

**MILL VALLEY HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

THIRTY THIRD ANNUAL WALK INTO HISTORY

LOWER HOMESTEAD

Guidebook

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2010

Co-hosted with the Homestead Valley Community Association

TO THE GUIDES:

This is the 33rd year that the Mill Valley Historical Society has organized a Walk Into History thanks to the efforts of many volunteers working throughout the year as well as on the day of the Walk.

Guides are special volunteers with a responsibility to provide a group of walkers with an interesting, informative, enjoyable and safe experience.

Several guides have been leading these walks for many years. The fact that they continue to volunteer to be guides is an indication of their enjoyment and commitment.

If this is your first year as a guide, we welcome you and hope you will find as much pleasure in learning and sharing the history of Mill Valley as the old timers do.

Walk-Into-History Chair: Betsey Cutler

Guidebook Editor: Chuck Oldenburg

TIPS FOR GUIDES

Thank you for being a Walk-Into-History guide. Welcome to those who are leading a walk for the first time. We hope you enjoy the experience as much as the returning guides who tell us they look forward to the experience.

To be a successful guide requires a commitment of time, energy and preparation. The objective is to provide good leadership and well-presented historical information. It is essential that you have the desire and devotion to offer your group an informative and enjoyable Walk-Into-History. The following instructions can make your job easier:

1. Read the guidebook several times to familiarize yourself with its contents. You will be better able to energize your presentation and connect with your audience if you impart the information in your own words.
2. Practice the walk several times. Each guide is required to go on two walks that are conducted by a guide trainer. You should also do one or more practice walks with a friend who can give you feedback on your presentation.
3. Be a strong leader. Keep your group together. At each stop, face the group with your back to what you are describing. Make eye contact.
4. Cover as much guidebook information as you can, focusing on what you believe to be particularly interesting at each stop. Describe the history in your own words—use the guidebook only for reference. To assure accuracy, you might wish to read the anecdotes.
5. Show pertinent photos and encourage comments and questions. Participants may have interesting anecdotes to relate. This type of discussion should generally be encouraged.
6. Welcome any information that walkers contribute. Make a note of it and pass it on to the guide leader, Betsey Cutler, after the walk.
7. Try to avoid groups ahead and behind your group. Speed up or slow down by covering some information before or after the stop where it should be related.
8. Ask one of the participants to manage the photo album for you.

Guides and walkers have enjoyed the annual Walk Into History for over three decades. Good luck, have fun and enjoy the experience of leading a group of walkers interested in the history of Mill Valley.

Lead the group across the bridge to the Meadow

Gathering Point: On the meadow

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 33rd Walk Into History sponsored by the Mill Valley Historical Society. Last year we toured Millwood and stopped at several elegant pre-1910 houses on Miller Ave. In 2003, we toured Upper Homestead Valley. This year we will tour Lower Homestead Valley.

Lucretia Hansen Little had been Mill Valley's Town Clerk and official historian. In 1977, illness forced her to retire and move away. A group of interested people established a Historical Society. Their primary goal was to make available all historical material relating to Mill Valley, including the invaluable collection of books, pictures and documents collected by Mrs. Little. Other goals established at the outset were:

1. Work for the library in all matters relating to the History Room
2. Take responsibility for the popular First Wednesday Programs
3. Continue the Oral History Program

Today we will walk from here to the 2 AM Club and back, a total distance of 1.4 miles. The time required is about 2 hours. The route is quite level.

Introduce yourself and determine how many in your group are not from Mill Valley.

SAFETY

Most of the walk will be on streets. Keep the group together and be alert for cars and bicycles.

OVERVIEW

The objective is to inform participants about the history of the Homestead Valley community. The route will take us to historic houses as well as sites of historic houses. Other stops include historic community centers, the 2 AM Club and the Quonsets (now Whole Foods).

Lead the Group down the Path to the Schoolyard

STOP #1 In the Schoolyard at the Amphitheater

Homestead Valley is an unincorporated community of 2300 residents living in 1100 homes located between the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and the city of Mill Valley. It is not in Mill Valley although it is in the Mill Valley School District and in 94941 as are other unincorporated communities.

Describe Current Parcel Map on Easel

Last year's walk into history was on Miller Ave. The focus was on the history of large, elegant houses built between 1890 and 1910 for wealthy owners. This year we will focus on the history of Homestead Valley where construction of more modest homes began in 1904. The terms Upper and Lower Homestead were common in the 1920s, the school being the dividing line.

1903 Map of Lower Homestead Valley (1A)

Point out Miller Ave., Reed creek, LaVerne, Evergreen, Ethel and the school lots. By 1910, 60 homes had been built, most not owned by affluent people. Among the 60 heads of households, 25 were foreign born. Of the 84 residents that were gainfully employed, 54 were blue collar workers or laborers. Homestead's politics were to the left of Mill Valley's. In every presidential election between 1908 and 1948, Homestead voted more for Democrats whereas Mill Valley voted more for Republicans. Mill Valley attempted to annex Homestead Valley six times between 1908 and 1966. Homestead held firm. In 1986, historian Henri Boussy wrote, "Of all the developments that have become Marin, the one with the greatest sense of community has been Homestead."

The valley had been part of Rancho Sausalito which extended all the way to the Golden Gate. It was owned by Richardson, then Throckmorton and eventually the Tamalpais Land & Water Co (TL&WC) which subdivided it in 1903.

1907 Photo of Lower Homestead Valley (1B)

Point out various features on the photo: Evergreen, LaVerne, Scott, Melrose, Worley House, Heckman House, Doherty's, marsh and Power House.

Anecdote

In 1947, Harry Wilhelm knocked on Tony Brabo's door on Reed St. to ask for directions. In 1904, he had built a large house in the neighborhood and lived there until 1915. He told Tony he couldn't find his old house. From Harry's description, Tony knew that the house was on Ridgewood Ave. and took him there. Harry gave Tony a photo that he had taken from his house in 1907. Our photo is only a small part of it.

Move to Playground

STOP #2 In the Schoolyard at the Playground

Our tour will take us to the sites of the first two community centers. The third one, our starting point, is on a 1.16-acre lot. In 1922, a small house was built on it near the street. In the 1930s, a horse ring, barn and tack room were built on the flat part for the Homestead Valley Riding Club. Riding lessons were given to many Homestead Valley children until the late 1960s.

1956 Photo of Horse Ring (2A)

From 1951 to 1974, Hughes and Volinda Call and their four children lived in the substantially enlarged house. Homestead Valley acquired the property in 1976 and renovated the home for a community center.

In April 1950, when the Call family was living in Kent Woodlands, Hughes took his son and daughter to the Grand National Rodeo, Horse and Stock show at the Cow Palace. Their tickets won the raffle. The prize was Hopalong Cassidy's pony, tack and a cowboy outfit. Under pressure from his children, Hughes purchased the property so that "Little Topper" could live at the Homestead Valley Riding Club.

1950 Photo of Little Topper with Lewis and Phoebe Call (2B)

A word about the history of Homestead School. In the north east you can see a white house that is half of the school which was built in 1907.

1907 Photo of Original Homestead School (2C)

The first class began on January 13, 1908 with 50 first and second graders who had been attending the Mill Valley Grammar School. Only 19 of them lived in Homestead Valley—the rest came from Mill Valley. The teacher was Coral Coats. She earned \$50/month.

1908 Photo of Homestead School Kids and Teacher (2D)

In 1920, a new school was built on this property. The old school up there was cut in half, and one half was moved 10 ft. to the left. The result was two houses which still exist. The original two families were good friends. Years later, the husband in one house died and then the wife in the other house died. The widow and widower decided to get married and live together in one of the houses and sell the other one.

The 1920 school here closed temporarily in the 1930s and permanently in 1983. The property is leased to Marin Horizon School — 300 pupils, pre-K through 8th grades.

Exit Schoolyard, Turn Right on Melrose and Go to LaVerne

STOP #3 In front of 301 LaVerne across from 304

The 4000 sq. ft. house across the street was built in 1999. The historic house it replaced was built before 1910. It was painted blue for at least the last 30 years before it was demolished and was commonly referred to as “The Blue House.”

1924 Photo of The Blue House (3A)

The 1924 photo shows the Silva family posing on the front steps. Joaquin A. Silva immigrated from the Portuguese Azores in 1880 at age 19. His wife, Mary V. Silva immigrated in 1896 at age 18, also from the Azores. They were married in 1900. They had two daughters, Mary born in 1906 and Simiana born in 1909. That’s Simiana in the photo. Joaquin had a chicken farm on the 15,000 sq. ft. lot. He was also a carpenter who built his house and a few others nearby.

In 1910, 12 of the 60 heads of household in Homestead were from the Azores. Throckmorton had rented land on Rancho Sausalito to families from the Azores for dairy operations. An 1892 map depicts 36 ranch subdivisions. Homestead’s Portuguese families played an important role in the community. The men were often day laborers employed in construction projects. The women often provided laundry and house cleaning services.

“The Blue House” gained historic fame just before it was demolished in 1999. The property still had Homestead’s last known privy (outhouse). Prior to the installation of Homestead’s sewer system in 1948, privies were not uncommon, although most homes had septic tanks and leach fields to serve indoor facilities.

The Silva’s privy had been placed several yards from the creek. By 1999, however, the banks of the creek had eroded to such an extent that the privy was on the edge of the creek bank. It probably would have eventually fallen into the creek. Owners of the new house installed large boulders on the bank of the creek to prevent further erosion.

Anecdote

In 1926, Simiana Silva, age 17, married Joe Hornsby, a carpenter and contractor. Their daughter Eunice was born in 1930. Simiana’s contemporaries criticized her for her frequent attendance without her husband at dances at the community center. Simiana and Joe Hornsby were divorced in 1932. In 1934, Joe Hornsby bought The Brown Jug, now the 2 AM Club, and tended bar there. In 1935, he sold the 2 AM Club and moved to southern California. Joe wrote Simiana a long goodbye letter which expressed his sadness and bitterness, especially in having to leave his daughter Eunice.

Go down to 250 LaVerne

STOP #4 At driveway of 250 LaVerne

The two houses across the street were formerly on just one property. In 1904, attorney Alfred Worley and his wife Fannie built a mansion here. Alfred had come from England at age 2. Fannie was born in Duncans Mills (Sonoma Co.). In 1909, they subdivided the 20-acre Worley Tract south of LaVerne Ave. into lots on Ferndale Ave. and a new street named Melrose Ave. The other part of Melrose Ave. was at that time called Avery Ave. Fannie Worley died in 1920 at age 54 after a long illness. She was the first woman to settle in Homestead, and the first woman to die in Homestead. Alfred moved away.

1907 Photo of Worley Mansion (4A)

In June 1940, Ove Johnson bought the three-story mansion for the bargain price of \$7700, reportedly because it was “haunted”. Two months later it was completely destroyed by fire. He replaced it with a small stucco house using the same foundation. He founded the Homestead Valley Volunteer Fire Brigade soon thereafter and housed the fire engine in his garage.

1950 Photo of Ove Johnson House (4B)

There was also a cottage on the property, formerly a carriage house. In 1942, shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor it was used as a sector post for air raid wardens, fire wardens and first aid workers. A telephone was installed and an air raid siren was installed on top of Homestead School. At 7:30 PM a volunteer would arrive at the sector post, sleep there and leave in the morning. During the day, John Cooper at his grocery store on Linden Lane was responsible for warning residents of any emergency.

During World War II, Ove tried to have his family be as self sufficient as possible.

He put in 35 fruit trees and a huge victory garden. He had chickens, for meat and eggs, and raised two hogs once. His wife did a great deal of canning and otherwise preserving the produce.

In the spring of 1984 after Ove had become a widower, an electrical fire caused extensive smoke damage to the house. Ove died 8 months later, just shy of his 82nd birthday. We will talk more about Ove Johnson at our last stop, the site of the Homestead Valley Fire House.

In 2000, Ove’s house was demolished and replaced with a modern 4000 sq. ft. house constructed primarily of steel. Previously, the site had two entirely different houses: a brown shingle mansion built in 1904 and a small stucco house built in 1940.

Go down to 228 Laverne

STOP #5 In front of 228 LaVerne

The vacant lot across the street is the site of the Ezekiel house built in 1904.

1922 Photo of Ezekiel House (5A)

The photo was taken after Marin's biggest 20th century snowstorm in January 1922. Edwin Ezekiel, his wife Josephine and their seven children moved into this house in 1904. Edwin was a buyer for a famous furrier, Herman Liebes, owner of a fur house in San Francisco. Edwin spent a lot of time in Alaska trading with indigenous people for furs.

The 1910 census counted eleven people living in the house. In addition to the Ezekiel family of seven children aged 6 to 28, there were two boarders: Anne Foley, age 34, a bookkeeper for the telephone company, and her 4-year old son John.

Last year's Walk-Into-History guidebook included a photo of the eldest son, Edwin, on a wagon drawn by two horses which he drove to deliver purchases from the Emporium department store in San Francisco.

By 1920, the Ezekiel family had moved away, and the eldest son Edwin had moved to a house on Evergreen with his wife and three children. The wagon he drove for the Emporium had been replaced by a truck, and Edwin was a chauffeur not a driver. Later on he became a UPS driver.

The Ezekiel house was demolished in the 1920s. Today, there is a small 648 sq. ft. house on the 0.84 acre lot at 227 LaVerne. The property was recently purchased and made ready for development.

1914 Photo of the view from the Ezekiel House (5B)

This 1914 photo shows the view from the Ezekiel house. The girl is Josephine Ezekiel, age 11. Note the barren hill and the house on Evergreen which was originally two cabins. We will stop at that house later.

Go down LaVerne to Hawthorne turn left, go to the driveway of 212

STOP #6 At Driveway of 212 Hawthorne

Today Hawthorne Ave. has 10 houses on it, five on each side. In 1904, John C. Bone bought the lot that encompassed the entire west side. In 1905, he constructed a house on the corner of Evergreen. He subdivided the rest of the property into three small lots and this large lot across the street on the corner of LaVerne. In 1909, William N. Veale built a house on the lower part of the lot. Note the wonderful deer resistant garden there today—the present owner is a master gardener.

3 Photos of the Veale House: 1910, 1930, 1940 (6A)

The top photo was taken in 1910. On the far right is a white house built in 1906. We can see it from here. Note the privy behind it.

The 1910 census lists William W. Veale, age 39, a stationary engineer, his wife Mamie, 31, and four children: Mervyn, 9, Helen, 8, Rachel, 3, and Margaret, 3 months. School records show that both Mervyn and Helen entered Homestead School on August 1, 1910.

The middle photo was taken in 1930 from LaVerne looking down at the small house. Note that between the Veale house and the white house there is a brown house. It was built in 1913, and was the last house to be built on this block. They all still exist.

In the 1930s, the small house was moved up the slope closer to LaVerne and a larger house was built around it. The bottom photo shows the completed house in 1940. The large redwood tree in the yard today must have been planted after 1940.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the grandsons of William and Mamie Veale spent summers here with their grandparents. They enjoyed Homestead Valley which was much cooler than where they lived in eastern Contra Costa County.

The house we see here today was remodeled and expanded in the 1990s.

Anecdote

William W. Veale grew up on his father's farm near Brentwood in eastern Contra Costa County. In the 1920s he had trouble making a living here in Marin, so he and the family moved back to the farm. He soon found a job at the newly constructed crude oil pumping station in Brentwood. After he retired in 1936 he and his wife moved back to this home. The farm is now the Veale Tract a 4000-acre irrigated pasture in the San Joaquin Delta surrounded by levees and only 3 ft. above sea level.

Go down Hawthorne to 207

STOP #7 In front of 201 Hawthorne across from the Bone House

In 1905, John Bone and his wife Lillian built a small house on this corner. After the 1906 earthquake the Bones invited their San Francisco friends to stay in tents they set up for them in their large back yard.

Photo of Shed (7A)

John added on to the house several times and built various out buildings such as the shed shown in the photo. The shed served as storage of garden tools, the orchard's fruit and the garden's vegetables. Part of the shed was a chicken coop. He also built a workshop which is now a guest cottage behind the house. The garage was built recently by the current owners who plan to replace the house with a larger one.

John and Lillian Bone had two children, Lancelot, and Carmelita. A granddaughter, also named Carmelita, lived with them later on.

During the 1930s, Lillian's hobby was raising lily pads. John built several concrete lined ponds. When the neighbor across the street, Albert Von der Werth, would travel to Portland, Oregon on business, he would sometimes pick up exotic lily pad varieties that Lillian had ordered from a Portland nursery.

John Bone died in 1946, and Lillian, in 1967, having lived here for 62 years. In 1968, a Mill Valley couple named Brown bought the house. In 1977, they sold it to Candace Johnson who kept a goat. When Homestead residents were walking, jogging, bicycling or driving up Evergreen, the goat would often be watching them from inside the gate of this house.

Photo of Goat (7B)

The unique design of the gate was perfect for the goat who seemed to enjoy observing what was happening on Evergreen. His name was Toby. The house came to be known as "The Goat Lady House." Candace Johnson was not a customer of Mill Valley Refuse Service, Inc.. The goat consumed household garbage, and also trimmed the vegetation. Cans, bottles, and anything else the goat refused to eat were buried. Paper was burned in the fireplace.

Anecdote

In 1995, when Candace Johnson decided to sell the house, a Marin Association of Realtors notice referred to it as "The Famous Goat Lady House." The house did not have central heating. The floors were not level. The yard was overgrown with old fruit trees, shrubs and vines. The lily ponds were full of dirt and whatever the goat did not eat. But the goat was no longer there. Even today, many Homestead residents refer to the house as "The Goat Lady House."

Turn right on Evergreen and right of Linden Lane to 155

STOP #8 In front of 155 Linden Lane

Homestead Hall was built here in 1904 as a center of community activities including scout meetings, dances, movies and political meetings. The Mill Valley press usually referred to it as Homestead's Scout Hall. In 1932, the hall was sold and converted into a residence which has since been remodeled extensively. Remnants of the original building are still evident upstairs in the house.

Photo of Homestead Hall 1920s (8A)

Recall that at our third stop at the "Blue House" we learned that Simiana Silva had spent a lot of time at dances here in Homestead Hall unaccompanied by her husband, Joe Hornsby. But this was also where volunteers gathered to work on various projects.

Photo of Volunteers Making Benches 1930 (8B)

Homestead Hall was the first of three Homestead Valley community centers. We began our tour at the third one. We will soon stop at the second one, Brown's Hall which was constructed in 1934.

Anecdote

During the 1920's, there was a speak-easy nearby. Virginia Stolte lived in Upper Homestead at the time, and attended Homestead School. Her father, Fred Stolte, admonished her never to go beyond the school to Lower Homestead because there was a red light district down there.

Thus, Lower Homestead had a dance hall, a speak easy and a red light district. Should be a juicy story here, perhaps a drunken brawl. No such luck. But there is a story. Mary Bettencourt remembers the dance hall very well because she went there for catechism lessons. Every Saturday, nuns came down from the catholic church in Mill Valley to teach Homestead children their catechisms. Mary also recalls movies being shown there. Mary Bettencourt Brabo lives in Homestead Valley on the property where she was born in 1910. She will be 100 years old in November.

Anecdote

An example of a political meeting at Homestead Hall is one that took place on September 21, 1912. The headline in the Mill Valley Record=Enterprise was "Big Non-Partisan Meeting at Homestead Last Saturday." "The first real non-partisan meeting that has been held in the county in many years was held in the village of Homestead at which at least 300 of the citizens participated." There were talks by candidates for various offices: two for state senator representing both Contra Costa and Marin counties, one for state assembly candidate, and two for county supervisor. Before the meeting there was music by the Sausalito Brass Band.

Return to Evergreen, turn right then left on Linden Lane to 11

STOP #9 In the back yard of 11 Linden Lane

This building was a grocery store opened by Iowa Compere in 1905. In 1909, John C. Cooper bought it. From 1917 on, ownership passed through several hands. It was in business until the late 1960s when the building became a residence. The present owner remodeled the building in the style of his birthplace, Nice, France. In the living room he has preserved a remnant of the grocery store, a glass-front refrigerator for cold drinks, dairy and other products requiring refrigeration.

The building is located just down the street from the home of Herman Heckman on the corner of Ethel—we will stop at the Heckman house later. The Heckman family took over the grocery store in July 1920.

Grocery store ads 1920, 1922, 1924 (9A)

A 1920 ad announces Homestead's New Store. A 1922 ad lists Herman's wife Mrs. C.T. Heckman, proprietor of Homestead Grocery. A 1924 ad lists their daughter, Miss P. M. Heckman, as proprietor. Note that the name of this street at that time was Richardson Street.

A 1926 ad reads, "Homestead Grocery—Cash and Carry, under new management: Mrs. Elsie E. Wetmore." Elsie sold Cigars and Tobaccos in addition to groceries.

In the 1930s and 1940s it was known as Homestead Valley Grocery with John G. Cooper, proprietor. The street was named Heckman St. at that time. In the 1950s and 1960s the store was again known as Homestead Grocery.

Many long time residents found it convenient to walk there to buy necessities. Children often stopped there for candy or soft drinks after school.

Anecdote

In 1909, Florence Ezekiel, age 27, who lived on LaVerne —we stopped at the Ezekiel house—was appointed by Teddy Roosevelt as postmistress of Homestead's first post office located here in Cooper's Grocery store. The name of the post office was LaVerne. In announcing the opening of the post office, the Mill Valley Record=Enterprise stated, "Last night, Homestead Valley became a thing of the past and the new town of LaVerne sprang into existence." Although Homestead School was renamed LaVerne School, and there was even a LaVerne baseball team, this name for the community was abandoned in the 1920s in favor of the original "Homestead Valley." The post office was closed in 1914 with the advent of Rural Free Delivery. Mail to Homestead residents had an address consisting of the name of their street and RFD #1, Sausalito. The small building in back is thought to have been the post office.

Go to driveway of Homestead Terrace

STOP #10 In driveway of Homestead Terrace

Homestead Terrace was established as Federal Public Housing, Elderly/Disabled, for residents at least 62 years old with very low income. There are 27 studio apartments in 5 buildings plus a community building. There are younger disabled residents here today.

1969 Photo of Homestead Terrace (10A)

The photo was taken in 1969 when construction of Homestead Terrace on Linden Lane was just about complete. In June 1966, when project plans for Homestead Terrace were announced, initial reaction of neighbors was negative: density was too high and increased traffic would be a hazard. But in September 1966, the Homestead Valley Improvement Club voted to support the project and a week later it was approved by the Marin County Board of Supervisors. Construction was completed and a dedication ceremony was held in April 1969.

In 1974 it received the Bay Area AIA Design Excellence Honor Award. Architecture was by Campbell & Wong. Landscape architecture was by Royston, Hanamoto, Beck and Abey. Robert Royston lived in Homestead Valley for over 50 years until his death in 2008. Eldon Beck still lives in Homestead Valley.

Anecdote

In 1903, house painter Michael J. Maguire of South Carolina built a large two-story house and a stable for horses on this property. He and his wife, Winifred Crowe from County Cork Ireland, raised their five sons here. The youngest son, Robert (Red) Maguire and his wife Jean, an acclaimed cellist and a co-founder of the Marin Symphony, raised their family here.

Our next stop will be the 2 AM Club. We will walk down Montford to Miller Ave.

1905 Photo of Work Party (10B)

This 1905 photo was taken from Miller Ave. at the 2 AM Club. A group of Homestead residents are gathered for a sidewalk-building work party in 1905. The formally attired gentleman is Jacob Gardner—we will learn more about him later in the walk. Lumber for the sidewalk had been donated.

Go to Montford then down Montford to Miller

STOP #11 In front of the 2 AM Club

John W. “Bill” Brown was born in Chicago on May 2, 1863. When he was ten years old, he went to Montana with his parents in a covered wagon. As a young man he lived in Salt

Lake City. In 1893 he attended the World's Fair in Chicago. Shortly thereafter, he brought his mother and his sister to Marin. . Bill Brown, his mother and his sister established a resort at Willow Camp (Stinson Beach) providing tents and food for campers. In 1905, the first Dipsea race was held. It started in Mill Valley and ended at the Dipsea Inn situated on the sand spit [Seadrift], not far from the Brown's resort. Shortly thereafter, he sold the resort and moved to Homestead.

Bill Brown built a house on Montford near Miller where he and his sister Dolly had a grocery store on the first floor. His mother Lucinda lived with them. In 1906, he opened a saloon known as The Brown Jug on the corner of Miller and Montford. Prohibition caused its closure in 1921. The building became a grain and feed store.

With the repeal of prohibition in December 1933, Joe Hornsby purchased the property and reopened The Brown Jug. Joe left in 1935 after a divorce from his wife Simiana Silva—remember her from our stop at the Blue House?

In 1939, Louis Greyerbiehl and his sons Bill and Bres bought the bar. By that time it had been renamed the 2 AM Club. When bars within the city limits of Mill Valley closed at midnight, there was considerable migration of customers to The Brown Jug which could stay open until 2 AM—it was outside the city limits.

During World War II, Bill and Bres were called into military service and their father and mother were in a serious automobile accident. Mary Gallioti, a friend who lived on Ethel, was recruited to run the bar— Mary and Bill married after the war.

1950s Photo of the 2 AM Club (11A)

The 2 AM Club looks about the same as it did 60 years ago.

Anecdote

In the early 1940s, Ray Miller an operating engineer living on East Blithedale went to the Brothers Bar on Locust every day after work. The regulars were construction workers like Ray. In 1947 he moved to Homestead Valley and went to the 2 AM Club every day after work. These bars are only two blocks apart. Changing neighborhoods meant changing pubs. Ray got to know a new group of regulars. He went hunting with them and played on the 2 AM Club baseball team. He knew Mary Greyerbiehl, her husband Bill and her brother-in-law Bres, very well. When he moved to Sonoma in 1959, he took with him plenty of memories of what went on in the 2 AM Club during his tenure there. For example, when a group of suits just off the bus from the city would enter the 2 AM Club, all conversation would stop.

Move to in front of the Buddhist Temple

STOP #12 In front of the Buddhist Temple

This building was Homestead's second community center. We started our tour at the third one and later stopped at the first one, Homestead Hall. This one was called Brown's Hall, named for Bill Brown who had loaned the Homestead Progressive Club \$2000 for its construction in 1934. This is the same Bill Brown that established The Brown Jug saloon. Brown's Hall was the center of Homestead's community activities from 1934 to 1972 when it was sold to the Buddhists of Marin for their temple.

Local carpenters volunteered their time for the construction of Brown's Hall. It was initially used for carpenters' union meetings, boy scout meetings and various community activities. Political meetings could adjourn to The 2 AM Club for further argument.

1940s Photo of Brown's Hall (12A)

In 1951, Mill Valley annexed the two-block long commercial strip on Miller Avenue. From then on, Brown's Hall was within the city limits of Mill Valley. In the late 1950's, Brown's Hall was suffering from lack of maintenance, and was no longer serving the community very well. The Homestead Valley Improvement Club had trouble meeting its expenses. Real estate taxes owed the city of Mill Valley were a particular drain. President Jo Schlesinger rallied community volunteers, first to clean up Brown's Hall, and then to develop ideas for producing at least one money-making event every month. As a result there were lectures, plays, art shows, concerts, dances, etc.

Will Geer, a famous impresario, initially brought morality plays, and later performed in his memorable Mark Twain monologue. Local acting talent organized themselves into the Homestead Players. Sali Lieberman's involvement in the theatrical productions led to the establishment of the Marin Theater Company which today offers highly rated plays in its theater across the street. A Candlelight Concert series of five winter concerts, including three by the Bach to Mozart Players with musicians from the San Francisco Symphony, began in 1960 and continued here until 1971, and then in other venues until 1978. In 1962, the same group, presented an outdoor concert in Stolte Grove. These concerts continued to be held every year until 2003.

Anecdote

The following letter to the editor appeared in the Mill Valley Record regarding an announcement of the construction of Brown's Hall: "This is the biggest thing that ever struck Homestead. What a break for Homestead! I would that I had literary ability to put in words just what this does and will mean to Homestead! Pardon this slight burst of enthusiasm, but it is only the consensus of the feelings of all Homestead on the eve of a great achievement!"

Go through Whole Foods parking lot, turn right on Evergreen to 14

STOP #13 At driveway of 14 Evergreen across from Whole Foods

In 1947, Louis Ferrera developed the property with the help of Frank Gerlardi, a pharmacist. He drained swampy areas, added fill, poured a concrete pad and erected interconnected Quonset huts.

The grand opening of the Miller Avenue Shopping Center was 9 AM Friday April 18, 1947. Inside were his Grocery and Vegetable Departments, Gosser's Meat Department, Doris Baby Shop, Dorothy's Beauty Salon, a post office and the G&G Company: a pharmacy, beauty bar, fountain, camera shop and liquor store. Frank Gelardi and Joe Gaidano were Messrs. G&G. This was one of the largest shopping centers in Northern California at that time. Quite a boost in prestige for Homestead Valley. Today it is Whole Foods, although old timers still refer to it as "The Quonsets". However, it is now in Mill Valley and not in Homestead Valley.

1955 Photo of the Quonsets (13A)

This photo of the Quonsets was taken during the flood of 1955. Even before it opened in 1947, the Mill Valley City Council was trying to figure out how they could get the expected sales tax revenue. They settled on a plan to annex the half-block commercial strip on Miller from Reed to Montford. Homestead residents were opposed. It took several years of legal work, but on January 19, 1951, the California Secretary of State certified the annexation. As a result, Brown's Hall, the 2 AM Club and the shopping center were in the city of Mill Valley.

In 1991, Living Foods, the San Anselmo-based natural foods company with a store on Throckmorton, signed a lease for the Quonsets, and planned a million dollar remodel. But there were two problems: the then current tenant, Jerry's Meats & Deli, had to be paid off for his lease; and because of the drought, MMWD required that a source of well water had to be found for the increased water requirements. Living Foods drilled a well behind the Quonsets, but the flow was not sufficient. Whole Foods came along and solved both problems. They worked out a deal with the current tenant and drilled a successful well across the street in the parking lot next to the Buddhist Temple. Whole foods opened in the summer of 1992, and Living Foods closed its Throckmorton store one year later after 16 years in that location.

Anecdote

In 1905, The Doherty Company had three lumber yards: one was the Mill Valley Lumber Co. on Miller, a second was in Larkspur and a third was on Evergreen in Homestead Valley where Whole Foods is now. Doherty had a mill at this location and a siding that connected with the railroad a block away at Reed Street. If one zooms in on the 1907 photo of Lower Homestead that was displayed at our first stop, one can see that "The Doherty Co." is painted in large letters on the roof of the lumber yard building. Next door was Homestead Fuel Co. which sold hay, grain, feed, coal and dry oak firewood.

Go up Evergreen, turn right on Ethel to 541

STOP #14 At driveway west of 541 Ethel across from 530

Rancho Sausalito was a 19,000-acre Mexican land grant awarded to William Richardson in 1838. It was open cattle range until the 1860's when it was divided into dairy ranches that were leased to tenants who had immigrated from Portugal's Azores Islands. In 1866, Samuel Throckmorton, who had succeeded Richardson as owner of Rancho Sausalito, built a hunting lodge named "The Homestead." It was located here on this corner and faced east, in our direction. In the 1850s, the site had been occupied by William Reynolds who managed Reed's cattle herds on Rancho Corte Madera del Presidio north and east of here. Throckmorton lived in San Francisco. When he brought friends to the ranch to hunt elk and bear, they stayed in one half of the lodge. The ranch manager lived in the other half.

1888 Photo of The Homestead (14A)

This photo of ranch manager Jacob Gardner and his family was taken in about 1888. From left to right are his wife Annie, Lillian (in her lap), Leslie, Cora, Jacob and Georgina. Later in life, Jacob Gardner (1846 - 1921) was a prominent citizen: member of the first Mill Valley Board of trustees, promoter and financier of the first Mill Valley school, county sheriff, and county supervisor. He was the gentleman in the 1905 photo of volunteers building a sidewalk on Montford Ave.

Jacob Gardner was hired as ranch manager in 1868. It was a tough job overseeing the tenants, managing a large cattle ranch, maintaining 15 miles of fencing with several gates and farming at "The Homestead" where he had to keep riding horses ready for Throckmorton and his hunting buddies. After five years, he left for greener pastures. But he returned with his wife and family in 1880 after the murder of the interim ranch manager, Charles Severence.

Every month, Severence made the rounds collecting rents in gold coin from the tenant dairymen. The cook at "The Homestead" plotted to murder Severence and take the gold. He prepared a burial site and carefully disguised it. He waited for a night when the Severence family was away. Severence returned from his rounds later than usual with about \$100, and immediately began the evening milking chores. The cook snuck up behind Severence, struck him with a hatchet, and shot him five times. He dragged the body to the burial site. Twelve days later, the body was found, and the cook was arrested in Sausalito. He was put in jail where he hanged himself with a noose made from his undergarments. This was a sensational crime for that era. The funeral service in San Rafael for Charles Severence was the largest ever in Marin County. Throckmorton delivered the eulogy.

"The Homestead" burned down in about 1900. The building we see here today was constructed by Herman Heckman in 1904 for his large family. There are four apartments in the building today. More about Mr. Heckman at our next stop.

Turn around and go back down Ethel to 550

STOP #15 In driveway of 550 Ethel

This house was formerly a barn, the only building that survived the 1900 fire that destroyed “The Homestead.” It can be seen in the 1905 Work Party Photo (10B).

Sketch by Grace Martin 1898 (15A)

This sketch of “The Homestead” shows there were several out-buildings, but this barn is located to the left of the lodge and not in the sketch.

Throckmorton viewed Rancho Sausalito as his pride and playground. He was jealous of it and would allow no trespassers or campers. One visitor wrote, “It was quite a privilege to obtain a special permit to spend a day at the ranch. You drove up from Sausalito in a livery conveyance to The Homestead, presented your permit and procured a key to the gate at Locust that would allow you to picnic at the Old Mill.”

Upon Throckmorton’s death in 1883, ownership of Rancho Sausalito passed to his daughter, then to San Francisco Savings Union and finally in 1889 to the Tamalpais Land & Water Co. which immediately undertook development projects, initially the Eastland and Millwood (Mill Valley) subdivisions. The Almonte and Homestead Valley subdivisions were next in 1902 and 1903.

In 1903, Herman Heckman, a carpenter and cabinet maker from Merrill, Wisconsin, built a millworks on Miller Avenue where Vogue Cleaners is today. He manufactured doors, windows, cabinets and other products and did general carpentry such as house additions and remodeling. In 1904, he bought a triangular piece of property that is today delineated by Evergreen Ave., Linden Lane and Ethel Ave. He sent for his wife and six children and built a 13 room house on the corner where “The Homestead” had been.

Herman also created the Heckman Tract on his triangular property, a subdivision of 19 lots. The Heckman home occupied three of the lots. The house where Homestead Grocery used to be is on two lots. There are 14 other homes in the tract.

Anecdote

Pearl Heckman in her oral history about the 1906 earthquake when she was 21 years old states, “We went to the top of the hill and watched the fire. The wind carried leaves out of the Bible clear over the bay and dropped them here in Mill Valley. They were burned all around the edges. We picked them up and took them for souvenirs.”

**Go down Ethel, turn right and go up the right side of Evergreen
After Hawthorne, cross Evergreen to 231**

STOP #16 At driveway of 231 Evergreen across from 222

In 1904, Henry Morton, a carpenter, bought this property and started construction of a house which is behind this house on Evergreen. He then built a carriage house here which was later converted into this house. Access to the house in back is via a lane.

1904 Photo of the Morton family (16A)

This photo shows Henry, his wife Rebecca, their daughter Grace, age 7, and son Leland, age 3. They lived in a tent during construction. In 1905, when the house was ready for them, Henry and Rebecca moved here from San Francisco with their two sons and three daughters.

Henry Morton also purchased and subdivided a nearby block of land between Evergreen and LaVerne. The Morton Tract consisted of 8 lots and Willow street. The name of the street was later changed to Richardson, then to Heckman and is now Linden Lane. Homestead Hall was on a lot in the Morton Tract.

Photo of the Morton family on front porch (16B)

This is a photo of the house on Lillian Lane. On the back of the photo is written, "This must have been taken during first world war 1917-1918. Grandpa and grandma Morton at right on front porch of their home in Homestead."

The woman and man on the far left could be their daughter Grace and her husband Benjamin W. Woolecroft, a brakeman on the railroad. The day could be the fourth of July or Armistice Day. The camera direction is southeast. It is late afternoon. Descendents continued to live in this house until it was sold in 1996.

As for the house here on Evergreen, Henry Morton's great-great-grandson, also a carpenter, lives here. He is the only known fifth generation Homestead resident.

Anecdote

The 1910 census shows that Harry Morton, the oldest son of Henry and Rebecca, was living in the front house with his wife Helen and 2-year old son Stanley at that time. The senior Mortons lived in the rear house with their daughter Essie, age 30, a piano teacher, their daughter Grace, age 13, and their son Leland age 9.

Proceed up Evergreen on the left side of the street

STOP #17 In front of 253 Evergreen across from 254

In 1907, two seemingly identical cabins occupied this site on Evergreen Ave.

1907 Photo of 254 Evergreen (17A)

This 1907 photo taken from up on Ridgewood Ave. shows the two cabins. Note the tent at the house next door on the left. Note the numerous trees along the creek but barren land between Evergreen and LaVerne.

1914 Photo of 254 Evergreen (17B)

This photo was taken in 1914 from the Ezekiel house on LaVerne—we stopped there earlier in the walk. The two cabins have been connected to make a house. In 1979, the house was raised to create a basement. In 1985, the basement was converted to a living unit. The house is now a duplex. Each unit has about 1200 sq. ft. There is a deck over a carport on the left and a large yard on that side for the upstairs residents. The parking area and a large back yard on the right are for the downstairs residents.

In the early 1990s, Homestead was caught in the middle of a political battle between the Tamalpais and Mill Valley fire departments. Tam Valley and Homestead Valley fire departments had been merged in the 1970s. Through a joint powers arrangement, fire stations in both Mill Valley and Tam Valley served Homestead Valley.

In 1993, the agreement between Mill Valley and Tam Valley fire departments was voided. The Tamalpais Fire Protection District then decided that a fire station was absolutely necessary in Homestead Valley. In 1994, after failing to find a suitable site for a new fire station, a temporary solution was developed. Two firefighters were housed in the ground floor apartment of this house. Communications equipment was installed. A temporary shelter was erected to protect an ambulance and fire engine parked in the parking area on the right. The fire fighters and vehicles stayed here only at night. During the day, firefighters would respond to an emergency from the Tam Valley fire station. In 1999, high level fire district employees in both the Mill Valley and Tam Valley retired and the Southern Marin Fire Protection District was formed by the merger of Tam Valley and Alto-Richardson Bay fire departments. A new arrangement was made for Homestead to be served once again from both Mill Valley and Tam Valley fire stations. The firefighters and their equipment moved out.

Enter the backyard through the gate on the right, go around back and exit on the left. Proceed up Evergreen to Volunteer Park

STOP #18 In Volunteer Park

In the early years, Homestead's fire protection service came from the Marin County Fire Department. In 1940, Ove Johnson watched helplessly while his home on LaVerne burned to the ground. The county fire fighters had responded to the call, but they were not authorized to fight structure fires—they were there to prevent the fire from spreading. Ove was furious. He did something about this sad state of affairs. After rebuilding his home, he bought an old Hudson truck. He and five friends refurbished it as a fire truck or "pumper". The Homestead Valley Volunteer Fire Brigade was born. The pumper was kept covered with a huge tarpaulin on the flat lawn north of the house, reached by a long steep concrete driveway.

In an emergency, Ove's wife sounded the siren on top of their house. The volunteer fire brigade rushed to the Johnson's house, and sped off in the pumper.

In 1950, Mrs. White, who owned a lumber yard, gave the firemen enough lumber to build a fire house. She also sold them this lot for \$100. It was on top of Reed Creek. Dirt from the excavation for an expansion of Homestead School was used as fill on top of a culvert.

1950 Photo of Volunteer Fire Department in Firehouse (18A)

This photo was taken on New Year's Eve 1950. Members of the Homestead Valley Volunteer Fire Dept. and guests are celebrating the completion of the fire house. The old fire truck is on the left. Ove is on the right standing on the running board of a newer fire truck.

In 1962, paid firemen took over from the volunteers. Homestead Valley's fire department was later taken over by the Tamalpais Fire Protection District which had a fire station in Tamalpais Valley. In 1980 the Homestead firehouse was declared surplus and was rented as a residence. In 1989, after the Loma Prieta earthquake had caused severe damage, the firehouse was demolished. Volunteers developed the site into a park. The Homestead Valley Land Trust provided the funds for a landscape architect and materials.

1992 Photo of the dedication of Volunteer Park (18B)

On February 29, 1992, a large number of Homestead residents met here to celebrate the opening of Volunteer Park. Shortly after Homestead Valley was subdivided in 1903, volunteering became commonplace. Volunteer Park itself is the result of work by volunteers. Volunteer Park honors all those who have served the community of Homestead Valley throughout its history including the volunteer fire brigade.

WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED

Homestead Valley is not in the city of Mill Valley.

The name comes from Throckmorton's hunting lodge.

We stopped at a few homes built before 1910 and saw photos of others.

Three community centers: Homestead Hall, Brown's Hall and today's.

The 2 AM Club began as The Brown Jug.

Cooper's Grocery once had a post office in it.

Miller Ave. Shopping Center is now Whole Foods.

Volunteers played a major role in Homestead Valley's history.

MORE INFORMATION

www.millvalleyhistoricalsociety.org

120 short articles on the history of Homestead Valley

2003 history walk guidebook for Upper Homestead Valley

2010 guidebook for Lower Homestead Valley—to be posted soon

The Mill Valley Historical Society REVIEW Spring 2010
“Tales from Homestead Valley”

Copies for sale today at the community center