be made by people who could afford it, and the workers, through payroll deductions, would acquire shares in the company, and, if they wanted, convert their property into land.

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Continued from page 6

Rossi

Pietro Rossi was born in Pagliani, Italy in 1855. His family had been grape growers and wine makers for generations. While in college he studied chemistry, and during his vacations he helped with the wine making, gaining more and more experience. In 1875 Rossi decided to go to California. Once in San Francisco he opened up the Rossi Drug Store.

In 1881, shortly after the organization of Italian Swiss Colony, Andrea Sbarboro invited Rossi to visit their new vineyards at Asti. Rossi discerned a profitable venture and joined the corporation. With his knowledge and background he was soon elected president and manager of the Colony. Under his eye and with his skills Italian Swiss Colony wines won many awards. It was due to his urging and confidence that Italian Swiss Colony endeavored to make a champagne - which eventually won high honors.

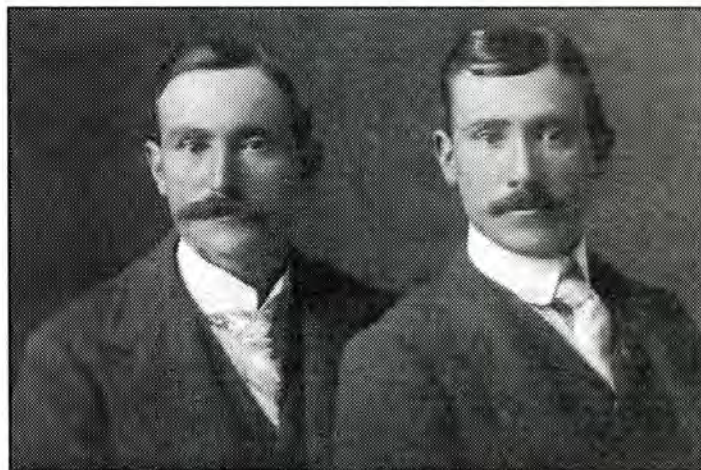
Italian Swiss Colony

Several Italian businessmen and professionals were approached by Sbarboro with his proposal. Many were interested in investing and so the colony was organized and officered. In 1881 1500 acres of land were bought in northernmost Sonoma County, near Cloverdale. In a town named Asti (after the Italian Piedmont town) workers were settled, and in 1832 planting began. To start, the workers received \$30-\$40 per month, plus room and board. Worker preference was given to Italians or Swiss who were or wanted to become U.S. citizens, because this was to be a permanent community.

The original purpose of the colony changed in two ways soon after its inception. First, the Italian workers did not want to be a part of the investment plan. The \$5 deduction in their wages caused great suspicion and they refused participation. Therefore, Sbarboro and his directors and investors carried on as any regular joint stock company. Second, the original idea of growing grapes to sell happened when grapes were bringing in \$30 per ton. In 1886 the market collapsed and by 1887 the price brought in was \$8 per ton. The Italian Swiss Colony directors decided to enter directly into the wine business and built a 300,000 gallon winery.

Italian Swiss Colony gradually became successful. By organizing their own agencies and putting their own goods directly on the market, they were able to ship large amounts of wine to New York, New Orleans and Chicago. They developed extensive vineyards and soon shipped to foreign markets as well. They also had a good altar wine market. By the turn of the century Italian Swiss Colony at Asti was the largest source of table wine in California, and it had a 500,000 gallon wine cistern that had become a California tourist destination. By 1910 Italian Swiss Colony consisted of over 5,000 acres including property in other parts of California. In this year the winery capacity reached 14,250,000 gallons, and the stock, originally worth around \$150,000, was now valued at \$3,000,000 and growing.

Shortly after the death of Pietro Rossi in 1911 Italian Swiss Colony consolidated with the California Wine Association. A few years later the passage of the Prohibition amendment prohibiting the sale of wine caused the California Wine Association to sell the wineries and vineyards it controlled. The Italian Swiss property at Asti was sold to people who were connected to it over the years in ownership or management. The properties in Asti were incorporated in 1920 and Italian Swiss Colony was established anew. At this time it grew grapes for shipping and for the manufacture of grape juice.



Giuseppe and Pietro Simi

Simi

In 1848 Giuseppe Simi left Tuscany, Italy, and went to California to look for gold. Unsuccessful in the gold fields he headed to San Francisco, where he and his brother Pietro began farming. They drove a horse drawn wagon, supplying their lettuce and cabbage heads to San Francisco restaurants. In 1860 Giuseppe - who had grown up working in the vineyards near Florence and knew how to make wine - decided to try wine making. He bought a three story house on Green Street (the "little Italy" district in San Francisco) in 1876. The wine cellar was in the basement, and the brothers lived upstairs. They bought grapes grown in the Healdsburg area, shipped them by wagon to Petaluma and shipped them by barge to San Francisco. They then sold their finished wine to San Francisco restaurants.

The Healdsburg climate and terrain reminded the Simis of Tuscany. In 1881 they bought a winery on Front Street near Healdsburg's train depot and called it Montepulciano. By the next year Giuseppe had increased the winery capacity to 100,000 gallons. In 1883 the Simis bought 126 acres of land north of Healdsburg for vineyards. In 1890 they began the building of two stone cellars, one of which had a 200,000 gallon capacity. Since the winery was right next to the railroad, Simi and Montepulciano brand wines were barrel shipped to hotels and restaurants in San Francisco, New York and Boston.

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While in the middle of doubling the cellar's capacity to 400,000 gallons in 1904 both Giuseppe and Pietro died. Giuseppe's 18 year old daughter Isabelle took charge of the winery and vineyard operations. At the age of 22 in 1908 Isabelle married Healdsburg Sotoyome Bank cashier Fred Haigh. In 1915 Fred quit his bank job to help Isabelle manage the winery full time. Then came Prohibition.

During Prohibition Fred and Isabelle had to sell much of their vineyard land. Fred, however, refused to sell any stored wine during Prohibition's 14 years. When Repeal came they had over half a million gallons of wine. The wine that did not survive was sold for brandy making or vinegar. At this time Isabelle decided to change the name of the wines from Montepulciano to simply Simi.

Scatena

Martin Scatena left Italy in 1870 at the age of 18 and ended up in San Francisco. Alone and penniless he accepted the first job offered to him - the running of a vegetable wagon. In 1874 Scatena bought a ranch near Healdsburg and started a small wine cellar in his home. The wine produced was shipped to San Francisco and sold to family trade. (The Italians that made wine at the turn of the century sold their wine - often made in the old country tradition - to Italian immigrant communities and families in other cities). In 1899 Scatena began wholesaling. That year, Scatena purchased a tract of land near Healdsburg upon which he started a small winery. In 1906 his son Frank joined him in the business, and their Roma Wine Company grew. By 1911 it was a large winery, with a yearly output of 400,000 gallons.

By 1936 the Scatena family was still in business, operating under the name the *Scatena Brothers Wine Company*, and managed by Frank and his brother, along with partner William Massoni (son of Lucca, Italy natives and a wine making family descendant). The winery reached a million gallon capacity and averaged shipping 600,000 gallons of wine per month. It became known for Scatena dry wine.



Martin Scatena



Oliveto Winery located at West Street (Healdsburg Avenue) and Powell Avenue, circa 1910.

Oliveto

D. Lorenzini was born in Italy in 1858. His family soon moved to Switzerland where he eventually learned how to make wine and brandy. In 1883 he came to the United States and worked as a wine maker in Napa for two years. By 1887 he had become manager of a Healdsburg winery, a position which he held for two years. He then established his own winery along with John Gardini under the name of Lorenzini and Gardini.

This partnership eventually dissolved, but the firm continued under the name of Franceschini and Lorenzini in 1895. This company became the proprietors of the Oliveto Wine Company of Healdsburg. By 1911 over 2000 tons of grapes were crushed by Oliveto yearly. Oliveto not only purchased the grapes from vineyardists in the surrounding countryside, but maintained a 50 acre vineyard of its own. It also manufactured 10,000 gallons of brandy a year in its distillery.

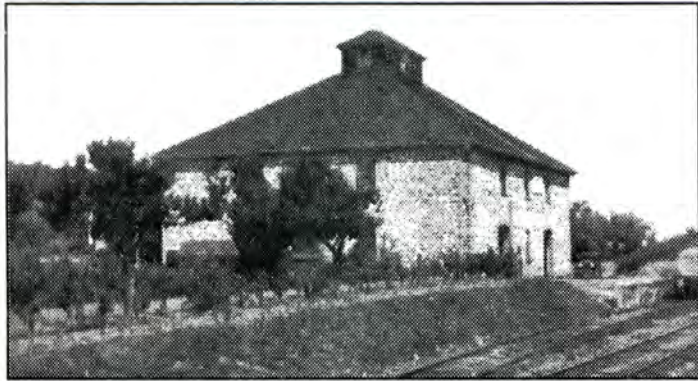
Seghesio

Edoardo Seghesio was born in Piedmont, Italy. In 1886, at the invitation of Pietro Rossi, he came to California to work at Italian Swiss Colony at Asti. For the first three years of his tenure he was not paid (except for room and board). At the end of the three years he was paid in one lump sum. Edoardo continued to work at Italian Swiss Colony and saved his money. In 1893 he married his boss's niece, Angela Dionisia Vasconi.

In 1895 the Seghesios bought 56 acres of land for \$200. They grew grapes and produced 100 tons of grapes at \$12 a ton the first year. They sold grapes to Italian Swiss Colony, and continued to save their money. In 1902 they built a simple winery near Geyserville (9000 gallon capacity) and dealt in bulk wine. (Sonoma County was known as a producer of bulk wines - wines which are held in storage tanks

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prior to bottling or sale to another winery under another's label). Seghesio expanded, buying more acreage, buying grapes from other growers, and selling wine to producers like Petri Wine Co. and Frei Brothers in San Francisco. In 1919, due to Prohibition, Edoardo shut down his winery. He bought Italian Swiss Colony and he and Angela were sole proprietors for one year. They sold to the Rossi brothers, but remained partners until 1933. Edoardo died in 1934, but the family and their business continued.



First tank car wine shipped from Nervo Winery after repeal of the 18th Amendment. Photo taken August 22, 1934 by Ed Nervo

Nervo

In 1890 Frank Nervo and his wife Maria left Venice, Italy, and came to Sonoma County. Frank worked at Italian Swiss Colony and earned \$1.00 per day, plus room and board. In 1896 they bought 250 acres to the north of Healdsburg. This property already had Zinfandel vineyards and a small winery.

In 1908 Nervo built a stone winery next to the railroad tracks, with the intention of shipping wine across the country. Redwood tanks were put on the upper level of the winery, and the crusher below. The must was piped upstairs by steam power to the open tanks, and after fermentation the juice was delivered by gravity to the storage tanks, and the leftovers in the fermenters were delivered to the press to squeeze out any liquid. The finished wine was shipped by rail to New Orleans, Chicago, New York and San Francisco in 50 gallon barrels. During Prohibition Nervo left his wine aging in redwood tanks. After Repeal he enlarged the winery.

Pedroncelli

John Pedroncelli left Lombardy, Italy at the age of 16 and came to California. He first homesteaded a 160 acre ranch near Pitt River. In 1927 he purchased the J. Canata winery in Dry Creek Valley, which had been founded in 1905. Pedroncelli was interested in wine making and he thought about growing and selling grapes to his friends (who were amateur wine makers). He cleared the land and planted a mixed burgundy vineyard. He produced simple red and white wine, which he sold in barrels and gallon jugs mainly to the Italian communities in and around San Francisco. ❀❀❀

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Over a Barrel: the Life of Lidio Bellagio, Healdsburg's Master Cooper

by Holly Hoods

Winemakers will tell you that great wine is created by the magic that happens during the fermentation process: the interaction between grape, cask and time. For centuries, the creation and repair of wooden barrels and tanks has been the skilled trade of the cooper. In Healdsburg, the name "Bellagio" became synonymous with cooperage during the 1930s.

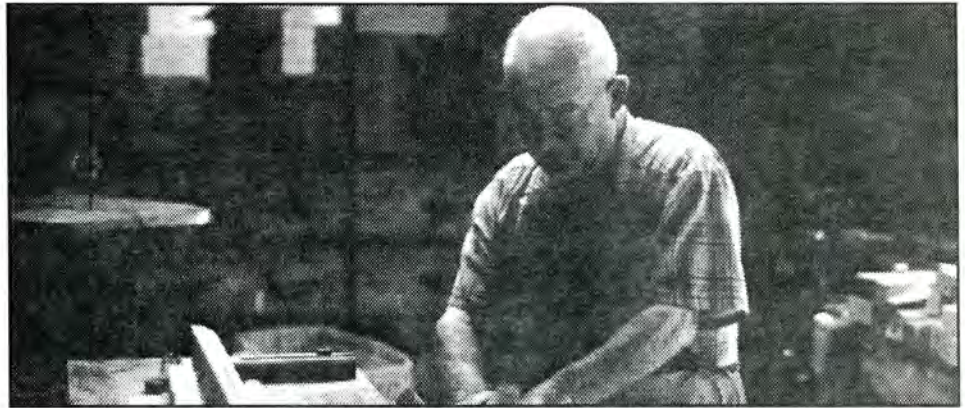
Early to Work

Lidio A. Bellagio was born in 1896 in Maloja, Switzerland into an all-too-early life of labor. He developed his woodworking skills as a boy when economic hardship forced him to quit school in the fourth grade to take a job to help support the family. He never returned to formal education. A cabinet maker hired young Lidio and trained him as a woodworker, encouraging his natural abilities. The boy grew to manhood as a skilled cabinet maker.

Lidio fell in love with and married Palmira Rogantini, a quiet beauty from Piuro, Italy. They made quite a handsome pair: muscular Lidio with his thick dark hair, vivid blue eyes and dashing, waxed mustache; and Palmira, graceful and slender, with upswept hair, laughing eyes and a gentle smile. Soon they had a daughter Lidia, the image of her mother, followed by son, Aldo. Like many who immigrated to this country before them, Lidio and Palmira dreamed of greater prosperity.

Moving to America

In 1923, at age 27, Lidio left Italy to come to America, encouraged by optimistic reports about work from his cousin in Idaho. His wife and two children remained behind in Italy, while he sought to establish himself in the new country. He went first to Idaho where he worked as a cabinet maker, then to Salt Lake City, then to San Francisco. He worked and saved until seven years later,



Lidio Bellagio, premier cooper, whose work became highly sought after because of his exacting standards, well-crafted products and reasonable prices.

Palmira was able to join him, bringing Aldo and Lidia over on the long ocean crossing. Lidio had found employment as a cooper at Acme Brewing in San Francisco's North Beach. There he worked for about six years, gaining the skills and knowledge of the cooper trade to establish his own business. Among other things, he learned how to make his own cooper tools: a set of which is still prized by the family. Son John was born in San Francisco in 1931.

The Bellagios in Healdsburg

The Bellagio family moved from San Francisco in 1932, drawn to Healdsburg by a reported need for cooper work in the area. They moved up to the Molinari ranch in upper Dry Creek for the first year. Daughter Lidia later married John Molinari. The surviving Bellagios mourn her passing at age 76 last May.

Around 1934, the family moved into town. They first rented a home on the corner of Powell Avenue and Prince Street, then moved to Ward Street. In 1935, they purchased the Hassett home at 523 University Street from Barbas Cellia, across the street from what is now Recreation Park. Lidio built a workshop, which still stands today, at the back of the property. They planted a large garden and grew everything for the family table, including lettuce, string beans, potatoes, onions and beets. They also raised chickens, rabbits and goats, and made their own sausage. Son Mike (Mickey) remembers Earl Osborn borrowing the goats to serve as lawn mowers at Recreation Park!

Satisfied Customers

Working out of his cooper shop on University Street, enterprising Lidio became the premier cooper of the area. His work became highly sought after in the wine industry because of his exacting standards, well-crafted products and more-than-reasonable prices. More artist than businessman, however, his prices were a little too reasonable for his own good--and his own cost of living. He had a large family to support, yet only charged his customers \$1-1.50 per hour in the late 1940s. His urge to provide for his family was so strong that it kept him working, always working. He took jobs--big or small--wherever they were offered, all over the state. During World War II, he was hired by Frank Towle to build water tanks for Christian Brothers and for the Army Base. His sons remember him packing up his tools to journey to Delano and Fairfield to repair wine tanks. He would frequently be gone for a week at a time.

On-call to the Wine Industry

Lidio did a lot of work for Italian Swiss Colony at Asti, building, testing and repairing their cooperage. He built storage tanks that are still in use today at Pedroncelli, Foppiano, Beringer, Gallo, Christian Brothers and Napa Valley Coop. He also repaired their casks. He erected water tanks for Waldo Iversen at Camp Rose and at the Hollis Black Ranch on River Road in Cloverdale. He felt a responsibility to be on-call to the wine industry, and to stand behind his work. He would come

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out in emergencies if a tank sprang a leak, and do whatever was necessary to make the tank hold.

A good deal of Lidio's business came from repair work to 55 gallon barrels. This wasn't because the barrels weren't sturdy; in fact, quite the contrary. People commonly reused barrels again and again, and over time they sustained damage or needed to be rejuvenated. Lidio replaced broken heads and staves, and made new hoops to rebuild barrels as good as new. He tested them for leaks by filling them with water.

Enjoying Life

Despite--or perhaps because of--his taxing work schedule, Lidio made plenty of room for fun in his life. He made 250 gallons of his own wine every year from Zinfandel, Ruby Cabernet and Golden Shasta grapes. He grew the grapes on a parcel of land on Limerick Lane. He dug a basement by hand, and stored the wine there in barrels. The Bellagio home became a lively hub of the Italian social scene of Healdsburg. The wine flowed freely on weekends. Friday nights, folks came over and socialized and played King Pedro, a popular Italian card game. On Sundays, the men got together for games of bocce. Most everyone belonged to St. John's Church.

First Bocce Ball Court in Town

Lidio Bellagio was one of the first people to have a bocce ball court in Healdsburg. He constructed and maintained a court for years in his backyard, complete with a crushed layer of seashell. Before a bocce session, it was important to get the playing surface perfectly prepared, with the shell crushed, sprinkled and rolled out evenly with a heavy, metal roller. Eight to ten Italian fellas would take turns playing bocce in the midday or evening [See Arnold Santucci's article about bocce ball this issue for more about the game.]. Their wives would visit on the sidelines, and crochet and embroider. The men joked and teased each other throughout the game, and played competitively. They drank Grace Brothers' beer and puffed on little Italian cigars, "Tuscanellis", clamped between their teeth.



The Bellagio family in the Spring of 1944. Left to right, top row, Aldo, Palmira, Catherine, Lidio and Lidia; bottom row, from left, Mickey, John, Gino and Alfred

The losers had to pay 25-50 cents each to the winning opponents. At Palmira's insistence, Lidio installed an outhouse in the backyard to minimize the traffic of bocce ball players going in and out of the house. Usually the games were lively and friendly, but occasionally there were disputes. In 1955, Lidio shut down the bocce ball court for good after some players got into a heated argument.

Family Life

Lidio and Palmira raised seven children: Lidia (born in 1922), Aldo (1924), John (1931), Alfred (1933), Mike (1935), Gino (1937) and Catherine (1942). Italian was always spoken by Lidio and Palmira at home and with friends, although both of them did speak English. The children grew up bilingual. Lidio's children today remember him fondly as a good father and a good provider. One of the family's greatest losses was the tragic death of oldest son Aldo in World War II.

Father and Son in the Cooper Business

Around 1956, son Alfred got out of the Air Force, and asked to join his father in his cooper business soon after. Lidio was proud that his son wanted to continue in the same skilled trade, but they were worried about whether the business could support them. Al's first move was to raise the rock bottom prices. By 1958, the name of the business was changed to "A. Bellagio, Wood

Tank Company."

Lidio taught his son that quality came first and that it was important to do a job right. He encouraged Alfred to take pride in his work. By age 65, Lidio was ready for semi-retirement. He quit driving and stopped doing the heavy work. Alfred continued to run the cooper business with Lawrence Biagi for a number of years. Lawrence had worked for the George Windeler Company on Gerald Avenue in San Francisco. When the Windeler Company went out of business, Lawrence and Alfred bought a lot of the company's equipment and went into partnership together. When Lawrence was ready to retire, Al bought out his share of the business. He continued to build an excellent reputation in the wine industry.

Lidio died in 1978 and Palmira ten years later. Alfred passed on the skills and knowledge of the cooper trade to his stepson, Gene Nelson. Since Alfred died in 1989, Gene has operated "A. Bellagio Wood Tank Company" on Grant School Road off of Old Redwood Highway on his own. He specializes in redwood water and wine tanks. The Bellagio legacy of skilled coopering lives on. ❀❀❀

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Mike (Mickey) and Betty Gromo Bellagio
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Healdsburg Tribune, June 10, 1998
"Cooperage" file at Sonoma County Wine Library

Il Giuoco delle Bocce

by Arnold Santucci

Along with their love of music, their art, their knowledge of creating a simple meal into a banquet, their knowledge of how to make wine, the Italian immigrants brought with them another part of their culture --- the game of bocce.

In its simplest form bocce (or boccia or bocci) is an Italian variety of lawn bowling played on a dirt court that is shorter and narrower than the rink of a bowling green.

Mario Pagnoni in his definitive book on the game, *The Joy of Bocce*, tells us that the game of bocce, Il Giuoco delle Bocce, has its roots in antiquity, back to ancient Egyptian times. Unearthed was an Egyptian tomb from 5200 BC giving evidence of a bowling game played by young boys tossing balls or polished stones. Bocce spread throughout the Middle East and Asia. It is believed that the Greeks took on the game around 600 BC and, in turn, introduced it to the Romans.

Pagnoni suggests that the Egyptians game became bocce in Italy and was altered slightly to become boules in France and lawn bowls in England.

The author says "It is easy to imagine the early games being played with spherical rocks or even coconuts. The name bocce is derived from the Italian bacio meaning kiss."

"The idea is to kiss, snuggle or otherwise get close to the object of your affection - the pallino," says Pagnoni.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Italian immigrants brought the game of bocce - and there were many regional versions - to America with them, a part of the "old country" and for Italian men a social outing with "kibitzing" from the sidelines a part of the game.

Of course, the Italians who settled in the Healdsburg area were no exception.

Il Giuoco delle Bocce consists of two to four players and is played with wooden or composition balls, 4-1/2 inches in diameter on a flat dirt court that averages 60 feet in length and 10 feet in width. A wooden enclosure surrounds the court. The object of the game is to propel the balls from one end of the court toward a target ball (the pallino) at the other end. One point is scored for each ball that is closer to the pallino than an opponents.

Each side has four balls with different colors for teams. To begin the pallino (a small white ball target) is thrown out by the first designated player. The teams then



Enjoying a game of bocce ball at the court near Recreation Park, circa 1967.

Don Meachum photo.

try throwing underhand to get their balls as close as possible to the pallino or to knock out opponents balls that are close. Rebounds from the side walls are permitted. At the end of the round, a side receives a point for every ball nearer the pallino than the nearest opposing ball. The side that gets 12 points first is declared the winner.

Enjoying a game of bocce has always been the prerogative of Italian men, with women and children being discouraged to take part. However, following a period of downsliding, the game has taken on a new life with men, women and children enjoying the challenge of bocce.

Although it can be played on a simple dirt court, you can find state-of-the-art courts in wineries such as Armida in Healdsburg, million dollar estates and family back yards.

A bocce ball court has long been established in Giorgi Park at Healdsburg Recreation Park where the ancient art of playing bocce has been enjoyed by men of Italian heritage.

Il Giuoco delle Bocce, a tradition transplanted from the "old country" to the new, over the years has become an integral part of the wine country. ❦❦❦

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