

Hallcrest Vineyard

Chaffee E. Hall (1888-1969) founded Hallcrest in 1941. The winery and vineyard were located in Felton, northwest of the town of Santa Cruz and west of Scott's Valley. This area in the Santa Cruz Mountains has been noted for premium wine production since the 1880s. Hallcrest was one of the first small premium California wineries started after Repeal and, as such, served as an important seed for the premium wine revolution that swept the northern California coastal wine districts in the 1960s and 1970s.

Hall was the son of Alameda County Superior Judge Samuel P. Hall and attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he served as student editor of the *Daily Californian*. He began practicing law in San Francisco in 1912 and over the years developed a keen interest for fine wine.

In 1941, with assistance from professors at U. C. Davis, Hall planted his vineyard to Cabernet Sauvignon and White Riesling. The wines from these grapes were always estate bottled and vintage dated, with the appellation "Santa Cruz Mountain" on each label.

In 1956 *Penry (PG)* and *Marie Hall Griffiths (MHG)* moved to Felton and took over the management of the winery and vineyard. They, Hall's daughter and son-in-law, are the subjects of the following interviews. The last vintage was in 1964 and the winery closed in 1969. The vineyards continued to operate, with the grapes going to other wineries.

The interviews began with a planning session on September 21, 1992. They took place in the Griffiths' home, which stands just west of the original Hallcrest vineyard, now operated by another family. Last year the current owners celebrated the 50th anniversary of Hallcrest at the old winery.

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October 5, 1992

Chaffee Hall at Felton

CS: Let's start by talking about Chaffee Hall, the winery's founder, and his background.

MHG: He was born in Oakland in 1888. He was about the middle of eleven children. His father was an Alameda County Superior Court judge, Samuel Pike Hall. His father bought the old house here in Felton 1891.

CS: Was he a Californian too?

MHG: Yes, he was born down near Big Sur, on a cattle ranch. His family came from Marshall, Texas.

CS: Where did your father go to school?

MHG: He went to Oakland High School and then went to a private school. He went on to the University of California in Berkeley where he was a Sigma Nu and in many other societies. There were gaps in his schooling because he worked through high school and college for the PG & E putting

up towers. And he got typhoid fever and was out of school for a semester. He graduated from law school, Boalt Hall at Berkeley, in 1912.

CS: How about your family Mr. Griffiths?

PG: My father was a good friend of Chaffee Hall's. He graduated from Berkeley in 1906. And he was a Rhodes Scholar. Farnham Griffiths. He was a lawyer also and graduated from Boalt Hall at Berkeley. He taught there too, a Regents' Professor of Law. He was also secretary to Benjamin Ide Wheeler when he was President of the University.

CS: Chaffee Hall practiced law in San Francisco right down to the end of his life, didn't he?

MHG: Yes.

CS: I wonder how Mr. Hall got into the wine business here. What was the background of it?

MHG: I'm really not sure. He loved Felton; it was the place he spent his summers with his family. He even went to school down here for a while.

CS: Let's jump to Felton and get that connection straight.

MHG: The family owned the old home down the road, but not the vineyard land, not until 1940. They had about three and a half or four acres where the old house is.

CS: What is the old house?

MHG: It's out just off the road, down below the winery.

PG: The winery was built in 1946, and there is a storage building right behind it.

MHG: The old house is right below there. You can see the carpenters working on it now. My grandfather acquired it in 1891.

CS: When was the house itself built?

MHG: In the 1850s. My grandfather bought it from the estate of the former Felton postmaster. We have the deed for it someplace. I forget what he paid for it but it was only a few hundred dollars.

CS: That house goes back to the first real Anglo settlement here.

MHG: That's right. There were tanneries here, lumber.

PG: And lime. Quarrying.

CS: How did the Hall family use the place?

MHG: They came down for the summers. There were so many in the family, and each child usually brought a guest. And when my grandmother was pregnant she brought her obstetrician. Two of the girls were born down here. They would stay three months, because that's how long the court was closed, I guess. They also rented the house across the street. And some of them would stay in the hotel. My dad never knew a time when they didn't come down to Felton.

CS: How did he get the rest of the land?

MHG: He bought it in 1940. He wanted to have something to do when he retired. He thought of putting in pear trees, but there was a pear blight then that he didn't like. And he thought of raising game birds; his father had raised pheasants.

CS: How big was the property he bought?

MHG: Forty acres, I'd say. That would include this property here where we live, and the woods there to the south. And all the way down to the road where the Felton Post Office is now. And the pasture down below; that's where we kept our horses. And, of course, where the vineyards were, here right in front where the Cabernet vineyard was, and the Riesling vineyard near the winery. This was all part of the old Zayante land grant from Mexican times.

CS: Why did he lean toward winegrowing?

MHG: Well, he certainly liked to drink wine. He belonged to the San Francisco Wine & Food Society, and the French Club, the Cercle De l'Union.

PG: And her family would drive up to Sonoma and Napa in the early years to eat dinner there and they'd drink wine. She had to go and spoil her Sundays.

MHG: We all had to go. It was part of life.

CS: That would be in the thirties?

MHG: Yes, and the twenties, too.

CS: So, they'd drink their wine out of a coffee cup then.

MHG: Yes.

CS: Mr. Griffiths, was your father involved in this wine and food interest too?

PG: Oh yes, he was also very interested in it and was a member of the Wine & Food Society.

CS: I wondered if there was a unity of interest there.

MHG: That's how we met, through them. I was six and Pen was ten when we met.

CS: Did Mr. Hall have any of those famous dinners where they'd drink dozens of bottles of great wine?

MHG: Yes, but those were usually stag dinners. That was when he'd have them at our house in Piedmont. My father didn't think that any of my mother's Piedmont bridge club friends knew anything about wine. So they'd be stag dinners.

CS: That sounds like what Leon Adams calls a 2.0 dinner, two bottles per person.

MHG: He was just as interested in the food as the wine. But I really didn't know who was there. I wouldn't even be down stairs.

CS: Something just occurred to me when you mentioned Piedmont and the 1920s. Does the name Wetmore ring a bell?

MHG: Yes.

CS: Great. Charles A. Wetmore lived in Piedmont in the 1920s. He founded Cresta Blanca and was the first head of the State Viticulture Commission in the 1880s. I wonder if he knew your dad. And he was a Cal man too, from the first graduating class. It's a definite maybe.

How about other University men. Your father knew Robert Gordon Sproul. Was he interested in wine?

MHG: Not really. They were good friends and he would have been invited to those dinners, but I don't think he had any special interest in wine. I don't think he was a member of the French Club.

CS: What was the French Club?

MHG: We went there often for dinner. Dad had lunch there quite often. You went upstairs in an elevator. I think it was Geary Street. Everyone had a locker and kept their liquor in it.

CS: So, about the decision to grow grapes here.

MHG: I was in college and didn't pay much attention.

Founding Hallcrest

CS: He bought the land in 1940.

MHG: Then he put in the vineyard in 1941. But then there was the war and he couldn't build a winery yet. You couldn't build anything.

CS: So that explains the 1946 date on the winery, the year after the war ended. The vineyard planted in 1941-- to what varieties?

PG: Cabernet Sauvignon and White Riesling.

CS: Did you ever call it Johannisberg Riesling?

PG: No. I suspect he knew White Riesling was the proper term. They'd have told him at the University.

CS: Of course, everybody calls it White Riesling today. But back then virtually every winery's label read Johannisberg Riesling, except Hallcrest.

MHG: He would have found out and done it correctly.

CS: I'll bet he talked to Winkler and he, or perhaps Amerine, set him straight. How was the vineyard planted?

PG: He got Manuel Silvey to do it. He lived right down below here. He cleared the land.

MHG: He had worked a lot for my family. He cleared the whole area.

CS: What was here? Was the land being used for anything?

PG: It was manzanita and poison oak.

CS: Who owned it?

MHG: The Holmes Lumber Company. It had been cleared but not replanted. Manuel used horse labor to clear the land. He never had a tractor.

CS: Did you have a tractor?

PG: No, never. We had a jeep and pulled the disc with that, eventually.

MHG: But Manuel always plowed with a horse. He had a great facility with horses. Manuel didn't know how to drive. But later we used a World War II jeep. It was narrow enough to get through the aisles.

CS: Who planted the vineyard?

PG: Manuel and some others. And someone came down from UC Davis to do the grafting.

CS: Did you graft in the field or inside.

PG: In the field.

CS: Do you remember what the rootstock was?

PG: Rupestris St. George.

CS: So these are field grafted. That means that the grafting would have been done in 1942. The rootstock in 1941. You lose a year if you field graft. If they were bench grafts they could go right in that first year.

PG: They were grafted in the vineyard.

CS: Now I've got a problem with a date. You have a label in the scrapbook that reads 1943. But it isn't the regular Hallcrest label I've always seen. Did he buy wine or grapes from someone?

PG: No, never. Absolutely not.

MHG: That could be the wine that Herman Wente made for him with Hallcrest grapes.

CS: But if it were 1943 it would have been the second vinifera leaf. I can't imagine that there would be more than a couple of pounds in 1943. I can't believe that the first real Hallcrest vintage was 1943. And he never bought wine or grapes from others. Maybe in 1944 there would have been a few more grapes, but not many.

MHG: We probably started building the winery the spring after the war ended. The winery was dedicated on September 14, 1946. So Wente probably made the wine in 1945.

PG: I know that it was just the one year. And the wine was very good.

MHG: Yes, Dad was encouraged by the result.

CS: Right, he gets this first wine made by a real professional and its good, and then he makes the final decision to build the winery.

MHG: He always felt that it was a great favor that Herman Wente did for him. He kept the grapes separate and made up a special batch.

CS: Herman Wente was like that. He was one of the heroes of the fine wine industry then. Until you came down here and took over, was Mr. Hall his own winemaker?

PG: Very much. Yes.

CS: At vintage time did he hire people to help in the harvest?

MHG: Family did it. There were also some local people, but mostly family.

CS: How long did it take?

MHG: About a week. First the Riesling, usually in September, and then the Cabernet Sauvignon in October.

CS: How was most of the wine sold in the early days?

MHG: Mostly at the winery. There were some restaurants. And there were a few liquor stores.

PG: The year before we came down here I did some selling to restaurants and a few liquor stores. But he was always interested in making a direct contact with the consumer. He wanted to get as many people as possible to come to the winery and see the place.

CS: Was he able to sell most of his wine that way in the early days.

MHG: Yes, because there wasn't much wine.

CS: After you were getting full crops here, how much was a good yield?

PG: The Riesling, about 23 tons. And the Cabernet perhaps 13 tons.

CS: How many acres of Riesling was that?

PG: That was about ten acres. There were about five acres of Cabernet.

CS: So by no means was the forty acre estate close to being fully under vines.

MHG: No, we had pasture down below for the horses.

CS: Did your father have any of those big dinner parties down here in those early years?

MHG: They had a big grape arbor and they'd have dinners outdoors at the old house out there. Those were Isabella grapes which I think my grandfather planted.

CS: Did he ever have little dinners at the winery, in that tasting room where all the great old

labels are on display?

MHG: No, never. There was no kitchen there.

CS: So those labels don't represent the history of that room.

MHG: Every time we'd go to a restaurant and he'd have a good wine he'd ask them to soak off the label or give him the bottle. That's where most of those came from.

CS: What had you been doing before you moved down here to run this place?

PG: Just briefly before we came here I was selling Hallcrest wines. It was sort of part-time. Previous to that I worked at the University, at the botanical gardens.

CS: So you had had some horticultural experience before you came here.

PG: Practical, yes, but not academic.

CS: Why did you come here.

PG: It seemed to me that I was running into a sort of dead end at the University.

MHG: And we wanted to get out of Oakland. Our older boy was just ready to start Claremont Junior High. The gym had been condemned and they did their PE by running around the block.

CS: That's where I did one of my semesters of student teaching. Eighth grade English in 1957.

MHG: And that's right after we left.

CS: Did Mr. Hall need more help, or was he getting tired of it.

MHG: They weren't living here then.

CS: But I'm thinking through those years of the early fifties when the vineyards were producing full bore. It must have been quite a job for him to come down here and see to everything. Manuel Silvey was still running the vineyard?

MHG: Yes. But my father came down all through the summer. And he'd come down during the vintage. At that time, well, he never really retired from the law. During the last few years I don't think he took any money out of the firm. But he kept an office there. And he did do some work. But, he could get off whenever he wanted. And he did.

CS: But he must have had somebody dragging hoses for him and topping barrels.

MHG: Manuel's son did a lot of that.

The Griffiths Family at Hallcrest

CS: So the deal was that you were to come down here, manage the vineyard and run the winery.

PG: That's right.

CS: Was your first vintage 1956?

MHG: We moved into this house in June of 1956. We built this house. We looked right out over the Cabernet vineyard; it grew right up to the house, right up to that fence there.

CS: So this land here was inside the forty acres.

PG: That's right. Actually the house was finished in August.

MHG: Yes, we came down in June and stayed at the old house with Mother and Dad.

CS: Were they actually living here.

MHG: Not really; there were very few years when they stayed the whole year. And never before we moved down here.

CS: So after you're here Mr. Hall is going to be around during the vintage.

Were there any real changes in vineyard or production after you took over? Did the operation stay pretty much the same?

PG: Yes. I'd say so.

CS: Let's take a vintage and go through it. Tell me how it worked.

PG: We'd take grape samples from the vineyard and check the sugar content with a hydrometer. We'd take them in and crush them and test the sugar.

MHG: My mother would do that.

CS: What kind of sugar would you aim at for the Riesling?

PG: 21 degrees Brix would be good.

MHG: And we'd like 24 for the Cabernet, if we could get it. And there was always the question of getting the sugar up before it rained.

PG: We'd get housewives in the area to help do the picking, to pick up a little cash. We paid them by the hour. We had a jeep and a trailer and stacked the lug boxes on the trailer as we went through the vineyard as they did the picking.

MHG: And I drove the jeep. The jeep and trailer would make it through the twelve foot aisles all right.

CS: You were on twelve foot centers in the vineyard.

PG: The aisle was twelve feet, but vines were spaced nine feet apart.

We had a stemmer and crusher and then pumped the must into the open fermenters.

CS: Where did you get them?

PG: He had them built new. We had a big screw press we ran by hand, but I don't know where he got that. He bought the crusher-stemmer from the government.

(Mrs. Griffiths shows CS pictures from the crush.)

CS: Do I see picking boxes with "Hallcrest" on them?

PG: Yes, they did.

CS: That's classy. Here's a question. Were the corks stamped "Hallcrest" in these early days? I know they were when I started buying wine here in the early 1960s.

PG: Yes, they were done by the people we bought them from.

CS: Did Mr. Hall do that even before you took over?

MHG: He always did.

CS: In those days it was almost unheard of. Lee Stewart did it early at Souverain, but I guess Hallcrest was the first after Prohibition. Perhaps Martin Ray did, but not this early. This is very interesting, because it gives a good picture of Chaffee Hall's total commitment to the premium wine package.

(Mrs. Griffiths brings out a hot plate holder made from Hallcrest corks.)

Did you use SO₂ and add yeast to get the fermentation started?

PG: We prepared a fifty gallon barrel of must with yeast as a starter.

CS: Did you aim to have the Riesling go dry in fermentation?

PG: Well, we immediately took the juice off the skins after crushing, with as little skin contact as possible. We let the fermentation go to zero, totally dry.

CS: That's my memory of those wines. I know the 1951 was dead dry.

Was there ever any talk about botrytis and the Riesling?

PG: Sure, but not in a positive way.

CS: Right. There was never any attempt to make a botrytis infected late harvest Riesling.

PG: No, it was something we tried to avoid.

MHG: Leo McClosky did that years later.¹

¹ Leo McClosky was a partner in the Felton Empire wine operation that took over the Hallcrest winery in the 1970s. He was a biochemist who has also worked many years for Ridge Vineyards.

PG: After fermentation we pumped the Riesling down into the cellar into the storage tanks. We had large oak puncheons and casks there.

CS: How long would you hold the Riesling in these casks?

PG: About a year. We kept the Cabernet Sauvignon four years in the barrel.

CS: Let's go to the Cabernet. 24 Brix was the target for sugar at harvest.

PG: Well, I don't think we ever got it up that high. That was just the ideal.

CS: What would satisfy you even if it weren't ideal?

PG: 22 would be pretty good. I recall that once we only got to 19.

CS: Did you ever chaptalize with sugar?

PG: No.

CS: I know some small wineries did that when sugar was really low. They do it in France. I know one very famous little winery that would dump in a five pound bag of sugar now and then.

How did you handle the fermentation of the Cabernet?

PG: We punched down the cap of the Cabernet during the fermentation. We let the fermentation go all the way until it was dry before we pressed. It would get pretty hot sometimes. Then we'd pump it down to the cellar for storage. Most of it went into 150 gallon puncheons. It would first go into larger casks, maybe 600 gallons. We had one big one that held 1,000 gallons. Then we'd let it settle out some and then break it down into the smaller ones.

CS: Were any of your smaller barrels French oak?

PG: I think they all were.

CS: That was very early. That would be before Hanzell, which is usually named as the pioneer in such things.

PG: We racked them several times, but the wine stayed in the barrel for four years.

CS: Did you filter before bottling.

PG: Yes, we filtered. And we fined the wines too with egg white. That was with both the Riesling and the Cabernet.

CS: When you bottled the wines did you bottle from the barrel or did you assemble the wines in a larger container?

PG: We'd take the wines from the barrels into a bottling tank and bottle from there.

MHG: We had a little bottler with five spigots. I did that sometimes.

CS: Tell me about the Hallcrest label. You have a label in one of the scrapbooks that doesn't look

like what I take to be the Hallcrest label, and it has a 1943 vintage date on it. Was that ever the official label?

PG: No, I don't think so.

CS: I think that was an experimental label that never was used, so he had to have a year on it and he printed it in 1943, so that's the year he put on it, and never used it. It's very difficult for me to believe that there was ever a Hallcrest estate bottled wine from the 1943 vintage on the market. He wouldn't have had more than a couple of buckets of grapes that year.

I wonder if all the wines were vintage dated when they did go on the market.

PG: No, not the wine made at Wente. We couldn't vintage date that. But from 1946 on I think so.

CS: And they all read "Estate." Even that Cabernet Rosé you made one year?

PG: Yes, I think so.

CS: How often did you make those wines when the sugar was so low?

PG: Just the one year.

(Mr. Griffiths goes to check a label.)

There's no vintage on that label.

CS: I wonder when it was. I remember it, so it much have been in the late fifties or early sixties. I think this is a good place to stop. Next time we'll watch the video you made from the early movies here and you can narrate through it.

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October 13, 1992

Movies from the First Years

Chaffee Hall made several 16 mm. movies of activities at Hallcrest during the first few years of operations. Recently Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths have had these old color movies copied into video on VHS format. On this date we sat through the video twice and talked about what we were seeing. The tape itself lacks any really solid continuity, but the following paragraphs give a fair indication of what one sees in these historic shots. Mrs. Griffiths has edited them so that the first portion is given over to establishing the vineyard through the first real vintage and the bottling of that wine. Then there is a series of scenes from the actual building of the winery in 1946, and then the winery dedication ceremony and the happy party that accompanied it that year.

First we see the brand new bare vineyard, already staked in this shot. A worker is using a post-hole digger to prepare the hole for the St. George rootstock that will be planted here. In another part of the vineyard, already laid out in lanes, a huge shire horse, the size of a Percheron, drags a sled

through the lanes and stakes are dropped off at each point where a vine will be planted. They are planting thirteen acres, eight acres to White Riesling and five to Cabernet Sauvignon. Now we see a worker driving the six foot redwood stakes so that about three and a half feet remain above ground. Each stake is driven with a sledge hammer. Now a shot of the planting of the first vine. The rootstock is very healthy and thick, AA quality.

Next there is a series of shots, probably in April or May. There is a light weed cover and the rootstock is up, and quite bushy. The take appears to be 100%, or close to it. The next shot shows several people cultivating around each vine, with large mattocks. Later shots show that these oversized implements have been substituted with much more manageable wide-faced vineyard hoes. Next we are in mid-summer. The rootstock is huge. Next there is a very careful presentation of the grafting "ceremony." The person doing the grafting is obviously well-versed in the process and the film was shot in slow-motion to emphasize the steps. He has bud-wood on three foot shoots. The process is taking place well before dormancy, since the rootstock is still full of its late season leaves and shoots. He has a traditional grafting knife to cut the bud and place it on the rootstock. Then he ties the new vinifera bud in place with white tape and the job is done.

The next shots comes at the end of the next growing season when the new bud has sent its shoot up the stake. Mrs. Hall stands by one stake and shows the first vinifera growth of well over six feet as she proudly displays the huge shoot far above her head. She is five feet eight inches tall. The next shots are taken later in the summer. They are shaping the new vine, cutting it at the top of the stake and cutting off any lateral shoots that have developed. Virtually every vine has grown far above the stake during this first year of vinifera growth.

Next there is a rather humorous shot of a bed that has been set up in the vineyard. It is for the manager, Manuel Silvey. There is also a big sun umbrella over the top of the bed. He will sleep out in the vineyard to drive off deer that may come to browse on the shoots of the new vines. He sets off a stick of dynamite from time to time to keep them away.

Now we have the shire horse dragging the sled through the vineyard. Then shots of Mrs. Griffith and her mother checking to see that the vines are tied tightly to the stake for the coming winter winds. Now Mr. Hall is on the sled, pulling through the vineyard, keeping the soil broken and loose. Then a shot of a few grapes in this second year, Cabernet. The vineyard is now in its second vinifera year. The lateral buds have shot out and the vines are taking their permanent shape. This is 1943. Now to the next year, a shot of Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths, married in 1942, suckering the young vines and giving them a bit of summer pruning. The vines looked well-shaped.

Now to 1944. The vineyard is full. There are no blanks to be seen, or places where blanks have been replaced with younger vines. For now there is no bird problem. Here we see the first tiny vintage. The shire horse drags the sled with the picker boxes on it through the lanes. Mrs. Griffiths is riding the shire horse. There are six boxes of grapes on the sled. Following up come the small army of family pickers with what look to be the baskets from the day's picnic. The next shot shows a tiny hand operated crusher. The grapes are put in with the stems at the top and below a crowd of family workers push the grapes through the holes in a large wooden screen, thus removing the stems from the fermentation process. Now we jump to the first bottling at the winery. There is a six spout filling machine. They are bottling the Riesling by hand. Manuel's son is topping off the bottles with what look to be a large baster. There is a single hand corker. They are corking four bottles per minute.

Now we see the vineyard later. The jeep as a tractor pulls the trailer up and down the lanes. This is probably the 1945 vintage, the first really commercial production, that Wente made up. The vineyard shots now show that a trellis system has been set up. Now a shot of the pasture below the vineyard with the four horses, two for riding and two working shire horses.

The next series of shots shows the building of the winery. There is lots of detail and many shots of the winery as it goes up, from the digging of the cellar, the pouring of the footings, much cement mixing, and the building of the wooden upper floors, much as one might expect in the construction of a good 19th century California winery. Then shots of the winery set above the vineyard in a very picturesque manner which, at this early date helps explain the very strong interest in Hallcrest among those who hoped for a renewal of small scale premium winegrowing in the coastal valleys on a scale similar to pre-Prohibition days. The shots begin with Mrs. Hall turning the first shovel before the footings are dug. Bulldozers scrape the side of the hill for the cellar. Barrow after barrow of cement are poured. Whatever the construction, it stood up smartly to the great Loma Prieta temblor of 1989, without the loss of a bottle. Finally there is a barbecue party for the workers after the job is finished.

The next section is devoted to the dedication of the new winery. There is a large crowd of people. Tables under the oaks on the north side of the winery looking out over the Riesling vineyard. There are several people in uniform, it was 1946, one air force officer with a notable limp. In many of the shots we can see Robert Gordon Sproul, president of the University of California, finally addressing the group surely in the jocular manner well known to all "old blues." Surprisingly, none of the UC Davis people who were there appear in these pictures. There was music after the party and dancing in the open area.

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Later Years at Hallcrest

CS: Let's take up the later years now, from 1956 on. How was Hallcrest wine sold now? Did Mr. Hall continue to emphasize sales at the winery?

PG: Yes. And there was a much higher return that way.

CS: Did you develop a mailing list of customers?

PG: Yes. I kept a list of individual customers. Periodically I'd write to them about the wines for sale. We wanted people to come by the winery to get their wine. But we also sold to restaurants and bottle shops.

CS: Did you do any conscious public relations work in these years? Did you go out and contact people to write about the winery. You surely got lots of good press.

MHG: We really didn't have to. They came to us.

PG: We were involved in wine tastings, continually.

CS: You mean where your wines would be on display with other wines?

MHG: Yes. Like the Medical Friends of Wine. There were several at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

PG: And with the Santa Clara Valley Winegrowers. But one thing that my father-in-law did not want to do was to advertise.

MHG: Well, there was an ad in the UC California Monthly.

CS: Right, I saw that. But that's different.

During those years did you have a lot of wine writers coming through. Balzer, Melville, Street?

PG: Not Balzer. We're in Melville's book, but I don't recall his coming by.

MHG: Julian Street came down.

CS: He gives Hallcrest a nice plug in his book. How about Schoonmaker?

PG: I don't remember him coming by. I wish we could find that old guest book we kept.

CS: How about UC people.

PG: Not so much in these later days. They were here in the early years, of course. Amerine and Winkler. Amerine did come down in later years.

MHG: Maynard and a friend of his would come down for lunch once in a while. Who was the fellow who came down from Davis when we had the problem, and he stayed over night with us?

PG: I don't recall his name, but he was an enologist from Davis.

CS: What was the problem?

PG: It was the biggest error we had here. We went off on a vacation. But the man who was working for us had to do some racking of the white wine. We didn't have enough storage at the moment for the whites. So we took some of the casks that had been used for red wine storage and we racked the Riesling into them. So they picked up some color we didn't want. I had told my son and Bradley to be sure to give those casks a good cleaning first. You have to use a lot of soda ash and hot water. They tried to do it but they didn't do a good enough job.

CS: I wonder if they picked up anything else. Did you usually go through malo-lactic?

PG: No, we didn't. We didn't want to.

CS: I was thinking you might have had the lacto-bacillus in the Cabernet barrels.

PG: The problem was the color that it had picked up. So we had to treat it with charcoal, filtered it. The fellow from Davis was here for a couple of days working on it. It never did come out quite right.

CS: So, you made a "blush" Riesling before its time.

Let's talk about a few names that have come up. You've mentioned Manuel Silvey several times as the person really responsible for keeping the vineyard in shape in the early years. Was that his name?

MHG: His name was actually Thomas Emanuel Silvey. It had been Silva, but he changed it.

CS: Well, that explains the T. E. Silvey I keep finding reference to in these old articles. He was pretty old even in the early years. From the various numbers I've seen I calculate that he was born in 1880. I wonder how long he lived, and worked here. He's listed as 72 years old in 1952.

MHG: He didn't seem that old. After we came down he kept working in the vineyard. I wonder, did he die before Dad?

PG: I think he died first.

CS: So he was around here well into the sixties. Who was William Bradley?

MHG: He worked here. He was Canadian. Earlier he'd been a prison guard in Michigan. He was someone who was looking for work. He came up and Dad interviewed him and hired him.

CS: I also come across the name Arlene Pike.

MHG: She's the one who did the labeling. She worked here for several years. She's still alive, in fact. She's the oldest Feltonian today, who was born here.

CS: How about the family, your sons. Did they work too?

MHG: The boys both worked. Dick and Jerry. Jerry worked the most.

PG: They worked in the vineyard and in the winery, particularly when we were bottling.

MHG: We didn't pay them very much. There's a story to go with that. We had a split log bench out there under the oak trees. We found that Jerry had carved his initials and the date when we thought he was working.

CS: Your pickers were local people down to the end.

MHG: Yes. But one year we had University students and it was a disaster. They picked one day and it was hot, so they didn't show up the next day.

CS: I have some specific questions I want ask.

I saw something about wire mesh around the early bottles. Was that true?

PG: Yes, just the first few years.

MHG: They were gold, just decorative. You drop them over the bottle and twist them on the bottom. They cost too much.

CS: What about the old bell up there in the belfry?

MHG: L. J. Schermerhorn² gave it to Dad. I don't know where it came from.

CS: I read that it came from an old winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains, but there is never of word of which one.

MHG: It had a beautiful tone. We rang it at our son's wedding. And we'd ring it to start and end the harvest.

CS: Let me ask you about Dr. Schermerhorn.

MHG: He owned some ranches in the Santa Clara Valley. He grew a lot of apricots. That was from

² He planted Vine Hill Vineyard in the 1940s. Mrs. Schermerhorn was Mrs. Griffiths' father's sister.

his first wife, who died very early. I don't know how they met. She was a widow. He went to Stanford. So did his first wife. He had retired when he was about forty from being a pediatrician in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He had had a heart attack.

CS: So how does he get this vineyard?

MHG: He wanted to compete with my father. He planted Vine Hill after Hallcrest had been planted. A man by the name of Tom Mattingly did most of the work. He lived on the place. He never had a winery. For a while he just came out during the summer from Grand Rapids.

CS: So he and your aunt were married before he bought the land for Vine Hill?

MHG: Oh yes.

PG: He died in the late seventies.

CS: What happened to the horses your dad had working here?

PG: He gave them to Roaring Camp, the narrow gauge railroad. That was in the early sixties.

CS: That makes sense, because they started that little railroad in the late fifties.

Winding Down

So, let's go to 1964 when you decided not to make wine anymore. Actually, you don't write your letter about closing down the winery until 1968.

MHG: I think the final decision to close down came after my brother died in 1968. Before that my mother had gotten so sick that they weren't coming down at all.

CS: Where did the grapes go after the 1964 vintage?

PG: We sold them. More than one year we sold them to Mirassou. And I think we might have sold to Bargetto. After 1969 when we terminated the winery operation we sold grapes to Concannon. Then we went into a lease situation with them.

MHG: Most of these deals were handled through Dad's office up to 1969. I don't know what happened to those files up there. He died in April, 1969.

PG: That was a very depressing period of time.

MHG: My brother, my father, my mother, Pen's mother, and two of his aunts all died within about a period of two years.

PG: I don't think Mr. Hall ever recovered from his son's dying.

MHG: He died of cancer. He was only fifty-one.

CS: He had been my wife's advisor when he was working at the University in Berkeley.

PG: In 1968 and 1969 we were selling off all the winery equipment. I do have a record of those

sales.

CS: These are interesting. Walt Richert got the fermenting tanks.³ Bob Mullen bought some bottles and the basket press. He still has it outside the winery.⁴ Here's Dave Bennion buying bottles, a scale, a hand truck and a cork puller for Ridge. Bargetto bought the filter and corker. And here's Fritz Maytag buying miscellaneous equipment for his then little Anchor Steam Beer operation.⁵

Let's finish up by tracing the use of the vineyard and the winery at Hallcrest in the later years, after 1969.

PG: First we sold grapes to Concannon and then we leased the vineyard to them for about three years. Then Jim Beauregard and John Pollard leased the vineyard on a yearly basis. They eventually started up the Felton Empire wine operation. I have a record here that in 1974 we sold them thirteen tons of White Riesling and 8.79 tons of Cabernet for an average price of \$300 per ton. Then they took over the winery. We sold the winery and the Riesling vineyard to Felton Empire in 1980-81. They continued to lease the Cabernet vineyard until 1983, and we pulled it up two years later.

CS: And there it is right outside your door waiting for grapes to be planted.

MHG: We can't do it now. It would just be too much trouble for us.

CS: Thanks for all your help. We have some interesting and useful history here. By the way, that 1961 bottle of Hallcrest Cabernet Sauvignon you gave me last time we did this was still quite good. It was a little feeble; all the tannins had been resolved. But the flavor was delicious, elegant cab flavors with a hint of eucalyptus. It was just ever so slightly oxidized, but really in perfect chemical condition for a wine of that age. It was a historic wine.

* * * * *

³ Walter Richert had a premium sweet wine operation near Morgan Hill in the Santa Clara Valley in these years.

⁴ Woodside Vineyards winery in Woodside. See Mullen interviews.

⁵ Maytag also developed the York Creek Vineyards on Spring Mountain above Napa Valley.

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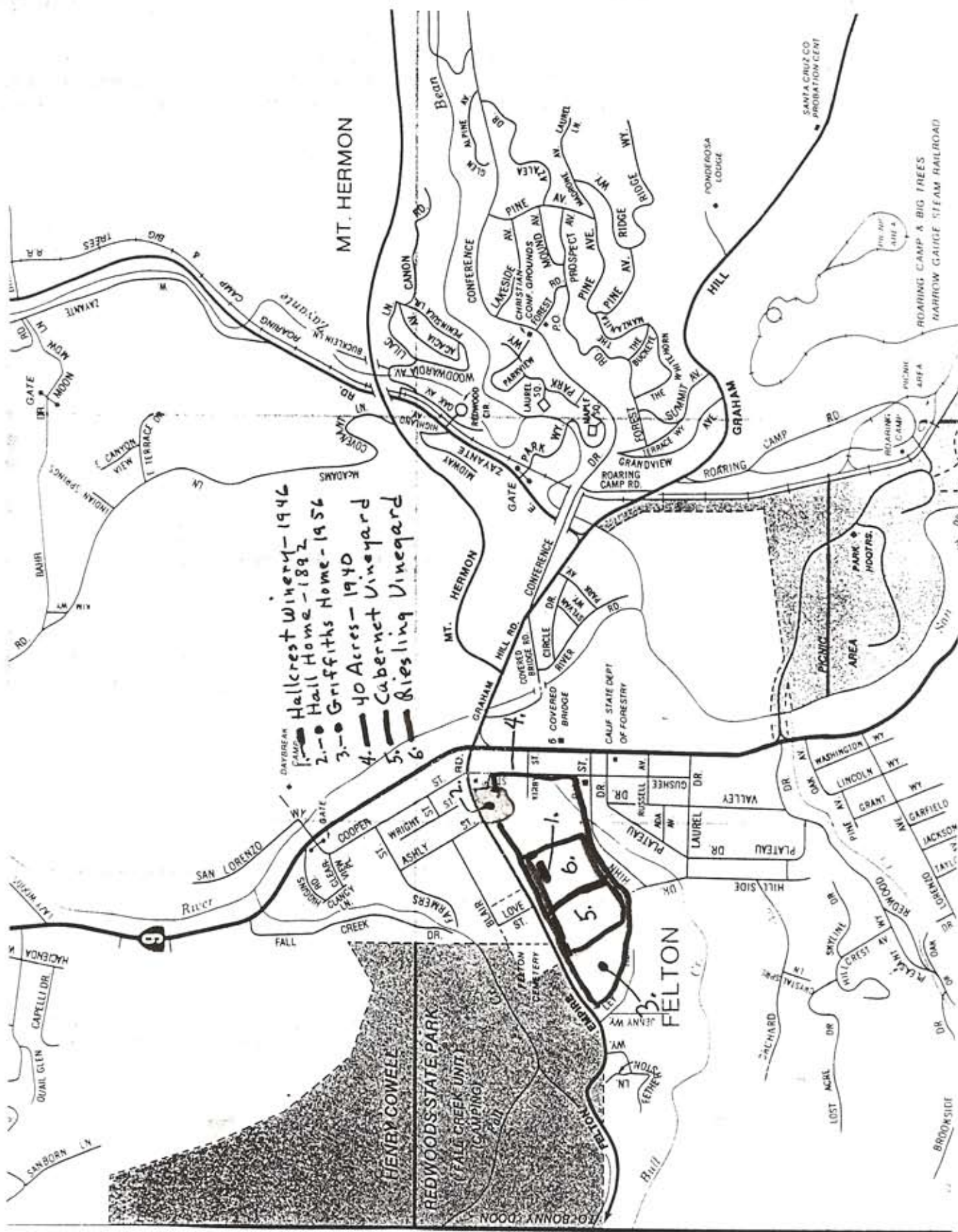
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- 1. Hallcrest Winery - 1946
- 2. Hall Home - 1892
- 3. Griffiths Home - 1956
- 4. 40 Acres - 1940
- 5. Cabernet Vineyard
- 6. Riesling Vineyard

MT. HERMON

FELTON

HENRY COWELL

REDWOODS STATE PARK
(FALM CREEK UNIT)
(CAMPING)

ROARING CAMP & BIG TREES
NARROW GAUGE STEAM RAILROAD

PONDEROSA
LODGE

SANTA CRUZ CO
PROBATION CLERK

CALIF STATE DEPT
OF FORESTRY

San Lorenzo
River

HACIENDA
CAPPELLI DR
SANBORN LN
QUAIL GLEN

BROOKSIDE

LOST ACRES DR

PACIFIC

LETNICH LN

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