

The History of Anderson Valley

Written by Neill Bell and the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association around 2010

White men first came to Mendocino County in the 1830s, when Mexican officials made several large land grants in the Russian River Valley. Throughout the Mexican era in California history, Anderson Valley remained undisturbed as a homeland of the native Pomo Indians. Even the acquisition of California by the United States brought few changes.

What did bring about rapid change in the state--change which eventually reached even a tiny, remote Mendocino valley--was the discovery of gold. People rushed into California from all over the world in an effort to strike it rich in the foothills of the distant Sierra Nevada. More people meant more pressure to find new land for farming and ranching.

One group that felt the lack of elbowroom was the Walter Anderson family. Walter and Rhoda Anderson had left Missouri and crossed the plains and mountains with their children in 1845, seeing new land and new opportunity. They had settled in the Sacramento Valley, several days' ride northwest of Sutter's Fort.

Two of the Anderson boys had been among the couple dozen daring Americanos who had taken part in the Bear Flag uprising at Sonoma in June of 1846, when they declared California to be a republic independent of Mexican rule. These same two went on to fight under John C. Fremont and other American officers in the war that wrested California (along with Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico and parts of Colorado) from Mexico.

Not long after the fighting ended--and even before the peace treaty was formally signed--John Marshall made the fateful gold discovery in the tailrace of John Sutter's lumber mill in Coloma. By the middle of 1848, sailors were jumping ship in San Francisco to try their luck in the gold fields. Within a year, tens of thousands were leaving their homes in Europe, South America, China, and all parts of the United States, seeking the quickest route to the riches of California.

Most of them found more disappointment than gold. Lack of success didn't send all of them back home, however. Many former gold seekers decided to stay on in California and send for their families. The first great California land boom had begun.

To people like Walter Anderson, the prospect of having "neighbors" within a few miles was most unwelcome. He had already wandered from Kentucky

through Indiana, Illinois, and frontier Missouri before coming to California, and again began to feel the need for more elbowroom. In the spring of 1851, he loaded his family, livestock and possessions and headed west once again.

The Andersons considered settling in the Clear Lake area, but kept moving when they found out that the local Indians were angry about a recent massacre by the U.S. Army at, "Bloody Island." The pioneer family eventually stopped in a small valley in northern Sonoma County, near Cloverdale.

The three eldest Anderson boys went on ahead hunting for game to feed the family. The young men wounded and tracked an elk for quite a distance, when they came to a rocky ledge on a ridge-top. What they saw below both astonished and delighted them. It was a long valley stretching to the northwest, surrounded by dense woods on the southwestern side, and grassy hills to the northeast. The young hunters descended to the valley floor and found the valley to be a veritable Eden. There was abundant meadow grass, and water for livestock. Deer, elk, bear, and small game animals roamed the valley and surrounding hills. They camped for several days, exploring and taking in the natural wonders that had perhaps never before been seen by white men.

As soon as they rejoined the rest of the family, the young explorers told of their find. Within a few days, the Andersons were on their way to make their home in the small, jewel-like valley that was to be known afterwards as Anderson Valley.

The same beauty and abundance that had attracted the Andersons to the valley soon drew other settlers. By the following year, even old Walter was happy enough to have a handful of neighboring settlers, since the local Pomo band had shown little enthusiasm for welcoming the newcomers. Within a few years, a small but thriving agricultural community had grown up in and around Anderson Valley.

In the year 1856, a group of Swiss immigrants (who had originally homesteaded in Illinois) settled in the lower end of the valley, between the present-day towns of Philo and Navarro. The Gschwend, Gossmand and Guntley families brought with them Old World skills and know-how. They planted orchards--and perhaps vinifera grapes--on their homesteads. John Gschwend built the valley's first sawmill the year he arrived, and neighbor Andrew Guntley brewed some grain from the first harvest into beer. Soon, Guntley was distilling some of his fermented grain and fruit into brandy. The beverage industry in Anderson Valley had begun.

There is no mention of wine in early accounts of life in the valley. It is difficult to believe that none of the settlers--especially those with European backgrounds, like the Swiss--made and consumed wine. North American

native (labrusca) grapes were as abundant as other wild fruits in Mendocino County. However, whatever wine was made by the early settlers must have been limited and kept for home consumption. No written account of commercial winemaking in Anderson Valley during this period has come to light thus far.

There are several mentions of Anderson Valley pioneer families growing grapes. Like other agriculturalists, valley people grew grapevines around their farmhouses for beauty and utility. In a 1982 remembrance, old-timer Alva Ingram said he remembered seeing a small (20 vine) vineyard at the old Ball ranch near Boonville in 1897. He estimated--from the size of the vines--that they were then about 20 years old. He mentions having seen gnarly old vines that must have been planted in the 1860s or 1870s at several other valley homesteads.

There are even suggestions that a few families may have tried to set out sizable vineyards, just as they had planted orchards. Apples soon became the mainstay of Anderson Valley's export economy, but peaches, pears, prunes and hops were all grown with greater or lesser degrees of commercial success during the first half-century of settlement.

Two factors seemed to have limited the growing of grapes and winemaking in the early years. The first had to do with the people themselves. Except for the Swiss families mentioned earlier, most of the early settlers in Anderson Valley were from the Eastern U.S., where there was no tradition of winemaking or drinking. Andrew Guntley probably had no trouble finding takers for his homemade whisky (at least until 1866, when new tax laws put an end to his commercial distillery) because that is what the people from Missouri and other Eastern states traditionally drank. There wouldn't have been much demand for wine in the valley during those years, and remoteness from larger communities combined with primitive transportation shut off potential outside markets.

In fact, it was difficult to ship any agricultural products from Anderson Valley to the outside world. Most of the apples and other fruit shipped outside the valley in the 19th century were dried before shipping. It wasn't until 1868 that the first toll road was completed, linking the valley to the seat of county government in Ukiah--only 25 miles away.

The second problem was the climate. Those few who had tried to grow European (vinifera) grapes in Anderson Valley had experienced problems with ripeness and frost. Most of the homesteads and farms were located on the valley floor, where sub-freezing temperatures often occur on spring nights. Springtime frosts rarely damaged apples, but they usually resulted in low or even non-existent yields for wine grapes. Except for native or a few

ornamental vines, old-timers in the valley were inclined to state that, "You can't grow grapes in Anderson Valley," and leave it at that.

The first change in this situation took place in the 1890s. In the late 1880s, L. E. White had begun turning sleepy Greenwood (the present-day town of Elk) into a major coastal lumber mill and shipping point. White built a new mill and wharf, and began building railroad tracks up the Greenwood and Elk Creek watersheds. This new activity brought an increased need for labor and agricultural goods from nearby Anderson Valley.

As it happened, there was a group of people ready and willing to fill these needs.

Italian economic and political unrest fueled immigration to the United States during the 1890s and early years of the 20th Century. Although many Italian immigrants settled in urban areas of the Northeastern U.S., a sizable number made their way to Northern California. A few of them had been in California since the gold rush days of the 1850s, and they encouraged their relatives and friends to settle on the West Coast. They brought with them a number of old-country ways, including winegrowing skills--and a taste for wine.

A number of Italian immigrants came to Greenwood from San Francisco in 1894. Among them were Angelo and Rosie Frati, Demeterio Tovani, Fansto Guisti, John Frati and Giovanni Giovanetti. These people homesteaded on Greenwood Ridge, high ground with a good road that connected the port of Greenwood with Anderson Valley, a road distance of about 18 miles.

Greenwood Ridge has a very different climate from Anderson Valley proper. The broad ridgetop plateaus and benches sit at elevations of up to 1600 feet above sea level. This puts them above the persistent coastal fog that hangs in the canyons of Greenwood Creek and the Navarro River, fog which can chill lower portions of Anderson Valley in summer as well as winter. Ridge lands are drenched with sunlight. However the close proximity of the Pacific Ocean keeps ridge top temperatures from rising--or falling to valley extremes. Occasional summer heat waves drive Anderson Valley temperatures well into the 90s, or even 100s. Ocean breezes reaching Greenwood Ridge often moderate these highs by ten degrees or more. Springtime frosts are virtually unknown to many parts of the ridge, where cold air drains down the steep slopes into the canyons below.

These were the climatic conditions the Italians encountered when they arrived on Greenwood Ridge in 1894. They had come from an area where grapes were traditionally grown on hillsides, with the richer bottomlands reserved for more demanding crops. The climate and the rich clay soils reminded them of their native Northern Italian homelands. So, to make themselves feel even more at home, they cleared the wooded slopes and planted their native vinifera grapes. Since few of the pioneer vines have

survived the ravages of time and replanting, it is not known with certainty what varieties of grapes were planted in the 1890s.

Unlike today, most early viticulturists did a certain amount of "blending" in the vineyard. The primary black (red wine) grape in most of these early plantings appears to have been Zinfandel, with some Carignane and an occasional Alicante thrown in for balance. For white wine, Golden Chasselas (Palomino), Malvasia Bianca and Muscat grapes were the favorites. The cuttings for most of these early grapes probably came from established vineyards in neighboring Sonoma County.

Angelo and Rosie Frati, like many of the Italian-Americans of Greenwood Ridge, made wine and bread to sell in Anderson Valley and Greenwood. As more Italian immigrants came to cut timber, work in the lumber mills and perform agricultural labor in Anderson Valley orchards, Greenwood Ridge vineyardists found an increasing market for their products. The Fratis reportedly sold their wine for a dollar per gallon, and bread for fifty cents a loaf. As the logging railway pushed its way up Greenwood Creek from the coastal mill, it brought customers closer to the budding wineries of the ridge.

Italian-Americans weren't the only people to grow grapes, or make and sell wine in the early 1900s. Charles Hagemann bought the John Studebaker property next to Giovanni Giovanetti's about 1910. Giovanetti had been growing grapes and making wine for years. A land survey made at the time of the sale showed that a good-sized portion of the Giovanetti vineyard had been planted on Studebaker's land. Hagemann is said to have given the crop to his neighbor for five years--and then claimed the vines and fruit as his own.

While Giovanetti mourned his loss, Hagemann was planting more grapes. Zinfandel and Alicante reds were set out, along with Riesling, Malvasia Bianca, and Sweetwater whites. The enterprising Hagemann reportedly carved and burned out a large redwood tree stump to use as a wine press, and built a 1900-gallon fermentation tank. By the end of World War I, he was delivering wine to Anderson Valley and Greenwood by car. His neighbor Giovanetti kept up a lively business with his remaining vineyard, delivering five and ten gallon barrels and wicker-covered demijohns to his customers by horse-drawn wagon.

The quality of the wine produced on Greenwood Ridge must have varied according to a number of conditions--including transportation--prior to its sale. The ridge was certainly famous on the coast and in the valley for its wines; Greenwood Ridge was referred to in the vernacular of the region as "Vinegar Hill." Boontling, the elaborate local language developed in Anderson Valley at the end of the 19th Century, recognized the importance of the Italian wine growers and makers. Boont speakers called the winegrowing

ridge "Iteland," and referred to winegrapes as "Frati shams" in recognition of the Frati family's pioneering contributions to winegrowing.)

Customers who liked their spirits but found the sourness of wine disagreeable had another choice. Several of the winemakers had also built stills, which produced "grappa" brandy. Prices were accordingly higher. Since several of the school districts in Anderson Valley had voted to outlaw the sale of alcoholic beverages in their areas (by 1914 both Boonville and Navarro were "dry," and the saloons were out of business), business on Vinegar Hill must have been brisk.

The success of the Greenwood Ridge vineyards led to plantings in other nearby areas. On ridges south of Anderson Valley, Italian-American families found similarity suitable conditions for growing grapes and making wine. There may have been as many as 150 acres of wine grapes growing in the Fish Rock Road area of Mendocino County during the World War I era, and portions of two of these high-elevation vineyards--about 14 acres in all--survive and produce high-quality Zinfandel to this day. Greenwood Ridge probably was home to more than 200 acres of winegrapes at that time.

Ridges weren't the only places to be planted during early years of the 20th Century. The Pinoli family began buying property in the Mill Creek-Lazy Creek area between Philo and Navarro, and they planted grapes on sloping hillsides above the creeks. Joe Pinoli began planting his vineyards in 1911 or 1912, and is said to have founded the first bonded winery in the valley. Jon and Charles Pinoli bought land nearby and began planting grapes in 1917. Zinfandel, Alicante and Sweetwater were the varieties chosen for their venture. These vineyards, situated on warm south-facing slopes, survived the frosts and showed that winegrapes planted in some valley locations, at least, could grow to maturity.

Just when things were looking up for Anderson Valley growers and their wineries, Prohibition brought down the curtain. It was one thing to work around the local ban on the sale of alcoholic beverages, quite another to take on the U.S. government. By 1921, making and selling wine had become a federal offense.

Federal agents came calling on winery owners--with axes. Although some of the older residents could speak little English, they soon got the point. Olga Tovani Hill recalls the Feds making a raid and smashing her family's wine tanks. She remembers the wine running down the road, where it collected in ruts and potholes. As soon as the agents were out of sight, the children collected it and put it in small barrels for later use.

According to most accounts, the raids did put a dent in--but never really stopped--winemaking. Most of the old winemakers still sold wine and grapes

"through the back door." Hard times in the lumber industry and the fear of federal action certainly clouded the outlook for the local wine industry during the 1920s and 1930s. Many vineyardists let their vines fall into neglect or pulled them to make way for orchards or open grazing land. Some sold their land and moved on to other parts of California. Still, there were a few people who believed that the future would be brighter.

The Cameron family sold its ridgetop land to John and Rosier Pardini about 1922. Despite the recently-enacted Prohibition, the Pardini family planted some new vineyard. The family cellar was soon converted into a winery, where John made three wines. Bruna Pardini Slote remembers that the red was made mostly from Zinfandel, the white from Golden Chasselas and Sweetwater. Her personal favorite at the time was the sweet "pink," a rose probably made from a blend of red and white grapes. When the house burned in 1927 or 1928, John built a new home nearby and continued to make wine in the cellar of the old house.

By the time Prohibition ended as a national experiment in 1933, winegrowing and making had undergone such an eclipse that it could not recover. The railroad that had once brought lumbermen and their families up Greenwood Creek for weekends of camping, music and wine drinking was only a memory. Greenwood (renamed Elk to avoid postal confusion with another California town of the same name) was itself more of a ghost town than anything else, and Anderson Valley was no more prosperous than other rural depression-era communities.

About the only thing that had improved during the 1930s was transportation. Public roads were being upgraded as part of the get-America-back-to-work projects, and Anderson Valley got a good, all-weather surfaced road. For the few growers left in the valley and surrounding ridges, this meant that grapes could be trucked and sold to wineries in Cloverdale and other northern Sonoma communities. The Pinolis began selling to Bandiera, Sink and Seghesio instead of making their own wines, and other growers did the same.

Weather took its toll on the vines, too. The 1940s saw a number of killing frosts that hit hard even the oldest vineyards. The Pronsolino family (which had bought the neighboring Pardini place in 1944) had to pull the 50 year-old vines from its old home vineyard in 1949 because of frost-induced losses. John Pardini's choice of a well-drained hilltop site had proven to be a wise one. The five-plus acre block of Zinfandel planted by the Pardini family in 1922 is still producing award-winning winegrapes.

The post-World War II period was an exciting time in Anderson Valley. The housing boom of the post-war years hit Mendocino County square in the timbers--and that was just fine with the loggers, mill workers and timberland owners. For the first time in decades, more people were coming into the

Valley to work than were leaving. Philo, Navarro and Boonville each sported several sawmills, and the stores, gas stations, and bars prospered.

One business that was not improved much was winegrape growing. The newcomers were mostly from the heartland of America, and--like the original white settlers--had no tradition of wine drinking. Most of the vineyards fell deeper into neglect, and acreage continued to drop.

The only exception to this trend was an experiment conducted by Italian Swiss Colony, a winery located in the northern Sonoma County town of Asti. Colony was looking to expand (it went on to become a giant in the wine industry in the 1950s and 1960s), and figured the nearby Anderson Valley was a promising location. In 1946, the company and its associated growers bought 200 acres of flat land (where Anderson Valley High School is presently located) and began planting about 100 acres of Ugni Blanc and French Colombard the following year.

Italian Swiss Colony also signed contracts with a number of Anderson Valley land owners, guaranteeing to buy their grapes for 15 years. Colony agreed to pay freight charges plus a two-dollar-per-ton premium if they would plant certain high-yielding varieties. Several valley owners accepted Colony's offer. Among them was Ranking Rickard, who planted ten acres--five each of Golden Chasselas and Carignane--on his ranch just north of Boonville.

Unfortunately, things didn't go well for Colony or its growers. The company had guessed wrong on its varieties, and most of them were never in great demand at the winery. But the biggest problem was that the grapes never developed enough sugar to satisfy Colony's need. At that time, many wineries were looking to harvest grapes that were extremely high in sugar content--very ripe or mature--in order to make the sweeter wines popular in those days. Anderson Valley, with its coastal marine-influenced weather, just couldn't deliver.

Cool evenings and warm days yielded fruit with relatively high acid and moderate sugar. Worse yet, the fruit ripened slowly and late, often falling victim to early autumn rains before harvest. Springtime was no better. The low-lying vineyards Colony and most producers planted were hit by repeated frosts, and the only method of frost protection at the time was the expensive--and often ineffective--smudgepot.

Some of the damage that was attributed to frost was later found to be a result of phylloxera infestations. Mendocino County Farm Advisor Bruce Bearden reported that he saw considerable evidence of damage from these pesky root lice when he examined Anderson Valley's vineyards for the first time in 1954. He speculated that the insect pests were brought into the Valley on the roots

of the young vines planted in 1947. With economics and nature united against it, the first post-war winegrape experiment in the Valley was a failure.

Colony sold its 100-acre experiment to the Anderson Valley School District about a decade after it had begun, and most growers pulled their vines. Rickard harvested the last grapes from his ranch in 1973 and pulled the vines. Colony sold off the remaining 10 acres for residential use about the same time. Only one small block of vines (then owned by the Goodhue family) remains from this ambitious attempt to re-establish Anderson Valley as a winegrowing area.

The modern area of winegrowing and winemaking in Anderson Valley began in 1964. That was the year Dr. Donald Edmeades, a Southern California physician, planted 24 acres of premium wine grapes and hung up a sign that read, "Edmeades Folly." Judging from experience the Edmeades sign was not just self-deprecating humor.

However, the doctor had experts--if not experience--on his side. Viticulturists from the University of California at Davis had recently completed a survey of Anderson Valley. They had concluded that with the right varieties Anderson Valley had the soils and climate to be a successful premium winegrape growing area. No matter that the Valley was one of the coolest (and certainly the rainiest!) areas, with a high probability of frost damage, and a low potential for ripeness. The UC Davis experts recognized some of the limitations of Anderson Valley's climate when they classified the Valley a Region I (Philo or lower end) and a cool Region II (at the upper, Boonville end).

Edmeades decided to hedge his bet by planting four winegrape varieties. Gewurztraminer was one of those recommended by UC Davis as well suited to the climate, and French Colombard and Chardonnay were expected to do fairly well. Edmeades' real gamble was in choosing Cabernet Sauvignon as his major red variety. Cabernet is now regarded as a slow-ripening grape, one that needs more than average heat to mature.

The skeptics -- of whom there were many in the Valley -- sat back and waited for Edmeades Folly to fulfill its own prediction, while the young vines grew toward maturity. Within a few years, the Edmeades gamble had company. Tony and Gretchen Husch bought 60 acres near Edmeades and planted Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, and Pinot Noir in 1968. They crushed their first ripe fruit in 1971 -- founding Husch Vineyards -- Anderson Valley's first winery since prohibition.

The Husches also hedged their bets in a different way -- they bought a second parcel of land high on Greenwood Ridge. Betting that the success of the early

Italian winemakers was no fluke, the couple planted an eight-acre vineyard with blocks of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and White Riesling.

For the first few years, Dr. Edmeades sold the fruit from his family vineyard to wineries outside the Valley. He soon decided to crush and ferment the winegrapes on his own. Although the doctor himself did not live to see his dream of producing his own wine come true, his son Deron guided the fledgling winery through its first crush in 1972.

With two family wineries producing premium wines for high-quality fruit, the modern renaissance of Anderson Valley as a wine-producing area got underway.

Winemaking efforts of the 1970s were not carried out on a grand scale, or with state-of-the-art equipment. Both Husch and Edmeades used makeshift facilities and equipment for their wineries--a remodeled chicken coop and an old apple dryer, respectively. Early tasting rooms were places where customers were so novel that they might have to wait 15 minutes for someone to show up to open a bottle for them. The quantity of wine the two pioneer Anderson Valley wineries produced was small, with bottlings of less than 10 cases not at all unusual.

Having such limited-scale production turned out to be fortunate for Anderson Valley's unequipped winemakers, as Tony Husch discovered during a hard freeze in the winter of 1972-73. It got so cold that Husch resorted to using electric blankets to protect the wine he was fermenting in wooden barrels. Improvisation--along with trial and error--characterized those early years.

Still, the quality of the early Anderson Valley wines showed promise, and encouraged others to try their hands at winemaking. Within a few years, Ted Bennett and Deborah Cahn had planted a vineyard across the highway from Edmeades, and began producing wine under their Navarro Vineyards label.

Realizing that the Mendocino Coast was a good place to sell wines to affluent visitors, Edmeades and Navarro put their heads together in 1976 and created the Mendocino Wine Guild. The Guild was a cooperative arrangement, with its own label appearing on wines produced by each of the two wineries. These wines were sold at the Guild tasting room, located above the delicatessen on Main Street in the town of Mendocino.

Hundreds of tourists climbed the stairs to the cozy second-floor tasting room to sip wine and enjoy the view. Among the novel offerings at the Mendocino Wine Guild were several apple wines made by Edmeades, and varietal grape juices produced by Navarro. Although the Mendocino Wine Guild experiment lasted only a year or so, it helped make Anderson Valley wines an important part of the visitor scene in Mendocino, and introduced them to many

vacationers for the first time. Returning home through the Valley, coastal visitors began stopping at the wineries for newly-discovered wines to take home.

During the 1970s, Edmeades introduced several other innovations into the California wine business, including the reproductions of watercolor paintings by local artists on its labels. Proprietary wines were big sellers for Edmeades, with its "Rain Wine," "Whale Wine," "Queen Anne's Lace," and "Opal" breaking new ground in the marketplace.

Edmeades entered several years of turmoil and restructuring during the early 1980s, and ultimately ceased production altogether. Kendall-Jackson Vineyards and Winery of Lake County purchased Edmeades in 1988.

The last years of the 1970s saw other Anderson Valley grape growers become involved in the winemaking business. Lazy Creek Vineyards and Greenwood Ridge Vineyards began producing estate-bottled wines from their own grapes, so there was finally a true handful of Anderson Valley wineries. In 1979, Anderson Valley began a tradition of hosting the Mendocino County Fair Wine Competition, where wines produced from grapes growing in Mendocino County are judged by a panel of wine experts.

Another milestone was passed in 1979, when Tony and Gretchen Husch sold their winery to the H. A. Oswald family. The Oswalds were already in the Mendocino County grape growing business, with extensive vineyard plantings at La Ribera Ranch in Talmage.

The 1980s saw expansion of Anderson Valley wineries on a scale that would have seemed almost impossible a decade earlier. During the early '80s, wineries seemed to spring up like mushrooms all over California, and Anderson Valley was no exception. Handley Cellars, Christine Woods, Pullman Vineyards and Pepperwood Springs Vineyards all began producing wine during those years.

Pepperwood Springs was in some ways typical of the new wineries. Larry and Nicki Parsons had bought their hillside vineyard land in 1980, and had turned to winemaking as a way to make the most of their wine grapes. They got the name of the winery from springs that had been developed for livestock that were grazed on their land during the depression of the 1930s. What wasn't typical about Pepperwood Springs was that winemaker Larry Parsons was blind.

Pepperwood Springs won design awards for its labels, but they were also unique in that they contained Braille writing. The small, family winery attracted a lot of attention in the news media because of Larry's blindness.

In 1986, Larry Parsons was killed in a tragic automobile accident, and ownership of Pepperwood Springs was eventually transferred to Gary and Phyllis Kaliher. Recalling one of the more unusual aspects of their pioneer efforts, Nicki Parsons remembered that Larry often had to jump-start their 1938-vintage tractor while she towed it with their pickup truck. She also recalled that they got plenty of help and helpful advice from neighboring winemakers, that a sprit of cooperation and mutual assistance was very much a part of the scene during those years.

An important moment in Anderson Valley wine history took place in 1982, when the French firm Champagne Louis Roederer announced its plans to build a California sparkling wine facility in Anderson Valley. Valley grapes had been going into sparkling wine production for several years. In fact, Scharffenberger Cellars of Ukiah and several other Mendocino County producers had selected Anderson Valley as an area ideally suited to growing top-notch Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for their sparkling wine cuvees. But Roederer's decision to locate its vineyards and sparkling wine production facilities there gave a big boost to Anderson Valley's prestige as a premium wine-producing area.

Starting in the mid-1990s, wineries from Napa, Sonoma and beyond began to source Pinot Noir grapes from Anderson Valley, noting the high quality and reasonable prices for fruit. In 1998, the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association founded the Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival to showcase its rising reputation as a Pinot Noir-producing appellation. This festival now sells out every year and raises substantial sums for local charities.

Many wineries from outside the appellation now bottle vineyard-designate Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs, and an ever-increasing number have purchased vineyard property in the appellation. Producers like Copain, Rhys, Cakebread Cellars, V. Sattui, Cliff Lede, Hall Winery, Long Meadow Ranch and Twomey, among others, currently own vineyards in the appellation. Well-established Pinot Noir names like Littorai, Papapietro Perry, MacPhail Family Wines, J. Davies Vineyards, Arista and Walt Wines all produce Anderson Valley-designate Pinot Noirs.

Anderson Valley has also become well known for its Alsace-style white wines, made from Gewürztraminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Riesling, and Muscat. Because of the appellation's cold climate, these varietals grow extremely well and produce crisp, aromatic wines beloved by many. To celebrate these sometimes difficult-to-navigate wines, the AVWA started hosting the International Alsace Varietals Festival in 2006. This festival now involves wine producers from around the world and hosts hundreds of people every February.

Those pioneer winemakers of the last century would have a difficult time understanding how their modest efforts started a tradition that would eventually see Anderson Valley recognized as one of California's finest winegrowing areas. Like the highway that runs through the Valley, getting to this point in the Valley's viticultural history has taken some ups and downs, a few twists and turns. But the results of those years of work have proven well worth the effort.