California TABLE GRAPE HISTORY

Viticulture, or the science, production, and study of grapes, first began in California in the late 1700s when Spanish friars arrived to establish Catholic missions. Because the native grapes were sour and made poor wine, the friars brought over grapes from Europe and planted their own vineyards to make sacramental wine.

In the mid-1800s, prospectors poured into California. They came looking for gold until some discovered that there might be more money in grapes. Shortly after the Gold Rush, California's fledgling agricultural society declared, "Capital put into vineyards would bring greater rewards than… fluming rivers for golden treasures."

Their instincts were good. California's warm, dry climate turned out to be ideal for growing grapes. Today, more than 856,000 acres across California are planted with fresh grape, wine, and raisin vineyards, and 99 percent of U.S. commercially-grown table grapes are from California.

Artwork source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, United States. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11417

6000 *B.C.*

Vitis vinifera grape (common grape vine) varieties are first cultivated near northern Iran between the Black and Caspian seas.

Glass pendant in the form of a bunch of grapes
Greek, Eastern Mediterranean
late 2nd–1st century BCE

3000 B.C.

Cultivation reaches Egypt and Phoenicia.

Grapevine
New Kingdom, Amarna Period
ca. 1353–1336 B.C.

2000 B.C.

Viticulture reaches Greece.

1000 *B.C.*

Viticulture reaches Italy, Sicily, and North Africa.

Pilasters
North Italian
10th–11th century

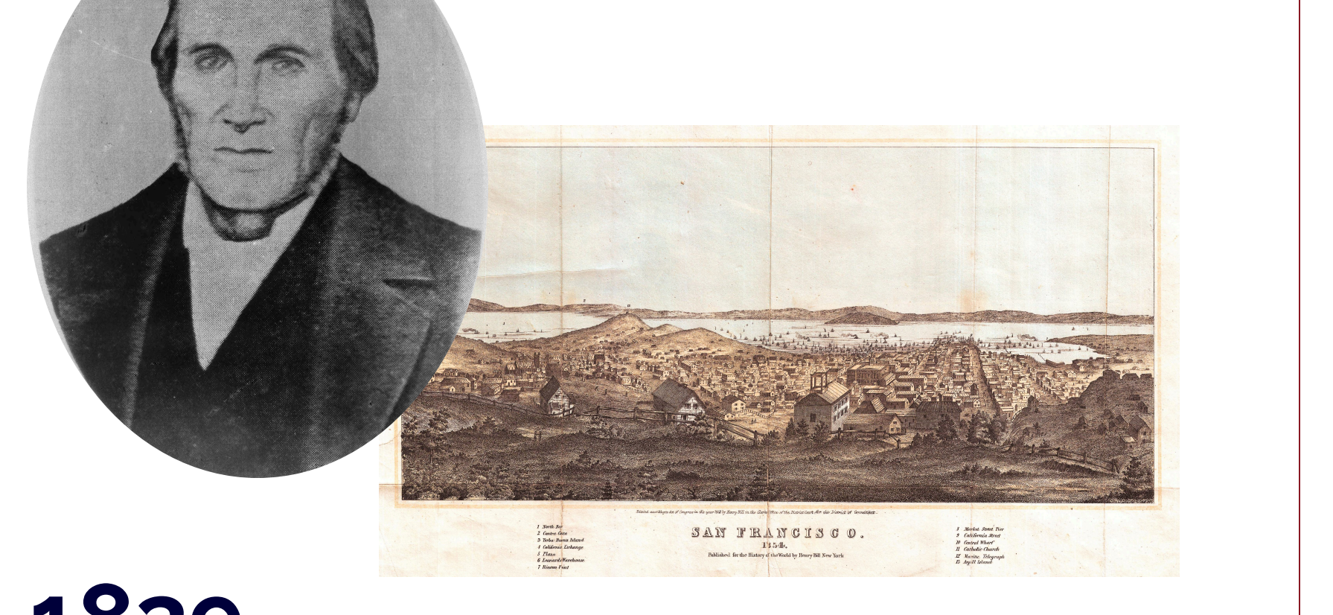
500 B.C.

Viticulture reaches Spain, Portugal, and France, then spreads across Europe to the British Isles.

Terracotta phiale (libation bowl)
Etruscan
ca. 250–200 BCE

October, from "Twelve Months of the Year"
Artist and publisher Johann Esaias Nilson
German
ca. 1766

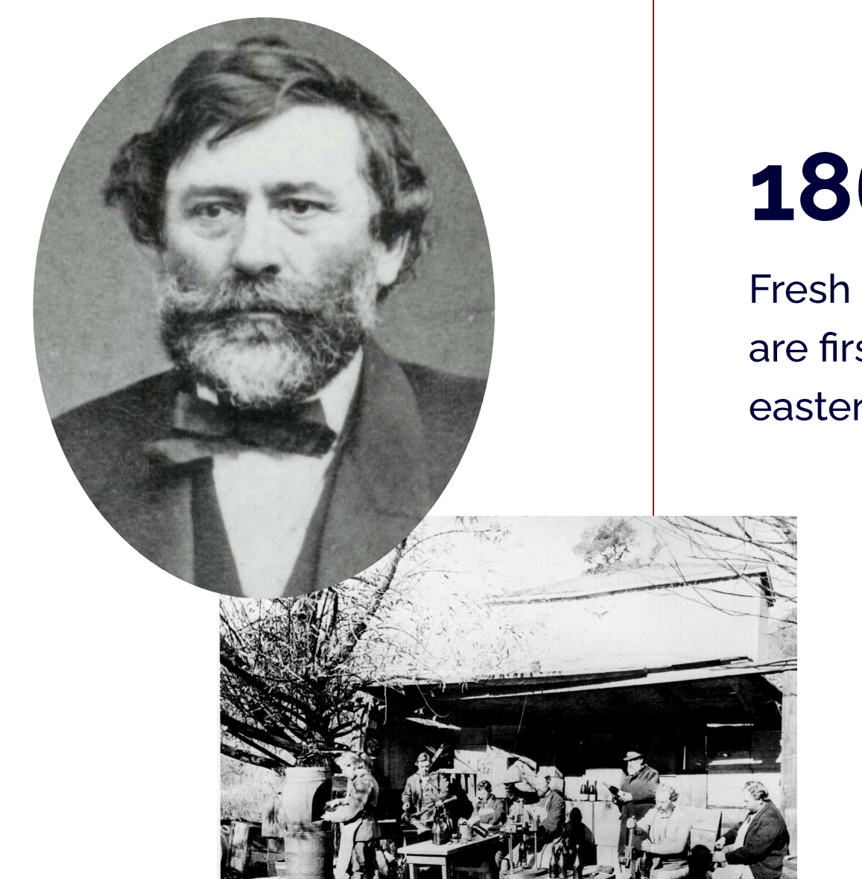
1839



Kentucky native William Wolfskill plants the first table grape vineyard in California.

Mid- 1800s

Hungarian expatriate Colonel Agoston Haraszthy, often called the "Father of California Viticulture," brings 100,000 cuttings of Vitis vinifera varieties from Europe to California.



Sparkling wine being bottled during the early 1870s at Buena Vista, as photographed by Eadweard Muybridge

1860

English settler William Thompson plants a Mediterranean grape called the "Oval Kishmish" near Yuba City north of Sacramento. This popular green variety is now known as the Thompson Seedless.

Malaga Grapes.

Malaga Grapes, from the Fruits series (N12) for Allen & Ginter Cigarettes Brands
Publisher Issued by Allen & Ginter American
Lithographer George S. Harris & Sons
American
1891

1869

Fresh table grapes are first shipped to eastern markets.

Still Life with Grapes
Carducius Plantagenet Ream,
American
(1838–1917)

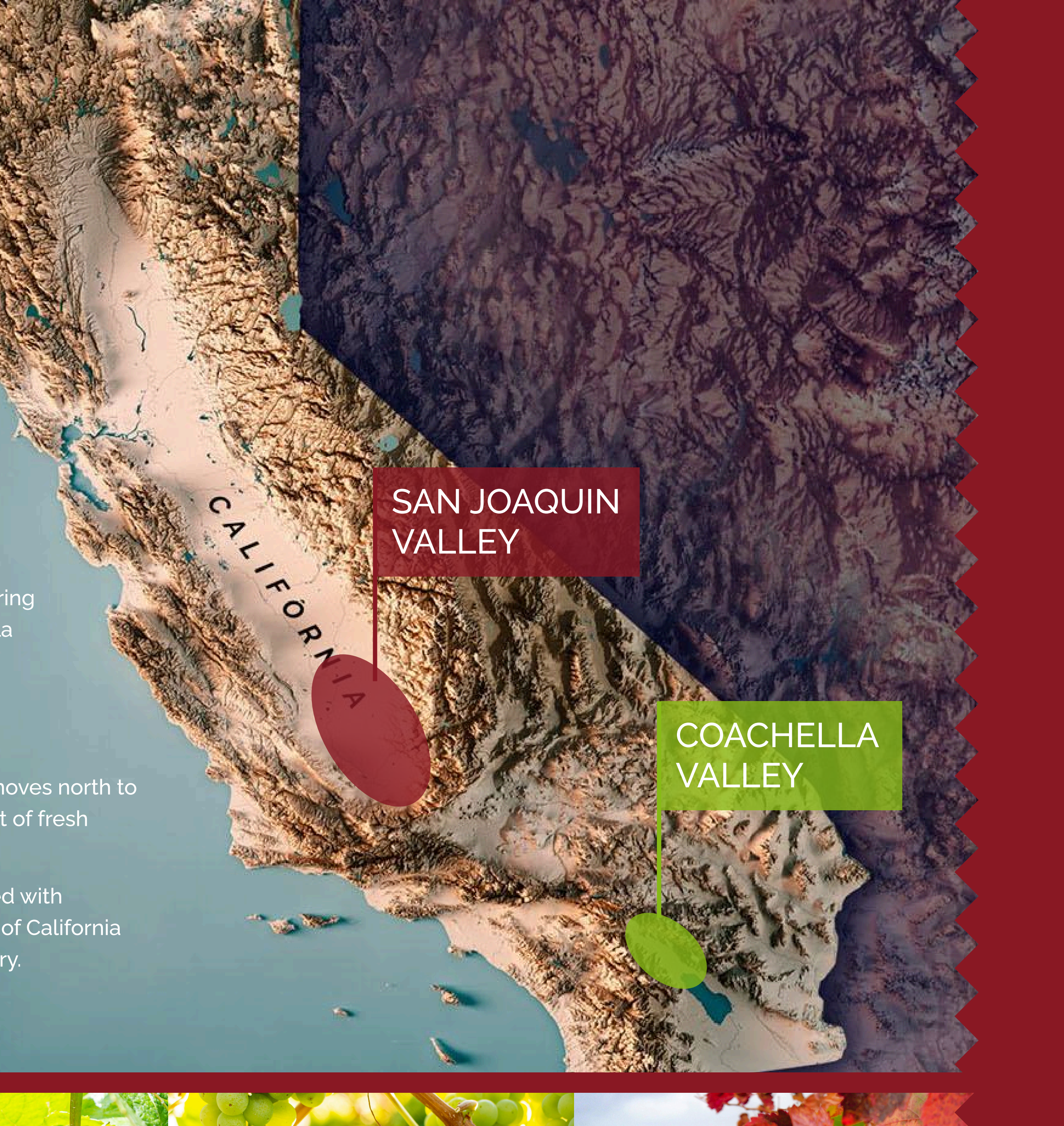
1970

Per capita consumption of grapes in the United States reaches 2.5 pounds.

Today

Per capita consumption of grapes in the United States hovers a little over 10 pounds.

Four Seasons IN THE VALLEYS OF THE SUN



COACHELLA VALLEY

The California table grape season begins in late spring when the first grapes are harvested in the Coachella Valley, California's southernmost growing region.

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

By mid-July Coachella's season ends and harvest moves north to the San Joaquin Valley. Through late fall the harvest of fresh California grapes continues.

Sequential harvesting from south to north combined with advanced storage techniques means that varieties of California table grapes are available from May through January.

THE LIFE CYCLE IN THE *Vineyards*

The winter months are an important part of the California table grape growing cycle. Growth and development stop temporarily and the vines rest. This stage is called "dormancy." At this time, growers prune the vines and set them up for the upcoming growing season. Pruning and training of the vines are two of the most important aspects for quality grape production – growers decide how much and which parts of the previous season's growth to remove in order to regulate vegetative growth (shoots and leaves) and crop load (grape clusters) to produce quality grapes and optimum yield.

In early spring tiny buds on the vine start to swell and green leaves appear. Appearance of the first green leaves through the bud scales is called budbreak.