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WINE IN THE WAR YEARS

FIRST EFFECTS

The chance that the war that was declared in September 1939 would open up the world to American wines—an exciting thought rather widely shared at one time—was more theoretical than real.¹ Those few parts of Europe that were not caught up in the war were not much interested in American wines, even supposing one could safely transport them there; South America had its own supplies; there was war in Asia. None of the necessary work in establishing markets and the means of supplying them had been done.² And soon enough, the United States was in the war too.

This is not to deny that there was a surge in exports at the beginning of World War II: the 86,000 gallons of American wine exported in 1939 jumped to 400,000 gallons in 1940.³ But after America entered the war it was not possible to continue this export trade. On the other side, the gap created by the disappearance of European wine (mostly French and Italian) was not very large—on average the American market had taken fewer than 4 million gallons annually. Nor did this gap take long to repair: though few imports were made in 1942, by 1943 the volume of imports had already reached the prewar level, and in the next year it surpassed even that. Neutral Portugal and Spain had replaced France and Italy, with the anomalous result that the United States imported more wine over the wartime seas than it ever had in times of peace.⁴

What did come about as a result of the war, however, was of inestimable importance to the American wine industry. At first there was not much apparent concern about supply. As late as May 1940 the *New York Times* reported that there were stocks of French