

THE INN AT ccidental

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THE HISTORY OF SONOMA COUNTY

The history of Sonoma County is the history of the State of California and of the wine industry in California with personalities and legends all rolled into one. The flags of seven countries have flown over the county; Spain, England, Imperial Russia, Mexico, the Bear Flag and the United States.

The rolling hills, verdant meadows, rugged coastline, streams and rivers, mild climate and rich soil have served the many and varied residents well. The 1608 square miles have seen the peaceable Miwok, Wappo and Pomo Indians flourish. The abundance provided enough for all; and the tribes lived peaceably taking only what they needed from the sea and the land.

The early 1800's saw a change for the Indians and Sonoma County that never allowed such easy existence again. The Spanish had made general claim to California in 1521 with the conquest of Mexico, but Sir Francis Drake claimed the area for Elizabeth I when he reached Drake's Bay in Marin County in 1579. However, no long-term permanent settlements were made here until the beginning of the 19th century.

The Russians, who were looking for a way to provide for their settlement in Sitka, Alaska, explored down the Pacific Coast and finally established a settlement at Ross, an archaic name for Russia. They built a fort, a chapel and a stockade on the site and set about with great determination to produce what they needed for themselves and the Sitka settlement. They bartered with the Indians, Californios (the Mexicans living in the area) and Yankee traders who explored the Russian River and Mt. St. Helena. They named the California poppy, *Eschscholtzia Californica*.

The Russians' grape growing and winemaking activities indicated the potential for developing the grape culture in the northern part of the state. Both the Yankees and the Mexicans were alarmed by the Russian venture and were greatly relieved when the Russians sold out to John Sutter of later Gold Rush fame in 1841.