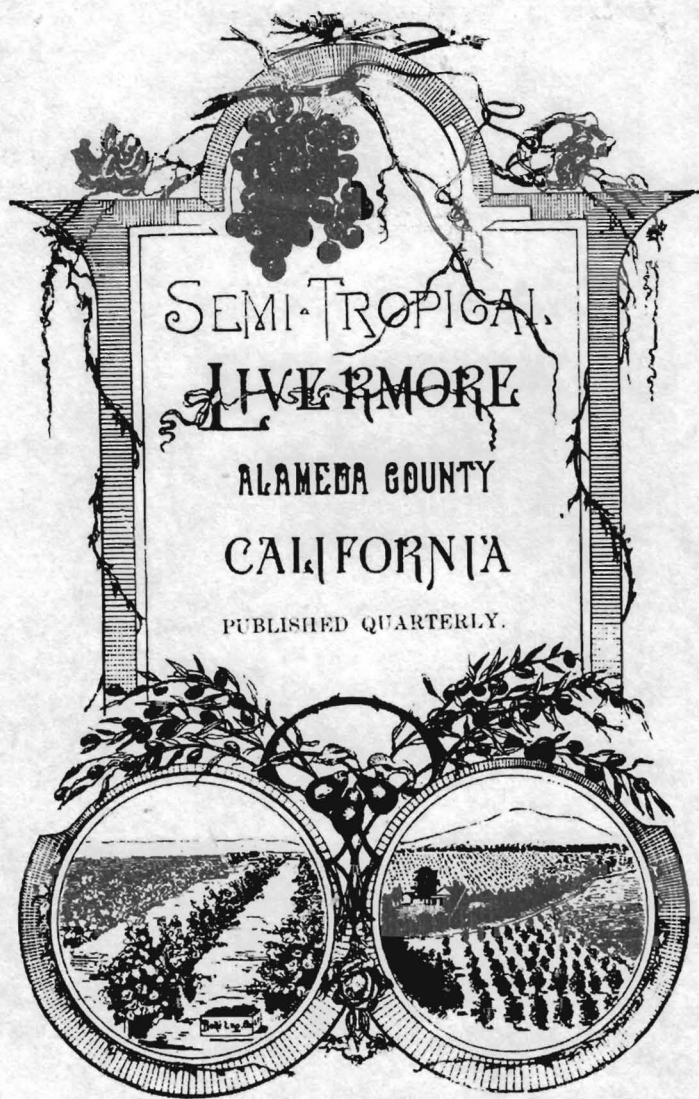


STORIES  
OF THE  
VINEYARDS AND WINERIES  
OF THE  
LIVERMORE VALLEY



ISSUED BY THE LIVERMORE BOARD OF TRADE.

LIVERMORE  
THE LIVERMORE HERALD POWER PRINTING HOUSE.  
1887

By Janet Newton

## EARLY HISTORY

The first systematic planting of grapes in this valley was done in the late 1870s. Joseph F. Black is credited with being the first man who realized the potential of making the valley into a community of vine growers. Black owned very large areas of land both in Livermore and Pleasanton and by 1889 he had 200 acres of vines.

Some of the first men to establish vineyards and wineries were natives of Bordeaux, France, such as J. Mortier and Louis Mel. A. G. Chauche of San Francisco, after noting the quality of the vintage of 1884, immediately purchased land in the Livermore Valley for a vineyard and winery. C. Aguilon, an experienced winemaker of Sonoma, decided to open a branch establishment in Livermore. By 1893 there were at least 156 vineyards in this valley occupying over 5500 acres.

The book *Wines and Vines of California* by F. E. Wait,

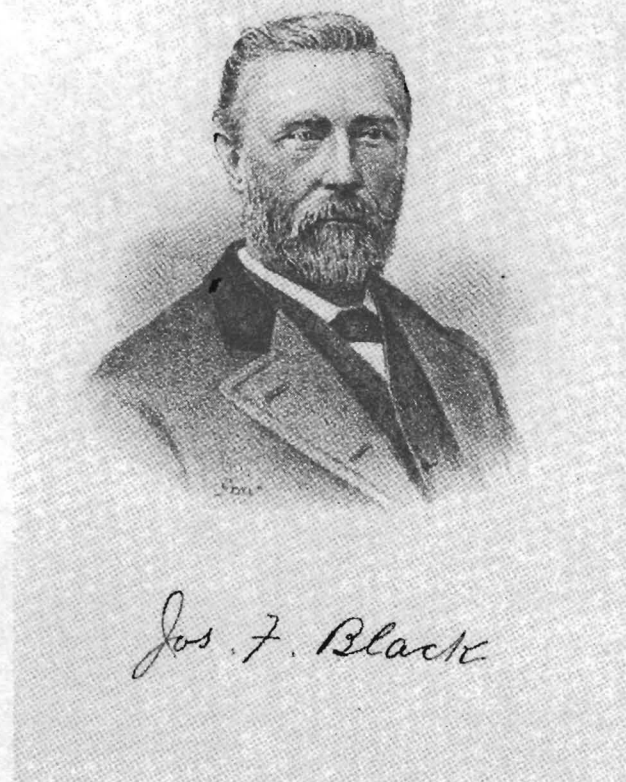
published in 1889 states "...that part of the Livermore and Vallecitos Valleys supported by the tertiary and cretaceous hills and terraced table lands flanking the streams known as the Arroyo del Valle, Arroyo Mocho and San Antonio. Here every condition known to be essential for the production of the highest grade of wines and brandies, approximating the noblest French types, exist." From the First Annual Report of the State Viticultural Commission, revised April 1889 (paraphrased) "French, Portuguese and Italians made wine at home. Their apparatus consisted of six or so French claret casks, a couple of tubs to tread out the juice, and a small lever press, or a small cider press if they wanted to be up to the times. All the members of the family drank wine, including the baby. But they were never drunk and disorderly. They loved wine too well to abuse it."

The Austrian J. W. Kottinger, as early as 1874, made over 1000 gallons of wine from his four acres of vines.



*Fred Winters and horse Mollie*

*Wente Vineyard*



*From History of Alameda County, California, by M.W. Wood.*



## THE CONCANNON WINERY



*From Alameda County Illustrated Oakland Tribune 1898*

*Home of James Concannon, Livermore*

James and Ellen Concannon came to Livermore in 1883. It had been suggested to James by Archbishop Alemany in San Francisco that he should establish a winery in Livermore to produce wine for the Catholic Church, and on August 1, 1883, he purchased 47 acres in Livermore.

James was born on the Island of Inisman in Galway Bay, Ireland. He got his only schooling from an itinerant preacher who gave him lessons outdoors while sheltering from the wind behind a wall. He left home when he was eighteen, embarking on a sailing ship for Boston where he arrived in 1865. He got a job with the Singer Sewing Machine Company, but shortly afterwards he moved to Augusta, Maine, where he became a bellboy in the Mansion House Hotel. Hard work and study at night school made it possible for James to become manager of the hotel before very long.

In Augusta James met a young lady from County Kilkenny named Ellen Rowe who had come to Maine to join relatives, one of whom was a United States Army

Captain. James and Ellen were married in Augusta, but in 1878 they moved west, first to a sheep ranch in Oregon and then to San Francisco. In San Francisco James began his business career by selling books for the publisher Anton Roman.

When the couple moved to Livermore they planted a vineyard and established a winery. It was a great success. The Concannons built a house on the estate where they raised a family of five sons and five daughters.

Through Charles Crellin, another Livermore Valley vineyardist, the Concannons obtained a group of St. Bernard dogs from Switzerland - one for each child. Once when young Veronica Concannon fell into the water of a nearby creek, her St. Bernard dog rescued her. The dog's name was Captain. They were fine dogs, but so many were stolen that the Concannons gave up trying to keep dogs.

James made a trip to Mexico where he persuaded the government of Mexico to let him establish a wine

become a citizen.

The Ferrarios and the Concannons were friends and neighbors. Not very long afterwards Nina was married to Joseph Concannon, who was James and Ellen's third son. They were married at Ravenswood, the former home of Blind Boss Buckley on the Arroyo Road, and this is where they lived at first.

Joseph, who was a Captain in the Army, began his career in 1909 as a private in the Coast Artillery at Fort Columbia, Washington. He was with the Coast Artillery at Vancouver Barracks and then was with the 46th Field Artillery at Camp Kearney. Later, he was stationed at the Presidio of Monterey, then was stationed in Douglas, Arizona. He also became a member of Livermore's Company I, 5th Infantry when that group was stationed at Nogales.

The family scrap book contains many letters from famous men such as Pershing, Roosevelt, Mark Clark, Truman and Hershey. There is also a letter from Governor Earl Warren. It was a tribute to Mary Concannon when she died.

The Concannons have participated in many activities

in the Livermore Valley. Captain Concannon was a Director of the County Fair Association and he was the one who organized the first Livermore Rodeo as a benefit for the Red Cross in 1918.

The winery, in addition to making sacramental wines, made, and still makes, premium table wines. In 1970 the winery bought cuttings of the Russian grape Rkatsiteli from the University of California at Davis to use them in an experimental one acre plot. The wine produced was the first American wine of this grape. The Concannons were also the first ones in the United States to make a Petite Sirah, releasing it in 1964. It has been a big success. It shows that the Livermore Valley is capable of producing a premium red wine as well as its famous whites.

After Captain Joseph Concannon died his two sons Joseph Jr. and James operated the winery. But when Joseph Jr. died in 1978, James decided to establish a partnership with Augustin Huneus, a well-known wine producer. James has continued as president of the 200 acre vineyard on Tesla Road. In April, 1983, Concannon Vineyards was sold to Distillers Company, Ltd., a British production Company. Sergio Traverso continues as vice-president and winemaker.



*Concannon Family*



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*Concannon Family*

## RAVENSWOOD



*Livermore Herald photo, 1896*

In the late 1880s it was fashionable for gentlemen of San Francisco to have a country estate that included a vineyard and winery. Some of the estates were also profitable businesses that sold large quantities of wine and brandy.

Such an estate was Ravenswood on the Arroyo Road south of Livermore. It was owned by the San Francisco political boss Christopher Augustine Buckley. Buckley arrived in San Francisco with his parents in 1862 when he was seventeen. His father was a stonemason and had been a gold miner in the California foothills. Young Christopher got a job in San Francisco as a conductor on one of the city's horsecar street railways. He traveled from one end of San Francisco to the other and got to know a great many of the city's residents.

But it was his ambition to work in a saloon where he could get to know influential people. He achieved his goal about 1864 when he became a bartender and bookkeeper in the Snug Saloon in the basement of the New Opera House at the corner of Montgomery and Washington Streets. In the 1880's he purchased a partnership in the Alhambra Saloon at Bush and Kearny Streets. This establishment became known as "Buckley's City Hall". About this time Buckley became totally blind.

Buckley bought a hundred acres of land near Livermore where he planted a vineyard, and built a winery

and distillery. By the 1890's he was shipping wine and brandy by the carload from the Livermore Southern Pacific Depot.

Wm. O'Neal wrote, "By 1903, the winery was leased to the Wetmore-Bowen Corporation, makers of Cresta Blanca wine. The Cresta Blanca Winery was two miles south of Ravenswood on Arroyo Rd....Cresta Blanca bottled such wines as Sparkling Burgundy and sparkling Sauterne, both in the Cresta Blanca winery and in the Buckley winery....No wine labels for Christopher Buckley's wines [were found]....He probably shipped most of his wine in bulk as did other Livermore Valley winemakers. (Teiser, 1983)"



*The Ravenswood tallyho*

*Louis Stein collection*



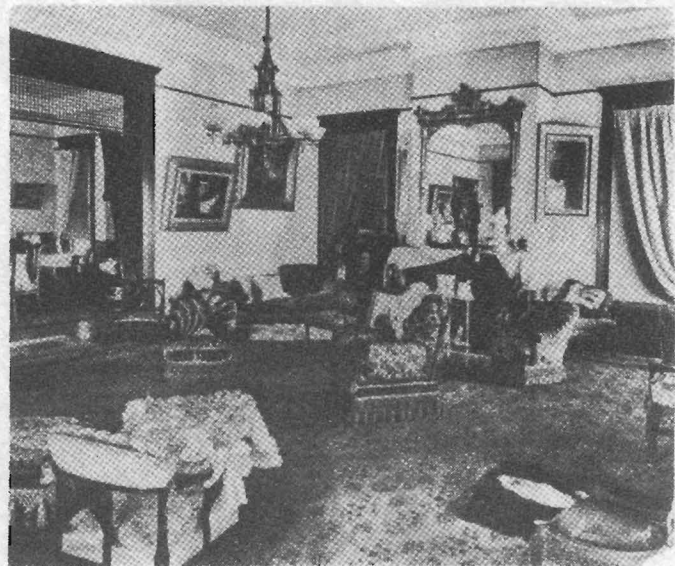
After the birth of his son in 1893, the Buckley family, consisting of Buckley, his third wife Anna M. Hurley, and his son Christopher Jr., became permanent residents of Livermore, instead of just summer visitors. They used a building they referred to as the cottage that had been built in 1885. It contained two bedrooms connected by a dressing room and bathroom, and, across the hall, two sitting rooms joined by an arch that could be closed by a sliding door. The cottage did not have a kitchen but there was a covered passageway at the back that led to a large tank house where a Chinese cook presided over the preparation of meals for the family. A two story stable was built about this time also. The upper floor of it included quarters for the coachman and other workers on the estate.

A much larger house was built in 1891. There was (and is) only one bedroom and bathroom in it, in an apartment for Mr. Buckley. But the house had three quite large rooms designed for entertaining important guests. It is an attractive structure and its usable space is increased by a wide porch along three sides.

Young Chris attended school in Livermore as did Nell Langdon, the daughter of one of Mr. Buckley's associates. Chris Jr. had a Shetland pony and a ponycart that he drove to school at a fast pace. Nell used to ride a donkey. Mrs. Buckley's sister Nell Hurley was a frequent visitor.

There is a pencil sketch of the estate that was made in 1899. It shows the group of buildings near the big house and beyond them, further south, the winery and the chimney of the distillery.

Although in 1918 Mr. Buckley contributed \$8000 to the Livermore Liberty Bond Drive, the Buckleys were



DRAWING ROOM, BUCKLEY RESIDENCE.

*Livermore Herald photo, 1896*

then spending most of their time in San Francisco. The winery was no longer in use and the grapes from the vineyard were sold to the Raboli winery on Second Street in Livermore.

Christopher Buckley Sr. died in 1922, leaving an estate of over a million dollars. The Concannon family suggested to Chris Jr. that he might sell Ravenswood to the Redemptorist Fathers for a retreat. The Fathers moved into the estate in 1921. They renamed it the Villa San Clemente. They retained possession of it until it was sold to the developer Masud Mehran who turned it over to the City of Livermore to fulfill the park dedication required of developers. It is now a beautiful city park.



*1899 drawing of Ravenswood Estate*

*Courtesy Theresa Thompson*



*Old photo of Wente family*

In 1883, Carl Heinrich Wente and his bride Barbara Trautwein came to live in the Livermore Valley. They decided to buy fifty acres of land in partnership with Dr. Louis Busch and Herman Oterson. Twenty of the acres were planted with Zinfandel grapes, and the Wentes began to make wine. Eventually they added to their acreage. Mr. Wente had been working with Charles Krug in his winery near Napa and Mrs. Wente had a background of winemaking in her family in Germany.

At an early date, Mr. Wente began to buy grapes from the nearby vineyard of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Mel. F. E. Wait wrote that C. H. Wente of Livermore was a practical and thorough man. His operation of the Livermore vineyard and winery must have been excellent, judging by its success. By 1898, according to a local newspaper, he was shipping two carloads of wine a day from the Livermore depot.

Carl H. Wente had three sons. Two of them, Ernest and Herman worked with him in the vineyard and winery. Ernest, after graduating from high school in Liver-

more, attended the University of California at Davis, an agricultural school. He was in its first graduating class. Herman Wente graduated from the same school in 1915. Their brother, Carl F. Wente became a noted banker in the state, but Ernest and Herman devoted the rest of their lives to the family winery. Herman was credited with being the first one to market a varietal wine in the state, a Sauvignon Blanc. This means that the wine is made from a specific grape. In 1969 the winery owned 800 acres of vineyard in the Livermore Valley, and in 1978 the business had expanded to 500,000 cases a year.

The Wentes continued to make wine from the grapes imported by Charles Wetmore from the Chateau d'Yquem in Bordeaux, France through the courtesy of Louis Mel.

The son of the Marquis de Saluces, owner of the Chateau d'Yquem, made the first of two visits to the Wente estate in 1939. Each time he tasted Chateau Wente of different vintages and was impressed with its quality and its consistency from year to year. (The



summer weather of France is not quite as reliably warm as the summer weather of Livermore.) It is nice to think of the proprietors of the Chateau d'Yquem keeping in touch with the descendants of their vineyards.

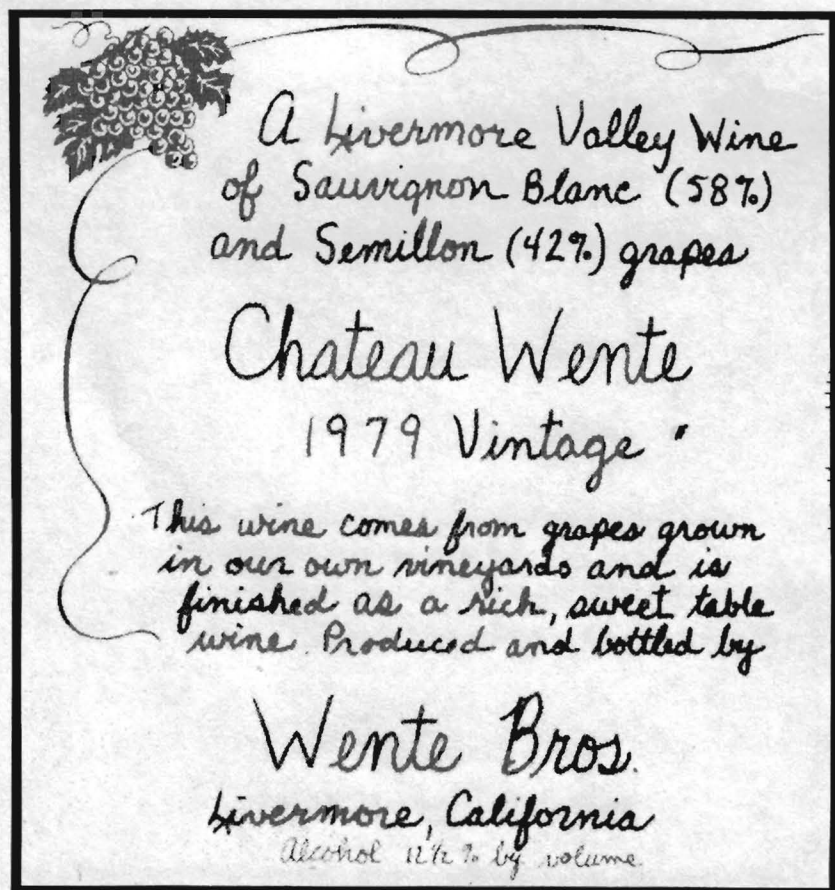
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When the winery re-started after prohibition, it was named Wente Bros. Herman Wente died in 1961. It was written of him that he was a leader and an elder statesman of the California wine industry. In 1957 he was given the coveted Merit Award of the American Society of Enologists.

When Herman died, Karl Wente, the son of Ernest, became the president of Wente Bros. and when Karl died, Karl's son Eric became the president, with Eric's brother Philip the executive vice-president, and Eric's sister Carolyn the vice-president of public relations and marketing. Their mother Jean is the Chief Financial Officer.

It was said of Karl that he was an innovator. His was one of the first family owned wineries to use overhead irrigation to protect the vines against frost, and to use mechanical harvesters of grapes.

Ernest died in 1981. Jean Wente says of him that he was one of the most creative thinkers she has ever known. In the book Guide to California Wines it says "... the brothers Wente are the producers of some of the finest white table wines of the country, notably of the Sauterne and white Burgundy varieties."



## PROHIBITION

The passage of the eighteenth amendment to the United States Constitution, in 1918, seemed to spell the doom of the wine industry in the Livermore Valley. The Volstead Act was passed the next year to implement the amendment. This caused great trouble in the wine business, and in the community in general, until the act was repealed in 1933.

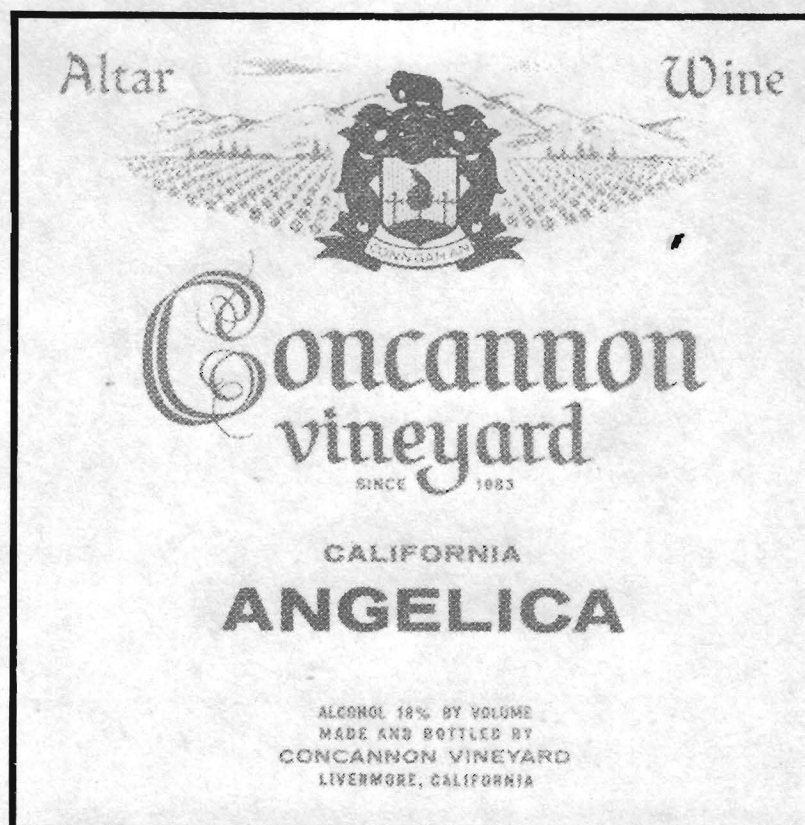
The following items from local newspapers of the Livermore Valley will serve to illustrate these events.

In June, 1918, the Livermore ECHO had an item about the nearby town of Stockton closing its saloons until after the November election, when two prohibition measures would be voted on. In August, the Livermore HERALD had a headline, "REPORTS UNFAVORABLE FOR WINE INDUSTRY". And in September, there was a headline, "FINAL VINTAGE NOW IN PROGRESS" In October There was a headline "GRAPE SYRUP MAY BE THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM".

The HERALD of January 3rd, 1920, reported "C. H. Wentz shipped a carload of grape juice to Colorado

this week." Also, that "five and a half million gallons of wine are in California today, and the only way it can be disposed of legally is to export it. This must be done before January 16." On January 17, there was a headline, "PROHIBITION ENDS GREAT INDUSTRY - WINERIES OF VALLEY DISPOSE OF STOCK AND CLOSE THEIR DOORS"...the last few days were a wild scramble to secure a supply...some took away only a few gallons while others took cask after cask of bulk wines, far in excess of the 200 gallons which is supposed to be the limit of family consumption in a year. Fancy prices have been realized, running as high as \$1.50 a gallon for wine which once sold for 35 cents retail."

On January 20, there was a headline: "CRESTA BLANCA CLEANED OUT...C.H.Wente, C.L.Crellin, A.C.McLeod, Garatti Bros., and several other valley men, made no wine this year. ... The only wine the Concannon winery has on hand is a quantity of sacramental wine for which it has long had an established market. Raboli Bros. and Carlo Ferrario have disposed of all the wine which was on hand May 1st, 1919, which was the limit period allowed for sales. The wine industry is doomed!"





# Merry Christmas

## Livermore Beverage Co.

—Wholesale—  
Distribution of Leading Beers  
4% and 3 1/4 %  
Golden Glow, Rainier, Acme  
Exclusive on Old R. B. Hayden's  
LIQUORS  
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FRANK GARATTI Prop.

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Therefore, the wineries and retailers and wholesalers of beverages in this valley send you a message—**BE OF GOOD CHEER.** Drink as in the days before and drink the products of your own valley

## Ruby Hill Winery

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FAMOUS AS ONE OF THE OUT-  
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Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey  
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ALL THE BETTER BRANDS OF  
WINE AT PRICES YOU CAN  
WELL AFFORD

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Fifths \$1.00  
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Superior Quality California Wines  
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GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR

## Concannon Vineyard

LIVERMORE, CALIFORNIA  
ANOTHER HALF CENTURY  
1883—OF PROGRESS—1933

In the year 1883 when Chester Allen  
Concannon was in the middle of his term as  
President of the United States an impor-  
tant thing happened. James Concannon  
was elected to favor the future prosp-  
erity to the celebration of the centry in  
Livermore Valley. Now the country  
managed by the successive im-  
portance from the Concord City is con-  
tinuing to advance further west.

In order to start to have success with  
Mr. Concannon imported all the cuttings  
from France. He brought to Livermore  
cuttings from the Champagne district  
with Southern Discharge, selected from a  
district celebrated for its Southern type  
of wine. Records of his studies of the

district. Mr. Concannon knew that the  
climate conditions of the Livermore  
Valley and the soil conditions found  
here are ideal for the cultivation of a  
wine vine.

During the last 50 years, the Liver-  
more vineyards have specialized in  
Chateau Ygonne, Heur, Sauterne, Hen-  
nessy and most wines as true to type as  
any vineyard.

The wine industry in the Concannon  
district has been gradually a religious  
cult as that a business proposition.

There can be denied when facing  
Concannon products that they are re-  
ceiving the finest quality in any dis-  
trict of wine wherever their products

## Jack Gardella Announces

the line of WHISKEYS of E. G. LYONS & RAAS  
Co., San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL

GOLDEN WEDDING GIBSON RYE  
BLACKSTONE ECHO SPRINGS

HENNESSY'S THREE STAR  
PURE CALIFORNIA BRANDY  
DU BONNET WINES

ALL LEADING BRANDS OF BEER  
also

CONCANNON  
Champagnes and Wines

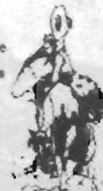
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Livermore Famous

The Livermore Wine  
Made The Rodeo  
Successful



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and other Liquors is  
Carried Here

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