ALMADÉN VINEYARDS
1530 BLOSSOM HILL ROAD, SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA 95118 (408) 269-1312

KLAUS P. MATHES
VICE PRESIDENT — WINEMASTER

December 2, 1982

Mr. Richard Mascolo
Chief of Research and Regulations Branch
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Washington, D.C. 20226

Dear Sir:

SUBJECT: Petition for Establishment of SAN BENITO as a Viticultural Area

In conjunction with the provisions of 27 CFR §§4.25a(e)(2), Almadén Vineyards hereby petitions for the establishment of SAN BENITO as a viticultural area as detailed in the following paragraphs:

I. Evidence that the area is known:

The area, SAN BENITO, sought to be designated is located in unincorporated San Benito County, California. History for this area dates back to the 1700's and the county itself was organized in 1874[1]. The SAN BENITO area was openly roamed by the outlaw, Tiburcio Vasques, and the robberies and murders attributed to Vasques are an integral part of the history of this region[2]. Vineyards were planted in this area in the 1850's in both the Paicines and Cienega areas and includes the acreage purchased in 1883 by William Palmtag from Theophile Vache. Under the name of San Benito Vineyards, quality wines were produced and won prizes at fairs and expositions in France and Italy[3]. Many of the plantings were from cuttings provided by Professor Frederick Bioletti, head of the Viticulture Department of the University of California as early as 1907. When Prohibition was in effect, wine grapes from this area were shipped to the Eastern markets and at the close of the Dry Era in 1935, the San Benito Vineyards property was rehabilitated and again operated as a winery. Small wineries started to spring up within the general area until they reached a high of 1,765 acres in 1948[4]. Today there is approximately 4,223 acres of vineyards within the boundaries herein petitioned to be SAN BENITO, or 94.7% of all vinifera grapes grown in San Benito County. Major wineries within this area are Almadén Vineyards, Enz Vineyards, and Calera Wine Company. There are approximately 23 different varieties of wine grapes grown within this area, namely, Burger, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Gewürztraminer, Grey Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Sylvaner,

Johannisberg Riesling, Folle Blanche, Veltliner, Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay Beaujolais, Grenache, Pinot Noir, Tinta Madeira, Zinfandel, Palomino, Sauvignon Vert, Carignane, Pinot St. George, and Cabernet Pfeffer. Reference is made to the vineyards located within the petitioned SAN BENITO area on Almadén's wine labels ranging from the Blanc de Blanc Champagne of 1959, and the Vintage 1975 Special Selection SAN BENITO Pinot Chardonnay, up through today (See Attachment 1).

II. Boundaries:

The proposed area is outlined in blue on the U.S.G.S. 7.5-minute series topographic maps attached as Attachment 2 comprised of Hollister Quadrangle, Tres Pinos Quadrangle, Quin Sabe Valley Quadrangle, Mt. Harlan Quadrangle, Paicines Quadrangle, and Cherry Peak Quadrangle, and the vineyards are traced in yellow. The requested SAN BENITO area is comprised of approximately 45,000 acres. This area is located at the base of the Gabilan Mountain Range which rises to 3,274 feet and forms a boundary line between San Benito County and Monterey County. The San Benito River runs diagonally through this area as does the San Andreas earthquake fault line. The region is about 17 miles north of Pinnacles National Monument and Park and approximately 2 miles south of the town of Hollister, the San Juan Valley and the Flint Hills. The San Luis Dam and Pacheco are on the northeast side; on the eastern edge is the Panoche Valley and New Idria with its' history of quicksilver mines.

The specific foundaries are as follows:-
POINT OF BEGINNING:-The Southeastern-most corner at 36°37'30", Township 15 South, Range 7 East, Section 17 and traveling West to Township 15 South, Range 6 East/Range 7 East, Section 18, West border; thence North to Township 15 South, Range 6 East/Range 7 East, Section 1, South border; thence West to Township 15 South, Range 6 East, Section 1, West border; thence North to 800-foot elevation and traveling North-Northwest to Township 14 South/Township 15 South, Range 6 East, Section 35, South border; thence West on Township 14 South/Township 15 South to the 1200-foot elevation; thence following the 1200-foot elevation in a generally Northwestern direction, crossing Thompson Canyon, Harlan Mountain Road, and Indian Canyon to where it intersects with the North boundary of Township 14 South, Range 5 East, Section 10; following this boundary line in a Northwest direction to where this boundary intersects with the 1600-foot elevation; thence following the 1600-foot elevation in a generally Northern direction to where it intersects with the unimproved road; thereby looping Southward and continuing in an Easterly direction to the designated "Spring", thence crossing Bonanza Gulch, and continuing on the unimproved road in a Northeast direction parallel with the gulch to Cienega Road; thence in a straight line Northeast, crossing Bird Creek and the San Benito River to the Northeast corner of Township 13, Range 5 East/ Range 6 East, Section 19; thence in a straight line East, crossing Airline Highway, Quin Sabe Road and Santa Anita Road to the Township 13 South, Range 6 East/Range 7 East line; thence South along the Range 6 East/Range 7 East line to the intersection of Township 13 South/Township 14 South, Range 6 East/Range 7 East; thence following

the Township 13 East/Township East line East to the Northeast corner of Township 13 South/Township 14 South, Range 7 East, Section 6; thence South along the Eastern boundary of Township 14 South, Range 7 East, Section 6; thence in a straight line South to the Northwest corner of Township 14 South, Range 7 East, Section 20; thence East to the Northeast corner of Township 14 South, Range 7 East, Section 20; thence in a straight line South, crossing Tres Pinos Creek and Panoche Road to the POINT OF BEGINNING at the Southeastern-most corner at 36°37'30", Township 15 South, Range 7 East, Section 17.

III. Geographical Features:

Sea fossils are often found along the edge of the San Benito River which bisects this area. The San Andreas earthquake fault, which also bisects this area, is a source of continual study by geological survey teams. Vegetation is live oaks, white oaks, coyote brush, chaparral brush, poison oak and also the Coulter pine. The terrain is extremely hilly to mountainous and the elevation ranges from 500 feet to well over 1,500 feet. As per 53 years of records, rainfall averages 15.29 inches. The 10-year average temperature ranges from 2861° days to around 2750° days between the northern and southern portion of the petitioned area. In spring, relative humidity averages 60 to 75 percent at night and 40 to 50 percent during the day. Summers are generally quite dry; the average relative humidity in the daytime being 20 to 25 percent. In fall, readings of 45 to 60 percent are common at night, but during the day the readings range from 30 to 50 percent. There is some dry farming, and some irrigation from runoff from the Gabilan Mountains. The flood plains and alluvial fans are Sorrento-Yolo-Mocho and Clear Lake-Pacheco-Williams. The soil associations on the uplands are the San Benito-Gazos-Linne association and the Sheridan-Cineba-Auberry association (as per the Soil Survery of San Benito County). In general there is good water holding capacity and the root depth ranges from medium to quite deep. There are some sandy alluvial fans and terrace escarpments with rapid runoff.

This area is in a wind tunnel of cool ocean air flowing to the San Joaquin Valley and is often blanketed by fog which burns off generally by mid-morning.

In 1893 a prediction was made that the vineyards of the future in California would be established in this area. This forecast has proven to be true as evidenced by the hundreds of acres of vineyards planted with numerous varieties of grapes. Coolness and variety hold a great deal of importance in the production of fine wines, and this area ranks among the best regions in both climate and soil which produces, over the years, these fine quality wines of distinct character. The adjacent mountain range and the cool ocean air that comes into this area each day help create an ideal micro-climate for the production of fine, distinguished-quality grapes, thus creating a distinct difference from the wines produced further north in the Santa Clara Valley or further south in the Pinnacles.

Since this area is unique in its' climate and soil composition, and there is a marked influence on the grapes and, henceforth, on the wine, we, therefore, request your consideration of SAN BENITO as a distinct viticultural appellation.

Respectfully submitted,

Klaus P. Mathes

/bjo

Attachments

## REFERENCES


1. Evening Free Lance (Purblisher), Crimes and Career of Tiburcio Vasques (Hollister, California 1927), 40 pp.

2. San Benito County Historical Society, Crimes and Career of Tiburcio Vasques (Hollister, California Reproduced 1976) 40 pp.

3. Ohrwall, John - A History of Vineyards and Wineries in San Benito County. As presented to the San Benito County Historical Society, July 29, 1965. Reproduced by San Benito County Farm Advisors Office, March, 1976.

4. Evening Free Lance, Hollister, California August 10, 1965

ALMADÉN VINEYARDS

KLAUS P. MATHES
VICE-PRESIDENT
WINEMASTER

August 10, 1984

Mr. Charles Bacon
FAA, Wine and Beer Branch
Department of the Treasury
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Washington, D.C. 20226

Dear Mr. Bacon:

This memo is in response to Mr. Thomas George's letter dated June 21, 1984 (C:R:F:JPG) and Mr. Richard A. Mascolo's memo dated January 19, 1983 (R:R:R:JPJ) requesting more information regarding the petition by Almaden Vineyards for the establishment of SAN BENITO as a viticultural area.

A. Climate

The reason this area was selected and found unique was that the fog which is drawn in through the Monterey Bay funnel during the vegetation period growing season in summer quite often reaches the city of Hollister, but infrequently penetrates the proposed viticultural area of SAN BENITO. The fog surrounding the city of Hollister, and west to San Juan Bautista, does not burn off quickly in the morning, and thereby creates a cooler climate which is evidenced by the abundance of vegetables and row crops planted in this area. Within the outlined area of SAN BENITO, surrounded by a higher mountain range, a lower elevation valley extends itself from the Pacific Ocean in a southeasterly direction towards the San Joaquin Valley which is known as a warmer region. However, when the San Joaquin valley air temperatures rise during the day a natural vacuum is created which must be filled with cooler air. One of the valleys which allow the cooler air flow towards the San Joaquin valley is the area within the region of SAN BENITO. Because of this, the climate changes and creates the uniqueness of this area. When Almaden Vineyards sold some of their vineyards in San Jose and was in the process of purchasing well-suited vineyard land to grow fine varietal grapes, the area outlined as SAN BENITO was selected as ideal for this purpose. Assistance at this time in selecting this particular land was provided by Viticulturist, Professor Winkler, of the University of California, Davis, California.

Reference to the rainfall and humidity is as per the University of Davis system of heat summation by degree-days, and also records kept at Almaden's vineyards operations office. We have also interviewed local residents who have resided in this area for many years.

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B. Geographical Features

The source of the information regarding vegetation, soil associations and topographic features is as per SOIL SURVEY SAN BENITO COUNTY CALIFORNIA issued by the United States Department of Agriculture in November 1969. Reference to the San Andreas Earthquake Fault is as per the 7.5-minute series topographic maps attached to the submitted petition. Geological survey teams are often in attendance at Almaden's Cienega winery situated within the SAN BENITO area directly on the San Andreas Fault Line. These survey teams have their instruments set up in the field and on the main winery floor to gauge the earth's movements.

We trust this additional information will substantiate granting Almaden Vineyards request to establish SAN BENITO as a viticultural area.

Yours very truly,

Klaus P. Mathes

KPM:bjo

May 15, 1985

ALMADÉN VINEYARDS

Mr. Charles Bacon
FAA, Wine and Beer Branch
Department of the Treasury
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Washington, D.C. 20226

Dear Mr. Bacon:

This memo is in response to Mr. Richard A. Mascolo's memo dated 10 December 1984 requesting more information regarding the petition by Almaden Vineyards for the establishment of SAN BENITO as a viticultural area.

We will attempt to identify each question and answer to the best of our ability.

QUESTION: Of the 100% vinifera grapes grown in San Benito County, why are we including only 95% and not the full 100%? Where are the other 5% grown and why are they excluded from our proposed boundaries?

ANSWER: The remaining 5% are grown approximately 30 miles north and west of Hollister with another small vineyard directly west of Hollister. Both areas have different climates. The fog arrives at the vineyard west of Hollister earlier in the day and lasts much longer in the afternoon. There is also a high amount of boron in the water which deforms and destroys the leaves; the vines cannot grow properly and the grapes cannot ripen. The area north and west of Hollister has an entirely different climate and is separated from the proposed viticultural area by a mountain range.

QUESTION: Are there any potential grape-growing areas that are known by the name "San Benito" particularly around Hollister and could grapes be grown there?

ANSWER: There is a winery called "San Benito Vineyards" with offices east of Hollister, however, they now produce only fruit and berry wines. Their bottling is done outside the proposed viticultural area. Most of the area surrounding Hollister is now being zoned for housing.

QUESTION: Does the cooler foggier climate during the growing season in the proposed "San Benito" area prevent grapes from being grown around Hollister?

ANSWER: No, it would not prevent growing grapes, however, the balance of the area surrounding Hollister that is not zoned for housing is utilized as fruit and nut orchards.

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QUESTION: Can grapes be grown in the Santa Ana Valley and why is it presently excluded from the boundaries?

ANSWER: Yes, grapes can be grown in this valley, however, there is very little fog thus creating a different climate, and there is also high boron in the water. There were vineyards in the Santa Ana Valley in the early 1900's but most of them were pulled out during prohibition and anything left was destroyed by the toxic effect of the high boron in the water.

QUESTION: Does our northern boundary, which is a straight line, coincide with any specific geographical feature? If so, what is it, and if not, why not?

ANSWER: No. We utilized the straight line to include the areas where grapes are most likely to be planted in the future, with a climate and weather conditions similar to the Paicines/Cienega regions. We also included all present vineyards yielding grapes that blend into wines of consistent quality.

QUESTION: If the northern boundary represents the limit of the relatively foggy climate, should the Tres Pinos vineyard be exluded?

ANSWER: The fog comes in from the Pacific Ocean and funnels down through the area we have presently described. The described area is not as foggy as the Hollister area and the fog burns off earlier in the day as it retreats from south to north. This creates a pronounced difference in the wine. Even an extra hour of fog daily, which is the situation around Hollister, can create a different characteristic in the wine. The grapes would be slower ripening and would result in higher acid.

QUESTION: Is our Tres Pinos vineyard climate more associated with Hollister than Cienega Valley?

ANSWER: No--again, the fog is a very definite factor, plus the fact that there is approximately 200 feet difference in elevation with Tres Pinos being higher than Hollister. The region then fans out north of Tres Pinos to the valley floor leading into Hollister.

QUESTION: What geographical feature causes the distinction between Tres Pinos and Hollister?

ANSWER: Tres Pinos is at a higher elevation and is mostly rolling hills, whereas Hollister is in a river basin. Tres Pinos gets more sunshine as the fog retreats earlier in the day, and gets more rain during winter as the clouds come up against the hills.

QUESTION: Does this mean that the northern boundary of Paicines should have been set at Tres Pinos?

ANSWER: Not necessarily. There are fruit and nut orchards around Tres Pinos. The area between Paicines and Tres Pinos is very narrow and there would not be room to plant vineyards.

We trust this additional information will substantiate granting Almaden Vineyards request to establish SAN BENITO as a viticultural area.

Yours very truly,

Beverly J. Oaks

Beverly J. Oaks
Wine Inventory Coordinator

ALMADÉN VINEYARDS

January 10, 1986

Rec'd 1-14-86

Mr. Richard A. Mascolo
Chief, FAA, Wine and Beer Branch
Department of the Treasury
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Washington, D.C. 20226

Dear Mr. Mascolo:

As per the phone conversations between Mr. Steve Simon and myself on January 3 and January 6, it was decided not to expand the boundaries of the SAN BENITO viticultural area as the San Benito Vineyards soil is no longer suitable for growing grapes due to the presence of boron. We are not aware of any other area within San Benito County that could be known as "San Benito" or that would have comparable or compatible climatic and growing conditions.

Also enclosed is a copy of the Evening Free Lance article written and printed on August 10, 1965 referencing the San Benito area; a copy of the presentation to the San Benito County Historical Society dated July 29, 1965; the pamphlet Crimes and Career of Tiburcio Vasquez again referencing San Benito. We feel these do add credence to the fact that San Benito is a known area and the boundaries as we have drawn them include this area. We have also tried to include all the areas with similar enviromental conditions thereby providing grapes of consistent quality.

I would appreciate the return of the pamphlet whenever you are finished with it. I hope it will be of some use to you in helping us establish this viticultural appellation.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours very truly,

Beverly J. Oaks

Beverly J. Oaks
Wine Inventory Coordinator

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# A HISTORY OF VINEYARDS AND WINERIES IN SAN BENITO COUNTY

by

JOHN P. OHRWALL

Over a century ago there were vines around all the Missions of California, and we can assume that the good Padres planted vines at San Juan Bautista and eventually made wine for sacramental purposes from these grapes.

In the early 1850's Theophile Vache, a Frenchman, settled in the area some 9 miles South-west of Hollister, later known as the Vineyard District, cleared the original chaparral brush and trees, and planted vines. He produced wine and hauled it by oxcart (the cart consisting of a single puncheon fitted with wheels) to San Juan. San Juan Bautista was then the largest city in this area, a stop on El Camino Real between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Hollister did not exist at this time. In the book "Early Days at the Mission San Juan Bautista" written by Isaac Mylar, and published in 1929, he mentions the merchants of San Juan as he remembers them in 1856. I quote, "A Mr. Filoucheau operated a saloon on the corner of 3rd and Washington Street, he was the agent for Theophile Vache. Vache would send down from his vineyard in a carretta, two or three barrels of his products, leaving them with Filoucheau for disposal. The Mexican driver would return on that toilsome journey, there being hardly a vestige of a road through the canyon late at night, and without mishap. Vache ultimately sold his vineyard to the late William Palmtag," end quote.

1883 was the year that William Palmtag bought the 320 acres from Theophile Vache. He employed Adam Renz, the father of George Renz of Gilroy, and Bill and Bob Renz of Hollister, as his vineyard foreman and winemaker. More grape acreage was planted, the winery enlarged, and a small distillery was established. Under the name of Palmtag Mountain Vineyard and San Benito Vineyard, quality wines were produced which

were ~~said to~~ have won prizes at various expositions and fairs, including some held in France and Italy.

About 1895 Leopold Palmtag, the nephew of William Palmtag, replace Adam Renz as winemaker and Vineyard Superintendent. Adam Renz moved to Hollister and established a home on the Tres Pinos Road.

Alta Williams drew my attention to a book published in 1893 in which the authors say, and I quote, "The foothills throughout this region are undoubtably adapted to the growing of vines. The splendid results obtained by Mr. Palmtag with several kinds of foreign grapes, serve as a pointer which others may follow with confidence. Though his wines are young, they show plainly enough to the discerning something of the future possibilities of this section in viticulture. The vineyards of the future in California will be established on the foothills and hillsides of this area," end quote. How true these authors were in their forecast,made 70 years ago, is shown by the present 3500 acres of fine varietal grapes that Almaden Vineyards has in the Cienega and Paicines District, at this time.

Early in the 1900's several vineyards were planted in the Cienega and Grass Valley area. Some of the owners that I remember were the Contival family, who also had a small winery, the Sullivan's, Pivetti's Benassi's, Lat Hawkins, and others. I believe that Emil Corotto had a vineyard and winery in the Southside, as did the Lucchetti family. The Calleri's had a vineyard and later a winery just South of Tres Pinos.

During the period that William Palmtag owned the winery and until Prohibition became the law of the land, a bar was operated on the premises. The vineyard and winery employees would gather here in the evenings for a game of cards, and I imagine to spend some of their wages over the bar. A picnic area was established near the winery, with a swimming pool fed by springs, and early time residents of Hollister have told me that they used to drive up on Sundays with their

families for a pleasant day in the country. While this location was never a branch Post Office, for the convenience of neighbors, and I imagine to bring in additional customers to the bar, a semi-official mail service was established to Hollister. The first farmer going to town in the morning would stop and pick up the mail bag and deliver it to Palmtag's saloon in Hollister, which was on the corner of 5th and San Benito Streets. Someone would take the mail bag across the street to the Post Office which was located at that time in the middle of the block on 5th between San Benito and East Streets, and mail for certain residents in this area would be collected from their private boxes, and the bag and contents brought back to the winery by some one returning in the afternoon. One of my chores, as a boy, was to ride horseback to the San Benito Vineyards in the evening, a distance of 3 miles, and get our mail. As a reward Captain St. Hubert, who acted as winemaker and part time attendant at the bar would give me several brandied cherries kept in a glass jar on the bar. I never remembered ever falling off the horse on my way home.

In 1906 William Palmtag sold his vineyard and winery to a group of Eastern men who incorporated the property under the name of San Benito Vineyards Company. Again the vineyards were expanded under the managership of Capt. Jules St. Hubert, a retired French Cavalry officer, who acted as superintendent and winemaker for the next six years. John Dickenson, the senior member of the San Benito Vineyard Corporation finally assumed full ownership and control, and operated the property until Prohibition when the winery was closed and Dickenson left San Benito County for San Francisco. He was said to have traded his property here for a hotel in San Francisco.

In 1907 Professor Frederick Bioletti, who was head of the Viticulture Department of the University of California, interested my father, Dr. H. Ohrwall, in the development of an experimental vineyard in

Grass Valley, some 12 miles South-West of Hollister, on the Cienega Road. A partnership was formed under the name of El Gavilan Vineyard, and the next year about 100 acres of varietal grapes were planted from cuttings obtained by Bioletti, from the best vineyards of California. Bioletti was called back to the University after a year, and my father carried on alone. A small winery was built about 1914 and operated until Prohibition, the wines being sold in bulk each year to the California Wine Association.

When Prohibition was the law of the land all wineries in San Benito County closed and a new era was established -- shipping wine grapes to the Eastern markets. During the Dry Era it was legal for a legitimate head of a household to make up to 300 gallons of wine each year for his own use. In the Eastern cities which had a large foreign born population, there was a big demand for grapes each Fall.

Following the close of the first World War the Northern part of San Benito County was changing from a hay and grain economy to one of orchards, row crops, and vineyards. Vineyards of shipping quality grapes were planted in the Ausaymas, Sunnyslope, and Cienega areas. Quality wine grapes that were produced at the San Benito Vineyards and on my father's El Gavilan Vineyard were penalized on account of their poor shipping qualities, and the tough skinned varieties brought a premium price.

At the close of the Dry Era in 1935 when it was again legal to operate a winery and produce quality wines, Edwin D. Valliant and son Ed Jr., acquired the former San Benito Vineyards property and commenced rehabilitation and operation of the winery. Other small wineries opened in the area around Hollister and by 1940 there were wineries operated by Antonio and Peter Felice in the Ausaymas; Domingo Lima, on Sunnyslope Road; Josephine Guerra, in Hollister; and John Podesta in Aromas.

In 1943 W. A. Taylor & Company, a New York State subsidiary of Hiram Walker & Sons, acquired the San Benito Vineyard property from the Valliants, and this Company undertook a program of renovation, replacement, and expansion. The original Oak cooperage which William Palmtag had received by sailing vessels, around the Horn, some 75 years ago, were recoopered, and are now in their original condition maturing excellent wines. Much of the vineyards had suffered from poor care during the preceding years, and a program of removal of old non bearing vines was established, and new plantings were made of high quality grape varieties. In 1945 Taylor and Company acquired the El Gavilan Vineyard, which had been in my family's name since 1907, and here too instituted a program of grape variety improvement.

In the early 1940's B. Cribari and Sons established a 600 acre vineyard South of Hollister on the Tres Pinos Road. Their grapes were crushed in their winery at Madrone. Water and soil conditions were not the best and this acreage was abandoned after a ten year period.

Grape acreage in San Benito County after Repeal gradually built up to a high of 1765 acres in 1948 and then gradually declined to a low of 860 acres in 1959. Latest figures from the Agricultural Commissioner's office show a total of less than 150 acres of grapes in the County that are in individual ownership, the balance of the 3700 acres now in the County are owned by Almaden Vineyards.

Almaden Vineyards came to San Benito County in 1956 with the purchase of the Paicines Orchards from Mrs. George Sykes. All available land on the property that was thought to be suitable for vineyards, was planted. Other acreage was acquired from neighboring ranchers, and each succeeding year has shown an increase in grape acreage. At the present time the Company has over 3500 acres in vines. In 1963 Almaden acquired the former W. A. Taylor property in the Cienega district. A million gallon capacity winery was built at Paicines, together with a still,

and here all the Company's white wine grapes are made into wine. In the Cienega plant, red grapes are processed, and this plant has been increased in size so that its capacity is approximately one million gallons also.

Henry Schacht, the Farm Reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, in an article entitled "Paicines --- Giant of the New Vineyards," dated last March, has this to say, and I quote, "Paicines in the foothills of the Gavilan Range south of Hollister is little more than an old-fashioned general store. A country crossroads where a tribe of Indians, the Paicines, once lived on the border of a soggy meadow. Where the squaws hunted grasshoppers and gathered acorns, and where later settlers herded cattle, is today the center of the world's largest vineyard of fine wine grapes. This is the astonishing Paicines Vineyards of Almaden Vineyards Inc., with headquarters at Los Gatos. Under the pressure of urbanization Almaden has now sold its original vineyards at Los Gatos down to 50 acres around the winery. For the future it looks to outlying plantings and especially to the monster Paicines operation where 1.3 million vines of 19 varieties have been planted. Paicines is the largest single contributor to the growing volume of fine wine grapes being produced in the "new frontier" of San Benito and Monterey Counties. Far better known in the past for livestock, tree fruits and vegetables, these counties will play a most important role in satisfying the future demand for California table wines. Visitors are usually surprised that the climate is so cool, seldom going over the 80's even on summer days, and quickly losing its heat after sundown. The daily average for the summer is about the same as in the best wine districts of Europe. The factors of coolness and variety seem to hold more importance in the opinion of wine experts, these days, than soil. On both of these factors Paicines ranks with the best regions. We knew it was big before we saw it but Paicines is

more than that... It is staggering." End quote of Henry Schacht's article.

And now, in conclusion, may I extend to you a cordial invitation to visit the Almaden Winery at Cienega where the first commercial winery and vineyard was established in this area over 100 years ago. We will show you a vast aging cellar, almost 4 acres in extent, which has no comparable equal in the world. Here in over 30,000 small oak barrels, Almaden's red wines await their maturity and perfection. Visit our tasting room where you may sample the wines of your choice that have made Almaden's great and evergrowing reputation known throughout the world.

Thank you very much for allowing me to make this presentation to you.

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Presented at the meeting of the San Benito County Historical Society

July 29, 1965

Reproduced by San Benito County Farm Advisors Office
March, 1976

# Wine Industry's Importance To County Told Historians

By ALTA WILLIAMS

Members of San Benito County Historical Society recently heard veteran viticulturist John Ohrwall tell the story of vineyards and wines in the county, an industry that is rapidly becoming one of great importance to local economy.

Ohrwall pointed to an 1893 historian's opinion "that the foothills throughout this region are undoubtedly adapted to the growing of vines — and it is evident that the vineyards of the future in California will be established on the hillsides of this area."

It has taken more than 70 years for this to come true, but Almaden's sprawling 3,500 acres of vines and two huge wineries in the Cienega and Paicines are positive evidence of the prediction.

"It is known that over a century ago there were vines growing around California Missions. We can assume that the good Padres planted vines at San Juan, to make wines for sacramental purposes, for winemaking dates back to Biblical times," Ohrwall said.

It is recorded history that a Frenchman named Theophile Vache settled in the Cienega, about nine miles south-west of Hollister, in the early 1850's. This area was to become known as the Vineyard District, after Vache cleared the chapparral and trees from the hillsides and planted grapevines from cuttings brought from Europe.

**Uses Oxcart**

Vache made wine from his grapes, then hauled it by oxcart to San Juan; the cart consisted of a single puncheon fitted with wheels. San Juan was then the largest city in this area; a stage-stop on El Camino Real between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Isaac Mylar's history of San Juan written in 1929 mentions merchants as he remembered them from 1856. Included in the memory was a "Mr. Filoucheau who operated a saloon on the corner of 3rd and Washington Streets." Filoucheau served as Vache's agent, when he sent two or three barrels of his wines from The Cienega in a carretta, leaving them for disposal. It is reported that a Mexican driver made the round trip in one day's time, traveling through the canyons sans a roadway and invariably without mishap.

William Palmtag bought Vache's vineyard in 1883 and employed Adam Renz, father of Bill and Bob Renz of Hollister and George Renz of Gilroy, as his vineyard foreman and winemaker. More vines were planted, the winery enlarged and a small distillery established. Under names of Palmtag Mountain Vineyard and San Benito Vineyard, quality wines were produced which are said to have won prizes at expositions as far away as France and Italy.

About 1895, Leopold Palmtag, nephew of William, replaced Renz at the vineyards and Renz moved to Hollister to make his home on Tres Pinos Road.

**Vineyards Planted**

Several vineyards were planted in The Cienega and Grass Valley in the early 1900's and "some of the owners that I remember were the Contival family who also had a small winery, the Sullivans, Pivettis, Benassis, Lat Hawkins and others. I believe that Emil Corotto and the Luchettis had vineyards and wineries in the Southside District. The Calleris had a vineyard and later a winery just south of Tres Pinos," according to Ohrwall's personal recollections.

Before prohibition became law, William Palmtag operated a bar near the winery, where employes gathered for an evening's card game — "and I imagine to spend some of their wages over the bar," Ohrwall said. A picnic area was set aside, with nearby springs providing water for a swimming pool and "Hollister residents and their families drove into the hills on Sundays for a pleasant day in the country."

There has never been a Post Office in the Cienega, but during early days residents established their own semi-official mail service into Hollister. Mail was left at the Palmtag Winery and the first farmer going to town would pick up the mailbag and deliver it to Palmtag's Saloon at the corner of 5th and San Benito Streets in Hollister. "Someone" would take the bag "across the street" to the Post Office, which was then located about mid-block on Fifth Street. Mail for up-country residents was gathered from their private boxes and transported back to the winery by the first farmer "going home."

"One of my chores as a boy was to ride horseback from our Grass Valley home to the San Benito Vineyards for the mail each evening, a distance of three miles. Capt. Jules S. Hubert, who was then winemaker and part-time bar tender, would give me several brandied cherries which he kept in a glass jar on the bar. I can't remember ever falling off the horse on my way home," Ohrwall said.

**Sells Vineyards**

In 1906, William Palmtag sold his vineyards to a group of Eastern men who incorporated the property under the name of San Benito Vineyards Co. Under managership of St. Hubert, a retired French cavalry officer, further expansions took place during the next six years.

John Dickenson, senior member of the Corporation, assumed full ownership and operated the enterprise until Prohibition closed the winery. It has been said that Dickenson traded his vineyards for a hotel in San Francisco.

In 1907, Professor Frederick Bioletti, head of the viticulture department at University of California, "interested my father, Dr. H. Ohrwall" in development of an experimental vineyard in Grass Valley, farther south than The Cienega, with the partnership operated under the name of El Gavilan Vineyards. During the next year about 100 acres of varietal grapes were planted from cuttings obtained by Bioletti, from the best vineyrds in California.

The professor returned to the university shortly "and my father carried on alone," Ohrwall said. A small winery was built in 1914 and bulk wines were sold to the California Wine Association, until Prohibition closed all San Benito County wineries.

During this era wine grapes were shipped to Eastern markets. The law made it legal for the head of a household to make 300 gallons of wine each year, for his own use. Since the Eastern cities had a large foreign-born population, there was a demand for California grapes.

After World War I, agriculture in northern San Benito County changed from the raising of hay and grain to that of orchards, row crops and vineyards. At this time vineyards of shipping-quality grapes were planted in the Ausaymas and Sunnyslope, and "grapes from the San Benito Vineyards and my father's El Gavilan Vineyard were penalized because of their thin skins, which made them poor shippers," Ohrwall said.

When winemaking again became legal, Edwin D. Valliant and his son acquired the San Benito vineyards in 1935 and commenced rehabilitation of old vineyards and winery. Other small wineries were opened in the area around Hollister, and by 1940 included enterprises run by Antonio and Peter Felice in the Ausaymas, Domingo Lima on the Sunnyslope Road, Josephine Guerra near Hollister and John Podesta in Aromas.

**Taylor Co. Buys**

In 1943 W. A. Taylor and Co. acquired the San Benito Vineyards from the Valliants, and the Ohrwalls' El Gavilan Vineyards in 1945 and undertook a program of renovation and expansion. The original oak cooperages, which William Palmtag had received from vessels sailing around the Horn some 75 years earlier, were re-coopered and are still in use today, maturing high grade wines for the Almaden Vineyards Inc.

In the early 1940's B. Cribari and Sons planted a 600 acre plot on the Tres Pinos road south of Hollister, crushing the grapes in their winery in Madrone; but water and soil conditions were not suitable and the endeavour was abandoned after a 10 year trial. During this same era the Wapples planted a vineyard at the head of Sunnyslope Road which was also abandoned after a time.

Following Prohibition grape acreages increased in the county until by 1948 there were 1765 acres planted; then declining to a low of 860 acres in 1959, according to records in the agricultural commissioner's office. These same records show a total of 3,700 acres under viticulture today, all except 150 acres of which are operated by Almaden Wineries Inc.

**Almaden Comes.**

Almaden came to San Benito County from Santa Clara County in 1956, with purchase of the Paicines Orchards from Mrs. George Sykes. Suitable lands were planted to grapes, and gradually tillable lands were acquired from neighboring farmers, until today's total acreage under the one ownership stands at 3500 acres, with more in process of procurement. In 1963 Almaden acquired the Cienega properties from W. A. Taylor Co. Expanded building operations have brought today's vintage capacities to approximately one million gallons at both the Paicines and Cienega plants, plus a huge distillery at Paicines.

Ohrwall pointed to a recent writer's description of Paicines, — "little more than an old-fashioned general store — a country cross-roads where a tribe of Paicines Indians once lived on the border of a soggy meadow; where the squaws hunted grasshoppers and gathered acorns and early settlers came to herd cattle."

This area now is being developed by the Almaden Vineyards Inc., who have been forced out of their former holdings near Los Gatos by urbanization, having sold all but 50 acres surrounding the original winery.

Nearly 1.5 million vines of 19 varieties are growing on former pasture and farm lands, *presenting a "new frontier" in* agriculture and industry in San Benito County.