

Winehaven

For many years, the only visitors were the Indians making seasonal visits to gather shellfish. In 1871 there came the Chinese shrimp fishermen with their camp, mostly South of the Point (see photo on page 5). As a result of declining production and legislative controls the camp gradually reduced until it was abandoned in 1912. But, by far the most enduring and memorable impact on the Point Molate area came as a result of the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which destroyed the buildings of the California Wine Association.

The California Wine Association was formed in 1901 as a cooperative among seven wineries. Their Calwa brands were a major force in California wine-making for a number of years. In 1907 they purchased 48 acres on the north side of Point Molate and began construction of what would become the largest winery in the world until the advent of Prohibition in 1920.

At an expense of over one million dollars they constructed a major red brick winery building reminiscent of Rhineland castles with its crenellated parapets and towers along with secondary shipping buildings, power generation, a hotel for workers and eventually cottages and a school. The location was seen as ideal because a quarry near Point Castro had resulted in a railroad connection to the Richmond Belt Railway in 1909, thus connecting to the rest of the country to the East, in addition to deep water access for shipping around the world and river access for shipping up the Sacramento River.

The winery's shipping capacity was 500,000 gallons a month and could crush 25,000 tons of grapes in a single crushing. They had cooperage for 10,000,000 gallons of wine and over 3,000 vats for initial aging. The largest of these were 58 feet in diameter and had a capacity of 25,000 gallons. For reference, some of my favorite Sonoma wineries have an annual production of less than 10,000 gallons (3,000 cases is a little more than 7,000

gallons). The Winehaven warehouse could hold 8,000,000 gallons and more than 15,000,000 bottles were kept on hand for restocking.

The winery produced wines using 67 different varieties of grapes from over 40 vineyards, including dry wines, sweet wines, and brandy. Sweet wine production was about 2/3 of the amount of the dry wine production..

After construction was completed, there were more than 120 employees full time and over 400 during seasonal peaks. There were 29 rooms in the hotel for the construction crew and later the bachelor employees. Additional early housing was provided by the City of Stockton, a riverboat anchored in the cove (at left in the photo on page 1). Later, a number of cottages were constructed.

Reputedly, when France's wine production was destroyed by phylloxera, Winehaven shipped an "emergency 18,000,000 gallons of "French style" wine to help tide them over, as well as providing rootstock for the replanting.

This somewhat amazing enterprise was brought to a halt by the Volstead Act which imposed prohibition effective in 1920. The winery was caught with full warehouses and no way to sell their stock. There was fear of wine getting in the hands of bootleggers, in response to which, the story is told, nearly 250,000 gallons of wine was dumped in the Bay. Supposedly one could simply grab fish by hand for a while after that!

The winery attempted to keep going by producing grape juice, but ultimately the Association dissolved its assets beginning in 1926, but not completing until 1941. The property was then acquired by the Navy for fuel storage and refueling.

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