President's Message

The Mill Valley Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the assistance and encouragement of Jean and Jack Barnard, and Jean and Larry Symmes in our research of the extensive and historic Ralston White home and estate on the farther slopes of Blithedale Canyon. Jean Barnard is a niece of Ruth and Ellyn Gardner. Ralston White and Larry Symmes is a nephew. They lived in the Ralston White home at various times and have been generous in sharing memories, information and photographs of the family and the Garden of Allah.

The United Church of Christ now owns the estate in trust and United Camps, Conference and Retreats operates it as the Ralston White Retreat for nonprofit group meetings. They have graciously given us access to do our research and for our tour and we give them our heartfelt thanks. We also thank the Mill Valley Public Library for giving us permission to quote from their oral histories and to publish photographs from their History Room files.

Ron Olson, President
In the Garden of Allah, which has now passed into other hands, a little boy may often be seen playing. He is happy, as children are, and sometimes, he is naughty and... tears off the petals of the geraniums and scatters them to the breezes that whisper among the trees. And his small face becomes earnest and dreamy, as if it looked on far off things...
Ralston White, the consummate romantic, could very well have been able to recite these lines from the final chapters of his most cherished novel, *The Garden of Allah*. After all, he had already committed to memory all 110 stanzas of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. His bride-to-be, Ruth Boericke, was too long to remember his constant recitations from that poem throughout their courtship and would reminisce on them often during her lifetime. Ralston’s own copy of *The Garden of Allah*, is preserved in the History Room at the Mill Valley Public Library with Ruth’s handwritten notation of the emotions that swept over her as she re-read it decades later.

Ralston Lovell White was born in 1877 to Lovell and Laura Lyon White. At the time they were living in an elegant residence on Sacramento Street in San Francisco. Lovell White worked at the San Francisco Savings Union where he became president until his death in 1910. He had previously worked for William Chapman Ralston, well known as the “Silver King” from his good fortune in earlier mining activities around Virginia City. Coming to San Francisco, William Ralston built the Palace Hotel and founded the Bank of California. Lovell White worked for him at that bank and their friendship grew. Lovell and Laura named their son Ralston Lovell White in his honor. Twelve years later Lovell White was one of five associates to form the Tamalpais Land & Water Company. Their purpose; to subdivide and develop Samuel Throckmorton’s 13,000 acre ranch on which the San Francisco Savings Union had foreclosed following Throckmorton’s death. On May 31, 1890, the lots in “Easland” and “Millwood” were put up for auction. This area was to become the westerly portion of our present town of Mill Valley.

Ralston attended schools in San Francisco and later the University of California, Berkeley. He had matured to be a great lover of nature but as a respectful son, did his best to oblige his father by working at the bank. In spite of his disinterest, he was so efficient and ahead of his co-workers that he was able to memorize the *Rubaiyat* in his spare time afforded each day upon completion of his duties. Unhappy in banking and with $1,800 in savings from his travels, he took off to see the world. He travelled for 18 months until his funds gave out and returned steerage from Japan.

*Ralston and Ruth White in front of the Tamalpais Land & Water Company, 1911. (Presently Citicorp Bank.)*

The long absence of his only son had softened Lovell’s heart. Upon Ralston’s return he said to his son right. You can start at the bottom Tamalpais Land & Water Company Mill Valley, and that will be your.

Ralston started as a surveyor, was then on the slopes of Mt. Tam he discovered the spot where he soon build his magnificent home. He was reading Hitchens’ book *The Garden of Allah*. It’s a very romantic tale, loved it. He always said: “When I found this magnificent site I just took a deep and said to myself, this is my Garden of Allah. He fell in love with the natural beauty of the spot, and that’s how its name.”

Ruth Boericke and her twin sisters Dorothy were born at home (181 Washington Street) in San Francisco May 13, 1888. They were baptized Swedenborgians as were their five brothers. Their father Dr. William Boericke, a homeopathic physician a close friend of Mr. Joseph Worcester, the minister of the Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco. It was Mr. Worcester who invited Dr. Boericke to come over to Mill Valley to see a
Savings Union had foreclosed following Throckmorton's death. On May 31, 1890, the lots in "Eastland" and "Millwood" were put up for auction. This area was to become the westerly portion of our present town of Mill Valley.

Ralston attended schools in San Francisco and later the University of California, Berkeley. He had matured to be a great lover of nature but as a respectful son, did his best to oblige his father by working at the bank. In spite of his disinterest, he was so efficient and ahead of his co-workers that he was able to memorize the Rubaiyat in his spare time afforded each day upon completion of his duties. Unhappy in banking and with $1,800 in savings from his travels, he took off to see the world. He travelled for 18 months until his funds gave out and returned steerage from Japan.

Ruth White, c. 1910.

Wonderful place to build a home for his family. They first made the trip in 1904 or '05 when the girls were about 16. Ruth and Dorothy continued their education at the Westham School for Girls near Boston, Briarcliff Manor on the Hudson and in Dresden, Germany. They made their debut in 1909, returning to Mill Valley, Ruth attended the "summer hops" at Dr. Cushing's Blithedale Hotel. There she met Ralston White. "We always drove back and forth with a horse and buggy, and the horses had to stand tied to a tree while we went in and danced."

In 1910 Ruth and Ralston were married. Earlier that year Lovell White died and Ralston succeeded him as president of The Tamalpais Land & Water Company. Their honeymoon included a 400 mile horseback ride from Paso Robles to San Francisco over the old Monterey Trail. Ruth's sister and her brother Garth went along. They all slept on the ground and did their own cooking with the provisions they carried. Of course they added fresh fish to their menu as they fished daily from their many campsites along their route.

After the honeymoon the newlyweds took up residence in a hotel, as was the common practice of the day, while they began to plan their splendid home. They hired the prominent architect Willis Polk who had designed the Boericke home in San Francisco and who was largely responsible for much of the re-design of the City after the disastrous earthquake and fire in 1906.

Construction began between 1912 and 1913. Building materials for the house were delivered to the building site by the
Mt. Tamalpais & Muir Woods Railway. A spur track, called "White Siding," was constructed so the rail car containing the building materials could be left on the siding to be unloaded at leisure. A slide was constructed from the spur to a terrace just above the homesite. From this terrace, which was later to become the barn area, the materials were hauled to a level knoll on which the seventy foot square foundation was begun. More than two years later the home was completed. It coincided with the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915.

This was a great season of entertaining for the Whites in their new home. Friends from all over the world attended the Exposition and enjoyed the hospitality of the Whites. The country was prosperous at the time and the family had a groundskeeper with an assistant, a cook and a second maid. They all lived on the property. Ruth said, "We did a lot of entertaining and had friends in and just held open house."

"It was very bare when the house was finished. But we had a perfectly fabulous Finnish gardener, Alfonso Haapa. He took care of it for 45 years. Mr. White and the gardener talked everything over and planted everything. Rabbon didn't do much of the actual work, but he did the landscaping and gave direction."

Alfonso was also responsible for maintaining the stream-fed swimming pool. Sixteen feet at its deepest, it held 350,000 gallons of water and was rarely warmer than 60 degrees. Ruth loved the cold water and swam in the pool for fifty years. Clinton L. Thoney, Fire Chief at the time of the devastating fire of 1929, recalled (to the Mill Valley Historical Society in an oral history conducted in 1970) pumping all the water from the pool in efforts to check the fire. It burned for three days from July 2, at 2:00 p.m., until July 4. Because of its concrete and steel construction, the house was spared by the fire which destroyed 117 homes and burned an estimated 2,500 acres.

Ruth was in San Rafael when the fire broke out but her sister Dorothy was at the house with her three children. Jean Symmes (Barnard) was ten years old that summer but she recalled the day very well. "My mother went to the telephone, ironed her souvenir dress for the Exposition and got the children packed up and we rode to the coast road and my sister and I hid under the car cover."

and I can still hear her calling up the volunteer fire department... She told the operator, 'There's a fire up here!' The operator seemed a little slow on the uptake, and my mother said, 'There's a fire, there's a fire! Get some people up here.' Pretty soon the volunteers started arriving. Each volunteer had a touring car; the number of cars was really remarkable. They were big in those days—great big touring cars, big wheels, long chassis. The front of the heart-shaped lawn at the Garden of Allah had so many cars you could hardly move, each car with just one individual in it.'

That winter Jean remained with her Aunt Ruth in Mill Valley. That's when she remembers learning to ride horseback. "In order to make me a rider,..."
my aunt rented a horse for a couple of months, and the two of us rode everywhere so I could get completely used to it. I rode an old gelding of her named Billy. He was about 12 years old when I started riding him, and he has been very sedentary. During the 1925 fire he did what no horse is supposed to be smart enough to do; he stood in an open spot and just shook the sparks off his back. Most horses gallop into a fire. He was rewarded by still being alive in the fall, so Aunt Ruth and I rode everywhere. It had a remarkable effect on Billy; he had a second childhood, shed his fat, he became lively again, and had a wonderful year riding.

Ruth and Ralston lived happily at 1 Garden of Allah for almost twenty years before they lost a good deal of their personal fortune in the great Depression of 1929. Unable to afford their haven they leased it, furnished, for $250 a month to Carl and Nan Priest, a couple they trusted. They decided to travel in Europe where the American dollar had much greater value. Alfons stayed on and received half of that rent.

They located in Munich and from there travelled extensively throughout Europe by bicycle, third class train and on foot covering over 15,000 miles. In an interview for the Marin Independent Journal on May 30, 1959 Ruth was quoted. "Though money was scarce, it was one of the happiest times of my life. We lived the life of students, seeing opera two or three times a week and bicycling 5,000 miles in the seven years we lived abroad. At one time we stayed in a Bavarian castle for one dollar a day. We lived during this period in Berlin, Leipzig, Paris, Rome, Vienna and even rode our bicycles into London in 1937 to see the coronation of George VI before we went on through Ireland and Scotland."

In 1936, while they were living in Munich they received a letter from Kathryn Symonds asking for memories of early Mill Valley. Ralston's thoughtful reply follows this article.

They returned from Europe in May 1939. During the War, Ralston worked unceasingly both at his own business and for the War Rationing and Tire Board. Alfons went to work in the shipyards. Ralston took on the necessary garden work often rising at 5 a.m. to begin the day. So much work took its toll. In March 1943 he was stricken with a minor he...
my aunt rented a horse for a couple of months, and the two of us rode everywhere so I could get completely used to it. I rode an old gelding of hers named Billy. He was about 12 years old when I started riding him, and he had been very sedentary. During the 1929 fire he did what no horse is supposed to be smart enough to do—he stood in an open spot and just shook the sparks off his back. Most horses gallop into a fire. He was rewarded by still being alive in the fall, so Aunt Ruth and I rode everywhere. It had a remarkable effect on Billy; he had a second childhood. He shed his fat, he became lively again, and I had a wonderful year riding."

Ruth and Ralston lived happily at The Garden of Allah for almost twenty years before they lost a good deal of their personal fortune in the great Depression of 1929. Unable to afford their haven, they leased it, furnished, for $250 a month to Carl and Nan Priest, a couple they trusted. They decided to travel in Europe where the American dollar had a much greater value. Alfons stayed on and received half of that rent. They located in Munich and from there travelled extensively throughout Europe by bicycle, third class train and set foot, covering over 15,000 miles. In an interview for the Marin Independent Journal on May 30, 1959 Ruth was quoted. "Though money was scarce, this was one of the happiest times of my life. We lived the life of students, seeing opera two or three times a week and bicycling 5,000 miles in the seven years we lived abroad. At one time we stayed in a Bavarian castle for one dollar a day. We lived during this period in Berlin, Leipzig, Paris, Rome, Vienna and even rode our bicycles into London in 1937 to see the coronation of George VI before we went on through Ireland and Scotland."

In 1936, while they were living in Munich they received a letter from Kathryn Symonds asking for memories of early Mill Valley. Ralston's thoughtful reply follows this article.

They returned from Europe in May, 1939. During the War, Ralston worked untringly both at his own business and for the War Rationing and Tire Board. Alfons went to work in the shipyards and Ralston took on the necessary gardening, often rising at 5 a.m. to begin the day. So much work took its toll. In March of 1943 he was stricken with a minor heart attack. The following September he suffered a coronary thrombosis and died a few days later at Ross Hospital.

Ruth was most proud of Ralston's fortitude to repay to the penny all the great losses they had suffered during the Depression. The last debt was paid off three days before he died. Mrs. White did her best to carry on, with members of her family living with her until early 1951, when she gave the Garden of Allah in trust to the California Academy of Sciences of San Francisco as a memorial to her husband. The Academy held it for six years, during which time many dedicated students of nature explored the surrounding 43 acres of relatively virgin country which is included in the estate.

Due to charter restrictions of funds spent outside of San Francisco, the Academy of Sciences could no longer maintain the Garden of Allah properly, at which time Mrs. White offered it to the Northern California Conference of Congregational Churches. This organization, now known as the United Church of Christ, presently holds in trust the Garden of Allah, now called the Ralston L. White Memorial Retreat.

"She strove to draw calm once more from this infinite calm of silently-growing things aspiring towards the sun."

Ruth White in her living room at the Steinway parlor grand. A six foot piano, between a grand and a baby grand, it is no longer made. Photos on the following two pages are taken from an original scrapbook made by Ruth. From the permanent collection of the History Room of the Mill Valley Public Library.
Ralph White’s Letter from Munich

January 24, 1936
Mrs. Carl Symonds
Mill Valley, California

Dear Katheryn,

Ruth read me your very interesting letter, and we were glad to hear such good tidings from home. I note that you are collecting historical facts about early Mill Valley, and I will be glad to contribute whatever impressions I can glean from my recollections of those times. Unfortunately I have no pictures available and no written records that might add luster to the “light of other days.” I have been keeping track of this movement as occasionally commented on in the Mill Valley Record. I am afraid that anything regarding early Mill Valley that I may be able to supply has perhaps already been furnished you by some of my fellow old-timers, Jack Burt, the Thompson family, etc. But I will do my best to ransack my memory’s storehouse and give you a brief outline of my own impressions and scattered facts about those bygone days. So here goes.

In the 1880’s, an Englishman named Throckmorton owned the 14,000 acres lying between the summit of Mt. Tamalpais on the north, Marin County and Tennessee Valley on the south, Corte Madera Creek and Richardson Bay on the east, and the Pacific Ocean on the west. These lands were for the most part rented to ranchers. A certain Mr. Severance was the superintendent of all this large property and had his headquarters in what is now Homestead Valley. Here he was murdered one day by his Chinese cook just after he had collected the rents. After this, Jacob Gardner became the superintendent. Mr. Throckmorton had borrowed $100,000 on this property from the San Francisco Savings Union Bank. Among the officers and directors of this bank were Albert Miller, Thomas Magee, Joseph G. Eastland, and Lovell White, for whom some of the streets were named, as you know. These men became interested in the subdivision possibilities of the ranch, and a settlement was reached whereby the loan was paid off. Throckmorton gave an equity in cash and the title to most of the tidelands along the bayshore frontage of the ranch. The company thus acquiring the property was named the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. This company then put surveyors and engineers in the field, the first of whom was named Short, who in turn was succeeded by the late M. T. O’Shaughnessy, whom I have often heard my father refer to as “that brilliant young Irishman,” and whose future career fully justified that appellation.

The ranch was then cut up for sale into smaller ranches of from 300 to 600 acres each, a town site was laid out where Mill Valley now is, and an accompanying map filed for record, known as Tamalpais Land and Water Company map Number Two, later resurveyed as Map Five. The North Shore Railroad built a spur to this town site, and by 1890 everything was ready for the great auction sale that should give birth to our future metropolis, then christened and now known as Mill Valley.

The first train was run into Mill Valley by Conductor Jack Brady, a famous character of those early days, who was universally liked and highly esteemed by the travelling public, and who was a pal of all the Mill Valley kids of the Gay Nineties. I believe the engineer of the first train was the late Charles Stocker, also a well-known personality of that epoch, and later, the auction sale was duly held in May, 1890, under the persuasive salesmanship of Pittress Ferguson, a celebrated auctioneer of that day. A great crowd of people attended the auction, and considerable property was disposed of. Most purchases were made along Corte Madera and Old Mill Creeks, as it was considered that Mill Valley would never be anything but a summer outing place, and the lots along the streams were shady and cool in summer and afforded swimming and fishing. It was not until about five years later that the people began to realize that Mill Valley was destined to become an all-year-round residence community.

In its Map Five subdivision, the Tamalpais Land and Water Company had reserved to the public the famous tracts of land designated as “Cascade Reservation” and “Old Mill Park.” These parks were later donated to the town when it was incorporated as the “Arches” in 1901. The Summit School was built at an early date at its present site on the lot also contributed by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. The lot on which the Old Mill School now stands was originally subdivided, but reserved by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company; until, after some few houses had been built thereon, it was finally purchased for school purposes in 1917 through the efforts and leadership of public-spirited citizens. Prior to the establishment of the Old Mill School, the lot was largely used as a baseball field by the Babe Ruths of that day.

Going back to the next few years right after the auction of May, 1890, the late Louis L. James was then resident Manager of Tamalpais Land and Water Company affairs. Jacob Gardner continued as Ranch Superintendent and Road Builder, and one E. Steele was the Real Estate Agent. The latter was a high-pressure salesman of the most modern type; and when all the property had been sold, he began to talk the people into buying lots on the hillside, where they would find sunshine and cool breezes. His eloquence was effective, and he literally talked the people “out of the woods.” On the Cascade side, houses sprang up along Throckmorton Avenue and Cascade Drive; and in Corte Madera Canyon the stream was lined with the summer dwellings of the pioneer families of Throckmorton, Simon, Billings, Bridge, Harrold, Marcus, Hayes, Costigan, etc. Lovell White built the first hillside home on Magee Avenue in 1891, which was named “The Arches.”

In 1896, Mr. D. H. Bibb, on a trip of exploration, found a building site to his liking in the wilds of upper Corte

Modern Campus; and for his work in settling in this district the Company constructed Upland Drive and Madera Avenue to his proposals. He also acceded him certain water rights and other concessions as part of the purchase. Up to 1905 no one thought so far up the mountainside a Summit Avenue, but about the great San Francisco fire there was a rush to buy the remaining lots at this commanding site, and at a premium. By Miss Alice Eastwood, and the Ursuline Nuns, and the Hamilton Harker family, the district soon became an island of sunny homes and well-kept estates.

I need not go into further details.

Yours sincerely,

Throckmorton
In its Map Five subdivision, the Tamalpais Land and Water Company had reserved to the public two tracts of land designated as “Cascade Reservation” and “Old Mill Park.” These parks were later donated to the town when it was incorporated about 1901. The Summit School was built at an early date at its present site on the lot also contributed by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. The lot on which the Old Mill School now stands was originally subdivided, but reserved by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company; until, after some few houses had been built thereon, it was finally purchased for school purposes in 1917.

The Summit School was built at an early date at its present site on the lot also contributed by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. The lot on which the Old Mill School now stands was originally subdivided, but reserved by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company; until, after some few houses had been built thereon, it was finally purchased for school purposes in 1917.

Going back to the next few years right after the auction of May, 1890, the late Louis L. Janes was then made Resident Manager of Tamalpais Land and Water Company affairs, Jacob Gardner continued as Ranch Superintendent and land Builder, and one E. Steele was the Real Estate Agent. The latter was a high-pressure salesman of the most modern type; and when all the canyon property had been sold, he began to talk the people into buying lots on the hillside, where they would find sunshine and cool breezes. His eloquence was effective, and he literally talked the people “out of the woods.” On the Cascade side, houses sprang up along Handsworth Avenue and Cascaide Drive; and in Corte Madera Canyon the tram was lined with the summer dwellings of the pioneer families: Illings, Bridge, Haverford, Marcus, Hayes, Rosecrans, etc. Lovell White built the first Ilisse home on Magee Avenue in 1891, which was named “The Archies.”

In 1896, Mr. J. H. Bibb, on a trip of exploration, found a building site to his liking in the wilds of upper Corte Madera Canyon; and for his pioneer work in settling in this distant locality, the Company constructed Upper Corte Madera Avenue to his property and accorded him certain water rights and other concessions as part of his purchase. Up to 1905 no one thought of settling so far up the mountainside as Upper Summit Avenue; but about the time of the great San Francisco fire in April, 1906, there was a rush to buy the choice building sites at this commanding altitude. Led by Miss Alice Eastwood, and the Rosenquists, and the Hamiltons, and Harkers, the district soon became a cluster of sunny homes and well-kept gardens. I need not go into further details regarding the old pioneer families of the Nineties, as many of them or their descendants still own their old family homes, and are well known to the chroniclers of Mill Valley history.

I may add, however, the following few personal impressions that I retain of those early days:

1. Jacob Gardner’s house at Locust Avenue looks exactly at it did over forty years ago, it being about the first house in Mill Valley.
2. Homestead Valley, with only a ranch house at the lower end, was a wilderness where we used to go quail-shooting and deer-hunting.
3. The site of our new City Hall was originally occupied by “the cook house,” a whitewashed building where, under the spreading oaks, the early surveyors and road builders ate their meals and pitched their tents.
4. The canvas-back ducks used to light on the ponds where the Tamalpais High School baseball field now is.
5. What is now “Tamalpais Park” was a dense forest of alders, willows, maples, bay trees and a wild blackberry. We used to go blackberrying down there on a summer day, while thousands of songbirds filled the air with their music. The station was originally called “The Willows,” and later “Millwood.”
6. At that time, before the water was taken out in large volume for domestic use, the creeks had a very large flow in them; and there were lots of places where the kids could go swimming, and the fishing was good at all times.
7. In Cascade Canyon, “The Cascades” and the “Three Wells” with their large volumes of water, were real showplaces of the Nineties. On the Corte Madera side, there was the big dam—about where Lee Street is now—in size about 60 by 80 feet and about 6 feet deep, and a fine swimming place for the early inhabitants. Also the little dam, about where King Street is, which was shallower but served as a swimming pool for the Bithedale children.
8. The center of social activity was the Bithedale Hotel where dances where held every Saturday evening. On the Cascade side was the Monte Vista Hotel, later the Kenilworth Inn, also a center for social gatherings. I could perhaps conjure up many other reminiscences, could I talk to you personally; but I rather imagine that with the wealth of information that you have available from other old-timers, anything further I might offer just now would be redundant.

I will say, though, that I can be of any service in affording information on any specific point, I will be glad to do what I can. And especially after our return home, I may be able to find old records among the Tamalpais Land and Water Company effects that will throw further light on the dim and distant past.

With all kind regards from us both to yourself and Carl, and wishing you both a very happy and prosperous New year,

Sincerely,

[signed] Ralston L. White
Willis Polk and the Garden of Allah

by Jonathan Jacobs

The son of an itinerant, midwestern carpenter and occasionally self-proclaimed architect, Willis Jefferson Polk, was born in 1867 in Kentucky or Illinois. His father, Willis Webb Polk, was an advocate of temperance and hard work. The family settled in St. Louis in 1873, when Willis was six, and is reported to have established a prosperous practice in both design and construction services there. Polk was sent to work for a local contractor at the age of eight. Within five years he had become an office boy in the architectural firm of Jerome B. Legg, and soon after began to assist his father.

The family, ever itinerant, next moved to Kansas City, Missouri in 1885. The 18 year old Polk's ambitious rendering of a house for David McMechan shows a typical Victorian house plan of the period with an overabundance of ornamental details attached, probably influenced by (or borrowed from) journals or plan books of the period, and signed Willis J. Polk of W. W. Polk & Son, Architects. In 1887 his skills had developed enough for him to land a job with Van Brunt and Howe, eminent Boston architects who were just in the process of relocating to Kansas City. Van Brunt was an advocate of Academic Classicism and an excellent tutor who took an active interest in the education of young draftsmen. His lessons were sown on fertile soil and Polk began a career of distinction as a "classiﬁst."

Polk, always a quick learner, left Van Brunt's ofﬁce after only six months. He crossed the country three and a half times in the next two years and worked for at least five architects in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and San Francisco, among other places. He stopped in New York where he attended special architectural classes for draftsmen taught at Columbia College by William Robert Ware, a leading exponent of the rising Academic Movement and former partner of Van Brunt. Typical of Polk, he didn't finish the curriculum, but he later recounted it was one of the most valuable experiences of his youth.

Mckim, Mead & White, in New York, was probably the most inﬂuential (and successful) ofﬁce in the country at this time. Polk went to work for A. Page Brown who had trained in that ofﬁce. Both ofﬁces were at 57 Broadway, a building that was a hothouse of architectural creativity. Many of the young architects, painters and sculptors who worked and assembled there later left important marks on the arts in America. Polk maintained these contacts and they proved most useful.

Polk continued to learn rapidly, and his talent was recognized. When Brown moved his ofﬁce to San Francisco in 1889, he asked Polk to come with him. Brown's good connections (he began doing commissions for the Crocker family), and espousal of the fashionable McKim, Mead & White style made him an instant success with San Francisco society. Brown, astute businessman that he was, let his staff "execute his conceptions." Polk, now 22 years old, mastered McKim Mead & White's architectural vocabulary and produced Brown's best designs. That is, until he left the following year to open his own ofﬁce in partnership with Fritz Gamble, who had no professional training but whose social contacts were invaluable.

Polk was ebullient, gregarious and had a volatile personality. He had inherited his father's penchant for itinerancy, but not for temperance. He became well known as a bon vivant, raconteur, reckless gambler, bohemian and dandy. He needed to be the center of attention. He gleefully hurled insults at colleagues, public ofﬁcials, and anyone who disagreed with him. A colleague later recalled that Polk was "a genius, only spoiled by having read Whistler's Gentle Art of Making Enemies," after which he "became a genius at this as well." Like Whistler, he was very small of stature and was adored by some and despised by others.

Running counter to this was Polk's connection with a growing group of people who venerated the natural environment and rustic ideals. This discriminating group of Bay Area residents sought pleasure in the isolation and beauty of the Coastal Range, the Russian River and, a little later, the Sierras. Outstanding among this group was Joseph Worcester, a Swedenborgian minister with a strong interest in both architecture and the environment. In the 1890's he became what we would now probably call a guru to the young artists and intellectuals in the region.

In 1887 Worcester persuaded a member of his congregation to invest in land—a steep, unspoiled, picturesque promontory atop Russian Hill and to build three small speculative houses designed to enhance the rustic setting rather than dominate it. He then built a house himself on a portion of the land using unpainted redwood for both exterior shingles and interior paneling, a practice most unusual at that time when wood was almost always painted or varnished. He commissioned A. Page Brown to design his new Church of the New Jerusalem, familiarly known as the Swedenborgian Church, in San Francisco in 1889 and Bernard Maybeck, in Brown's...
d. His office to San Francisco, he asked Polk to come with him. "It's good connections (he began), but he continued to learn rapidly, and lent was recognized. When Brown did his office to San Francisco, he asked Polk to come with him, his good connections (he began) commissions for the Crocker

family), and espousal of the fashionable McKim, Mead & White style made him an instant success with San Francisco's society. Brown, astute businessman that he was, let his staff "execute his conceptions." Polk, now 22 years old, mastered McKim Mead & White's architectural vocabulary and produced Brown's best designs. That is, until he left the following year to open his own office in partnership with Fritz Gamble, who had no professional training but whose social contacts were invaluable.

Polk was ebullient, gregarious and had a volatile personality. He had inherited his father's penchant for itinerancy, but not for temperance and became well known as a bon vivant, raconteur, reckless gambler, bohemian and dandy. He needed to be the center of attention. He geuinely hurled insults at colleagues, public officials, and anyone who disagreed with him. A colleague later recalled that Polk was "a genius, only spoiled by having read Whitstler's Gentle Art of Making Enemies," after which he "became a genius at this as well." Like Whitstler, he was very small of stature and was adored by some and despised by others.

Running counter to this was Polk's connection with a growing group of people who venerated the natural environment and rustic ideals. This discriminating group of Bay Area residents sought pleasure in the isolation and beauty of the Coastal Range, the Russian River and, a little later, the Sierras. Outstanding among this group was Joseph Worcester, a Swedenborgian minister with a strong interest in both architecture and the environment. In the 1890's he became what we would now probably call a guru to the young artists and intellectuals in the region.

In 1897 Worcester persuaded a member of his congregation to invest in land—a steep, unspoiled, picturesque promontory atop Russian Hill and to build three small speculative houses designed to enhance the rustic setting rather than dominate it. He then built a house himself on a portion of the land using unpainted redwood for both exterior shingles and interior paneling, a practice most unusual at that time when wood was almost always painted or varnished. He commissioned A. Page Brown to design his new Church of the New Jerusalem, familiarly known as the Swedenborgian Church, in San Francisco in 1894 and Bernard Maybeck, in Brown's

On horseback, Ruth White visits the home site. The heart-shaped lawn is indicated by stakes, c. 1912.

Remodel their house at 1812 Washington Street in San Francisco. In 1895 Polk designed a new house for Dr. Boericke near Garden Valley, El Dorado County, but it isn't known whether it was ever built. At the suggestion of Worcester, the family moved to Tamalpais Avenue in Mill Valley in 1905. Perhaps it was only a summer residence because at the time of the 1906 earthquake Dr. Boericke was in Naples with two of his daughters. Their house in San Francisco was west of Van Ness Avenue and escaped the fire, but they worried for three days before

The steel-framing takes shape, 1914. The pile of lumber in the foreground was probably for the roof framing, later to be covered with Spanish mission tiles.
Hichens' popular 1904 novel, *The Garden of Allah*, and has been many times reported to have exclaimed on his visit, "This is my garden of Allah!"

Ralston White succeeded to the presidency of the Tamalpais Land and Water Company in 1910 when his father, Lovell White, died. He married Ruth Boericke that same year and they began planning their house. Willis Polk was selected as their architect. The house was designed in 1911, but took four more years to build.

The driveway in front of the house wraps around a heart-shaped lawn that contained two golden Irish yew trees transplanted from the neighboring property that had been purchased for the much needed water rights.

The house, totalling some 14,000 square feet, was to have been two stories, but White wanted an attic story to keep the house cool on hot days. The main house had 16 rooms originally (some

Entrance facade. In this 1948 photo the entrance facade is the one facing the heart-shaped lawn.
Hichens' popular 1904 novel, The Garden of Allah, and has been many times reported to have exclaimed on the spot, "This is my garden of Allah!"

Ralston White succeeded to the presidency of the Tamalpais Land and Water Company in 1910 when his father, Lovell White, died. He married Ruth Boerick the same year and they began planning their house. Willis Polk was selected as their architect. The house was designed in 1911, but took four more years to build.

The driveway in front of the house wraps around a heart-shaped lawn that contained two golden Irish yew trees transplanted from the neighboring Bibb property that had been purchased for the much needed water rights.

The house, totalling some 14,000 square feet, was to have been two stories but White wanted an attic story to keep the house cool on hot days. The main house had 16 rooms originally (some spaces have been subdivided for various purposes over the ensuing years) and a number of balconies with wonderful views, although now somewhat surrounded by tall trees. It is steel-framed, a structural system of which Polk made frequent and expert use. The exterior walls are unadorned and looked strangely modern, but they were intended to be covered by vines and, in fact, in one old picture, dated 1948, not much more than the openings and the tile roof can be seen. The roof framing, however, is of wood and it was originally covered with clay tiles in the California Mission style.

The grand entrance hall, a typical Polk feature, had an open stair-well that was surmounted by a huge skylight. What was originally the attic floor is now used as a dormitory and a fire-stop had to be placed over the stair-well at the second floor level. What now appears to be a skylight is really a cleverly designed lighting fixture. The real skylight can still be seen from the third floor where it lights the present dormitory. The ballusters supporting the handrail had to be specially carved to follow the slope of the stair along both their top and bottom edges, a rather curious feature. According to some accounts, they were ordered by Polk without the knowledge of White who might have objected to the extra expense. Fluted classical columns, said to be of cedar, appear at the second floor level.

The entrance hall is flanked by a dining room on one side and a living room on the other, not unlike a typical McKim, Mead & White villa plan from the 1880's. There was a back hall and a billiard or game room (utilized as a "vegetable room," behind the living room. The kitchen and pantry were on the east side of the back hall, and there were two rooms behind the pantry where the Chinese servants and their family

Entrance facade. In this 1948 photo the heart-shaped lawn is prominent, but the vines seem to have taken over the house.
lived. The upstairs originally had five bedrooms and three or four baths. The present occupants have rearranged the spaces somewhat to suit their own needs.

The house, some four years under construction, cost $70,000, and was finished just in time to entertain guests who came to the Bay Area for the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915 of which Willis Polk was, coincidentally, the supervising architect.

Polk's later career included many large projects. He designed the Crocker Mansion in Hillsborough, known as "The Uplands," in 1913. The Hobart Tower on Market Street in San Francisco was built in 1914, an exceptionally fine example of the "skyscraper" genre, said to be his favorite. He had his office there. He repaired the neglected Mission of San Francisco de Asis and in addition to restoring its detailing in a most scholarly way, brilliantly inserted steel framing into the walls and roof to support the building without damaging the original timbers. He designed "Filoli," the Woodside estate of his long-time friend and patron William Bourn, who, convinced the architect's extravagant habits would lead to Polk's ruin, put his commission into a trust for Polk's wife. In 1918 Polk designed the Hallidie Building, acknowledged to be the world's first glass curtain-walled structure. It combines the most advanced building technology of the period with elements of Academic Eclecticism in the best Willis Polk style.

As The Garden of Allah is a fitting memorial to Rabboni White, who died in 1943, so may it serve as a memorial as well to the complex, multi-faceted career and personality of Willis Jefferson Polk, who died in 1924.

Mrs. Helen Dreyfus, founder of the Mill Valley Historical Society and Mill Valley Friends of the Library, passed away on January 3, 1995 at Marin General Hospital after a long battle with emphysema. She was 86 years old.

Babbie, as she was fondly known, was born in Mill Valley. She was a member of the Frederick Thompson family and played a truly remarkable role in the history and development of Mill Valley. She was a tireless community and civil rights leader who fought hard for her cases for many decades. The support she gave the Library was tremendous through her service on the Library Board, The Friends of the Library and the bond issue that financed the new library building. She was also dedicated to The Center for Performing Arts as served on its board of directors in a myriad of capacities, doing whatever needed to be done. A "cause", political or civic, never had a better friend than Babbie Dreyfus.

Mrs. Dreyfus was the wife of the late Benjamin Dreyfus, a well known civil rights attorney who defended Daniel Ellsberg in The Pentagon Papers case. Two sons, David and Timothy preceded her in death. She is survived by her daughter, Ann Eller, two grand-children, Adam and Christian and Katherine Babbie Dreyfus will be remembered forever as a crusader for freedom and an energetic best friend to her native Mill Valley and to all who knew her.

The following are excerpts from an article, "Thoughts from Babbie Dreyfus," which appeared in The Mill Valley Historical Review in Spring of 1985.
Mrs. Helen Dreyfus, founder of The Mill Valley Historical Society and Mill Valley Friends of the Library, passed away on January 3, 1995 at Marin General Hospital after a long battle with emphysema. She was 86 years old. Babbie, as she was fondly known, was born in Mill Valley. She was a member of the Frederick Thompson family and played a truly remarkable role in the history and development of Mill Valley. She was a tireless community and civil rights leader who fought hard for liberal causes for many decades. The support she gave the Library was tremendous through her service on the Library Board, The Friends of the Library and the bond issue that financed the new library building. She was also dedicated to The Center for Performing Arts and served on its board of directors in a myriad of capacities, doing whatever needed to be done. A "cause," political or civic, never had a better friend than Babbie Dreyfus.

Mrs. Dreyfus was the wife of the late Benjamin Dreyfus, a well known civil rights attorney who defended Daniel Ellsberg in The Pentagon Papers case. Two sons, David and Timothy preceded her in death. She is survived by her son Jared of Mill Valley and three grandchildren, Adam, Christian and Katherine. Babbie Dreyfus will be remembered forever as a crusader for freedom and an energetic best friend to her native Mill Valley and to all who knew her.

The following are excerpts from her article, "Thoughts from Babbie Dreyfus," which appeared in The Mill Valley Historical Review in Spring of 1985.

People of my age, or older (is there anyone older?) who lived in Mill Valley before 1915, might remember that there was a small establishment built into the group of redwoods on the left of the road between Cascade Drive and the Old Mill. It was known as "Agazellow's" and was owned by a pleasant man of approximately that name, who sold soft drinks, gum, candy bars and so forth to the local children and the weekend hikers, most of whom went up the Dipsea steps on their way to the varied beauties of West Marin. Mr. Agazellow not only provided refreshments, but he made nice little hanging baskets of latticed hazel-wood sticks. At one time there was hardly a house in Mill Valley that didn't have a fern or two in one of those little baskets. The weekend hikers were not the only vigorous walkers in those days. It astonishes me now that the whole population of Mill Valley walked almost everywhere it had to go. There were a few (possibly four) carriages for hire at the station, but unless it was raining, or one were heavily burdened, or very fancily dressed, they were not much used. We all walked, men to trains, women to the store or the movies or on visits, and children everywhere.

This unavoidable walking explains, of course, why there were so many flights of steps in all parts of Mill Valley. The early residents loved the views from the hills, but didn't have cars. They HAD to have shortcuts.

I wonder how many teenagers today would consider HIKING to Muir Beach (we called it Big Lagoon) to go swimming? To my generation it seemed like a perfectly reasonable (as well as the only) way to get a day at the beach. And some even hiked to Stinson (we called it Willow Camp).

The first car that came into our family was my brother's Model-T Ford roadster with overhead valves, whatever they were, and by that time I was sixteen and there were more cars around, though not many belonging to teenagers. When I think of going up and down Wildomar between Molino and Helen's Lane in that car, my hair stands on end. I wonder what the world would be like if nobody had ever invented the combustion engine! On that note I leave you.
Peck - Stanton - Hockett Insurance Agency, Inc.
174 E. Blithedale Avenue
P.O. Box 459
Mill Valley, CA 94942
phone: 415 - 388 - 2236
fax: 415 - 388 - 1868
David R. Peck
President

Richard Stanton, Agency Founder

LAW OFFICES of LINDA A. MOODY
LINDA A. MOODY, Attorney at Law
EDA J. COLE, Attorney at Law
MARJORIE WILKINSON, Probate Paralegal
62 Princess Street
Sausalito, CA 94965
(415) 332-0216
Probate and Probate Avoidance, Estate Planning
(Domestic and International), Trusts, Taxation,
Conservatorships, Guardianships

Tom McEachern, CTC
TRAVEL CONSULTANT
219 Mulich Avenue
Mill Valley, CA 94941
(415) 383-7200
Fax (415) 388-9332
Home: (415) 388-2313

Stephanie Wickham Witt
(415) 381-3000 Ext. 40
Pager: (415) 485-6632

Paradise PRINTING
35 MARK DRIVE / SAN RAFAEL, CA 94903 / (415) 492-9565 / FAX: 492-0732
4th Generation Mill Valley

HEATING REPAIRS & PLUMBING
388 - 8260

35 MARK DRIVE / SAN RAFAEL, CA 94903 / (415) 492-9565 / FAX: 492-0732