

Selling A Name: How Paul Masson Marketed His Label To The World And Became
The Champagne King Of California

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Introduction

The history of wine is as rich and diverse as the drink itself. While it dates back to the Neolithic period (ca. 5400-5000 B.C.) in Iran, some of the most popular contemporary producers are France, Italy, and the United States.¹ Although the United States is much larger in area than the other two countries, nearly 90% of its wine comes from California. This dominance by the West Coast in American viticulture can be significantly attributed to the fruitful soil where the grapes grow. However, California's reputation as one of the world's elite producers would not have been possible without the efforts of a handful of early California pioneers. While there were multiple European immigrants who brought their skills as master vintners to the United States, one in particular played a very important role in giving credibility to American wine on the global stage. Paul Masson, an immigrant from France who settled in the Santa Clara Valley, did not introduce wine to California. Instead, he introduced wine from California to the world.

Masson was born in 1859 and raised in France's Burgundy region. He was the offspring of several generations of vintners, who had been tending to the same French soil for hundreds of years. As a child, Masson was surrounded by vineyards, wine cellars, and experienced industry veterans. He was exposed to some of the world's greatest winemakers and their techniques at a very young age. His access to these people provided him with invaluable skills, which benefited him greatly when he arrived in the United States.

¹ Patrick McGovern, *The Origins and Ancient History of Wine*, (London: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 2000), ix.

Masson, like many other Europeans in the 1860's and 1870's, came to California in an attempt to take advantage of the state's rich soil. Because Phylloxera, an aphid deadly to grapevines, had broken out in France, many French vintners abandoned their crops in search of new land. In addition to a large number of European immigrants, many California ranchers also turned to viticulture after a devastating drought in 1862 that "virtually brought an end to the appeal of cattle raising."² This wave of new vintners in California supplied locals with more than their fair share of wine. In order to succeed in the over crowded market, one had to possess superior skill and business savvy. Masson was certainly a talented winemaker, but his affinity towards showmanship and marketing eventually elevated him above his competitors.

Historiography

Masson was very influential regionally as well as nationally and around the rest of the world. Locally, he was a well-known figure in society. He was a prominent winemaker, businessman, and public figure. Nationally, he was respected for both his expertise at his craft as well as his ability to bring attention to the American wine market. He was recognized as one of the first Americans who could compete with the best vintners in the world. Masson's name could be found in newspapers and books from San Jose to Burgundy. Accordingly, it is important to be familiar with the best works about Masson locally, nationally, and internationally. While Masson's town newspaper published reports about events as minor as when he purchased a small piece of land, more widely read national publications focused only on more significant events in his life and business.

² Robert Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1970), 9.

Locally, Masson was frequently mentioned in newspapers. *The San Jose Evening News* was the source of an abundant amount of information about his life. Everything from his advertisements to the famous guests who visited his winery was published in its pages. More personal accounts of Masson were written by fellow Santa Clara Valley residents Eleanor Ray and R.V. Garrod. The title of Ray's book, *Vineyards in the Sky* (1993), refers to a property developed in the Saratoga hills known as the Mountain Winery. The property was later bought by Ray's husband, Martin, who was an aspiring winemaker. Much younger than Masson when he purchased the Mountain Winery, Martin constantly asked Masson for advice on a wide variety of issues and "watched the winemaker's every move."³ Often, this advice concerned not just how to make great wines, but also how to market them. Because Eleanor was so close to these discussions, she is a very valuable primary source.

Like Eleanor Ray, R.V. Garrod also had personal experiences with Masson, so his *Saratoga Story* (1962), suggests what Masson was like as a person. Garrod and his family were also involved in the wine industry and lived within a couple miles of Masson's Saratoga winery. Garrod's first hand anecdotes accurately display Masson's personality and the environment where he lived.

The husband and wife team of Lloyd and Alice Reeve collaborated to write *Gift of the Grape* (1959), which focuses on Masson but also deals with many other issues related to viticulture in the Santa Clara Valley. For example, there are chapters dedicated to Masson's predecessors in the regional wine market as well as those who followed him.

³ Eleanor Ray, *Vineyards in the Sky*, (Stockton: Heritage West Books, 1993), 17.

The book specifically puts Masson within the context of the local wine market and the impact he had on it.

The *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* are important sources of Masson's impact on the national and international stage. They featured advertisements that were seen by millions of people and demonstrate that he had a unique ability to reach the masses that other winemakers did not. Other works that put Masson in a greater international context include *This Uncommon Heritage* (1970) and *California's Best Wines* (1948), both written by Robert Balzer. These books are significant because Balzer is considered by many to be the premier authority of the American wine industry in the twentieth century. Because he witnessed the end of Masson's career, his writings are a valuable first hand account of how the great vintner was perceived at the time. *This Uncommon Heritage* is the most complete biography of Paul Masson. The fact that one of the most respected wine historians wrote such a thorough account of Masson proves that he is one of the most significant people to impact the industry in recent history and merits further study.

Few works have asked why Paul Masson became successful while others did not, yet his networking skills and marketing tactics were crucial to his success. It is evident from critical reviews that Masson's wines and champagnes were of high quality, but he would probably have done very well selling a lower grade product too. In fact, he focused on making upper end wines based on his understanding of contemporary market trends. It is clear that Paul Masson's background in viticulture gave him an edge among California winemakers, but it was his keen eye for good business opportunities that put him among the state's elite vintners.

Coming To America

Paul Masson left his native France for the United States at the young age of nineteen. He enrolled at the College of the Pacific, then located in San Jose, and wasted little time making valuable connections. Perhaps the most important person in his life was his first employer, Charles Lefranc. The elder Frenchman was impressed by the young student and hired him to work at his well-known winery as its bookkeeper.⁴ Being responsible for the company's finances certainly helped Masson learn that there were other important aspects to being a successful vintner than just making enjoyable wine. Marketing, networking, and general business knowledge can transform a good product into a great one. He mastered these skills, and they became valuable assets to him later in his career.

Masson's association with Lefranc was the first of many smart business relationships he formed. Not only did he get a job out of his employer but he was unofficially accepted into a small community of elite French vintners living in the Santa Clara Valley. When Lefranc had come to the United States, he too had sought out the guidance of a more experienced winemaker named Etienne Thee. Thee, who came from France's Bordeaux region, "planted vines along the Guadalupe Creek, five miles east of present-day Los Gatos."⁵ Charles Lefranc and his boss formed a close partnership, which was solidified when he married Thee's daughter. Because Thee had no sons, Lefranc took over the estate when he died.

⁴ Robert Balzer, *California's Best Wines*, (Los Angeles, Ward Ritchie, 1948), 130.

⁵ Leon Adams, *The Wines of America*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 362.

Similarly, “in 1888, Masson secured himself a place in a winemaking dynasty by marrying Lefranc’s oldest daughter.”⁶ In a conversation with Martin Ray, Masson told his young protégé, “Well, you see, after Charles Lefranc died-he was killed suddenly, tragically, when trying to stop a runaway horse-I married his older daughter, Louise. They needed a man in the family who could take charge of things, make decisions. And I liked Louise.”⁷ While the marriage may have been purely out of love, it also provided Masson with complete control over his father-in-law’s wine company. In fact, the union could be seen as a business arrangement in some regards. Masson admitted that he was following in the footsteps of his father-in law by marrying into a prominent French winemaking family.⁸ The marriage was not unlike those between two royal families whose statuses could be elevated by joining forces. The union was also good material for the newspapers, which undoubtedly helped market the Masson name. Even decades later in 1918, *The Evening News* announced that “Paul E. Masson and Louise Lefranc secured a marriage license today,” in a piece about the significant stories of the day from thirty years earlier.⁹

After marrying Louise Lefranc, Masson bought the remaining shares of her father’s company from his brother-in-law, Henry. Now that he was in complete control, he dropped Lefranc’s name from the business, and changed it to the Paul Masson Champagne Company. In later years, some critics believed that his wines were better than his champagnes, but Masson could better market his entire collection under this

⁶ Winery History.” *the mountain winery*. Apr 2010
<<http://www.mountainwinery.com/publisher/articleview/frmArticleID/82/?WSDS ESSID=0294b0a2517cf24310eb31baa473f500&/1/>>.

⁷ Eleanor Ray, *Vineyards in the Sky*, (Stockton: Heritage West Books, 1993), 17.

⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁹ “30 Years Ago Today,” *The Evening News*, 5/14/1918, p. 4.

label because he was the only person in the area who was making champagne or sparkling wine.

The Champagne King of California

It was fitting that Masson focused the company's name around his signature product, champagne. He realized that France viewed the drink as the "embodiment of the national spirit,"¹⁰ but he believed that he could make it into something special in the United States too. In fact, "he was convinced that California soil could produce champagne comparable to the best of France so he dedicated his energies towards developing the champagne type of wine favoring grape."¹¹ Because nobody else was making champagne in the state at this time, Masson realized the potential for this untapped market. Having identified the opportunity, he made "repeated journeys to his native France...in which he brought back choice wine grape cuttings and gathered men skilled in champagne making."¹² Paul Masson's ties to France attracted other prominent winemakers from his homeland to come work in America. Because he had already made a name for himself in California while working for Lefranc, French vintners looking to follow in his footsteps were eager to learn from him firsthand. Masson's use of well trained winemakers gave him a significant advantage over his rivals, especially former ranchers who were trying to break into the industry.

Although Masson was not raised in France's Champagne region, he knew enough people from there who could provide him with everything he needed to become a very

¹⁰ Kolleen Guy, *When Champagne Became French*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2003), 1.

¹¹ Florence Cunningham, *Saratoga's First Hundred Years*, (Fresno: Panorama, 1967), 173.

¹² Ibid.

successful champagne maker. He worked quickly to get the first stock of his new product ready for sale because he knew that as the first vintner in the market, he would have a monopoly for a brief period of time. In fact, when he originally released champagne under the Paul Masson label in 1892, it “took the California market by storm.”¹³ With a practiced business sense, he understood that he could market champagne as not just a drink but a lifestyle. His marketing acumen soon established his reputation as the Champagne King of California.

Though in France the only time sparkling wine has the distinction of being called champagne is when it comes from that region of the country, Masson marketed his American sparkling wine under the Paul Masson Champagne label. This name gave the drink a more sophisticated connotation. Wine aficionados appreciated drinking something with a French name because the superiority of French wines was well established. Masson believed that the champagne he was selling was just as good as those from his native country, but he was also smart enough to know that no matter how good it was, some people would never agree and others would not know the difference. Masson entered his wines in many competitions in order to increase the name recognition of his label. One of his most memorable victories came in 1904 when he won the Grand Prix in St. Louis at the World’s Fair. But maybe even more impressive was “the prestigious Paris Award, which he won at the Paris Expo of 1900,” and “did not go unnoticed by the French press. Suddenly the whole world knew about Paul Masson

¹³ Charles Sullivan, *A Companion to California Wine*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 204.

Champagne of California.”¹⁴ For the French to recognize an American wine in any way was a remarkable accomplishment. Masson, always looking for a way to improve business, understood that this recognition would also help him win over new customers internationally who were skeptical of American wines.

“Masson was not content with the gold medals from competitive showings. This would interest only a few. There must be a more dramatic way of bringing attention to California Champagne, and particularly his own.”¹⁵ Masson had just the right marketing ploy to bring such attention to his label. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, one of the biggest stars on the world stage was actress Anna Held. Born in Poland, she moved to Paris with her family as a child to escape Polish anti-Semitism. Her French background would eventually lead her to Masson when she moved to San Francisco. Not long after she arrived in the United States, she was offered a high paying job in a Broadway production. She became very successful and “her rolling eyes, eighteen inch waist and naughty songs made Held a major star...She increased her fame by such shrewd gestures as riding horses astride (rather than side-saddle), and by being one of the first women to ride the newly invented bicycle and motorcar.”¹⁶ Masson knew that by getting “one of the first celebrities to win transatlantic fame, and a leading musical stage star”¹⁷ to work for him, his business would boom. He invited Held to his estate in the Santa Clara Valley so that she could be photographed and help publicize the winery. Masson’s marketing genius even further. He had Held bathe in a zinc tub filled with his

¹⁴ “Winery History.” *the mountain winery*. Apr 2010
<<http://www.mountainwinery.com/publisher/articleview/frmArticleID/82/?WSDS ESSID=0294b0a2517cf24310eb31baa473f500&/1/>>.

¹⁵ Robert Balzer, *California’s Best Wines*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1948), 132.

¹⁶ John Kenrick, “Anna Held,” <http://www.musicals101.com/ziegheld.htm>, 2002.

¹⁷ Ibid.

own champagne. Within days, “the news raced around the world in headlines and Paul Masson Champagne became a household word.”¹⁸ The stunt confirmed Masson’s acute marketing sense. Without this gift for publicity, he might never have achieved his fame as a vintner no matter how good his product was.

While Paul Masson did have a passion for making good wine, he also believed in the consistency of the demand for high end products. He understood that the wealthy portion of the population was always in the market for luxury goods. Masson identified them as “those important people who know and love fine wines.”¹⁹ Because Masson often targeted these people who had money to spend, he became very successful. As a result, he became well known among people who were not as wealthy too.

Masson constantly expanded his product line. After his success with champagne, he kept on a lookout for the next big thing. Arpad Haraszthy is usually credited with making California’s first successful blanc de noir, but Masson would add his own variation on the drink. He marketed “the first Californian blanc de noirs sparkling wine made from Pinot noir, to which he gave the name Oeil de Perdrix (Eye of the Partridge).”²⁰ Masson was much more familiar with Pinot noir grapes than the majority of his competitors because they were the predominant vine grown in Burgundy, where he originally lived in France. His version of blanc de noir based on pinot grapes is now preferred by top winemakers in the United States.

¹⁸ Robert Balzer, *California’s Best Wines*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1948), 132.

¹⁹ Eleanor Ray, *Vineyards in the Sky*, (Stockton: Heritage West Books, 1993), 235.

²⁰ Charles Sullivan, *A Companion to California Wine*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 28.

Masson: The Marketing Wizard

Masson put himself in a good position to succeed at an early point in his career. He attached himself to an already established vintner, he later inherited Charles Lefranc's business, and he was an innovative winemaker. He definitely would have done well relying only on these advantages. However, Masson consistently made headlines and often had advertisements in newspapers in many different markets. His ability to get his name seen by the masses was the key factor in putting himself at the top of the wine industry.

Paul Masson Champagne advertisements were regularly featured in the *Los Angeles Times* alongside a handful of other prestigious labels. In one such advertisement, a quart of his extra dry sparkling wine was on sale for the special rate of one dollar and fifteen cents as opposed to its normal price, which was twenty-five cents more.²¹ Only two other companies were mentioned in the section, I De Turk and Cresta Blanca. The other two labels were less expensive than Masson, but were also on sale for a quarter less than their regular market price. They were also highly regarded labels. In fact, Cresta Blanca won the grand prize at the Paris Exposition in 1889. Although Masson never won the top prize at the exclusive competition, people were willing to pay more for his products based on name recognition as evidenced by this advertisement.

The name recognition that Masson accumulated throughout his career was not based on luck. Rather, it was the result of his efforts to consistently be in the public eye. Sometimes, this meant surrounding himself with A-list celebrities. Other times, it meant having his name published in *The New York Times* among a list of "one hundred Good

²¹ *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1908, Display Ad. 52, (Proquest).

Will delegates, elected from all parts of the United States,” who were setting sail to France to pay “tribute to Louis Pasteur.”²² When Masson was written about in national publications, it was often in the society sections, which were proof to a large audience that he was somebody important. His status as a member of the social elite made his wines more desirable to those who were otherwise uninformed.

For residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, it was almost expected that Paul Masson’s name could be located somewhere within their daily newspaper. Often, he was mentioned concerning real estate disputes or court appearances. Such was the case when he was asked to comment on the rumored purchase of land by the railroad. Masson responded by saying “there is absolutely nothing to the report. The property is for sale, but there has been no purchaser. The Key Route Railroad has not made any negotiations. If it were true I would tell you so.”²³ This particular incident was significant for two reasons. First, the railroad was a hot topic at the time because it was attempting to reach San Jose. Masson’s connection to this issue demonstrated his importance in the community. Second, the land he was discussing belonged to his close friend and business associate, “Mrs. Frank H. Moon, the prominent society woman.”²⁴ Masson’s name could often be found in print close to that of some celebrity or other important public figure.

The press Masson garnered gave him a clear edge over his rivals. For example, Mirassou, who controlled the oldest family owned vineyards in the United States, did not feature any advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times* prior to 1930. While they had been making wine in the Santa Clara Valley longer than Masson, they were only mentioned in

²² *The New York Times*, May 23, 1923.

²³ *The Evening News*, Jan. 30, 1913, p. 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

print a few times like when P.L Mirassou was “one of nine directors, representing districts from Los Angeles on the south to Ukiah on the north, were elected here today at the annual meeting of the California Grape Grower’s Exchange.”²⁵ While this was certainly a notable achievement and honor for Mirassou, he did not command the constant media attention like Masson. The Mirassou article discussed the meeting of several winemakers trying to survive prohibition. On the other hand, Masson was making flashier headlines while trying to weather the prohibition storm. He received national attention when his winery was robbed in 1929. During the era, “thieves, who stole \$100,000 stock of rare champagne and wine from the Paul Masson chateau near Saratoga,” were exciting and worthy of front-page headlines.²⁶

While Masson’s name and reputation became more widely known as the years passed, his place in society was already very well established by the turn of the century. In 1903, Mary Bowden Carroll published a work called *Ten Years in Paradise*. She hoped the document would “to some extent be the means of attracting desirable people to this fertile valley.”²⁷ In fact, it served as a society piece that detailed the who’s who of the southern portion of the San Francisco Bay Area. For somebody new to the region, the work was a complete guide of the most important people and places. Along with his friend, Mr. Frank H. Moon, Masson was one of the select few worthy of mention. Bowden praised Masson claiming that “the reputation of his product competes very strongly with that of the imported,” and that “the ever increasing popularity of the Paul

²⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, “Grape Men Beat Slump in Market,” Jan. 11, 1928, (Proquest).

²⁶ *San Jose News*, “Wine Theft Clue is Hoped,” April 6, 1929.

²⁷ Mary Bowden Carroll, *Ten Years in Paradise*, (San Jose: Popp and Hogan, 1903), Preface.

Masson Champagne tells its own tale.”²⁸ The comparison with imported wines, which had always been considered far superior was the highest compliment.

Many people today are familiar with the Paris Wine Tasting of 1976 when California wines swept the French in a blind taste test. However, not as many people are familiar with a very similar event at the Exposition at St. Louis in 1903 when “the commission on wines was composed of eastern wine men and several foreign wine experts as well. Two of these experts were Frenchmen.”²⁹ In a blind tasting where the labels were removed from the bottles, Masson beat the imports when the judges, including the two Frenchmen, awarded him the Grand Prix. This was a shock to everybody including Masson and the judges. The victory and the national attention it received served as an enormous boost to the label’s reputation. It also gave Masson material that he could use to increase the prestige of his company in the media and the power to increase the number of advertisements circulated in local and national newspapers.

Masson: The Showman

Paul Masson’s personality was definitely one of the contributing factors to his success. Masson was an extrovert who had the ability to make people feel welcome. He could be loud and unruly, but people liked having him around. His popularity made people he might have only met one time inclined to buy his products because they felt a sort of connection with him. Visitors to his winery considered him to be a flamboyant host with a great attention to detail. Every minor part of an event with Masson needed to

²⁸ Ibid, 134-135.

²⁹ *The Evening News*, “Pride in Local Product is the First Essential,” Aug. 22, 1910, p. 5.

be perfect. He only used one particular chef from San Francisco to cater his parties because he did not trust anybody else with such an important task. Food was an increasingly important part of Masson's life. He wanted his wine label to portray an image of luxury, and he helped his cause by being a model of this lifestyle. This meant that he tended to live in an excessive manner and often ate too much. Another detail that Masson paid great attention to was the appearance of the grounds of his winery. He always made sure that there the bushes were hedged and there were freshly planted flowers.³⁰

Masson always had a knack for dealing with the rich, which served him well. When he first arrived in California, he sought out "a wealthy aunt in San Francisco by the name of Mrs. Bourginon."³¹ She got her young nephew on his feet and made sure he had everything he needed to get started in his new country. For Masson, "an ambitious youngster," his aunt's initial help was all he needed to make a name for himself.³² While living in San Francisco, he made connections with many well-to-do families and socialites. Once his wine business was big enough, he frequently invited these people to his winery to introduce them to his brand and encourage them to spread the word to their friends. In addition to their business, the presence of these local celebrities gave the Paul Masson Champagne Company a glamorous image that attracted other potential customers.

Masson built upon the lifestyle he marketed by showcasing the grand estates that were a part of his properties. The original winery tended to by Thee, Lefranc, and then

³⁰ Robert Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1970), 30.

³¹ R.V. Garrod. *Saratoga Story*. (Saratoga: Garrod, 1962), 141.

³² Ibid.

Masson was located in San Jose and known as Almaden vineyards. It was named “after the great quicksilver mine nearby,” and is the oldest vineyard still in operation.³³ When Lefranc took over control from Thee, he expanded the size of the vineyard and built a beautiful stone winery. Masson realized that the architectural appeal of the structure was an asset he could use to attract prominent locals into visiting.

Inspired by the Almaden property, Masson bought a piece of land in the Saratoga hills, which he named La Cresta. The purchase was necessary as “an ever-increasing demand for Paul Masson Champagne dictated a move. A new vineyard in the chalky soil of the Saratoga foothills would be an ideal answer to his dream of a Champagne, unmatched anywhere.”³⁴ Not only was this land capable of producing excellent grapes, but a lot of them too. In the Paul Masson cellars, there were “2,000,000 bottles of champagne in storage in the process of being aged and cared for.”³⁵ Masson was producing premium wines and champagnes at an incredible rate and he had no trouble selling them. To harvest enough grapes, Masson needed a lot of land. He was one of only a handful of vintners who owned over one hundred acres in the Santa Clara Valley. The only other vineyard of comparable size was Almaden, the other property Masson managed.

The Saratoga property served as a springboard to new levels of success for Masson. At this location he took the vision he had in his head and made it come to life. Most of his champagnes that were critically acclaimed came from the Saratoga vineyards.

³³ Charles Sullivan, *A Companion to California Wine*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 7.

³⁴ Robert Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1970), 30.

³⁵ R.V. Garrod. *Saratoga Story*. (Saratoga: Garrod, 1962), 143.

More importantly, the beauty of the winery that Masson built there represented the entire image of his label to the rest of the world. Decades after its construction, rival vintners admired the estate and admitted that it was “still deservedly famous.”³⁶ Since the time of its completion, La Cresta has been a necessary destination for wine enthusiasts.

The estate in Saratoga served as the perfect place for Masson, the “flamboyant host” to entertain his high-end clientele.³⁷ He spared no expense when it came to impressing his guests, who he understood were not only his best customers but also crucial to bringing in new business. Masson made sure it was widely known that celebrities such as Charlie Chaplin often visited La Cresta. Determined to show his socialite friends that his label set the standard for American champagne, he entered into the wine competition at the 1915 World Exposition in San Francisco. The Paul Masson Champagne Company won the grand prize along with two other medals. The label’s victories in such competitions immediately boosted sales, but they had longer known effect as well. More than fifty years later, “very few San Joseans could identify half a dozen of the area’s early viticulturists besides Masson and Mirassou whose names had retained their prominence.”³⁸

While his victories in San Francisco and New York competitions made his label a necessary part of every American wine aficionado’s collection, it was his success overseas that made headlines around the world. Although he did not win the grand prize, his Pinot Champagne won a prestigious award in the Paris Exposition of 1900. This

³⁶ Tom Marvel, *American Wine*, (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce 1941), 69.

³⁷ Robert Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1970), 33.

³⁸ Clyde Arbuckle. *History of San Jose*. (San Jose: Memorabilia of San Jose, 1986), 176).

success “brought a new commercial importance to a hitherto will-o-the-wisp, Europe-dominated market.”³⁹ This breakthrough, along with Masson’s use of natural bottle fermentation techniques, made his wines acceptable to European wine connoisseurs, who often dismissed American labels as inferior. His success at the Paris exposition was particularly significant because many believed that champagne belonged to the French patrimony with an exclusively French trademark.⁴⁰

Masson’s experience in the Paris Exposition is representative of his career as a whole. The award he received proved that his champagne was of very high quality, but it did more for sales than anything else. Masson already knew that his products were as good as most products on the market, but his success in France made headlines around the world and gave his company more visibility than it could have otherwise had. Every move that Masson made was carefully calculated and had a clear marketing objective.

In the United States, more companies entered the champagne market, but Masson kept producing one of the country’s best sellers. He continued to entertain world famous guests at his Saratoga hilltop estate. Ironically, although Masson was known for his renowned “vineyard in the sky,” he did not live there. In fact, he lived in an elegant townhouse that stood at 64 South Thirteenth Street in San Jose until after his wife’s death in 1931. He then moved to the 455 South Market Street residence of his sister-in-law Marie Lefranc.⁴¹ While Masson loved his Saratoga Mountain Winery, he considered it a place for work and also for entertaining famous and wealthy clients. Paul’s wife and only child, Adele, never came here. A son, who might take over the business, would have

³⁹ Robert Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1970), 28.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Olson, “A Tempest (but No Bubbles) in a Bottle of Swiss Champagne,” *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1998.

⁴¹ Clyde Arbuckle. *History of San Jose*. (San Jose: Memorabilia of San Jose, 1986), 177.

been a different matter of course.⁴² Masson, like Lefranc and Thee before him, hoped for a male heir to take over his empire. Because his daughter, with whom Masson had a strained relationship, did not marry a suitable heir either, he sold the property to Martin Ray in 1936. Ray became more of a son to Masson than Adele was a daughter.

Ray very much wanted to own his own vineyard, and viewed the Mountain Winery as a great opportunity. He had a great deal of respect for Masson, and learned the intricacies of winemaking from him. Ray spent a lot of time at La Cresta before acquiring it because he wanted to first learn how to run the business properly. Masson appreciated the care the young man took in his craft and taught him valuable lessons about how market wine. Ray understood the lessons he learned from the elder vintner, and put them into use. Like Masson, he often made use of newspapers to get his name out to the masses. One particular article included Ray's name in a discussion of how classic estate wineries like his were buying out small local vintners.⁴³ Such press suggested to the public that Ray was a major name in the winemaking business and was worth recognition. Ironically, Masson's name was also mentioned in the article because he created one of the original American estate wineries, demonstrating that he still had an effect on the industry after his death.

While Masson was alive, he thought about how his label could become more successful even after he died. He did not leave his daughter any stake in his business, and gave much of his estate to the company itself. Because he did not want his fortune to go to waste, Masson put in his will that his daughter was not to receive a lump sum of

⁴² Eleanor Ray, *Vineyards in the Sky*, (Stockton: Heritage West Books, 1993), 21.

⁴³ "California Wine Industry Aging Well," *New York Times*, 22 December 1968, 15. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

money but a monthly stipend of five hundred dollars. Adele was insulted that her father did not give her La Cresta or his nearby country house. Masson viewed those properties as business sanctuaries that had nothing to do with family.

In his later years, Paul Masson had to deal with other difficult issues. Many winemakers went out of business during Prohibition in the United States. Masson was no stranger to this issue as even his wife, Louise, supported Prohibition. Always the consummate businessman, he found a way to continue running a successful enterprise. Masson was granted the first license to sell medicinal champagne in the United States. Just as when he was the first person to produce champagne in California, Masson again had a monopoly. During this difficult time for the wine industry, he also sold his grapes wholesale on the commercial market. Many of these grapes went to the East Coast, which did not produce the same high grade of grape that flourished on the West Coast. Masson's ability to improvise allowed his company to stay afloat when many others could not.

Winning a wine tasting competition in New York prior to Prohibition made it easier for Masson to enter business on the East Coast. Since Easterners had gotten most of their wine from the West in the early part of the twentieth century, Masson had many established connections. In the late nineteenth century when he was beginning his rise, "the State of California exports to the Atlantic Coast as much wine as is imported into the whole country from France, and consumes herself of native production three-fourths as much as is imported into the entire United States from all countries."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Frona Eunice Wait. *Wines and Vines of California*. (San Francisco: Bancroft, 1889), 9.

In addition to having a significant amount of land and incredible resources when Prohibition happened, Masson's ability to sell put him in good position to do well in the grape market. He loved talking to crowds, and "the 'Duc De Cognac as he was known to the fellow members of the San Jose club, was of commanding size, and voice. Given to practical jokes, he was also given to long speeches, once he gained the floor. Naturally, he talked about wine, about France, and above all, about his own wine."⁴⁵ His outgoing personality was a crucial asset to many of the deals Masson set up with individuals and organizations that he did business with.

Paul Masson's Legacy

Many contemporary vintners, especially in the Santa Clara Valley, can trace part of their history back to Paul Masson. The marketing techniques that he passed on to Martin Ray and others are still used to sell wine. Although one of his label's most famous advertisements debuted decades after his death, Masson deserves much of the credit for it. The company filmed a series of commercials starring Orson Welles, which featured the celebrity delivering the line "we will sell no wine before its time." While these words gained fame when the commercials aired in the 1970's, they were part of a message that Masson had delivered to the public while he was still alive. He was an American pioneer in the art of allowing wines to age perfectly before their sale. This technique used by Masson not only helped sell his wines when he was just starting his business, but also long after he was no longer in control.

While Masson's family no longer controls his vineyards, they are still thriving today. The Almaden winery continues to be the oldest in California. Although the

⁴⁵ Robert Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1970), 26

Saratoga property no longer focuses on wine production, Masson would probably be pleased with its development. Almost twenty years after his death, the Mountain Winery stopped wine production and became a concert venue. Although there was no more wine coming from Masson's Saratoga property, the estate was still being used much as Masson had wished. It was a destination for celebrities to visit and entertain. While the property is still being used mainly for performances, small-scale wine production did start up again on the valuable land in 2004.

All of Masson's marketing strategies and publicity stunts were undertaken with the goal of creating a household brand name. All of the contests he entered and all of the famous guests he hosted fit into a larger design to create a successful marketing image. He understood in his time that each bottle bearing the Paul Masson label is the total symbol of the house itself. Its value includes the sum of its history, its present energy, executive direction, technical leadership, and productive vineyards.⁴⁶ While Masson undoubtedly took pride in the quality of his wines, he was always aware that the name on the label was far more important than what was actually inside. As multiple critics have observed, once he was able to associate his company with the image he envisioned, the label sold itself. For that reason, Masson's name is still used on bottles sold in most grocery stores even though the label has gone through many different owners and parent companies.

From the time of Masson's arrival in the United States in 1878 until his death in 1940, he had a significant effect on the local, national, and international wine market. He became successful largely through his use of the media by publishing numerous

⁴⁶ Ibid, 112.

advertisements as well as being the subject of many society pieces. His connection to Charles Lefranc, and the later marriage to his mentor's daughter, Louise, made him a part of a wine making dynasty. His famous friends and beautiful winery made him somewhat of a local celebrity himself. He was frequently the subject of major news stories in the local papers, and his name could even be found in national publications like the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. When he passed away on October 22, 1940, the *New York Times* printed the obituary of the "well-known wine and champagne producer."⁴⁷ Paul Masson's innovative strategies in champagne production, showmanship, and marketing, and his part in turning California into an international power in the wine industry make him one of the state's great pioneers.

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, Oct. 23, 1940.

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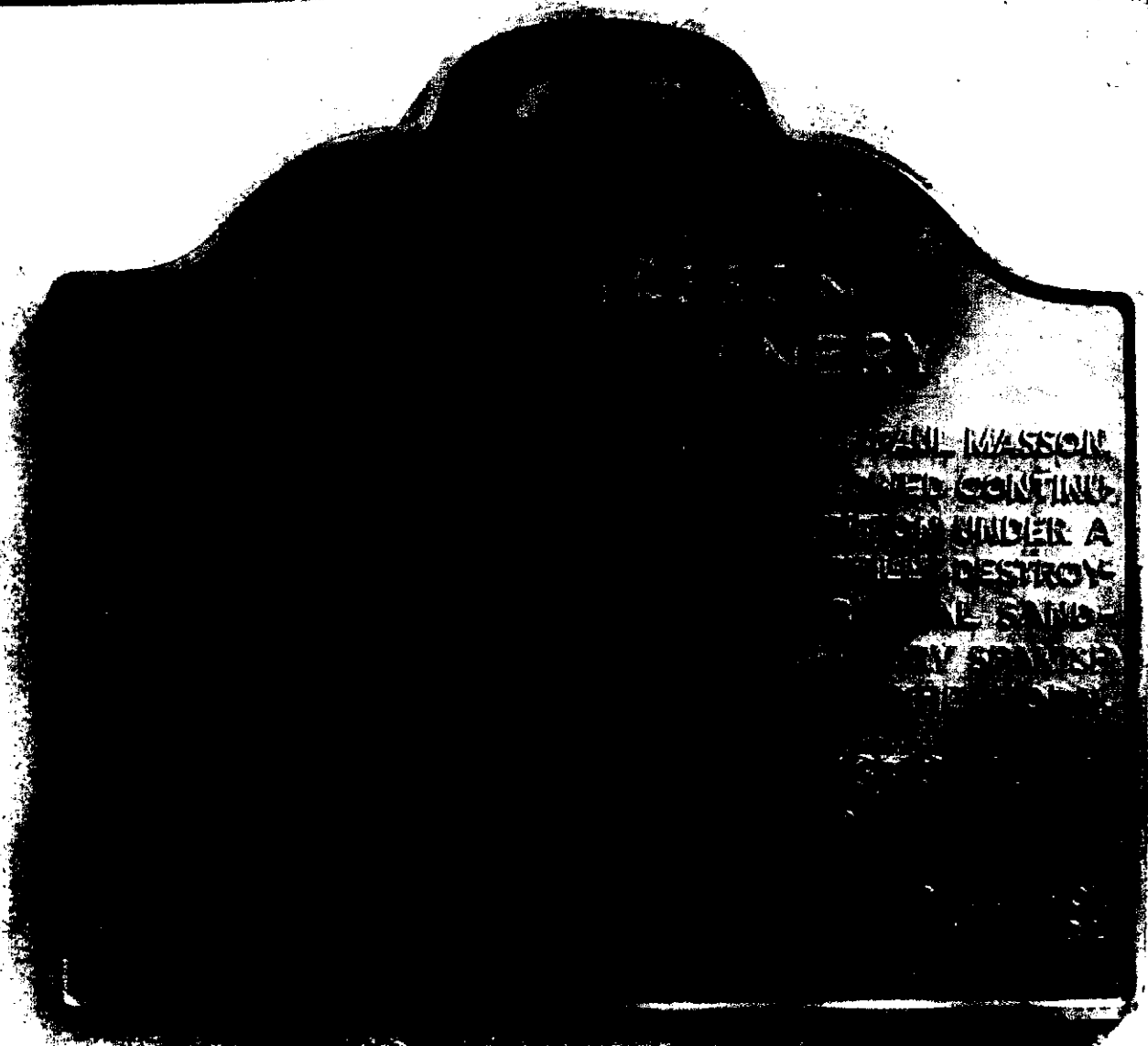
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UNDER A
WILL DESTROY
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SPARKS
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Los Angeles Times (1886-1922); Dec 21, 1914;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881 - 1986)
pg. 13

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wine in your celebrating.

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Sparkling Burgundy (red label.)

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 Pullman reservations should be
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 Ask for booklets.

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No one was ever
 prepared for it.
 No one was ever
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1 mile deep; 18 miles
 wide; 217 miles long;
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The Great Mormon Tabernacle at Salt Lake City, where the
 Welsh Festival will be held.

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 Particulars at all ticket offices and in Los Angeles at 601
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	Regular.	Special.
Paul Masson, Extra Dry—Quarts.....	\$1.40	\$1.15
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I De Turk, Sparkling Sauterne—Pints...	.75	.60
Cresta Blanca, Sparkling White—Quarts.	1.25	1.00
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GRAPE MEN BEAT SLUMP IN MARKET
Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Jan. 11, 1928;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881-1986)

GRAPE MEN BEAT SLUMP IN MARKET

*Growers' Exchange Hears
of Successful Season as
Crop Averages \$43 a Ton*

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 10. (P)—Nine directors, representing districts from Los Angeles on the south to Ukiah on the north, were elected here today at the annual meeting of the California Grape Growers' Exchange. Three hundred growers attended, representing the 1250 members.

The directors named were C. L. Crawford, Ukiah; E. G. Smith, Geyserville; J. C. Larsen, Napa; L. De Martini, Concord; P. L. Mirassou, San Jose; E. H. Frye, Franklin; H. E. Watson, Modesto; J. P. Thorrell, Roseville, and A. H. Conger, Los Angeles.

Reports read at the meeting showed that during the past season the average price for grapes of different varieties ranged from \$31.50 a ton for Rose of Peru to \$52 a ton for Allcote, with an average of \$43 a ton.

E. M. Sheehan, San Francisco, president, reported that the black juice grape crop of members amounted to 50,000 tons. Before the slump in October practically all crops of members had been sold, he said.

At a dinner tonight talks were made by Sheehan, Crawford, W. F. Allewalt, George H. Becke, W. V. Cruess, Christopher M. Bradley and E. F. Stoll.

Officers will be named at a meeting here February 2, it was announced.

Mauk Retained as Marshal of Arizona Area

PHOENIX, Jan. 10. (Exclusive)—George F. Mauk has received reappointment from the President as United States Marshal for the Arizona district, the news being carried to Mr. Mauk by a telegram from former Governor Campbell, Arizona member of the Republican national Committee.

This ends one of the bitterest political fights ever known in Arizona, with defeat of the Cameron-Maddock faction, which has been supporting Hugh R. Daggs.