



BARDESSONO FAMILY HISTORY
By: Stephen J. Bardessono - May 24, 2008
BARDESSONO, NAPA VALLEY

John and Lucy Bardessono were immigrants, originally from the Piedmont District in Italy, more specifically, from the small village of Aglia, approximately forty-five minutes north of Turin and just off the main highway that leads to the Swiss Alps. They were born in Aglia (1887 / John) (1893 / Lucy) and before coming to the United States spent a considerable time in British Columbia, Canada. While in Canada John worked in the copper mines along with a brother-in-law, Martin Zucco, who was married to John's sister Katherine.

John and Lucy had five daughters, all born in British Columbia: Katherine, Antoinette, Peirina, Mary and Rose. They worked very hard in Canada and were frugal, and after having saved a considerable amount of money they, along with their five children, went back to their Italian roots, presumably to find a place to farm which is what most of the locals did for a living. They thought they could return to the home they once knew and where they could be with family and friends. They found the conditions in Europe had not changed since they had left; people were generally poor and opportunities were few. They had spent a portion of their savings on travel home and had provided financial help to relatives in Italy. After about a year they took their five children and returned to British Columbia where they knew they could return to work in the mines, earn and save, and look for another way of life other than the one they knew in Italy.

In 1924 shortly after their return to British Columbia, they had another child, a son Peter. About this same time Martin Zucco's wife Katherine passed away and left her husband Martin with two children, Mary and Katie, first cousins to the Bardessono children. At the time Martin had a sister living in Berkeley, California and he decided to bring his daughters to Berkeley to live with their aunt. These two young women were older than the Bardessono children, and they eventually married, raised their families and spent the rest of their lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The importance of the Zucco entry into the Bay Area is that Martin actually discovered the property that was eventually to become known as the Bardessono property. At the time the property consisted of twenty acres and Martin found out that it was for sale. He contacted John and Lucy who were back in Canada, described what he had found and convinced them to come and bring their children to join him in California. The story goes that Martin described the Napa Valley as being much like their home in Piedmont, Italy and told the Bardessono's that there was a house for them to live in and that the property was immediately adjacent to an elementary school and would be ideal for the Bardessono children. John and Lucy quickly agreed to relocate and came to Yountville with their six children in August 1926. The Bardessono's and Martin formed a partnership which lasted for over twenty-five years with each having an undivided fifty percent interest in the property. The former owner carried the mortgage; the purchase price was \$14,000.00.

When they all arrived in 1926 the property was partially planted and other crops were added. They produced grapes, prunes and walnuts for commercial sale. Diversified farms were common

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at the time to assure a cash crop in times when other crops failed. Martin and John farmed the property together, doing almost all the farm labor, Lucy ran the domestic side of the household and worked to maintain a very large vegetable garden. They also had a variety of farm animals; a milk cow for milk, cottage cheese and butter; a workhorse used to cultivate the fields (they had no tractor), chickens for eggs and meat and occasionally ducks. They also raised one or two hogs each year which they used to make "homemade" salami. Vegetable and fruit preservation (canning) of local produce and fruit was a regular summer time task and the results filled the cellar and was available for year round use.

To supplement the farm and produce cash income, John and Martin also worked for others, some on a year round basis and others seasonally. Along with Lucy and the children they often went to other growers to harvest prunes and other crops. These were generally difficult times financially as the country entered the great depression years but the Bardessono's and Martin were hardworking and frugal and managed to make ends meet and pay their mortgage. The family became well known in the area and well respected in the community.

Steve was born in Napa in 1933, the seventh child of John and Lucy. Tragedy hit the family in 1934 with the passing of John. In addition to the emotional loss, Lucy was left with a large family, some still in school and a small farm still in debt. Martin and Lucy continued the partnership where he managed the farm and Lucy managed the finances. The children were now graduating from high school and securing employment which also helped financially. As the children grew older, the older daughters married and left home to start their own families. The two younger daughters continued to live with Lucy. Peter graduated from high school in 1942 and almost immediately went into the military. At about this same time Lucy was employed at the Yountville Elementary School as a custodian where she and Steve cleaned each day after school and on Saturdays.

If the Bardessono early years in Yountville sound difficult, they may have been, particularly for Lucy. But it was a wonderful place for the children to grow up. The town was small and people were wonderful and supportive. The countryside was available for children to explore and enjoy in a safe environment. The Napa River was a year round stream where you could fish and swim in the summer time. There was always work to do but it was a very fun place to grow up and Lucy's kitchen was always a warm and welcoming place for the neighborhood children.

Peter returned from the military after World War II and helped with the farm, as well as, pursuing agricultural interests of his own. Rose married and relocated to New York City with her husband.

Martin died in August of 1949. In addition to the loss of Lucy's business partner and long time close family member his passing was even more serious because he owned a fifty percent share of the family property. Peter, Mary and Steve were the three Bardessono children still living in



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Yountville and along with Lucy had to decide if they wanted to retain the property and, if so, how that might be done. Fortunately, at Peter's urging, the four "pooled" what cash they had and purchased Martin's share from his heirs.

Peter married his wife Maxine in 1950 and they located in Yountville. Several years later they built a home on the family property where they raised their five children and where Maxine continues to reside. Mary married Willard Mulholland in 1951 and built a new home on the property in the general location of the original farm house which was then razed, all except for the original stone cellar. Lucy lived with Mary, her husband and their daughter until she passed away in 1967. Steve married his wife Pat in 1955 and they spent their first year together in Napa and then began a two year military service commitment. During Steve and Pat's absence Lucy became ill and grew concerned about settling her estate. She, therefore, subdivided the twenty acre property and gifted it to the three children (Peter, Mary and Steve) who had helped finance the purchase of Martin Zucco's interest. Upon Steve's return to the valley from military service, he and Peter and their wives formed a partnership that would farm the Bardessono property and others for approximately the next 40 years.

The Bardessono brothers replanted the property changing from diversified crops to premium wine grapes only. They sold fruit to a number of very prestigious Napa Valley wineries and for several years in the mid-eighties, marketed their own wine, a Sauvignon Blanc / Semillon blend, under the Bardessono label.

Steve and Pat with their three children returned to Yountville to live in 1974 purchasing the house that Mary had built in the 1950's. After enlarging the house they lived there for the next 32 years.

In 1989, approximately 11 ½ acres of the original 20 were sold to make way for what is known as "Heritage Estates", a forty-two unit single family detached residential property. The balance of the property (approximately 6 ½ acres) is being developed as a mixed use project consisting of a small public park, a 25 unit work force housing project, a single family residential parcel which will be owned by Steve and Pat to accommodate a replacement residence. Approximately 5 acres remain in Bardessono Brothers ownership and is the site of "The Bardessono Inn and Spa".

With one exception, Peter, Mary and Steve spent their adult lives in Yountville. (Steve and Pat lived in Napa for a time in the early 60's and early 70's.) All of these three Bardessono's and their families have strong ties to the town, strong support for preservation and enhancement of agriculture as the primary Napa Valley industry and an active interest in public and other community service. These traits are best noted through their separate career paths and accomplishments and their many involvements in community life. Mary passed away in 1998 and Peter in 2001.

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