A Walk In My 'Wood
Cascade Canyon and the HVLT
The Unsinkable Mountain Play
Designing Clothes
The Fabrication of a Legend
Artists in the Canyon
The California Alpine Club
A Coast Miwok Perspective
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President’s Message

Each of us has different interests and different passions when it comes to “history.” Some consider ourselves amateur historians, or history buffs. Others simply have a curiosity with the past and how it ties to us today. As you open this 2013 Review, I thank you for taking the time to notice and acknowledge the Mill Valley Historical Society. Founded in 1977, MVHS services a variety of purposes for a variety of groups: oral histories, guest speakers, articles about the town’s past, and history walks. As it says in our founding declaration: “It shall be the Purpose of the Mill Valley Historical Society to educate by gathering, preserving, researching, publishing and disseminating information about local history.” This is the core of service the Mill Valley Historical Society provides and executes.

The Mill Valley Historical Review is the one grand periodical we publish each spring. We have a true all-star lineup of contributors for this issue. Each writer has taken a different spin or angle of local history and brought it forth in entertaining and engaging articles. Joyce Kleiner covers Mountain Play history in colorful form, and Arlin Weinberger recaps the history of the California Alpine Club. Both those organizations celebrate centennials this year. Stephanie Krames muses about living and walking among the redwoods of Cascade Canyon. Susan Trott recalls co-creating one of the more controversial of the Mountain Play productions, while Betty Goerke writes about the historical significance of Mt. Tam to the Coast Miwok. Editor Abby Wasserman contributes two articles—one about the legend of Tamalpa, the other about an impressive community of artists active in Mill Valley in the early 1940s through the 1970s. Chuck Oldenburg’s intriguing articles tying a unique history angle of Homestead Valley to this year’s annual Walk Into History in Cascade Canyon.

I trust you will enjoy reading this Review now and re-reading it in future years.

— Tim Amyx
After living in Manhattan for ten years, I returned to California, where I met my future husband. Before marrying, we searched for a home in Marin County. On a summer day in 1986 we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, skirted the curvaceous gold mounds of the Marin Headlands, and took the roadway by Richardson Bay to Mill Valley, sitting snug and sunny against the base of Mt. Tamalpais.

Near The Depot, we turned off Throckmorton Avenue onto Cascade Drive and entered the coolness of the canyon, searching for the address of the house we would one day own. Taking off my sunglasses in the sudden shade, I looked up at a redwood trunk ascending to the sky, and gasped, “Now, that’s a tree!”

On the flat landfill of the island town of Alameda, where I grew up, I saw trees struggle to stand upright under the pressure of the heavy winds off the bay. Ungainly as they grew, they appeared soulless in an inhospitable land.

In Manhattan, trees searched for sunlight in small sidewalk patches of dirt. Ringed by iron railings to prevent delivery trucks from crushing them as they beeped backwards, they, too, seemed unnaturally squeezed by curbs, cars, and cement.

But here in Marin, vestiges of the once vast swath of Coast Redwoods still stood in their ancestral groves, reclaiming their territory, and we were going to be their neighbors.
During the next twenty-seven years I acquired the daily habit of walking among the redwoods of Cascade Canyon. Following in the footsteps of early inhabitants, explorers, settlers, campers, holiday-makers, and fortune-seekers, I felt a member of the same family just as the second-growth redwoods were of theirs. We grew and expanded in the same space. It’s why I call my neighborhood a neighborhood.

Walking in my ‘wood is a walk on the wilder side of Mill Valley, where the asphalt merges with the forest’s uncultivated edges; where the winter rain floods the roadway with rivulets of water rushing to join Old Mill Creek; where the wind in winter tosses the tall tree-tops like feather dusters, spilling limbs and leaves. It’s the enchanted forest of fairy tales and mystery. The street lights illuminate the dark even on a summer afternoon. The cool marine layer drifts over the hills from the ocean, sending tendrils of fog down to the canyon floor, requiring a hat and jacket to keep warm in August. The sun, swimming with flecks, sends angled blades of light slicing through the groves.

It is where my curiosity is pricked about the life behind my neighbors’ fences and gardens. Escaping into the trees, leaving conventions and conversations behind, my mind, loosened by the movement of my legs, allows my imagination to flourish. After walking shaded Cascade Avenue to tiny, crooked Cornwall Street, turning down the wide, sunlit sidewalks of Throckmorton to the little lanes of Eugene and Josephine, circling through Old Mill Park, I head home, open the gate, hang my jacket in the closet, and return to who and what I must be.
On winter days, when the fulsome waters of the creek roar, I can see how its strength once powered the relic sawmill that stands nearby. The giant metal saw cut the timber of the tallest trees in the world. I imagine the heaving oxen dragging their timber along the muddy trails amid the shouts and strains of the men at work felling mighty trees. I hear the timber crushing through branches as they tumble to the forest floor; hear the birds, alarmed, rushing to the sky. I understand how, within a few decades, nearly all the redwood groves had gone.

Now, I walk among the offspring of the great logged trees admiring their animal-like, furry great-coats of bark laden with the tannin that provides their color and resistance to fire and pests. Standing close in a grove, they shield each other in heavy winds. In the cool marine atmosphere, the young and the old live together, nourished by the fallen duff of their own leaves and debris. Dead redwoods fall and decay among family members, providing sustenance and support for the next generation. Ample bushes of feathery green saplings sprout from burls. How can one not respect their family values and their recycling system?

But then, our own keen desire to recycle comes to mind when I walk among the homes and bungalows nestled among the trees. Lilliputian, the homes appear placed by the hand of Gulliver, seemingly merged with the trees, as the planks of a deck wrap a redwood, or in some cases, a redwood pierces clear

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through the middle of a cottage. The subdivision of parcels, the carving of lanes, paths, and steps, the assignment of land for schools, parks, and churches was modeled by the hand of a surveyor. A rarity of its time, Mill Valley was an early planned community. At the first land auction in 1890, the canyon was ready to be populated by the men who had successfully bid that day. In my ‘wood, some came to establish estates on which they built eclectic, large homes with fairytale names, like Joseph Eastland’s seven-acre “Burlwood,” Dr. S. Frederick Westerberg’s “Breidablik,” Captain Melvin Staples’s fifteen-acre “Yvetot,” and Anton Michalitschke’s “King’s Castle,” built from a mail-order house plan from Sears, Roebuck and Co. For others, a single lot for a cabin or a pitched tent would suffice. Whether they hosted guests in burlwood-lined dining rooms, served by household staff under electric lights, or camped in the open around cooking fires under the light of the lanterns strung from tree to tree, the new canyon residents were all, I am convinced, in search of carefree living, fresh air, fresh water, and sunlight, away from the dirt and dust of the city. No wonder I feel akin to them!

Part of the Rancho de Saucelito auctioned by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company, Lot #04, Subdivision 3, Lot 18, sold for $330 and was deeded on June 21, 1890 to Jerome Stanford, nephew of Leland Stanford, the former governor of the state and founder of Stanford University. Jerome built a small summer cottage, and on his large adjacent lot, a roony Victorian. He later married a very young Bessie Douglas, apparently scandalizing the town. Bessie was a music student of Mrs. Thomas Kelly. The Kellys were notable for having built Mill Valley’s first “house in the open” at 64 Lovell Avenue, still standing, just west of the old Carnegie library. I read this bit of historical gossip in the Mill Valley Library History Room archives, in a file titled “The Nest.” Lot #04 no longer identifies the property, nor does “The Nest,” because a numerical address now locates each home in Cascade Canyon.

Our own home’s genealogy is a twisted strand of real estate DNA: Stanford, Bork, Shirly, Kydd, Coppola, Seivert, Krames. However, a photograph taken of “The Nest” in 1927 is all the DNA required to identify charm: a gently sloping, sunny lot, the little yellow cottage with a lean-to kitchen and seven tiny bedrooms, set back and surrounded by dahlias. Here and there are blackberry brambles, a set of little stone steps leading to the rear, and to the side, next to a young redwood sapling, stands a wispy cherry tree dressed in white blossoms. Mr. and Mrs. David Bork bought the lot with the cottage from the Stanford estate in 1914, and in 1922, the neighboring Victorian. Mrs. Bork established a dahlia garden on the sunny cottage property and became well-known as the only grower of cut flowers for sale in Mill Valley before there were florist shops. Being the site of many entertainments, the garden’s name, Sans Souci (care-free) is certainly the gestalt gleaned from this imprint of the past.

The cherry tree, now eighty years old, sits in a sliver of land bounded by our fence and the rockwork of my neighbor’s house. It finds the sun, though under an ever-increasing canopy of redwoods. It blossoms, but no longer bears fruit. Its life suggests a remodel of Haiku master Basho’s lines:

The redwood tree:
Not interested in
Cherry blossoms.

As trees are submerged by darkness, I turn the corner at Cascade Drive, arrive at my house, and hesitate, considering a further walk in the canyon. Instead, I open the garden gate to view the slope that once held dahlias, now planted with my adaptation to the redwoods: tree ferns, rhododendrons, azaleas, foxgloves, redwood sorrel, meadow rue, and the sun-loving citrus trees on the terrace.

Aspirations, whether of nature or man, find their fulfillment and loss here among the redwoods.

Stephanie Krames is a member of a weekly writing group at O’Hanlon Center for the Arts. This is her first published work.
Cascade Canyon and the Homestead Valley Land Trust

By Chuck Oldenburg

Cascade Canyon is a Mill Valley gem. Geologically, it is the Old Mill Creek watershed in what was originally Rancho Saucelito. The creek originates on the side of Mt. Tamalpais and ends at Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio, beneath the shopping complex on the corner of Miller and Sunnyside avenues. The most familiar part of the canyon is Cascade Drive, from Old Mill Park to the Old Reservoir. This narrow, winding road is often used by walkers, hikers, runners, and cyclists. Two popular stops are Cascade Falls and Three Wells. Cascade Drive leads to trails up the ridges and on to Mt. Tam and Muir Woods. A Cascade Canyon loop tour can incorporate Throckmorton, Lovell, or Marion avenues. Steps, lanes, and paths access Marion, a route to the Dipsea Stairs.

After John Reed built his sawmill, about 1835, redwood groves in the canyon were denuded to provide lumber for building San Francisco. Today's magnificent redwoods are second growth. One residence has 140 redwood trees on the property, including a ring of 80.

By 1889, the Tamalpais Land & Water Co. (TL&WC) had acquired the Rancho, and a decision was made to become land developers. Its first subdivision was Eastland and Millwood. The North Pacific Coast Railroad constructed a 1.74-mile branch line to access the subdivision. A land auction took place near the old mill on May 31, 1890.
TL&WC Map No. 2 (May 16, 1890) was the legal document in force at the land auction. It defined each property’s dimensions and location. It also described the location and dimension of each street and the alleys that connected the streets. Map No. 2 displayed the following statement:

“The free and unrestricted use of all streets and alleys will be deeded to purchasers, but no public dedication of the same will be made, thus making this property distinctly the choicest place in every way for a suburban home.”

TL&WC thereby retained ownership of the streets and alleys. Normally in California subdivisions, each lot purchaser owns the land out to the middle of the street. Such is not the case for streets in Cascade Canyon.

TL&WC’s president, Joseph Green Eastland, the prime mover and financial backer in the founding of what became Mill Valley, acquired sixteen lots in Cascade Canyon bounded by Throckmorton Avenue, Cascade Drive, and Cornwall Street, six acres altogether. In 1893, he built a three-story, twenty-two room home in the English Tudor-style, which he named Burlwood for the extensive redwood burling in the living room paneling. The estate had a private lake behind a dam on Old Mill Creek, two tennis courts, and a steam heat-generating building. Blue Bird Cottage, a miniature of the mansion, was a playhouse and schoolroom for the children.

TL&WC was chartered as a 100-year corporation in 1888. Therefore, it had to go out of business in 1988. In 1973 the Homestead Valley community had passed a bond issue to purchase eighty acres of adjacent land for open space. The Homestead Valley Land Trust (HVLT) accepted a quitclaim deed for all properties owned by TL&WC in Marin County. Why? Because in 1988, the HVLT board thought that TL&WC might own properties adjacent to this open space that would provide additional access to it.

Homestead Valley is an unincorporated community of about 1,100 homes situated between the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and the city of Mill Valley. It shares short boundaries with three other unincorporated communities: Almonte, Tamalpais Valley, and Muir Woods Park.

In 1995 the HVLT board hired an experienced title specialist to identify properties that had been acquired from TL&WC in 1988. After researching the records, he reported that TL&WC had sold all its properties. But he was surprised to learn that Homestead Valley Land Trust was the owner of streets and lanes in Homestead Valley, Almonte, and the city of Mill Valley. He consulted several Marin title companies—none knew about the quitclaim deed. The HVLT board was, understandably, dumbfounded.

Cascade Drive is one of fifty HVLT-owned streets in Mill Valley. As for lanes, in 2009 the city of Mill Valley accepted a quitclaim deed for forty HVLT-owned steps, lanes, and paths. This was a key part of Mill Valley’s efforts to reclaim its pedestrian heritage and to improve its emergency preparedness. Several of the lanes are in Cascade Canyon.

The 2013 Mill Valley Historical Society Walk Into History includes stops at homes on Cascade, Throckmorton, Cornwall, and Laurel. The guided tour focuses on the histories of the pioneer families who owned and lived in these homes over a century ago. The Homestead Valley Land Trust owns those streets and many near them, including Lovell, Josephine, Eugene, Marion, Renz, and Wainwright.

Chuck Oldenburg recently published a booklet of 137 one-page articles on the history of Homestead Valley.

Left to right: Kathy Lines, Shirley Planert, and Larry Counts.
Photo by Philip Planert.
Courtesy Lucretia Little History Room, Mill Valley Public Library
The Unsinkable Mountain Play
by Joyce Kleiner

The tale of the 100-year-old Mountain Play rings with testimonials to vision and perseverance, often against seemingly insurmountable challenges. And—unlike many of the folktales and legends that cling like costume beads to the institution—the story of how the Mountain Play survived tempests and turmoil for a century is completely true, and one worth telling.

Some versions of the Mountain Play’s origin story suggest divine inspiration, but one less pious version recalls an afternoon “orgy of beer and red wine.” Either way, in 1913 a group of hikers conceived the idea of a “forest theater” and set out to make it happen, only to find—just as any Broadway producer today would—that community enthusiasm didn’t necessarily mean financial support. “I do not know just what is the matter with the majority of the Mill Valley people,” complained the show’s business manager Austin Ramon Pohli in a donation thank you note. “The proprietor [of the local newspaper] tried to beat me for $10 to give the play a write up. I thought it was rather scurvy.”

Ultimately, various hiking clubs stepped up to help, and on May 4, 1913, the play Abraham and Isaac and scenes from Twelfth Night debuted to an audience of 1,200, who enjoyed the production and the breathtaking view of San Francisco Bay behind it.

In 1914, the organizers created the Mountain Play Association (MPA), only to have someone point out that their venture trespassed on land owned by the Kent Family of Marin. Fortunately, newly recruited MPA vice-president William Kent soon deeded the land to the Association. His only stipulation: Performances must continue for at least twenty-five years.

And they did. For a generation, singing and ukulele-playing San Franciscans ferried across the bay and joined up with locals to hike or take the scenic railroad to the mountain’s top, happily braving fog, heat, and slippery hillside seating for their day of entertainment and nature.

The theater stayed in shape with the help of volunteers—mostly from the Tamalpais Conservation Club, the Alpine Club and the Sierra Club—who dug out poison ivy, seeded grass, and hauled water to maintain the site. But eventually, the grueling work and the Great Depression thinned their ranks. By the early 1930s the California State Park system had taken over much of the land surrounding the Mountain Theater. Seeing the opportunity for help, the Association negotiated the transfer of their land to the park, with a Kent-like caveat that MPA productions continue. The transfer brought the WPA-sponsored Civilian Conservation Corps, who created a Greek-inspired amphitheater, ushering in a Mountain Play golden era, with theatrical pageants of historical, biblical, or mythological stories enacted by elaborately costumed actors portraying queens and gods.

Joyce Kleiner is a writer living in Mill Valley; her column “Civics Lessons” ran in the Mill Valley Herald from 2007 to 2012.
An early 1970s cultural shift reduced interest in the histrionic pageants. Attendance dropped alarmingly. Understanding the need to adapt, the MPA hired veteran theatrical producer Marilyn Smith in 1977. Smith refocused the plays to a more crowd-pleasing Broadway musical model, but controversy followed her first selection of an original musical scripted by Susan Trott, with music by George Leonard and Steve Riffkin, called *Clothes*—a reinterpretation of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. The show, said some MPA board members, had “undertones that are not family fare.” The board’s concern only grew when they saw the already printed *Clothes* poster, featuring a rear-view of a naked Emperor. To appease the worried board members, a rubber stamp of underwear was fabricated to disguise the exposed derrière, and Trott herself stamped all the posters and flyers—thousands of them. The Emperor wore a flesh-toned body suit for the show, and the musical garnered positive reviews and the board’s stamp of approval.

The press coverage of the *Clothes* controversy translated to a high turnout for the show, a point not lost on Smith. She soon mastered the art of leveraging free press, including media brouhahas like the *Newsweek* magazine article asking if the Mountain Play’s *Guys and Dolls* poster showed Nathan Detroit shaking something other than a pair of dice.

Under Smith’s stewardship, the Mountain Play thrived. The bigger-than-life amphitheater proved to be the perfect setting for high-production musicals. She also reduced traffic by introducing shuttle buses to and from the mountain and encouraging the already popular, scenic six-and-one-half mile post-show hike into Mill Valley. Both features continue today.

Until 1985, Mt. Tam Park allowed a variety of live performances in the amphitheater. But when the park approved a series of summer jazz concerts, residents and environmentalists complained, ultimately leading to a lawsuit filed by the Tamalpais Conservation Club—the same club that had sustained the Mountain Play for so long. The lawsuit argued against “commercialization,” amplified music, and general threats to the environment. A successful lawsuit might have ended the Mountain Play, but ultimately the court’s narrowly focused ruling had no impact on the MPA. A citizen’s advisory committee convened soon afterward, creating new amphitheater use policies.

The Mountain Play has met and solved every problem presented to it (though its greatest challenge remains the same one that frustrated poor Austin Pohli in 1913: Money). Today, the much-loved and wonderfully old-fashioned tradition attracts thousands each spring. They arrive, picnic baskets in hand, to enjoy a Broadway musical, nature’s splendor, a block party-like sense of community, and—though perhaps not an “orgy” of wine—maybe a glass or two.
DESIGNING CLOTHES
The Musical
By Susan Trott

In 1976, I wrote the book for the musical comedy, Clothes, as well as additional lyrics, in the space of two months. My invention was sparked by God’s Electric Soul (the name of one of the songs) and by three dynamos: Marilyn Smith to produce, George Leonard as composer and lyricist, and Steve Riffkin to compose and score music, as well as to co-direct with Michelle Swanson. Jay Lehmann was our music director.
George and I had wanted our friend, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, to play the Emperor. He was a trained musician with a sensational baritone singing voice and a handsome, charismatic figure, with a social background that would lend itself to the Emperor’s sartorial wardrobe of tuxedos, yachting clothes, capes, and even the invisible clothes. He had spent a few years earlier in Mill Valley writing his autobiography and longed to return, but he was getting ready to be minister of Riverside Church in New York City, so he declined, saying wistfully, “Only in Mill Valley do people get together and create something imaginative, joyous, and wonderful such as you are doing.”

Joyous was the word. “It was just so much fun, and Steve was a big part of making it so,” said my friend Claudia Shenefield, who was in charge of costumes. “I was hesitant to do the sewing of the kids’ costumes, so Marilyn Smith just dumped a big bag of material at my front door with a note attached saying, ‘here’s the fabric.’” Marilyn was great at getting the community to do things whether they wanted to or not and they ended up glad that they did. My daughter, Natalie, said, “I loved being up there with all my friends. I mostly remember doing lots of cartwheels.”

Artist Henry J. Breuer’s poster showed the back of the naked Emperor admiring his “new clothes” in a mirror. This deeply offended the Mountain Theater board, so I stamped red boxer shorts on the thousands of leaflets and posters, which caused the publicity to “go viral,” as they would say today, but then it meant the item was launched from the Marin I.F. and Mill Valley Record all the way to Herb Caen’s column in the Chronicle. One local liquor store refused to hang the poster because of its “indecency.” “What about all your porn magazines?” I asked.

For me, it was a thrill to see the production unfold and come together. I loved to attend rehearsals, which went on daily and nightly all over town and, vaingloriously, I never tired of hearing my own words spoken or sung aloud. Near performance time, there were rehearsals on the mountain in sunshine, fog, or drizzle, stiff winds, or driving rain, everyone carrying on ebulliently, despite doing their numbers on uncertain earth instead of an actual stage.

Our debut to 4,000 people was triumphant, and garnered a lot of good reviews, despite the truly horrible sound system of multiple standing mikes that—along with the huffing and puffing and sometime howling of the wind—failed to create the ideal audio for our songs and my immortal words. (The chosen musical performed on the mountain the following summer had such a good sound system that it broke my heart to hear it.)

Clothes had three performances and, with impresario Bill Graham’s karate-trained bodyguards, Marilyn made sure that no one could sneak in without paying.

Mill Valleyan Kathy Kertesz said she made friends for life playing in Clothes. I like to think many others did, too. Danny Tamm went on to Hollywood to be in movies and TV series. George continued to write many wise and wonderful books. Marilyn headed up the Mountain Play Association for more than two decades. Steve is still composing, teaching, and playing in bands. I continue to obsessively celebrate Mt. Tamalpais and Mill Valley in my novels.

Mill Valley author Michael Murphy (Golf in the Kingdom) contributed his javelin to Clothes; Danny Tamm used it to poke the clouds for lightning in the generating song, thus successfully releasing God’s Electric Soul upon our magical Mill Valley mountain, which has vibrated ever since.

Susan Trott is the author of sixteen novels.
The Fabrication of a Legend

By Abby Wasserman

The oral traditions of Native California peoples include sacred narratives about prominent topographical features. These stories, colorful and dramatic, humorous and sometimes frightening, often feature supernatural forces. Legends about mountains, such as the Sutter Buttes and Mt. Shasta, were passed from generation to generation to impress a sense of identity and connection with one’s home territory; to educate children about values and right behavior; and to instill a reverence and respect for natural forces. There is at least one story from the native Coast Miwok people about Mt. Tamalpais—but it’s nothing about Tamalpa, the “sleeping maiden.”

By the late 1800s, fanciful stories about the mountain surfaced from other sources. In Tamalpais Walking, Gary Snyder and Tom Killion cite what may be the first Anglo mention of “Sleeping Lady” (“Sleeping Beauty”) in a hiking log of the Tamalpais Club in 1886. References in poems followed from 1897 to 1920, including a Lowell High student poem, “The Sleeping Beauty of Tamalpais” in 1909; “Legend of Tamalpais,” a 1911 winner of the Yale Poetry Prize; and Mill Valley poet Kathleen Norris’s “The Lady of Tamalpais” in 1920. Dan Totheroh, a local playwright, expanded such stories into a play, Tamalpa (initially Tamelpa), which was produced eight times as the Mountain Play between 1921 and 1970.

A legend is a narrative handed down from the past that appears to convey the lore of a culture. It is sometimes popularly regarded as historical but is unauthenticated.
records now exist, for unlike many other primitive tribes, no cave drawings have been discovered around or on the slopes of Tamalpais.

“Rather than to disappoint GARNET who was so anxious to produce an Indian legend on the mountain, I used my imagination and wrote the pageant-play, TAMALPA, that is now accepted as the authentic [emphasis Totheroh’s] legend of the Sleeping Maiden and her lover, PIAYUTUMA, the Indian brave who climbed the fearsome mountain to obtain the Gift of Healing from the Great White Spirit.

“Several of the hiking trails on the mountain have been named after the characters and places in the legend, names which I created and are not Indian names at all.

— Dan Totheroh.”

There was a Coast Miwok community known as Tamal, though its name does not appear in the script itself; rather, Tamalpa’s tribe is called the Hookooeko, which has basis in fact. A Native informant in Betty Goerke’s book on the Miwok leader, Chief Marin, states that Hukuiko is what the Coast Miwok people of Nicasio called themselves. “Tamalpa” is not a Coast Miwok word, but the name Tamalpais is: “tamal” is translated variously as “coast,” “bay,” “west,” and “bay country”; and “pais,” means mountain.

A character in Tamalpa asserts that the Hookooeko were “long vanished, a branch of a race returned to the dust from whence it was fashioned…never again to be part of the life force.” This is untrue. Coast Miwok descendants had not disappeared when Totheroh wrote his play; they were living in Marin County in 1925, four years after Tamalpa was first produced; and their numbers had been strong only a century before, circa 1816, when the expedition artist Louis Choris painted groups of Coast Miwok at Mission Dolores and Mikhail Tikonovich Tikhanov made illustrations in Coast Miwok territory in Bodega.

The claim in the preface that Native Californians were “Digger” Indians, i.e. Indians digging out roots of plants to eat, had negative overtones, implying a culture without art, another untruth. Perfectly adapted to their environment, industrious and creative, the Coast Miwok constructed homes and boats out of tule reeds they cultivated; fished and hunted with tools they handcrafted; made their own clothing and abalone shell adornments; tended native plants for food and functions; and wove intricate baskets, some of which are in museums in Germany and Russia. In many Native California tribes, a person’s belongings were burned after death, which accounts in part for the scarcity of these perishable artifacts. The Native people of this region had not “returned to the dust.” Their descendants, although beleaguered and displaced by the Spaniards and gold seekers, were and are still here in California.
Tamalpa, the production, was a hodgepodge. The set featured a teepee (a Plains Indian dwelling; though some of the redwood bark huts of the Coast Miwok were also conical), and the costumes were fanciful. The plot was high melodrama. The princess Tamalpa (daughter of an evil witch) sacrifices herself to heal her lover’s people and thus immortalizes herself. As the “Great White Spirit” character declares at the end, “Tamalpa’s face is everlasting now, for yonder mountaintop will be her bed where she will lie stretched out in dreamless sleep for future men to marvel at and to remember.”

Totheroh, a prolific playwright who wrote other plays for production on the mountain and served on the Mountain Theater Association board for decades, initially subtitled his drama, with becoming humility, “A Fantasy of the Mountain,” but by the 1946 production, it was Tamalpa, The Legend of Mt. Tamalpais, which suggests that the story had acquired gravitas for the people and playwright alike.

Does it matter that many believe our local indigenous people wove the story that a gallant Indian maiden sacrificed her life and now sleeps eternally as stone and earth? Well, yes. No number of repetitions of the Tamalpa story will transform Totheroh’s fantasy into a Coast Miwok legend. But there are many ways to relate to a mountain, from hiking its trails and understanding its geology to anthropomorphizing its origins. One thing is certain: Mount Tamalpais continues to inspire and ignite the imagination.

Writer and editor Abby Wasserman focuses on California themes in her books and articles. Most recently, she served as Developmental Editor of Boom: A Journal of California (University of California Press) from 2011 to 2013.

Above: Ella McSpedden as Tamalpa (left), with Lucille Gordon as Ah-Shawn-nee in the 1938 production of Tamalpa.
Both photos courtesy Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.
Artists in the Canyon

By Abby Wasserman

Every October, Mill Valley celebrates its arts community with the Milley Awards for Creative Achievement. Honoring five or six artists annually, the gala event, now in its 19th year, always sells out. The city also supports its own Art Commission, and arts organizations and attractions abound.

Although many visitors came here to paint, write, photograph, and compose prior to World War II, our resident community of artists began forming in the 1940s, when those living on a dime could rent and even buy; when hiking shacks, summer cottages, and drafty barns could be made livable. There were no “rich” or “poor” neighborhoods in Mill Valley; everyone lived side by side.

Cascade Canyon in particular bubbled with artistic ferment, thanks largely to the energy of visual artists, including Lucienne Bloch, Steve Dimitroff, Ray Strong, Richard Graveson, Bart Perry, Hal Riegger, Valborg Gravander, and Clem and Posey Hurd. And at the center of them all were Richard and Ann O’Hanlon, and Sam and Sylvia Newsom, who provided strong leadership within this thriving artistic community.
In 1942, Ann Rice O’Hanlon and Richard O’Hanlon, with family members, purchased acreage in Cascade Canyon on a former dairy. Their lots stretched from Throckmorton up to Lovell and straddled a freshwater creek, with plenty of sunlight on the uphill side and cool shade on the downhill. Ann (1908-1998), a painter from Kentucky, met Dick (1907-1985), a sculptor from Long Beach, in 1931, when both were graduate students at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco.

The year they moved to the Throckmorton property, Ann was 34 and Dick was 35. She had already developed the nascent art department at Dominican College in San Rafael and was teaching, and Dick was newly on the faculty in the art department at the University of California, Berkeley. Their new home was without electricity or plumbing, and they slept in the barn's loft in sleeping bags. Their first project was to rebuild it into a studio.

Samuel (Sam’l) Newsom (1898-1996), a decade their senior, was born in Piedmont and raised in Oakland and Napa. His family had a summer cottage on Molino Avenue here. After Navy service in World War I, he went into business growing dahlias on ten acres in Napa, then spent four years in Japan studying garden design and painting. In 1939 he published his book, *Japanese Garden Design*, the first of its kind.

In 1942, Newsom learned that the Hagiwara family, caretakers and residents of the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park, were going to be sent to an internment camp. He offered to safeguard their belongings, storing more than thirty-two truckloads on the Molino property, including parts of houses, decorative objects, and plants. When the Hagiwaras were released, everything was returned to them, and they rebuilt the Tea Garden.

He sold the Molino house and in 1947 bought a barn on the Throckmorton property of Harvey Klyce, hiring Klyce’s son Melvin to fix it up, retaining the barn’s spacious character and weathered beauty. Creature comforts such as thick newspaper insulation in the drafty floor were added. Outside, Sam’l created a Japanese garden with a stream, waterfall, and pond, with distinctive stones and a traditional wooden bridge. He planted Japanese maples, camellias, and giant bamboo. By this time he had established a business as a landscape designer, and this was his showcase.
Coincidentally, there was another Japanese garden in Cascade Canyon, at Burlwood, the summer mansion of Joseph Eastland built in 1893. That garden bordered Throckmorton near the junction of Cascade Drive, not far from Newsom’s property. It’s striking that there were two Japanese gardens in such close proximity within town, especially considering the difference in the homes boasting them: a burlwood-lined mansion and a rustic barn.

Ann, Dick, and Sam'l formed a friendship and made many trips together. They were regulars at Valborg Gravander’s boarding house in the city, where “Mama” Gravander taught spinning and weaving to her boarders and every Friday night offered a smorgasbord, dinner, and folk dancing for just a dollar. “[We] would go over … in Dick’s old open top car and enjoy a good meal,” Sam'l wrote in his memoir. “There we met several boarders, among whom was Sylvia Bowditch, a technician in Encephalograms at UCSF. She took a liking to us and soon, with her friend Rae … became frequent visitors to Mill Valley and eventually built their cabin ‘The Shackeau’ on part of the O’Hanlon property.”

“Mama” Gravander taught spinning and weaving to her boarders and every Friday night offered a smorgasbord, dinner, and folk dancing for just a dollar.

Valborg “Mama” Gravander in an undated photo. She was decorated by the Swedish government in 1964 with the Order of Vasa for her work in promoting Swedish culture in this country.
Red-headed Sylvia (1910-1989), daughter of proper Bostonians, worked for Dr. Robert Aird, who also lived in Mill Valley, on Summit. Embracing the bohemian lifestyle of her new friends, she soon gravitated here—as did Mama Gravander, who in 1945 moved into her weekend cottage on Tamalpais Avenue and “continued to be the rallying point for our original group,” Sam’l wrote later.

Sam’l Newsom was single when he moved to The Barn, but at the suggestion of Dick O’Hanlon (“Why don’t you marry Sylvia?”), Sam’l and Sylvia were married in 1949 in Chocorua, New Hampshire. The O’Hanlons and Mama Gravander drove across the country in Dick’s “woodie” station wagon to attend; Dick was Best Man, Ann cut Sam’l’s hair, and Mama Gravander made the wedding cake.

“We were all practically penniless, having to make every nickel count, that is, if we had a nickel,” Sam’l wrote. “Moreover, most of us were manfully struggling with the infinite intricacies of art. But the great advantage of our situation was that we were as free as we ever would be and had the time for whatever inspiration was urging us on.”

For nine years the Newsoms hosted a Friday Night Art Group in their loft. Among the participants were Pauline Campbell Johnson and Geraldine Frickie, neighbors in Cascade Canyon. Others were Francis, Alice, and Norman Todhunter, and Mary Englehart. During this time, Sylvia took photographs to illustrate her husband’s other books on garden design. Sam’l painted scenes of Mill Valley, including one of the Mill Valley Market which is still displayed on the wall above the fruit bins.

In 1954, Clement and Edith (Posey) Thacher Hurd moved from Vermont to Renz Road, above the canyon, with their young son, Thacher. Clem (1908-1988) was already well-known as the illustrator of books by Margaret Wise Brown (Goodnight Moon, The Runaway Bunny), and Posey (1910-1997) wrote prolifically (one of her later books was The Blue Heron Tree, based on a year’s research at Audubon Canyon Ranch). Clem concentrated on printmaking, and for a time worked in a studio on the O’Hanlon property.

The O’Hanlons had no offspring, but the children of their friends delighted them. Growing up surrounded by artists fostered the children’s own creativity. Thacher Hurd, who became a writer and illustrator of children’s books, recalled the impression the Newsoms’ barn made on him. “It was the first house in Mill Valley that was completely striking to me. There was this big open space with beautiful paintings on the wall, and the big windows looking out to the Japanese garden. The way all the space was done was incredibly harmonious. The kitchen was very simple and straightforward. Even then, I knew it radiated the highest Japanese sensibility, and I think it was what initially got me interested in Zen. Sam’l was like a slightly feisty Zen master—smart, with a lot of opinions.”

In 1950, Sylvia and Sam’l opened their bonsai nursery and gift store, The Greenwood Tree. When the Newsoms received Japanese visitors, the O’Hanlons invited them over, with Sam’l and John Beck, Dick’s and Ann’s next-door neighbor, as translators. A Japanese sensibility abounds in Dick’s sculpture: a love of birds and animals, respect for natural materials, simplicity, and subtle expressiveness. In 1957 the O’Hanlons visited Japan and had the opportunity to study with Hidai, a master calligrapher.

After 20 years at Dominican, Ann resigned, dissatisfied with the way art was taught in academia. “We have put the cart before the horse in teaching people what to see rather than how to see,” she told the Marin Independent Journal in 1966. “Our seeing is too often conditioned by what we think we are supposed to see, and we make no new discoveries on an individual basis.” She taught a “Perception Workshop” for UC Extension, then began giving workshops at home. In 1969 she and Dick created a non-profit organization, Sight and Insight, with the purpose of fostering a new approach to art.

Ann was a visionary, and Sight and Insight attracted many who wished to express their innate creativity freely and joyfully. In 1988 she was the first recipient of the Mill Valley Award for Creative Achievement—the future Milley Award.
Dick’s public sculpture clients included the Lawrence Hall of Science, California Academy of Sciences, and Mill Valley Library. He created landscaping at home with Sam’l’s help and contributions of plants, and populated the garden with sculptures. After retiring from UCB in 1974, he devoted himself to making art and maintaining the property. Ann’s painting took on an interior, contemplative character during this period.

Mill Valley continues to attract artists, and its reputation as an arts-friendly community remains strong, despite the high cost of housing. Artists settle here because they find others to share and encourage their creative vision. The O’Hanlons’ property, renamed O’Hanlon Center for the Arts, continues to be a vibrant center for exploring individual creativity and forming community.

Today, the Newsoms’ daughter Sylvia, nicknamed “Chipps” (“She’s a chip off the old block,” Dick declared upon seeing the red-headed newborn) lives in The Barn with her husband, Alan Barsky. She is a tender caretaker of her parents’ legacy. Much remains the same, such as the bathroom her father painted silver, and the cut-glass kitchen cupboard doors that he salvaged from a demolition; and the Occidental stove her mother cooked on. In the old days, things (and friendships) were made to last.

“This was a time Mill Valley was a magnet for people on the cutting edge,” Chipps said recently as we sat in her kitchen looking out at the Japanese garden. “They were art-driven, without much money, but spiritual, innovative, hardworking, progressive, and very liberal. Anti-war. They were middle class and lots of them were builders and people in the creative trades. They loved to experiment, to invent. Their imagination was so highly stimulated that you couldn’t help having yours stimulated by just being in their presence. They were the rebels. They were all way ahead of their time.”
If you can take your eyes away from the ocean view on your left while coming up Mt. Tamalpais on Panoramic Highway, you’ll see a stone building with the arrowhead-shaped sign “California Alpine Club” hanging by the roadside. This year marks the 100th anniversary of its founding. The building you see is one of two owned by the club—the other being Echo Lodge at Tahoe.

In early 1913, a few individuals began meeting Sunday mornings to hike in Marin. Notices in *The Call*, one of several San Francisco newspapers (later the *Call-Bulletin*), informed hikers of these outings. Soon they had formed a club and began printing a schedule of weekly trips. Most people came from Oakland or San Francisco by ferry to Sausalito, then by train to Mill Valley to begin their hike.

By 1914, their numbers had grown to eighty-four dues-paying members, and in April, they held a meeting in the Polito Hall in San Francisco (rented for $4.50), adopting California Alpine Club as their name. At the June 7th meeting, which took place at a hike lunch stop at Rodeo Lagoon, the club choose the arrowhead symbol that has been used ever since.

The Mt. Tamalpais Railroad, built in 1896, operated from Mill Valley to East Peak until 1930, and was important to hikers. An early Alpine Club member wrote of hiking up to the West Point Inn, then riding the Gravity Car eight miles back down, along the Double Bow Knot, now a hiking trail.

World War I had a major impact on the club. Of 206 members, seventy-four served in the military. Those at home formed the “Sweet Box” committee to send letters and homemade treats to the servicemen. At Christmas, every club member in the service received a gift from the Alpine Club. Today, the committee, renamed the Sunshine Committee, continues to support members in times of hardship.

By the early 1920s, members wanted a permanent home on the mountain they loved. They purchased a stone cottage on Throckmorton Ridge for $1,700. Gradually, the building was expanded, with almost all volunteer help, to include a second floor women’s dorm, a sleeping porch, a professional kitchen, and an additional building for a men’s dorm. In 1954 the large event hall was added and in 1995, the east-facing deck.
In 1952, with a membership of over 460 and at the urging of younger members in search of a ski lodge, Echo Lodge was purchased for $10,000. The land it sits on is leased from the US Forest Service. This historic lodge, with a commanding view of Lake Tahoe, is located one mile off Highway 50 at Echo Summit. It is a favorite retreat for members to ski and hike in the Sierra.

Over the years the lodges have been maintained, enlarged, and preserved by dedicated members. Today, the club offers its 700-plus membership weekly hikes, social events, outings, and other activities. Every Sunday, innkeepers welcome the public with coffee and cookies. Hikes for members begin and end at this historic lodge.

Centennial celebrations are ongoing throughout 2013, including an Open House on June 23rd (see box). Visitors will be welcomed into our historic building, partake of music, historical displays and live presentations, sit on the deck with refreshments, and talk to members about our unique club on the mountain.

Arlin Weinberger has been a member of the California Alpine Club for twelve years and serves as Chair of its Foundation. She grew up in San Francisco and now lives in San Rafael.

Do you know anyone in these photographs? If so, please contact David Grossman, MV History Room.

Alpine Club Open House
Music, refreshments, historical displays, live presentations
Sunday, June 23, 2013, 1 to 4 p.m.
730 Panoramic Highway, Mill Valley
(on the west side, just before the Mountain Home Inn)
Many of us in Mill Valley think of Mount Tamalpais affectionately as “our” mountain, a personal close friend known as Mount Tam, and the hallmark of our town. We enjoy it as a refuge where we can hike, bike, picnic, attend the yearly Mountain Play, and even marry. But to Native Californians who once lived here, it could be a forbidding place, one to avoid, where Chief Marin believed evil spirits lived.

Coast Miwok culture in the late 17th and early 18th centuries attributed calamities and illnesses to these evil spirits or to human poisoners paid to make people sick or kill them. Such poisoning could be counteracted by doctors hired to heal illness through singing, dancing, and sucking out a foreign object from the suffering person, although doctors themselves could be poisoners. Native people also believed in dangerous spirits living all around them: in the wind and air, as well as in the redwoods at the base of Mount Tam where “little folk” known as Sekah lived in the darker areas and could cause you to go “crazy.” Some evil spirits had mountain in their names: mountain snake (with a head as big as a cat), mountain fish, and mountain man, but it is not clear if they originated or were encountered on the mountain.

Native people considered Mount Tamalpais (a Coast Miwok word) and other high places to be significant places of power because, for example, from ridge tops one could have a good view of striking celestial events such as the equinox. In this case the sun can be observed rising between two peaks of Mount Diablo from a site near Pan Toll on Mount Tam, where archaeologists have found evidence of native tool and food preparation.

Another high spot in southern Coast Miwok territory contains a major rock art site. Native people were probably aware that on summer solstice morning when they stood facing the rock art on the most prominent boulder, the sun appears to rise directly over the rock.

Tops of mountains figure in creation stories of some central California tribes, because these few spots were thought to be exposed when the rest of the world was considered flooded. One of these narratives, told to the ethnographer C. Hart Merriam by an elderly Coast Miwok woman, asserted that humans originated from feathers that Oye, Coyote Man, threw from Oo’n-nah pi’s, Mount Sonoma.

Mount Tamalpais is the center of a traditional narrative told to Merriam about the “Rock Giant” known as Loo-poo-oi’yes, who once lived there and spoke through his throat of abalone shell. According to this story, he told two young boys playing nearby that their dead father used to play there. The curious boys approached, and pulled on what turned out to be hairs from his nostril. Angered, the Rock Giant chased and tried to kill them, but instead was killed by the boys, who shot an arrow at his abalone throat, the only spot of his rock body that could be penetrated. The Rock Giant then split into many pieces, revealing his inner core of human flesh.

Different versions of this story were told by two Coast Miwok elders interviewed in the 1930s. In one, ninety-year-old Tom Smith of Bodega said that the Rock Giant lived on Mount St. Helena, and had earlier killed the boys’ father, well before the boys shot at his shell throat. In Maria Copa’s version, a squirrel had hunted Old Man Rock. The Rock in turn chased the squirrel, and today all the rocks “on top of the hills are drops of sweat” from the exertions of the Rock Giant. The story must be of great antiquity, because various versions are found in different languages from tribes north, south, and east of the Coast Miwok.
A more recent story of historical interest involves Chief Marin (a Coast Miwok born in what is now Mill Valley), who believed dangerous spirits lived on the mountain. In 1833, when California was still a part of Mexico, Jacob Leese undertook a survey of San Rafael Mission lands, accompanied by an Indian crew including Marin. The surveyor’s plan was to set a point on the mountain for his survey, but the Indians refused to accompany him up the mountain, because it was “inhabited by evil spirits.” Climbing the mountain alone, Leese placed a limb across a tree, forming what looked like a cross, so that when he returned, he could show the Indians he had made it unscathed. Chief Marin, not to be outdone, then climbed the mountain, ignoring the protestations of his fellows, and, reaching the cross, hung his shirt on it. When he returned shirtless, his fellow Indians thought at first he had been attacked, but were soon assured that he himself had placed his shirt on the limb. He thereby became in their eyes “the bravest of the brave.”

Even today, the Kashaya Pomo caution natives about “bad spirits” on Mount Tam.

It is significant that there is so little archaeological evidence on Mount Tamalpais, indicating that the mountain was rarely frequented. Two adjacent sites at approximately 2000’ elevation contained quartz crystal fragments and a piece of human bone suggesting the use or preparation of doctors’ kits for curing or for sorcery. (Tom Smith’s doctor outfit contained five quartz crystals.)

Native people had an oral history, rich in imagery and unknown to most non-Indians. The surviving stories about the mountain speak to their real fears of the supernatural. From evidence we have today, the Coast Miwok looked on Mount Tam in culturally determined ways, not as a place of recreation but as a place of power, warranting respect and caution.

Betty Goerke is the author of Chief Marin: Leader, Rebel, and Legend and Discovering Native People at Point Reyes. She taught anthropology for thirty-seven years at the College of Marin.

Notes
Where Local History Comes Alive

By David Grossman

If you like to peruse old photographs, maps, and newspapers or explore the history of homes in your neighborhood, you should definitely visit the Lucretia Hanson Little History Room at the library. Since opening in 1977, the History Room has amassed a unique collection of vintage photographs, maps, oral histories, biographies, books, and newspaper articles chronicling nearly every aspect of Mill Valley life through the decades.

The History Room walls are lined with file cabinets filled with old railroad timetables, restaurant menus, programs and scripts from early Mountain Play productions, and countless additional local treasures from bygone days.

History Room docents, student interns, and library staff continually pore through newspapers and other sources to collect every bit of published or unpublished information about local businesses, houses, buildings, events, newsworthy topics, and anyone who has ever lived in Mill Valley. Visitors are always amazed to discover the vast quantity of newspaper articles and other information about their family and friends lurking in the History Room files.

The room is open for public access, and a staff member is always present to assist visitors and protect delicate historic items.

Although the History Room may receive just ten or twenty visitors on a typical day, research questions pour in by phone or email from all corners of the globe. While finding an obituary for a relative or viewing the file on a particular house or building might be quick and easy, it might require considerably more time and resources to find the answers to some questions.

One recent inquirer sought information about a former Mill Valley resident known as “the owl lady,” and another requestor sought a list of Mill Valley houses with a history of “paranormal” activity. Two high school students, creating a film documentary, wanted to know what life was like in Mill Valley during the Great Depression.

When not answering reference questions, History Room staff are busily digitizing the 6,000 vintage photographs, 500 maps, 200 oral histories, the library’s collection of Tam High yearbooks, and many other historic resources. All digitized photographs and other documents will soon be accessible by anyone, anywhere, by visiting www.millvalleylibrary.org and clicking on the History Room link at the top of the home page.

The new Internet search capability will connect all parts of the History Room collection and streamline the research process for everyone. If, for example, a user types “Cascade Canyon” in the online database, the software will display all photographs, maps, newspaper articles, books, and information files about Cascade Canyon, as well as any oral histories which contain a reference to Cascade Canyon.

Currently, a printed photograph may be filed only in one place. For example, a photograph of the Hermann family standing in front of their burned-out house after the 1929 fire may be filed in the “Fires” folder and could easily be missed by someone searching for photos of the Hermann family. With the online database, that photo will display on the screen when someone searches for “1929 Fire” or “Hermann,” no matter where the original photo is located.

Although the History Room is not a museum, the collection includes a number of artifacts, such as old traffic lights and street signs, an antique US Postal Service mailbox and mail cart, and a case of trophies from past Dipsea Race winners. A changing exhibit of History Room photographs is also on display in the gallery outside the History Room.

Every spring, the History Room is often overrun by third graders writing a report of some aspect of Mill Valley history. They ask some of the most interesting and difficult questions. One third grader wanted to know how long it took to build the mountain railroad, while another inquired about the speed of the gravity car. If you, too, want to know the answers to these and other questions, you’ll need to visit the History Room to find them.

Please call ahead for special History Room hours, or to schedule an appointment with a docent or librarian.

David Grossman is Librarian of the Lucretia Little History Room, Mill Valley Public Library.

Become Part of Mill Valley History!

The History Room is always searching for donations of photographs of people, houses, streets, or any other aspect of life in Mill Valley and the immediate surroundings, including Homestead Valley, Almonte, Strawberry, Tam Valley, Mount Tamalpais, and Muir Woods. Copies of property deeds, legal or personal letters, and other documents are also welcome. The History Room also collects current photographs, as these will become part of the historical record for the next generation.

All original photographs will be preserved in the History Room’s fireproof safes, but if you prefer to retain your originals, History Room staff will scan (digitize) them for the History Room’s collection and return your originals, along with a copy of the scanned images.

To donate, contact David Grossman, History Room Librarian, at 415-389-4292 x4738 or dgrossman@cityofmillvalley.org.
Strawberry Point School. Spring 1958. Third Grade Class Photo. Rock Musician Huey Lewis (Hugh Cregg) is on far right end of front row.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward O. Hermann and daughters Evelyn and Marguerite stand at the ruins of their 409 Magee Street home after the 1929 fire.

50 Cent Admission Badge for the Mountain Play Tamelpa.

Menu from the Tamalpais Tavern.

Mount Tamalpais Muir Woods Railroad Poster.

Tamalpais High School Yearbook Cover for 1933. All images on this page courtesy of the Lucretia Little History Room, Mill Valley Public Library.

Strawberry Point School. Spring 1958. Third Grade Class Photo. Rock Musician Huey Lewis (Hugh Cregg) is on far right end of front row.
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