Vinaceous Correspondents:
Martin Ray's Friendships with Eminent Oenophiles

The Third Article in a Series

by *Barbara Marinacci*

[Note: This is the sixth piece in an ongoing series of articles, and sections of articles, focusing on California winegrower Martin Ray and his relationships with notable persons connected to him by a mutual love of fine wine and shared opinions about the wine business. This correspondence reveals facets of unique friendships while providing glimpses at the eras in which they were formed and thrived—and then sometimes collapsed. After the Introduction (I), the first article (II), published in four installments, concerned MR's epistolary friendship with East Coast connoisseur-writer Julian Street. The author of this series—a book writer, editor, and daughter of Eleanor Ray, MR's second wife and widow—spent a year going through the abundant and fascinating Ray Papers, now archived by UC Davis. However, some of the quoted material in the initial sections of this article (to be published in several installments) derives from MR's letters to Julian Street and from Amerine's own correspondence with Street—both archived at the Princeton Library Division of Rare Books and Special Collections, which granted permission to quote from them. Additionally, valuable comments about Martin Ray's years at Paul Masson (1936-43) were obtained from an unpublished transcription of Charles L. Sullivan's interview with Maynard Amerine, conducted in 1984. Information about Amerine's early work was provided by Thomas Pinney. John Skarstad, University Archivist at UC Davis Library, located a Paul Masson Winery file folder that contained early correspondence between MR and members of the Division of Viticulture (now the Department of Viticulture & Enology), and permission has been kindly granted to use excerpts from some of these letters (Department of Viticulture & Enology Archives, AR-059).]

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

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Almost a half-century after the event, Dr. Maynard Amerine recollected that he first met Martin Ray at the Paul Masson vineyard and winery premises in Saratoga in 1936. If his memory of the year was correct, he and Dr. Albert J. Winkler would have come to the Masson property soon after MR had bought it. On their first trip to this winegrowing "ranch" (as MR called it) in the eastward-facing foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains, the two educator-scientists from the University of California at Davis probably arrived on a day in late spring, when grapevine leaves would be well developed and grape clusters expanding, to reveal varieties' special characteristics. The two men came there to determine which winegrapes were grown in the 60-acre vineyard.

This visit was only one of many investigative field trips undertaken by this duo, who sometimes were joined by "junior viticulturist" Harold Olmo. They were journeying to far-flung vineyards and wineries on a mission: to rescue the state's wine industry from its dismal reputation and foundering economy. Their purpose was to identify, primarily from the results of testing and tasting, the comparative quality of wines they would make from distinctive grape varieties they'd harvest from different climatic regions. Thus their job entailed obtaining grapes for the winemaking research begun on campus in 1935, less than two years after Prohibition ended.

After welcoming the visiting professors to his lofty domain, Martin Ray would have given them a tour of portions of the extensive hillside vineyards that stretched in different directions around the old winery. He expected to benefit from their ability to discern or confirm the identities of various grapevines planted in what were supposed to be blocks of fine varietals; some still baffled him, despite his questioning old-time vineyard workers and a diligent use of several ampelographies.

Many years later, Amerine would tell Charles Sullivan about the confusing condition of the Masson vineyards that confronted him and Winkler on their visit in the mid-1930s:

> Martin Ray certainly didn't know what was up on the hill then. I don't really think that Paul Masson gave him very much information. But the blocks had been sort of named, so that in a general way the Chardonnays were in one area and the Pinot Noirs in another. But it was very mixed up.... [W]e had to spend a whole day just trying to figure out where we were going to sample from before we even got started....
>
> These were all old vines. And the vineyard was in much worse shape than the [flat] one at Almaden. Being on a hillside, there was more erosion from the heavy rains and washouts. People sometimes don't do the terracing properly. So you begin to have missing vines, and so there was more and more interplanting

up there. You couldn't say that the next vine was going to be Chardonnay.... Almost all the blocks had been interplanted during Prohibition. They didn't try to keep a pure block but were just trying to keep the vineyard going.

First of all, we had to spend quite a bit of time to try and identify where there was enough of a variety in an area that we could pick. I remember going up there one more time before we actually picked to do this. [From Charles Sullivan's interview; transcribed text slightly rearranged.]

Such a rampant mix-up of winegrapes wasn't just a recently introduced problem, since for almost a century vineyardists—unless they were extraordinary purists—tended to plant grapevines in haphazard and heterogeneous ways. Most chose vinifera varieties (usually as budwood to be grafted after the 1890s on phylloxera-resistant native-grape rootstock) for convenience, fast and healthy growth, and bountiful production, rather than for fine vintaging quality or uniformity of type. The 14-year Prohibition period starting in 1920 had worsened the situation, as vineyard owners removed or grafted over the delicate, shy-bearing varieties best for making good wine. Even the finicky Paul Masson, desperate to generate income, had succumbed to the trend, so now many previously pristine blocks of fine varieties had been replaced by inferior grapes that MR, fixated on quality, didn't intend to vintage. Nor would the UC Davis researchers want them either. But MR at least could sell them to less discriminating wineries.

As the visitors walked through various vineyard blocks at Masson, they must have explained to MR what they were doing, and why. Their findings, plus knowledge of varietals' performances in the European wine regions, should eventually enable them to recommend which varieties to plant where in California. Following their guidelines, wineries could begin to produce much better wines—even high-quality wines that connoisseurs far beyond California might approve and start buying, ultimately to transform the market. Bulk wine producers too could benefit from learning where to grow or obtain the most intensely flavorful grapes for blending with bland wine fermented from abundant and much cheaper juice grapes, to make superior if unpretentious *vin ordinaire* jug wines.

Background to a New Friendship

Both Amerine and Ray knew why California's wine industry was in deep trouble, and each man had committed himself to altering the situation in his own way and over time. Repeal, coming at the end of 1933, had brought a new set of hurdles when legal winemaking was resumed. During Prohibition total vineyard acreage had greatly expanded on valley floors as growers put in the coarse, heavy-bearing varieties yielding dark, purplish-red juice favored by bootleggers, shippers, and home winemakers. Many couldn't even accurately identify their own vines, and most—strapped now for cash in these Depression years—wouldn't or couldn't consider replanting. The scarcity of fine-varietal grapes, known to yield the best vintages when grown under stressed conditions, dismayed the rare vintner who truly wished to make premium wines, as California had produced in the distant past. Fortunately, though, for Martin Ray, a number of fine varieties still grew in the Masson vineyards.

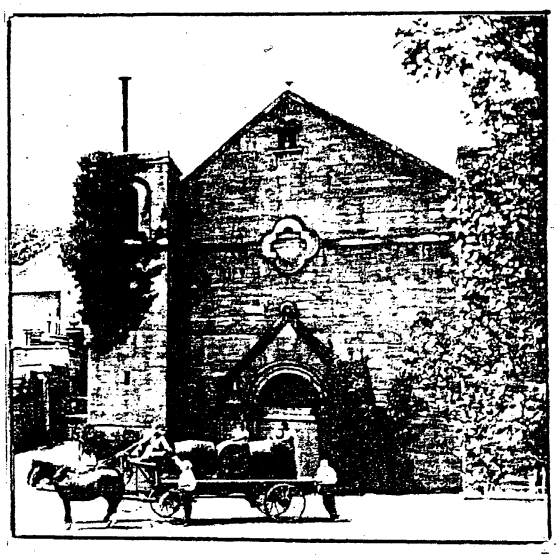
After 1933, some previously established wineries resumed their places in the commercial wine-producing ranks, and scores of new wineries joined them. But most wines made and marketed were inferior in quality, even awful. Most of the knowledge and skills of professional winemaking hadn't been transmitted to the new generation now enlisted in the business. Because the state's resurrected wine industry had a desperate need for expert help, UC's agriculture-focusing campus at Davis had launched the practical work of serving it through research, education, and outreach to be provided by its Division of Viticulture. Besides studying grapegrowing, the curriculum and research also included enology, the science of winemaking (now being pursued again at UC Berkeley as well).

When telling MR what their research project entailed, Drs. Winkler and Amerine probably presented the methodology of this complex new investigation, begun a year or two earlier. Intending to find out which varietal winegrapes did best in California's different climate zones, they set up a study of cumulative daytime temperatures in the various grapegrowing regions of California: foothills, mountainsides, and valleys in coastal or interior areas. Their heat-summation system would calculate the number of "degree days" by adding up for each area the highest temperatures, day after day, above 50° F, when vine growth takes place. Grapes coming from an identical variety but grown in either hotter or cooler regions would inevitably have distinctive properties when fully ripe; thus, when fermented under uniform conditions, the resultant wines would not only be of variable quality but also have measurable chemical differences. Some grape varieties would produce healthier, unique, and intensely flavorful grapes in cooler areas, whereas quality in other types would be better if grown in places with warmer overall temperatures.

An important facet of this research would come after identifying which grape varieties were growing

in the many vineyards in the five different temperature zones in California, ranging from cool to hot. The two scientists would request permission from a number of growers to pick samples at vintage time, for they planned, with help from their students, to crush these grapes and proceed to make white and red wine samples from the fermented must. Certainly when they met with MR the UC Davis visitors would have expressed the desire to eventually harvest ripe grapes from the uncommon fine-varietal vines they saw on the Masson premises —although they realized it wouldn't be an easy picking job because of those mixed-up blocks.

As for Martin Ray, surely he told the two professors about his own aims as Paul Masson's new proprietor: he wanted to make the best still wines and champagnes possible, to show the world what California was capable of producing. To do this, he would vintage, and therefore ultimately grow, *only* pure fine-varietal grapes. MR would also have asserted emphatically that he intended to make his future Paul Masson dry table wines wholly from fine varieties. There would be no blending at all for him, as the other winery proprietors and vintners did it. He wanted his wines to be "natural," alive—individual living entities created from the beneficent actions of microorganisms like yeast upon juice extracted from handpicked, clean, high-quality winegrapes. So he didn't wish to sterilize them chemically by adding sulfur dioxide or to pasteurize all the life out of them by subjecting them to heat treatments. Such statements were bound to astound Amerine. In those years he was unlikely to ever encounter another zealous fine-wine purist like Martin Ray, who sought to learn and then perfect the mysterious alchemy of traditional winemaking.



[The handsome facade of Paul Masson Winery]

During this first visit by Amerine and Winkler, MR surely introduced them to all four floors of Masson's 30-year-old winery building, which he had begun to renovate. (Years later, Amerine recalled how impressed he had been with the impeccably clean cellars—always an MR requirement.) Then MR must have invited his visitors to partake of vinous refreshments before their departure, leading them to the nearby two-story stone house where he and Elsie lived—formerly Paul Masson's requisite but modest Burgundian vineyard *château*. That was surely the occasion when Amerine met Paul Masson, for he recalled that MR had persuaded the elderly Frenchman to return to his former domain, to meet and talk with the two scientists. "He wanted us to quiz him about where it was he had gotten some of the grape varieties there," Amerine said. The occasion would have called for MR to ceremoniously serve a champagne made in some past year by Masson himself and perhaps some aged still wines dating back to before Prohibition.

At this and other early encounters Maynard Amerine not only took note of MR's ambitions and already adamant opinions about winemaking, but also experienced his vitality, robust humor, and forceful character. He must also have seen traces of sudden sensitivity and an impetuous temperament. A curious coincidence had also emerged: Maynard was already acquainted with Elsie. "I knew her socially before I knew Martin at all," he told Charles Sullivan. "She knew my family in the valley." Elsie, though, was some years older than he; by then she was in her late 30s while he was in his mid-20s.

MR would learn from Amerine that after spending his early childhood in Santa Clara Valley, he had later moved with his parents from San Jose to a fruit ranch near Modesto, in the Central Valley—where they failed to prosper. A farm boy born in 1911, Maynard had been a high achiever in school; attracted to science, he saw the value of applying the scientific method to solving agricultural problems. After earning a B.S. at the UC campus in Davis, he had gone on to UC Berkeley—and was near to completing his Ph.D. in plant physiology when viticulturist Albert Winkler, appointed chairman of the new Division of Viticulture (separated now from Berkeley's control), brought him back to Davis in 1935, to serve as an instructor and his research assistant, specializing in the scientific study of winemaking.

Amerine and Winkler's research project would last seven years altogether—nine before its full results were published. (Eventually, two decades later, it began influencing vineyard plantings virtually worldwide when the Wine Revolution commenced.) During its long course Maynard

Amerine would meet a great many vintners as well as winery and vineyard owners. A number of them became both research collaborators and friends. The cooperative interactions between them and him, as well as with others on the UC Davis faculty, were bound to greatly affect how winegrapes were grown and wines made. As multiple problems emerged in vineyards and cellars, the university's scientists and outreach educators worked to diagnose and solve them, often in concert with viticulturists and enologists elsewhere in the world.

For his part, Martin Ray over the years would sometimes seek information about scientific findings in biochemistry, microbiology, plant physiology, and pathologies in grapevines and wines, as well as about new technologies devised for winemaking and vineyard care. At such times he was likely to contact the staff at UC Davis, particularly Amerine. But his orientation differed radically from that of most commercial vintners in his era. He was more interested in tending his vineyards and making great wines in the classical tradition than in making a lot of money—which he had done earlier as a stockbroker. At the same time, though, MR strove to earn a living from doing what he loved best. And he needed it to be sufficient enough for him to enjoy the gustatory pleasures of "the Good Life," as he called it. From the start, Maynard Amerine surely understood and admired him for those aspirations, and he may have enjoyed a more emotionally and spiritually intimate relationship with MR than with any other vintner of their time ... while this close relationship lasted.

Early Correspondence and Contacts

That first grape-identifying session at the Paul Masson premises between MR and the two UC Davis faculty members was followed by letter, telephone, and in-person contacts. The earliest letter in a folder devoted to the Paul Masson winery, in the correspondence archives of the Department of Viticulture and Enology, is a carbon copy of a brief letter from Dr. Albert Winkler to Martin Ray. It indicates that MR and Amerine had connected since their initial meeting.

> Dr. Amerine informs me that you are planning to employ a man to take care of the operations and development of your vineyard. I have a man in mind who graduated here last year and whom I think would be just about the type of individual that you are looking for....
>
> Before getting in contact with him again, I wish you would give me a little bit better idea of what you intend to pay and just what you would expect of him. [9/15/37]

As in the letters MR would begin writing to Julian Street two years later, here was an opportunity for him to present aspects of his modus operandi along with his high aims as a winegrower. What MR wrote he'd probably already told MA.

> I was glad to receive your letter of the 15th and to learn that you have in mind a man graduated there last year whom you think would be the type of individual that I am looking for here.... [I] will endeavor to give you a better idea of what I would expect of such a man so employed.
>
> As for salary, I have no amount in mind, except that it is always my policy to pay in proportion to what I receive. I have had men at very low salaries who did not earn them, and others at high salaries who easily earned all they were paid. You can readily understand that I would be willing to pay any reasonable amount for the right kind of a man, although I would expect that the responsibility of the proof of worth rest in the hands of the man. I would not be interested in starting a man out at a high salary merely basing it upon his apparent ability and recommendation of others, nor would I be inclined to touch any immediate value on any theories of how he might in the future prove his services of outstanding value.
>
> I came very close to hiring a foreman recently at a salary far in excess of what I would normally have paid merely because he had all but sold me by conversation alone on his value. I had negotiated with him over a period of some months which afforded me an opportunity to try out several of his plans in the vineyard, and his pruning methods, in which he was so confident, were tried out in a certain section of the vineyard with a resulting loss of at least five tons of Champagne grapes. This and a few other incidents fortunately indicate[d] to me that he really did not know all that he claimed to, and because of this and other situations which have arisen lately I have definitely decided that what I want is a young man of intelligence and willingness to learn, but preferably with no experience at all other than whatever theoretical training he may have received or actually experience acquired at the University. If I can obtain this type of a chap who is willing to do what we tell him to do and otherwise intelligently go about his job, he will fill the order better than the more experienced man who has certain set ideas which probably would not work in with our plans here.
>
> Briefly, the job would be one of permanence, and its value to the right party would certainly be greater than that afforded by any other probable opportunity. It is our desire to develop here the finest vineyard in the country and, as you know, this will involve a great deal of planning and hard work. I have found that many foremen today are inclined to want to have men to do all of the work. Everyone works here, and anyone selected for this job would have to be a working foreman who, during certain months of the year, would

> have no one to assist him. He would have to willingly undertake all kinds of work and his reward would be based not only upon his accomplishments, but also his attitude and willingness to go ahead in the same way that our head cellarman works with his men in the cellars.
>
> I will be very glad to meet anyone that you might think qualified for this position. [9/21/37]

Later, Dr. Winkler responded that unfortunately the young man he'd had in mind had decided to stay in his current position and that he had no one else at present to recommend. (No former UC Davis students, it seems, ever worked for Martin Ray. He probably felt that receiving an excellent technical education but minimal practical skills would spoil them for performing hard field or cellar labor under his direction.)

Although after this MR would exchange occasional letters with Winkler and Olmo about viticultural matters, his primary connection with the Division of Viticulture was with Maynard Amerine, whose first letter to MR on file was sent in mid-October of 1937—over a year after the two men met, if indeed Amerine was correct in saying that it was 1936 when he had first looked at those wildly mixed-up Masson vineyards. (It may in fact have been 1937.) Although the letter is properly addressed to Martin E. Ray, Proprietor, the salutation says "Dear Mr. Martin"—doubtless a department secretary's unnoticed error. In the first paragraph the "Junior Enologist," as MA gave his title below his signature, expressed a pro-forma gratitude.

> I want to thank you very much for your kindness in permitting us to secure the grapes from you yesterday. It is very helpful to us to be able to secure varieties from your location and we trust they will be of future service to the industry at large as well as ourselves.

(The "us" mentioned by Amerine may have included one student or several, as well as Dr. Winkler. And this grape-gleaning session during vintage time that Amerine referred to had been his *third* visit; when he told Sullivan about first meeting MR, he said they'd had to return a second time to Masson to examine the varietal blocks before the actual picking.)

As for the grapes the UC Davis men took away, Amerine remembered this:

> We collected a large number [of varieties]. They are all listed in the 1944 *Hilgardia*. Certainly we collected Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Folle Blanche. And Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay. [They also probably picked MR's Gamay Beaujolais—one of his favored varietals.] The vineyard was very difficult to sample from. The only block that I remember being reasonably easy was the Chardonnay variety. The others that we tried to pick, we'd try 25 vines in each direction and if we found 10 of the proper vine we had enough to collect. We wanted 10 pounds from 10 vines, which was the minimum amount we had established previously for collecting.

The Winkler–Amerine intention for the winemaking experiments at Davis was to gather, if possible, a minimal 100 lbs. of a particular variety from a vineyard—not enough to deplete a winery's supply—in order to produce ultimately a good sample of wine. So they must have taken away at least 500 lbs.—a quarter of a ton—of five or six fine-varietal grapes from Masson. They always hoped winegrapes would be donated to their good research cause, but if necessary they'd pay for them. After harvesting the selected grapes, the scientists would return to Davis to make small batches of wine. These were usually kept in separate 5-gallon glass jugs, labeled as to vineyard of origin, variety, and date; eventually they were bottled. The end result over time: several thousand separate wines, kept in a cellar on campus. Various researchers in the Department would systematically both analyze chemically and taste-test these varietal wines, comparing them with others taken from different climatic regions, I (the coolest) through V (the hottest). Using a 100-point system for "organoleptic evaluation" of these wines, Amerine and others would taste 20 wines in the morning and another 20 in the afternoon.

Developing a highly sensitive palate and acquiring good knowledge of the European wine models were both clearly crucial tasks, and young Maynard Amerine, who had known almost nothing about wine at the start of this work, had applied himself thoroughly to the job. Winkler brought to the campus a former viticulture professor at Berkeley, Edmund Henry Twight, specifically to instruct both him and Amerine (but particularly the latter) in the principles of winemaking and wine judging. Maynard read widely through wine literature, covering aesthetics, history, and technical practices. He also joined men's upscale social clubs in the San Francisco Bay area and spent time with wine connoisseurs, to be introduced by them to many of the world's great vintages. By 1937 he was well on his way to becoming an acknowledged expert. Early in that year he had taken a leave of several months from his Davis position, and traveling at his own expense went off to visit winegrowing regions on the Continent—the first of many such informative yet pleasurable expeditions.

At the same time, Martin Ray, intent upon establishing himself as the grower and maker of America's best wines, was also fast becoming adept at wine tasting. In his former years at college, in magazine publishing, and as a stock broker—all

during the Dry Years—he had drunk various intoxicating and banned beverages with gusto and sometimes to excess. Now he centered his attention upon wine. However, as MR later told Julian Street in several letters (and surely Amerine had learned this earlier), he had to be carefully abstemious. He had found that for health reasons (he'd suffered a probable stroke in the early '30s, when he was only around 30) he could no longer "drink" alcohol of any kind in appreciable amounts without suffering anxiety and severe palpitations. So he only permitted himself to *taste* wines, including his own—sampling them with the utmost moderation. (Quite probably Elsie Ray closely monitored his consumption.) As a winery proprietor, he was deliberately training himself to detect and discern all manner of things about wines: their aroma, color and clarity, flavor, acidity, tannin, reducing sugar, body, balance, complexity, imperfections, and downright defects. MR also looked for what he'd later describe as the overall "come-on" that encouraged a drinker to consume more—but which he refrained from doing in that period of his life.

Since MR intended to make table wines and champagnes comparable to or possibly even superior to the best ones produced in Europe, and stoutly maintained this was possible to do in California, his personal goals as a vintner coincided with enologist Amerine's aims as a wine scientist. And both men truly loved fine wine.

Discussing Technical Wine Issues

The bottle of champagne that Amerine took away with him on that grape-picking day in 1937 was Paul Masson's popular signature rosy champagne, *Oeil de Perdrix* (eye of the partridge). In making it, MR and his head vintner, Oliver Goulet, apparently used as the main constituent a wine that had been cellared some years earlier. MA soon reported on the UC tasting group's reaction to the sample:

> There was some question as to whether the wine itself was of sufficiently high quality to justify the expense of champagning it. This is not to be taken as a criticism of the champagne itself, although we did feel that it was made from wine that was perhaps a little too old and consequently had a somewhat woody flavor; and, furthermore, it may have been a little too dark for the type. Our impression of this type of wine is that it must be very fresh and gay, and possibly because the wine was a little old, it did not quite come up to what one would have anticipated.

Amerine, though, then had wonderful things to say about the bottle of Pinot Noir, vintaged around 1916, that MR had given him earlier, in the spring.

> [W]e found this a very delicious wine with a beautifully developed bouquet and possessing all the charm and elegance which one associates with the wine of this age made from these grapes. There were several remarkable features of this wine aside from this beautiful bouquet, one of which was the very good retention of color after all these years in the bottle. The wine was smooth and velvety and I may say that, at least in my own opinion, it is one of the nicest red wines that I have ever tasted in California. I am hoping that somewhere in the crevices of your winery you are going to be able to find a few more bottles of this....
>
> The Pinot is an exquisite example of a fine wine properly aged and brought to maturity. The shame of it is that it is improbable that we shall have more of this kind of wine for many years, at least until you begin to bottle your red Pinots. [10/13/37]

By now, of course, Maynard Amerine could make the last statement with some confidence because he had seen Masson's Pinot Noir vines (few other winegrowers had any), and almost certainly had tasted the 1936 vintage as it was developing in cask. He had also listened to MR talk about his plans as a vintner of pure varietal wines, and could contrast this with what he was seeing, hearing, and tasting at other California wineries.

Within several days MR responded to Amerine's letter. He thanked him for his high opinion of the "old still wine so well preserved," and finally took up the Oeil de Perdrix matter, letting Amerine know that he welcomed his forthright judgments, even if negative.

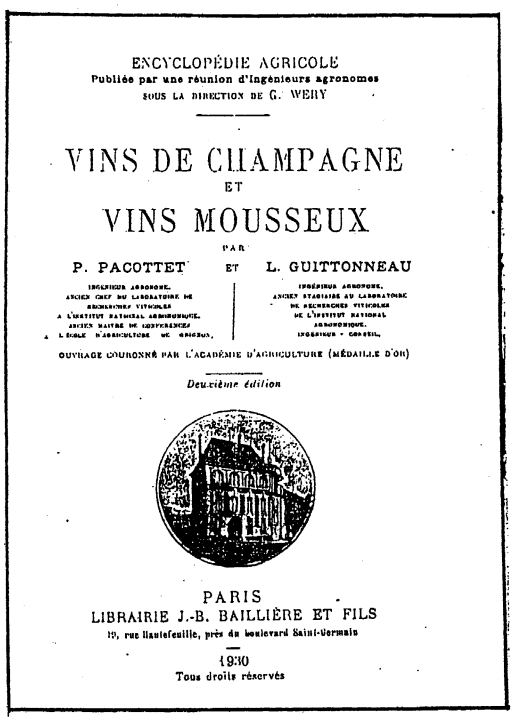
> With reference to your comments on this wine, it is entirely true. The wine was in wood too long, but it was necessary to make the best of such a condition after repeal, particularly since we were not permitted to bottle this wine during the prohibition period. It follows it was bottled after repeal. Wherever it has been offered, it has met with the finest reception, and we have long since sold our entire 1937 production of this wine. It is from a purely technical standpoint that you have criticized it, which I fully appreciate. In any case, you will always be free to express your honest opinion of any wine submitted to you by me, which is the condition which should obtain. [10/19/37]

At some point in their early contacts MR must also have asked Amerine to taste, test in the laboratory, and then hopefully identify the cause of problems he and Goulet were having with the champagnes in their first two years there, when they knew little yet about champagne making. They were continuing Paul Masson's long tradition of producing, by the labor-intensive *méthode champenoise*, several types of this sparkling wine—which Masson somehow had cleverly arranged to be able to make legally during Prohibition and be sold by prescription for medicinal purposes. In 1984

Amerine told Sullivan about MR's champagne crisis at Masson:

> Certainly by 1937 Martin realized that he had a major problem in the champagne.... [H]e had been to Korbel at least once and he had tasted all the currently available French champagnes. It really didn't take very long for him to realize that there was something wrong with that champagne.... Well, he asked us and he asked other people who were making champagne. He would get on the phone and call a dozen people before breakfast. [Transcribed text slightly rearranged.]

According to Amerine, MR had appealed to Paul Masson himself for advice but couldn't get satisfactory technical counseling from the old Burgundian. Inevitably, he and Goulet pored over champagne-making recipes and tried out formulas and remedies found in Masson's old Cellar Book. Amerine may have alerted MR to a classic French book, *Vins de Champagne et Vins Mousseux* by Paul Pacottet and L. Guittonneau, that detailed the standard processes for making champagne and sparkling wines. MR arranged to get the 1930 second edition translated for his own uses, and Amerine and Twight (who was fluent in French) agreed to read the manuscript text for accuracy before MR had several copies duplicated and bound. (Two are now at UC Davis; MR had agreed to donate them in lieu of paying the professors for their work. MR's own copy now resides in the Sonoma County Wine Library, Healdsburg, CA.)


ENCYCLOPÉDIE AGRICOLE
Publiée par une réunion d'ingénieurs agronomes
SOUS LA DIRECTION DE G. WERY

VINS DE CHAMPAGNE
ET
VINS MOUSSEUX
PAR
P. PACOTTET ET L. GUITTONNEAU

OUVRAGE COURONNÉ PAR L'ACADÉMIE D'AGRICULTURE (MÉDAILLE D'OR)

Deuxième édition

PARIS
LIBRAIRIE J.-B. BAILLIÈRE ET FILS
19, rue Hautefeuille, près du boulevard Saint-Germain

1930
Tous droits réservés

[Title page 1930 2nd French edition]

MR and Goulet eventually solved the Masson champagne problem. "I think it was a bacteria," Amerine recalled. "He got the new culture and the difference was like night and day." But there may have been other problem-causing factors that Amerine, a half-century later, had forgotten about. For instance, he had written this to MR as if offering technical advice and guidance:

> I have been looking over what Pacottet and others have to say about pasteurization of the must. I find that Pacottet has nothing to say against this process, and that he recommends it for (a) grapes damaged by rains and rot, (b) grapes picked from the vineyard without sorting. He also has considerable to say about using SO_2. I find no comparison of the two methods in the text. From what he has to say, there is little danger of pasteurizing must if the heating period is not too long nor the temperature too high as far as leaving a cooked taste in the wine. [MR definitely did not subscribe to pasteurizing wines by "cooking" them in hot rooms.]
>
> I still feel that a test would be desirable for this reason: the grapes that Pacottet and co-workers were using are considerably more acid than the grapes to be used here. Under conditions of lower acidity the grapes <u>might</u>—I don't say would because I don't know—prove more susceptible to oxidation during pasteurization.
>
> The higher volatile with the X variety still seems to me to be a combination of conditions: (a) coming to the winery first and boxes not completely sterile; (b) inoculation of yeast in crusher, etc., not great and sluggish fermentation; (c) possible hotter weather earlier in season for grapes as they reach winery and for fermentation. There is no indication that this variety <u>naturally</u> has a tendency to higher volatile than any other. The only possible difference might be in having a lower total acid (hence a higher pH) than FB [Folle Blanche, which MR grew and often used in his champagnes], etc., and thus being more nearly in the optimum pH range for spoilage organisms. [5/31/38]

Whenever Amerine visited at Paul Masson, MR might have shared with the enologist one or several of the French or German wines he had been acquiring, so they could compare their judgments. And surely too he'd often take him to the winery and use a wine thief to proffer sample tastes of various table wines developing in cask that he and Goulet had vintaged: the white fine varietals—Pinot Blanc (Vrai), Pinot Chardonnay, Folle Blanche; and the reds—Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay Beaujolais. He always expected to get a candid evaluation.

In an October 1937 letter to Amerine, MR had said in a P.S.: "Our vintage season is at an end, and we believe we have some very fine new wines, concerning which we will know more, of course, a

little bit later on." It turned out later, though, that apparently the grape harvest in 1937 proved disappointing in its vintaging outcome. (Probably it wasn't good either for Amerine's getting decent winegrapes from the Masson vineyards other than Pinot Noir for his winemaking research.) As MR would later tell Julian Street:

> In 1937 I lost (for our use) all our crop except the Pinot Noir. It was a very bad year. The grapes came in in bad shape and were covered with wild yeast and bacteria. I didn't look at them under a glass as it was not necessary and would not have changed anything. I knew from the first fermentation that it was a bad year. I saved the Pinot Noir because it was the first grape picked and I made the wine you have tasted ... out of the free-run juice. The wild yeast and bacteria is always on the skins and the free-run juice is more free of it. So, this wine was a good wine, the only one I made that year and kept. I sold all of half the grapes, and the wine I made I also sold. None of the fermentations were perfect. You have to take such years but they don't often jump at you without warning. [7/3/40]

It's more than likely that Amerine had strongly advised MR to sell off the defective wines he had made in 1937, since he was so adamantly determined to establish a reputation for making only superior varietal wines. Other wineries could, and did, ameliorate various faults in an unlikable wine by sterilizing it with metabisulfite, adding other chemicals, blending it with better-tasting wines, or distilling it into brandy.

A Continuing Correspondence

During the latter part of 1937 and the first half of 1938, notes and letters passed frequently between Amerine and Ray, who after a while changed the salutation from "Dear Mr.—" to using each other's surnames only (e.g., "My Dear Amerine"), eventually to evolve into first names, as MR would do with Julian Street. Like Street, Maynard called him Martin, avoiding the nickname "Rusty," which many other people readily used, including Elsie.

In the fall of 1937 Amerine had apparently gently criticized a newly designed and printed label that MR had affixed on some Masson wine bottle he'd given to Amerine. (A copy of this letter, alas, apparently wasn't preserved.) MR responded:

> I must plead guilty to the accusation politely made in your letter of October 21, 1937, although I call to your attention a carbon copy of a letter just written to the makers of the label, which I thought would be of interest to you and which I ask that you please return.
>
> I was truly very disappointed in this label, but expect to have finished shortly something more nearly what I had originally in mind. [10/26/37]

Amerine wrote back, indicating that perhaps the two men had talked over the phone.

> A very interesting and intriguing discussion on the subject of labels, I must say, and I trust that you will be able to find a satisfactory label for your white and red still wines in the near future. Unfortunately, I am busy as a bee this morning getting ready to go to Los Angeles and cannot make more extended comments.
>
> Thanks for letting me see the letter and I shall be very much interested in finding out how your final label comes out. [10/28/37]

MR may have continued to use that unsatisfactory label; or if he did contrive a replacement, it was the notoriously pretentious one that mimicked Germany's Schloss Johannisberger label, with its vineyard panorama. MR would use it on the new line of "signature" table wines (with the label bearing Martin Ray's own signature)—pure varietal wines that Masson began releasing in the late '30s, with the white ones going first. (It's highly doubtful, of course, that Amerine ever approved this label.)

Toward the end of 1937, Amerine wrote to ask whether Masson might have a spare old champagne-corking machine that MR would sell to the Viticulture Division. When informed that indeed there was one, Winkler and Amerine drove to Saratoga to see it, knowing in advance that MR would set a modest price on it. Amerine wrote to MR afterwards:

> We enjoyed very much our visit with you yesterday morning and the consequent discussion of the multiple problems of the industry. I also want to thank you for the case of champagne and I shall be looking for the bill here at any time....
>
> With respect to the white wine "M.R." [a signature Chardonnay], Winkler and I tasted it rather carefully and found it to be a pleasant wine, of nice basic quality, and having good body. The color seems to have darkened a little since I tasted it last and you have added such a slight amount of SO_2 that it is hardly perceptible. While tasting the wine we discussed with Mr. Goullet [*sic*] its probable future. Since other white wines of your vineyard may behave in the same fashion, we thought it might be of interest, if you had a good barrel, to divide your present puncheon, placing half in glass and half in the barrel. This would give you a fine opportunity to discover if the volatile acid continued to increase in glass (it probably won't increase very much in glass), and to find out the behavior of the wine in wood with further aging. However, this was all more or less polite conversation since the wine is very nice and probably will not spoil under most treatments. [12/30/37]

Then it was MR's turn to write back, and he defended the wine made from his Chardonnay grapes. This fine varietal in future years would be

one of the three sought-after Martin Ray table wines, but even then (hard to believe today) was little known, as it was rarely planted in California until the 1970s—four decades after MR began vintaging it at Masson and then marketing it as a 100% varietal wine.

> I am very sorry that it was not possible for me to properly entertain Doctor Winkler and you on the occasion of your last visit, but I assure you that I did enjoy the visit which we had, and I am going to look forward to the next one being more leisurely conducted and including many discussions which I hope to have some day with you....
>
> Concerning the Pinot Chardonnay wine which you tasted, I was interested to note what you said about it, although of course it would be necessary to discuss it before I could have your full opinion. There is one thing, however, that seems to have formed an impression on your mind which I do not fully justify. It is the matter of color. Any Pinot Chardonnay which is picked for still wine will have some color, and if allowed to ferment on the skins, it will have an abundance of color. It will, in fact, become a deep gold. For champagne, these grapes are picked earlier, are quickly crushed, pressed, and the juice is rapidly drawn off. Obviously, in champagne, you do not want this color. It exists in all of our present wines, but will not exist in any of those which we will ultimately finish under our own manufacture. But for still wine, I do not understand why the color should be objectionable to you, if it is. Every white burgundy of merit which I have ever inspected has been deep in color. In fact, I have thought that the finest of them must have been fermented on the skins without doubt. Please advise me what you have learned with regards to this condition in the burgundy district with their white wines of the finest grade.
>
> To me, a golden color in a fine glass of fully matured white wine is definitely an advantage as compared with a pale greenish hue which cannot be held permanently in any white wine, however manufactured and preserved, and which in itself does not possess the same character, so far as appearance is concerned as I react to it.
>
> Everywhere I go, wine makers seem to demand the absence of color. You will find that next year our still wines will have more color than the one which you tasted, as we have definitely determined that the best qualities in the grapes can only be conveyed into the wine if treated in such a way as will surely bring along much color, too, in the case of the white Pinot grapes. Being natural, and additionally pleasing to look at, we have determined to accept it. What do you think about this? [1/4/38]

The contents of the folder of letters written between September of 1937 and June of 1938 indicate that traffic of various kinds frequently went on between MR and MA during those 10 months—as when MR asked Amerine to send several gallons of Seitz filtered grape juice, which he intended to pasteurize (by heating it) and then use as a base for starting new yeast cultures for inducing a second fermentation in the Masson champagnes when bottled:

> I do not know how it ever happened that we did not pasteurize and retain sufficient grape juice last vintage season to take care of the growing of our yeast for this spring's bottling. I guess we were so fatigued that when the last grapes came in we were so happy that we forgot all else other than that the season was over. [2/10/38]

But then MR, who loathed the odor and taste of any sulfur used in wines, had to write MA again, to complain about the second gallon of juice sent to him:

> I understood you to say that the juice had not been sulphured, whereas I found it heavily sulphured.... Goulet and I wondered how the sulphur may have gotten into your juice, since you did not know that it was there—but there are, of course, many ways that it might have happened. I thought that possibly you had instructed some one to draw off the free-run juice immediately after the grapes were crushed, and that it was your assumption that in so doing there would be no sulphur in the juice. I further assumed that possibly sterilization of the must by the addition of meta-bisulphite had already taken place, thereby putting the sulphur into this juice. In any case if you will test any that you have you will find that it is there present.
>
> Despite the sulphur the last shipment received from you was in a state of fermentation, showing that either the sulphur was not in large quantities, or else the yeast was very sturdy in sulphur resistance. I should say that another day or so would have seen an explosion of the glass container. Which brings me to the further cause of writing you. I suggest that you look into the matter of fermentation of any which you have remaining if you desire to retain it. [3/16/38]

Amerine's letter written several days later shows the quick attention, reflective reasoning, and precise investigation that he customarily gave to all wine-making problems that were brought to his attention:

> I was sorry to learn that there was something wrong with the second bottle of grape juice. I am entirely unable to account for the presence of the SO_2, but I am able to figure out the fermentation. When we sent the first jar to you, we had noted that the corks were loose on some of the other jars. At the time of sending the second one, I picked the jar that had the tightest cork, but none of them were very well sealed in so that it quite easy to account for the presence of the free yeast

and the slow fermentation which had taken place.

As far as the SO_2 is concerned, I am quite sure that when the grape juice was filtered there was no sulfur in it because I had the class do this filtration and I watched them crush the grapes, dilute it with water, and finally pass it through the Seitz germ-proof. Occasionally the boys use a little meta-bisulphite in washing the gallon jars, and it is possible that the jar which you received had not been properly washed. After receiving your letter I immediately went to the cellar where there were two more jars and took samples for determination of SO_2. We were unable to detect any SO_2 in one jar, but in the other there was about 40 ppm. [3/19/38]

Each correspondent in his letters usually invited a response from the other to some question asked or opinion given—or a bunch of them. In letters and talks the two men continued discussing wines, whether MR's or European vintages, and technical matters in winemaking. But gradually books and other cultural subjects would be brought up, along with noting the alarming condition of international relations in Europe and Asia. It's certain too that MR began asking Maynard to come to Masson on various occasions when he would be entertaining celebrities there, as the erudite and increasingly sophisticated young professor would have fit well into the social milieu.

What MR Said About Maynard Amerine

By late 1939, when MR began his extraordinary correspondence with Julian Street, he mentioned Amerine in his first letter—and frequently afterwards.

Dr. Maynard Amerine of the University of California School of Viticulture at Davis, is ... doing a great deal to further the interest in, and appreciation of the fine wines of the world. We, who make wines, must rely for recognition of them, to a very great extent, upon those of you who have come to be respected as eminent authorities. Our actual success, is then, to be obtained in a major way at your hands, for, until the people can judge for themselves, they have no alternative than to follow your recommendations.

With this in mind, I have considered it my responsibility to cooperate to the fullest with any undertakings intended to educate the people further of wines. [11/27/39]

MR's letters to Street often praised him as a matchless arbiter and promoter of fine wine who was providing crucially needed wine education to the public. He soon began to show what pride he took in his close association with Dr. Maynard Amerine. Like Street, Amerine was engaged in wine education—of UC Davis students, of wine professionals, and of wine drinkers. But he also worked diligently as a researcher who delved continuously into the science of winemaking, about which Street admittedly knew almost nothing at all. Amerine was intent upon perfecting wines by understanding, through numerous investigative projects, both their most basic and most complex aspects.

As for MR himself, he knew he was performing a vital corollary function by aspiring to make excellent wines. It was the crucial way to change people's attitudes about California's potential for producing fine, and someday even great, wines. As he told JS:

I would give anything if there were more people here on the coast who were genuinely interested in fine wines, like you and the group with whom you are no doubt intimately associated. Mr. [Harold] Price [of the San Francisco Wine & Food Society] and Dr. Amerine are doing a great deal to educate people and they deserve great credit, but there are tremendous prejudices to overcome and it will require time.

As I have already said, it is my desire that one of the first accomplishments will be the recognition of the fact that fine wines can be produced here. If just this much can be accomplished, we will have come a long way. Recognition of this fact can come only through the few outstanding authorities, for it is to these few people that those unable to judge for themselves look for advice. You will understand then, I feel that our future is to a very great extent in the hands of you and a very few people. Wines must be both made and recognized (or discovered). One without the other does not benefit very many people. [1/15/40]

A half-year later, MR told Street much more about his UC Davis friend, writing at surprising length about Maynard's virtues and activities. Now that MR had established his own satisfying correspondence with Julian Street, he decided he should broker a relationship between JS and his friend, who during his occasional travels to the East Coast might make time to meet his favorite wine authority. MR's description of the young UC Davis enologist provides a rare look at Amerine when he was still in his twenties. At the same time, MR reveals his own—and evidently Amerine's as well—growing disillusionment and dismay over most of California's publicly acknowledged wine connoisseurs.

I want to say, I am in the process of introducing to you Dr. Amerine, of whom I have heretofore written. And with your permission, I am going to ask him to write to you.

He is, in my opinion, the only one active and influencial [sic] member of that group of leaders in California, who pretty well dominate things, who is genuinely and profoundly interested in wines. The others either are not active and influencial or they are phonies, stuffed shirts or only selfishly interested as a

means to some other end, I believe. Amerine's interests outside wine are a means to the end that he learn to know and enjoy more of his life which is actually devoted to wines, the knowledge and appreciation of them. There are lots of other honest people who like wines but they are not in that group of leaders other than as above classified. I sincerely believe there is Dr. Winkler, who is certainly an honest man of much experience. But his experience is limited to a certain type of experience as is his ability and his life. Amerine lives and works in a broad world. He knows every vineyard in California, which I do not believe can be said of any other man. He knows virtually every producer. He knows the vineyards of France and Germany as well as he could by one extended trip there and many friendships that also take him into the vineyards and cellars abroad. He spent his own savings to go abroad to learn first hand. He is active in the Bohemian Club, where he is on the Wine Committee. He helped organize the Society of Medical Friends of Wine for the good of the Wine Industry and the prestige and respect it needs here. He is active in the Wine & Food Society of San Francisco....

Amerine works long and hard. He reads a lot and on many subjects. He goes to a few operas and sees some of the good shows. He is very interested in foods and permits himself to eat well. He has a mind of his own and is indeed very strong willed but he has permitted some much older than himself to dominate at times in the past when he knew more than they. I believe they have sort of leaned on him while at the same time taking the applause. He probably permitted this in the knowledge it might be proper and even best but I doubt if he will do so in the future and certain it is he can and will do what he thinks is best.

His ability is outstanding and extensive, both native and acquired. He also has personal charm. He will grow away from them all. He is honest and genuine. He thinks clearly and deeply. He is appreciative, thoughtful of others, and I have found him always anxious to give more than he receives. He will be the leader someday, if he so desires.

This covers Amerine pretty well, as I see him. I have gone a "long way" but it is necessary to go a good deal further to find another like him, and I would not know where to look.

He is interested in making wines as you and I know they should be made. He is a professor at the School of Viticulture, I think you know. He has drunk more fine wines than all the other members of the S.F. Wine & Food Society put together and continues to drink them, so he knows something about fine wines other than what others say of them.

He should know you and you will enjoy knowing him. [5/4/40]

(When Amerine did write to Julian Street, however, his first letter wasn't to MR's liking—as will be revealed in the next issue.)

Insights Into a Close Connection

The Paul Masson Winery folder containing less than a year of their early correspondence indicates that the two still-youthful men—Maynard was seven years younger than Martin—were fast forming a firm friendship. They began to meet occasionally, since Amerine often found both job-connected and social reasons to visit the Masson premises. Probably a few times in those early years MR even drove up to Davis to see the vineyards and winemaking facilities under development there and to bring wine samples—and to visit with Amerine. Their letters began mixing personal information and social transactions with the mutual wine-connected interests—as shown when Amerine lent MR his copy of Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* as a prelude to discussing the provocative novel with him.

Correspondence and contacts would naturally have continued apace. Considering their frequency at the start, as the friendship progressed in the months and years ahead, letters would have passed often between the two men as the most satisfying form of communication when in-person conversations couldn't take place; better than telephone calls, they provided written records. However, to locate any extant letters between them beyond May of 1938 would require time-consuming delving into the chronologically arranged general correspondence files of the Viticulture & Enology Department, since having a special folder of Paul Masson letters wasn't continued.

It's apparent from his letters to JS that by 1940 MR regarded himself as a mentor and confidant to the younger man, who had not yet wholly achieved the superb self-confidence, urbane manner, and mature professional demeanor remarkable in subsequent years. MR declared that the young enologist was the only truly knowledgeable and genuinely talented person in California who was involved with the wine industry and wine connoisseurship; after their split in 1955 he continued to proclaim the highest esteem for Amerine's knowledge and abilities.

Probably Amerine served as a pipeline to MR for a lot of information and gossip about the wine industry and its personalities from the late 1930s into the mid-1950s. Because of his various professional and avocational positions, he circulated much more than MR out in the wine world. MR, for his part, most of the time stayed on his mountaintop, working in his vineyards and wine cellars, or occasionally writing long, revelatory letters to a succession of wine-loving recipients. Amerine at

times disclosed negative information and trade gossip that MR might not have known about otherwise—though his letters to Street indicate that he had some other informants as well. For instance, he would often send Oliver Goulet out to visit certain wineries and vineyards as both his emissary and spy. Over time, Maynard began to realize that he needed to become more circumspect about sharing his experiences, impressions, and opinions, because MR might well use them later as ammunition when attacking other vintners and wineries when furthering his own great cause: the making of pure and fine varietal wines—so as to raise far higher (he said) California's reputation for quality winemaking.

Anyone writing about the nature of the relationship between these two very different wine men will be further handicapped by the fact that in later years, after self-protectively putting their friendship "on ice," Amerine as a matter of policy would seldom mention Martin Ray's name, let alone say anything about him or his wines. But his previous, longstanding social connection with MR had run very deep. Furthermore, although MA presented a gracious and cosmopolitan man, he was also intensely private, and apparently wished to remain so to posterity—an unfortunate circumstance for an aspiring biographer. He eventually destroyed copies of personal correspondence in his UC-Davis office files, and probably much of his professional correspondence as well. (However, some of his friends and associates surely cherished and preserved letters from him.) During his retirement, he also got rid of personal papers kept in his home.

Amerine was a prolific writer, publishing hundreds of both technical and popular articles and pamphlets, and a number of books. (He was already busily writing when he took up with Martin Ray. His first paper, published in 1937, "Wines at the Paris International Exposition," was followed in the next year by 12 more, all but two co-authored with either Winkler or Twight, and these 10 appeared in Wines & Vines.) He didn't compose a memoir, though he did provide two oral histories (1972 and 1988) about his work. Occasionally Dr. Amerine would agree to be interviewed, as he was by Charles L. Sullivan in 1984. It's rather amusing that in his note to Sullivan assenting to their meeting, he declared, "I would not want to be interviewed on anything about Martin Ray or his wines or winery." Yet he ended up saying quite a lot when he got talking. That's the kind of person Martin Ray was: whether admired or despised, he fascinated people who knew him, or even knew *of* him—and still does, more than a quarter-century after his death. They couldn't, or can't, help giving memorable first-hand or second-hand impressions of him or remembrances of encounters. They also speculate about MR's undeniably charismatic powers, which induced susceptible people to undergo sudden "conversions" to pursuing the winegrowing life—though resultant bad experiences in more than a few gave him the reputation of being a con man. Amerine, like numerous others, may have been mesmerized by him for years.

There are, at least, additional sources of information about the MR–MA bond ... and its eventual breakage. As indicated above, MR wrote about the young Amerine during the early 1940s in his long letters to Julian Street, most of which have fortuitously been archived. It's evident that MR got to know Amerine well during his early years at Davis, before he became internationally renowned as an enologist, wine authority, and author. As for a later time in their relationship, the Martin and Eleanor Ray Papers, now at UC Davis, contain a number of informal letters, notes, and postcards that Amerine sent to them over several years in the mid-1950s. (Previous letters from MA and carbon copies of MR's letters to him were destroyed in the Masson winery fire of 1941 and a house fire in 1952.) There's also a fat file of carbon copies of the Rays' letters to Amerine (with MRs especially revelatory), as well as various references to Amerine in other correspondence of theirs.

What held this friendship tightly together for so long? Both men had grown up on the land and wanted to live and work close to it. They had a number of interests in common, both earth-bound and sophisticated, and they liked to read as well as listen to and tell stories. MR acted out his outsized emotions in ways that the far more reserved MA could not—or did not. Surely the most intense and abiding link, of course, was that both strove to perfect winemaking in California, so they often exchanged conjectures about and insights into ways of doing it. Their connection, both professional and social, grew steadily into an intimate friendship that went on satisfactorily for a decade and a half.

[To be continued in the next issue.]

[EDITOR NOTE: See our Tendrils Newsletter, Vol.8 No.2 and No.3 (1998), for personal remembrances and tributes to Maynard Amerine (1911–1998). See also Vol.3 No.2 (1993) for a review of *Vineyards in the Sky. The Life of Legendary Vintner Martin Ray* by Eleanor Ray, with Barbara Marinacci (1993; 2nd ed, 2002). Copies of *Vineyards* are available from Barbara (bookmill@ix.netcom.com). Also of interest, see "Eleanor Ray: A Profile in Memoriam" by Barbara Marinacci (Vol.10 No.3, July 2000).]