



Vintner Jean Escalle & His Winery

The life of Jean Escalle exemplifies the hard work, savvy determination and dreams of success that generations of immigrants have brought to these shores. According to a 1920 *Sausalito News* item, Jean, a native of France, came to Marin County in 1881 at the age of 23 and found work in a brickyard near present-day Greenbrae. Within a couple of years, he was employed at the Larkspur brickworks owned by fellow Frenchman, Claude Callot, taking care of his stable of Clydesdale horses. When Mr. Callot died in 1888, Jean married the widow, Ellen Callot, and while the two continued to operate the brickworks they also opened the popular inn and tavern, The Limerick Club, a name suggested by Ellen who hailed from Ireland. The establishment was popular with weekend vacationers from San Francisco and featured beautiful gardens, outdoor dining and a dance floor with a bandstand. Bastille Day was an especially joyful celebration at the Inn for many Marin County Francophiles.

Soon after marrying Ellen, Mr. Escalle cleared twenty-three acres of land on the hillside behind the brickworks and planted both Zinfandel and Riesling grapevines. Within a few years, the vineyard was producing more than eight thousand gallons of wine a year, making it one of the leading wineries in the county. Escalle was also responsible for one of Marin County's only 'gold rushes' when he found a vein on his property while digging a well in February of 1899. Although the discovery never panned out there was a genuine rush of prospectors that winter to Escalle.

Jean became a leading citizen of the area, and the North Pacific Coast Railroad station and small community around the brickworks came to be known as Escalle. He was prominent on the Larkspur political scene and was elected a city trustee three times. Ellen died in 1903 and he married Wilhelmina Vogel in 1905. He retired from running the Limerick Inn but continued working the winery. Seizing another opportunity he started a delivery service and personally delivered wine to his customers in a horse-drawn wagon. In 1909, he fought the incorporation of the small community named after him by neighboring Larkspur but lost in court and the community of Escalle faded into history. In 1919, Prohibition was voted in and the wine business quickly dried up. Jean Escalle died suddenly of a stroke in November of 1920 leaving behind a legacy any citizen could be proud of.