



A HISTORY IN VINES

The history of grape growing and winemaking in Dry Creek Valley is among the longest in California. The region's national reputation for wine may be modern, but the roots of Dry Creek Valley quality go back more than 120 years.

Dry Creek Valley's beautiful and fertile landscape began attracting settlers soon after the California gold rush of 1849. Early farming in Dry Creek Valley consisted primarily of wheat, hops and sheep; but by 1870 French immigrant Georges Bloch had established the first vineyard in the valley. Bloch soon joined forces with fellow Frenchman Alex Colson to found the region's first winery.

Vineyard expansion in Dry Creek Valley was rapid; by 1883, the region had 54 separate vineyards totaling 883 acres. Remarkably, well over half the acreage was planted to Zinfandel, the grape for which Dry Creek Valley continues to be best known.

Vineyard growth in Dry Creek Valley was accompanied by a similar growth in wineries. The second winery in the valley was founded in 1885, when Charles Dunz built a cellar with a capacity of 70,000 gallons. By 1889 the number had grown to nine, including Paxton Winery, designed by the most famous California winery architect of the day, Hamden McIntyre.

Because the wineries in Dry Creek Valley sold virtually their entire production in bulk during this era, they received little consumer recognition. However, within the California wine industry, Dry Creek Valley wines - especially Zinfandel - were highly regarded.

Depressed grape prices during the 1890s halted the growth of vineyard acreage in Dry Creek Valley, but the early 1900s brought renewed vineyard development and several new wineries. The strong Italian influence in Dry Creek Valley during this era is reflected in the names of new winery owners: Gaddini, Stefani, Cappelli, Canata, Pieroni and Lencioni.

Phylloxera and Prohibition together put an end to Dry Creek Valley's first wine boom. The spread of Phylloxera in the early 1900s killed many vineyards just when the threat of Prohibition made replanting financially risky, although several growers took the risk and replanted Zinfandel on resistant rootstock. Prohibition closed the wineries in 1920, but growers who didn't pull their vines eventually found a market for their grapes among home winemakers.

When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the wine industry in Dry Creek Valley was a shadow of its former glory. Only two wineries remained in business: J. Pedroncelli Winery (the former Canata Winery) and Frei Brothers Winery (formerly Charles Dunz' cellar). The Depression and frequent oversupply made



earning a living growing grapes difficult. Vineyards endured, but orchard crops such as prunes and pears became the valley's mainstay.

Revival began in the early 1970s. Both newcomers and longtime residents began planting new vineyards, not only on the bench lands that had been the site of earlier vineyards, but also on the valley floor. The new vineyards brought with them new wineries: Dry Creek Vineyard in 1972, Mill Creek Vineyards and A. Rafanelli Winery in 1974, Preston Vineyards, Lambert Bridge and Lytton Springs Winery in 1975. Sauvignon Blanc grown in Dry Creek Valley soon gained a reputation for quality to match that of the region's Zinfandel.

The local wine industry has prospered in the years since. Dry Creek Valley received formal recognition as an American Viticultural Area in 1983, enabling local wineries to put the Dry Creek Valley appellation on their labels. Over 9,000 acres of vineyards now carpet the valley and hillsides, providing exceptional fruit to more than 70 wineries. Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc continue to be the region's best known wines, but Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc from Dry Creek Valley have each established reputations for distinctive quality, along with the popular Mediterranean varietals, such as Syrah.

###

REFERENCES

Leon D. Adams, The Wines of America, 4th ed., (New York, NY: McGraw Hill Publishing Company, 1990).

Joseph Novitski, A Vineyard Year. (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1983).

William F. Heintz, The Zinfandel Grape in Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley, (Sonoma, CA: 1985) Used with permission from Preston Vineyards and William Heintz.

William F. Heintz, The Wine and Grape Heritage of Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County, California, (Sonoma, CA: 1979) Used with permission from E. & J. Gallo Winery and William Heintz.