

By Mrs Hugh Brown

The San Felipe - Del Rio Winery

The first F. R. Qualia came from Casa Lansa, Italy in 1882. Del Rio was a young and growing village of 200 people. It was a farming section being watered by irrigation from San Felipe Springs.

He married Miss Mary Franki in 1883. They had seven children, John, Chris, Margaret, Charles, Mary, Louis and Jeanne.

In early days of the community, a few families of Italian origin made wine for their own families, and their neighbors who desired it. Today, the Qualias are operating the only winery in Texas that is licensed. They ship to individuals all over the State and because of Laughlin Air Force Base being located here, the wine has been introduced into many other States by the boys who would take a bottle home with them.

An annual check on the output of the winery is made by the Liquor Control Board in Austin under the brand name of "San Felipe - Del Rio Winery". At one time there was competition from twenty-five other wineries throughout the State but

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all have gone out of the business.

In 1883, and on into the present time the Qualias Winery has refreshed travelers on their way to California, the soldiers from Ft Clark, and at Camp San Felipe Del Rio.

Behind the house at 137 Hudson Drive is a garage type building with huge barrels on either side and at the back. A delicate aroma of ripe grapes pervades the whole place. This structure is two-storied. It is built of adobe cement. Through the years, it has been kept in good repair and enlarged when needed.

Some of the casks are small. a small portion of the grapes is pressed for grape juice, but the harvest is mostly for wine. 2000 gallons of wine ^{are} processed each year. These grapes are taken from the vines on 14 acres in back of the Winery. They are cut and brought in to the sheds in wheel barrows. They are pressed and fermented. The wine is stored in the casks and after holding it for the required number of years to age it is bottled for sale.

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The Qualia family has experimented with various types of grapes from one year to the next. Some of these have been from California. Most of the black Spanish grapes have been the best and the most productive. The rich sweet wine and the dry amber wine are the favorites. This wine has an alcoholic content of 20%.

During the prohibition years, there was no wine for sale. The grapes were sold on the market until the prohibition era passed. Then the vats which hold 425 gallons ^{each} ~~a piece~~ were used again.