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RUTH WHITE (MRS. ROBERT) BOWIE

An Interview Conducted by  
Ruth and Joe Wilson

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# Interview with RUTH WHITE BOWIE

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Mrs. Robert Bowie (Ruth White Bowie née  
Ruth Boericke)

Born May 13, 1888 in San Francisco.

Resident of Mill Valley since 1904.

Interviewed November 1969 in her home, The  
Garden of Allah, Mill Valley.

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## Introduction

Ruth White Bowie is one of Mill Valley's grande dames in the true sense, though she would deplore the use of the term.

Her home, the Garden of Allah, remains one of the show places of the Bay Area. She came to the estate as the bride of Ralston L. White who, along with his father, Lovell White, was largely instrumental in the early land development of Mill Valley. Ralston was named for William C. Ralston, a lifelong friend of his father.

Mrs. Bowie was born in San Francisco. She and her twin sister were educated at Miss West's private school in the city, then at the Waltham School for Girls near Boston and Briarcliff Manor on the Hudson. They made their debut in 1909, and in 1910 Ruth and Ralston White were married.

Accustomed to a life of plenty, the Whites took in stride the 1929 market crash which not only wiped them out financially but left them deeply in debt. They leased their Mill Valley home for \$250 a month. Half of this went to their gardener, who remained at the Garden of Allah. They then went abroad for seven years, living in inexpensive pensions for \$1.00 a day and using a part of their meager income for travel -- on foot or bicycle.

Mrs. Bowie takes pride in telling how Ralston White completely cleared his debts. The last payment was made on September 23, 1943. Three days later he died.

In order to perpetuate his name, Ruth White Bowie has deeded the Garden of Allah to the United Church of Christ, which uses it as the Ralston L. White Memorial Retreat, a conference center for Congregational Church groups.

## RUTH WHITE BOWIE

I was born in San Francisco. My father, Dr. William Boericke, was a homeopathic physician in San Francisco for 50 years. He was born in Austria, but he came to America as a very young child and grew up in Philadelphia. My mother was born in New England.

The old Boericke home where my parents lived in San Francisco was at 1812 Washington, near Van Ness. All seven of their children were born there. My twin sister Dorothy and I were born May 13, 1888. We had five brothers. Two of my brothers were also homeopathic doctors. They have both passed away. Only one brother is left now, and my twin sister.<sup>1</sup>

The Boericke family came to Mill Valley about 1904. We first had a place up in the Sierra, near Placerville, where mother used to go with the seven children every summer. But I think somebody scared my father about having his family way up there in the mountains, so he decided to build a summer place in Mill Valley, on Tamalpais Avenue.<sup>2</sup> We were all baptized Swedenborgians, and the minister of the Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco, Mr. Worcester, was very close to my father. It was Mr. Worcester who said to him, "Come over to Mill Valley. I'll show you where to build a home for your family."

We came over in 1904 or '05. Mill Valley was strictly a summer place in those days. There were practically no year-round residents, just a handful. Everybody came over just for the summer.

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Laurence M. Symmes, Sr., formerly of Scarsdale, N.Y., who now lives at the Tamalpais Retirement Residence in Greenbrae.

<sup>2</sup>309 Tamalpais Avenue, now the residence of Mrs. White's nephew, Laurence M. Symmes, Jr.

At the time of the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906, my father and my twin sister and I were in Europe. My sister and I had gone to school in Dresden that winter, and my father came over to bring us back. Before we came home we went on a trip through Italy, Spain and southern France. We were in Naples when the earthquake happened. As you have heard, there was an eruption of Mt. Vesuvius at the same time. Vesuvius is right under San Francisco, as you know, so whatever happened, happened at both ends! I never will forget the headlines in the Naples newspapers: "San Francisco Wiped Off the Map!"

We were naturally very worried about my mother and my five brothers. Father cabled across, and it took three days to get a reply.

As it happened, mother had moved over to Mill Valley the first of April, so they actually weren't in San Francisco.

Their home in San Francisco, which was designed by Willis Polk, was marked for dynamiting to stop the spread of the fire. Fortunately the fire didn't cross Van Ness Avenue, so they didn't dynamite. It's torn down now, of course. What a shame to tear down a Willis Polk house. He was the architect for the Garden of Allah, too, as you know.

Mill Valley in those days was the most fascinating place there ever was. I loved all the horses and buggies. I date back to steam trains, of course. Electric trains followed. When I was a child we all rode horses, and we used to race the train into Mill Valley. The first train station was Millwood, and we would ride our horses down there. It was about a mile out of town. Millwood doesn't exist any more; it's Locust Avenue, I think. We used to line up at the station. Being a steam train, it took a minute or two to get going when it started off, so it gave us riders a chance to get a little ahead.

The Mill Valley depot was a big wooden building, and everybody went down there with their horses and buggies. All the families met the 5:15, the popular train. The Blithedale Hotel had a four-in-hand that came down. It would make a wide swing around the big redwood tree before the guests got in. The Kenilworth Inn had its own bus, also the Woodside Inn, and all three hotels



sent their busses down to meet the 5:15. You could hardly get through the grove around the depot. It was full of horses and buggies and horseback riders. Those were such fascinating days.

As children we did a good deal of walking on Mt. Tamalpais. We thought nothing of walking to the top of the mountain. It was almost a weekly event. It was only three miles, up and back. Mill Valley in those days had a lot of hikers who came over by the train. Most of them walked up Summit Avenue, or up Tamalpais Avenue by the Boericke home, on their way up the mountain. Any amount of people walked to the top. It was just the regulation walk.

Dowd's stable was in operation then. Irvine Dowd ran that stable for many, many years, and his father before him. There were a few stores, but it was just a little country town.

We went to the old Summit School. They had about four grades in one room. There weren't many children. Kathleen Norris was one of them, you know. Her youngest brother, Jimmy Thompson, was the first white child born in Mill Valley. Rob and I used to see a lot of Kathleen before she died. We still see something of her brother, Joe Thompson. He was an usher at Ralston's and my wedding.

Ralston White and I were married April 6, 1910. Mr. White was a great one for camping and the out-of-doors. He was so fond of that side of life that he was bound he'd get me just as fond of it. Part of our honeymoon trip was a 400-mile horseback ride from Paso Robles to San Francisco, over the old Monterey Trail, which is Highway 1 today.

Let me show you some pictures of that famous riding trip. This is the way the trail was. We rode 400 miles of coastline, most of it along a sheer cliff.

We had been married a month when we got the horses. My twin sister and youngest brother went along. We thought it would be better to have four than just two starting off in that rugged country. Here is a picture of the four of us as we left Paso Robles. We slept on the ground and did our own cooking. We carried everything with us, food and all. Of course we fished along the way.

Ralston was very romantic and a great outdoorsman. He loved hunting and fishing.

Mr. Lovell White, Ralston's father, was a banker. He was president of the San Francisco Savings Union for 40 years, and of course he wanted his only son to be a banker. My husband was more interested in the beauty of the out-of-doors, but his father insisted that he had to work at the bank. That's when Ralston memorized Omar Khayyam's "Rubaiyat." He worked so fast and was so ahead of everybody else that he could finish the job and then memorize 105 stanzas of the Rubaiyat, which he kept reciting to me all the time. He had no taste for banking, and he had to disappoint his father, when he finished college, by saying he couldn't face a banker's life; he just had to do something else.

Ralston had earned \$1,800, so he left home and went around the world. He traveled for 18 months. His money gave out and he came back steerage from Japan. He was such a nice-looking young man that the captain invited him for meals every day, but he slept steerage.

He and his father had been a little estranged on account of the disappointment, but the 18 months' separation did the trick. When Ralston got home, Lovell White was so glad to see him he said, "All right. You can start at the bottom at the Tamalpais Land & Water Company in Mill Valley, and that will be your future."

Here's a picture of the land and water company. It was located where the telephone company office is now.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lovell White was instrumental in opening up Mill Valley, along with other early residents. They all date back to the 1890's.

Ralston started as a surveyor. Actually, it was when he was surveying the slopes of Mt. Tamalpais for the Tamalpais Land & Water Company that he discovered this spot for our home. He was reading Hichens' book, "The Garden of Allah."<sup>2</sup> It's a very romantic tale, and he

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<sup>1</sup>128 Throckmorton Avenue.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Smythe Hichens (1864-1950). British author who replaced G. B. Shaw as music critic for The London World. "The Garden of Allah," an immensely popular novel, was turned into a successful play and filmed three times.

loved it. He told me, "When I saw this magnificent site I just took a deep breath 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 it got its name. That's why I've seen to it that the name will always be perpetuated. This is written into the deed to the property, and the name can never be changed.<sup>1</sup>

I want to show you some pictures of the beginnings of the Garden of Allah.

The building is steel and concrete. All the material for the house was brought up on the mountain railroad. From the railroad track down to the road here, the material came down a slide. Then it was hauled down to the site.

Here's a picture of the beginning of construction. You can see the steel structure. It was probably the first house of its kind in Marin County; everything else was wood.

Many people, when they see these pictures, say, "My goodness, did they need that much steel?" I think they used more than they needed, but it has certainly stood well. I suppose it's practically indestructible.

The University of California called me, after I had made arrangements to leave the property as a memorial to Ralston, and offered me a breath-taking price. They said, "We need a building for our Natural Sciences work, and we want it near the Berkeley campus. Would you be interested in \$400,000?"

I said, "I wouldn't be interested. It's a permanent memorial to my husband." I think they were really disappointed.

The Garden of Allah was finished in 1915, the year of the Panama-Pacific Exposition. The place was over two years being built. It was started between 1912 and 1913. It was mostly hand labor in those days, so it took a long time to build.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1957 Mrs. Bowie deeded the house and 43 acres of natural woodlands to the Northern California Conference of Congregational Churches, as a memorial to Ralston White.

We lived in the little cottage up around the bend while the main house was being built. The cottage was very cozy and comfortable. It has been lived in by a good many people over the years, but it was new when we occupied it.

Here it shows how they poured the concrete. No wonder it took over two years to build!

It was very bare when the house was first finished. But we had a perfectly fabulous Finnish gardener, Alphonse Haapa.<sup>1/</sup> He took care of it for 45 years. Mr. White and the gardener talked everything over and planted everything. Ralston didn't do much of the actual work, but he did the landscaping and gave directions.

Alphonse is still alive, and a wonderful person. He's 78 years old now. He used to come regularly. Now he says, "Mrs. Bowie, any time you need me I'll come, but otherwise I don't care to come to the Garden of Allah. It makes my heart sore."

He just can't bear to see the neglect of the garden; the place has become so run down. I'm not criticizing, because I know times have changed. A lot of people still think it's beautiful, but some of us remember how it did look.

People have said to me, "You remember it always at its best, but it still looks attractive to strangers." And I guess that's true.

Several people who have come to the Garden of Allah have said to me, "This is simply beautiful! If you hadn't called it the Garden of Allah you should have called it Shangri-La."

This is a picture of the swimming pool. It holds 350,000 gallons of water. You can see what a beautiful pool it was under Alphonse's marvelous care. I swam in that pool for 50 years, and the temperature of the water was never warmer than 60°. Most of the time it was even cooler. I loved cold water and still do.

When we first built the pool it had this bridge across, with a diving board at either end. Mr. White had it taken down, because he thought it was dangerous. He said a person who dove might hit his head on the dam,

<sup>1/</sup>Alfonso Haapa.

and he didn't think it was worth taking the chance. We kept the two diving places on either side, but we got rid of the bridge.

Here is our tennis court. We had a wonderful court. It was made of Indian shell mound, and Alphonse took perfect care of it. It was the one court in Mill Valley that was full size. Helen Wills and Tilden and many other champions played on it. We always had big buffet luncheons for them out on the terrace.

Alphonse hauled the shell over from Alto in his truck. It was from an old Indian shell mound.

This was a bridge that went across the canyon to the barn area. Alphonse built it. He walked or ran around this place all day long. He lived up in the cottage, and he went back and forth, back and forth. So he built this bridge. He never thought of driving down in a car. Everybody who lives up there now brings their car down to the kitchen door and drives back and forth!

Here's a picture of the house before the vines grew and the yews were transplanted. We had to fence in the lawn on account of the deer.

Here's the house, with the heart-shaped lawn. Look how bare it was compared to the way it is now. The growth over the years is really amazing.

We had a pair of golden Irish yew trees at the entrance, which Mr. White and Alphonse transplanted from the old Bibb place. One of them died. It's a rather rare type of yew. The green Irish yew is not rare at all. Everybody has green Irish yews, but this is the golden.

Mr. White bought the Bibb property, which adjoined the Garden of Allah. We had a large acreage, but he wanted the whole canyon. These two golden Irish yews were at the old Bibb place, and Alphonse and my husband transplanted them and brought them over here. Where Mr. Bibb got them, I don't know.

Alphonse and my husband slipped a lot of the golden Irish yews, so we have them planted all over the place. There are all kinds of "children" of that tree. They're

beautiful at certain times of the year because they are golden.

As I said, one of the pair at the entrance died, which in a way was almost fortunate. Full-grown, it would have blocked the view from the porch entirely. The one left is a little off to the side. It's really fortuitous **because** it's in just the right place so that people can stand on the front porch and see the view. But the other trees are growing so rapidly that the view will soon be blocked anyway. I've never seen anything grow like those trees. I guess that's why people say it should be called Shangri-La, because it's so nestled in among the trees.

Here's a picture of Ralston ready to play baseball. He really started baseball in Mill Valley, for the young boys. He was crazy about baseball, and he taught them and helped them and directed them. One of the first things he taught me was to keep score. He said, "Ruthie, you'll never enjoy baseball until you can keep score."

We had our own baseball field on a large plateau above the house. Mr. White used to have the Rotarians and the bank people and his friends from the American Legion -- they all came over and played baseball here.

It's all part of the church property now, although I sold a little piece of it. I was reluctant about it because I didn't like to cut it up. But a young couple came to me with tears in their eyes and asked if they could buy a little piece of land. They told me they wanted a home on the mountain, so I consented.

They paid me \$500 -- and within a year they had sold it for \$5,000. Since then a home has been built on it, which adds to the value, and it is now for sale for \$35,000. They told me they were going to live there forever! Well, anyway, it doesn't matter.

There was a pasture up there for our horses for awhile, and we had a shed up there, for hay. We also had some water tanks up there. We had a rather expensive system -- a tank down below and a pump that pumped water up to the ball field. Then it came down by gravity. But that was an expensive and troublesome system.

Mr. White realized at once that we couldn't develop

this place without our own water supply. That was essential. You can imagine, with a place like this -- and with leaking faucets and all -- it would be terrific if we had to buy town water. So he knew he must acquire a water right.

Way back in 1913 he was able to buy a water right that belonged to the Bibb place. He got it for \$18,000, which was a good deal of money in those days, but that water right today would be about \$180,000 -- if it were for sale at all. At any rate, Mr. White was able to buy it, so the Garden of Allah has always had its own water supply. That's the reason we had the swimming pool and everything. That was very smart of my husband because, as he said, we never could have developed the place without our own water supply. It would have been quite impossible.

Here's a picture of the snowfall in 1913. Mill Valley did occasionally get snow, and it was always a great event. This was quite a heavy fall. There was another snowfall in 1919. Here's a picture of the mountain covered with snow. We don't seem to have snowfall like that any more, do we?

Look at the kind of cars we had back in 1911 and 1912. The roads everywhere were in such disrepair, and camping out as we did we took so much luggage that the cars just broke down. We had to be hauled out all the time.

When we first lived at the Garden of Allah we drove back and forth to the Mill Valley station with a team of black pacers. They were some horses! It was a very costly team. Every time we passed the mountain railroad train the horses reared right straight up, they were so frightened. That's the type of horses they were. They were just wonderful.

Mr. White was so fond of fishing and hunting that we went in rather heavily for dogs. And we had a lot of horses. We each had a riding horse, and the team of black pacers, and a work horse. We had a cow and all those things in the early days.

Mill Valley was so marvelous then, so adorable in every way. The trees, the old mill, and the people. We all knew each other. It's all changed now. It's

still a lovely place, but a very changed place. I like to remember driving down to the 5:15 train and the 7:45 in the morning, the horses and the buggies, and the railroad cutting right across the mountain.

Blithedale was fascinating in those days. I think it was Dr. Cushing who opened up the summer hotel on Blithedale. Do you know Mrs. James Jenkins? She lived here for many years. Dr. Cushing was her grandfather. Sidney Cushing was her father.

Every Saturday night we all went to the "summer hops" at the Blithedale Hotel. In fact, that's where I met Ralston White, at one of the summer hops. 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.

The Kenilworth Inn was in the Mill Valley canyon, out what is now called Throckmorton Avenue. Kenilworth was right about at the end of Throckmorton, before it becomes Cascade. It was a fine old hotel. The Woodside Inn was near Blithedale, down in Corte Madera Canyon. It was a very nice hotel, but it wasn't on the scale of the Blithedale or the Kenilworth.

Mr. White enlisted in the army during the First World War, and I worked as a volunteer in an organization called "Fatherless Children of France." The office was in San Francisco, at Sutter and Montgomery. I was the corresponding secretary. We sent \$100,000 to the French orphans from people in the Bay Area. Lucien Brunswick, a prominent San Francisco citizen, went to France at the end of the war, and I'm sure it was through him that I was sent a medal and a letter of thanks from the French Government. I think Mr. Brunswick called attention to the fact that I had stuck it out for the longest of any of the volunteers (I was there for over three years), so I was the one who got the medal. Of course it was the organization that did the work. I don't know that I deserved thanks any more than the others.

Dr. Bowie, my second husband, was in the First World War, too. He was a surgeon in France for 18 months.

Mr. White was at Fort Scott when the Armistice was signed to end the war. He was at Fort Scott the whole time! He joked about it. I have a picture of him taken



with one of my brothers, and Ralston has written on it, "Admiral Boericke and staff, heroes of the great war." They wanted to get overseas, but they never did get across.

Mr. White and I later did a lot of traveling. I'm so glad we saw Europe and Japan and China and Egypt when we did. Now the countries all over the world are so frightfully Americanized. They were so different when we saw them away back in the 1920's.

"The Golden 20's," they always call them. Those were much better days, weren't they? There was a great deal of affluence. The country was very prosperous at that time, up until 1929 when the crash came.

We did a lot of entertaining and had friends in and just held open house. My sister and her three children<sup>1</sup> came out from the East every summer, and my father and mother were both alive. We led what you might call (although I don't like to use this expression) a typical society life. Of course in those days we had the means, and everybody had servants. We had a cook and a second maid, and Alphonse had an assistant. They all lived here. I was the head of the house and had to provide. So it was a busy life in an entirely different way.

Since I've been doing my own work it amuses me to think how afraid I used to be that my maids would announce their departure when I had a big dinner party. I was scared stiff! Since I've been doing my own work I consider myself very efficient, and I can do it very easily. If I went back to those days, if a maid demurred over a party or anything, I think I'd say, "There's the door."

Here is a picture of Ralston and me in costume for the Mardi Gras Ball in 1922. We used to go out to a lot of society functions in those days. You can see that I haven't always had white hair -- although I've had it a long time. I can remember when we were going to Europe in 1930. I had white hair then. We sat at the captain's table, and later one of the officers asked him, "I wonder how old Mrs. White is." The captain said, "I don't know, but I'm sure she's not over 50." I was

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<sup>1</sup>Two are residents of Mill Valley: Jean Symmes Barnard (Mrs. John Barnard) and Laurence M. Symmes, Jr.

so insulted; I was only 42! But that's what my white hair did for me.

[Mrs. Bowie was asked about the 1929 fire on the Middle Ridge of Mt. Tamalpais.]

That's an interesting tale. Mr. White was down at his office at the Tamalpais Land & Water Company. My twin sister was here then with her three children, spending the summer with us.

Somebody flicked a cigarette from one of the trains of the mountain railroad. That started it, right up here above the Garden of Allah, and gradually everything took fire. Alphonse saw the little smoke starting above the railroad track. He came down to the house and said to my sister, "There's a fire starting. You'd better report it to the fire department." She did, but the fire simply galloped. It was so dry that July.

I was in San Rafael. When I came back and wanted to drive up here, they stopped me. They said, "Mrs. White, you can't go up to the Garden of Allah."

"But it's my home," I said. "I want to get there."

"Oh," they said, "that's gone long ago."

My sister and the children got out safely. Mr. White came up from his office when he heard about the fire. He and Alphonse and the Fire Department, such as it was, fought the fire from here.

One reason the fire spread so much was because hydrants were not a standard size in those days. Mill Valley hydrants didn't fit the equipment that came in from all over the Bay Area, and they couldn't turn on the water. Middle Ridge was almost all burned; all homes were lost. My father and mother's home burned, over on Tamalpais Avenue. Strangely, the Lovell White place<sup>1</sup> on Magee did not burn.

Our garage burned; all the pasture burned, the barn,

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<sup>1</sup>The Arches, 95 Magee.

everything. Of course this house couldn't burn because it's concrete, and all the windows were closed. It could be gutted if a fire started on the inside, but it could never burn from the outside. So if any sparks did blow over this way, they were harmless. But the fire burned the little shed up at the ball field that we were speaking about. The fire swept over the hill and went right across the ball field.

Redwood trees are not combustible, so the fire swept over the redwood trees and none of them burned. It didn't go below the house. It swept down from the canyon and over the hill and took in all the houses on Ralston and on over to Tamalpais, where my parents lived. Actually only my mother was living there then, as my father had died in April. But that house burned to the ground. Almost all of Middle Ridge was burned, and right on down to Mill Valley. The fire burned for three days.

A story on the Garden of Allah in the Saturday Magazine Section of the San Rafael Independent-Journal for February 14, 1959, says:

"On the first floor are a large entrance hall, a big living room and adjoining solarium, a breakfast room and a dining room where more than 50 people may be seated, a kitchen that has been remodeled with modern equipment, and the apartments where Dr. and Mrs. Bowie live when they are not at their home in Colorado or traveling. The second floor consists of several baths and many bedrooms, each of which opens onto a veranda."

Mrs. Bowie commented:

Actually there are only five bedrooms. Each has its own balcony. There are only four baths in the house.

We had a large gymnasium on the second floor. Mr. White was so crazy about athletics that he had his rowing machine and so on in a gymnasium, sort of his special section of the house. We had a ping pong table there. He and I were great ping pong players. When we came back from Europe, after living over there seven years in the 30's, we came back on a freighter and, believe me,

we were the champions of the freighter! The church now uses the gymnasium as their conference room. They've completely renovated it.

In those early days I used to have a dressmaker come and stay a week at a time, so I had a special sewing room for her.

The house as originally designed did not have the top floor. But Ralston, even though he was very athletic, sweat easily. He decided there must be a third floor, a sort of attic, to protect the house and keep it cool indoors on warm days. Willis Polk added the top floor, which the church now uses as dormitory space.

Another story in the Independent-Journal of May 30, 1959 says:

"When the great depression struck in 1929, the life of affluence vanished, and the Whites leased their beloved Garden of Allah and went to live in Munich, Germany.

"'Though money was scarce, this was one of the happiest times of my life,' Mrs. Bowie recalled. '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, and we lived during this period in Berlin, Leipsig, Paris, Rome, Vienna and even rode our bicycles into London in 1937 to see the coronation of Edward VIII before we went on through Ireland and Scotland.' V

"Returning to Mill Valley in 1939, the Whites again lived at the Garden of Allah but were soon involved in the uproar of World War II."

During the Second World War Mr. White served on the War Ration Board, and both Mr. and Mrs. White did volunteer work in connection with the war effort.

Mr. White died of a heart attack on September 26, 1943.

Mrs. Bowie continued the interview:

V This is an error, as Edward VIII abdicated before coronation.

I was a widow nearly 11 years.

In the summer of 1954 I walked through the Alps, being very fond of climbing. I joined a group of ten people led by an Italian marquis. He took us through the Alps. Incidentally, I might say that I and a 16-year-old girl were the only two women who climbed all ten passes. The other women took the mail busses around the passes instead of going over them.

I had invited my 14-year-old nephew to go with me, and he had to get back in time to start school. My brother, his father, wrote me and said, "Why don't you come back a little early and join us for the three-week World Congress of Homeopathy in Rio de Janeiro? You can fly from New York, and we'd love to have you join us."

This would only shorten my European trip by two weeks, so I thought, "Why not?"

I came back to New York and flew to Rio de Janeiro with my brother and his wife. My sister and her husband were there too. We all stayed at the Gloria Hotel. There were a lot of doctors there, and I knew many of them. I was talking to one of them in the lobby one evening when he looked up and said, "Here comes Dr. Bowie from Colorado. You must meet him."

I thought to myself, "He is rather jaunty." He didn't pay much attention to me down there. I hardly knew he knew me. The only indication he gave me of even the remotest interest was when he said goodbye.

"Goodbye, Mrs. White," he said. "Will you write to me?"

I thought to myself, "Well, this is rather sudden!" I said, "Oh, I'll be happy to send you a California Christmas card."

He started writing before Christmas. Then in January he came out to Mill Valley, and we were married on April 3, 1955.

Dr. Bowie and I traveled quite a lot when we were first married. We made a world tour in 1956. We don't get around so much these days. Rob doesn't like to have

me drive after it starts to get "twilighty." But we're very cozy here in our apartment in the Garden of Allah, with this magnificent view of the mountain from our living room window.

I still pass my driver's license without glasses. I can read the smallest print without glasses, although my vision in one eye is not so good. I'm getting a cataract in my left eye. The last time I took my driver's test (which I have to take every year now), the man who took me out for the test said, "I see nothing wrong with your driving, Mrs. Bowie. It's only your age."

You can't get around the age, that 81!

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In 1936, while we were living in Munich, Catherine Symonds wrote to us asking for our memories of early Mill Valley. I'd like to read you Ralston's reply:

Munich  
January 24, 1936

Mrs. Carl Symonds  
Mill Valley, California

Dear Catherine:

I will be glad to contribute whatever impressions I can glean from my recollections of early Mill Valley. Unfortunately, I have no pictures available and no written records that might "add luster to the light of other days."

I'm afraid that anything 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 by-gone 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, Manzanita 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 dairymen. 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 about \$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 Eastland and Lovell White, for whom some of our streets were named, as you know. These men became interested in the subdivision possibilities of the Throckmorton Ranch, and a settlement was reached whereby the loan was paid off and Throckmorton was given 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. M. O'Shaughnessy, whom I have often heard my father refer to as "that brilliant young Irishman," and whose future career fully justified that acclamation.

The rancho was then cut up for sale into smaller ranches of some 300 to 600 acres each. A townsite was laid out where Mill Valley now is and an accompanying map filed for records, known as Tamalpais Land and Water Company Map No. Two, later resurveyed as Map Five.

The North Shore Railroad<sup>1</sup> built a spur to this townsite, 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 traveling 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 Phineas 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

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<sup>1</sup>According to "The Crookedest Railroad In the World" by Theodore G. Wurm and Alvin C. Graves, the name of the North Pacific Coast Railroad was not changed to the North Shore Railroad until 1902.

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 the 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 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 1907, 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. Janes was then made resident manager of Tamalpais Land and Water Company affairs. Jacob Gardner continued as ranch superintendent and road builder, and one E. Steele was a 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 Throckmorton Avenue and Cascade Drive. In Corte Madera Canyon the stream was lined with the summer dwellings of the pioneer families: 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 Madera Canyon. 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 until 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 90's, 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 might add, however, the following few personal impressions that I retain of those early days:

1. Jacob Gardner's house at Locust Avenue looks exactly as it did over 40 years ago, it being about the first house in Mill Valley.

2. Homestead Valley, with only a ranchhouse 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 recently occupied by the "cookhouse," a whitewashed building where, under the spreading oaks, the early surveyors and road-builders ate their meals and pitched their tents.

4. The canvasback 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 wild lilac. We used to go blackberrying down there on a summer day, while thousands of songbirds filled the air with their music. This location 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. 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 show-places of the 90's. On the Corte Madera side, there was the big dam about where Lee Street is now -- in size about 60 feet by 80 feet and about six feet deep and a fine swimming place for the early inhabitants. Also, the little dam about where King Street is, which was shallower, served as a swimming pool for the Blithedale children.

8. The center of social activity was the Blithedale Hotel, where dances were 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 you have available from other old-timers, anything further I might offer just now would be redundant. 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 dead 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 yours,

Ralston White

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You might be interested in another letter that still means a great deal to me. I received many wonderful letters when Ralston died, as you can well believe. Many of them were very beautiful expressions of sympathy for me, which was deeply appreciated, but this letter I've cherished because it was 90 per cent all about Ralston. It's from Bill Nostrand, who was an associate of Ralston's in the Tamalpais Land and Water Company and our good friend for so many, many years. This is his letter:

Dear Ruth:

This is a very belated note, but be assured it is not due to lack of thoughts of you. Ada and I want you to know how deeply we feel for you in this dark hour and

what a tremendous loss to us was Ralston's passing.

Time and again we have said Ralston's was the best company we knew of. What pleasure it afforded us to be with him. In years gone by he often stopped in for a chat, and never a time but he left us greatly stimulated and with the restoration of faith in human nature through his presence.

We will never forget his timely sense of humor, his spontaneous laughter, his gift of expression, his zest for life, his true philosophy, his thoughtfulness and kindness, nor his daily practice of a livable religion, the Golden Rule.

As you know, I have had many transactions with him, over a long period of time, and in every instance he leaned over backward to be fair to the other party, the essence of integrity. I would rather have had his word for a thing than the written contract of others.

This is a time for you to count your blessings, Ruth, and what a host of them you have. There cannot be a moment of the day but what brings to mind some happy event or camaraderie. We have always thought of you and Ralston as an ideal couple, an outstanding example for all others to imitate. So many happy memories, Ruth, that we know of -- and then the many more that you alone know.

To me, the greatest tribute that can be paid a man is to say the world has been better for his having lived in it. Applied to Ralston, this is far too mild a statement. To us who knew him, something irreplaceable has gone from this world, and it will never be quite so bright again.

With sincerest sympathy,

William H. R. Nostrand

Isn't that a lovely letter?