President's Message... This year the Mill Valley Historical Society is celebrating twenty years of operation, preserving and publicizing Mill Valley's history together with the Mill Valley Public Library and its Lucretia Little History Room. Barry Spitz' wonderful book, Mill Valley, The Early Years added immeasurably to the published historical record of our town. But as Barry admits, we have barely scratched the surface and there are many more stories to be researched and written. And so we continue in this Review with the story of the James Allen Thompson family and their Mill Valley home, Treehaven, built in 1891.

Carol Budds, a member of the Historical Society Research Committee and Walk Guidebook editor, was asked to write these articles since she already was well versed in Thompson family lore from writing an account of the family and their home for our 1997 History Walk Guidebook. I believe her articles capture the flavor of this fascinating family and their life in early Mill Valley. Photographs greatly enhance the written historical record and we appreciate the loan of Thompson family photographs for the Historical Review by two members of the Thompson family who live in Mill Valley, Treehaven, built in 1891.

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I never knew the Thompson children, but I have known their names all my life. The only one I remember ever seeing was Joe, the eldest, when he was honored at celebration for Mill Valley's 50th birthday in Old Mill Park in 1940. Joe was 12 in 1890 when his father James Allen Thompson bought lots on Molino Avenue at the M
The Thompson Children, Kathleen Norris and Me

by Carol Budds

I never knew the Thompson children, but I have known their names all my life. The only one I remember ever seeing was Joe, the eldest, when he was honored at the celebration for Mill Valley's 50th birthday in Old Mill Park in 1940. Joe was 12 in 1890 when his father, James Alden Thompson, bought two lots on Molino Avenue at the Mill Valley Auction for $325. Here they built their home, named Treehaven by Josephine Thompson. Observing Joe's interest in electricity and his mechanical ability, James Thompson frequently brought Scientific American home from the Mechanics' Library in San Francisco for his son. Joe worked on the railroad, at first digging post holes, soon teaching other workers to read blueprints for the installation of the electrical lines and shortly becoming foreman. He was the founder and president of the Pacific Electric Manufacturing Company. He also served as a director of the Marin Municipal Water District.

Kathleen, Teresa, and Fred were in the first group of children to attend school in Mill Valley. Fred was later a
Marin County Supervisor. His wife, Helen, was a charming lady whom I well remember from a play she directed at the Outdoor Art Club. The play required two small children; my sister was the girl, I was cast as the little boy. I still have the tiny demitasse cup she gave to each of us afterward.

My first four summers were spent at Bolinas and the next three at Stinson Beach. Many Sundays throughout the year found our family driving in that direction just for the day. From earliest childhood we knew "Fred Thompson’s house" on the road around Bolinas lagoon. We also knew that his son, Dave, was fighting in the Spanish Civil War. In recent years I have known his daughter, Helen "Babs" Thompson Dreyfus, first president of the Mill Valley Historical Society.

Fred was a leader in the 1928 movement to preserve a large grove of redwoods adjoining Old Mill Park. He chaired the committee which raised $4,500 in 20 days, purchased the property, and deeded it to the City of Mill Valley. Thompson Grove, honoring him, was dedicated in October, 1938. Helen and Fred Thompson also gave land on Molino at Lockwood Lane which is now Kathleen Norris Park, a natural setting to remain undeveloped, as it was when the six Thompson children played under the redwoods on that hillside.

Beautiful, talented Teresa married the poet, William Rose Benet, but died in the influenza epidemic in 1918. Kathleen wrote, "Something died out of life for ever in the hearts of us who loved her." Her three children were raised by Kathleen. Josephine Thompson called her two younger children a "second family". Margaret was just three when the family came to Mill Valley; James was born at Treehaven in 1891. My uncle and he were friends; he always called him Jimmy. I remember being charmed by his wife, too, at the Outdoor Art Club lived at Treehaven with the daughters. You could see well from Molino in the 1930s. I still visualize it with pink covering the porches which Molino. James later found his mother's diary in the house as the source for a delight, The Scenes of My Childhood, originally wrote it as a birthday present for his sister, Kathleen, published by Doubleday & Company in 1948. James and his wife, Kathleen, returned to Treehaven in 1941 and moved to Edgewood Avenue above the family home.

Margaret (Markie to the family) married Charles Hartigan in Washington, D.C. When children were small, she, Kathleen, and Teresa, and their respective families, vacationed together. Kathleen was the second eldest daughter of Josephine.
$4,500 in 20 days, purchased property; and deeded it to the Mill Valley. Thompson, honoring him, was dedicated to, 1988. Helen and Fred purchased land on Molino wood Lane which is now known as Norris Park, a natural park to remain undeveloped, as it was then. The Thompson children lived under the redwoods on that dark, dreary day. Waverly, William and Kathleen married, 1911. Waverly was born at Treehaven in 1891. He and Kathleen were friends; he was called Jimmy. Kathleen was the second child and eldest daughter of Josephine Moroney Thompson and James Alden Thompson. She was born in a little frame house at the corner of Jones and Lombard Streets in San Francisco on July 16, 1880. She later wrote, "One such bank clerk (her father), at 35, owned a little seven-room brick house, with iron balconies and a deep garden upon one of San Francisco's seven times seven hills, and could employ two good servants to keep his wife and his five first-born children comfortable therein." She described their schooling as "erratic." She never attended high school, but they were all extremely well educated. James Thompson idolized his family and he loved life. He took the children on long hikes over Mt. Tamalpais, and many times to Stinson Beach and back. They carried a simple lunch with them and he entertained them with stories of his life in Hawaii, China, and Ireland. Abraham Lincoln was his hero, he read the Gettysburg Address and the

Below the foreword to "Mother" written in 1911 by Kathleen Norris well exemplifies her love for her parents. Above: Frederick Thompson.

To J.E.T. and J.A.T.

As years ago we carried to your knees
The tales and treasures of eventful days,
Knowing no deed too humble for your praise,
Nor any gift too trivial to please,
So still we bring, with older smiles and tears,
What gifts we may, to claim the old, dear right;
Your faith, beyond the silence and the night,
Your love still close and watching through the years.
Declaration of Independence to the children and talked to them of the glories of the United States. He recited Shakespeare, taught the children chess, and surrounded them with periodicals and books. When Jimmy and Markie were about four and six, Kathleen began storytelling. After dinner she and the two little ones would sit at the dining room table and she would draw pictures while telling them stories. There were popular characters whom she had created and they continued in the stories for years afterward.

She later wrote of her mother, "I have only to think of her to have it all come rushing back—the goodness, the self-sacrifice, the gentle hand when we were ill, the slender, graceful figure at the piano with the copper-colored masses of hair... Her last message comes back to me, "Take care of my children. Love each other."

The six children in this very close, Irish, Catholic family were left without their parents in 1899. Josephine died on Thanksgiving Eve in November, her husband less than a month later. He was buried beside her in Fernwood Cemetery in Sausalito on Christmas Eve.

Now on their own, the children rented a five room flat in San Francisco. Joe was earning $60/month with an electrical firm. Kathleen went to work in a hardware store for $30/month, and Teresa in a private kindergarten for $5. Fred was able to help with the odd jobs and the two little ones attended school. Kathleen later wrote, "In those years I was a bookkeeper, a saleswoman, a companion, a school teacher and a librarian. I superintended children's parties, read to invalids, sat with practicing little girls, cataloged books, and did half a dozen other things by fits and starts. But I went on telling the children stories, and despite all the other makeshifts it became gradually clear that I was to be a writer." She was able to enroll in a story writing course at the University of California where Professor Chauncey Wetmore Wells singled out her compositions for special consideration, but Aunt Kitty, who lived with the six children, came down with pneumonia and Kathleen went home to care for her. A number of years passed before she got her first writing job as a member of the City Room staff of the San Francisco Call a few months after the Earthquake in 1906. In 1908 Kathleen met Charles Norris, also an aspiring writer, and they fell in love. In those early days of the 20th century New York land of opportunity for writer they decided they would have there. On their wedding day they put together two weeks pay saved up, $50. Kathleen wrote stories at home, submitted short stories to an editor, sold two, and won the prize—a total of $75. But the launching of her career.

She wrote her first novel, "A short story," shortly after her first child was born. Former President Theodore Roosevelt was so moved by it that he climbed three flights of stairs to the No apartment just to shake Kathleen's hand. During the lengthy writer's apprenticeship that followed, Kathleen produced hundreds of magazine articles, short stories, and over 80 novels. Many of Kathleen Norris' books were set in the Bay Area, especially the "Peninsula" common term when I was young, the area south of San Francisco included San Mateo County as well as Santa Clara County. As a puppy, I started reading her novels when I was young, and often serialized in the Woman's Companion. How well I recall the pain of despair when she left me.
In 1908 Kathleen met Charles and they fell in love. In those early days few months after the Earthquake in 1906 much passed before she got her first writing job as a member of the City Room staff of the San Francisco Call a few months after the Earthquake in 1906. In 1908 Kathleen met Charles Norris, also an aspiring writer, and they fell in love. In those early days of the 20th century New York was the land of opportunity for writers so they decided they would have to go there. On their wedding day they had two weeks pay saved up, $50. Kathleen wrote stories at home, submitted short stories to an evening paper, sold two, and won the prize for the week—a total of $75. But it was the launching of her career.

She wrote her first novel, "Mother", shortly after her first child was born. Former President Theodore Roosevelt was so moved by it that he climbed three flights of stairs to the Norris apartment just to shake Kathleen’s hand. During the lengthy writing career that followed, Kathleen produced hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, short stories, and over 80 novels. Many of Kathleen Norris’ books were set in the Bay Area, especially the "Peninsula", the common term when I was young, for the area south of San Francisco which included San Mateo County and part of Santa Clara County. As a preteen I started reading her novels which were often serialized in the Woman's Home Companion. How well I recall the agony when at the height of romance the words appeared, "Continued next month".

Kathleen and Charles Norris returned to California from New York as successful authors. They had a home in Palo Alto and a ranch in Saratoga. In 1931 Kathleen was the highest paid woman in the United States. She produced an average of two novels a year, uncountable articles, and was in great demand as a speaker. She spoke on the subjects of the day from Prohibition to Hitler. In 1940 she urged mothers not to send their sons to war. In 1959 she was selected on the first list of Distinguished Women of the Year by The Examiner.

After Charles died in 1945, Kathleen moved back to San Francisco. She died there on January 18, 1966, at the age of 85. One of my favorite stories was told in an article in the San Francisco Chronicle at that time. Malcolm Reiss, literary critic, recalled riding the #3 Jackson Street bus with Kathleen. "She began telling me the most engaging stories in her clear, vibrant voice and I was suddenly aware that all the other passengers in the bus, which was full, were also listening. I became so engrossed that the next thing I knew I had ridden several blocks past my stop. I excused myself and got off the bus—and so did all the other passengers. They had ridden past their stops, too."

When Kathleen was almost 80, she wrote Family Gathering, a story of a great clan that now includes dozens of Thompsons, Norrises, Bebets and Hartigans. It is a remarkable story by a remarkable San Franciscan about a remarkable San Francisco, and one time Mill Valley, family.
Thompson family, like so many early Mill Valley families, soon to love it and lived there all year around throughout the 1890's. Josephine Thompson named house Treehaven. In 1891 their seventh child was born (a little Francis, had died of pneumonia 1888, at the age of three). Very possibly the first child to be born the new town, he was named after father, James Alden Thompson.

The family had vegetable garden chicken coops, and a horse and cows. The eldest son, Joe, installed a tricycle device to carry the kitchen garbage from the back porch to chicken coop which was about 150 feet below the house. An entry in Mrs. Thompson's diary dated July 18, 1894, tells how Joe and Fred the old horse, Harrack, out to pasture at the Fairfax ranch and returned with the new horse, Dandy.

In 1897 an addition was made

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The Thompsons and Treehaven

In the Spring of 1890 James Alden Thompson and Josephine Moroney Thompson had been married for fourteen years and lived in a seven room brick house on Russian Hill in San Francisco with five children and two servants. The children were Joseph, Kathleen, Teresa, Frederick, and Margaret. On the day of the Mill Valley Auction, May 30, 1890, James bought two acres, a large hillside canyon lot in the redwoods on Molino and Wildomar for $450. A year and a half later in November, 1891, in a statement of his financial condition, James listed the Mill Valley lot as having a value of $1350.

The plans for the house were selected from a catalog, Shoppell's Modern Houses, and may have been purchased for $5. Using redwood from their own land, they had an eight room house constructed for $1400. It was a rustic style shingled house and was built with the balcony above the front porch. As was the custom at that time in Mill Valley, the house was built to the hillside, the hillside was not excavated, so that the rear of the house was a good three stories high.

The house was among the first houses built in Mill Valley after the Auction and was originally planned to be a summer house. However, the
Thompson family, like so many other early Mill Valley families, soon grew to love it and lived there all year around throughout the 1890's. Josephine Thompson named the house Treehaven. In 1891 their seventh child was born (a little boy, Francis, had died of pneumonia in 1888, at the age of three). Very possibly the first child to be born in the new town, he was named after his father, James Alden Thompson.

The family had vegetable gardens, chicken coops, and a horse and cow. The eldest son, Joe, installed a trolley-like device to carry the kitchen garbage from the back porch to the chicken coop which was about thirty feet below the house. An entry in Mrs. Thompson's diary dated June 18, 1894, tells how Joe and Fred took the old horse, Hatrack, out to pasture at the Fairfax ranch and returned with the new horse, Dandy.

In 1897 an addition was made to the house consisting of a room adjoining the living room which they called The Alcove, a bedroom, a bathroom, and a laundry with a laundry chute coming down from the upper floors. Two small dismal rooms were added downstairs which were described as "servants quarters". According to the diary "the children are much amused by my wandering around about the premises with carpenters and the like." Harvey Klyce was the successful bidder quoting $787 for the job. Kathleen (who later became the noted novelist, Kathleen Norris) wrote a verse, As It Is Now, which was found in the diary:

"Is it not lovely," said Mother,  
"Welcoming back the summer?  
No one must stay indoors today."  
Someone announced the plumber.  
"How I enjoy it," said Mother,  
"Isn't the sun shine nice?  
Treehaven in the 1890's. Facing page: Drawing by Bill Larry."

Let us go into the garden."  
Somebody said, "Mr. Klyce."

"Today I am glad," cried Mother,  
"Dear children, that I was made."  
"Mother!" screamed someone from somewhere,  
Shrilly, "Here's Mr. Braid."

Mr. Braid was an Englishman who had come to Mill Valley and opened a grocery store on Throckmorton. He was known by the nickname of Deacon. He wanted the architecture of Mill Valley to resemble the small towns in England.

Another addition was the "little cottage", an old election booth which had been brought home and installed near the house. It was used by everyone for every purpose. The girls slept there occasionally, Josephine Thompson sewed and rested there, it was sometimes used as quarters for houseguests. As the boys grew older they used it as an ideal place to spend the night when returning from a late evening in the city. Treehaven was one of the first houses in Mill Valley to have electricity and a telephone. The telephone number was simply 5. The first Catholic services held in Mill Valley were celebrated at the Thompson home by Father Valentini, an Italian priest who was pastor at Star of the Sea Church in Sausalito.

When Archbishop Riordan of San Francisco came to dedicate the first Catholic church on Summit Avenue in October, 1898, he stayed overnight at Treehaven. James Thompson's sister, Kitty, lived with them much of the time in Mill Valley. She and Josephine Thompson both loved gardening and Aunt Kitty was known for her success with planting. Some of the old-fashioned shrubs are still on the hillside; syringa, bridal wreath, and lilacs. A friend and neighbor, Mr. Grant, walked up Molino from his home for his usual Sunday visit and was given bamboo shoots to take home; the bamboo can easily be seen above the terrace. A gardener named
Martin was hired to rework the flower beds and put in walls and terraces and may have been the builder of the rustic seats which early Mill Valley property owners always had and which Josephine Thompson loved so well.

In the house, Josephine Thompson shared housekeeping with the servants. Her diary frequently includes the menus that were served to guests with notations as to who had made the cake, the soup, etc. According to one menu Roast Mutton (from Bohemian Club) was served. Whether it was served in the style of the Bohemian Club or whether it was left over from a Bohemian Club event was for the reader to decide. James Thompson was President of the Bohemian Club in 1898. Germaine was their French cook in 1894. For twenty dollars a month she cooked three meals a day on a wood and coal stove for six to eight people or more, washed and ironed, cleaned, and slept in a drab little room without gas or electricity on the dark ground floor of the house. She apparently “dismissed herself” by asking for $25 per month.

There are two streams on the upper section of the property which converge and flow down to Ethel Avenue. Surrounding the stream is a redwood grove where ferns and forget-me-nots grow wild under the redwoods and at the right time of the day shafts of sunlight slant down through the boughs of the magnificent trees. A small grill was built at the base of a clump of three trees and there was a round table for summer luncheons and bonfire parties in the winter. However, the winters of 1893 and 1894 were wet ones; the streets of Mill Valley turned into muddy streams, the creeks at Treehaven overflowed their banks, the lilac bank washed away, and Josephine Thompson wrote, “Mud, mud, mud.” James Thompson had been staying in the city because of the uncertainty of the commute in the inclement weather. So, after three days of steady rain, the entire family moved to the Beresford Hotel at Bush and Stockton streets in San Francisco for a few weeks.

The happy Mill Valley life throughout the 1890’s ended for the Thompson family on November 27, 1899, when Josephine died of pneumonia. Less than a month later, a few days before their wedding anniversary, Joseph Thompson died, saying, “She could not keep the day without me.” They were buried in Fernwood Cemetery; there was very little money left after the funeral expenses. Joe was 21, Kathleen was 19, and James was just 8. They decided to rent a flat in the city to save the cost of commuting for the three older children who would work to support the family, make access to school easier for the three younger children, and to make a less lonely location for Aunt Kitty. For the next decade they frequently rented Treehaven for the summer months.

*Posed on a rustic style garden bench, so po life to her; Joseph, Jim, Fred, Teresa, Kath*
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However, at the time of the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906, they were living in Mill Valley. Their chimney fell down, but they had water. For weeks they had to cook in the garden where they built a brick oven. Many San Francisco friends came and stayed for a few weeks.

The youngest son, James, married Margaret Carrigan in 1912 and they moved to Treehaven where they lived with their three daughters, Josephine, Jane, and Peggy, until 1941 when they sold the house to Wendell and Alice Ames. It was sold to Theodore and Elizabeth Thiebs in 1959 and sold to the present owners in 1990. Although some remodeling had been done throughout the years, the major changes have been made by the current owners. The address had been 123 Molino; with the convenience of the garage within the same building as the house and the extended driveway, the address has been changed to 40 Wildomar.

From an accounting in Scenes of My Childhood, the only source where we find $450 for the price of the lot. Perhaps the $325 which has been printed in other historical pages is from Kathleen Norris, My Own Story.

trees and there was a round table for summer luncheons and bonfire parties in the winter. However, the winters of 1893 and 1894 were wet ones; the streets of Mill Valley turned into muddy streams, the creeks at Treehaven overflowed their banks, the lilac bank washed away, and Josephine Thompson wrote, "Mud, mud, mud." James Thompson had been staying in the city because of the uncertainty of the commute in the inclement weather. So, after three days of steady rain, the entire family moved to the Beresford Hotel at Bush and Stockton streets in San Francisco for a few weeks.

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