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Mill Valley Historical Society

Mill Valley Public Library  
Mill Valley, California

JOHN GEORGE  
VERGINIA (MRS. JOHN) GEORGE  
An Interview Conducted By  
Carl Mosher

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John George

Born August 1905 at Lake City, CO

Resident of Mill Valley since 1930

Mrs. John George (Virginia Glahn Cameron)

Born May 18, 1913 at Petaluma, CA

Resident of Mill Valley since 1915

Interviewed August 22, 1979 in their home at  
233 Elinor Avenue, Mill Valley.

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JOHN GEORGE  
AND  
VIRGINIA GEORGE

Carl Mosher

This is August 22nd, 1979. I'm Carl Mosher, talking to Mr. and Mrs. John George, John and Ginny George. They've been in Mill Valley a long time, and so we're going to go right back to the beginning, and talk with John first about his early life and how he happened to come to Mill Valley. You were born in Colorado, John?

John George

Right.

Mr. Mosher

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. George

My father was a Baptist minister. My dad went to school in Indiana, and during divinity school he developed tuberculosis, so they shipped him out West for the cure. That's where he met my mother, who grew up at Mancos, Colorado, just under the Mesa Verde Park. For a while he worked as a Forest Ranger outside, and then this tiny church in Lake City, Colorado which was a booming mining-town of probably 2800 people or more. Then we moved to three or four places in Colorado.

He eventually went to Spokane, Washington, where he was the field representative of the Northern Baptist Convention, and while we were in Spokane I finished high school, and naturally went to a Baptist college, because as the son of a minister I got half tuition. I finished at Linfield.

Mr. Mosher

Where is that located?

Mr. George

At McMinnville, Oregon, just about forty miles south of Portland, very close to where Herbert Hoover went to school, Pacific College at Newburg. There were half a dozen tiny little

colleges in the area, most of them church-oriented. I had this chance to become the principal of a little high school about thirty miles inland from Astoria, Oregon, reached by a twelve mile long corduroy road.

There was no electricity in the valley. The enrollment was fourteen kids. There were two of us, my wife at the time, and I. We divided the entire curriculum. We offered a complete course in commercial subjects; my wife taught shorthand and typing and transcription. I handled the history, Latin and English. We had our own gymnasium with a Delco lighting system so you just walked in and pushed a button and the gas engine came on to generate electricity for the lights. The big distinction of that high school was that we had the highest cost per pupil of any public high school in the United States.

Mr. Mosher

I was thinking the ration of teachers to students was really very astonishing.

Mr. George

But coupled with that we had the lowest mileage tax rate of any public high school. We were in this tiny valley, with a little farm here and there, and thousands of acres of beautiful Weyerhaeuser timber. I decided at the end of three years I wanted to come to California.

Mr. Mosher

Before you leave Oregon, tell us a little about the corduroy road bit, that's something that's virtually unknown to most people now.

Mr. George

I suppose, technically, the real corduroy road is supposed to have split logs, split and then laid flat side up. In this case they had long logs as runners. The cross-pieces were rough-hewn four-by-fours. It was just wide enough for one car. About every quarter mile, they'd built a little turnout, so that you could pull out of the way.

I've never been a hunter or a fisherman. I didn't take after my dad, who loved both but the whole area teemed with deer. The river was full of trout and then in certain times of the year the salmon came up the Nahalem River. It was a real paradise. We were furnished a little teacherage, right by the school, a little three-room cottage, with a wood-burning stove and wood for heat. The chairman of the School Board and his wife were lovely people. We used to play "Pedro" with them. He was German. He had gone through third grade. We graduated four kids that first year I was there. His daughter was

valdictorian of the class. He just had spasms in terms of getting ready, because I had told him that we wanted him to give the diplomas. The entire valley, about ninety, or ninety-five people came to the graduation ceremony. He said, "Just write anything for me to say." So I wrote him a little speech. "I want to thank all our friends and so on, for their support and cooperation during the last year. Thank you." His wife said that when he'd milk he'd keep his little speech out there, propped off his knee, milk and go thru it. He got up that night, and he said, "I want to thank you people for the cooperation."<sup>1</sup> He was one of the most marvelous people. He had to be, you know, to serve as chairman of the Board.

Mr. Mosher

These were all farmers, I take it.

Mr. George

All farmers.

I coached both the boys' and the girls' basketball teams, and so that meant that everybody was involved. We put on a senior play, and I had to take a part. I think I was a policeman. We were an outstanding thespian success. That was one of the most delightful times. I can't recall any one in the community, who just wasn't a delightful heart. Religiouswise, you know, it's terrible to say, I don't think I ever went to church, a Baptist's son. There was no church in the entire valley.

Mr. Mosher

How much were you paid, do you recall?

Mr. George

My first year at the little school outside Corvallis was \$990 for the year. Then when we moved to Jewell I was paid \$1500, and my then wife was paid \$1350. This at a time when, starting jobs were universally a hundred dollars a month. Then my last year my salary was \$1800 and hers was \$1500, and since money didn't make any difference, they offered me \$2000 or \$2100 to stay a fourth year. But with the confidence and egotism, I guess, of youth, I said no, I wanted to go on to California, and there'll be no trouble getting jobs.

Mr. Mosher

Your pay, by the standards of that day was princely. I'm astonished.

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1. he pronounced it coop-eration

Mr. George

I suppose they figured it might be difficult to get some people to live under what to me were ideal conditions.

Mr. Mosher

If they were so ideal, why did you want to come to California?

Mr. George

I don't know. I just got to thinking, or I guess we did, "Gee, this is marvelous, it's Utopia, but do we want to stay here forever?" I had friends who had made the move to California, and I kind of wanted to test myself, you know. So I came to California. My then wife worked in a drugstore, the lunchcounter part of a drug store, and I dished hash at the old Cellar.

Mr. Mosher

Now where was this?

Mr. George

Stanford.

Mr. Mosher

You were doing graduate work there. What year was that?

Mr. George

Twenty-nine and thirty.

Oh, you mentioned the princely salary, which it was in those days, particularly double salary. I had a brother-in-law, who worked for Standard Oil up in Washington, and he had picked up fifty or so hours of flying time, and he was all thrilled. He said, "My gosh, the future is in aviation. If I could get two hundred hours, my transport license, why then, I'd start an airfield someplace." Well, it happened, my senior year when I graduated from college, I'll tell you about it later.

I had worked every summer in lumber-mills in northern Idaho, just off Lake Pend Oreille. Do you know anything about old-fashioned saw-mills? I was riding carriage, bull dogging the carriage, which doesn't take too much brains, but that carriage whips back and forth at tremendous speed and you always get bruised up pretty well. Anyway the pull-chain coming out of the river came off the sprocket. They called all hands out to help ease it back. It was driven by a huge leather pulley. Well, I stood up on the housing right even with the top of the drive-wheel. The rest of the men had ropes stretching out, like spokes, easing it back. Somebody got his signals mixed and thought it

was all okay, so they turned on the power and this big wheel threw me into the bulkhead. I dropped on to the bull-chain and it took me through the hole in the floor that was just big enough for the bull-chain to go through. Now those dogs that fit into the logs were on about every six to seven feet. Fortunately I hit in between the dogs and fell twenty feet to the steel burner chain. From there it was probably two hundred feet on up with the debris to go into the burner. I felt no pain at all, something anesthetized me. I could look up and I could see where I was headed, but of course that chain on the burner chain goes at a slow walk so I wasn't about to be dropped in. But as I went through it tore this, you can see the line there, one ear was removed, my back, the pelvis, and all the strips on my spine were pulled loose, double break. Anyway ----

Mr. Mosher

They cut off the power at that point?

Mr. George

Yeah, yeah. So that finished my work for the summer. The company doctor said, "I can't handle it." So they took me to Spokane and I finally pulled out of it and reported to school a month late walking on crutches. At that time, in the state of Idaho they had Workmen's Compensation. As I recall it, Delaware Casualty handled the Workmen's Compensation, and it was very specifically spelled out. Death, as a workman, payment in full, three thousand dollars. Loss of both arms, physically incapacitated entirely, was three thousand dollars, but everything scaled down from that figure. Three months afterward, just before I started my school job, the claim adjustor for Delaware Casualty wanted me to come down to talk over adjusting the claim. My dad went with me, and fortunately for me, we met down in the Davenport Hotel. That used to be THE hotel. The adjustor led off by saying, "Now, let's see, you're prepared to teach, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "I don't think we have too much to talk about in terms of a settlement, because in terms of your training you are not handicapped."

My dad said, "You've seen the gentleman down selling pencils on the sidewalk down below?" "Oh, yeah." He was a fixture. He had had his legs cut off and was in a little pushcart. Dad said, "That man lives here in the Davenport Hotel. He get fifty to sixty dollars a day out there, and if had hadn't lost his legs he would be doing day labor. According to you that guy owes you something for losing his legs." That ended it and they settled with me for two thousand dollars.

I told you that I had a brother-in-law with the yen to have an airplane. He said, "You and I ought to get together here. You buy the airplane, we'll fly it, and then we'll settle down and have a little airfield." I had the money. We were in Portland, the two of us, at the time, and the money had been put in the bank in Spokane.

This is pertinent to the situation. My family had a dog by the name of Carbon, a black fox-terrier. Very early in his life he had had an operation to make him stay home and not be too interested in young lady dogs.

I wrote my dad and said, "I want my money, we've got a chance to buy an airplane, a Waco biplane from Tex Rankin out at Swan Island in Portland." Dad wrote or phoned down and said, "You got no business doing that. You're trained to teach, you don't have any mechanical sense at all and to talk about going into something like that is ridiculous."

We kicked it back and forth, and he dropped me one note saying, "You have as much business buying an airplane as Carbon has to get married." I responded, "That's all right, I've thought it over, it's my money, and I want it." I got the wire and it said, "Money on the way. Carbon married." I bought the airplane. We barnstormed that next summer all over Walla Walla and Yakima and into a little county fair, and so on.

Mr. Mosher

Did he teach you to fly it?

Mr. George

I never soloed it. I had hours in the air and that was all. I never landed it.

Mr. Mosher

You were taking care of the business end of it.

Mr. George

What there was. We were short of funds we couldn't afford to have me take landing instruction because of the gas. This was, as I recall, about the year after Lindberg flew the Atlantic solo -- 1928.

I went down to Stanford, and found that I could get my California teaching credentials in four quarters. I thought,



"Well, shucks, that's easy. I'll get my masters at the same time." Which I did. I had at Stanford some extremely memorable professors. Does the name Elwood D. Cubberly hit you at all?

Mr. Mosher

I don't believe so. Was he in the Education Department?

Mr. George

He was in the Education Department. He had been a prize find of David Starr Jordan. He published a series of books on school administration. He was the father of a new concept in California. He preached it, and finally got it across. His theme was this -- the money for education in the State of California should come from where the money is. The money should be spent where the kids are. He was the forerunner of this idea that Beverly Hills can have a marvelous school system because they've got the money. But a place like Taft, a little spot out in the valley near Fresno with no assessed valuation, had no money but scads of little kids. His original concept spread the money around.

If you wanted to put out a book in the field of education you were ahead if you could get Dr. Cubberly to write a preface or foreword. They called them The Riverside Series. He and his wife never had any children. They amassed a considerable amount of money from his writings. There's a Cubberly Library down there you know.

In one of his lecture courses, he was talking about schools and buildings. He said, "There's one unique high school in California where there has been only one bond issue and yet the buildings have been completed one after the other from the regular school funds and taxes. Not only that, but this particular school has a man who draws all the plans for the new buildings. They do not put the buildings up for bid. They go ahead and build them and have a member of the school staff do the actual supervision. It's unique in the State of California. That's Tamalpais High School over in Marin County."

This was the Depression, 1930. Jobs were slim. Over in the placement bureau one day there was a little slip saying, "Wanted: Teacher to teach Navigation, History and English."

A friend of mine says, "You'd better get on that, you're History and English." I said, "Good gosh, are you kidding? Navigation? I don't know anything about navigation, I don't even know arithmetic." He says, "You know that's the school that Dr. Cubberly's talking about. It might be interesting to go see it anyway."

I took the train to San Francisco and then the ferry across to Sausalito. On the ferry coming across I got talking to a man. We just happened to exchange words. I said that I was on my way to interview at Tamalpais High School for an opening. He says, "So am I." We got to chatting and I asked him his background.

We was teaching at Redwood City in high school, and he was going to interview too. I found out he had four years in the merchant marine. We continued and got on the electric train, and got off down in front of the high school.

Do you know where the "Duke's" home used to be?

Mr. Mosher

When you say the "Duke" are you talking about Mr. Wood?

Mr. George

Yes. His former home is now used for domestic science and sewing classes. He lived right on campus. That was his property where his home was. At a later transfer he sold it to the school. We went over and rang the doorbell at his place. He came out and we walked over to the main building. Incidentally, at that time, it was probably ten o'clock or ten-thirty, and he had been up since four-thirty or five. Mr. Wood always got up with, or just before dawn. He got most of his work done then. His wife was the opposite. Mr. Wood was usually in bed, unless he had a meeting, by eight o'clock or eight thirty. His wife was just getting going. She would get to bed about one in the morning, but it seemed to work very well.

Then we went over to the office. I said, "Mr. Wood, I'll look around the campus and grounds, you talk to this gentleman first." I felt I had already lost. I just wandered around. He talked to him for about forty five minutes and finally came out. Mr. Wood called me in and asked just a general question or so. Then he said, "How are you mechanically?" I said, "I can't even change spark plugs in a Model T. I'm just absolutely worthless." We talked about this and that, and I was utterly relaxed because I wasn't going to get the job and I knew it. So when I heard the electric train whistle I said, "Mr. Wood, excuse me, I've got to get back to Stanford. Excuse me, I've got to run." He followed me out. I got clear to the bottom of the steps and then he called. He said, "Well, would you consider the job?" So that's how I signed up at Tamalpais. I apparently convinced Mr. Wood that I had a million job opportunities and this was the least of my worries.

Mr. Mosher

You were unconsciously taking advantage of a well-known psychological phenomenon.

Mr. George

I sure was. Navigation was a kind of misnomer. They had a twenty-four foot Sea Scout boat with a Gray marine engine. A teacher, Tom Edwards, was the skipper and he wanted an assistant to work with him. My navigation consisted of going out on cruises with the group in the Sea Scout boat.

I was the first Stanfordite that Mr. Wood ever would take a chance on. I think that was one thing in my favor when I came. He'd had some criticism. He was a graduate of the University of California, major in History which was his real love. He did not graduate from college until he was over thirty. He worked as a carpenter for some time after high school, then got the yen to go to college.

Mr. Mosher

He also taught mathematics at one time.

Mr. George

I don't know. He may have. During my time at Tam he did no teaching. But he was very, very enamored of Berkeley, the University of California, and any time the placement office over there had someone they thought was exceptionally outstanding, they'd get in touch with Mr. Wood. So there was some criticism that he was being a little bit partial. So I think I was an experiment; "Well, it may not work, but let's try Stanford once."

Mr. Mosher

I'm going to talk to Ginny for just a moment. I know that you were born in Petaluma and lived in Mill Valley off and on since 1915. I'd like you to talk about your years at Tam High. You started there in the mid-twenties. We were just talking about Mr. Wood, who was superintendent then. You must have known him rather well.

Mrs. George

Yes, he was principal, at that time. He didn't do any teaching.

Mr. Mosher

Tell me about your family. What was your father's occupation?

Mrs. George

He sold dairy products, butter, cream and milk. He did a bit of traveling.

Mr. Mosher

Where did you live in Mill Valley? What was your address in the twenties?

Mrs. George

East Blithedale. In fact it was almost across the street from the Boy Scout Hall. It's now a real estate office, I think Cagwin has his office there. The rest of the time we lived in my grandmother's big house on East Blithedale. That's after my father passed away.

Mr. Mosher

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mrs. George

Yes, one sister, who was born in Mill Valley.

I guess I went to every one of the grammar schools in Mill Valley. I went to Summit School, Old Mill School and Park School. I started at Park School, then I transferred up to Summit School, and then I went down to Old Mill School.

Mr. Mosher

Where were you when you graduated from the eighth grade?

Mrs. George

In Oakland. We had moved there when I was starting seventh grade.

Mr. Mosher

Then you went to Tam?

Mrs. George

Yes, when we moved back here from Oakland, in '28 or '29.

Mr. Mosher

Let's talk about Tam a little bit. Who were your particular friends?

Mrs. George

At that time they came from all over Marin County, except San Rafael. They came from Corte Madera, Larkspur, San Anselmo, Fairfax, Stinson Beach and Bolinas.

Mr. Mosher:

They rode a train to school in those days, didn't they?

Mrs. George:

My friends were from all over the county but the high school wasn't as large then as it is today. There were a lot of good teachers. I remember having a nice time at school. In fact, I cried when I graduated. I wanted to keep on going to school. I have fond memories of Tamalpais and the teachers there.

Mr. Mosher:

What was your major interest in Tam? Academically?

Mrs. George:

I majored in History and English, but my real major was History.

Mr. Mosher:

What did you do in extracurricular activities?

Mrs. George:

Art work, mostly. I took different art classes.

Mr. Mosher:

Now here we are up to Tamalpais High School with Ginny going there in 1927, 28 and 29, and John coming along in 1930, seems like the hand of Fate. John, why don't you talk to Ginny a little about this.

Mr. George:

She doesn't mention so many of the interesting things that

I know she can tell you. Now, for instance she once said, "You know all those windows down at Tamalpais High School? I washed practically all of those." I asked her how come you washed those windows?

Mrs. George

At that time we had to wear uniforms: middies and navy blue skirts and a middy tie and collars. All the girls wore them at that time. If we came to school with one part of it missing, like a tie, or wearing another skirt, we were sent to the Dean of Girls, Miss White. She made us do things around the school. I think I washed every window in the high school at least three time, because I didn't like to wear uniforms.

Mr. Mosher

I've been talking to people who went to Tam in the twenties and thirties off and on for the last six years on this program, and that's the first one that ever told me they washed windows as part of the punishment program. I'd never heard that before.

Mr. George

And then I think the most interesting part is something with regard to the social center, the Rose Bowl, the famous Larkspur Rose Bowl, and your connection with it, and your uncle, wasn't it your uncle?

Mrs. George

My uncle had the orchestra that played at the Rose Bowl, so my sister and I practically lived at the Rose Bowl every Saturday and Sunday night when they had dances up there.

Mr. Mosher

What was the name of this man?

Mrs. George

Walter Krausgrill, he was a Mill Valley man also. During the earthquake my grandmother and grandfather owned a summer cottage over here. They lived in San Francisco but they would come over here for the summer. At the time of the earthquake they were burned out, so that's how they originally came to live in Mill Valley. They moved over to their summer home. My uncle used to play with the Mill Valley baseball team. My grandfather was on the baseball team too. It's a family that dates back to even before the 1906 earthquake, but they established a permanent residence in Mill Valley right after the earthquake.

Mr. Mosher

Was this your mother's brother?

Mrs. George

That was my mother's brother and the name was Krausgrill.

Mr. Mosher

Lots of people talk about the Rose Bowl, and say, "I met my wife on a Saturday night at the dance over there." It was apparently a very important social institution.

Mrs. George

It was during the time that I was in high school. The students from high school knew everyone in Marin County. They would all meet at the Rose Bowl and had a good time. I think that's what was so nice about the era. The kids weren't out running the street or anywhere else. They had a place to go and they enjoyed the dancing, and it was very pleasant.

Mr. Mosher

You just reminded me, you mentioned baseball a little bit ago. Of course, sports played a very different part in our lives then. And I notice in reading old newspapers that stories concerning the local baseball team were front page news. The local people went out weekends to watch the games. A very wholesome way to expend your energy and have a good time.

Mrs. George

They played over there at Boyle Park every Sunday. Everybody'd get their picnic basket out and go over there and spend the whole day watching them play ball. It was really nice. You couldn't do anything else.

Mr. George

One other thing. Your Uncle Walt's sister, your aunt, played the organ at the old Hub on the corner of Throckmorton and Madrona in what is now the I.O.O.F. hall.

Mrs. George

She used to play in the old Hub Theater before talkies came in and before the Sequoia Theater was opened. The old Hub Theater was owned by a Mr. Cook. My aunt played the organ for all the movies. She was quite a musician. She

played for Rotary Club. She did a lot of singing. I think most old-timers in Mill Valley remember her. Her name was Hattie Thompson.

Mr. Mosher

You had some interesting connections, then. Going to the theater and the Rose Bowl. The most prominent social activities in the whole area.

Mrs. George

Right.

Mr. George

I saw a picture of a social evening at your aunt's place on Blithedale showing some very well-known people who had come over from San Francisco.

Mrs. George

You're talking about Tommy Harris, from San Francisco. He used to sing at the Rose Bowl with my uncle's orchestra. And Phil Harris, who was a very good friend of our family, also played with my uncle's orchestra before he made himself famous.

Mr. Mosher

We'll go back to Tam High again. Just after you graduated your present husband, John, came to Tam as a teacher.

Mrs. George

Right.

After I graduated from high school I worked in San Francisco. I commuted back and forth on the train and the ferry. In fact, I worked for the San Francisco Examiner. I worked there for about two or three years, then moved to San Francisco, and was gone for a while, then came back, so I've spent most of my life here.

Mr. Mosher

In the fifties you mentioned that you worked for Northwestern Savings and Loan for a while. Was that in the Mill Valley office?



Mrs. George

Yes, that was the Mill Valley office.

Mr. Mosher

You were good friends of the Dearths, then?

Mrs. George

Yes. Mr. and Mrs. Dearth were the managers.

Mr. Mosher

John, let's go back to your first year at Tam and build on that. I know you had an extraordinarily long and interesting career there.

Mr. George

I started in the fall of 1930, just three months after Ginny graduated.

Mr. Wood's nickname, the "Duke", seemed to fit him. He was very proud of it and liked to be referred to as the "Duke", but he was a very formal individual. Nobody on the staff called him the "Duke", or Ernest. Even his wife, in public, called him Mr. Wood.

If he were here today he would run into trouble with a million State regulations. For instance, he had one secretary who was the entire clerical staff. When I came to Tam the enrollment was over a thousand, which is not a bad-sized high school today. The clerical staff, for handling all State reports and so on consisted of his secretary, and she usually went home at three-thirty.

His accounting methods were informal. I was always convinced that I would trust him with anything, he was thoroughly honest, and he assumed that everybody else was honest, too. An auditor, going back into the early days would scream. A little gal named Susie Smith ran the book store and the student supplies. For instance, I'm taking a baseball team over to Richmond to a game, and needed money for the ferry tickets. I'd just run to to Mrs. Smith, and say, "I'm going over to the game." "How much will you need?" "Well, I think about forty dollars." "OK, here's forty, bring the rest back." So I'd go over, and come back and say, "Well, here it is, I've got five dollars and eighty cents left, that goes into the petty cash." That was the way that the school was operated. I don't think that anybody ever took advantage of it.

I moved, first thing, into what they eventually called Woodruff Hall. It was named for Margaret Woodruff, the first teacher assigned a room in that building. My class-room was up on the second floor along with Mrs. Muriel McCrum, math department, and Rae Kappleman, at that time Rae Buttner, who taught history. My schedule called for extra duties, with regard to Sea Scouts. I think I had a couple of classes in World History, two or three in English, and one in U.S. History, the first year.

Mr. Mosher

For the most part then you were teaching in your specialty, and you were happy about that.

Mr. George

I was happy in the other, because nobody expected me to know much, that was just recreation in the Sea Scout boat. Then in 1935 there was a man on the faculty, a Francis Watterman, who taught journalism and supervised the putting out of the school annual, the Pai, and the Tamalpais News. He was a reserve flier with the Navy, apparently a good one. The Navy asked that he be released for a year so he could go over to Alameda Air Station and train pilots.

During my last year at Linfield I had put out the Linfield Oakleaves, the annual. So I'd had a little experience, but not much, in some type of publications. I think Watterman suggested to Mr. Wood that maybe I could fill in for the year. Anyway, I took over that responsibility during his leave.

In April, the following spring, he had a student up in a plane over Alameda. They never knew what happened. Apparently the student froze at the controls and he couldn't bring it out. The plane crashed, and he was burned to death.

I just stayed on then, with the putting out of the Tamalpais News, until 1950, that was my real love in terms of working with the "Duke". Richard Dillon was a student. You know which Richard Dillon I mean? I called him Duke Dillon.

Mr. Mosher

Apparently not, I was thinking of the author.

Mr. George

That's the one. Sutro Library. Yes, I was speaking of him as a student. We've kept very, very closely in touch. He and others made it so enjoyable working with student publications.

In 1945 Mr. Wood resigned and the new superintendent, principal really, Mr. Willard Van Dyke, inaugurated the counselling program at Tam High. He brought a very fine woman, Eunice Reeder, to set up the counselling program. For a while I was half-time working with the student publications. In 1950 I became Dean of Boys. In 1963 I went over to the District Office as Director of Child Welfare and Attendance. For my last five years I was not a part of Tam per se, but kind of free-lancing through all the three schools. I retired in 1968.

Mr. Mosher

I know you did a lot of extracurricular things at Tam; sports, American Field Service and other things.

Mr. George

I had very little sports activity. Has anybody mentioned the old Tam Swimming-pool?

Mr. Mosher

No, I don't believe so. You mean the one in the gym?

Mr. George

It used to be in the gym. Long before my time they bought plans for a World War I concrete barge. This was under Gerry Wendering's supervision. They actually poured a swimming-pool which was a World War I barge.

Mr. Mosher

You mean they brought the completed barge in?

Mr. George

No. I've never been sure, maybe they brought in the whole works and sank it. But I thought instead that they had made the forms and the students did the actual pouring of the concrete. It was a student venture. It was just kind of resting in the ooze, floating, and gradually through the years it began to settle at the shallow end, so that the other end where the diving board was, became the shallow place where you could stand up. It tipped. They used to have a lot of jokes about how visiting teams hated to come and swim in the Tam pool because they had to swim uphill. They had a swimming coach, Relzey Aiken, who also taught art.

Incidentally, the "Duke" had a real phobia. He felt that in many schools the sports program dominated too much. He refused to hire anybody as a coach. For instance, at San Rafael and most other high schools even then the football coach was the coach and he taught P.E. during the day.

The "Duke" insisted that he wanted balance, so that's why at one time I taught one class in Physical Ed. Scotty Hall, who drew the plans for the buildings that Wendering followed through, had one period when he taught P.E. Wally Andrews who taught math, had one period of P.E. So that continued for a long long time. Coaching was secondary.

Mr. Mosher

That's quite a different system from what we have now in terms of emphasis. You know, you were down there for approximately thirty-eight years. I wish you'd comment with all the candor you possibly can on the school politics during that period.

Mr. George

For a few years after I arrived, the School Board meetings with Mr. Wood, were held in Mr. Wood's office. I guess there were always five Board members and then part of the time he had his secretary there to take notes. I think part of the time he took the notes himself. No teacher, no citizen, would have had the temerity to come up and knock on the door, and say, "May I come in to the Board meeting?. You just took it for granted that Board meetings were for the Board. Later there was pressure for change.

He also wasn't enthusiastic about the PTA. In a way Tam was different. This high school wasn't Sausalito and it wasn't Mill Valley and it wasn't Larkspur, but it was out in the hinterland. So that things just kind of went along automatically with nobody being too concerned or too bothered.

Mr. Mosher

He was what might be called a benevolent dictator.

Mr. George

He really was. When I first went there, I said to myself, "Maybe sometime if I could be guaranteed three thousand a year for the rest of my life how happy I would be, because that was the top salary then and there were just a few who were paid that. The head of the English department, Elizabeth Kaiser, a very outstanding woman after whom Kaiser Hall was named, had been there with Mr. Wood since Day One, since Tam opened in 1908. As head

of the English department, I think she got two thousand seven hundred dollars. I could name four male members of the faculty that got the three thousand or maybe it was three thousand one hundred dollars. It took a long time but eventually things began to boil. Mr. Wood had the theory that any man was worth more than any woman in a teaching position, because of the things he could be asked to do in terms of afterschool sports, and weekends and all that. He felt that it was justified. I can't remember just exactly when it was that a uniform salary schedule was put in for men and women.

Mr. Mosher

Did you like being in administration or did you prefer the teaching?

Mr. George

I think my happiest times were with the publications, and the contact with the students. I am not by nature an administrator.

Mr. Mosher

Ginny, where were you on July 2, 1929?

Mrs. George

1929?

Mr. Mosher

Yes, where were you that day?

Mrs. George

On July 2? I guess I was out on school vacation.

Mr. Mosher

I wondered if you were in town, because that was the day of the big, big fire.

Mrs. George

Oh. Oh, yes I remember that. They were evacuating people out of Mill Valley, as I remember. We were living on East Blithdale, and we were to move, or get out of Mill Valley as fast as we could. They didn't know how fast it would burn. Luckily we had relatives in Sausalito that had a big home. I know a lot of people

in town that had trucks or larger cars came along and they were picking people up to take them to Sausalito or some other place in the county. So we did go to Sausalito, but only for the rest of that day and night and then we came home the next day.

I can't remember seeing the fire when it first started, but I remember all the people running into the street, saying "Look up at the mountain", and you could see it right here, very clearly. It was really burning and it looked like it was coming down the mountain. It looked like it was coming right into town. I don't remember how close it did come, but I understand, if I remember right, that it came pretty close down to the foot of the mountain.

Mr. Mosher

Right down to Lovell Avenue, as a matter of fact, which is awfully close to downtown.

What are your memories of the mountain railway?

Mrs. George

You know, I never rode on the train, because when we were kids we used to walk up to the top of the mountain all the time. We never thought of taking the train up there. We walked up and down the mountain many Sundays, or Saturdays. We thought that was fine. We'd go early in the morning, go up to the top of the mountain and see the sunrise. That was fun. A lot of students or people in Mill Valley did that.

Mr. Mosher

Do you remember any of the stores or the merchants downtown?

Mrs. George

I remember Mr. Bagshaw well. There were two Bagshaw families, actually. This was Sam Bagshaw's market, he had a grocery store in Mill Valley. It was in the Keystone Building, right in the middle of the block.

Mr. Mosher

Just about where Strawbridge's is, from the pictures I've seen.

Mrs. George

There was Esposti's Ice Cream Store where The La Ginestra restaurant is now. That had been there a long time. There was an Eastland Bakery. In fact, that was one of the insignias on the baseball team they had in Mill Valley,. The Eastland Bakery was one of the famous names written across their shirts.

Mr. Mosher

Incidentally, you're starting to speak of Miller Avenue there, with your connections with the dance-band, do you remember a dance floor on Miller?

Mrs. George

I was just going to mention that. I wasn't too old at that time, so I just faintly remember. They did have a dance-hall about where Brown's Furniture Store was at 38 Miller. It was either right there or right next to it where all those trees are. They had a large dance-floor down there. It was open air. They used to give a lot of costume parties. In those days the whole family went, the little children and the old people and all the people and they'd give costume parties all the time. We thought it was fun. Everybody in town would plan months ahead to get together the costumes that they were going to wear to the dance.

Mr. George

What was the music?

Mrs. George

It was an orchestra, but I do not remember much about that. Usually they would have a piano, a drum and maybe another instrument.

Mr. Mosher

It was always live music, of course, in those days.

Mrs. George

Oh, yes.

Mr. Mosher

Was there any restaurant, or food-service in connection with it?

Mrs. George

Not that I remember.

Mr. George

Was it a wooden floor or concrete?

Mrs. George

It was a wooden floor. In fact it reminded me of the dance-floors up at the Russian River at Rio Nido.

Mr. Mosher

It had a resort flavor.

Mrs. George

Yes. And they'd have lanterns strung across. Of course the dance-floor wasn't even there when I was in high school. It had disappeared long before that. I remember it more when I was just in grammar school. I don't think it was there for too long after that.

Mr. Mosher

Do you recall the Outdoor Art Club? Was your mother in that?

Mrs. George

No. My aunt was. She played the organ and sang. The Fire Department, as I remember, was always on that same street, and I don't think they had a full-time Fire Department. I think it was all volunteers. Everyone in Mill Valley was a volunteer fireman. When there was a fire, they'd all go to the fire. In fact I have some pictures still of it.

Mr. Mosher

Til after the big fire in 1929 I think they recognized the necessity for more professionalism, more organization.

Mrs. George

Yes, but the time I'm talking about is when they didn't have a truck. They had horses to pull the fire-wagon. They used to keep the horses up in Dowd's Stables at 157 Throckmorton. That's exactly where the stables were, and they kept the horses there. My grandmother had her horse there. There weren't very many cars in Mill Valley then.

When my sister and I were children we would walk up to town, Mill Valley - we used to like to watch the hikers come in. We'd think they were so funny because of the way they were dressed.



I remember people coming back from hiking on the mountain, walking down the street to get on the train, and over half of them were carrying these big bouquets of what they thought was a beautiful red plant. Well, it was poison oak. We were so stinking as kids, we wouldn't let them know what they were carrying. They would take them on the train and take them all the way home.

Mr. Mosher

What amused you about the costumes?

Mrs. George

Well, in those days it seemed funny. Today it wouldn't seem so funny. They were all more or less dressed like Tyroleans, in leather shorts, and big hiking boots, which fits more in with the way they dress today. But in those days it looked funny, because we weren't used to seeing people dressed with short pants, like German people, and they would almost be like Tyroleans, with hats on and everything. Do you remember seeing any of them like that? Even knapsacks on their backs, like they were up in the Alps.

Mr. Mosher

You just remind me too, that there's been this German hiking club up in the Pipeline area, going way back into the teens or twenties. Whole communities of those people would come over here on weekends and holidays.

Mrs. George

I wish they'd bring the trains back again. I loved the trains and the ferry-boats. There were quite a few people though, who were killed in Mill Valley and around here, because of the electric trains. Because they always had the third rail. We grew up with that, so we were used to it, but there were some people electrocuted by the third rails. In fact lots of times animals were caught on these.

Mr. Mosher

Do you remember that your parents admonished you against the third rail?

Mrs. George

We were taught as little kids "Don't ever go near that".

Mr. Mosher

It's kind of astonishing that it wasn't fenced off better.

Mrs. George

We used to go across the tracks. The postoffice was down there about where the Wells Fargo is now on Miller. As they didn't deliver mail, we had to go down every day to our box at the postoffice. We would cut down the street and cross the railroad tracks a couple times a day, hopping over the tracks. Today it scares the life out of me. I think "My goodness, how could they have left those rails open."

Mr. Mosher

Do you remember any floods during those days? I guess you remember some in the thirties and forties, John.

Mr. George

Of course, down Tam way what was involved was the closing of Miller. Students used to enjoy seeing cars coming from Alto getting stuck and having to be pulled out. And where The Redwoods, the retirement home across from the high school, now stands many times it was covered with water. At Alto, I remember when they had floods you'd see cows wading deep in water. Where the Purity store down at the foot of Blithedale stood, now Blithedale Plaza, was all swamp land forty years ago. You could buy up anything in Mill Valley then and be a millionaire now, the way property values have risen.

Mr. Mosher

Any important events during this period that stick in your mind particularly?

Mr. George

A very important event I'll always remember. It was the student-body meeting called in Mead Theatre, Monday morning, December 8, 1941. We heard over the loud-speaker President Roosevelt saying that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. I can see the reactions in the theatre. There were some Japanese students. They had all been born in the United States. A couple of them were Nobuo and Todashi Kuwatani. These two boys came from a very fine outstanding family. They were as American as anybody could be. The students would say, "Well, they talk about the Japanese but Nobi here, he's not Japanese." The anguish that the student-body felt was very, very impressive. I cannot recall how long it was after that these kids were sent away to relocation centers when the government ordered Japanese to be detained for the duration of World War II.

Mr. Mosher

Tell me, John, about your children.

Mr. George

The oldest of my three is Robert. He is now a professor at the University of Wyoming in Zoology. His brother Dave, younger by two years, is a dentist in Modesto. I also have a daughter, Kathy, who lives in Shingletown which is near Redding.

Mr. Mosher-

Ginny, what of your children.

Mrs. George

I have two daughters, Vicky and Janet. I graduated from Tamalpais High School, my two daughters graduated from Tamalpais High School and my five grand-children graduated from Tamalpais so we have three generations who have graduated from Tam.

Mr. Mosher

It's awfully nice of you to take the time to work on this little project and talk to us and become part of the Oral History Program.

John Robert George (+Dorothy Potter)=

Robert George  
David George  
Kathleen George Wise

Virginia Glahn (+John Cameron)=

Vicki Mitchell  
Janet Rosevear