

LAKE COUNTY HISTORY

Steele Winery is in Lake County, directly north of Napa County and east of Mendocino County. The county is one of the most rural and least populated and developed of the North Coast's grape growing regions. The appellation currently supports 32 wineries and 8,800 acres of wine grapes, compared to 45,000 in Napa, 60,000 in Sonoma and 16,700 in Mendocino.

Lake County's current population is approximately 65,000 people. It is a mountainous region with a base elevation of around 1,350 feet. Some of the vineyards that supply Steele wines are planted at elevations as high as 3,500 feet. Clear Lake, the largest natural lake in California, dominates Lake County's geography. On the south side of the lake, the extinct volcano Mt. Konocti at 4,500 feet supports numerous vineyards.

Lake County was part of Napa County until 1861 and had a thriving grape and wine industry at the turn of the century. Wines made from Lake County grapes won numerous medals and awards at national and international fairs and expositions in the early 1900s.

Just like in other grape growing areas, Prohibition sounded a death knell for the area's vineyards and wineries. While grape growing continued in Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino Counties to supply the enormous number of home winemakers, Lake County's isolation and the fact that it lacked railroad access caused most vineyards and wineries to fail. Most of the vineyards were ripped out and replanted with walnut and pear orchards.

The post-Prohibition revival of grape growing in the County began in the late 1960s, but it wasn't until around 2000 that the rapid expansion of the wine business in Lake County began.

Most popular grape varieties:

Red - Cabernet Sauvignon

White - Sauvignon Blanc

Other plantings: Syrah, Zinfandel, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Tempranillo, Chardonnay, Barbera and Riesling

The County has seven recognized appellations:

Benmore Valley, Big Valley, Clear Lake, Guenoc Valley, High Valley, Red Hills, and the new Kelsey Bench