

## About This Project

David R. Bennion was one of the founding partners of Ridge Vineyards. He was also something of a midwife to many of the individual winery operations that developed in the Santa Cruz Mountains and Santa Cruz County from the 1960s until his untimely, accidental death in 1988. In virtually all the important developments in the recent history of winegrowing in this important region Bennion took an active and, more often than not, a leading part. The regularity in which his name comes up throughout the interviews in this project gives clear evidence of his importance to the development and success of modern winegrowing here.

My wife and I met Dave and Fran Bennion in the early 1960s and we became good friends over the years. Aside from our convivial social relations Dave and I were powerfully affected by the other's interest in wine history. We spent much time feeding each other historical information and sources. He was a member of my first wine and viticulture history class at De Anza College in 1979 and before that he had personally goaded me into turning my private interest in wine history to a practical and professional pursuit. My first article on wine history came out of a dinner at David Bruce's in 1976 when Bennion challenged me to come up with something tangible others might use, something beyond my outpourings of data and at social functions. "Solve some mystery, Charles!" The result was my article in the *California Historical Quarterly* in 1978 on the historical origins of Zinfandel in California. Later Dave was one of the strongest supporters of my history of winegrowing in the Santa Clara Valley and Santa Cruz Mountains, *Like Modern Edens*. He was also a long and continual supporter of my publisher, the California History Center at De Anza.

Meanwhile Roz and I had come to know many of the winegrowers who led the modern wine revolution in this part of California and we developed a strong devotion to Santa Cruz Mountain wines and some powerful bonds with many of the men and women who produced them. We seemed always on the road here searching out new little wineries and stocking our cellar with their wines.

Following Dave's death in 1988 several friends came together to commemorate his contributions to the modern wine industry. The upshot was the D. R. Bennion Trust Fund, whose major purpose was to further the viticultural and vinicultural interests of the California wine industry with special emphasis on the Santa Cruz Mountain district. The Board of Directors determined that its first project would be to fund an oral history project for this area. It was conceived as a two-year project and the Board solicited proposals from those interested in conducting the project. I had just finished writing a large history of winegrowing in the Napa Valley and was attracted by the idea of a different type of activity related to an area to which I had developed such a close relationship.

I submitted my plan and was accepted. My idea was to record extended conversations with old-timers and modern pioneers, coming down as close to recent times as possible. I ended by setting my sights on people who started work here before 1980. I contacted individuals I wanted to interview and asked others, particularly Board members, to help. During the first year I concentrated on interviews with older subjects. In the second year I went after the rest in no particular order. After I had made my first contact I scheduled a meeting and often was able to start taping at the first session. I tried to limit these sessions to no more than two hours. This was not the first oral history project I had worked on and I was able to start up with a fairly good set of experiences in my background dating back to 1968. The sessions aimed at a sort of logical time sense in the discussion of material, but chronology was not always the rule. Parts of the interviews were organized thematically. But I did try to come out with a clear time sense and attempted to answer the basic question which should always be answered in such a process, "What happened?" Thus I should make it clear that this is not a collection of opinions and personal philosophies, although from time to time that does become an important element in the story.

Most interviews covered at least two sessions, some as many as four. After each session I transcribed the interview and heavily edited it to make the transcript a more literate and orderly document than might have been the case had the interview been printed as it occurred. Naturally, I was careful to preserve the sense of the interview and the level of language that prevailed. But I think that spoken dialogue often results in such disturbing things as improper pronoun reference and subject-verb disagreement that may sound all right but are not happily read, particularly by the participants. And sometimes, since I was often long acquainted with the subject, the discourse could collapse into a somewhat ribald exchange that shouldn't be written down. But it is all on the tapes if anyone might want to hear the complete exchanges.

I then sent the transcript back to the subjects, who made what changes they wanted, and these I made on the final rendition which was recorded on a computer disk (Apple). In some cases I collected a sizeable amount of production data which was also included in the final product. Eventually all the interviews were organized geographically, on disk and in the final hard copy. And these were submitted to the Board of Directors on August 11, 1994. I began the project July 1, 1992.

My interviews did not all have the same purpose. For some subjects the obvious purpose was to preserve knowledge of the past which might be lost after their deaths. This was of particular importance in the Spezia, Picchetti, and Bargetto interviews, and with the Quistorf manuscript material.

For others I emphasized the subjects' relationship to their memories of events in the years before the 1960s and the modern wine revolution. Here the Hallcrest, Gemello, and Wheeler interviews were significant.

Others, such as the Ridge partners, David Bruce, and Robert Mullen, were part of the early years of this revolution and had a special outlook for the events of the turbulent sixties. The rest took me into the center of the revolution here in the seventies. These interviews also had their own special concentrations. In each I tried to develop information that would afford us special thematic material, based on the unique experience of the persons involved. For some the stories of their origins were particularly instructive. Others could supply special insights into technical matters relating the vineyard and cellar. Some wine operations had special marketing problems and solutions. Other had a particularly strong relationship to the development of industry organization. For all I worked to establish the interrelationships that had developed between themselves and others, here and in other areas. Other areas are of great importance to winemakers in the Santa Mountains and Santa Cruz County, since most of the grapes converted to wine here do not come directly from this region. And with all I tried to get any historical information which they themselves had discovered about the land which they were working or the area in which they worked. Where it was particularly appropriate I worked up historical maps of an area. I also was able to get fairly complete production figures from several persons, often with grape sources in and outside the region. I saw no reason to attempt this with everyone, but I thought that several representative operations would give a fair picture of how our wineries were operating over the years.

In all of this I worked on a special principle. I have written numerous wine and viticulture histories which go back into pre-Prohibition days and with but one exception, Inglenook, there are no good sets of data from manuscript material that give the historian a really clear picture of the past. Thus, throughout this project I have been animated by the idea that my product would be something that would be useful to the wine and viticulture historian at the end of the 21st century, in a way that material has not been available for me from the previous century.

In preparing this project I have tried to keep the level of discourse and data to that which could be understood by a moderately knowledgeable wine consumer, but not an expert in any facet of the industry. Thus our conversations often need an expansion of added information. This I have provided by way of footnotes throughout. I have also supplied historical references from my own files for subjects and questions about which there has been some disagreement, or where I thought I reader might like to pursue a point with further reading. For several of the wineries about which much has been written I have supplied a small bibliography at the end of the interview.

The physical result of this project is a set of three computer disks, scores of cassette tapes, and a transcript volume of about 500 pages. I hope that it will be made available to all who have a serious interest, which means that there is more work to be done on this project. Distribution of this project should be thoughtful and deliberate. The project also needs an index. Without one it will not reach its potential for usefulness.

Finally, I want to thank all those who have helped me on this project. Mostly their names can be inferred simply by reading the result. I also have to thank Roz for letting me use her zippy little car to flit about the Santa Cruz Mountains to collect these interviews, while she remained on the valley floor to plod about in my old heap, which she disdainfully terms the "red slug."

Charles L. Sullivan

Los Gatos, California  
August 1, 1994

## Interview Schedule

1. Marcel Pourroy- 6/19/92
2. Scott Knight Smith- 7/22/92
3. Mario Gemello- 7/27/92, 8/6/92, 8/25/92
4. Germaine Pourroy- 7/29/92
5. Robert Mullen- 9/8/92, 9/28/92, 10/19/92, 10/27/92, 11/3/92
6. Dan Wheeler- 9/14/92, 9/10/93, 11/15/93
7. Penry and Marie Hall Griffiths- 9/21/92, 10/5/92, 10/13/92
8. David Bruce- 11/24/92, 1/4/93, 1/18/93
9. Bargetto Family- 12/4/92, 1/5/93, 2/4/93, 4/23/93
10. Ron and Rolayne Stortz- 1/27/93, 2/5/93, 2/8/93, 2/17/93, 8/26/93, 11/30/93
11. Beauregard Family- 3/1/93, 4/13/93
12. Ridge Partners- 3/9/93, 3/24/93, 4/7/93, 4/26/93, 5/19/93, 6/9/93
13. John Spezia- 3/10/93, 2/23/93, 4/2/93
14. Quistorf Ranch- 3/11/93
15. Leo McClosky- 4/23/93, 6/11/93, 6/23/93
16. Lee Carrasco- 6/18/93
17. Elmano Homem- 7/12/93
18. Picchetti Family- 7/14/93, 9/6/93, 10/19/93
19. Roudon-Smith- 8/5/93, 10/29/93
20. Vic Erickson- 8/17/93
21. Ken Burnap- 10/11/93, 12/14/93
22. Mikulaco Family- 11/1/93
23. Dexter and Valerie Ahlgren- 12/8/93, 1/18/94
24. P. and M. Staiger- 12/27/93
25. Nat Sherrill- 1/13/94, 2/3/94
26. Duane Cronin- 2/12/94, 3/5/94
27. Charles Devlin- 2/21/94, 3/7/94
28. Fellom Ranch- 3/8/94
29. Richard Stark- 3/17/94, 4/1/94
30. Kathryn Kennedy- 3/30/94, 4/6/94
31. Paul Draper- 8/22/94, 8/29/94, 9/6/94, 9/12/94, 9/19/94, 9/29/94