Vallejo arsonist jailed

17 Nov 2009 by Linda Murphy

The Marin County man suspected of setting fire to a Vallejo wine storage facility in Oct 2005, which destroyed some $200 million worth of wine kept there by Northern California vintners and dozens of collectors, pleaded guilty Monday (16 Nov) to a charge of arson and 18 other transgressions.

Mark C Anderson, 61, likely dodged a sentence of life in prison with his guilty plea, and is expected to get 16 years of incarceration when he's sentenced 26 Jan, 2010.

Among the wineries that lost some or all of their inventories and/or wine libraries in the massive fire are **Saintsbury, Long Meadow Ranch, Tres Sabores, Sean Thackrey** and **Justin**. At the time of the blaze, more than 90 wineries and 40 collectors had wines stored at the Wines Central warehouse, located in a former submarine repair facility on Mare Island in Vallejo, south of Napa Valley. An estimated 6 million bottles were destroyed or damaged so that they were not sellable. (Julie Johnson, owner of Tres Sabores, turned her overheated wine into a fire-roasted Zinfandel grilling sauce.)

Anderson, a former Sausalito city commissioner and newspaper columnist, did not say why he set fire to Wines Central, though investigators said he was trying to cover his tracks after defrauding clients of his business, Sausalito Cellars, which promised collectors safe storage of their wines, at Wines Central. Allegedly Anderson sold many of his clients' wines, without their knowledge, to raise funds for his extravagant lifestyle; when he was evicted from Wines Central for non-payment of rent, he set fire to it, destroying it, to cover up his pilfering of collectors' wines.

There is no making up for the loss of Saintsbury's wine library, nor an entire vintage of Long Meadow Ranch wines, though I imagine a glass or three of wine was hoisted on Monday in celebration of some justice being served.