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Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles

Fourth Section of the Second Article in a Series

by *Barbara Marinacci*

[This concluding section about the MR–Julian Street letters follows four previously published pieces: the Introduction, in April 2003 WTQ, and the first three segments covering Ray's epistolary relationship with the East Coast author, in the July and October 2003 and the January 2004 issues. The author, who is Martin Ray's stepdaughter, is grateful for permission granted by the Princeton Library's Special Collections to use excerpts from some of the many letters exchanged between the two men. Articles focusing on other MR correspondents will appear in future issues. The next subject will be Maynard Amerine—UC Davis's renowned enologist. Like this one, the article will be published in several sections.]

PART II. JULIAN STREET AND MARTIN RAY: 1939-1947

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By the start of 1941 Martin Ray felt frustrated over his long and fruitless attempt to secure a partner with both sizable assets and a desire to implement a grand vision for the California wine industry, comparable to and compatible with his own. No wonder he began talking with Frank Schoonmaker, out visiting from New York, about a possible future they might build together.

In past letters to Julian Street MR had often portrayed FS as a cunning and manipulative entrepreneur, ambitious to become someday—preferably soon—wealthy enough to enjoy the finest of wines at his leisure. Yet he was also aware of FS's notable virtues as a sales promoter: his verbal and writing skills, energetic charm, astute knowledge of wines, and ample merchandising connections—all attributes useful to the Masson operation.

MR recognized, too, the bond between them: both intended to raise the reputation of Californian wines by producing and marketing high-quality, specifically named varietals. The time was right for change, since the war in Europe offered the chance to replace cherished vintages from Germany and France, now in dwindling supply, with new ones from California. But the better American wineries must aim far higher than before to impress wine connoisseurs—and avoid continuing to repel them. Also, MR would always acknowledge FS as an excellent judge of wines, though his commitment to selling particular ones could influence him to downgrade those he didn't represent.

> ... I always found Frank an honest taster while he tasted with me. Trade pressure on him does warp and change his opinions as time passes, until he will say of wines once tasted things he would not have said originally. But brought to face the same wine again, he will honestly deal with it again, seemingly pleasantly surprised to find it again as he originally did and gradually repudiated in favor of his trade obligations. [1/24/43]

Admiring the pure varietal wines made by Martin Ray, FS had persistently courted him at his 600+ acre winery kingdom, founded by Paul Masson on a mountainside near Saratoga. In mid-February of 1941 MR told Street of the plans FS had revealed during his recent visit.

> He astonished me by announcing to me that he has determined to get a monopoly on the top grade wine industry of the country through purchase of the

necessary vineyards and cellars in California. He says he has the capital behind him and that if the survey convinces that the necessary properties can be had, he expects to go ahead. He wants most of the properties to be in this county. He is always out in front. I admire it in him. He will get the jump on the others, perhaps, at that. He is showing good judgement in recognizing this district. All the old timers, all but the new comers, know that the best California drys always came from this county....

Frank stayed late and we talked much but mostly about districts, properties, wines now available in other cellars and in general about his plans.

MR then reported that a partnership arrangement between him and FS was now pending.

He wants to get this property or its products.... He is coming back to see if we can work something out. I told him what could be done, that I would sell him a half interest in the property and with it the sole right to merchandise our wines, withdrawing to a position of producer. He phoned me he thought he could swing the deal. We shall see. It is a long way from becoming a fact....

Frank has not told me who is backing the plan but he says he will when he returns to New York and reports his findings. I'll tell you as soon as I know more. [2/15/41]

While awaiting an explicit proposal from FS, MR was visited by several other wine entrepreneurs. They expressed plans similar to Schoonmaker's: to buy up prime vineyard properties like his and thereby gain control of high-end wine production and sales. As he reported to JS:

Well, everyone can't do what all think to do. I am not sure any of these can do it. Frank can probably succeed, if he has the money and he seems now to have it.... He has made his survey, has now returned to NY to report to his backers. He expects, he says, to advise me shortly of their intentions. All else discussed had had to do merely with possible plans and operations. I am not committed but if he has capital I will go along with him under certain conditions.... Frank says his backing is a man who has unlimited wealth, who has approached Frank, (not Frank him) with the idea. [3/4/41]

Shortly thereafter, MR wrote that he and FS had arrived at a definite understanding about their future business association.

Frank has orally agreed to terms which await only the necessary financing on his part. He has telephoned me several times recently and on the occasion of the last call, he said that he had already raised two-thirds of the necessary funds and that the balance was all arranged for. We will see. If he is as smart as I think he is he will be able to conclude his end of it.

In the past MR had found FS closemouthed about trade gossip, which always was useful to him as ammunition for future attacks upon wine industry's representatives and practitioners, whom he regarded as either craven stooges or greedy obstructers to essential progress in quality. But things could soon change.

It is pretty difficult to draw Frank out on personalities. I have often tried, but he has been very discreet, with the possible exception of the last two times I talked to him when he did open up a good deal in such a way as to show that once we have a common interest, he will be very open and straight forward.

Just as MR had earlier hoped to create gainful employment for his multi-talented friend Julian in a triadic business association with Bellows, he now envisaged a place for him in the pending Masson–Schoonmaker partnership.

From what Frank has told me of his financial backing, I presume that the way is now open for him to take and secure a dominant position in the wine industry.... [If he does so], it is my intention to propose to him that he invite you into an association which would make available to the Business your knowledge, writing ability and tremendous following, through a salaried position such as you and I discussed as a result of my one time proposal to Wildman. It is premature to discuss it further now, I only want you to know what it is in my mind.

MR believed he could now influence and even control the statements FS would make about California wines in the future: "I can handle Frank Schoonmaker because Frank wants to say the correct things and will be forced to if he is to have an association with me." The partnership, though, was still tentative.

Frank is due tomorrow. He keeps delaying his trip. We have had no correspondence. He phones. There is nothing new on the negotiation. It awaits his coming....

If he has the money, there will be a deal, otherwise there will be no deal as now proposed.

I had to refuse a shipment to him this week, because he presumed too much in assuming he could buy from our inventory before our deal becomes a fact. Frank will not like it, but I shall release no stock to him on mere anticipated association. We must first have an agreement on many things and money must pass.

But, on Frank's word, it seems we may conclude a deal. I hope so. [4/22/41]

Martin Ray, though, already knew that Schoonmaker was predictably undependable.

A Case of Literary Blackmail

Frank Schoonmaker's arrangement with MR involved his buying a full partnership share in the Masson company for $100,000, with half of that amount to be delivered in a cashier's check before contract signing. The dynamic and persuasive fellow seemed sure of obtaining financing to clinch the deal. And MR wanted to believe in him.

When the day of reckoning arrived, toward the end of April, Frank drove up to the Masson premises. He brought with him the galley proofs for *American Wines*—the second book he had written with Tom Marvel, soon to be published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce. First he showed MR what he'd said about the remarkable wines being produced by Martin Ray at Paul Masson. Then he handed over a check for $5,000—only one-tenth of the agreed-upon figure—but assured MR that the remainder would soon be forthcoming. Disappointed and angry, MR refused to accept the small down-payment and to sign documents that would have made FS his equal partner in the Masson wine business.

What happened next? The bare facts seem to be given in an irate letter MR wrote to Schoonmaker 14 years later, during a barrage of attacks and counterattacks going on within the wine industry between MR and selected Establishment foes. (The continuing story of MR's "Wine Quality Fight," as he called it at its crescendo in 1955, will be expanded in later articles.) MR had just received a scolding letter from FS strenuously objecting to his use in a publicity piece of a favorable FS quote about wines MR had made years ago at Masson. FS had sent copies of his letter to various persons prominent in the industry—including some whose wines MR had recently disparaged. When MR fired back, he reminded Schoonmaker of that fateful encounter long ago.

> You had with you that day the printer's proofs of an entire chapter you had written about me, my former vineyard [Paul Masson], and my wines. You said if I did not go through with the deal then and there you would jerk the entire chapter from the book. And you did.

There's no evidence that Schoonmaker replied to MR's letter, denying that the scene had ever taken place. Curiously, the incident as MR reported it (above) is at variance with the one told by MR's widow, Eleanor Ray, in *Vineyards in the Sky*. In it, when MR insisted on being paid for some Masson wines FS wanted, Schoonmaker threatened to remove the chapter. Not to be bullied, MR told him just to "yank it." (This was probably the rejected wine order MR had mentioned to JS.) Eleanor Ray didn't cite (and perhaps never knew about) that impending partnership.

Unfortunately, MR's subsequent letters to JS surviving from that time period don't relate what happened. After the blowup, MR may have telephoned JS to report on the incident—though their relationship seemed confined to correspondence. Or perhaps JS lent an MR letter describing the scene to someone else, but it was never returned. (Unfortunately, there are other significant gaps in the Ray–Street letters.)

It's intriguing, in any case, to ponder the probable wide-ranging consequences in the wine industry had a partnership between Martin Ray and Frank Schoonmaker actually come about—to operate jointly a much-expanded Paul Masson enterprise, as MR already envisaged it, and also to enter into cooperative ventures with several other better wineries. Had the planned setup succeeded, MR's subsequent career trajectory might have gone quite differently. So might have California's wine industry, in that period.

Yet could this sort of business alliance have actually endured for long? MR's uncompromising, control-demanding, volatile temperament would surely have sparred with a business partner with an equally sizable ego and his own strong aims, opinions, and lifestyle requirements. Schoonmaker was much less of a purist and far more commercially oriented—demonstrated by his subsequent long involvement with Almaden. Furthermore, since FS would have secured financial backing from other entities, he'd be answerable to them. An obligation to put the quest for profits above adherence to creating and marketing premium wines would certainly have infuriated MR.

Sidelined from California Wine History

Schoonmaker went through with his threat, for when *American Wines* appeared a few months later, it contained only one small reference to the Paul Masson winery; the authors had written in more detail about some other California wineries. After removing the chapter about Martin Ray's aims and accomplishments, FS retained a single remark, whether as an oversight or a conscious decision. Here's what the book nearly buried in its text:

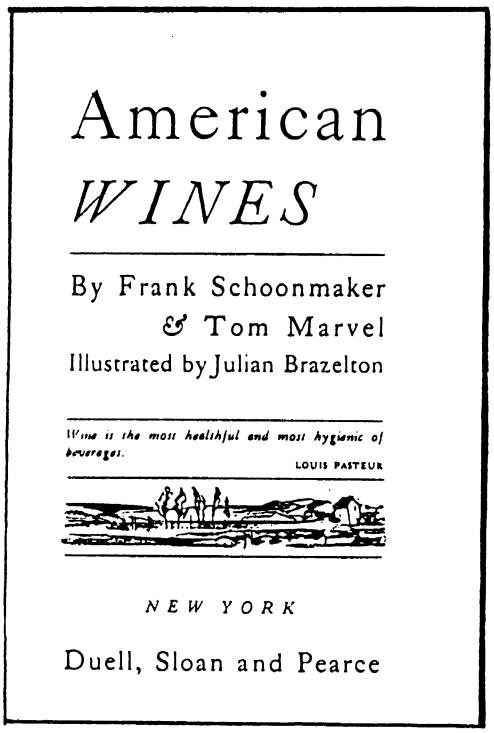
> At present the outstanding wines of the Santa Clara–Santa Cruz district are produced by a scant half dozen vineyards, almost all of them well up in the foothills, at least five or six hundred feet above the valley floor. The best, and probably the best wines of California, are those of the Paul Masson Champagne Co., which, paradoxically produces even finer still wines than Champagnes and is no longer owned by Paul Masson. [pp 90-91]

Also, in the Acknowledgments the authors had thanked a few "outstanding California wine pro-

ducers" for their "interest and cooperation." Among them was the name of a "Mr. Martin Ray"—though not identified as the proprietor of Paul Masson.

Besides these mentions, there's a startling statement, made before the authors took up the wine districts of Napa and Sonoma counties:

> [T]he best vineyards of Santa Clara County are in the foothills of the mountains from which Santa Cruz County takes its name.... And on the basis of the evidence now at hand, this is perhaps the most promising of all the viticultural districts of California. [p. 87]


American
WINES
By Frank Schoonmaker
& Tom Marvel
Illustrated by Julian Brazelton
Wine is the most healthful and most hygienic of beverages.
LOUIS PASTEUR
NEW YORK
Duell, Sloan and Pearce

Moreover, *American Wines* proclaimed a prediction that sounded almost as if Martin Ray himself had written it:

> [I]t is possible to make, out of the great, traditional European grapes—the Cabernet, the Pinot Noir, the Pinot Chardonnay—grown on foothill vineyards, cultivated, picked, sorted, crushed, fermented in the slow, meticulous, European way—wines which will, within a few short years, be able to hold their own against the better Classed Growths.... Wines of this class are being produced, although in very small quantities, even today in the Santa Cruz Mountains. [p. 91]

Then, considering how MR had earlier accused Schoonmaker of perpetrating wine frauds with his "Selections," it's interesting to read this provocative assertion in the chapter on "Wine & Legislation"—perhaps an outcome of FS's listening to blasts from Martin Ray about the toothless legislation regarding the production and marketing of varietal wines. (One should remember, however, that at the time the law required that wineries use only 51% of the named winegrape.)

> It is possible to level, against the present alcohol administration, only one serious charge: its regulations are not being enforced. Obviously, it will be a long time before we have in this country the sort of personnel which once staffed the celebrated *Service des Fraudes* in France, but a start should be and, as far as the authors know, has not yet been made. The Federal Government requires that all wine labels be submitted to it, and carefully checks these, as it should: but this is at best a theoretical control, and from a practical point of view is no control at all.
>
> A label is submitted and approved for a California wine made from Riesling grapes: the Federal Government does not know and is apparently in no position to find out, whether this wine was made from Riesling grapes or from Thompson's Seedless. If not made from Rieslings, the wine may have been made and labels ordered by a grower who is convinced that his grapes are Rieslings ... or by a grower who is committing a deliberate and conscious fraud. The Treasury Department apparently believes, and far too many lay citizens also believe, that it is possible to make people honest and intelligent and well-informed by publishing a book of regulations or by passing a law.
>
> As varietal names become more prevalent, this is a problem which will become increasingly critical. At a guess, fully one-quarter of the wines marketed under varietal names in this country have no right to such names, but the Treasury Department will never separate the sheep from the goats by poring over labels which are submitted to it.
>
> There is only one obvious solution. Someone will have to undertake the identification and certification of the grape varieties grown in American vineyards. This is a necessary, but a Herculean and thankless task. Until it has been accomplished, a system of honest, varietal labeling is virtually unattainable in this country. If Pinot brings a high price, there will be a good deal of "Pinot" on the market, some of it genuine, some false but so sold through innocence and ignorance, some false and so sold by people who know better but are quite willing to defraud their customers and injure their neighbors by giving the name of "Pinot" to something which they know does not deserve it. [pp. 259-260]

Published in 1941, the Schoonmaker–Marvel book was regarded at the time, and has been ever since, as providing the best contemporary coverage of the complex post-Prohibition winemaking period in the U.S., when hundreds of wineries started up in various states, many only to fail. Although the reason for FS's chapter excision is fascinating, more important is its drastic effect on Martin Ray's

reputation. An entire chapter about him and his unmatchable Masson wines, if published as FS originally intended, would have influenced both wine producers and connoisseurs, and then had enduring value to wine scholars. (One can't help but wonder if the text of this dropped chapter still exists, in MS or printed galley form, in an untapped archive.)

The scarcity of solid references to Martin Ray's seven-year ownership of Paul Masson has affected wine historians' perspective on the late 1930s and the early WWII years. Those using *American Wines* as the principal reference wouldn't realize the impact of MR in this critical period (including upon Schoonmaker) unless they knew about him from other sources. Moreover, MR's perennial tendency to alienate noted wine authorities and authors who were his contemporaries, most notably the Wine Institute's Leon D. Adams, worked further against his attaining immortal recognition. (The additional matter of wine scholars' use of awards and medals as the best indicators of wineries' successes in producing high-quality wines will be taken up in a later article.) Post-Repeal wine quality fame has thus been accorded to MR's peers like John Daniel at Inglenook, the Wentes, André Tchelistcheff at Beaulieu, and Louis M. Martini. When MR was at his first peak, they and others produced less impressive, less uniquely crafted wines—ones that rarely, if ever, were pure varietals when commercially released. Inaccurately identified or blended with lesser grapes, subdued, fine-filtered, sometimes having residual sugar, their wines were more drinker-friendly to people unaccustomed to dry, classically made European wines, with their usual deposits. They were also accessible: made in far greater quantities, reasonably priced, and much more widely publicized and distributed.

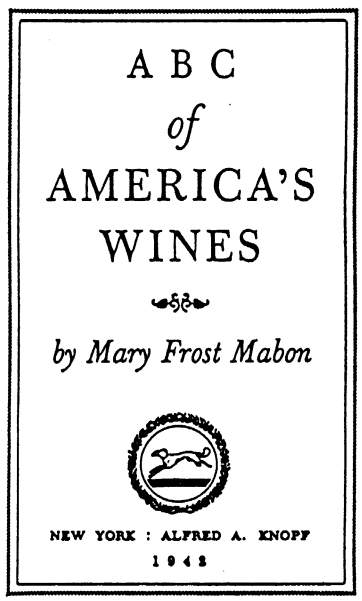
Martin Ray, at Masson and later in his own eponymous winery, virtually ran a "boutique" operation long before this epithet was applied to small-scale, prime-quality, pricey production. In those years, only connoisseurs (and aspiring ones) were apt to hear of these rare wines.

Portraying a Winegrower

Writing and reading about wines were becoming more prevalent activities in the publishing business. During the early part of 1941, Mary Frost Mabon, an East Coast journalist interested in American wines and winemaking, and also acquainted with Julian Street, toured California's main wine districts. She was gathering impressions and background information for a series of articles to be published in the stylish *Harper's Bazaar*.

After interviewing various winegrowers, Mabon formed an opinion about them as a genre, as differentiated from other agriculturists. She summed them up in *ABC of America's Wines*—the book based on her articles, published by Alfred A. Knopf in the following year.

> The longer a man makes wine the less hammered into a pattern, the more individual he becomes.... Perhaps it is due to the intelligence demanded by the uncertainties of his occupation, for if the weather does not fail the vine-grower in the field, there are a thousand other potential disasters to be circumvented before the wine is bottled and sold.
>
> But in any case the industry seems to attract and to create unusual characters. Each wine-maker has his own convictions, his own personality; each winery has special methods of handling general problems. Each wine therefore differs from winery to winery, no matter how much the owners act as a group. The strong influence that personalities have on the wine business is one of its most entrancing facets; there is not a man in it who does not consider that he is making his wine in the best possible way. [pp 20-21]



Mary Frost Mabon and her husband spent a day with Martin Ray at his residence and winery on the Saratoga hilltop. Certainly Martin Ray, as Mabon depicted him, epitomized this vintner archetype.

> Overlooking the sweep of the Santa Clara Valley and the Mount Hamilton range beyond it is one of the highest, smallest, but most talked about of California vineyards....
>
> To say that Ray has put his whole heart and soul into this spur of the Santa Cruz Mountains is stating the case mildly; he might be described as a fighting idealist who never hesitates to speak his mind and sometimes becomes unpopular in consequence. About forty years

old, "Rusty," as his wife calls him, looks younger, bearing a startling resemblance to Lindbergh. He almost never leaves his eagle's aerie, and works in his vineyard or winery from dawn to dusk. A mesmeric talker, with qualities that would have made him a religious leader in another age, his great theme is his hand-groomed vineyard, planted more and more with the finest varieties, and his wines.

His are the highest-priced, most expensively made (by true French methods), most carefully bottled-aged native vintages in the country. His production is very small, for he has rather less than a hundred acres in bearing vines.

It is typical of the man that he talks about bottles, or cases, rather than gallons; he prefers to sell, and does sell, a large percentage of his wines direct. Other than this, he operates under a unique system by which he sets minimum prices on new wines and invites subscriptions, with twenty-five per cent falling due at once, twenty-five per cent when the wines are bottled, fifty per cent when they are shipped four years later; a portion of the wines always being reserved by the vineyard. [pp 99-102]

It would be one thing for Mabon to publish nice things about Martin Ray, his wines, and the Masson premises. But MR reacted vehemently to several of her magazine articles—much as he would do in later years to other wine writers' statements that he judged ignorant or deliberately misleading. He couldn't abide her complimenting other vintners, wines, and places that he felt didn't merit them. Irritably, he ranted to Julian Street in one of his lengthy paragraphs:

There are so damned many of the writer people who set themselves up as authorities, before they learn anything about the subject on which they would be recognized, it takes a very large part of one's time just protecting against the injuries they bring about in their ignorance, not to mention the ills which they cause in ignorance while being directed by them are shrewd wine merchants who use them for their selfish ends. Now, I had hopes for Mary, because she showed a desire to learn, a determination to get at the bottom of her subject, it seemed. Whether or not sincere, I cannot know.... Recently I read a batch of trash which she had written which almost made me vomit, so bad was it, by way of naming almost every California wine and giving it a senior vote of thanks in flowery language, I thought. Elsie tamed me down by telling me she had to give the magazine what they wanted and that after all it was her job. I accepted this but with the reservation that ... this was a damned poor way to earn a living, in my estimation. [12/28/41]

MR later told JS that he was sending letters to Mrs. Mabon in an attempt to correct the grave errors that her articles had contained. She may not have paid much attention to his declamations. After all, the Wine Institute had basically helped arrange her itinerary, setting up connections with wineries around the state. She had come to California to praise and to encourage wine buying, as well as winery touring—not to mount a judgmental soapbox. MR began urging Julian Street to write another book about wine, since he knew the subject far better than anyone.

Setup for Disaster

The fiasco over the aborted MR–FS partnership deal in April of 1941 had a devastating sequel several months later. Soon after their split, MR learned that Schoonmaker had become a consultant with Almaden Winery as well as a shareholder. MR's suspicions about FS boiled up anew. While negotiating with him, evidently FS had also been setting up similar arrangements with other wineries.

In later years, MR often told the story of how in early 1941 he had been approached by the Almaden vineyards' new proprietors, Louis Benoist and Brayton Wilbur. They proposed that the two historic wineries be combined because of the connection with the Thée-Lefranc-Masson family succession. (Masson had directed winemaking at Almaden, which belonged to his wife's family until it was sold in 1929. Furthermore, MR customarily bought Almaden's better varietal grape crops for vintaging at Masson.) MR, though, refused to consider their proposition. (Perhaps FS was counting on effecting this merger after becoming MR's business partner.)

In the late spring of 1941Schoonmaker had begun directing what would now go on in Almaden's extensive vineyards and at its winery. MR would later tell JS why and how this happened:

Those fellows [Benoist and Wilbur] bought the Almaden property admittedly with the single thought and expectation that I would unite it with this, make a place for them and a profitable deal. They had put down $20,000, less than one fifth.... [W]hen they found I wouldn't go through with the deal they had been obliged to do something to raise money to harvest the crop. It was then they turned to Frank who in turn went to his people.... These very involved things would drive me nuts. There certainly is no dignity in having to run from one to another as the wind changes. [12/28/41]

It's probable that the money FS intended to put into the partnership with MR instead went toward bailing out the Almaden proprietors and helping fix up the winery there. For not long after his deal with FS collapsed, MR learned that the Almaden management, including Schoonmaker, had invited his own head vintner, Oliver Goulet, to become their

wine-maker once the disused winery was upgraded to again produce commercial wine. Their offer emboldened Goulet to ask for a large raise. Disliking the tactic, MR released Goulet, but secured his agreement to remain at Masson until the vintage of 1941 was over. Almaden's push to acquire Paul Masson, not just its skillful head vintner, possibly precipitated a dire event ... or so MR always maintained.

In the late evening of July 7, 1941, the wooden roof of the grand old winery, accessible from an upper road, caught on fire. Martin and Elsie Ray watched helplessly as the fast-moving conflagration destroyed their offices, the highly promising 1940 vintages and other wines still in casks, and the tall and long rows of bottles not yet released or deliberately withheld from sales. Within a few hours the entire interior of the four-story structure had burned to the ground. Only its outer masonry shell and the handsome Romanesque façade stood upright and stark against the night sky.

The next day, having received news of the calamity, Schoonmaker phoned MR from New York to make what MR considered an insultingly low offer for the Masson premises. It was vehemently rejected. Believing that an arsonist had set the fire, MR suspected his winemaker. He figured that since Goulet knew that the winery was under-insured, he would have viewed its destruction as the best way for his future employers to purchase the Masson property, at a fire-sale price—thus bringing about the coveted union with Almaden.

MR was not an easy quitter during adversities. When challenged by the elements—by fire, wind, flooding, landslides, power outages—he was often at his best. So he intended to carry on, despite the heavy losses—including much of the valuable wine inventory he'd reserved from past vintages. His determination shows in the telegram sent to Julian Street while the winery's ruins were still smoking around charred casks and melted glass shards of wine bottles.

> LAST NIGHT WE WERE BURNED OUT BUT THE LAND CLIMATE AND WINE VARIETIES REMAIN AND WE WILL START AGAIN UNFORTUNATELY WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF INSURANCE [7/8/41]

Julian first wired a consoling message to the Rays, then composed an encouraging letter in which he offered to send out publicity—"keeping the legend alive." He went on:

> The statement in your wire that you were not insured hurts. I hope it doesn't mean that you'll have any difficulty in financing your rebuilding. I don't suppose it will. Only of course it makes things a lot harder to take a loss like that. I am hoping that your wire will tell me you managed to rescue a good deal of the wine, so you won't be stripped bare. And just remember this: While you are now dazed and probably all shot to pieces over the disaster, in another four years things will be about where they were before this fire, only better, because you will have things more as you would want them....
>
> It is good to know at least that the vines were not hurt. You will harvest your grapes this fall and make your wine and before you know it the wheels will be going round again. Get out notices to your customers, telling them they'll have to wait a bit &c.

JS added a comment indicating how and why a partnership with FS just couldn't have worked out earlier.

> Maybe, as things are now, you'll want to take in a partner after all. Maybe not. Just be careful who it is if you do take one. When a man has ideals such as yours it's hard to find a fellow to go along with him in the double harness of business. Big financial interests would probably want to hurry up, get profits quickly, &c. Some rich man with a hobby would be the ticket if we could find him, I think....
>
> It did comfort us to read in your wire the lines of courage. Almost nothing is as bad as it seems at first. Experience will have taught you that[,] I know. [7/9/41]

MR dismissed all office and cellar employees, retaining only the vineyard foreman; he planned to hire field and cellar workers when necessary. Expectably, Oliver Goulet left for Almaden. MR had chosen not to confront or bring charges against him, despite the sheriff's supposedly having evidence of his guilt, for he feared some ugly future reprisal. MR began to plan how the winery could be rebuilt within a month, then arranged for financing, equipment, and supplies, and assembled a team of construction workers. Amazingly, the new winery was ready to receive harvested grapes just in time for vintage.

In the months afterwards, day after day, MR and Elsie did most of the cellar work, along with bottling, labeling, and packing up the wines for shipment. MR would also arise before dawn to work in the vineyards—pruning, plowing, sulfuring. They got frequent help from Elsie's family members and occasional assistance from hired workers.

Fortunately, some of the precious bottled wines, kept in a subcellar, had survived the fire. But to stay fully viable in the wine business MR needed to buy from other wineries high-quality finished wines that could be bottled and sold under the Masson label. When Madame de Latour of Beaulieu offered him the choice of any wine still in cask, MR gratefully accepted, and picked a Gamay. Her winemaker, though, was riled; André Tchelistcheff sometimes said that MR took away the best BV wine he'd made

since coming there three years earlier.

When Mary Frost Mabon's *ABC of America's Wines* was published by Knopf in May of 1942, Blanche (Mrs. Alfred) Knopf sent the Rays a copy. They read not just the positive coverage of MR and the Paul Masson premises, but also a brief, sympathetic notation about MR's resurrection of the winery and its business.

> The winery was rebuilt in the fall of 1941 (Munson G. Shaw selling Ray oak puncheons two and a half inches thick to replace the cooperage) after the disastrous fire of July 1941 that destroyed it entirely and caused at least a $250,000 loss of equipment and inventory. Ray's "money in the bank," all the wines aging in wood and over half of the wines in glass, were suddenly and tragically no more. This means that such varietal bottlings as were saved have practically become rarities and connoisseurs' items. However, Ray also bought wines to blend, bottle, and sell as lesser grades, to tide over the gap till his 1941 vintage, which would seem to be exceptional in quality even for this vineyard, is ready for the market in 1944 and 1945. [pp 99-102]

Then, as she did with other wineries, Mabon briefly presented most of the Masson wines, whether available on the market then or sometime in the future: on wine shop shelves, kept in cellars elsewhere, or as rare survivors found miraculously unbroken below the winery's black rubble.

The terrible fire and the stressful, exhausting recovery period took definite tolls on MR's emotional and mental stability. His letters to JS showed him moving more into a feeling of isolation and a frequent suspicion of others' actions and motives. He always felt that FS had somehow been indirectly responsible for causing the catastrophe that not only abruptly ended his splendid aesthetic reign, but seemed likely to doom his winemaking kingdom.

Who, Exactly, Was Frank Schoonmaker?

Though never a vintner himself, Schoonmaker (1905-1976) is generally regarded by past and present wine scholars as the foremost visionary and varietal-promoting activist of the American wine industry as it was slowly being regenerated in the several decades following Repeal. He then exercised considerable sway in the expansionist period after World War II through both his writings and his close connection with the ever-expanding Almaden enterprise. Surprisingly, nobody has yet published a biography of this uniquely influential wine man. Nor does anyone seem to know of a Schoonmaker archive—an unfortunate circumstance for recapturing such an energetic and prolific life.

FS fascinated MR, as his letters to Street show. Remarks about "Frank" occur frequently and extensively in the correspondence. (Only snippets can be given here.) Details of the two men's interactions, MR's opinions of the wines FS chose to promote and sell, and his recounting of what others said about FS—including the years after their disassociation—could provide compelling primary sources for information, both positive and negative (decidedly biased toward the latter), about FS's behavior and reputation in the wine trade during the late 1930s and early '40s, then on into the '60s.

Schoonmaker, then, was scarcely an idol to MR in the early '40s—or in later years. In one letter to JS he referred to FS as "our smart young villain" [12/28/41]; in another, as "a dangerous man ... associated with others perhaps no less dangerous. They are a thoroughly bad lot, as I have learned to know them" [1/17/43]. His letters to Street also raise questions about the actual quality of the varietal wines from various California wineries that Schoonmaker marketed, mainly in the East, as his "Selections." These reputedly momentous wines vintaged from the mid '30s to the early '40s probably have never been sampled by more recent wine authors, who perhaps have only read what others wrote in an earlier era.

In 1941 through 1943, MR frequently shared with JS the latest gossip as well as his current insights into FS and Almaden. The vineyards there in past years had been a good source of grapes for some Masson wines—notably Cabernet Sauvignon and Folle Blanche. For vintaging the former one, MR had carefully identified vines of the true variety from a block of "mixed black grapes" sold elsewhere for blended reds. In 1941, though, because Frank had secured control of the winemaking operation there, the new management had been crushing all the miscellaneous dark grapes, including the authentic Cabernet. MR declared that FS would make of them a "Selection" that he would market as a varietal wine, though it wouldn't be close to a genuine one.

> But this much I know, there is no more than two ton[s] there, altogether, and there is no one in the state of California, outside the University of California or myself, capable of picking out the real thing from that block, if there be I have not met them. I mention this because you will hear, in due course, of the Almaden

Cabernet. [12/28/41]

If there is some truth in MR's many assertions about these post-Repeal wines and their makers, detailed in his letters to JS, wine scholars may need to modify their view of FS as the heroic figure who pushed for premium quality in California wines, and to question his credibility. FS was, after all—as MR often pointed out to JS—always operating as a "tradesman." And MR knew the type well, since he had once been a super-salesman himself, of stocks and bonds. (He hated selling his wines, but could do it well enough when he had to, and always recognized the value of positive publicity, or what he called "propaganda.")

MR always tended to demonize or disparage certain people in the wine industry. Schoonmaker was one of his early targets; the Wine Institute became another. In some letters to JS, MR displayed the general conviction (repeated in innumerable future letters to other people) that he was being ostracized, punished, and conspired against by other (usually unnamed) wine men. But if he felt lonely, he could blame it on the uncompromising crusader's role he had taken up. His words and actions inevitably isolated him from the majority of people in the wine trade.

> I am no doubt a lone wolf in the industry but I doubt if I am too much so. Rather, I would say I am as little so as is possible. Smile if you will. But grant me this, only I can know. After all, I have tried. I always say that every man does the best he can with the tools given him. Whether I might be less a lone wolf had I other tools, I cannot say for sure. But I think the answer is, no. To run with a pack, you must be first accepted or able to fight them off and force your presence on to them. They wont accept what we are doing, it isn't us.

MR believed this standoff began with his refusal to "join" with them. He made his entry dependent upon the better vintners' commitment to pursuing the highest standards in winemaking and wine marketing. He relished exposing what he called their deceptive and illegal practices. He was especially incensed when wineries began to market varietal wines, selling them at prices approaching his. None, he declared, could possibly be 100% pure, as he asserted they should be; but of course the legal requirement of only 51% of a varietal was another outrage. Moreover, MR saw active malevolence coming from at least some people in the industry, and often suspected Schoonmaker's participation.

> Often enough they have tried to take us in, but always that they may themselves rest upon us, use what we have created, consume and thus destroy us. It has been calculated cleverly enough and times aplenty. I sometimes doubt if you know how sharp are the practices of the trade. Some things that have happened, I simply cant write of. There seems to be no ends to which they will go.

In this same letter, written three weeks after the U.S. declared war against the Axis powers, MR found their evil rulers' counterparts in the leaders of the California wine industry—those who, he believed, had expected the winery fire to finish him off.

> To travel with them is like trying to travel with Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and the Emperor H[irohito]. For even though there be plenty of good growers, all are under the spell of these, their leaders, even as are the states of Europe today under the direction of those who by their shrewdness and cunning have tricked and forced them into submission. Certainly I do not wish to set myself up as a martyr to a cause. I simply tell you, the growers don't like what we do, want us out, are now unhappy that we did not step down and out last summer. [1/1/42]

Most people spending time with MR would soon become aware of his paranoia (coupled with megalomania). His claims about persecutions and plots, however, can't always be dismissed as distorted perceptions and fixated beliefs caused by nervous- system damage from an early stroke, in the early '30s. For example, MR told JS that some detractors (perhaps the Almaden team?) had informed all his creditors—the suppliers of funds, labor, and materials for the winery rebuilding—that he was a big credit risk. They then demanded immediate payoffs, which would have forced the sale of the Masson property had MR not managed to talk all but one out of pressing him. Having paid that off that debt, he continued making regular payments to the rest.

Still, Martin Ray disliked having *any* indebtedness. And since he detested the whole business of selling the wines he made, he now began thinking of selling out. Above all, he wished to spend the rest of his life mostly in vineyards.

More Negotiations

As his letters to JS show, since early 1940, and possibly before, MR had been trying to interest the right persons—individuals or established business concerns—in making a partnership-sized investment in Paul Masson. Recovering from the winery fire had then put far greater pressure on him. The new winery was a fine improvement over the old one, but the monumental effort he and Elsie still were exerting to rebuild the wine business itself was exhausting them both. Although MR could take proud satisfaction in triumphing over calamity, he no longer could happily and lavishly entertain

highbrow oenophiles, as in the past. Also, he now lacked time and energy for writing long letters to his good friend Julian Street, as their much-diminished correspondence demonstrates.

Despite his grievances against Schoonmaker, MR had been pragmatic enough to stay on speaking terms with this lively wine entrepreneur. (MR told JS that when FS visited MR's rebuilt winery, he offered no comments at all about it as they walked through it, though surely he was impressed.) MR's ambivalence about FS continued. He recognized that beneath the conniving merchant might dwell a decent fellow—who used the incessant wheeling and dealing in the wine business as a way to achieve the aristocratic lifestyle he so desired.

> ... Frank's influence is so great, simply because he gets around so much, knows how to talk and write, I am always tempted to "join up" with him. I don't like to buck him. I'd much rather work with him, think even that it would benefit both of us. But that is provided we could use our best efforts. I doubt very much if Frank can use his best efforts exclusively, so long has he fought rough and tumble among the toughest tradesmen in existence. It may have done that to him. He wants to be a gentleman but he isn't rich, so he has to go on trying to get rich. If Frank should suddenly come into a few million, he'd be all right, would abandon his shrewd trade practices and endow the industry like a Rothschild of France. Maybe. [12/28/41]

So MR could consort with the enemy if benefits might be gained. "Frank wants this place," MR again told JS, and once more, despite their past discord, he began negotiating anew with FS and some of his business partners over their desire to buy Masson. "Markets are being organized in such a way you have to engage in tactics I don't employ, to reach some of the best places," he explained. In February of 1942 MR handwrote a long letter to JS—who at the top penned the comment, "End of Martin Ray at Paul Masson and a fine effort." "Dear Julian—" MR began, when wearily providing what he figured was his swan song.

> Once you said something to the effect, the world is run today by gangsters. I was impressed by your simple and honest analysis of what I immediately endorsed. Since, I have often thought of it. The world is also run largely by business and/or financial interests and what you said therefore goes for business. It is a nasty enterprise. I hate it. I do not like either business or those who conduct it. Exceptions only illustrate the rule. I can take care of myself and my interests but it raises hell with me, would ultimately destroy me. I was not trained for this kind of a world and each shock rocks me to the soul. It has been like selling my own flesh, as I have engaged in business. Many is the time I have had to go to my bed after a negotiation, conference, or even luncheon with business associates. I could <u>just</u> bear it, no more.
>
> It is bad enough to make mistakes but one doesn't justify another. This property and this life cannot be separated from business. Yet, I have finished with business. My life is perhaps half over. I have spent <u>all</u> my maturity in business until the last six years, and even these years have been and now increase as business enterprise. Those forces gathering make escape impossible for me so long as I continue here. It is not discouragement I feel. I am simply unwilling to spend any more time in business. For, I do not have to and there is but one compensation for this place. Another, smaller place, will take me beyond the boundaries and safe out of business.
>
> Accordingly, I have communicated with some of the individuals and groups who have in the past expressed a desire in this place. Some of them have come already and all have been interested. A sale will be concluded, I have no doubt.
>
> I have long hoped to get a partner or make an association with a company, so as to shed the business and retain only the work I love—growing. But thus far it has been not possible.
>
> You have been so much a part of our lives, these last years, I thought I should write you. I have wanted to all week but it has not been done. I put it off because I rather hate to tell you.
>
> Now there will be a new start, a reorganization. What has been learned will come into play and I will be able to control what now controls or forever seeks to control me. This property is too large. In Burgundy they have been unable to grow in 100 acre vineyards. Neither can I in California. It became business, when that large. If there must be business before growing, for me there is great conflict....
>
> Then there is the war. It is changing everything.... I prefer to live simply, on the land, free of the business and economic influences I dislike. I will work just as hard, achieve more. It is, then, a move forward and in no sense a folding up of either ambition or effort....
>
> The industry want me out. They have turned on me in hatred for bringing varietal names into trade. I was first to do it. The idea caught Frank's fancy, it spread.... Markets are being organized in such a way you have to engage in tactics I don't employ, to reach some of the best places....
>
> As I write I hear the carpenter's hammer. It seems odd, that development continues even as we take our departure (in plans). And Elsie is making curtains and drapes. Well, it is the way we are. We'll keep improving the place, as we always have, until it is sold. I remember my old grandmother doing the same with our old ranch near by. She was weeding and spading the garden while moving out and refused to go until

the job was complete. It's all rather sad but there is the pleasure in a correct decision. [2/10/42]

MR was clearly relieved to be detaching himself from the wine business and ridding himself of debts. The prospective deal wasn't wholly to his liking, but it did offer him the welcome chance to bail out of Masson—and let it be taken over, ironically, by the very men who'd been so eager to get it before, and whose courtship he'd rejected at least twice.

A week and a half later, though, he was both depressed and angry over another promising deal that apparently was poised now to fall through.

> I am lonesome this morning and feel that I have been so for a long time, probably always, since it is the human lot. But this morning it is different. Yesterday, fear, anger and desire wrestled each other all day long, within me. This morning found me so profoundly lonesome it was almost a form of happiness, by contrast, it brought with it such relief....Probably one should not write letter when in such a frame of mind, but you will understand the necessity.
>
> Frank Schoonmaker, Jack and Charlie of "21," Louis Benoist and their individual and group associates, including Talbot [Wildman] and the Almaden crowd, are now one, I have been advised by the "21" bunch [a New York investors' group] and by Frank, each by letter.
>
> Louis Benoist is now their spokesman. We have talked by telephone several time[s] recently, while he has been honeymooning in Palm Springs. We had come to a definite agreement.

What, then, had occurred to doom the sale?

> Yesterday I awaited Louis' coming. He was scheduled for Tuesday, so I determined to expect him Wednesday, in which I was fortunate enough, but he was an hour and a half getting here after phoning me he would be here in thirty minutes. Why must it always be so! Something had happened since we talked. I could not learn what, but it seems there are others who must be further consulted, their operations at Almaden are not going as had been planned by them and one of their associates who has put up money wants to withdraw it. It may be but a play, rehearsed [by] the bunch of them, I don't know. I only know that whatever it is, it is not out in the open as was agreed upon and yet the results or intentions, of that concealed, are waved before me. What these chaps never seem to be able to learn is that if they so provoke a real man it prevents rather than encourages their successful dealing. I would rather see them in hell than eat out of their hands. I was all set to let them have the place, the name and all but the Vintage of 1941 and some thousand or two thousand cases of tirage champagne, and that was our deal. Now I see them trying to alter it and I know the chances for each of us are withering. The whole idea, as I grasp it, is that not one of them has any real guts.

MR then launched a passage of nostalgic recollections of his youth, and indeed of how he saw the America of the pioneering years, now past—a theme that would often recur over the years. The several pages begin with his rage against the "new order" in which the timid winery investors clearly belonged.

> I was once surrounded by a family of people who had guts and I grew up with them. There was a whole race of them. They lived on farms and some even had businesses in the towns. They went through times as tough as we may yet have to again face and they came out on top. We never had money. We only had land. We had no markets for our crops. We had fought the Indians, each other in the Civil War, the wilderness, the pests, epidemics, God knows what all. But now I see none of their kind. Things are not met, face to face, openly, or head-on, anymore. It is not the modern way. Today there is a new order. I don't like it. [2/19/42]

So MR again took up the task of selling outright the Masson premises—the winery, chateau, and other buildings, the 60-some acres of vineyards planted on a square mile of mountain land. But he found the sale couldn't be done swiftly and easily. It involved numerous site visitations, handing over documents and account books for scrutiny, and lengthy negotiations, with lawyers present. None of the promising prospects got anywhere—a big drawback being MR's insistence upon being paid fully in cash for all of it. A full year after he'd decided to put Masson on the market, MR still sought a buyer. As MR wrote to Street in January of 1943:

> This business of being pushed along, almost frantically, by the rush of life, I do not like. For, I too, am moving under that same force and have felt raw and ragged nerves from it for years. It was, in fact, an ill advised effort to escape it that led me to this very property. Viewed from the distance, this life seemed once to be an idealistic paradise. But it is the price exacted of one who would dare dream such dreams, I guess. Anyway, I am one to whom it comes naturally to think that all experience, however trying, is for the best, if only it be survived. So, I struggled to survive, and in this sense am not unlike the most of us, unless it be in that I am yet determined to find what I seek. [1/17/43]

In the meantime, big changes were taking place in the wine industry. Along with the war, large distillers started buying up commercial wineries at high prices, so as to make and market alcoholic beverages. Hard liquor production had been severely curtailed, because the grains used for brewing were needed either to feed troops or to convert into

alcohol for munitions and antiseptics. Drinking people usually had to settle for wine instead of whiskey or gin, and it was often fortified with brandy. As with Prohibition, most didn't fuss over what they drank—which the new corporate winery owners counted on. Not unexpectedly, the overall quality of California wines, which had been steadily improving, plummeted.

National Distillers bought Bellows as a subsidiary distributing operation. Rather reluctantly, Street stayed on the directors' board, and contributed a newsletter column, "Table Topics." Frederick Wildman eventually launched his own distributorship. Writing to JS, MR prophesied that "A new era will form, is now forming. What part you and I will play in it, if any, time will tell. Since I seek to play no part now, only to be free of playing a part, it is not likely I will take part." A complete Westerner, MR resented the dictates and takeovers originating on the other coast. "[I]t angers me a bit to see that situation in the East, all those strange fellows who have been shaping the wine industry, reaching from the growers to the consumers." He again regretted that Wildman's ego had prevented Bellows from joining him and Julian in the great, concerted campaign to make, sell, and promote fine varietal wines. And, "As a result, the responsibility of doing it went to Frank Schoonmaker who messed and botched it, squandered the money on ill management and deprived a lot of people of getting what they were led by him to believe in and expect." He then he announced, "An era has, however, ended, with the failure of Frank Schoonmaker, about which I see you have not been told. So I will tell you of it." [1/17/43] After joining the OSS toward the end of 1942, Schoonmaker had flown off on a secret government mission. (He began working in Spain as a spy, trying to find out about German military plans while posing as a sherry dealer.)

With ill-concealed pleasure MR now proceeded to detail for Street's sure interest the fiscal collapse of Schoonmaker's company—due, he said, to FS's convoluted business chicanery during several years of rounding up wines for his enterprise and of enlisting financial support for both his wine merchandising and vineyard property acquisitions. This information had been given to him "in confidence," but he disclosed that it came directly from Mr. (Tony) Korbel, whose family-owned winery had supplied Frank Schoonmaker & Company with champagnes. Along with several other wineries (Martini, Wente) he had invested $10,000 in the company, which gave them all seats on its directors' board. Moreover, each was owed thousands of dollars for wines shipped but not paid for.

> [T]he creditors of Frank Schoonmaker & Company have audited Frank's Corporate books and found there many shocks will illustrate clearly enough what sort of a chap Frank is, that he had so involved himself and others as to make impossible any end but the one he has found.... Frank's moves were such, months back, that he had ceased to be a factor in the wine trade, had become pretty much the servant of the machine he had built which had finally started to tear itself to pieces, Frank with the machine. It was not because of the war, it was not because of anything but Frank. He never was sound nor square in any attempted dealings here, however well they seem always to promise each time anew. As we all know, there are two kinds of failure. One is what I term outright and honest failure, met squarely and recognized at a point when its force has gained mastery. The other kind of failure is what I describe as the beginning of some things bigger and more sinister, rather than the end of an endeavor.

And MR well recalled what he had witnessed as a stock broker in the heyday before the Crash and then in its grim aftermath.

> I mean the sort of thing we had so much of on a very large scale during the 1920's. If a thing wasn't sound or successful, you simply hid it by adding something else to it, thus mushrooming and pyramiding it, putting off the day of destiny, as other people, businesses or properties were added to give enough life to carry on a bit further. Now and then a dash of new capital was thrown in to save a day or reckoning. So it was with Frank, as it has now been disclosed to me.

Schoonmaker had left behind him not only debts totaling over $100,000 connected with California wineries, but also a great snarl of complications in the various businesses he had either started or entered into on the side.

> The Almaden venture had failed to make money, had failed even to produce the champagne they had put down in hopes of it bailing him out. All the things small but in their total more important than these individual items, are too numerous to mention here. His deception and errors, his failures, his agreements and his various frantic efforts and activities are now unimportant. Cornered, Frank simply turned over everything and stepped off via plane and left the boys holding the large bag he had handed to them, unopened.

After Schoonmaker's return to a shared management of Almaden after WWII, he proved far more successful.

Selling Out

For a while MR toyed with the possibility that Masson could be bought by 21 Brands, the New York firm that pulled Almaden out of Schoonmaker's financial quagmire after his patriotic

defection. He then hoped that Lucius Boomer, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel's debonair millionaire president, would become his partner (JS's ideally proposed "rich man"), so he was devastated at the news of Boomer's death. He finally settled upon a pragmatic solution. The entity best able to give him cash for the Paul Masson property and business would be a large distillery. With wartime price ceilings enforced, distillers liked the established high ones on the Masson wines. And MR, confronting reality, saw the frustrating futility of pushing 100% fine-varietal wines into a marketplace where most people didn't care what they drank so long as it contained alcohol.

Suitors from several distilleries visited Paul Masson, to look around and discuss acquisition. (One was National Distillers, and MR promised JS a commission if they bought.) In early 1943, less than two years after the winery fire, MR sold the Paul Masson property, name, and most of the wine inventory to the Joseph Seagram Corporation, for the large cash payment he wanted. The sale caused a minor shock wave in the wine industry. Just before his departure, MR wrote to JS, expressing no regret over his decision.

> We are a happy couple, tonight. The deal has been completed, we have no debts, and ahead is a life which we will carefully plan that its freedom may be safeguarded. We want to live more modestly, if possible, than ever before, devoting ourselves to what we believe will make life best. We want to work at what we want to do, when and as we like. The last few days were filled with strain and incidents that will be funny when viewed from the distance that will separate us from these people, tomorrow night. For, tomorrow we move. We will go to Elsie's sister's for a bit, until we can settle on a place of our own....
>
> My head is threatening to burst open with an ache, tonight, so I will not go many words beyond this. But we do want you to know that Seagram's are the proud owners, now. They have asked me several times to remain with them, even in an advisory capacity. But I am a queer sort, it seems, while I admit no plans, I am not interested, and am instead leaving. There is so very much to do, in gathering up ends, doing this and that, give me a little time for more.
>
> Elsie and I have you with us so much you have been a part of even all this last. You are the only one who really sees the facts as they are. The others seem to think it a crime to have sold what we bought. We are content to say, we have not sold ourselves. We feel, in fact, quite free. I know what I shall do, but I don't want to talk of it until I get it all straight in my own mind, which you will understand. [4/26/43]

In a few months the Rays bought a 20-acre property a half-mile from the town of Saratoga, next to the place where Rusty had spent his early childhood. They intended to remodel the old house there, and while doing so would set up a cramped residence in the tank house.

> The land is just what we wanted. It is, after all, the soil we bought. The fruit trees on it are old, like the house. Part of it we will take out this fall and on that part will plant Pinot Noir. But we will not again make wine commercially. The law permits an individual to make 200 gallons each year. This amount only, will we make hereafter and the grapes we will sell. And we will sell none (wine), but give it away. As long as we can make better wine than is made elsewhere we will continue it, and with the experience gained out of the past and the knowledge of that experience, I think we can always make wine that our friends will be justly proud to have. In this way, it will be just fun, as we want it to be. To hell with all that other that is a part of being in it as a business....
>
> We will grow one grape, the Pinot Noir. From it we will make the big red wine, the big white wine, the champagne and a rose if it please us. We can do one thing one year, another another year.... We can do it all ourselves. [7/1/43]

Martin and Elsie merited a rest from their intensive labors. MR even dared to depart from his health-induced abstemiousness, going from judicious tasting to consuming daily a glass or two of wine. But in spite of his declaration about removing himself from the wine business, MR couldn't easily abandon his winemaking ambitions and principles. In 1944 he bought two adjoining quarter-sections of undeveloped mountainous land to the north of the Masson property, divided from it by a small canyon. There he began carving out his new winegrowing kingdom.

He wanted a much smaller operation than before—one that this time would bear his own name. But ever canny, knowing the value of an early founding date and historic lineage, he had retained the Paul Masson Champagne Company's original articles of incorporation when selling to Seagram. Changing the company's name now to Martin Ray, Inc. he felt he could claim a symbolic connection with three earlier generations of familial winemakers: Paul Masson, Charles Lefranc, and Etienne Thée, whose winery was started in 1852. (This was why MR, to wine people's consternation, said he could legitimately claim that founding date, using it on his young winery's labels—and later celebrating its centenary in 1952, though Martin Ray wines only began selling in the late '40s!)

Meeting at Last

From late 1939 to 1945 Martin Ray had carried on an intense correspondence with Julian Street. But the two men and their wives had not yet met. As World War II approached its welcome end, Julian and his wife, Margot, began planning a trip to California. One compelling reason was their intention to revise and expand Julian's popular book, *Wines*. Since they would add a new section on the wines now being made in the U.S., they wished to visit some of California's wine country.

Here was Julian's first chance to make direct acquaintance with his winegrowing correspondent of over five years. Martin and Elsie Ray were overjoyed that the Streets accepted their invitation to stay at their home in Saratoga. MR always cherished the Streets' two-week visit as a great highpoint in his life. The four of them went on investigative expeditions to different wineries around the San Francisco Bay area. And of course Rusty Ray gave them a tour of his vineyard-creating activities on Table Mountain (which eventually he'd call Mt. Eden); soon he would build a small house there. At breakfast time, Julian endeared himself to Joseph, the Ray's terrier, by treating him to doughnuts. During their time together, the men exchanged stories about malicious wine men. "I never can understand how such a noble occupation as wine-growing lures such an overwhelming number of scoundrels and crooks," Julian was said (by MR) to have memorably remarked.

When published in 1948, the Streets' book, not surprisingly, would contain a reminiscing tribute to Martin Ray's earlier wines, while indicating that unnamed other winegrowers, in California and elsewhere in the U.S. were, like him, already making or aiming to make fine wines. "What of the future, the long-range view?" JS would ask, rhetorically. "And can we make better wines?" His response:

> The greatest certainty of a good future rests with the practical idealists, all striving to make fine wines. Some are individuals working on a small scale, many in vineyards so far unknown but which one day may be famous; others are carrying out their projects in well-established wineries. All are grape-growers as well as wine-makers, and this fact is important. There can be little genuine concern with the production of good wine when the grapes used are mixtures of everything brought in from all over the state.
>
> The first wines to bring real hope that the industry might be heading into something permanent and fine came from the Paul Masson Champagne Company when it was owned by Martin Ray of Saratoga from 1936 to 1943. Martin Ray continued making the Champagne for which the vineyard had gained some fame, adding a very fine still Champagne to his list; but also he began to make one-grape table wines by the time-honored, and so far unimproved, method of fermenting the wines in small cooperage, racking them as needed, maturing them properly, bottling and storing the bottled wines to gain proper age. I tasted the first in 1940, a Pinot Noir 1936, and it was a remarkable wine, the first American red wine I ever drank with entire pleasure. Ray's Cabernet, especially the 1936, seemed to me to be the best wine ever to be made of the Claret grape in the United States, and his Gamay was a pleasure to drink.

As for Julian Street's prototype of the "practical idealist," he had already seen Martin Ray at work creating his new but small winegrowing kingdom. The updated Street book describes their friend and host thusly:

> Martin Ray finds life most agreeable when he is his own wine-maker. Although the Paul Masson vineyard is not large, something around a hundred acres, its size restricted the amount of personal attention he could give to each detail. Consequently he disposed of that holding, and now he and his wife, who plant, tend the vines and make the wines together, are perched serenely on a mountain-top adjoining their old property, surrounded by a workable vineyard planted to Pinot Noir. [pp. 208-209]

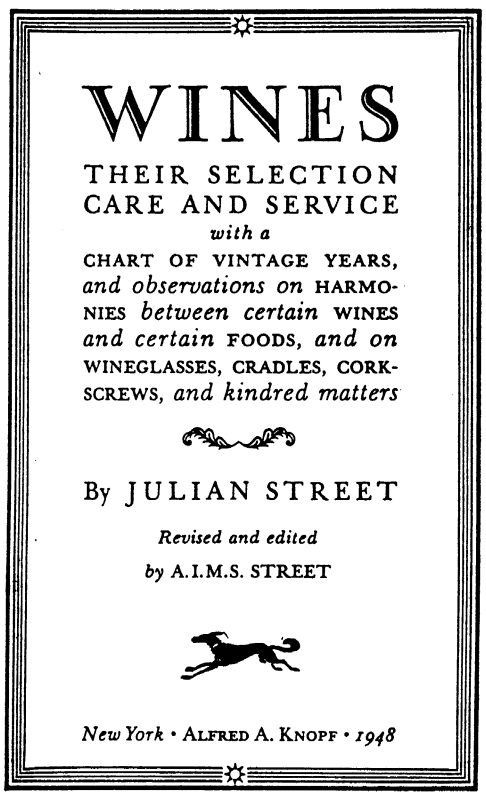
During their earlier correspondence JS had referred to his vintner friend in California as his "white hope" for American wine. Doubtless he was thinking primarily of Martin Ray when he wrote this prophesying paragraph for his revised book:

> The hope of the American wine industry, to my way of thinking, lies with a few individuals—individuals of tremendous idealism who are working with assurance and devotion to produce fine American wines. Where these few lead, the others ultimately must follow. [p. 24]

Street's solutions for improving American wines echoed various notions and methods described to him by MR—that winemaking insider who had deliberately made himself an industry outsider. MR had explicitly given JS permission to use in his book, without attribution, any statements of his or information supplied in his letters.

The Streets' visit to the Rays had been wonderfully satisfying. "We don't forget [the] beautiful time you gave us when we so much needed it," Julian wrote in his last letter to MR. Alas, the first time that Martin Ray met in person his correspondent, and now close friend, proved to be the last. In February of 1947, less than a month after writing that letter, Julian was suddenly dead, of a heart attack.

Margot Street, Julian's widow, completed the work of revising *Wines*, which Knopf published in 1948. (She used gender-hiding initials, A.I.M.S, before the Street surname, since women weren't viewed then as capable of fully appreciating wine, let alone *making* it superbly.) Without seeing evidence of the manuscript's evolution, one cannot know how much she contributed to the new writing. Margot took up other food- and wine-writing projects of Julian's. She also continued his epistolary connection with Rusty and Elsie Ray, transferring the distaff side of the quartet's friendship to Eleanor Ray after Elsie's death in 1951. As "Mrs. Julian Street," she was made an honorary member of Mount Eden Vineyards after the Rays founded the corporation in 1960.


WINES

THEIR SELECTION
CARE AND SERVICE
with a
CHART OF VINTAGE YEARS,
and observations on HARMONIES *between certain* WINES
and certain FOODS, *and on*
WINEGLASSES, CRADLES, CORKSCREWS, *and kindred matters*

By JULIAN STREET

Revised and edited
by A.I.M.S. STREET

New York • ALFRED A. KNOPF • *1948*

(The Ray–Margot Street letters that often passed back and forth between the two coasts during the '50 and '60s are now archived at UC Davis. They contain intriguing gossip about people in both the wine and publishing industries, including Frank Schoonmaker. Some of these will be summarized or excerpted in future articles on Martin Ray's correspondence and relationships.)

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE.

JULIAN STREET (1879 – 1947) WINE BOOK CHECKLIST

by *Gail Unzelman*

1912. *Paris à la Carte.* Illustrations by May Wilson Preston. New York: John Lane. 79p.

1924. *Where Paris Dines. With information about restaurants of all kinds, costly and cheap, dignified and gay, known and little known: and how to enjoy them; together with a discussion of French wines and a table of vintages by a distinguished amateur.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday. 322p.
British edition, London: W. Heinemann, 1929.

1933. *Civilized Drinking: the selection and service of wine.* Reprinted from Redbook Magazine. 33p.

1933. *Wines, their Selection, Care and Service. With a chart of vintage years, and observations on harmonies between certain wines and certain foods, and on wineglasses, cradles, corkscrews and kindred matters.* New York: Alfred Knopf. 194p. With a folding map of the vineyard areas of France.

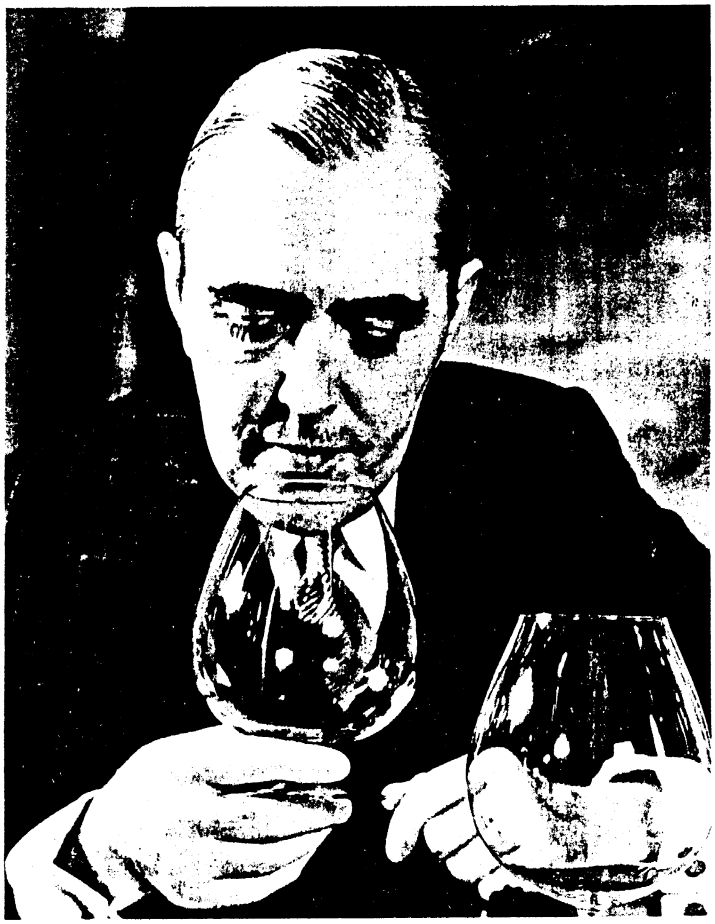
"This was perhaps the first real post-Repeal guide of its type ... and remained popular through numerous editions." (Eberhard Buehler, Wine & Gastronomy Catalogue "S", 2001)

1948. *Wines, their Selection, Care and Service. With a chart of vintage years...* Revised and edited by A.I.M.S. Street. New York: Alfred Knopf. 288p. With a folding map of the principal vineyard districts of Europe.

1959. *Table Topics.* Edited, and with additions by A.I.M.S. Street. Introduction [biographical sketch of Street] by Sophie Kerr. New York: Alfred Knopf. 289p.

"Street...in retirement began writing a series of pamphlets about wine and food for Bellows & Co., New York wine merchants. These [4-page] pamphlets, titled Table Topics, were sent [beginning in June 1943] for nearly four years to Bellows' customers ... this delightful little book, a compilation [by Street's widow] of the best articles, elegantly expresses the author's eclectic and life-long love of food and wine." (Gabler, *Wine into Words*, 2nd ed.)

NOTE: For a description of the contents of the Julian Street archives at Princeton University, see Buehler, Wine & Gastronomy, Cat.S, 2001, p.41. It clearly illustrates the depth of Street's writings.



PHOTOGRAPH BY EUGENE HUTCHINSON

Julian Street

[From *TABLE TOPICS*, by Julian Street. Edited, and with Additions, by A.I.M.S. Street. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959]