

3

THE DISMAL '30S

A TROUBLED PROSPECT

At the beginning of 1934, when a winemaker, returning to his newly legalized business, looked around him to see what his prospects were, he would have found little enough to cheer him. The economic depression, surpassing in length and intensity anything ever known in this country, showed no signs of lifting. The legislatures of state after state were busy laying new and unpredictable taxes on wine and inventing new laws to confuse commerce in wine. The federal government had taken on a new activity in the licensing and regulation of winemaking while at the same time refusing to resume its role in assisting and encouraging viticulture and winemaking. Yet while hampering regulations proliferated, there was no organization within the wine trade itself, no concerted means whereby it might promote itself, defend itself against attack and injury, or present itself effectively to an uninformed public. It was not merely unorganized: it did not know its own business. Whatever standards and traditions had operated before Prohibition had been effectively lost. Nothing but the barest minimum in the way of legal wine standards existed, and it would be the work of years to discover what desirable standards might be, let alone what they ought to be.¹

As for the market—that is, the people who would buy and drink whatever wine was made for them by the winemakers—they could hardly know what they wanted. Nor, it soon appeared, were there many who were interested in wine at all. The culture of wine, frustrated and defeated as it had been through more than two hundred years of trial in the history of American settlement, had never managed to grow as more than a sickly,