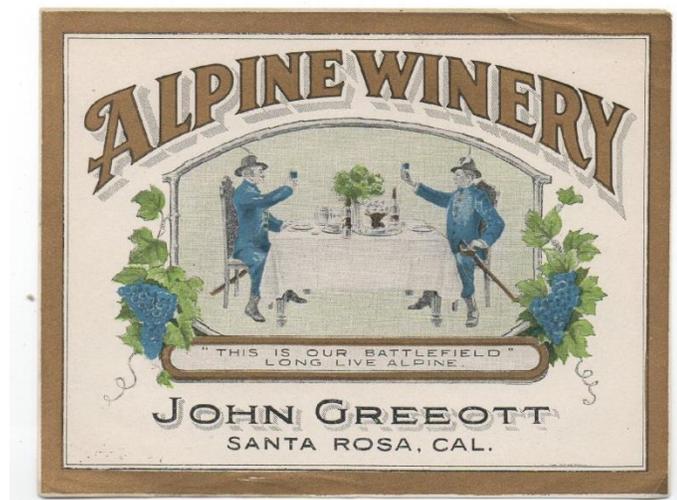


Grayott Apartments: John Greeott



The Grayott Apartment building at 616 B Street was built by John Greeott in 1922.

John Greeott was born Giovanni Griotti in 1868 in Piedmont, Italy. When he came to the United States in 1889, he Americanized his name to John Greeott. A few years later he arrived in Santa Rosa where he worked chopping wood and in the vineyards until he saved enough money to purchase some land, planted his own vines, and opened the Alpine Winery in Santa Rosa. He started the winery on Alpine Road (off Calistoga Road) more or less by accident. He had a friend who owned a bar in Tonopah, Nevada, who ordered some wine from him. John shipped a barrel of his wine that he had for his ranch and his farm helpers. The friend liked it as did the bar patrons so more wine was ordered. That started the winery on a very small scale and in a very crude fashion.



In 1911, the winery had grown to the point where they had to build a larger facility. The new winery was built nearer downtown Santa Rosa at 15th and Stewart Streets which reduced the trip from east

Santa Rosa by horse and wagon and also eliminated having to navigate the steep grade on Calistoga Road. The winery consisted of two large buildings, one for fermenting and partial storage, the other for storage and processing, and shipping. John brought in a lot of grapes out of the Sonoma Valley on freight cars. (The cars were open, slatted, cattle cars cleaned before the grapes were loaded.) A Southern Pacific railroad spur track ran between the two buildings with a loading platform to run them into the grape crusher. There was also a tilt-down ramp crossing that driveway used for loading barrels, which were rolled into the freight cars for shipment. The Alpine Winery shipped many, many freight car loads of wine, to the East Coast, using this method. The new winery had a capacity in excess of 200,000 gallons. One of the customers was Kanaye Nagasawa, one of the first Japanese immigrants to California and winemaker at Santa Rosa's Fountain Grove Winery.



Greott home at winery location on Stewart Street in 2015.

Unfortunately, the advent of Prohibition caused Greott to get out of the wine business. But before he publicly declared: "If I cannot drink my wine any more, I will eat it". He did so by pouring wine over the bread he took with him for his lunch when farm duties kept him away from home. For this Greott made the front pages in many of the newspapers across the country and abroad the story being frequently captioned "Eats His Wine".

Greott moved on to property development and became one of the early leaders and developers of business buildings.



In 1923, he partnered with Eligio (John) Storbino to build the finest movie theater north of San Francisco. It was first rate all the way including a nine-piece orchestra. Starting out as the G&S (for Greott and Storbino) Theater, it later became the California Theater. The first movie was "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" with Lon Chaney. (Sadly, the California Theater was torn down in 1977 as part of the City's redevelopment project and the spot is now used for Macy's parking garage.)

Greeott also built the building that later housed the Topaz Room, the city's first 2-story parking garage on B Street, and the Grayott Apartment building.

In 1928, John Greeott moved out of Santa Rosa. He bought property on Chalk Hill Road where he retired. He passed away at the age of 74 in 1942.



John Greeott's family.

Left to right: (front row) Theresa, John Sr., Sarah (wife), John Jr., Isobel;
(back row) Virginia, Julia, Wesley and George.

VII: DPR 523 FORM: ST. ROSE LOCAL DISTRICT

Significant persons represented in the district include the Runyans, Cornelius Shea, William Carithers and T.J. Ludwig, mentioned above, and also the following. Frank Berka (558 B St.) sold lumber and building materials for three or four decades on a large property in the North Railroad District (see DPR 523 form). Dr. Boyce (1825-1898; house moved to 537 B St.) was Santa Rosa's first resident professional physician, and he continued to practice until his death. Julia Sweet, who lived in a Register-listed house in the Cherry District, owned and probably developed four houses on Lincoln 417-419, 421, 425 and 429) and was president of the Saturday Afternoon Club when its building (430 Tenth) was constructed in 1908. John and Sarah Grayott developed five business properties in Santa Rosa, including the Greeot Apartments at 616 B St.; they also operated wineries in the county and a ranch at Windsor. George Noonan, whose 19th-century residence was replaced between 1908 and 1915 by the present 514 B St., had been a banker, president of the Santa Rosa Board of Trustees in the early 1870s, and involved in many civic improvement projects.