

Germaine Pourroy

I interviewed Germaine Pourroy at her home in the Congress Springs district behind Saratoga on July 29, 1992. Her rustic abode, where she has lived all her life, is reached by taking the turnoff to the Congress Springs Winery from Congress Springs Road. After climbing to the top of a plateau-like area, one can see the Pierre Pourroy home, Monmartre, which looks out on the Santa Clara Valley. It was built in 1923 and for some years in the 1970s and 1980s it served as the Congress Springs Winery. It is surrounded on three sides by vineyards, some vines having been planted in recent years, some Zinfandel vines on the north side dating back almost to the turn of the century.

To continue on to Miss Pourroy's home one passes the Congress Springs winery building revived and built up by the Daniel Gehrs family in the 1980s. This earlier was the Pierre Pourroy winery. One continues on up the little canyon to Miss Pourroy's home, crossing over a small bridge. But the remains of the old road up to her father's vineyard and orchard can be seen continuing up the north side of the little creek into the second growth forest. Before reaching the bridge one passes an open area where the ruined walls of an old winery building can be seen protruding from the hillside. This apparently was the first Pierre Pourroy winery, the newer one passed earlier down the road probably having been built at the end of Prohibition.

South of Miss Pourroy's home are the ruins of her father's old winery, its stone walls clearly visible and offering a precise set of dimensions for the old operation. In the yard are ancient apple and pear trees that tower above the buildings here. One cherry tree survives with the largest trunk I have ever seen in such a plant. There are several fig trees, and seedlings from these plants have escaped into the surrounding land in large number.

On up the road, on both sides of the creek, the forest has begun to re-establish itself, as it has at the vineyard farther up the canyon.

Pierre and Eloi Pourroy came from France in the Department of Hautes Alpes, near the town of Gap. Pierre (1866-1960) was first to arrive in California, in 1887, first going to the Bakersfield area and then moving to the Saratoga area in 1890.

The hills behind Saratoga became the home of numerous French, Italian-Swiss and Italian families before the turn of the century. Most were involved with fruit culture and many grew grapes for themselves and others. Several came from the Gap area, the earliest probably August Boisseranc, who arrived here in 1874 and whose daughter Mathilda married Eloi Pourroy. Joseph Rispaud may have been here earlier than Boisseranc, having arrived in California in 1866, but I was not able to learn the date of his settlement in this area.

Eloi Pourroy (1868-1957) arrived here in 1893 and with his brother bought land where the old wineries were later built. He cleared land for vineyard and orchard and built the little house where Germaine Pourroy lives today. She was born in 1911, the youngest of seven children, five of whom were girls. Germaine and two sisters, Helene and Mathilda survive. Germaine and her two brothers, Henry and Robert, did not marry. They lived their lives on the estate, Robert dying in 1940, Henry in 1973.

The Eloi Pourroy winery was a typical rustic structure often seen in the wine districts of Northern California. It was stone below and wood above, a gravity-flow operation that was able to handle the grapes from the 80 acre vineyard he and his family developed. There were two levels, the top for fermentation, the bottom dug into the hillside for storage in several thousand gallon tanks. There

were few small barrels. For the most part this was a bulk wine operation. The grapes were brought down from the vineyard on horse-drawn sleds. Wheeled wagons would have been too dangerous for such terrain. It is an interesting note in local history that Eloi Pourroy never acquired a truck for his ranch and continued to haul goods to and from town by wagon in a day when automobiles and trucks had come to dominate the road.

The vineyard was planted mostly to red wine grapes, chiefly Zinfandel, Carignane, Grenache, with a little Petite Sirah. For family use there were also a few white grapes, Palomino (often incorrectly termed Chasselas by many California winegrowers) and the Muscat of Alexandria. The wine was sold locally, mostly in jugs and small barrels, to individuals. There was no case goods trade or commercial bottling at the winery. Neither was wine sold in bulk to other wineries.

During Prohibition Eloi sold grapes to home winemakers and continued to raise prunes. He also made wine and, like most producers in the area, discreetly sold to local folk he knew. Germaine remembers government inspectors at the winery fairly regularly in the years before Repeal in 1933. The Pourroys were also plagued by wine thieves during the 1920s. She recalls one time seeing two men heading up the road to the winery with pick and shovel, only to learn later that they had broken in and stolen wine. Her uncle Pierre also had trouble with thieves and pilferers. Sometimes whole barrels were taken.

When Prohibition ended Eloi Pourroy resumed his production of red table wine for local consumption in bulk and continued to sell his grapes to home winemakers. Most of the wine trade ended in the 1940s, but Pourroy and his children continued to sell grapes to the nearby Novitiate in Los Gatos for many years. Germaine thinks that as a commercial vineyard the end came in the mid-1950s. But her brother Henry kept some vines for their own use up into the 1960s.

The 240 acre Eloi Pourroy estate remains today a discrete entity which Germaine Pourroy holds for her life. Several years ago Santa Clara County bought the land and it will eventually be part of the county park system.¹

¹ For other family histories of grape growers of French, Italian-Swiss and Italian descent in the Congress Springs area see: Eugene Sawyer. *History of Santa Clara County* (Los Angeles, 1922); Andrew Loyst, p.998; Joseph Rispaud, p. 1087; Adrien Bonnet, p. 1188; August Boisseranc, p. 1270; Firmin Ladarre, p. 1277; L. Reynaud, p. 1470; Eloi Pourroy, p. 1270; Pierre Pourroy, p. 1174. Also see: R. V. Garrod. *The Saratoga Story* (Saratoga, 1962) for these families: Pourroy, Rispaud, Boisseranc, Lotti, Taudt, Baille, Barnard, Bordi, Gautier. For some history of the Congress Springs Winery, with some less than totally accurate Pourroy history, see my *Like Modern Edens* (Cupertino, 1982).

The pages that follow were copied from the typescript history of the Saratoga area by R. V. Garrod, The Saratoga Story (1962). This section gives further information on the Pourroys and on other families who lived in the Congress Springs area in the pre-Prohibition years and who were involved in winegrowing.

Next to the Bordi holdings, to the south and at a higher elevation, were the Marenco Orchard and Vineyards. Bartlett pears, French prunes and wine grapes, were its products. Antone and Mrs. Marenco had three daughters and two sons. Mary was married and had one daughter and two sons. Eva married twice, had one son by her first husband, who became a mechanic. Later, being widowed, she married William Small. Fred married Mary Bassi; Christine had one son, and Phillip never married.

Mr. Marenco bought a home in Saratoga to which he retired, leaving Fred to operate the ranch. Next to Marenco lived the Booker family whom I have already mentioned, then the Pourroys.

Next to the Bookers on their east, the Bonjetti family occupied the place at the beginning of this century. Joseph Bonjetti worked on the Loyst Brothers' threshing machine every season. During the rest of the year he lived on his 160-acre home place which he slowly cleared off and planted to apples and grapes. On the Sanborn Road at McElroy Road, lived a Swiss by the name of Gasper Gnesa; one would always notice his place because of its neat appearance. The fence, house and other buildings were kept clean and shining white by frequent white-washing. There always seemed to be some flowers in blossom and the steep hillside behind his cabin was just like a wall with grape vines hanging onto it. It was a spot which commanded a second look.

Gasper had a sister in Switzerland who had heard of California and the Saratoga hills. Gasper helped her to come here, but it didn't do him much good as about all he got out of it was a brother-in-law, Joseph Bonjetti. In the course of time he was presented with a niece, Cecilia, and two nephews, Cesar and Ben Bonjetti. After the birth of the latter, Joseph died and his widow married Anthony Bassi. This match resulted in a daughter, Mary, and one son, Anthony. In 1908, after becoming widowed the second time, Mrs. Bassi sold out to Pierre C. Pourroy and moved to Santa Cruz where some of her children and grandchildren are still living.

Fred Marenco, a childhood friend of Mary Bassi, persuaded the Bonjetti-Bassi property. For several years previously, he had lived and ranched in the hills just west of Lake Ranch. Consequently, he was an experienced vineyardist and general rancher. Peter had been born in France, near Gap, Hautes Alpes, November 11, 1866. He arrived in Bakersfield in 1887. In 1890 he came to Saratoga and worked for Adrian Bonnet and Narcissus Aubrey. He soon branched off on his own, purchasing forty acres of land, and marrying Mary LaSalle, daughter of his last employer and a native of Saratoga.

Peter was an energetic, hardworking man with a high degree of intelligence. He was the father of five daughters and five sons. Two of the sons, Pierre and John, died while in the U. S. Army. Another son, Louis, died when he was 17. The girls, most of them married, are still living. Mrs. Fourroy died several years before Peter, who passed away in 1960. At one time Peter owned 400 acres of land, but after his boys' deaths it became part of the Pick Laboratory estate. Peter had a good vineyard and made its grapes into wine. His daughters are Marguerite, Marie, Emily, Lucile and Amelia. Peter's son, Marcel, has a family of three daughters and one son, and is a Morgan Hill orchardist. Medard with his family is living on his orchard in San Martin.

Adjoining Peter's place to the west was the ranch of his brother, Eloi, who was also born in Gap, Hautes Alpes, on December 4, 1868. He arrived in California in 1893 and worked for Mr. Aubrey, then for Adrien Bonnet. Two years afterward he purchased part of the former Bonnet ranch. He cleared some of its acreage, planting vines and prunes. Eloi married Matilda Boisseranc, daughter of Jacob Boisseranc, a pioneer settler of Saratoga. He was bereaved of his wife in 1912. They had two sons, Henry and Robert, and five daughters, Helen (Mrs. G. Legalls), Elizabeth, Matilda, Mary, and Germane. His prunes were dried on the ranch and his grapes were made into wine.

Another well-known vineyardist was Joseph Rispaud. Joe was born in the Hautes Alpes, France, and arrived in California in 1866. With Maurice Garcin he became the owner of 320 acres of land at Long Bridge. Dissolving partnership on a fifty-fifty basis, Joe planted his 160 acres to vines and prunes. Like other vineyardists, he constructed his own winery, putting out an excellent claret for which there was a good demand. He married Miss Elizabeth Calpin, a native of Belgium and they had two daughters, Mary and Lily, who married two brothers, Albert and Leon Athenour. Mary had several children. Louise had one son, Leon, Jr. George is a widower with one daughter. Jules, now deceased, married Rose Carbella, and they had one daughter. Henry married Renee Reynaud (both now deceased), had two daughters, Eugenie, now Mrs. Clarence Bailey, and Henrietta, now Mrs. Diannina. Joseph is still living and Louis is deceased.

After his father's death at Long Bridge, Jules farmed the property until he retired. His widow sold his valley orchard to the Catholics and this is where the present Catholic Church and school are now located.

Going up Big Basin Highway from Saratoga you come to Sanborn Road. Avoiding the branch roads and staying on the main one for three miles, brings you to the Lake Ranch on the top of the ridge dividing the Saratoga and Los Gatos watershed. It was for many years the home of the Barnard family.

About the beginning of this century this family consisted of the parents, both natives of France, Grandma Barnard and a son, Emile, and a daughter, Josephine, who later became Mrs. Espitallier. On the top of the divide there was a long land depression which attracted the attention of the San Jose Waterworks engineers. This company bought this 40-acre piece of land, excavated its center and banked it up at both ends, forming a lake. This lake was kept supplied with water coming from a watershed on its west, extending up to the top of Castle Rock Ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountains. It is also astride the San Andreas Fault, and at the time of the 1908 earthquake, the lake shook like a horse trough, and emptied much of its water.

The Barnards owned 400 acres of land. Four-foot firewood was cut from the oak, pine, madrone and other native growth. On the cleared land, hay and grapes were grown, and consequently another vineyard and winery were here.

Entering the main road on its opposite side from the Taudt home, were two or three other roads all leading to the west, further up the canyons into the mountains. One road led to Charlie Lotti's who had a combination of cattle, hogs, grapes, prunes, and apples. He was one, who since his release from World War I army twenty-five years ago, would buy and sell any type of livestock. He had the Congress Springs pasture land, the Fatjo Ranch part of the Hubbard and Carmichael holdings, rented or leased to run his cattle on. In a way, he was Saratoga's David Harum.

There was also the Leon Baille Ranch, afterward sold to H. P. Dyer, who lived there for many years. Mrs. Dyer was president of the Saratoga Women's Club and appointed the Library Committee that raised the money that built our present library building. This building is still very much a part of the old Saratoga Village.

Beyond Bailles, a mile or so, one came to almost a village, for in an open spot where some streams came together were three or four homes called by some us, Lottisville. All had their own farms, varying as to size and extending back into the hills. It

was mostly populated by the Lottis, a Swiss-Italian family of numerous connections.

Firmin Ladarre owned forty acres on which he raised cherries, grapes and prunes. He was a half-brother of Jean Casanova, a native of Basses Pyrenees, France, who made his home there, moving in from Stevens Creek after purchasing forty acres of land. Jean had a real tragedy when his home caught fire and left him and his wife homeless. About two weeks later, their son Kelly was born; that was the month of December of 1917. That evening, from where I lived, I saw the glare of a fire. Knowing Judge Welch lived in that vicinity I phoned him asking where the fire was, but he said he had not noticed it. On going outside his home he saw it, and taking his ranch foreman with him, they drove over. By the time he reached the fire, the house had been destroyed. Soon afterward Jean sold out. In 1930 he purchased the twenty-acre farm of Charles R. Rocliffe, recently deceased, on Mt. Eden Road for \$8,000. As his son grew up they added to their holdings upon which they both have very attractive homes. Kelly's family consists of his wife, formerly Natalie Boisseranc, and two children, Nancy and Phillip. Mr. Jean Casanova is now living alone and is a widower.

Leaving all these mountain people and coming down the road past Long Bridge over Guest Bridge in the years just before the beginning of this century, there was, on the north side of the Big Basin Way at Congress Springs, a thriving, growing vineyard. Today, it is only pasture land. It was also the spot where the old Summit Road toll gate was. This vineyard consisting of some forty five acres, was planted and cared for by the Sages, who owned Congress Springs. Like most of those who in early days went into the production of fruit, they had no place to go with their crops after they had grown them.

Al Sage, with some of his grape-producing friends, decided they could convert the flour mill at Saratoga into a winery. A corporation with A. D. MacDonald as president, Lewis A. Sage, as secretary-treasurer, and Pete Warner as manager, was formed. Thus a winery came into existence. William Haun, the second settler of Saratoga, together with his father-in-law, John Whisman, built the flour mill. Across the road from it, backed up to the creek, were some stone buildings. I am told they were occupied by the post office, the first post master in Saratoga being Levi Millard who was appointed in 1855.

Across the road from the stone flour mill and connected to the mill by an overhead walk-way, were some other buildings. These consisted of a store owned by Washburn and Pipkin; a blacksmith shop run by Henry Jarboe, and some storage for wheat. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1864; just how soon it was used again I don't know, but there is on record that 63,000 gallons of wine were made there in 1887. I was given to understand that the grapes were handled on a cooperative basis; grapes from the 45 acres of Sage Vineyard, and the 20-acre Loyst Vineyard being a part of the tonnage used. The finished wine products

were sold and the proceeds divided according to quantity and varieties.

In 1863 the village was resurveyed and additions made by Charles Maclay, who became owner of these added lands, as such he called the town of Saratoga.

On a hillside southwest of the mill, an Irishman by the name of Pat Sheehan, had established himself as a grape grower and winemaker. His place was very picturesque. He lived in a two-story house with shady oak trees nearby. His winery and barns were about twenty yards to the right of his home. His vineyards sloped away from the front of his house toward the creek, and behind his place they crowned a good-sized picturesque ten-acre knoll. His vineyard consisted of the Mission variety of grapes, the kind the Padres introduced. His sales were largely, if not entirely, local. I am told that at one period he was selling his red Mission claret for 15¢ a gallon. These Mission grapes are heavy bearers; there are records of one vine bearing 1,500 pounds of grapes in one crop.

These small vineyards have all but disappeared. In our Saratoga area where once these hardworking Swiss, Italian, French and German Americans had vineyards growing, today the land is covered with native brushy growth which, in some places, is being covered up and stifled by young and thrifty Douglas Spruce, the hardy pine trees we see growing so freely south and west of the San Andreas earthquake fault.

