

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Wine-Making

Many years ago when we first arrived in Monterey from San Jose, we remember the loads of grapes that used to travel the streets at a certain season of the year to be unloaded at private homes where preparation was being made for the making of the yearly supply of wine. We wonder why that picturesque bit of the old town has disappeared.

We were reminded of this seasonal event while reading the 1882 issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine which we have been reviewing for the past issues of the Peninsula Diary. In this article of 73 years ago the unknown author writes of the wine industry in this part of California—in the Santa Clara Valley in particular—where many of the names are still familiar to Peninsula residents and where famous wines are still produced and grapes of the best varieties are still grown.

The author of the article on California was making the long journey from San Francisco to Monterey, stopping en route to visit interesting places and industries. He had this to say about the vineyards: "It was the mature season now in the country around San Jose which boasts of a number of acres of grapevines under cultivation (something over 1,100) larger than any but one other, in the State of California, that of Sonoma. Napa, however, also to the north, and Los Angeles to the south, greatly surpass it in the number of gallons of wine and brandy made."

The author was taken to the Le Franc vineyards, which dated from 1851, and was the pioneer in the way of making wine-growing a regular business venture. Here he saw about 175,000 vines set out— 1,000 to the acre. He went on in his article to describe an Alsatian foreman who showed them through the wine-cellars. A servant-maid bustling about the yard, he said, was a thorough French peasant, only lacking the wooden shoes.

We read on with interest his description of the other activities at the vineyard: "The long tables, set for the 40 hands employed in the vintage time, are spread with viands in the French fashion. Scarcely a word of English is spoken. At other places, the surroundings are as exclusively Italian. One feels very much abroad in the scenes of this new industry on American soil." We think

that that same sense of abroadness is felt on the Peninsula today, with our cosmopolitan population—those who have been here a long while and those who have recently come to attend the Language School at the old Monterey Presidio.

In describing the process of making the wine and the cleanliness of the operation the writer notes: "A certain romantic interest attaches to the industry wherever found. The great tuns in the wine-cellars, and all the processes, seem delightfully clean. It is reassuring to see the pure juice of the grape poured out in such floods, and to know that at this source of supply there is to be no need, founded in scarcity at least, of adulteration."

Then in another paragraph the author describes another phase of the industry: "Heavy loads of grapes are driven up, across a weighing scale, and lifted to an upper story, put into a hopper; where the stems come off, and the fruit falls through into a crusher. It is lightly crushed at first."

It was surprising to the visitor who was seeing the wine making process for the first time. Red takes its hue, so he was told, from the coloring matter in the skins, which were utilized in a subsequent rougher treatment. The visitor was impressed with the immense upright casks containing a warm and audibly fermenting mass, and others lying down, neatly varnished, and with concave ends, the most salient features of the dimly lighted wine cellar.

"Those (wine cellars) of Gen. Naglee, a successful maker of certain kinds of brandy on a large scale, are really charming from an artistic point of view. The cobwebs have been allowed to increase till they hang in tattered banners. Through these the light penetrates dimly from above, or it makes a white glare through a latticed window, upon which the patterns of vine leaves without are defined."

Gen. Naglee was well known in Monterey in the early days. He settled in San Jose where Naglee Park was named in his honor.

The unknown author completes his story of vineyards and wine making in California with this statement. "The country is bathed in fixed sunshine or steeped in the hues of its own wines."