



COMMANDERIE DE BORDEAUX HISTORY

Restoring the exports after World War II from all French wine regions was a challenge. An organization called La Confrèrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin had been formed in 1934 to promote the wines of Burgundy. Moreover, in the immediate post-WWII years, the Jurade de St. Émilion had been resurrected to push their wines. Henri Martin, the proprietor of Château Gloria in the St. Julien appellation of the Médoc and Secretary of the Viticultural Federation of Bordeaux, was inspired by these other organizations to form the Commanderie du Bontemps.

Initially focused on St. Julien, it was expanded to include all the Médoc and Graves regions. Several men involved with the wine trade in New York, including Alexis Lichine and Julius Wile, had become members of the Commanderie du Bontemps. They also remarked at the success the Chevaliers du Tastevin was having in restarting the importation of Burgundy wine to the US. However, they felt strongly that a similar organization in the US should represent ALL Bordeaux wine regions. After discussions with Henri Martin, the Commanderie de Bordeaux became a reality in 1957.

The president of Chanel in the US, Gregory Thomas, was installed as its first Grand Maître. The Commanderie became a New York corporation in 1959, and other Commanderies (chapters) soon followed: Philadelphia (1961), New Orleans & Los Angeles (1963), Houston (1967), with new Indianapolis and Cincinnati chapters inaugurated in 2019, and Aspen in 2020, for a total of 37 in the US so far.

The custom of assembling wise men and leading citizens into councils (conseils) to make crucial decisions for the good of the commune goes back in France to the Middle Ages. The debates in the council, enriched by the differing points of view expressed, thus became a unique tool of reflection and decision. In this tradition, 15 wine regions in Bordeaux had formed each their own brotherhood (confèrerie), some dating back hundreds of years. Each of these, with distinctive robes, was an association of wine growers and traders that undertakes to maintain local tradition, to defend and promote its wines, and to communicate their winemaking principles. However, from a marketing point of view, there was no uniform action. It was in 1952 that Henri Martin, then President of the robust Conseil Inter-professionnel du Vin de Bordeaux (CIVB), had the idea of gathering the various regional brotherhoods (confrèreries, compagnons, jurades, etc.) and other organizations promoting Bordeaux wines into a new and separate entity.

That new entity was called the Grand Conseil du Vin de Bordeaux (GCVB). Completing this federation took time, but in 1975 the GCVB became a non-profit organization with authority to represent all the appellations of the various Bordeaux wine-producing regions without distinction, both in France and abroad. The current President of the GCVB is Francis Boutémy who also serves as the world Grand Maître of the Commanderie de Bordeaux at headquarters in Bordeaux itself.