Cover photo
1890's view of Lytton Square from the Bernard steps. Victorian house in left foreground still stands at 21 Lovell, corner of Bernard, well preserved in bright yellow with white trim. Below lies the center of 1890's Mill Valley. Throckmorton Avenue runs through the "Square" and off to right. Miller runs off into the trees toward the bay.

The Review wishes to express gratitude to Thelma Percy and the Mill Valley Library and also to Jean Hitchcox. Research for the 1982 Walk Into History was done by Gene Stocking, Chairman; Sam Bagshaw, Eunice Bedd - Marie McClure, Ralph Martindale, Earl Reinke, Patty Simmons.

Special thanks to Judy Anderson and Debi Anker of Typecraft in Novato for their unrelenting cooperation in meeting tight schedules with fine typography.

Ads from Our Merchants

We would like to call special attention, this time, to the ads on the back cover.

From old issues of the Mill Valley Record and Record Enterprise, we have culled ads from yesteryear and related them to enterprises still in business, or their successors. When you patronize these merchants, be sure to say, "I saw it in the Review!"

You will be interested to see what had advertising value 60 to 80 years ago. For the uninhibited, Egg Preservative is sodium silicate; a Shrapnel Safe is a "piggy bank"; and Suey Kee sold fruits and vegetables from door to door in his twin baskets.

Today we live in thoroughbreds, enjoy the fine trees, marvel at the old spring blossoms from the barely visualize the bare pastures that once made famous Coffin "ferryboat" stark with hardly a tree.
Love of history, as the love of gardens or of the grand vistas is among the passports to a happy life. History awakens the imagination and allows one to live a thousand vicarious lives; the gardens touch some vital, atavistic spot, deep in man; and the soul is healed by the grand vista.

Mill Valley is a place of gardens and grand views. Her gentle history has been molded by both, by the intimacy of the random flowering plants and the constantly changing face and presence of the mountain. Poor indeed is he who can enter this small mountain village and not be touched by its unique loveliness. A visit to Mill Valley is unforgettable; to live here is an incomparable privilege. So it seems to us today, and so it seemed to those who have gone on ahead.

Today we live in those old houses, many times remodeled, enjoy the fruit from the ancient apple trees, marvel at the old magnolias, celebrate the spring blossoms from the elderly plums. We can barely visualize the bare hillsides and orchards and pastures that once made up the landscape. The famous Coffin "ferryboat house", for example, stood stark with hardly a tree in sight when it was completed.
Scars from the 1929 fire that swept down the flank of the mountain and threatened to destroy the entire village are no longer visible, covered by dense foliage. Gone with the railroads and stables and the carless streets and lanes, are the traces of earlier residents, the Hoo-Koo-e-Koos who gave us the name of our mountain, Tamalpais, and the Lacatuits whose chief was called Marin. These Indians, being wise, lived off the land and the abundance of game and shell fish. Our grandfathers used their shellmounds to pave walks, trails and

The two story building with spire, seen left foreground of picture, is located at the corner of 1922 Bernard Street and Throckmorton Avenue and now houses O'Leary's Tavern. The Keystone Building on Larkin Square is right of that. Note Mr. Tamalpais Railway tracks and crossing sign on Corte Madera Avenue in right corner. Photo taken 1898.

Miss Inez Baxter Canfield was inspired fifty years ago to compose the following, highly embroidered, lines about her favorite place:

**Mill Valley**

God dreamed a dream of loveliness
Of birds and bees and flowers
Of running brooks
And rustic nooks,
And leafy woodland bowers.

God dreamed a dream of mountains high
Of lovely wooded hills,
Of wood and breeze
And mighty trees,
And feathered songsters trills.

God dreamed a dream of peacefulness,
Of gardens wondrous fair,
Of cheerful homes,
'Neath mountain domes,
Where men his peace might share.

God dreamed his dream of loveliness,
Of love spots fair to see,
Where days are spent
In peace; content;
And then — He brought forth thee.
the mountain and visible, covered by dense streets and lanes, who gave us the name chief was called Marin.

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even tennis courts. Only the Ka-Sum (deer) and the Hoo-ma-ka (hare) survived and prospered.

In the early days, as now, famous people have been drawn by the magnet of Mill Valley and writers, actors, poets, musicians, and painters are commonplace on Mill Valley streets. One is hard pressed to say who was or is the most famous, but Kathleen Norris comes to mind.

Of course, there have always been serpents in the Garden of Eden. The town's early fathers and mothers worried about the stench from the stables, the rowdies from somewhere who hung around the bars and pool halls, the felling of the trees, the gouging of the hillsides, the greed of the developers, the condition of the roads, the quality of the water, the schools, the littering. It is the same today.

If Mill Valley's past is not dramatically evident in the sense of a Boston or Paris or even Angel's Camp, it is a daily presence in our lives. Lytton Square, named for the first Mill Valley youth to give his life for his country in World War I, the buildings — Dowd's, the O'Shaughnessy property, the Outdoor Art Club, and the

For a Breathtaking View of 1900

MILL VALLEY

Turn to the next page
Th is magnificent pre-1900 vista of the Lovell-Summit Avenue area highlights the route of the 1982 Mill Valley Historical Society Walk-Into-History. The vista has changed drastically and only a few of the buildings shown remain today. The large two-story building in center of photo was Summit School. First a one-room school in 1892, with an enrollment of 35, it grew into the two-story structure shown by 1896. Demolition was in 1941, when the cleared property—now holding six homes—sold for $1,350. The school itself was removed to the last brick and board for $250. Across the street stands the Congregational Church, now a 5-unit apartment and missing its spire. The next building up Summit, after the school, is the original Catholic Church. Although still standing, it is the nucleus for an apartment house. Still further up, at what is now the corner of Summit and Tamalpais Avenues, is the Alonzo Coffin house within its shrubbed enclosure. Popularly called the Ferryboat House, it remains today as one of Mill Valley’s most famous landmarks. Directly below the Catholic Church, with one house intervening, is the Kelly House, built in 1871, at 64 Lovell.

One of Mill Valley’s loveliest attributes is its infinite capacity to provide shelter for all—for those whose paths have been straight and narrow, and for those who have marched to different drummers; the straightlaced and orthodox, the colorful characters and the merely outrageous. Churches and pool halls, saloons and temperance leagues have existed, if not in harmony, at reasonable and safe distances from one another—and so it continues.

One gets sentimental about Mill Valley the way it was—the way it is. Helen Roberts, a budding poet from another era, summed it up this way:

Of all the places of the earth Mill Valley is most blessed.

If I could have my wish tonight by sayin’ one lone prayer

I’d say:

Not wealth with mansions, nor the lure of fame
Not treasures brought by ships that sail the main
But one lone cabin sheltered by the trees,
Mid flowers and sunshine, pungent ocean breeze,
Dear Lord, above Mill Valley.
The Kelly House

This property at 64 Lovell Avenue was purchased at the Tamalpais Land and Water Company auction in 1890. The original deed from T. L. & W. reads December 2, 1890 and the price of the land was $710.

This house was the first permanent residence on this side of the valley. It was built in 1891 for Thomas and Augusta Kelly. Thomas Kelly was a jewelry designer for Shreves in San Francisco. Augusta, his wife, was a talented musician and the magnetism of her personality drew out the talents of others. Her talent was never restricted to one group, one church or one school. She sang at the 8:00 mass at the Catholic Church and at the 11:00 service at the Episcopal Church. It was her custom to celebrate holidays with entertainments. Christmas and Memorial Day were observed and everyone in town was welcome. For several years she held an annual Maypole dance teaching the local children the dance. A lovely yellow rose planted at the turn of the century still blooms on the front porch of the house.

The smaller photo at left shows the house as it stands today.
Alonzo Coffin, among the first of Mill Valley's distinguished residents, takes credit for the realization of one of the town's more monumental landmarks. Coffin served on one of Mill Valley's first school boards and was the town's third mayor. A San Francisco pattern maker, he commissioned the house in 1893 for his growing family. It was designed and constructed by architect Emil Jahn on the previously barren hillside at the corner of Summit and Tamalpais Avenues. Both Jahn and Coffin, apparently captivated by the ferry boats which plied the bay in those days, designed the front of the house to resemble that vital link in the local transportation system and to capture the panoramic view. Coffin drew on his trade skills to richly embellish the interior of this "Ferryboat House." He originally named the home "Vineyard Haven," but the ferryboat image was too strong and the name didn't stick. With his family, he occupied the big home off and on until 1916, when he sold it for what was then a handsome sum to a Mr. Barbisch.

Alonzo Coffin kept a diary, addressing it on February 20, 1916: "I took Mr. Barbisch and his son to see the house in Mill Valley. He made me a cash offer of $7,000."

Six days later he entered: "Mr. Barbisch was so interested in his new home that he could hardly spare the time to go to the bank and settle the final payment."

Once, in his diary on New Year's Eve, awaiting the first dawn of 1901, Coffin wrote: "We illuminated the house with electric lights and as the old year went out, we woke the children and joined the noisy celebration by blowing our fish horns around the porch. Sunny Heights and Schlingmans had illuminations too. At about one o'clock the Cappelmans and Selwoods and Seamans called on us. We did not let them in but cheered them from our upper windows."

Coffin's Ferryboat House has since known numerous owners and has been remodeled many times over. One of Mill Valley's most historically rich residences, it has always remained a single family dwelling. It is presently owned by the Robert F. Palmer family.
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At left, Irene Coffin's birthday party at home on the veranda in 1894. Alonzo Coffin waves his hat from the right side of the photo. Below it, the Coffins picnic with friends at Old Mill Park.

The sign in the foreground (pictured at right) said "Vineyard Haven," the name Coffin chose for his home as he had richly planted with grapes and fruit trees, but the name never caught on. It was known then, as it is today, as Ferryboat House. Today it is barely visible behind the dense foliage of its gardens.

These hills are not West Texas and the riders below are not cowboys. This is just a group of energetic folks on their way to the top of Mount Tamalpais in 1893. The Coffin home is prominent in the background. Burros were hired at Dowd's stables.
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