

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 9, 1955

### **Krug's Venture**

Today history takes us back to 1861 in the California wine industry when Charles Krug, a young teacher, writer, and free thinker, planted his first grape vines and founded Napa Valley's first commercial winery.

California was turning to agriculture in the years following the Gold Rush. The grain fields of Napa Valley were giving way to vineyards, and wine was being made. It was not the wine that was to make Napa Valley famous, but a lesser beverage made in the primitive manner of the Spanish missionaries, trod out by foot for home consumption, we learn from one of the series of Keepsakes of the Book Club of California as written by James E. Beard.

Krug came to California from his native Germany in 1852 to edit a German-language newspaper in San Francisco. Impressed by California's agricultural expansion, Krug left the newspaper for a farming career. Because of his total lack of experience his first adventure in farming was a failure, but it brought him into contact with Agoston Haraszthy, the ardent advocate of viticulture, about whom we have already written in this series. Under his influence Krug planted a small vineyard near Sonoma.

Krug altered the course of Napa Valley's wine history in 1858 by making wine for a Napa vineyardist, using a small cider press and modern methods he had learned from an intensive study of the subject. The knowledge led to the demand for his services as a winemaker. For two years he continued to make wine in Napa Valley with the result that he sold his Sonoma vineyard in 1860 and established himself upon a piece of land adjoining the village of St. Helena. There in 1861 he planted his first vines and founded Napa Valley's first commercial winery.

The writer, James E. Beard, relates that Krug was a methodical and scrupulously careful winemaker, with an intense pride in his vineyards and winery. The high quality of his wines and his energetic salesmanship expanded his market to include the middle-western and eastern states, Mexico, Germany, and England. He favored the white grape varieties in laying out his 153-acre vineyard. Perhaps his reputation was established predominantly by his white wines, although the winery

also made some excellent reds, as well as dessert wines and brandy.

A well-planned stone building was erected in 1868 to house the wine-making and distilling operations. That building burned in 1874, was rebuilt and progressively enlarged until by the mid-eighties it had reached approximately its present proportions.

Krug died in 1894 but the winery continued to operate until prohibition, under the ownership of James K. Moffitt. After repeal, it was used in the bulk wine operation until its purchase by C. Mondavi & Sons in 1943.

Mr. Beard writes that "Cesare Mondavi and his sons Robert and Peter Mondavi have had as their aim the rebuilding of the winery's pre-prohibition prestige. They restored the winery buildings, furnished them with new cooperage and wine-making equipment, rebuilt Krug's stone stable into an aging cellar, and replanted most of the vineyard. They are following Krug's footsteps in pioneering a number of improved wine-making practices, and have achieved some outstanding results, thinks our editor."

A prized possession of the winery is the original cider press with which Krug made Napa Valley's first commercial wine nearly a century ago.