

CONTACT US
Wine & Business desk
 ♦ David Stoneberg
 wines@sthenastar.com
 (707) 967-6804

Wine & Business

INSIDE:
 ♦ EDITORIAL
 ♦ COMMENTARIES
 ♦ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Page A5

ST. HELENA STAR

Thursday, March 5, 2009



John Lindblom photos
LEFT: Andy Beckstoffer and Rue Ziegler share a laugh in front of a century-old map of Napa County that is serving as a research aid in the 'Registry Project.' The moment may be light, but the cost of the project isn't, approaching upwards of \$300,000.

BELOW: Documents dating to more than a century ago have a vital role in the search for 100-year-old Napa Valley vineyards that qualify for inclusion in the Historic Vineyard Registry project.

Looking for history in the vineyards

By John Lindblom
 STAFF WRITER

Despite all that is known about the rich history and tradition of vineyards and winemaking in the Napa Valley, there remains a chasm between what was and what is.

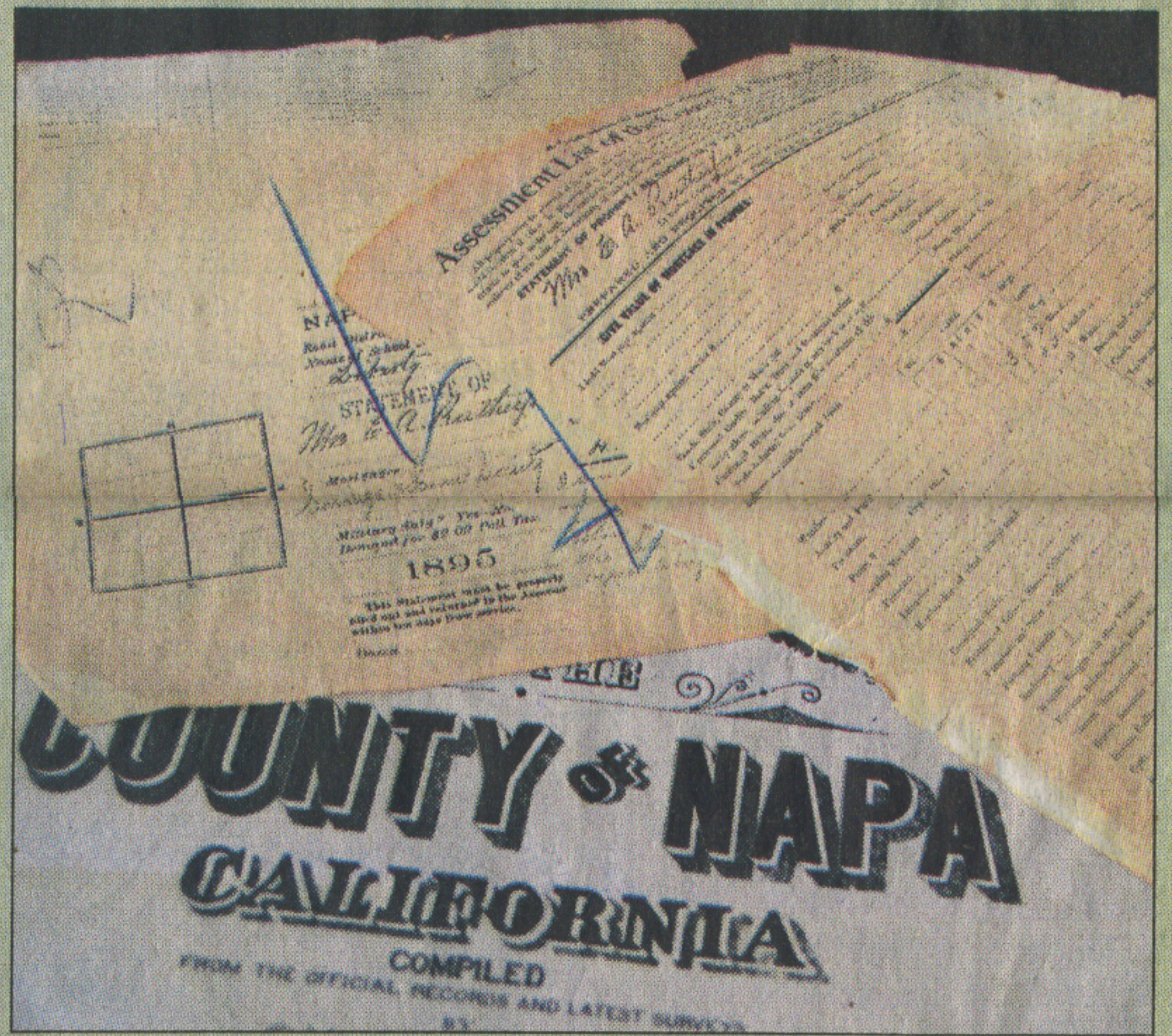
The numerous books and studies that recount the wine industry's history and identify its most important pioneers — Mssrs. Yount, Krug, Beringer, Hudson, York, Rutherford, et al — notwithstanding, it was never clearly defined who owned what and which vineyards have operated continuously as vineyards over the past century.

But when an exhaustive three-phase study being driven by Andy Beckstoffer is complete, this gap will be bridged. Launched in 2003, the Historic

Vineyard Registry project will be the "golden spike" linking the old Valley with the present one. The project is sponsored by the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association.

What has been determined is that the wine industry reached a promontory point in the 1890s when the Napa Valley had 18,177 acres planted in grapes (as opposed to the modern-day 44,000 acres). What is rapidly becoming clear are the names of who grew grapes on each of those acres.

The "legwork" for phase one is being done by St. Helena cultural anthropologist Rue Ziegler, Ph.D. She has completed research encompassing the records of more than 6,000 grape growers. Her objective is to establish a searchable database



of all the growers in Valley history. Who is eligible among all these growers to have their vineyards listed in the Registry will then be determined by a Beckstoffer-chaired select committee of gatekeepers from diverse fields. Once the Registry is up and running, individual property owners will be able to petition to have their vineyards certified as historic and be included in the registry.

"But no vineyards will go in there unless we have good information that it was a vineyard 100 years ago," Beckstoffer said.

He provides two reasons for the study, which will cost upwards of \$300,000.

"One, I want to (establish) the sense of place and terroir that is the Napa Valley," he said. "More

than just the fact that we sell wine for a lot of money, I want to make sure that people understand that this is a vineyard area.

"Secondly, if the vineyards are important, you need to preserve them. I'm really interested in doing this and in so doing making them even more important."

Once established, Beckstoffer believes the documented Registry of Vineyards — ergo, wine production — will give Valley wines greater leverage vs. European wines.

"It will establish that perhaps we are more a part of the old world of wine than the new one," he reasoned. "You hear constantly that the Europeans produce better wines because they've been growing grapes for 2,000

See VALLEY, Page A8

A8 | Thursday, March 5, 2009

NEWS

St. Helena Star

Valley

FROM PAGE A5

years. I would argue that after 100 years you probably know as much as you're going to learn."

Beckstoffer and Ziegler contend that what has been written about the history of the Valley's vineyards doesn't go far enough.

"We need to define (the vineyards) in a certifiable way. Somebody didn't just turn on the faucet," Beckstoffer asserted. "A premium product wants to be defined as to where it comes from. We know that a product — whether it's Vidalia onions or Atlantic salmon — is sold by the way it's grown."

Ziegler adds: "There is no book that compiles a record of all the historic grape growers. There are pieces, but there is no compendium."

Her research is based on 40 different documented sources, among the most informative being 1891 and 1893 Directories of Grape Growers, Wine-

makers and Distillers compiled from surveys conducted by the California Viticultural Society, a forerunner to the state Department of Agriculture.

"In history books, you might be able to find 15 different names," said Ziegler, "but you will not find all the guys that you will in the 1891 and 1893 directories."

Another aid to obtaining the names of growers is the 1880 Napa County census, she said, because it was the first census in which grape growers were identified. "Before that they were all listed as farmers."

As essential to pinning down the wine industry forerunners are historic county maps secured by Beckstoffer. The maps, published in 1876, 1895 and 1915, bear the names of parcel owners.

Beckstoffer suspects there will be cynics.

"Some people are going to say, 'Oh, you're just talking fast and loose and this is a marketing effort,'" he acknowledged. "We've got to make sure that it is not. What we're doing is a research project."



John Lindblom photo

A ghost winery in downtown St. Helena, reportedly built in 1902 and operating until 1951, stands as witness to the Valley's long history in wine. The owner and namesake of the Jackse Winery was arrested and jailed during Prohibition. The Napa Valley Vintners plan to relocate its offices to the ancient structure later this year, after renovation has been completed.