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MAKING AND SELLING WINE IN THE '30S

HOW WINE WAS MADE

In 1933, before Repeal had come to pass but when its coming was already certain, Lou Stralla, having heard that the wine business might be a good thing, decided that he would give it a try, even though he knew nothing about wine or winemaking.¹ Stralla took a simple and direct path: he approached the wealthy J. K. Moffitt, who owned the historic Charles Krug winery, then lying idle outside St. Helena in the Napa Valley, and asked Moffitt to lease it to him. To Stralla's surprise, Moffitt agreed to do so. Stralla now found himself, as the result of his audacity, with a winery but without any idea of what to do with it; he had to find help, for he was in a position rather like that of the girl in the fairy tale who must somehow learn to spin gold out of straw, and learn quickly.

As in the fairy tale, help was forthcoming: first, the winemaker at Beaulieu Vineyards, on the other side of St. Helena, told Stralla that one Rufus J. Buttimer, who had been the winemaker at the Ewer and Atkinson Winery in Rutherford before Prohibition, might be coaxed out of retirement. Buttimer agreed to do what he could, and he, in turn, recruited Jack Heitz, whose family used to be in the wine business. Then old Joe Cheli, who used to work at Krug and still lived across the road, got interested in what was going on at the old place and gave them a hand. And so it went. Together they cleaned things up, and after the grapes had come in they found that they had made 400,000 gallons of red and white table wine, Cheli making the white and Buttimer the red. "I'll tell you," Stralla said to an interviewer years afterward, "it was an amazing thing to me. . . . I knew nothing