

## Picchetti Ranch

The Picchetti Ranch on the lower slopes of Monte Bello Ridge was founded by Vincent and Secundo Picchetti in the 1870s. They came from the northern Piedmont in Italy, the village of Fomarco, to the United States in 1872 and went to work in 1873 at the Villa Maria, the Santa Clara College's retreat, ranch, vineyard and winery in the Cupertino foothills in Stevens Creek Canyon. In 1877 they bought the first part of the Picchetti Ranch, 160 acres, for \$1500. In 1878 they built a small house on the property and in 1884 Vincent bought out Secundo's interest in the property. In 1886 the large house was built. Vincent and many of his descendants have operated the ranch and lived on Monte Bello ever since. In 1896 the Picchetti Winery was built, which is today part of the Open Space District and operates as Sunrise Winery. Other buildings on the property include a fermenting house, a press house, a blacksmith shop, a stable, garage, and a wash house. Winegrowing was the chief agricultural activity here in the years before Prohibition, but the Picchetti Ranch was an operation with many other agricultural pursuits, including the raising of pears, prunes, peaches, livestock, and fodder crops. They made wine here until 1963 and sold it until 1972.

These interviews took place at the home of *Elio (EP) and Letizia (Tish) Picchetti (TP)*, which looks down on much of the old ranch property. Also taking part was *Hector Picchetti (HP)*, Elio's cousin. Hector was Vincent's grandson, and the son of Antone; Elio was also Vincent's grandson, and the son of John. Both Antone's and John's families lived together in the big house on the ranch. Elio and Hector grew up together and worked on the ranch, as did Hector's brothers, Virgil and Mario, and Elio's brothers, Aldo and Joe (Oreste), and his sister, Irene.

### *The Picchetti Family*

1882							
Secundo	Vincent Picchetti		----- Theresa				
	(1848-1905)		(1859 - 1949)				
Antone	Secundo	John	Attilio	Hector			
(1884-1949)	(1885-1892)	(1886-1962)	(1888-1952)	(1890-1969)			
1953							
Virgil	<i>Hector(HP)</i>	Mario	Aldo	<i>Elio (EP)--Tish (TP)</i>		Irene	Oreste (Joe)
(1916-1945)	(1922- )	(1918-1985)		(1922- ) (1921- )		(1924- )	(1927- )
	(1917- )						

July 14, 1993

CS: Let's start back in the 1930s when you were very young men. What was the Picchetti Ranch?

HP: The ranch was very similar to what is there now as far as buildings. There was one big yellow building that was west of the horse barn, and a dehydrator where the parking lot is now.

CS: Out near the big eucalyptus trees?

TP: Yes. In that open area.

HP: We had old prune trays stacked on the upper level. On the lower part we had a couple of old wagons and another part was for hay for the cows. The cow barn was just below that, a lean to on that same building.

CS: So except for what we see today was what it was when you were young.

HP: It was supposed to have been a frame for another house. They built it for two of the boys.

CS: It was going to be like a third house up there.

HP: It was.

CS: Let's start at the bottom of the hill and look at the property.

HP: If we start at the bottom there was first the place we called Neschott. I don't know what the word means.

TP: I think it was somebody's name.

HP: There was a little prune orchard there. That was at the first bend as you come up the road, before the next bend with the big eucalyptus trees. We owned that property, maybe thirty acres. And before that we owned a piece where the quarry is now. That was before the thirties. When they built the dam that took a portion of the ranch.

TP: But when they built the dam they didn't need all that property and Voss, at the quarry, bought it. He bought that from the county or the state, but not from us.

CS: So actually there was Picchetti Ranch land on the other side of Monte Bello Road.

EP: Yes.

HP: But it was just a small piece.

CS: So, let's come on up the hill. What's next?

HP: Lots of brush land. Then when you come to the second turn, if you were looking south, you'd go over toward the lake and behind the lake it was all in vineyard. That might have been twenty acres.

TP: That was south of the winery.

CS: I've never seen the lake. Are there any vines left there?

HP: No. That's sage brush now.

TP: The Zinfandel that's left you can see it down below us here.

CS: I wonder when the last time you took grapes off that land.

HP: I'd say in the thirties-- more like sixty years ago. I used to plow that with a mule, so I had to have been big enough to do that. In 1935 I would have been 18 years old.

TP: Later it was used for cattle pasture. That was about it.

CS: But if somebody wanted to, it could be vineyard today.

HP: Above the lake that whole side hill was vineyard, that came up near the road, just before the entrance to Jimsomare.

CS: So it was on the left side going up.

HP: They came all the way up to the road. In the old days before you got to the Schwabacher place you look over to the left and you'd see vineyard. There we must have had about twenty acres, maybe more.

CS: When you were young was anyone doing anything, so far as agriculture was concerned, at the Schwabacher place? They bought it in 1936.

HP: Not very much. They had a walnut orchard to the south. But it was mostly a vacation place for the Petris and the Crocker, and then the Schwabachers.

CS: But there are these old Zinfandel vines there, six acres of them in the early 1960s. So they were there when you were young.

HP: No, I don't. I don't know who got those grapes.

TP: The folks might have bought them for the winery.

HP: That's a possibility.

TP: They used to buy grapes up above.

EP: How about Gemello?

CS: That's a good possibility. Elmano told me he'd seen John Gemello up there in the old days. Mario Gemello told me John worked up there before Prohibition.

TP: Then there was another vineyard of ours west of Monte Bello road. Above that, right under us here, there were walnuts.

HP: Across the road we sold that to Schwabacher. It was 200 acres.

CS: Did you own that in the 1930s?

HP: Yes. We sold it later. They have planted the vineyard across the way.

CS: Elmano told me about that.

HP: And we had vineyard up above there too. I think there were ten acres up there, above up there now, on the other side of the road. I think we sold the land to the Schwabachers in the early fifties. 200 acres.

CS: Did that land include the land where the old barn stands today, with those other houses, beyond the swimming pool at Jimsomare?

HP: No. But we did sell them a piece of land in there. There was a spring in there. That must have been sold in the forties.

CS: When was that old barn built? Elmano thought it wasn't so old, that maybe Elio had built it.

EP: No, I didn't build that.

HP: I can't remember when it wasn't there, so it has to go back to the twenties.

If you want to go way back there was more land farther up. We owned another 50-100 acres we owned on up to the Rousten line. It went above the Skinner Ranch.

CS: What was that?

HP: It was the land just next door to the Montebello School, just below the road. That didn't belong to us, but we did own above the road, up to Rousten's. All above the road that was all vines, above the schoolhouse. We went right up the the Rousten line. He had some vines too, above his winery. His father planted those vines. I remember him with his horse and buggy coming down the road.

CS: He was also named Charles Rousten.

HP: There was also a Mario, another son, but he died when he was in college.

CS: Charlie just died a few years ago.

So is that it, as far as Picchetti vines go?

HP: If you're talking about the thirties, we'd already sold it, above the schoolhouse.

CS: Let's talk now about how the ranch was run in the early days.

HP: My father and his family, and Elio's family, my uncle's family. John and Antone. They were partners in the ranch. Both families lived in the big house. Elio and I were like brothers. My uncle would kick me in the pants if I got out of line, and my dad would kick Elio. But we were all good kids.

CS: Who actually owned the land?

HP: Both the brothers, together. It was a fifty-fifty proposition. It was a partnership.

CS: It wasn't that one owned this piece and one owned that one.

HP: No. Not at all. Elio's father, John, was the winemaker and took care of the cellar. He also watched the orchards and vineyards. My father, Antone, was in charge of the horses and livestock, and he looked after the men who did the plowing and the pruning and such, the workers.

CS: So John had vineyard and cellar. Who decided, "today we put on sulfur"?

HP: They would both do that kind of thing. But my uncle was the man who did the wine, the fermenting, racking, filtering and so on.

CS: When Antone died in 1949 how was the land split up.

HP: When he died half of the property went to my mother. So we just worked it the same as before.

CS: How about your brother Mario?

HP: He was in the restaurant business in Hollister. Later I wasn't on the ranch either. I was working at the Monte Vista Cannery.

CS: So Elio and his dad are running the place.

HP: And Elio ran the winery after his dad died.

CS: And up to then Elio had helped in the winery.

EP: That's right.

CS: And you worked the vineyards too.

EP: Yes, I did.

CS: So when does this house get built up here?

TP: In 1968. There had been a little house up here where we lived, and then we built this one.

HP: This was the Carmeney ranch when the folks took it over.

CS: When did your mother, Antone's wife die?

TP: Nine years ago. She was in a convalescent hospital.

CS: So you, Hector, are in charge of her interests. I need to know this so that when you sell the place to the Open Space District I know who is talking for whom.

HP: I'll be able to tell you quite a bit about that.

CS: So after the thirties it's grapes, wine, prunes, some other fruit, livestock and some walnuts.

HP: And after my father and John died we had some boarding stables for horses.

CS: So let's go back to when you were really young kids, to the twenties. How did the grape deal work then?

HP: We sold grapes to different families. There would be a ton or a ton-and-a-half at a time. It worked real good. In those days we got a really good price for our grapes. I think it was up about \$125 a ton.

CS: That sounds about right until 1927; then prices dropped.

Were your sales mostly to families around here?

HP: Not totally. We sold up in Redwood City, Palo Alto, all over the Peninsula.

EP: And up to San Francisco, too.

HP: We had a truck. It would take up to maybe a ton-and-a-half. First we'd get the orders from people. It was usually the same old customers. Some would call on the phone. They'd let us know from year to year what they wanted. They'd pick into boxes and my Aunt Louisa, my grandmother's sister, who was up on the ranch, she was the one who would weigh out the grapes for different customers. We had a scale which you could put maybe seven or eight boxes on. She weigh them and have the tags saying what the customer wanted, maybe a ton of Zinfandel, and two boxes of Mataro and four boxes of Carignane. We'd deliver it to the person who ordered it. The grapes were picked right into the boxes and the men would set them right there in the yard. We put the boxes on the truck and deliver them.

Some people had their own crusher. The driver would dump the boxes for them into the crusher and we'd bring the boxes back to the winery. Others, we'd take the grapes to them, set the boxes down, and we'd come back after the boxes later.

CS: Did you ever crush for anyone right here at the winery and then deliver to them in barrels?

HP: No, we didn't do that.

CS: Sometimes they did that in San Francisco, but I never heard of it down here.

HP: Sometimes when the driver would go back to pick up the boxes, the people would give him a glass of the wine. Some would be pretty good and other was bad, but you had to drink it and say how good it was.

CS: When you picked did you hire people from around here?

HP: We did hire people from this area, as a rule. Elio and I would put out the boxes for them. And we'd bring the grapes into the ranch.

CS: Let's go over the grape varieties.

HP: Mostly Zinfandel. There was also Petite Sirah, Mataro, Carignane, and we had some Golden Shasta, also.

CS: Golden Shasta. I've heard that here. It was another way to say Golden Chasselas; that's what they called that white grape in Napa and Sonoma. Its real name was the Palomino.  
How about Alicante Bouschet?

HP: We had just a little bit of that.

CS: During Prohibition, did your folks make wine themselves?

HP: Sure. But we couldn't use the old wine; it was all stamped in bond. But we could make three or four hundred gallons a year.

CS: Right. You were two families, so you could legally make and drink four hundred gallons per year.

HP: I think that was what was happening.

CS: Did you have any wine left over from Prohibition when Repeal came?

HP: Yes, we had a little winery under the big house there. It had maybe 5,000 gallons in there in oval tanks.

CS: Under the 1886 house, it would hold that much?

HP: Yes. And there were bottles there that dated from 1919. But that wine got very light and it wasn't good drinking.

CS: Was there any old wine in cask coming out of those years?

HP: We had wine under the house that we gave it to Ridge. They came down and pumped it out. It was turning and they made vinegar out of it. They gave us so many cases back for the wine we gave them.

CS: I've seen that. We had some. It was labeled Festa del'uva, and showed the dates 1918/1978. The starter dated from the early date. I have an old bottle sitting in my kitchen.  
How did things change after Prohibition?

HP: We sold some grapes.

EP: Yes, we did sell some.

HP: Most went to wine. This is when the Picchetti brothers go back into the wine business.

CS: Did you use anybody else's grapes?

HP: We leased land with grapes on it. Up on top of Monte Bello. It was below Monte Bello Road, below where Ridge has the tasting room now.

TP: They bought also in Morgan Hill and Gilroy.

CS: How did you sell the wine in those days after World War II?

HP: It was mostly in gallons. But sometimes in 10, 25 or 50 gallon barrels, also.

CS: Did you have any retail accounts?

TP: We had it in several place's. At Sid's, Bargetto's down on 10th Street, and to that hotel down there, Val's out in Alviso-- we were their house wine. And we sold wine to Mrs. Andriano over in Los Altos.<sup>1</sup> She bought wine from us and then sold it at her old winery.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenia Andriano Winery, BW 4145.

CS: I wondered where she was getting it. I remember she still had her bond into the early 1960s, but there was no sign of winemaking there then.

HP: Now that you mention it there was another one up toward Palo Alto we sold to.

CS: I know the place you mean. They had a BWC number, but I can't recall the name. Mario Gemello mentioned it too. It was off El Camino Real.

EP: We sold to private homes, too.

TP: Yes, we'd deliver five gallon jugs to people, and gallons. I would go along with Elio before we were married. One time this old man asked Elio who was that young woman he had with him and he said it was "mia muros", his girl friend. It was the first time I knew it.

CS: La amorosa. I have to say it the way I hear it in the opera.

TP: We had quite a few customers like that.

HP: Back in the really old days, before Prohibition, they used to ship wine back east in barrels. They took it down to the train track at Monte Vista.

CS: Right. That was the old Vasona line. The tracks are still there.

EP: It goes to Kaiser Permanente now.

CS: In your days did your folks sell to other wineries?

HP: Yes, we sold to Gemello and Andriano.

CS: Did you know William Short up on top of the Ridge?

HP: Where they have the tasting room today at Ridge, he owned that property. He planted a lot of trees along the road up there. Before he was there a man named Andrew Mikulaco had it. He was Slovenian. Andrew's daughter-in-law and her two sons, Henry and Paul, planted grapes on Monte Bello Road in 1981. They sell their grapes to Ridge Winery.

TP: He had been in the bootlegging business up there.

CS: And then there's the old Perrone place on top.

HP: My uncles owned that property at one time. They owned the Mikulaco place also. That was Attilio and Hector Picchetti.<sup>2</sup> And they owned across the road, all that where those homes are today.

CS: There was the old home there, that burned down years ago, that looked out over the valley.

HP: They called that "the castle." That was the Perrone home. My uncles owned that, too.

CS: And they used the winery for a while.

HP: They planted a lot of grapes up there and they made wine up there.

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<sup>2</sup> For a while it operated as BW 1036 under the name Montebello Winery and was recorded in the industry directory in 1935 as having Osea Perrone as winemaker. He was the nephew of the man who had built the winery in the 1880s.



TP: I think your father made some down here from those grapes.

HP: But they made some up there.

TP: I can remember when they made wine up there. That could have been from the forties. I was pretty young then.

EP: They had this crusher where the horses would go around in a circle and run the crusher.

HP: And they had shoots that took the grapes down to the winery.

I have to go now.

CS: OK, we'll start here when we pick up on it again.

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At this session Hector Picchetti's wife, *Zorka Vlaovich Picchetti (ZP)* took part and added to the discussion.

September 6, 1993

CS: I want to go down to the old winery now and go through the physical estate and have you talk to me about the way the buildings were used and their history. The reason is that since I talked to you last I have been talking to the Stortzes at Sunrise, and there are some "mysteries" that I want to clear up; only you can tell me about these things.

Let's start with the winery itself, downstairs, in the cellar.

HP: There was a 6,000 gallon tank at the back left-hand corner, redwood.

EP: There were three big ones.

HP: Some were less than 6,000 gallons. As you came in the door, to the left, there were three oval oak tanks.

TP: I wonder if the cooper down in Cupertino, Mr. Pavisio, might have made them.

CS: So, there was a full-time cooper there, the cooper of Cupertino. (Laughter all round) That's worth knowing.

TP: He did make a lot of the cooperage for the wineries around here. He went back at least to 1900. His equipment is in the Cupertino Museum. Henrietta Marcotte, one of his daughters, is still living. She does a lot of writing. I think she is in her eighties.

HP: The cellar floor to the winery was dirt. The walls were made of rock.

CS: With concrete?

HP: I don't think so. It's just rock and limestone. They were two feet thick.

CS: Here's a question about the cellar. There is obvious archeological evidence that the winery was built at two different times. Does that ring a bell?

HP: Yes. You can see where the two parts are.

CS: I decided that the part farther away from the old homestead house was the older section. Was I right?

HP: Sure. That makes sense.

CS: The date I like for that second section being built is about 1893. The Stortzes like that date too.

HP: That would be close enough.

CS: 1893 would have been the right date so far as the economy was concerned. After that date it would have been very difficult.

TP: Aunt Louise said that they had money in the bank, and they took out \$3,000 to finish the winery. That was grandmother Theresa's sister. And the bank did go belly up after they took the money out.

CS: That's it then. It's perfect. They probably started the project in 1892.

Now, there is a carved cask in the winery. It was there thirty years ago when I first walked in the door. Can you tell me about it?

HP: It came from the St. Louis Fair, didn't it?

EP: I think it came from the Klein winery. We bought it from them. It was a prize.

CS: Klein won it as a prize at the St. Louis Fair in 1904.

EP: Yes.

CS: OK. I have been saying that what people really meant was the Atlanta Fair in 1893, and I know his wines were there, and of course at the Paris Exposition in 1900 where he won the gold medal for his Cabernet. I guess it just didn't get into the press that his wines were at St. Louis. But I've heard it enough now to buy it. And the date makes sense.

HP: But it's just hearsay. We don't know it for a fact.

TP: But that's always what everybody in the family said.

ZP: That's what I always heard, too.

CS: So you probably got that cask around 1911, because that's when Klein leased the place, and I think the family moved off the property to Mountain View.

EP: The Gemellos also bought that property. They owned it for a while.

CS: I knew that John Gemello worked on the Perrone property, so it figures that he might have owned land up here at one time.<sup>3</sup> I wonder if he also worked for Rousten. Was his family up there back then?

HP: Rousten was there as long as I can remember. I was born in 1917. The old man, Charley's dad, owned it for years.

TP: But the Rousten boys were born some other place. I don't think they were born on Monte Bello.

EP: They were born at the other winery down below.

HP: Which one was that?

TP: Doyle.

EP: That's it.

CS: So you all know the name Doyle and John Doyle's winery. That goes way back.<sup>4</sup>

TP: Mr. Rousten worked there for a long time, and I'm pretty sure that his boys were born there.

CS: I never knew that. So old man Rousten worked at the Doyle winery and then bought land up on Monte Bello near Perrone.

TP: He was the one who found that De Anza plaque while he was working at the Doyle place. He gave it to the Doyle family.

HP: And it disappeared.

CS: Robert Reece mentions that in his article in *Cupertino Chronicle*, but gives no information except that a "leaden plate (was) left by the first Spanish expedition. . . ." (I later noted that Bancroft makes no mention of it in his history of the De Anza expedition. TP recalls hearing Louis Stocklmeir, the noted Santa Clara County historian, say that he had seen it as a boy when it was brought to his school.)

TP: I have heard that it is in the Wells Fargo Museum in San Francisco, but I don't know anyone who has seen it.

CS: Doyle died in 1906 but the winery continued to Prohibition under the California Wine Association. The vineyards were sold off. So Rousten was working there in those years and found the plaque. And his sons were born there.

HP: There were the two boys. Mario died early. And there was Charley, who just died not too long ago.<sup>5</sup> Mario was the oldest.

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<sup>3</sup> See Gemello interview.

<sup>4</sup> John T. Doyle (1819-1906) was one of the most important men in the California wine industry between 1880 and 1900. His two wineries in Cupertino were named Las Palmas. He did business as the Cupertino Wine Company. For a more complete history see my *Like Modern Edens*, 50-51. More details can be found in *Cupertino Chronicle*, 10-11, published in 1975 by the California History Center as Local History Study #19. The research papers on file at the Center's library in De Anza College are also useful sources for this and other history related to the Santa Cruz Mountain wine industry. Also: *Pacific Wine & Spirit Review*, 3/27/1885, 5/27/1885; *San Jose Times*, 8/21/1881; *San Jose Herald*, 8/3/1887; *San Jose Mercury*, 8/10/1890.

<sup>5</sup> For his obituary and some local history see *San Jose Mercury*, 3/6/1990.

CS: Did the Roustens own that land on Monte Bello as long as you can remember?

EP: Rousten bought it when he was working at the Doyle place. Then he came up here.

HP: There was also D'Amico down there across from the Doyle place.

CS: Right that was the Monte Vista Winery, Chester D'Amico. I interviewed his son a few years ago concerning the Paul Masson use of his winery there.

TP: But it was part of the Doyle property earlier.

HP: The D'Amico place was across the creek.

CS: Actually it's still there. That condominium complex has the old cellar built right into it. There is a kind of patio and open space right on top of the roof. But years ago, up into the sixties, I can remember the winery sitting there at the bend of McClellan Road.

TP: I can remember seeing the warehouses at the Doyle place in my time. That would have been in the forties.

CS: How about the winery itself.

HP: There's a house built right on top of the old Doyle winery foundation. You could see it today if you drove down Palm Drive, down that line of Palm trees that are still there.

EP: It would be to the right at the end. Turn to the right going toward McClellan; it was about half way.

HP: A long time ago, when we had out prune pickers stay here, a lot of them would stay right in the top end of that winery, the Las Palmas Winery.

CS: Could you be thinking of the old Richard Heney place off Foothill?

ZP: No, no. I used to live right across the street from the old Heney place.

CS: I came by there the day they knocked the old Heney home down, in the early sixties, and picked up a sign, in perfect condition, professionally painted. "WINE GRAPES FOR SALE-- Apply at the tank house." And the telephone number. I take it out and put it up next to my front door when we have wine tastings.

Paul Masson used that place for a while, to bottle red table wines. All that, there and at the D'Amico place, ended when they opened the big cellars on Saratoga Road in 1959.

ZP: That was all vineyard over there at the Heney place for years. That was in the forties and fifties.

HP: They went all the way down to the railroad tracks.

CS: And then they made it into a pet cemetery.

HP: I remember Mrs. Heney; she used to come up to the ranch.<sup>6</sup> She used to wear leggings and boots and smoke cigarettes, and used strong language.

CS: Let's go back to the winery now. We've really gone far afield, but it was worth it.

Where was the crusher at the winery?

HP: To the east of the winery, at the press house.

CS: We'll get to that. Ron has the motor running and its all restored.

HP: I ran that motor plenty of times. I cranked that until I was blue in the face.

CS: Were there fifty gallon barrels in the cellar?

HP: Yes. The tanks were on both sides against the walls, and in the center they had the smaller barrels. We kept wine in those barrels. They'd bring wine down from the 6,000 to the 1,000 gallon casks, and then to fifty gallon barrels. And there were 150 gallon barrels as well. When we were growing up most of the wine was sold retail at the winery. We did sell some wholesale, but not a lot.

CS: Let's go upstairs in the winery. As early as you can remember, what was it used for?

HP: As early as I can remember we dried the prunes, and before we had the big dehydrator, they were sun dried. So they might have had 20-30 tons of dried prunes in the building. They were in bulk and then we'd sack them and Cali Brothers<sup>7</sup> would come up by truck and haul them down to Sunsweet or whoever we sold to.

CS: Anything else up there on the top floor.

TP: Parties.

HP: Right. I got married there. We'd clear it off and decorate it. But it was mainly for fruit storage, and empty boxes and trays.

In our time we don't remember anything going on up there that had to do with winemaking. The crusher was always in the building next door.

CS: But it's clear that when the winery was built that they meant to ferment up there. Then they must have changed their minds.

Did Ron replace the original roof?

HP: Yes, that was the original roof.

CS: Let's go next door to the fermenting building.

HP: There was the fermenting room and then the press room right next to it. There were three presses in the press room. There were seven fermenting tanks in the fermenting room.

CS: Take the grapes as they come in and go through the process.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Heney's Chateau Ricardo was one of the major wineries in the Cupertino district. Richard was the brother of Francis Heney, the noted California politician who handled the San Francisco graft trials in 1907. He built his winery in 1890. After his death in 1919 the property remained in family hands for many years. *Pacific Wine & Spirit Review*, 8/15/1890, 5/31/1902; *San Jose Mercury* 4/27/1923.

<sup>7</sup> For the story of R. Cali & Bro.'s feed store see *Cupertino Chronicle*, 64-73.

HP: There was a road around the back of the winery. You came around the corner of the winery, and you saw the crusher up above, with a gasoline motor down below to run it. Then there was a conveyer up to the crusher.

CS: Did the box or just the grapes go up the belt?

HP: Just the grapes. There was a table there where you dumped the grapes, and then you pushed them on up the conveyer. And we'd more or less sort the grapes out and take out anything we didn't want to go into the crusher. I remember doing that.

CS: That's good to know. That's a quality control thing. Must places did not go through that sorting process. If it came in in the picking box, it usually went right into the crusher.  
Did you ever have to weigh the grapes before you dumped them?

HP: No, not in my years there.

TP: We did buy grapes, but they'd be weighed at the other end. We got grapes from the Villa Maria<sup>6</sup> and harvested those.

HP: Well, yes, we harvested them ourselves. They were our grapes. We leased the vineyard and took care of them ourselves.

CS: Do you ever remember seeing the little winery down there used as a winery?

HP: The last thing I remember was seeing it used as a place to raise mushrooms.

CS: And later a stable. Buck Norrad Stable was there; that was in the late sixties.<sup>1</sup> They had stalls there then.  
Where was the Villa Maria vineyard.

HP: You know where the park is today. That whole hillside was once vineyard.

EP: Up above there from the park was all grapes. Even across Stevens Creek Road. I used to plow that vineyard with a horse.

CS: When was that?

EP: Maybe the late thirties.

TP: You went to war and then you didn't do it anymore, so it must have been then.

HP: I think that's right.

TP: That road there today is fairly new. The road used to go down below. The vineyard went right up the hill.

CS: But your point is that even where Stevens Creek Road is today, the vines went up above that.

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<sup>6</sup> The College of Santa Clara bought a 320 acre tract of land above Stevens Creek for a retreat and vineyard in 1870. It was called Villa Maria. At its height the vineyard amounted to about 100 acres. In 1888 a small winery was built there to produce sacramental wine, and commercial wine to raise money for the College. In the forties the vineyard was leased. Later the winery was a stable. *Wines & Vines* 3/1/1923; *Pacific Wine & Spirit Review*, 5/11/1888; *San Jose Mercury*, 2/3/1881; *San Jose Herald*, 8/3/1887.

HP: That's right.

CS: I had no idea that the vineyards of the College were that extensive. But they did have a still on the place to make brandy to fortify the sweet wines. It was listed in the industry directory, but I think the capacity was quite small.<sup>9</sup>

But the important thing is that the Villa Maria vines were going and producing through the 1930s and into the 1940s.

HP: We're still in the winery, aren't we, or the pressing room.

CS: Right, talking about grape sources. Any others. Rousten?

HP: No. But we did lease that other place up there, where the real estate man was. That was the old Fisher place.

TP: You mean Short, don't you?

CS: William Short sold the old Mikulaco place to the Ridge partners.

HP: Well, it was right below that.

CS: The Ridge tasting room is the old Mikulaco winery. But when you say that family planted grapes in 1981, you're talking about the land down below there.

HP: Now I have it. It wasn't the Fisher place. It was straight on down the hill from where the Mikulaco vines are today. It was owned by a pair we called Strubb and Wood. It was their vacation place. We worked the property and took the grapes. I suppose they had about ten acres.

CS: So there are a lot of vines up there. Short has his, Rousten, this place -- Strubb and Wood-- and then the vines up at the Perrone place.

Did you ever buy any grapes from Mr. Short?

HP: No.

CS: I wonder what he did with those grapes. I suspect he did make some wine for himself.

TP: He did make some wine.

CS: Any other sources.

TP: I remember my father-in-law buying grapes in the south county. Elio would drive his dada down there to pick up the grapes. I also remember one time when they sold to somebody else because they got a better price, and John said "you could have offered them to me at that price." He was very disappointed. That was in the fifties.

CS: Ok, let's go back now that we have all these grape sources down. I think we had them on the table, sorted, and going up the conveyer.

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<sup>9</sup> 193 gallon capacity. *Like Modern Edens*, 136.

HP: They'd be crushed, the stems out at one end, and the crushed grapes would go into a flume. Below there were seven fermenting tanks and you could take the flume and run them to any one of them. It was a kind of trough made out of redwood; the sides were maybe eight inches high, maybe higher, and about a foot wide. My brother has them in his yard over in Hollister; he uses them for planters.

CS: Were these always open fermenters?

EP: Yes, and we had lids for them.

HP: And we had wooden plungers to punch down the cap while it was fermenting.

EP: We would put the lids on them and nail them on. Then you didn't have to do that. Then we'd pump over the top later from the bottom.

CS: Did you ever have anything down in the fermenter to hold the cap down? We call it a submerged cap today.

EP: No, nothing like that.

CS: This is red wine. What about white wine?

ZP: There was good Sauterne. That was delicious wine.

EP: We'd crush into the tank and then draw the juice off. Then the crushed red wine grapes went on top of that.

CS: Right, never waste good pomace. Where did you finish the fermentation for the white wine?

EP: Into puncheons in the pressing room.

CS: So it was really barrel fermented, and there was no press wine in it.

ZP: What a wonderful wine that was. You can't buy a wine that tastes like that anymore.

CS: What kind of grapes went into the Sauterne?

HP: Golden Shasta.<sup>10</sup>

CS: Now you can solve a mystery for me. The red wine is in the fermenter. You press the pulp. How did you get it over to the press?

HP: Pans. Somebody in the tank would shovel it out.

CS: You didn't have a way to convey it over to the presses.

HP: We carried it over. There would be one man on the catwalk around the fermenter, too.

CS: That would be where you punched the cap from, also.

TP: It was really hard work.

<sup>10</sup>This was a local term for the Golden Chasselas, which in fact was the Spanish Palomino.



TP: It was really hard work.

CS: I would have figured out some overhead way of getting it to the presses. You did it for the hay going into the barn, which we'll talk about later.  
Ok, you're running the presses, ratchet type, right? strictly muscle.

HP: Later on we got two hydraulic jacks to supply the power.

CS: Where does the juice go?

HP: It drains into a cut half-fifty gallon barrel. Then we have a hose that goes into the cellar of the main winery.

CS: How does the hose get into the winery? I can't find it. Surely you didn't send it down the hill and through the front door and then back up into a tank.

HP: There are holes on the side of the winery; you'll see them. We had a lot of hose.

CS: Is that what they were for? I thought they were for ventilation. I told Ron there had to be some underground pipes, but now I see.  
Do you think they did it that way in 1900? You would still have to pump it.

HP: It would be a hand pump. Later we had a gas pump. Mostly we used that for racking.

CS: Right. He's restored it and it works again. It should be in a museum.  
Where did the cake from the press go?

HP: We dumped that out in the ditch behind the winery.

CS: That's it. No water and sugar and a little more fermentation. Second wine, grappa?

HP: Well, yes back when they had the still, but that was in the old days. I don't remember that.

CS: So, let's go over to the distillery now. In you time they called it. . . .

TP: The blacksmith shop. And there was also a big hole there where you could drive vehicles up and work on them from underneath.

HP: They worked on the tractors there. They'd change the oil, or whatever.

CS: But why did they call it a blacksmith shop?

HP: That's where we shod the horses. We had two forges. And we had about four teams of horses, eight work horses, and they had to be shod here. We had a fellow from Santa Clara named Adolph Verdier come up and he did it. He was a Frenchman. He would "hot-shoe" the horses. Now it's always "cold-shoe." He'd put them on the forge and shape them up, red hot. Sometimes he had to throw a horse down to do it. And they'd fix the plow shares there. They'd fix hoses and make knives and other tools.  
It was a distillery, to begin with.

CS: Did you ever see the still working? Was it in there when you were boys?

HP: It was complete, but I never saw it run.

CS: You were born in 1917. Maybe, when you were about ten years old, didn't you ever hear about it running, or maybe smell something?

HP: I know what you're getting at. You're a revenue man. (Everybody laughs.)

CS: I'm trying to get some grappa made, in the twenties. So, when you tell me how the still was used, you're telling me what other people told you.

HP: That's right.

EP: My father told me about using the pulp to make brandy.

CS: You never heard he did it occasionally?

EP: No, not at all.

TP: They were really afraid of the Internal Revenue people. John got stomach ulcers worrying about them. We would not allow anything illegal. All the Picchettis were that way; they were really law-abiding folks.

CS: He's not a tough guy.

TP: No, not at all.

CS: Well, there were stills chugging all through the hills here. It wasn't like doing anything outrageous. Lots of people thought Prohibition was too dumb a law even to consider. Antone Nichelini, in Napa, used to say that paying the fines was just another business expense during Prohibition. He couldn't believe that Prohibition was meant to put him out of business. He paid a lot of fines.

HP: I can remember seeing a car go down this hill with revenooers in it and a still tied behind the car.

But I've never seen a still working here, anyplace on the hill, myself. But I know they were here and working. I'd say there were three or four here.

ZP: The Slovenians here made a lot of Slivovitz, prune brandy, back in those days. I recall those little stills. Lots of people had them.

CS: How could they not in prune country like this?

Let's do the stable now.

HP: On both sides there were stalls. There were seven or eight stalls on each side. In the center was the hay barn. We used to raise hay. We'd cut it and bring it down. We had an overhead Jackson fork at the back end of the barn. At the front end there was a cable that pulled the fork along the full length of the barn. At the other end we had a horse that would pull on the cable and we'd bring the hay in that way.

CS: That's exactly the way Ron Stortz explained it, and I don't get it. Why didn't you just bring the hay in the door and unload it?

HP: You had to bring it all the way to the back of the barn. You couldn't do it that way. This way

HP: You had to bring it all the way to the back of the barn. You couldn't do it that way. This way you bring it all the way back, pull the rope, and it dumped the hay. Then there were two men in there, and they'd throw it to one side and another.

TP: The hay would be piled to the roof. You couldn't just haul it in in a wagon or truck. How would you do it?

HP: You back the truck in and then unload it with the fork. And there was about an eight foot fall where the truck would come in, so it couldn't come in all the way. But even without the drop, I don't know how you could get it up as high as we did with that fork, twenty feet in the air.

CS: I think I'm getting it now. How about the tack room?

HP: That came later. Just before the war a riding academy, and that's when we built the tack room. The stable man slept there and he took care of the horses.

CS: How about the garage?

HP: I don't remember when it was built.

EP: They got the material from Fort Fremont, after the World War I.<sup>11</sup> They got the building materials there, near Palo Alto.

CS: Can you ever remember when they were not there?

EP and HP: No.

CS: When you were young, what were the garages used for?

HP: The first section, up toward the big barn. That was our salami room.

ZP: The smoke room.

HP: We'd kill two pigs every year and a steer. But they didn't really smoke in there. There was a stove to heat it and keep it at a certain temperature, but there was no smoke in the room. If you look up on the sides you'll see all these little nails, where they hang the salami.

Your were asking about the top floor of the winery; that's where they made salami. They had a long table there and they'd mix all the ingredients up and they would make the salami. And they'd make head cheese and cotechino (pork sausage), from the skin of the pig. They'd grind it up with other meat. And they'd make wonderful mortadella, and salamini.

CS: Was all this for the family or were you selling it?

HP: Just for the family.

TP: There would be a year's supply.

HP: And then there'd be the big slabs of salt pork.

TP: And they made pancetta and prosciutto.

HP: The next section to the north was for two cars. That was open. It could be for cars or trucks.

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<sup>11</sup> See Sunrise interview.

garage, and each one had a separate door. This was for the family cars. The tractors were around the back. We usually had two of them.

Then there was an open part of the building, which was the woodshed.

CS: Could you get enough wood off the property to take care of the family for the whole winter?

HP: Yes. No problem. When I was a kid it was all wood stoves.

TP: Mother always cooked with a wood stove, even after we had electric stoves here.

CS: About horses. How long did they last?

HP: In the vineyard that was all we could use. We couldn't get a tractor through there. The vines were too close together. And it was too steep anyway for a tractor.

TP: The last two work horses, we put them out to pasture, they were so old, that was in the early sixties. They died from old age.

CS: There was this other building that was going to be a house but never was. Ron showed me an old photograph with it and it does look like the main house from the outside.

TP: It was never finished.

HP: The park people tore it down, but it was ready to fall over.

CS: But the main house wasn't about to fall down. I thought they were built the same.

HP: There was so much open space at the bottom. When we were kids we put the old prune trays on the upper level in there. The bottom was for a hay wagon. And we kept a manure spreader in there. And there was hay for the cows. It was just a barn.

CS: What was the wash house used for, where Ron has his office now?

HP: Washing, just as you said.

TP: But they canned out there. And they used to make the bread there. There was a big bread oven in there.

ZP: And they had the creamer in there, didn't they?

CS: Yes, and Ron thought they made cheese there.

HP: Yes, no question, my mother did.

TP: And butter.

CS: What kind of cheeses?

HP: I don't know what their names were. They looked like Monterey Jack. It didn't get very hard. We used to store it under the old house, the homestead house, in the dirt cellar down there. There were shelves down there. And that's where we had our vinegar barrel, too.

CS: Let's go to the two houses now. How was the old house used when you were young?

HP: We had two rooms at the bottom. We had workers who lived there.

TP: And there was a kitchen there between that and the winery. The upstairs, that's where the workmen lived, when the family was living downstairs.

CS: So it was used pretty continuously?

HP: Yes. And they added a little place later on.

CS: How about the aviary outside.

HP: Elio's father was the bird man. They had a lot of canaries. There were birds in there until we sold the ranch.

CS: I remember birds in there in the early sixties.

TP: Elio's father was trying to breed a blue canary. He finally got a green one, but he never got a blue one.

CS: Before we go into the main house, tell me about its cellar.

HP: It was original, the wine cellar.

TP: It was built in two sections. The first was in 1885, and the addition was put in in the early nineties.

HP: The wine cellar was on the old house.

TP: And the addition had the food storage cellar.

HP: There was an incline to get into the wine cellar. They had planks to roll barrels down.

CS: Were there ever any kind of rails to run carts down on?

HP: No, nothing like that. We'd just roll the barrels up and down. And then there were these 800-1,000 gallon tanks. That was the original winery. Then later they built the big one. That was in 1885. Antone and John were born down at Villa Maria, in 1884 and 1886. They were clearing the land then; they weren't making any wine before then.

CS: So, when they built the house they built it with a cellar and the first wine goes under there. I wonder if those casks in there now, were they the original ones that went in.

HP: I guess so. But we sold a couple of them.

CS: Let's go upstairs to the main house.

TP: The first part of the house that was built, that was four rooms. Downstairs there was the kitchen and the dining room, what was later used as an office. But Ron thinks that it once might have been a kitchen, because they found chimney going out of there. Then there was what we called the pantry was where they prepared the food. There were two bedrooms and upstairs there were four bedrooms. Then they added the second part and they built a bathroom, a nice big hall, two more

bathrooms, and a storage room that was made into a bedroom for Irene.

CS: You mean in 1893 they had an inside, upstairs bathroom?

TP: Yes. They did.

CS: How did the water work? Where would the pressure come from?

HP: There was a tank way up on the hill. It was way up above the winery.

TP: There were also two bedrooms. And there was a trunk room, originally, where they stored things. Downstairs in that new section were the kitchen and dining room.

CS: Is that where the workers would eat?

TP: Yes. There was a long table there where they would eat. They had as many as eighteen workmen on the place and they fed them.

Then in the front, the front dining room, where there was an office, there was a dining room table and chairs and when the revenue man came, they always came just before lunch, they fed them in that room.

CS: Let's go outdoors. What was this huge cover over the area out in front?

TP: That was the picnic area. There was a big oak tree there. . . .

HP: But later on the tree died and they cut it down. And Dick Garrod and I went over to La Honda and cut down redwood trees and made this area by the fish pond a covered area. We used them redwood as posts supporting the cover and had wisteria planted all over it. And we used drying trays for the cover. It went just up to the edge of the fountain.

TP: It was just the width of the house. Later a big wind came up and blew it over. Then we had a smaller one built.

CS: Is the barbecue old?

TP: No, maybe forty, fifty years old.

CS: Was that really a bocce ball court up above the old house, or was that just a place where people played bocce ball?

HP: It was a real court, but nothing like what they have today.

TP: And no one would go in there with a truck; there was no driving in there.

CS: Good. Well, I think we've covered the property. This interview will fit perfectly with the Sunrise Interview III, where they go over everything as they found it and then tell how they changed it or restored it.

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October 19, 1993

CS: This session I want to talk about the process of selling the Picchetti Ranch to the Mid-Peninsula Regional Park District.

HP: After my father died (1949) and Elio's (1962) we had quite a bit of wine in the cellar. We still had the prunes and the apricots, and Elio was on the ranch. And then this valley ran out of prune orchards. So we didn't have dehydrators anymore available. We used to take our prunes down to Wolfe road, to Sunsweet. And then they closed that down. So Elio then had to take the prunes down from here to Morgan Hill. And there was also a big slump in the price of prunes. And the grapes we still had to work with horses because the rows were so close. And grape price were also poor at that time.

CS: Where are we in time at that point?

TP: Late sixties, and early seventies.

HP: It was really hard to make anything out of the ranch. Instead of making money we were going into the hole every year. So we decided that the best thing to do was to sell the ranch.

CS: At that point in time was the ranch pretty much the way we left it last session? Had you sold off any land?

TP: We had sold that 30 acres to Voss down below, near the quarry.

Remember their mothers were getting on in years (Anita [1885-1984] and Josephine [1902-1986]). And, of course, they were the owners of the property.

CS: Were they both living on the property then?

HP: Yes.

CS: Was there anyone else living there then?

HP: Elio came down every day.

TP: And after Uncle Hector's mother died (Theresa, 1859 - 1949) he lived there too. He was also in the house until he died in 1969.

CS: So, do the ladies live there til the end, in 1977?

TP: Yes.

ZP: Hector's mother left earlier. She was at Our Lady of Fatima nursing home. She was there for fifteen years.

CS: So she left in 1969, the year that Hector died.

TP: Josephine stayed on until the first couple of months in 1977. And Aldo is there until 1977 also.

HP: The property was sold in December 1976.

CS: And Elio is working the ranch right up until the end. What are you doing? The grapes going to Ridge.

TP: The winery closed in 1973.

EP: We were still doing prunes and pears.

TP: And we still had some cattle.

HP: And we had the horses. We were boarding horses for the last few years.

CS: What was the last year that you made wine with Picchetti grapes?

TP: 1963. Elio made wine one year after Papa died (John, in 1962).

CS: And then Ridge buys grapes the next year, 1964.<sup>12</sup> Was there any time then that you were selling grapes to anyone other than Ridge?

HP: We weren't really selling them the grapes. They were leasing the property and took the crop. But I don't think you sold grapes to anyone else then.

CS: So at that point you weren't making any money on the place. How did you get by?

TP: I went to work to help keep our household running.

HP: I was working at the cannery in Monte Vista. Elio was working the ranch. But I was putting money into the ranch.

CS: When you sold the place, did you sell the whole thing.

HP: We sold everything below the road here. There were 208 acres that we sold to Mid-Peninsula. And we kept this parcel from the road up to here. It was about thirty acres, maybe a little more. When my father died we had sold 200 acres above the road here, but I think we got that on the tape earlier.

CS: Were the wines all sold by 1973?

TP: There might have been some left, but very little. Just for family consumption.

CS: Were your mothers involved in the decision to sell? since they were really the owners.

HP: Sure. They understood it wasn't making it any more.

CS: Did you try to sell it to anyone other than the Park District first?

HP: We had it up for sale. There was an outfit in Los Angeles that flew up.

TP: And there was a syndicate from New York. But they didn't like the quarry down there. They wanted to put in expensive homes, and a golf course, and they didn't think that people who were going to pay that kind of money for a house would want to look out and see a quarry.

We started talking about it after Hector's moth left the ranch. And there were two families involved. But it really was time to sell it.

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<sup>12</sup> See Ridge interviews.



CS: How was the connection made with the Park District?

TP: We had it with a real estate company.

HP: And they talked to the Park District.

CS: So by then that's the direction it goes. There aren't others trying to get it.

TP: I had been at a meeting of the District at the Montebello School and they said that they said that they had their eye on our property for years. In fact, they thought we were going to donate it to them.

ZP: Well, you did donate \$100,000 didn't you?

HP: I guess so. It depends on how you look at it. They gave us a price and then they had it estimated afterwards, and it was \$100,000 higher.

CS: So you got the original money, but the difference in value was a donation.

HP: Yes, that was it.

CS: How long did the process of the sale take? And were there any dramatic stories along the way?

HP: No, there wasn't much excitement.

TP: They had threatened to condemn it.

CS: Yes, under eminent domain; they could do that but they would have had to pay you the fair market value determined by a jury. But then you have to pay a lawyer a piece of it.  
But I was expecting some interesting stories, from suggestions that others had made to me. But I had never heard anything concrete.

CS: How did the transfer take place?

HP: We signed the papers and they gave us a down-payment and then they paid off the rest later on. It went to the two mothers, and later the two families.

CS: How much did they get?

HP: \$500,000. But we just couldn't sell it on the open market.

ZP: Everybody said they got it for a song.

CS: It doesn't seem like much. When you correct that amount for inflation in terms of constant dollars, that \$500,000 would be \$1,215,000. But still, that was a deal for the District. I could raise that amount in 48 hours today if someone would sell it to me.

TP: It wasn't too interesting, but it was a very sad time. It was very hard on everybody in the family. Everyone was heartbroken to give up the ranch, especially Elio. And they said that it was going to be restored as a working farm, but it never has happened.

CS: But it's still there. The structures are in good shape again. It looks very much the way it was

golf course on it, I don't think so. Are you happy with what they've done with the buildings so far?

HP: I'm happy with what they did with them. I don't think there was much to be saved from what was the old dehydrator. We'd already pretty much knocked that down. Same with the sulfuring shed. I believe what they've done so far, they've done a good job on it. They did a good job on the winery, the fermenting rooms, and the barn. The main house is another matter.

ZP: My daughter cried when she came out the first time. It wasn't anything like what it was.

HP: Well, that's normal. That was going to be changed.

ZP: Well, some of us feel differently.

CS: They really need to fix up the front of the house on the outside. I think it is in very poor shape.

HP: Toward the fish pond. I'll say so. But I think they'll do it in time.

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