

By Charlie Consoli

Bricks and Churches saved the wine industry in California during Prohibition. Before Prohibition there were over seven hundred wineries in California, after, about forty. One of the survivors was Beaulieu Vineyard that called itself “The House of Altar Wines.” Their business increased during Prohibition through the sale of sacramental wines. Other wineries stayed in business by selling to Beaulieu. Wente sold 100% of its grapes to Beaulieu. Concannon, Bernardo, Beringer and Martini also survived by selling to churches, and Kosher wine to synagogues.

San Antonio Winery in Los Angeles even received special permission from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to produce sacramental wine. Pope Valley Winery in Napa flourished by capitalizing on a connection with Al Capone to supply wine to speakeasies.

Wine Bricks? A Wine Brick was about the size of a pound of butter. It was a concentrated grape product that could be rehydrated at home. The brick sold with a Warning Label: “Do not add yeast or sugar to the grape juice or leave it in the cupboard for 20 days before drinking because it might ferment and turn into wine.” Creativity and resilience — a testament to the enduring spirit of the wine industry.