

Marcel Pourroy

I interviewed Marcel Pourroy on June 19, 1992 at his home in Aptos where he has lived since the 1950s. He did not wish to have our conversation tape recorded. Thus, the following material has been written from the notes that I took during our hour and a half discussion.

Mr. Pourroy is a member of the family that developed the land which was to become the Congress Springs Vineyards and winery built up in the 1970s. His father and uncle, Pierre and Eloi Pourroy, came to this country in the 1880s and settled first with their parents on the family homestead on Sanborn Road, up the Congress Springs Road a short distance from the winery today. (I have appended that portion of R.V. Garrod's typescript history of the Saratoga Hills area which relates to this area of the Santa Cruz Mountains.) The family came from France, and like so many of the families in this area came specifically from the Department of Hautes Alpes, near the town of Gap.

Marcel was born in 1907, the seventh of ten children, five boys and five girls. Shortly before World War I the brothers acquired the winery land in three purchases, amounting to something over 400 acres. The land on which the Pourroy Winery was built was purchased from the Bonjetti family and in 1917 the brothers built the winery. There were already some grapes growing on this property, but the Pourroys upgraded vineyard plantings considerably in the next few years. They planted the area behind the family home, which are today planted mostly to Chardonnay, and on the steep hill facing the home, which is pictured in the well known photograph of the property that hung on the wall of the Congress Springs tasting room. The operation was quite diversified, with prunes almost as important as grapes in these years.

The purchase of this land and the building of the winery did not take into account the coming of Prohibition in 1921. Nevertheless, the federal law allowed home winemakers to make 200 gallons of wine per family per year. Thus, the Pourroys were able to sell grapes to others during the dry years and to make wine themselves, which they sold to others, as did many others in the Santa Cruz Mountain area.

In 1923 the Pourroys built the home that stands above the vineyard today. They called it Monmartre. Marcel Pourroy helped build the home, but left in 1925 at the age of 18. Nevertheless, he recalls the grape varieties growing there during Prohibition: Zinfandel, Carignane, Grenache, Mataro, Petite Sirah. There was also a bit of the dyer grape, Alicante Bouschet. He also recalls a bit of Pinot noir, which the family probably acquired from the nearby vineyard of Paul Masson, who was well known to the family.

The family's fortunes flourished during these years and they were able to cut back considerably on the level of agricultural activity on the ranch during the 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, some of the vineyard survived, particularly the Zinfandel, whose vines later provided grapes for Dan Gehrs' Congress Springs winemaking.

