Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles
The Third Article in a Series / Eighth Section
by ***Barbara Marinacci***

This is the eighth installment of a long article about the friendship between the "legendary" and contentious California winemaker Martin Ray and the eminent enologist Maynard A. Amerine, of UC Davis. It takes up the main features in the period of their reconnection in early 1955, following the latter's return from his sabbatical year in Europe. It also sets the stage for the Rays' all-out war with the American wine industry in what, then and afterwards, they would usually and proudly call their "Wine Quality Fight," for which they had sought Amerine's approval. Documentation comes primarily from the Rays' letters to and from Amerine, and from selections from other letters written at the time. Author Barbara Marinacci, who is Martin Ray's stepdaughter, thanks John L. Skarstad, Archivist, Special Collections, and Axel Borg, Wine Bibliographer of the Viticulture & Enology Collection housed in the Maynard Amerine Room at U.C. Davis Shields Library, for their frequent assistance in this writing project. Also, above all, she appreciates editor Gail Unzelman's dedicated work and patient indulgence in publishing this lengthy series, which is intended not only as an MR portrait but also to amend, even correct, the historical record—mostly concerning Ray's combative involvement in improving the nation's production of fine wines.

PART III. MARTIN RAY AND MAYNARD AMERINE (1937-1976)
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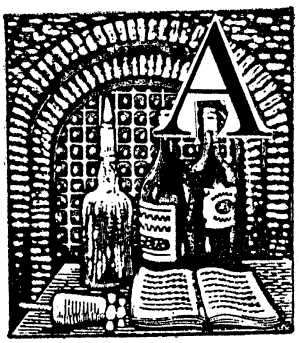


After Maynard Amerine returned to Davis at the close of 1954 from his sabbatical year abroad, it took him several weeks to settle back into his house, reoccupy his office on the university campus, and resume his faculty responsibilities and research projects. During that time Martin and Eleanor Ray pinned down the time and place for their get-together with him in the new year.

Much of the information about Amerine's contacts with the Rays during the first months of 1955 would get embedded in the Rays' letters to other people. Ceasing now were the numerous postcards, some crammed with observations conveyed in tiny script, and the occasional letters that Amerine had sent the Rays from Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany, France, and other places along his 1954 sabbatical route. After all, they could readily communicate again either by phone or, better yet, in person—when Maynard came up the mountain in Saratoga or the Rays drove over to his home. In both places, as before, they enjoyed their customary wine-tasting and -drinking sessions and long-enduring dinners (for all were cooks, epicures, and oenophiles).

On January 20th Maynard joined the Rays at their home on top of Mt. Eden, to help celebrate ER's 51st birthday. Right away he would have been given a tour of the new house they'd moved into after his departure more than a year earlier. Almost fortress-like with its indestructible poured-concrete walls, it replaced the redwood house they'd lived in for only a week before it burned to the ground.

With just the three of them there, the relaxed and intimate atmosphere was conducive to the good talk, tale-telling, and laughter that had abounded in the trio's past socializing. Far into the night, Maynard regaled them with stories of his adventures in Europe, including observations of vineyards and wineries visited, and opinions of wines imbibed, and Rusty would have shared his experiences during a just-finished selling trip in southern California. Of course plenty of wine was served too. "Every minute was delightful, fat with stories of Maynard's, and many many wine thoughts and observations," ER wrote to her son Barclay on the following day. It had been a prolonged reunion event, for Amerine stayed overnight in the guesthouse—the oak-shaded redwood cabin that had been the Rays' first home together on the mountaintop.

MR naturally had been anxious for his enologist friend to taste an array of his variously vintaged wines, in both cask and bottle, and next day they entered the cellar to start in. Some wines would be new to Maynard, others matured and bottled since his last acquaintance with them. After the tasting, Rusty wrote to his good friend Angelo Pellegrini—a professor of English at the University of Washington.

> Had a welcome-home dinner for Amerine. There were just the three of us, but we sat at table from 6 until 12:30, and it was an eight-bottle night—not bad, what? But Amerine's astonishment at tasting through our cellars was perhaps the highlight of the whole visit. This was the second day, and he had never tasted any of our Pinots and none of our recent Cabernets. We started, as the German do, with our oldest Pinot Noir, the 1948 (excluding, of course, the old 1941 [made at Masson] with which he is very familiar). We then tasted the 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, and 1954. He agreed with me that the 1948 and 1950 were not nearly as big wines as the 1951—but it was the 1952 and 1953 that really bowled

him over. He said without hesitation that he considers them in character and quality unlike any other reds heretofore made in the country, and ranked them with the greatest French Burgundies, saying, "If no one else ever makes a great Pinot Noir in California there will have been these two." I never have seen Amerine quite so astonished over wine.... The 1954's are a little new to judge yet with the more finished wines and if they do not come up to the two previous vintages I will not be unhappy because there is no uniformity in vintages—each year is different—even the 1952 and 1953 while perhaps comparable in quality can easily be distinguished one from the other. Naturally we are quite happy about all of this. [1/24/55]

Altogether, it made an auspicious beginning to the resumption of the two wine lovers' close connection, and the Rays anticipated sharing many more happy events and superlative wine evaluations with Maynard in the years to come.

Back to Selling

In several letters sent to Amerine in 1954 MR had mentioned the urgent need to amplify his income—and hence his business—by expanding both winegrowing and sales. The first involved long-range planning for developing more vineyard areas; and since Maynard's advice had already been requested, when together again they surely touched upon the matter. The second activity required selling off suitable portions of the wine inventory MR had built up during the past seven years, vintages now stored within the capacious cellar below the new house.

Selling, though, for MR meant doing driving trips away from Mt. Eden, to make personal calls on wine retailers. Since establishing his eponymous bonded winery in 1945, he hadn't conducted ambitious sales campaigns, but instead sold modestly through a few local stores and to loyal private customers. His wine production during the 1940s and early 1950s, anyway, hadn't been large. He'd also wanted to age these wines before releasing them—especially, of course, his reds.

MR would have told MA how toward the year's end he had first started going out to various localities in the San Francisco Bay area, reactivating connections with places (primarily liquor stores) that in past years carried his wines made at Masson, then some new Martin Ray ones, and also setting up new outlets. Before taking to the road, MR had carefully plotted the wine-vending stores he would visit, determining what he'd say and do. Years earlier, he had perfected his persuasive powers first as a super-salesman of magazine ad space, then of stocks and bonds. When becoming proprietor of Paul Masson in 1936 he had to build a sales network, so he adapted these skills to another commodity. Now he was reviving and honing shrewd sales tactics. He was confident of his ability to talk winningly to retailers, getting wine-shop managers to purchase and stock his wines—though they were more expensive than any other higher-end California wines, with some priced as high as the better French and German imports (if not the stellar-ranked ones). He could also work on charming restaurant and club managers, even deal cannily with wholesalers or distributors if necessary.

But actually Martin Ray *hated* selling. Years earlier, he had told Julian Street how it adversely affected him both physically and emotionally. Much as he recognized the crucial importance of vigorous sales to business success, he would far rather design campaigns and direct other people's efforts. Yet now his small, under-financed, and labor-intensive wine-growing enterprise could scarcely afford to hire or commission sales reps. Nor would MR, anyway, have trusted even experienced wine salesmen to know how to sell *his* wines properly.

Possessor of great physical and mental energy, MR usually gave the impression of indefatigability and indestructibility, and indeed his stamina, along with his determined willingness to participate in all sorts of labors required in both winegrowing and mountain living, was admirable—downright amazing. However, as numerous Ray letters disclose, in a stressful state he would get overwrought, at such times variously experiencing dyspepsia, a racing pulse, high blood pressure, insomnia, headaches, backaches, and allergy flare-ups. (It didn't help, either, that he often drank too much wine, whether in an exuberant mood or an angry, nervous, or depressed one.)

ER described MR's abiding tension over selling, as both prospect and activity, to her son Barclay, making it clear that family members should coddle him during stressful times.

Rusty knows that <u>selling</u> always has been very hard on him, it gets him worked up terrifically, always did even when he was very young and before his nervous break—but he <u>can</u> handle it, tho at a heavy price today. Since it is necessary for him to do it himself, at least for several years now till he gets thing established, the rest of us must realize how very very hard it is on him, the high tension about him, and try to keep it in mind at all times and ease him in every way we can.

Then she added this, relevant to recent explosive household ambience:

One thing is worst of all, controversy of <u>any</u> kind. From now on there must not be ANY. And we can tell when he feels especially edgy, and strained and tired—and at such times we must go out of our way to soothe him, no matter how we may feel, or what our own troubles or complications at the time. [2/20/55]

Around Martin Ray, though, it was often hard to avoid controversy.

A Discordant Family Drama

When Maynard visited the Rays in mid-January, during some of the time on those two days spent in their company he probably heard a lot about the disastrous holiday visit, a month before, of their son Peter Martin Ray and his new bride, Terry (whom he had married several months earlier).

Several months later, in purposeful retrospect, ER would trace what had happened to Rusty's nervous system back to his first forays at becoming a wine salesman again.

> He started out selling in the pre-Christmas period when nobody wants to have anything to do with wines, their big profits in the year hinging on spirits business at that time—and he had to put just terrific pressure on to make sales. He did make it, when nobody else could have done it. But it almost killed him, and none of us realized his precarious condition, or we certainly would have joined in canceling all parties & all the strain. [4/3/55]

Eleanor was becoming accustomed to blaming herself, and others too, for not being sensitive and sensible enough, when it was evident that Rusty was very tense or riled up, to prevent horrible scenes from happening. Twenty years later she would describe to his physician a chronic mental disability caused by the "nervous breakdown" (most likely a stroke caused by cerebral hemorrhage) MR had suffered in the early 1930s: "There was permanent brain/nervous damage that remains, though not observable. It is vital to understand this, to keep him calm and operating at his usual affable level," she said, then told how the psychiatrist had counseled Elsie, urging to "avoid all noise, confusion, and controversy." ER went on:

> Then when she was gone, and I tried to take her place, I lacked the psychiatric understanding and guidance. When he stated opinions I'd pop up with some diverging idea of my own, thinking we were just DISCUSSING. He would cry out NOT TO ARGUE!
>
> Over the years I've learned that any divergence from his expressed point of view must be handled WITH EXTREME CARE, realizing fully that due to the damage he sustained he was simply unable to grasp divergence as anything but OPPOSITION. In a flash his nervous system reacts with angry belligerence. Any further conversation should then be stopped, for if pursued it worsens, for his state deteriorates. [1/17/76]

When the Rays shared with their close and trusted friend their distress over their recent experiences, unresolved as yet, during the recent Christmas-to-New Year's family get-together, they described the course of events from their own perspective—which of course always had to be MR's. Even before Peter and Terry's arrival they had been upset with them for various reasons, which MR would soon detail in an eight-page, single-space typed letter. The fact that he wrote it on the very day that Amerine left Mt. Eden indicates that MA had urged him to record the grievances he'd been hearing about, then send them off to Peter to consider.

"Dr. Amerine was here late last night, and ... we were in high spirits because the atmosphere was conducive to happiness and celebrating. There was no emotional torment, and we all retired in good condition, and arose feeling fit and fine. I mention this to contrast the celebration that marked your coming home for the holidays," was how MR started out. Then—

> Your Mum and I haven't had a single argument about anything since you threw that bomb in our lap, about Terry not liking a lot of things around here. When Terry made the mistake of criticizing your family to you, when you made the mistake of permitting her to do it, when your Mum and Barclay made the mistake of not supporting me as head of the family, and when I made the mistake of turning on your Mum for having sided with you, you can see how the love and harmony of a family can be shattered so quickly. We are all part of this family and we have to work together just as your Mum and I have learned to work together.... The main thing is to face the issue, and then set about solving it. [1/21/55]

MR's letter was meant to launch this problem-solving, and in it he complained about many dissatisfactions with PMR and with Terry, separately and together. Readers detached from the scene can understand how the newest Ray family member, with British reserve in her upbringing, might react to a highly charged environment that demanded instant bonding. Nor had her spouse seemingly prepared her for excessive wine consumption and the apparent scrutiny inevitably watching her every move, recording her every word. Appalled and on the defensive, she quickly became withdrawn and glacial. Rusty Ray, who took immediate dislike to women who struck him as cold, condescending, and controlling, showed dismay and disapproval of Peter's spousal choice. Erupting, it was followed by Peter's more measured outrage. At some point in the domestic melee Eleanor came to her son's defense—to Rusty an intolerable act. The newlyweds exited the unhappy household when they accompanied Peter's twin to Pasadena (where Barclay was completing his doctorate in geology at Caltech), before returning to their Cambridge home (where PMR was finishing his PhD at Harvard, in botany—Terry having just received hers).

In his long epistolary diatribe (interspersed with comments about his own and Eleanor's childhoods) MR made such comments as these, which showed suspicious alarm that Peter might be removed from the winegrowing family's circle—interfering with his dynastic plans.

There is no people on the face of the earth more narrow, arrogant, bigoted, suspicious, and dictatorial than this dreary middle class of England, always trying to impose their narrow views on everyone about them.... All of us have to constantly look at ourselves and our ancestors with the idea of making some improvement as we go along. You now have to consider Terry's background ... Since you permitted Terry to criticize your family, and since between the two of you you built up just about the biggest emotional disturbance any family ever suffered and survived, it would only be a further step to have ... you finally settled in England, where it's just about as certain as anything that everyone is going to be wiped out when they begin dropping hydrogen bombs.... She doesn't want you to have a close family tie so far from England. Such things happen every day. Men find themselves in strange positions, perhaps living in foreign lands, or devoting their lives to pursuits they never intended, and all because their wives willed it that way, and took them step by step away from what was their original wish, training or intention. [1/21/55]

Yet in the same letter MR at times seemed fatherly. For instance, inappropriately discursive, he wrote about his own childhood and family members with mingled praise and blame, ostensibly to deliver both guidance and warnings to his stepson. Altogether, MR's letter is fascinating in its documentation of a peculiar psychopathology—as most of his tell-off letters are apt to be (and sometimes ER's too, in their long-sustained *folie-à-deux* partnership).

PMR responded by taking Rusty himself to task—in a forthright way presenting his own views about the recent family discord, explaining the deeds misjudged and inactions resented—all the while lobbing in his own accusations. For someone who was both a young man (aged 23) and a highly focused scientist, this letter was a remarkable accomplishment in both human observation and angry rationality. What PMR said would apply well to numerous altercations, furious and prolonged, or abruptly truncated by an exit, that he and others—family members, erstwhile friends, business associates—were bound to have with MR in years to come.

I have noticed in the past your morbid tendency to observe, select, judge, remember and accumulate small ordinary happenings of no significance, and later collect and present them in a scheme wherein, fitted together, each contributes significantly to the positive proof of some sinister trait. All indications to the contrary are discarded and forgotten. It is not unlike the current tactics of certain government "security" boards and congressional "investigating" committees. [*Reminder note:* This was the time of loyalty oaths and HUAC—McCarthy's rampaging House Un-American Affairs Committee.] . . .

Because the expression of our attitudes is not at every moment equal to your exact desires you generate, in the fashion of manic depression, an emotional state so grave it "has hit you even harder than the fire." Talk constantly to me about selfishness, this is the very essence of your behavior.

I have had enough of bullying and misrepresentation. Frank advice, given considerately and lovingly, I earnestly desire, and that part of your letter's contents based on fact rather than your imagination I take seriously to heart, even if it was couched in language so despising as to provoke this reply instead of the appreciative one just a little sense on your part would make possible. And I am no longer so naïve as to think that writing at such length will do any good towards bridging the gulf of misunderstanding you have chosen to place between us; your response on the night of your big blowup proved to me how the sticks are stacked. My humble suggestions brought to you respectfully in the simple interests of family harmony were condemned, twisted and warped before morning into an example of impudence and effrontery which has given your souls no peace since. You operate on the principle that our shortcomings are liable to abusive criticism while yours are susceptible of no suggestion, however gently made, and ridiculously thought I was challenging your authority or leadership, just as if the President should try to refuse to allow a congressman to disagree with his views, on the basis that he might take control of the government....

I doubt not that you will view this as another example of ghastly impudence and just the kind of thing you were trying to warn me against: effrontery it certainly is, and such of the like which provoked it could have no other answer.... In your final fury perhaps you will remember that it was you who raised the tomahawk. Terry and I are going to live our lives as human beings, not pasture animals. If you choose to herd us like swine you can hardly expect less placid consequences, nor to perceive that improvement in our personalities towards which your remarks, unless I am badly mistaken, were really directed. [1/28/55]

Peter managed to end his four-page letter with "much love, and hoping for a brighter future." Now that both sides had delivered their volleys while expressing views and misgivings about the awful holiday brouhaha, the outward stress and unhappiness between them began to dissipate. Right after Peter's letter arrived ER wrote to her son on her own, accounting for what had gone wrong during his visit.

Rusty is away all day selling.... He really hated to start out this morning, it is a tough job.... It takes a great deal out of one, starting out to sell something new to new customers, at this stage of life—and as you know, dealing with liquor men is dealing with a tough racket—so I'm very proud of Rusty, being so successful. I don't think

many men could do it, what he is doing. And think of the prices he is getting, too! Amazing accomplishment, I say. Three times he has started out, now, starting sales of his wine from scratch—which makes it even harder for him to start out, of course.... But Rusty has great spirit, so necessary to such a task. Nevertheless this big job (that he says will take him 3 years to establish) takes an awful lot out of him. To do the job he gets keyed up to a terrific nervous pitch—and that is terribly tough on his nervous system, which sustained a complete breakdown when he was in the bond business (and nerves are never the same after such a break)—all of which I have to keep in mind at all times, to protect him against irritations of all kinds.

Though ER sorely regretted having failed to be, as yet, the perfect wife, she also wanted her sons to share in the future responsibility of protecting MR from his own mental quirks and demons.

Sometimes I don't do as well as I should. It's easy enough to say this in talking, but difficult to follow through on—and to see that he meets relaxation at every turn, and plenty of sleep.... After Rusty's nervous break [Elsie] learned exactly what she could and couldn't say and do, and at what times, to keep him from being nervous and irritated—and that seems a wonderful accomplishment for a woman, to my mind—I haven't had much chance to practice all this in the past, and realize I could and should have done better. For Rusty by nature is the gayest, happiest and most enthusiastic of people, so quick and warm in his reactions to others—but when worn out, with his nerves frazzled, irritation drives him mad, almost beyond all endurance.

I mention this in reflecting especially over the holidays when you were here, when I feel all of us had we been fully aware of how terribly over-tired Rusty was could have done so much for him we failed to do, and consequently protected him and made him happy and in return made us all happier. I'm sure we can do better in the future. [1/31/55]

At this time the Rays worked out between them an understanding about the proper division of power in their relationship. In the Ray Papers a document handwritten by ER—dated February 13, 1955 (and therefore several weeks after Amerine's visit)—and signed by them both, states: "In all matters of importance we will advise and discuss with each other, but if we cannot agree between us then the ultimate decision will be made by Rusty." Rarely in the future would she ever question his authority, and probably she never again consciously challenged it.

For some years, Peter and Terry usually managed to be both attentive and pragmatically circumspect in their communications and visits with the Rays. Living at a considerable distance—first in Cambridge, then in Ann Arbor—decidedly helped maintain the peace. However, a spin-off soon occurred from the spectacle of Rusty's behavior—overwrought, dictatorial, drunken and loutish, harshly reproving—that December of 1954. Barclay realized that he dare not ever bring his German fiancée, Maria, into such family mayhem. He allowed their engagement, effected under MR's progeny-seeking pressure the previous summer, to fizzle. It was also clear to him that finding any woman guaranteed to please Rusty Ray, then sustain his liking, might be an impossible assignment.

This account of an early Ray family conflict indicates how periodic ruptures could, and eventually would, undermine Rusty Ray's dream of perpetuating a winegrowing kingdom on Mt. Eden. Furthermore, over the years the intra-familial disputes were paralleled by numerous relationship conflicts and their terminations, with discords and dissolutions precipitated by MR's erratic disposition and behavior. Ever lurking beneath his bonhomie social demeanor was a distrustful paranoic who could become savagely critical of people, particularly when something done or said, perhaps unwittingly, set him off. Whenever people left his circle, or just displeased or disappointed him, he was likely to predict their doom, financial or otherwise. He also had the autocrat's (or cult leader's) need to control the thinking and actions of others in his personal or professional life—and the closer the connection, the more intensive and intrusive his efforts would be.

Thus far, though, Maynard Amerine had done nothing to rouse MR's dark side. But certainly he had witnessed it directed toward others, as it had been toward Peter.

Moving into Springtime

When two of Amerine's purchases on MR's behalf in France and Germany arrived at Mt. Eden, they were soon put to use. The new French oak barrels coming from Louis Latour were deposited at the port of San Francisco in mid-February. After MR promptly picked them up and took them into his cellar, Eleanor told Barclay about them:

Our six casks just arrived from France, and they are most exciting looking. We shellacked and rubbed them, and they are golden wonders. Shorter than our barrels, but much fatter at the bulge, very heavy fine old oak, beautifully made, so sturdy and handsome. Rusty has been washing them now for several days, put hot water in several that leaked so they are now "taking up." Evidently they couldn't water-test them before shipping, or they would have molded inside if damp. [2/18/55]

Two weeks later ER wrote to PMR:

Rusty has the French casks all taken up by now, one was a big job, the one that had a knot in one stave, looked hopeless for many days. He was smart to work on just one at a time, otherwise it would have been a mess in the

cellar. Rusty has figured out why he thinks they put so very few nails in those wooden hoops on the casks—so you could take them off now and then without causing too much trouble, to drive in the metal hoops [beneath them] when necessary. He hasn't had to do this so far, as the maker anticipated the amount they would expand. Tomorrow we're going to filter the Madame Pinot blanc de noir 1954 champagne material using the new German filter pads, we're anxious to see how they work. [3/2/55]

ER's last sentence mentioned the fine-filter Seitz pads that Amerine had acquired at MR's request for use in clearing his white wines. She wrote Barclay next day to report that they had continual problems with clogging, and that they didn't finish the filtering job until 4:15 a.m.—having gone through the process five times and using a total of 45 pads. Still, she pronounced themselves "thrilled with the filtered wine, which was tart and beautiful. It is going to be a champagne out of this world."

Several letters ER wrote at this time, like this one to PMR, told how she and Rusty had taken time off to go and see Amerine—not without a painful consequence.

We had a fine visit with Maynard last week in Davis, a beautiful dinner at his house and stayed over with him. Maynard and I were dancing, he loves that kind of dancing where you whirl in circles both together and separately—but what he doesn't understand, when you turn separately you don't hang onto the girl's hand or you twist her fingers off. He kept grabbing my little finger in a vise-like grip as I turned, as if afraid he'd lose me—and to my horror I found my little finger damaged so badly it seemed broken for a couple of days! However, it was just badly sprained—imagine!!! It has caused me no end of pain and trouble, I can just begin to type again now, after a week, but my p's still are touchy and delicate. [3/2/55]

Two months later it was Maynard's turn to visit the Rays, and ER happily reported on it to PMR.

Maynard dropped by for lunch the other day—Friday. And we had a wonderful time. He has a beautiful new convertible which we loaded with wild clematis for a dinner he was giving that night—also an exquisite bird's nest found among the clematis, with two very lovely turquoise eggs in it. He was using this as the natural motif for decorating his table. What do you think of that? He drove off wreathed in smiles almost as fetching as was the clematis itself draped about him! [5/2/55]

Spring had arrived and both Rays were feeling ebullient about any number of things in their life. For instance, MR's wine-selling trips, previously dreaded, were almost becoming heady sprees. By now they had gone down several times to the Los Angeles area to try opening up a few high-end outlets for Martin Ray wines, and to their surprise MR did nicely in what was now the West Coast's best wine market. A raft of incoming wine orders, however, meant that the Rays now had to fill them themselves. Wines that were bottled-aged had to be decanted and rebottled, then labeled, packed in cases, and shipped off. There were also the vineyards for MR to take care of, with only nephew Will's imperfect help. As he wrote to Maynard:

We will start to plow just as soon as we get back from the trip we are leaving on tomorrow—Los Angeles, Palm Springs, Las Vegas....

Well, anyway, there has been a stepped up number of visitors, too. But from the day we got home about the first of this month, we never lost a single day and kept to a schedule that got the shipments off yesterday. We sent out 50 cases that net us about $1600, or average $32 per case net to us. There will be other shipments that will run the months sales to $2000. Not bad considering everything. But I can't last at this pace forever, as has oft been said. And we should get together and discuss the subject toward some solution. We must either get larger so as to support an organization of sorts of crawl back into the womb. But, damn it, I haven't even the time to think, there is so much to do. All I know is that sales and acceptances are improving and wines are coming along well.

Success signaled an unexpected rise in consumer interest—field observations MR surely shared with an interested Maynard Amerine. MR also saw real promise in encouraging private wine tastings. As he told "Pelly" (Angelo Pellegrini, in Seattle) just before heading off on another selling bout:

We are hardly back from a sales trip before dashing off on another tomorrow. Sales are phenomenally successful. Times have so changed since I was actively engaged in selling wines in the 1930s. Even in the smallest communities there are people, often of French or Italian background, who appreciate and are willing to pay for something finer than just an ordinary bottle of wine. There is also an intellectual interest in wines not known a decade or two ago other than in a limited circle of snobs. For instance, right now we have all of our retail dealers proposing to their customers that they buy not just a single vintage of our Pinot Noir but a bottle of each of the vintages 1950, 1951 and 1952, all currently available—and that they serve them simultaneously at a dinner built around the occasion of tasting one against the other and discussing their relative merits and perhaps arriving at opinions as to which is the most satisfying and to whom.

With this in mind, if we are going to go national! What about your having a dinner up there having a few of your friends who will appreciate this sort of thing and additionally who might wish to buy? (Mustn't overlook the trade angle, you know!) I had in mind that I could make you up a case to include say four bottles of each of these three varieties and send them along with our

compliments if you could carry on with the dinner.... As an important part to this sort of thing, the difference in these vintage years of a wine of a given variety and a single vineyard should be brought out in full discussion so as to refute completely the propaganda of the entire California wine industry that all years are alike in California. Obviously their claim is based on the fact that they blend for uniformity and they do this deliberately and without exception. [4/20/55]

MR had suggested this tactic for good reason. As he'd told Pellegrini earlier: "The majority of [our] sales are to consumers. It is a matter of word-of-mouth recommendation, one friend to another. At one time I could trace directly to Julian Street a very large number of the consumer customers we had, although many of them he did not know about himself." [1/24/55]

Something like this, and more, would soon start up with another kind of celebrity who enjoyed wine.

Entertaining Actors

In this springtime of 1955 a new and significant social and publicity connection came unexpectedly and dramatically into the Rays' life upon Mt. Eden, actually to start shaping the form of their future there. When they were in L.A. in April, they'd heard from wine writer Robert Balzer that Hollywood and stage actor Burgess Meredith had asked him where he could buy Martin Ray wines. Direct contact was soon established, and the Rays invited Meredith to a luncheon on Mt. Eden on May 8th—his day off from the road show of the popular *Teahouse of the August Moon*. Accompanying "Buzzy" Meredith were his fellow actor Scott McKay and their two wives, as well as Shakespearean actor Rollo Peters.

Next day, MR wrote to Barclay ("Bark") detailing the thespians' visit. Always attentive to the fare—both food and wine—served to influential visitors, he first described the meal:

We had champagne at 2-clock, grapefruit & avocado salad with Schloss Johannesberger (lilac seal, this is the dry one). And a 16-pound rib roast of beef cooked on the rotissoire (to the fascination of all guests!), whipped potatoes, and jumbo asparagus served on side plates, made up the main course, with which we had Pinot Noir 1952. Each serving of asparagus was 8 huge speares covered with butter and salt and pepper. Then, Rippe's famous cheesecake served with coffee but no wine—but followed by Louis Latour's Chambertin 1947. We were at the table from 2:30 to 10:30, and it was a 10-bottle night! [He added in handwriting: "Plus 1 bottle champagne at the gate as we bid them good nite."]

It had been raining a lot and the mountain top was "completely enclosed in a cloud until just before they came." Worrying that their guests might not safely drive upon the slippery dirt road, MR arranged to meet the visitors in Saratoga and transport them. Just as they arrived, the weather turned benevolent.

... and we had a beautiful sunny afternoon, brilliantly clear, and a full moon in the evening—so that occasionally we could leave the table for a stroll around the house, glasses in hand. When bringing them up the hill I stopped long enough to bring Eleanor some wild clematis for a centerpiece. It was so wet I had to shake the rain off of it. I brought her also a bird's nest, an exquisite one, with four beautiful blue eggs in it, which Mrs. Scott McKay carried home with her as a great treasure. You will note this wild clematis–bird's nest with eggs has become the latest thing in centerpieces, we having given Amerine the same as he left last week, for a big dinner he was giving at home and which he reported a great sensation with his guests.

Late this morning we were awakened by the phone. It was Burgess Meredith calling from San Francisco. He said the Scott McKays ... had left a note under his door saying that they had agreed between them that it was the most wonderful day they had ever had in their lives. Burgess said he and Kaja felt the same—they loved every minute of it.... He said they'd give anything if they could have this kind of life.

Such rapturous feelings and the desire to live life as Eleanor and Rusty Ray appeared to live it had often been expressed, and would be in the future, by visitors to Mt. Eden, just as it had been when Elsie and Rusty had reigned on Paul Masson's mountain.

Then MR added something else:

An interesting sidelight was this: They had been to Louis Benoist's at Almaden some weeks ago, and came to us confessing that they thought they'd find a little man with his back against the wall struggling to survive and they wanted to help! And they said, "And here we find you living in luxury, with a magnificent situation like none we've ever known!" So you see, you just have to have a position of entertaining or else those damned bastards who like to think of themselves as our competitors would push us out of a respectable position with their conversation alone.... The wines taken alone, no matter how fine, are not enough. But the big room, luxuriously carpeted, the food, the wines, the view, and our own personalities together make up the full picture which is carried away by guests, and through them presented to wine-loving people at large as something fabulous.

"This dinner was just about as near to perfection as we have ever come," MR had concluded earlier. Now having stressed the crucial importance to ambitious winegrowers of creating just the right ambience in presenting themselves and their wines in the context of their lifestyles, in a paternalistic vein MR began expounding, in this three-page letter reporting on the actors' visit, upon the topic of perfection-seeking—which of course he felt he knew about, since he always did it with his wines. This was the sort of discourse he

might well have had at times with Maynard, far into the night.

> When you are young and filled with idealistic ideas you actually expect to find perfection wherever you turn—at least you do expect to find it ultimately, and certainly at least in some things. And it comes as a shock to meet shortcoming and failures.... As you grow, you gradually come to realize that perfection, like security, is what you seek and what you never get. I do not mean you should become cynical or actually settle for less than you seek. You must, rather, drive on—always in search of perfection.... Just remember no one is ever fully prepared to accept the reality of death, and most of the populates [*sic*] of the earth actually go through life preferring to believe the most fantastic of all dreams—that of a future life somewhere in some sort of paradise where perfection will exist. This is the final proof I offer you that perfection does not exist in anything, certainly in no family life—and so in the end we dream (most of us) of it for some other day and life. [5/9/55]

The Rays' new friendship with Burgess Meredith moved into high gear. "Buzzy" invited them to come up to San Francisco for a lavish luncheon he'd set up just for them at Trader Vic's at a mid-afternoon time when the restaurant was closed to other customers. Next day MR wrote to Amerine describing the menu and wines served, and also told how he had "arranged" for the Merediths and McKays to go to Amerine's home in Davis for a dinner when the play would be appearing in nearby Sacramento. "I told them that you are the man that has done the most for California wine," he said, "and I told them you are our best friend." [Undated, May 1955]

Whenever he talked with MR, Buzzy expressed a keen desire to have a place like the Rays' on Mt. Eden. And as MR reported to Amerine:

> He is quite a person and we do like them all. They are good company and they really like and drink a lot of wine. He even wants to go into business with me. But, then, you can't say sure! That is just what I am waiting for. We will have to await a more opportune moment. It must be hard to get else he would not want it. Or if he thought I want money he would not like it. I will try to keep an open door and something might just possibly come of it. He buys our wines and a lot of them, that is something.... He likes imports and drinks the best and, I think, only ours in Californias.... He is not a snob. And he would love seeing your Davis lab and cellar. [Undated, May 1955]

One of MR's lengthy letters sent to Amerine in Germany, written toward the end of the previous year, had expressed his vision of an "angel"—the sort of person he'd like to have as a winegrowing partner on Mt. Eden.

> ... some one who would like to put up [$100,000—the figure MR had figured was needed] and have either an interest in all the expanded development here or own himself an interest outright in the newly developed vineyard land which would be tied permanently to what we now have so far as a right to the grapes grown. He could have a vineyard home on this quarter section and take up the life either of a grower or a part owner of the vineyards or of the whole thing, as he might wish and as we could arrange between us. We would then have a larger thing with which to work and yet not too large. I once thought of ten acres as ideal but I have learned a few things I did not then know and conditions have changed too until now I am inclined to think of a somewhat larger development as ideal, so approaching even 100 acres. I would be in a position to offer such a prospect a home and a life as a part of a wine growing development that I believe I may say would be recognized as First among all American Vineyards (as I have so long said—Jurgensen's of Pasadena, now with seven stores is sending out shortly 12,000 printed pieces that says in part "Martin Ray wines—Everywhere recognized as First among American Wines"). There is really no competition in just the sort of thing we have always done. Now, that would be worth something to a few people if we could but know each other. Then, I would be able to give such a person leisurely responsibilities, if it was wanted, such as many retired people like. It could be a social advantage to one so inclined also. And at last, there should be a sound return on the capital invested. And under any conditions however trying that may come, such a property could be the source of pride to the right sort of person and it would be investment in land and in income producing land. It goes without saying that I would not discuss any division of management or responsibility. [11/7/54]

Would Burgess Meredith now fill the bill? The Rays were beginning to think so. Eleanor, who did most of the entertainment scheduling in the Ray household as well as the letter writing, obviously enjoyed sending breezy notes to Meredith—like this note describing the pets and some of the wildlife up on Mt. Eden, where he too might dwell one day:

> The latest news in my dept. is that bluejays have just pushed all the baby linnets out of their nests all around the house and I've been picking up the birdlings trying to get them back in their nests but some nests are squeezed in such narrow slots between beams that I can't reach in. Frosto [the Rays' white Samoyed dog] has just broken the kittens' china milkbowl—and the kittens have been playing with all the laundry on the line so it's crisscrossed with muddy tracks. Aside from this the linnets have eaten most of my lettuce, the wind has blown over my fine pea plants, and a big fat frog has been sitting on most of my cucumber seedlings breaking them smack off. But I've just washed and dried a bunch of fine Baccarat glasses and didn't break a one, so I guess

that evens up the score for the day, what? [6/2/55]

In coming months Meredith would talk further with MR, in person and over the phone, about his desire to buy property on the mountain, build a home there, and have MR create a vineyard for him around it—after they'd formed a winegrowing partnership. Burgess would soon undertake several extraordinary occasions useful in promoting Martin Ray wines. However, the Rays all the while held onto some reservations about the wisdom of setting up a satisfactory permanent business connection with their friend Buzzy, just on the basis of the following experience alone!

A Midnight Champagne Cruise around S. F. Bay

As *The Teahouse of the August Moon* was nearing its departure from San Francisco, Burgess Meredith decided to put on a gala event, on May 23rd, that would be a thank-you to friends and supporters in the Bay area. Of course he invited the Rays to attend. As MR was wont to do with Maynard, he reported fulsomely on the experience in a letter to Maynard—and as he often did in his near stream-of-consciousness typing, he neglected to create some needed paragraphs.

> Meredith and McKay do not know much about wines, I find. But they want to know. As we have seen them now several times we learn more of them. They live a hell of a life, in every way abnormal. It is apparently the price of their kind of success. Surrounded always by hangers on who kiss their boots and put up with what no real man or woman would[,] they are in a way isolated from all normal existance [*sic*]. They must have their parties after midnight, they must eat their dinners at 2:30 and be sober by 8:30. Everyone watches everything they do. They have no free days. To carry on they must somehow get 9 hours sleep and it must be in noisy stuffy apartments that are within a block or so of where they must eat and get to the theatre. They can not trust taxis or street cars to get them there in time. They must be able to walk if they are to get the most out of their hours. They somehow seem to like our kind of life and the fact we do not make over them. But at their midnight boat party on the bay the other night there were actors, musicians, restaurant men and just plain hangers on. Burgess kept rushing about shouting, "Isnt it wonderful! Arnt we having a wonderful time!" Everyone was drinking champagne like mad out of paper cups and soon everyone was drunk. Finally, three hours later he came up to us on the top deck. Eleanor and I were the only ones up there enjoying the beautiful night and almost fantastic night scenes as we passed all the government docks and dry docks in the lower bay. Work was going on full blast—on a 24 hour basis the captain of the little excursion boat told us. We are taking out of storage all our world war II merchant boats and hurriedly putting them into condition! Welders could be seen welding on new plates and men swarmed over the fully lighted ships. It was the first I had known of this. Burgess said, "No one is having a good time. Aren't people awful. They refused to come out on deck, they are all huddled below, just drinking." They were. Many were asleep already. And when we docked a boat boy looked under all the benches. He told us usually there were people under them passed out. Finally Burgess leaned way out over the water and peered ahead and shouted: "To hell with the rich." I don't know why the rich. That is what he said, though. Then he went into the captains cabin and blew the whistle time after time as he had been doing all the trip. It was not a successful party. But these people dont seem to expect any other kind of party. They did drink great quantities of Champagne—Almaden.
>
> Now I come to the explanation of one of the greatest surprises I have ever had in wines. That Champagne was the greenest, poorest wine I have ever tasted. It was for me undrinkable. On top of every conceivable fault it was sugared and sulphured to high heaven. I never realized that the quality of Almaden had sunk so low. Nor can I see any reason except no one over there knows what a good wine is. Certainly they could make a good champagne if they knew what one is like and wished to do it. Even the tin foil was unglued to the bottle neck and I noticed the moment any one grasped a bottle the foil fell away leaving the neck naked. This disclosed a plastic cork, the first one I had seen. The entire bottom of the ship was covered with champagne. Every bottle opened shot out from a quarter to half its contents, so wild was it despite being iced fully. One girl was completely bathed in champagne early in the party when her boy friend opened a bottle and it gushed all over her even at four or five feet distance. Finally they learned to just let the cork go and what wanted to went on the floor or overboard. I opened several bottles and found, being experienced, I could hold back the wine by quickly slipping my thumb over the opening at the moment the cork was twisted out by the other hand. But it was all I could do to hold back the pressure! No inexperienced person could have managed a bottle. Eleanor and I had at the last moment wondered what champagne would be drunk and we brought aboard two bottles of Madame Pinot and that is what we drank, sharing some with Burgess and Scott. But as Burgess got into his cups he told everybody that the champagne was ours and finally introduced us over a loud speaker system from the captains cabin and nothing we could do could ever convince anyone it was not our Champagne. For good measure, we ran out of Champagne. So we put ashore and picked up a couple more cases—this time it was Criberi's [*sic*] Saratoga brand Champagne. Then people started coming back to us telling us they now had our champagne. As they were by then drunk we could not tell them anything. They just asked, "You come from Saratoga, dont you?" Then they

would hold up the bottle and say, "See, it says so right on the bottle. It is your champagne." I told Burgess over the phone yesterday I would not forgive him for serving such vile wine. He said, "I know. But I had already bought it and what could I do?"

The only way to give these people a good time and enjoy them is to get them away from all the people who hang on and treat them as human beings and equals. This is what they want but somehow they seem unable to manage. Burgess could have made it a wonderful party. But he seemed somehow removed from all the guests unless it was us. He just wandered about and wherever he went people kissed his foot. He did nothing at all to make the party a success. He then complained it was a failure. And he said, "I have had so god damned many wives I cant remember them all. Isnt it hell?" I don't know what he had in mind....

If they had had the salomi [*sic*] and French bread and cheese with a simple red wine and if they had all been drawn together by seating them at a table and if Burgess and Scott had been hosts in fact, the party would have been a success. But drinking champagne out of paper cups and large ones at that and eating salomi and cheese was hardly fit. The champagne would not pour into the paper cups. It simply filled the cups with foam. I tried several times and thought it might be the roughness of the paper. But our champagne did not froth up. So it was just that Almaden was so green and wild. And [Oliver] Goulet [MR's cellar master at Paul Masson, until the winery fire in 1941] always did say you should have a very maximum amount of pressure in champagne. He has it, apparently! [5/27/55]

(Not long afterwards, MR felt validated when he learned that consumers had widely complained not only about the foul taste of this champagne but also of injuries received from its wildly shooting corks; therefore Almaden had to destroy their remaining inventory and recall any bottles on wine dealers' shelves.)

Burgess Meredith's improbable dream in 1955 of winegrowing with Martin Ray inspired and set the conceptual form for the Rays' creation of Mount Eden Vineyards four years later. Its much-expanded shareholding membership would ultimately lead to the collapse of their glorious hegemony on Mt. Eden.

A Provocative Invitation

In early February of 1955 Martin Ray received a letter from wine industry consultant Louis R. Gomberg that contained a long memorandum "on the proposed cooperative action by premium wine producers to combat foreign competition." Named in the group were Almaden, Beaulieu, Buena Vista, Christian Brothers, Cresta Blanca, Inglenook, Charles Krug, Paul Masson, and Wente. Apparently MR didn't think much about it, and busy with other things, he put it all aside. (Gomberg's initial letter and the memorandum haven't been found among the Ray Papers.)

Gomberg, long affiliated with the Wine Institute, was possibly the only person within the inner circle of the California wine industry at the time who had long agreed with Martin Ray's proposed solutions for improving the quality of the state's better wines, and therefore their reputation. Gomberg had an interesting background. After being a concert pianist, then a lawyer, he made a career out of his wine expertise and enthusiasm. Gomberg may well have been the one who, years before, when MR owned Paul Masson, had urged him, though in vain, not only to join the Wine Institute but to serve as an officer—and therefore be in line to take the lead there someday in devising new winegrowing strategies. It appears that he and Martin Ray never actually met. But from their correspondence, and from what MR wrote about their long telephone talks, it's evident that they respected each other.

On April 5th Gomberg telephoned MR to ask him what he'd thought of the memorandum and to invite him again to consider joining this small group of winery proprietors who prided themselves on producing high-quality wines. MR declined. He had already had disagreements with some of the wine men involved, because he disapproved of most of their wines and their winemaking and marketing methods, and had often said so. He wasn't one who ever belonged to groups anyway.

However, MR soon began viewing this project of Gomberg's as an extraordinary opportunity to assert his opinions in such a way that these wine producers would be pushed into making the necessary changes to bring about quality standards. So on April 20 he sent a three-page letter to "My dear Lou." In the first paragraph he reiterated that he couldn't join the named wineries "in any effort to keep out of this market the fine European wines. Nor will I permit the use of my name as favoring your organized effort, which I believe ill-directed." The rest of MR's long letter followed this statement: "But with the passing of time I have given more thought to the real problem of these growers, and it is with this in mind that I now am writing you."

During the next several months Martin and Eleanor Ray together would be greatly occupied with what they usually called their "Wine Quality Fight." Much of their correspondence during that period, and afterwards as well, was taken up with plans for battles on particular fronts and then conducting them. Few letters indeed went out to friends and family members that didn't mention their fixation, as when MR told Angelo Pellegrini, after talking that day with Gomberg, about "a movement on foot [*sic*] among the

continued, page 19 —

the U.S.G.S., the Rodgers Creek Fault has a 32% probability of experiencing a quake of 6.7 or greater magnitude in the next 30 years.

On September 3, 2000, Mother Nature finally seemed to give the lower Napa valley a "wake-up call." It has been labeled as the Yountville quake since it was centered in the hills to the southwest of the famous wine village. Yet a seismic engineer on the scene reported that wineries near Yountville, Oakville, and Rutherford "didn't even lose Champagne flutes from their shelves." Down the road, the city of Napa experienced serious damage on soft sediments near the Napa River. Estimates of losses ran as high as $50,000,000, but none of this damage was wine industry related.

But what of the Hayward Fault, which lies in menacing slumber under the East Bay homes and workplaces of about 1,250,000 from the city of Fremont up through Berkeley and Richmond? The Bay Area press, local governments, and U.S.G.S. have been working overtime for the last four years to awaken people to this danger "threatening at any moment to rupture with a cataclysmic jolt." In a park in Fremont a 15-foot pit has been dug, exposing the Fault, and affords visitors a 9000-year view of the Fault's history.

And the wine industry there? The Livermore Valley wineries are far enough away from the fault to avoid disaster if a 7.0 quake hits. And the East Bay wine country south of Hayward, which U.C.'s Eugene Hilgard thought the best in the state, is long gone.

But there is one winery of great importance on some fairly soft land in Alameda. I called Rosenblum Cellars to see if their precious barrels of Zinfandel were properly protected. I breathed a tentative sigh of relief to learn that their seismic engineer was the same who had conducted the collapsing-barrel experiments for the University in 2000.

FOSTER, *continued from page 13* —

a bottle of Champagne were flashed around the world. The event sparked an international incident in which Germany recalled its American ambassador.

There are numerous stories equally fascinating in the book. The problem is that there is absolutely no easy way to find individual events because of the lack of an index. The book is well worth reading; it is just not the stellar reference book it might have been. Highly recommended.

[*Bob's reviews originally appeared in the February-March and April-May 2006 issues of* California Grapevine. *Visit their website* calgrapevine.com *for subscription information and/or a sample issue.* — Ed.]

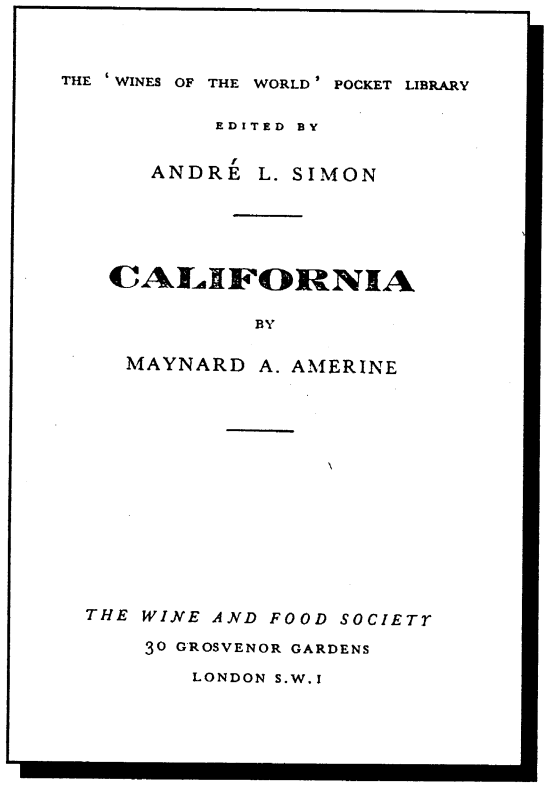
MARINACCI, *continued from page 31* —

better-known growers . . . which we have been asked to join, but which we are determined to fight and about which you will hear in another letter shortly." [4/20/55]

It would be the biggest war that Martin Ray ever waged with the California wine industry at large—but aimed in particular at a few of its best-known, most-respected practitioners. And Maynard Amerine and his friendship with MR inevitably would get caught in the crossfire.

[This story will be continued in the October 2006 issue.]

EDITOR NOTE: During his long and distinguished career as an enologist, Professor Maynard Amerine authored more books on the technical aspects of wine and winemaking than any other author in the English language. Amerine also enjoyed the history and bibliography of wine, and wrote on both. See Gabler *Wine into Words* (2004) and the Wayward Tendrils Newsletter (Vol.8, Nos.2, 3, 1998) for appreciations of Maynard Amerine and his works. The book illustrated below is unique in that of the seventeen books in the André Simon-edited "Wines of the World" Pocket Library series, only the *California* volume named an author other than Editor Simon.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