

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'The Vine in Early California'

"The Vine in Early California," a Keepsake series published by the Book Club of California, has been one of the most interesting series yet received. It consists of 12 folders each containing a reproduction of an early vinous item and has been distributed quarterly throughout the year.

The first eight parts of the series were edited by Joseph Henry Jackson, the last five by James D. Hart, following the program and plans established by Mr. Jackson prior to his death. The comments are by various authorities, with this series designed and printed by Adrian Wilson, San Francisco.

The last four in this fascinating group concerns the history of the Wenté Bros. at Livermore, the Stanford-Vina along the Sacramento River, Korbé in Sonoma County and the Italian Swiss Colony, also in Sonoma County.

Wenté Bros. is of special interest to us because the land upon which the winery is established and on which the grapes are grown was once upon a time the property of our grandfather, Timothy Hayes, a pioneer settler in California.

Carle Wenté, father of Ernest and Herman, was the third son of a miller in Hanover, who came to California about 1850 with his family. He studied for three years at the Krug vineyards. In 1853 he purchased 50 acres in Livermore and the baptismal crush was made in 1854.

Burton Warren Adams wrote the comments for this number in the Book Club series. The Wentés bottled no wines under their own label until 1934. Theirs was a much sought-after supply of casked wines for sale to other vintners under their own labels. Such wine history includes many romantic names – Bown and Schramm (now Cresta Blanca), Arpad Haraszthy, C.J. Wetmore, J. Lundlach, Italian Swiss Colony, I de Tuck, and many others to conjure with in gustatorial reminiscence. One may also muse a bit about prices of those turn-of-the-century years. Grapes brought \$6 to \$8 a ton, and the finest white wines brought the remarkable price of 30 to 50 cents per gallon. Nowadays, Wenté wines justifiably command a premium price.

We learn from the text of Keepsake on the Wenté winery that the Livermore Valley is particularly envied

for its fineness of its whites. It has been called the Sauterne district of America. Its Semillon, Sauvignon, and the incomparable Chardonnay have reached an outstanding pinnacle in the hands of the Wenté Bros.

Herman Wenté was the wine maker, Ernest the farmer. That is the way they want it, according to the editor of this issue of the "Vine in California." That is the way it has been for more than either might care to admit. Perhaps Flaubert was more right than he knew when he wrote, "He who plants a vine tree becomes entangled in its branches." So ends Mr. Adams' story of Wenté Bros.' winery in Livermore, California. The advice and philosophy of Father Carle Wenté, a pioneer of 1850, certainly has matured and flowered into an exemplification of some of the finest wines, according to those who know their wines.

A photograph of the Wenté family taken outside the Wenté winery building, which is still in existence, is included in the folder. Ernest is sitting atop a keg at the left and Carl occupies a seat on a matching barrel at the right. They look to be boys of about six years of age. Others in the picture are their mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Carl H. Wenté, a baby brother, Herman Wenté, and two sisters, Carolyn and May Wenté.

Carl Wenté recently purchased a home in Pacific Heights in San Francisco at the reported price of \$150,000, which is one of the city's show places.