

**Memoirs of Oldtimer Alphonse Bell,
As Told to the *St. Helena Star* on April 9, 1953
Reported by Mariam Hansen**

I am writing these lines in May 1944, sixty-five years after my arrival in California. Looking back, I remember the friendship I have received from the old pioneers who paved the way for our younger generation. I knew many of the pioneers of the 1840s—they were great people who settled in Napa Valley. When they gathered before the fireplace and recalled their past experiences, it was better than reading a book. The fireplace in the Townsend & Anderson Store in the winter was the gathering place for the covered-wagon pioneers to warm up while waiting for the mail and to tell tales of their trek across the plains.

In the 1880s Napa Valley experienced a great boom in vineyard planting. The beautiful oaks that dotted the landscape were being cut down. Hundreds of Chinamen were employed and Daniel Hunt was the wood king. After the wood was cut up, it was hauled, stacked along the railroad tracks at shipping points, and sent to San Francisco and Oakland. They got the land in shape for vine planting and the boom was on. Side hills almost too steep to plow were cleared and planted to vineyard. Up and down the valley was planted, especially from Yountville north.

Charles Krug (*center photo*) was the big man of the grape and wine industry. Everyone looked to him for advice on how, where, when, and what kind of vineyard to plant. In Charles Krug's business life he was a charitable and liberal man. In fact it was his only fault, if he had one. If anyone was looking for work, they were sent to



him and Krug found something for him to do. Under the beautiful oak grove surrounding his home, Sunday was a day of fellowship and feasting. It was nothing unusual for a northbound train on Sunday morning to drop a special car at the Krug siding. Forty to sixty visitors from San Francisco spent the day feasting on good things provided by Mr. and Mrs. Krug. It was my pleasure and privilege to spend many beautiful Sunday afternoons at their table.

Misses Linda, Anita, and Lolita Krug and a Miss Dixie Chiles were the magnets that drew a few of the young men to the Krug home. On several occasions we helped serve or wait on the guests from San Francisco. The famous Turnverein German Club of San Francisco was often entertained by the Krugs. After the southbound train left late in the afternoon and all the guests had departed, we home folks had a great time. Singing, other than the great food, was the principal entertainment.

Vineyard planting boomed for several years, grapes selling for \$30 to \$35 per ton. Wine cellars (except the few that aged and bottled their wines) sold to wine merchants of San Francisco. Some wineries sold wine locally at 30 to 35 cents per gallon and cleaned their cooperage for next year's crop.

A few of the big wineries in the upper Napa Valley, of which St. Helena is the hub, were Charles Krug, Beringer Brothers, John C. Weinberger [William Cole today], John Thomann [now Sutter Home], James McCord, R. M. Wheeler, Giaque Brothers, Brun & Chaix [in Oakville] and Gottlieb Groezinger [in Yountville].

This article has been slightly edited for readability. Mariam Hansen is research director for the St. Helena Historical Society (shstory@shstory.org).

