

Vines to Wine:

A History of our Local Vineyards and Wineries

At the Forbes Mill History Museum, Los Gatos

The vineyards and wineries of the Santa Clara Valley and Santa Cruz Mountains have been pivotal to the California wine industry for 200 years. In the boom years of the 1890s, 12,000 acres of vineyards stretched from the Almaden Valley to Cupertino and northward in the Santa Clara Valley. An additional 2000 acres spread upwards into the Santa Cruz Mountains. Through the decades, the local wine industry has gone through booms and busts along with the economic fortunes of the times, temperance, prohibition, and changes in public tastes. Vineyards have waxed and waned with bounty, disease, misfortune, and suburbanization. Today, there are about 1500 acres of winegrapes and over 70 bonded wineries in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and 37 in the Santa Clara Valley. Over the past two centuries, both regions have been tremendously influential in the creation of today's premium wines through improved viticultural techniques and emphasis on premium winegrapes and wines. These local vineyards and artisan wineries are largely family-owned, as many were a century ago, and are an important part of the economic livelihood and fabric of the community. Additionally, there are many home winemakers who make wine for personal consumption.

This exhibit at the Forbes Mill Museum commemorates the history of our local wine and viticultural heritage, its colorful and influential personalities, and the legacy that continues today with our local wineries. The region surrounding Los Gatos has been home to some of the most important wineries and vintners in California's history, and many more whose impact is still felt today. The exhibit traces the influence of the many French, German, and Italian immigrants to the

'Valley of Heart's Delight' and its surrounding mountain communities, starting with the founding of Mission Santa Clara and extending into the modern period. Featured vintners from the 1800s include: Charles LeFranc, founder of Almaden Winery; Paul Masson, founder of the champagne house under his name (now home to the Mountain Winery); the Novitiate Winery in Los Gatos founded by the Jesuits, and many others. From the 1900s, notable vintners include: Peter Lint in Los Gatos, who won a Grand Prize at the Panama Pacific Exposition in 1915; and Martin Ray, whose innovation and legacy pushed vintners to improve wine quality to its current high standards. More recently, a group of local winemakers who have predominated the modern era who have helped define the Santa Cruz Mountains and Santa Clara Valley as premium winegrape growing regions producing world-class wines.



The Los Gatos Cooperative Winery, circa 1889. The winery was producing 300,000 gallons of wine by 1889, mostly from vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and was Santa Clara County's largest winery at the time. Photo courtesy Los Gatos Public Library and The Museums of Los Gatos.

The Museum exhibit opens the weekend of June 13 with a preview focusing on the history of The Novitiate Winery in Los Gatos, with artifacts and photos from the archives at Santa Clara University. The Grand Opening for the full exhibit will be July 19, 1-4:00pm, with wine tasting featuring local wineries. The exhibit will continue through the end of the year. On July 11 and August 8, local wineries will provide wine tasting as part of the 2nd Saturdays in Los Gatos. The exhibit will run through the end of the year. Hours are Wed.-Sun., 12-4:00.