

Oral History Committee
Mill Valley Historical Society
Mill Valley, California

RUTH LESCOHIER

An Oral History

An Interview Conducted by
Marilyn L. Geary

Ms. Ruth Lescohier

Resident of Mill Valley intermittently from the late 1940's to the present.

Ms. Lescohier has resided in Mill Valley at 81 Sycamore Avenue, 249 Corte Madera Avenue, 407 Magee Street, and 40 Camino Alto Avenue, at the Redwoods Retirement Center. This interview was conducted by Marilyn L. Geary in March 2002 at Ms. Lescohier's home at The Redwoods.

Ms. Lesochier has reviewed the interview transcript. Her changes and additions are included in the transcript within brackets [...].

Proofreader: Ralph Harding

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INDEX

- Bjornstrom, Cora 8, 21
Blithedale Canyon 2, 4
Buck Fund 13-14
Canepa 4
Chevron 1-2, 19
Christian Science Church 16-17, 19
CIA 20
Coast Miwok 5, 9-12, 20
Community Church 4, 14, 16-17
Conger, Oliver 1
Corte Madera Avenue 1-,3
Dimitroff's 2, 16
Dipsea Trail 2
Dominican College 3-5
Downing, Ruth 21
Dreyfus, Babs and Benjamin 20-21
Eichorn, Bill 18
Episcopal Church 11, 16
Esson 1
Foster, Gordon 16
Green Frog 3
Gross, Joyce 15
Hallinan, Vincent 20
Hayawaka 13
Hippies 15-18
Homestead 8
Hurley, Yolanda 17-18
Independent Progressive Party 20
Jenkins, Bob 17-18
Jenkins, Doris 18
King, Dr. Martin Luther 17
Klyce, Harvey 4
League of Women Voters 12-14, 20-21
Lee Street 4
Little, Lucretia 3-6, 8, 12
Little Momma's 10
Lyon Place 1
Magee Avenue 1-2
MAPOM 10
Marin City 3-4, 19
Martin, Grace 8
Mason, Jack 5
Mauer, Mrs. 2
Melbostad, Gloria 4
Methodist Church 16
McCarthy, Sen. Eugene 21
Mill Valley Market 3-4
Mosher's Shoe Store 3
Muir Woods 1
Overstreets 16
Park, Helen Van Cleave 4-5, 8
Peri, David 20
Polapolis, Bill 19
Polio 19-20
Pomo 11-12, 20-21
Presidio Press 7-8
Redwoods Retirement Center 17-18
Redwoods Book Store 5
Reed Family 12
Richardson, William 6-7, 9, 11
Roach, Peter Roosevelt 3
Rose Avenue 13
Scott, Bob 17-18
Suey Kee Market 3
Sycamore Avenue 1
Terwilliger, Elizabeth 5
Throckmorton, Samuel 5-11
USO 2
Varney's Hardware 3
Vietnam War 21-22
Wright, Hazel 1-2

Marilyn Geary (MG): This is Marilyn Geary. It's March 5, 2002, and I'm at The Redwoods at the home of Ruth and Roger Lescohier. We're going to be interviewing her about her experiences in Mill Valley and about the books that she's written on regional history. Mrs. Lescohier, when did you first come to Mill Valley?

Ruth Lescohier (RL): We moved here about fifty years ago and rented an apartment at 81 Sycamore from Miss Hazel Wright, and then we were sent to New Jersey by Chevron. Roger was an engineer at Chevron, and meanwhile, we had bought a lot on Corte Madera Avenue at Lyon Place on the corner. And then the second time we were sent to New York and New Jersey because Chevron was invading Exxon at that time. We had purchased the lot, and when we returned we had a house built there.

MG: On Lyon Place?

RL: On Lyon Place and Corte Madera. 249 Corte Madera Avenue.

MG: What kind of house was it?

RL: Well, we had a model of it. It was u-shaped around a patio, and it had radiant heat floors. One story, nestled in the redwoods, and then later on, after we adopted two children, we had the patio roofed over with ripple plastic. Oliver Conger was the contractor on that.

MG: What kind of process did you have to go through to get your house built?

RL: We had money at that time from the sale of a home down in Los Angeles County. The next house that we had built was up at 407 Magee, off Summit Avenue. We did get a California veteran's loan. Roger was a California veteran. He'd been in the amphibious forces of the Navy. Actually he was at Iwo Jima invasion and saw the invasion through his binoculars. He saw the surmounting of Mt. Surabachi through his binoculars. He was a gunnery officer.

MG: So you have actually built two houses in Mill Valley.

RL: Yes.

MG: What drew you to Mill Valley? What brought you to Mill Valley when you first came?

RL: Well, when Roger was in the Navy before he shipped out, his dad told us to be sure and come over and see Mill Valley. His father has been a professor of labor economics at the university, and actually we have a little photograph of Roger at age four. The family had gone up on the mountain train and taken the gravity car down to Muir Woods, and Roger fell into the creek. And so we have this picture of him taken from the back, his

little shirt on and his clothes are drying on the bushes. They were having a picnic in Muir Woods where the gravity car went.

So we saw Mill Valley, and we liked it very much. We went to the USO on Throckmorton Avenue. Mrs. Maurer had loaned a store, which I think now is a frame shop, Dimitroff's Frame Shop, for the use of the USO. We hiked partway up the Dipsea Trail.

So then when we returned to California after the war, we didn't like it. We were originally from Wisconsin. Southern California was too dry, so Roger transferred within the company to Chevron up here at 225 Bush, and we rented that little top of a house from Hazel Wright, and then we bought the lot, and then we had the house built after we returned from the East. We had 249 [Corte Madera] built.

MG: After you returned from?

RL: After we returned from one of our trips East. Chevron sent us three times to New Jersey and once to Peru.

MG: What was it like in Blithedale Canyon back when you built your house?

RL: Well, there weren't as many houses, but it was the same. Corte Madera Avenue was sort of dark. The sun went down at three or four o'clock and that's why we wanted to build a house higher up there. We had a beautiful view. That house is still there at 407 Magee, and it has a view of the whole bay, Sausalito and The City. It had two decks. My mother never wanted to go out on there. She would come and visit from Wisconsin, and she was always too shaky. The people that bought the house later had the lower deck windowed in.

MG: The people who bought 407 Magee?

RL: Yes. It was a public health doctor. An Asian doctor and his wife.

MG: You were mentioning the USO on Throckmorton. What did it look like?

RL: Well, it was an empty room. I vaguely remember [that] it was a little bit dark, and it had tables. They offered us some refreshments. Very pleasant. Wartime.

MG: What size was it?

RL: It was just the size I would say thirty-five by seventy feet, perhaps not that much. That was 1944 or so. I can't quite remember that far back.

MG: What was Mill Valley like when you first came and saw it?

RL: Well, there were lots of little businesses. There are only two of the same businesses left, one is that rather strange pipe or tobacco shop on Lytton Square and the other is the Mill Valley Market. Varney's Hardware was very much a hardware store, and there were several grocery stores. The Green Frog which became the Mill Valley Market, the Suey Kee Market, and then two banks and two drugstores and a bakery. Carl Mosher's shoe store. It was a small town. There was a very, very good delicatessen adjacent to the theater. Mill Valley wasn't as glitzy as now, and there were no art galleries then. It was a small town.

(Knock on door interrupts interview briefly.)

Hello?

MG: So you got a teaching credential.

RL: Yes, I had a teaching credential. When we lived here, I attended classes at San Francisco State. I had taught under an emergency credential in Southern California. I had a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin. I graduated in 1946, but I wanted to get some more techniques. I kept up the credential. Actually, [that's] the reason I wrote the book about Mr. Throckmorton. I had to take a course, so I went to Dominican, and they had a course in local history, which is sort of a microcosm of national history. I went over to Bancroft¹ with Lucretia Little for whom the History Room² is named. She was the City Clerk, and she had moved to Mill Valley when she was ten. You have to have someone sponsor you to work in Bancroft Library, so she sponsored me because she had done a great deal in local history and had open access to Bancroft.

I was looking over some old letters which I was able later to donate to the Mill Valley Library. They are copies of letters Mr. Throckmorton had written to his cousin Peter Roosevelt Roach from 1850 off and on for fifteen-twenty years. I was much more interested in history, actually, than in teaching, but I taught school in Marin City. I taught third grade.

MG: What school was that?

RL: There was a grade school right in Marin City at the time. At that time, Marin City was half white, about a fourth black and a fourth Hispanic and other races, as I remember.

MG: What years were those?

RL: Late Forties and early Fifties. I taught there for several years. Later on, I went back and did lots of substitute teaching.

¹ The Bancroft Library, a special collections library based on Hubert Howe Bancroft's personal library of books and manuscripts on the American West.

² The Lucretia Hanson Little History Room is housed in the Mill Valley Public Library.

MG: What was it like to teach the kids in Marin City?

RL: Well, a lot of them hadn't been to a nursery school, and I think there were about thirty in the class. It was difficult when they were in kindergarten because they didn't have good work habits. We didn't have any help in the school. The mothers didn't come and there wasn't... Now usually teachers have an assistant, a non-credentialed person who comes and helps keep order and sees to it that the room's neat and all that. So it was more or less more old-fashioned teaching, too. The seats were kind of nailed down, and we didn't move things around much.

MG: You were mentioning that you took a course at Dominican in regional history.

RL: Yes, Gloria Melbostad, whom I happened to meet later in the League of Women Voters, was teaching a course in local history, and my project, my term paper turned into *The Search for Samuel Throckmorton*.

MG: I see. How did you meet Lucretia Little?

RL: Well, I was in the League of Women Voters. She and her mother were active in the Community Church, and I was interested in local history. We became friends. One time, she and I were driving around Mill Valley, and Mr. Klyce³, who built a lot of the houses in Mill Valley, was breaking up his daughter's house in Blithedale Canyon, and he told us that we had two hours if we wanted to go rummage in a dumpster that he had outside his daughter's house. It was just filled with things. She hadn't thrown anything away, I think, since 1910 (laughs). There were dolls, and there were papers, and there were books. One thing I still have, which I gave to my daughter, is a copper cake holder. Flat with little clips that held the cake. So [Lucretia] and I had a lot of fun.

I also used to work with Helen Van Cleave Park, who wrote Marin history too. She lived out in Blithedale Canyon up Lee Street and had a house with twenty cats. A very nice man, one of the Canepa relatives from the Market,⁴ sort of watched out for her. She was a recluse. It was so embarrassing because Lucretia and Helen had been friends for many years, but in local history, you get very jealous of your turf, and they almost hated each other later. I was in the middle, and I wouldn't listen to gossip. I said, "Look. I am trying to learn local history, and I'm not going to say anything wrong about Lucretia to Helen, and I'm not going to say the opposite to Lucretia, because I admire both of you and you've been very generous of your time."

Often I would go one night a week to Helen's house and read. She had an extensive library, and I read old recipes and oh, all sorts of things that she had collected. I don't know whatever happened to her books. I know Lucretia was researching the Portuguese

³ Harvey Klyce

⁴ The Mill Valley Market, operated by the Canepa Family for several generations.

women who lived at Strawberry in that house⁵ that was later given to Elizabeth Terwilliger. And all her notes are in the Mill Valley Library, if anybody ever wants to write something about that family.

MG: Was that the family of the Vernal's,...of the goat lady⁶?

RL: Yes.

MG: So those notes must be in the History Room somewhere.

RL: Yes, somewhere in the archives.

MG: So you were interested in local history, and these other two women were also interested.

RL: Yes. Lucretia never published anything. Helen Van Cleave Park worked with Jack somebody or other...and she had some things published in *The Point Reyes Light*.

MG: Was that Jack Mason?

RL: Yes, Jack Mason. And they came out with a joint book. Lucretia used to say, "Oh Ruth. At least you're making a little money. I guess I sold my little Throckmorton book for a few dollars. I had it in the bookstore. It was a wonderful bookstore in Mill Valley in those years.

MG: Do you recall the name of it?

RL: The Redwoods Book Store. I also sold my Coast Miwok book in bookstores in San Rafael and in Mill Valley. I used to run it off myself and put it together and sell it for five dollars (laughs). Mostly it was used by school teachers, because there was [nothing else] that had this material all in one place at that time.

MG: So when you were taking your class at Dominican, what prompted you to choose Throckmorton as the topic?

⁵ The Lyford House, a Victorian residence of Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Lyford at Strawberry Point. Mrs. Lyford (Hilarita Reed) was a daughter of John Reed, who had been awarded Rancho Corte Madera del Presidio by the Mexican government. The house was saved by conservationists and barged to its present location at Greenwood Cove in 1957. Rose Vernal donated the land at Greenwood Cove to the Audubon Society for the Lyford House.

⁶ Rose Vernal was nicknamed 'the goat lady' because she raised goats at Greenwood Cove.

RL: Well, I had asked Lucretia about him. Richardson was much more interesting, but people were writing about him. I was just looking through the stacks and through the file cards and came across all these letters. At that time, you could actually handle the letter itself. You didn't use microfilm, so I was allowed to copy and keep these letters. Also, as a child, I had heard the name Throckmorton Gildersleeve on Jack Benny's radio program, and it somehow rang a bell.

MG: Keep the microfilm?

RL: No, keep the xerox copies of the original letters, which were on bond paper. When you held it up, you could see the watermark. For a while, I wanted to give them to the Mill Valley Library, but they were considered the property of Bancroft. But recently, in the last two years, it's become legal. So copies of those letters are now at the Mill Valley Library. They're in longhand, Spencerian⁷ writing, but some of them have been so-called translated, re-typed. They tell about Mr. Throckmorton and his attitudes and the things he did. He doesn't say right out that he swindled the heirs⁸, but he did, you know. He was a swindler.

MG: So your finding these letters got you interested in him?

RL: Yes.

MG: Who did you see your audience to be when you wrote the Throckmorton book?

RL: Well, people in Mill Valley were always interested in anything to do with Mill Valley. I also had written a book about Richardson's children living at Yerba Buena Cove. It was sort of a little story I made up (laughs) about seeing an old mother bear with cubs. I don't know if that's in the archives or not. I hand printed it and told about the Richardson children at Yerba Buena Cove. I just thought that I was interested, and I just liked to share my information. I majored in history at the University of Wisconsin. I also had taken some courses at UCLA, so I just followed what I enjoyed doing.

MG: What prompted you to design it the way you did, handwritten with the sketches and so forth?

RL: Well, see those paintings over there? I did those paintings, so I've always dabbled in paintings. Right now, I still write little memories of my childhood and illustrate them. I guess I'm just interested in being artistic. I play the piano and now here at The

⁷ Platt Rogers Spencer published his book *Spencerian Writing* in 1848. It became the de facto standard writing style, taught in virtually every school in America for a century.

⁸ Samuel Throckmorton was hired by William Richardson to manage his assets, which included Rancho Sausalito, a Mexican land grant covering the Marin Headlands, Sausalito and parts of Mill Valley. Richardson's assets eventually dwindled, and Throckmorton ended up owning much of Richardson's property.

Redwoods, we're having a vaudeville show, and I'll be playing the piano for some of the people. We're going to put it on here and at the Mill Valley Center in March.

MG: How many copies do you think you made of *The Search for Samuel Throckmorton*?

RL: Oh, I didn't make very many. I think now there's only two or three. The book on the Indians, of course, could be run off commercially. I went to a copy center in San Rafael and had those run off, and then I would put them together and take them around. But the book on Throckmorton, I just wrote and I think I had a few copies made for my children and grandchildren.

MG: Do you recall how you made the cover?

RL: Let's see. Oh, I think I had a flat piece of wood, and I took some carving tools and carved it out. You can see that's hand-printed. And then I did this map of the hay wharf. Right here at Tam High there was the hay wharf, because this was all water at that time. Throckmorton had a hay wharf opposite the football field right out here.

MG: Why was it called a hay wharf?

RL: Well, because flat-bottomed hay scows came over from San Francisco to take the hay back. They came right up this creek right over here to where the clock tower is and loaded hay and took it back over to San Francisco, because in San Francisco they had horses that had to be fed. The hay wharf originally had been built, I believe, by Captain Richardson, who lived in Sausalito near where the theatre is. There is where their hacienda was. Just up the street from the little theatre, there's a pepper tree and that's where the Richardson's lived. That's a much more exciting story, the Richardson story, than Throckmorton, which is, in a way, a negative story, rather uninspiring.

I first did two versions of the Throckmorton story. The first one is very Victorian. I judged him because he had no descendents. It was very sad. His daughter never married, and Throckmorton had three sons. One of them was killed in a street accident in San Francisco. One of them died from cirrhosis of the liver. Then they had a little twelve year old boy named Harry, who was just a delightful child, but he contracted a fever and died. So it was really sad. All Throckmorton has left to remind [us of] him, if you have that kind of peasant attitude, is a ridge and a fire station and a street, but Richardson had heirs. He married the daughter of the Presidio Capitaine Martinez and had first courted her for a number of years. I think there's another version of this book in which I include the story of Richardson and his romance with his wife, and how they acquired their Sausalito rancho, and all that. It's labeled Edition 4, and it was issued in 1989 in time for the seventy-fifth Mill Valley Anniversary Celebration.

MG: So the Presidio Press...

RL: Yes, that's what I called my press.

MG: And you actually carved out of wood the cover page and the back and the map?

RL: Yes, and then I printed them using a roller and pressing down.

MG: You would actually have to reverse these, right?

RL: Well, this part I added on. I actually printed the letters, but it's this design here. I dug out, put the ink on the plate and pressed down in order to make a print. Well, I was very busy. There is in the Mill Valley Library a collection of sketches by Grace Martin of Throckmorton's Ranch, which was where the market⁹ is now. When [Grace] was a child, she made these sketches of Homestead, that's the name that Throckmorton called his ranch. He called it The Homestead. She did a lot of sketches of that.

MG: Where did you do most of your research?

RL: Well, you mean for the Throckmorton book? I just used those letters and then books that Lucretia and Helen loaned me. I don't know how careful I was, whether I did a careful bibliography or not. I was much more careful in the bibliographies that I did on the Indian books.

(looks at book)

That's right. I brought this out at the Mill Valley 75th anniversary...birthday...and sold them for three dollars at the Book Depot in Mill Valley and the Redwood Bookstore. That was the name of the bookstore. And at the Tides, and at Cottage Bookstore in San Rafael. It says so right there. This is the second edition. Well, it really was a lot of fun.

MG: So the book collections of Lucretia Little and Mrs. Helen Van Cleave Park provided a lot of information for you?

RL: Yes, just read around in history and get a feeling of how it was here then and then specifically Throckmorton. The descendents of the people who managed the Homestead Ranch, some of them still live here. Cora Bjornstrom ^{is} ~~and her sister~~ remembered mother Throckmorton. She said he looked sort of like Colonel Sanders, and he would come out on to his farm or his ranch once a week. He lived in The City. He and Mrs. Throckmorton lived in The City. They had a house at the site of the St. Francis Hotel, and when Cora was little, her ^{GRAND} father and ^{GRAND} mother lived there at The Homestead.

MG: So you interviewed people also for this book on Throckmorton?

RL: Yes.

MG: Do you recall who you interviewed besides Cora?

⁹ Whole Foods Market on Miller Avenue and Evergreen Street.

RL: No, I don't remember anybody else.

MG: What about Throckmorton's daughter? Why wasn't she able to keep hold of the property?

RL: She never married, and she died living in The City on Sansome Street, I think. That's where she was living when she died. One time,,,there were many Throckmortons. They're an old family from New Jersey. Actually from Massachussets, because they came over, maybe not on the Mayflower, but they came in when the original Pilgrims [did,] and they sort of spread. There wouldn't be enough land, and so they would spread west and south.

A Throckmorton from Texas wrote to me. A little story about my book was written up in the I-J¹⁰ as sort of a special feature, and those special features are often sent around the country, or were then. Newspapers would pick up on them. And so this was about a Mill Valley woman who had written about Throckmorton, and the Throckmorton from Texas wanted to know if he could have a copy. Well, [in] the first book, I judged him and kind of pitied him because he was so cruel to cheat Richardson's widow and children out of their inheritance. I was, as I say, very judgmental. The descendant never sent me the five dollars (laughs). Mr. Throckmorton, Samuel Throckmorton, was called "Five-Dollar Throckmorton" [by his fellow San Franciscans].

MG: Because?

RL: Well, because his business practices were very sharp, and he was just a real shrewd Yankee. But he wasn't a magnificent person, as Richardson [was]. Richardson was magnanimous. He wasn't perfect, but compared to Throckmorton, people loved Captain Richardson. They really loved him. He had Hawaiian servants and had had a very romantic life. He lived here during the days of the Dons, and married into an old Spanish family. If you arrived here before 1850, you could join Sons of the Pioneers. Throckmorton didn't arrive until after 1850, so he was not eligible, which hurt him. He felt badly, because he liked to be in with the old crowd.

(Ms. Lescohier is interrupted: "Let's see. Roger's supposed to be going now.")

MG: So after you wrote *The Search for Samuel Throckmorton*, did you start the Richardson book?

RL: No. I did some on the Coast Miwok book. You can research so much in Marin County. In Sausalito, where the Sausalito City Hall is, [on the site of] the old Central School, there was a library and a museum there. There were some artifacts at San Rafael. I didn't mention that in the book because I felt that the artifacts in the mission church in

¹⁰ *Marin Independent Journal*

San Rafael weren't guarded carefully enough, and I didn't want anybody to know that those baskets and things were there. Maybe by now they've taken a little more precaution, you know. And then there were things also up at the library at the Miwok Museum in Novato. There's an Indian Museum up there, Museum of the American Indian. And the sketches on the cover are of the charm stones in the museum in Novato.

MG: That's the Coast Miwok people?

RL: Yes.

MG: This says 1986, so the series of your books was first the Throckmorton book, then the...

RL: the Coast Miwok book, and then I was doing a lot of substitute teaching and sometimes when you do substitute teaching, it's good to have something to interest the children and not just be a baby sitter. Sometimes there are no lesson plans. So I had two bags full of artifacts, one of which I had found walking the creek in Novato. I kicked something, and it was a part of a Miwok grinding tool, which I thought was really neat.

Anyway, I had made many artifacts, like the gambling sticks and the clapper rattles. Out there on the deck you can see a bunch...in the corner on the left, there's a bunch of elderberry branches...no, to your left there. Those I intend to split and make into rattles if I want to give a little program about the Miwoks. And I have some California walnuts which they used for gambling. They filled the walnut with tar and little bits of abalone shells that sparkle. Then there are some plants growing around here, like the California Bullrush, which is really a sedge. So I thought, you know, to tell a little story you should have some things. So I am going to acquire those. When it's warmer, I'll sit out there and work on my gambling sticks. That's all illustrated in toys and games in *The Coast Miwok People*.

MG: Where did you do your research for this?

RL: I went to Bancroft. Like this picture of a skirt, it's a dancing skirt. The other side is covered with these feathers. I did that there, and these from the museum, and then this is in the public domain, these photographs of early sketches of the Miwok People in Mission Dolores.

MG: Did you actually sketch while you were at the Bancroft?

RL: Yes, I sat and sketched some of things in the cases. And then I belonged to MAPOM¹¹, which is the Miwok Archeological something of Marin and took some courses out there in making things that they used. We had to grind acorns and make acorn

¹¹ MAPOM: Miwok Archeological Preserve of Marin

mush and eat it (laughs). At Glen Camp, there's a place where you can spend the night and you come and take courses.

MG: What did the acorns taste like?

RL: Sort of like an acquired taste like bagels. It's kind of a haunting taste. You have to wash the bitterness out first. And then I have some buckeyes. The buckeye was an emergency food. You had to cook that in earth ovens and cook out the poison. It contains a poison, and it really wasn't very palatable. Then there's soap plant, which they could use for emergency food also. So there's lots of lore of what the Indians found when they lived here.

MG: How long would you say it took you to write one of your books?

RL: Oh, including the research, it's about a two-year thing for Throckmorton and maybe three or four years for Richardson. I never came up with a complete Richardson book, but the Coast Miwok book I would say was about five years before I completely was ready to get it copied and bound. I bound it together myself. I would take it around and sell it.

MG: How much of that time...Where would you be spending most of that time in terms of the process of creating the book?

RL: Most of the time you sit at home and write. You get all your papers out and work on it. Type...I had to type. At one time we lived in Novato, I retyped the Coast Miwok book. I was helping out as a volunteer at the St. Francis Episcopal Church, because their secretary went to Scotland on a sabbatical, and they needed someone in the office. They let me use their typewriter, so I called it the St. Francis edition (chuckles). The first Coast Miwok was printed on a little portable blue typewriter with cursive letters, so it looks different than this one. The typing is different.

MG: Which of these books would you say was the best received?

RL: Oh, the Coast Miwok book. It sold steadily, and before we moved up to Nevada City about twelve-fifteen years ago, I tried to give the copyright to the Pomo people. Now the Pomo people have an Indian center¹² near Healdsburg. They grow native plants, and they once in a while will let the public in, if they want to raise some money. No alcohol is allowed there. So I tried to give them the copyright so they could make some money by selling the book, but when you can get Indian people together, if you know anything about Indian history, that's why you couldn't make treaties with them. Each one's an individual, and they didn't like some of the things I said because they weren't sure that those really were Pomo things or Coast Miwok things, and so they never could get really down to business to do anything with it. So it's sort of up for grabs. I don't know where

¹² YA-KA-AMA (Our Land)

the original copyright is, but I thought, after all, I've always tried to help the Indian people.

In fact, the descendents of the Coast Miwok, the few that there are, and the Pomo, they liked the book, because I told the sad things that happened. In fact, one time I was teaching, and a young girl came up to me, and she said she was part-Pomo, and her parents had told her never to tell anybody because then you got cut down for it. Now there's more of a pride in being part-Pomo, so the children aren't ashamed, and they come to, well, you know of Kule Loklo¹³ at Point Reyes Center.

MG: Back to Lucretia Little.

RL: Yes.

MG: My understanding is that she collected a lot of Mill Valley history.

RL: Oh yes, and whenever there was going to be a festival, like the fiftieth birthday party or the seventy-fifth birthday party, they would always go to Lucretia, and she would neglect her own research because she wanted...well, you know, you like people to like you, and she couldn't say no. She helped me write timelines, and she was a wonderful historian.

MG: Where was her training? Was she self-taught?

RL: I really never did ask her that. She has a son somewhere. He came back when she died. She had moved from Mill Valley. She moved up to something-Flags area in Sonoma [so she could write her book]. I used to go visit her there. Then she was just getting ready to write up all her notes, but she was an inveterate smoker, and she had cholesterol in her arteries and her veins back here, and during the operation to ream those out, she died on the table. It was very sad, because she never did get to finish...to write up her notes.

MG: On the....?

RL: On the Reed family. On the Portuguese descendents.

MG: I see. Can you tell something about your experiences with the League of Women Voters?

RL: Yes, I joined. I was always a Democrat, and Roger was always a Republican until Newt Gingrich came along (laughs) and then he switched over. Because I couldn't very well work in the party, you know, and Roger's mother had been in the League of Women

¹³ Kule Loklo is an interpretive Coast Miwok village at Bear Valley Visitor Center in Point Reyes National Seashore.

Voters, and I liked it. I was its Secretary, the Membership Chairman, and the head of some of the studies. We were very active. We met at the Hayakawa¹⁴ residence twice a month in the morning, and we had workshops. Then I would drive around and pick people up before and after the meeting a lot. That's how I got to know the Mill Valley roads, like Rose Avenue. A terrible place to go. At least it was then. Eventually I did take over the Presidency when it was my turn, so to speak.

MG: Was this for Marin County or Mill Valley?

RL: No, this was....we had a Mill Valley League for many years, and then it was consolidated into the Southern Marin. The League of Women Voters of Southern Marin. Now, there aren't as many women now who are free, to do like what you're doing. All the women work. I noticed that in the schools. It was very hard to get room mothers or for anybody to be on the playground during recess, and [for] all the volunteer work. It just dried up, so the League of Women Voters is no longer the same. I thought, you know, after we moved back, surely they would be meeting someplace, and I could go, but it's not that way now. Life is very different.

MG: What do you recall some of the major issues that were around when you were in the League of Women Voters?

RL: Cross-filing, which we helped to get rid of. For instance, today is the Primary. Many elections were decided in the Primary, because you could cross-file into the other party, which the League opposed strongly. And then there was the water plan, which I think now was unfair to Northern California, and there was a big fight about that. I was sent to one of the conventions, a national convention in St. Louis. Locally, there was a problem on personnel, a personnel contract with the county employees, so the League of Women Voters got involved with that.

MG: Can you talk a little bit more about the water plan?

RL: Well, that was a state measure. The League did not oppose it. Our vote was at a state convention, and we hadn't really studied it as much. I think if we had studied it more, we would have been opposed to it. Some people felt it had been railroaded through.

By the way, something interesting. There's a big article today on the Buck¹⁵ money in *The Chronicle*. The use of the Buck money. One day a teacher at Old Mill School asked me to come and give a little talk [about the Coast Miwok] to her students, because she had used my book, and she'd heard that I could give a talk in a very interesting way. I

¹⁴ Marge Hayakawa and Dr. S.I. Hayakawa, President of San Francisco State College during the 1960's student protests and a one-term U.S. Senator, lived in Blithedale Canyon.

¹⁵ The Buck Fund, a trust established by Leonard and Beryl H. Buck. The fund forms a large part of the Marin Community Foundation assets.

asked questions around and could keep order. When I was looking [at her books], she showed me a book that she had received from a committee from the Buck fund. Now how did they get to helping the poor in Mill Valley by giving money to people to write this symposium [for the Coast Miwok,] (which had already been done by the county Board of Education)?

When I looked at this book that the committee which had met somewhere in Sausalito for over a year or two had come up with, [all] my book was in there. You know, mine was copyrighted, so I went right to the person in charge of this committee and said, "Hey look, I want credit. I'm not going to sue. I won't do that. I don't believe in going to the law to get money or whatever." And so they printed a kind of retraction, and I felt sorry for the lady who had [done it], not realizing....I thought, oh she's probably some young mother. She's busy at home. She doesn't realize she's doing something she shouldn't do (laughs), but she should know that you can't just copy things without giving credit. And so they straightened that out.

MG: Good.

RL: I've often wondered about ...this morning there's a big breakdown in the percentage of the money from Mrs. Buck's estate that actually goes to help poor people.

(Telephone rings. Tape stopped.)

MG: So there's an article in the paper today about the uses of Mrs. Buck's fund?

RL: Yes. In *The Chronicle*.

MG: And it talks about the percentages?

RL: The percent that goes to environmental and how the other part, the other counties in the Bay Area would like that part to be shared, because it's so big. And I have felt, watching it over the years, that, well, I guess... I just don't know. I know a lot of it goes to help the Hispanic poor in the Canal District in San Rafael, so that it is helping. I don't know how much goes to help the poor who live in Marin City, and I know that there are homeless people in Marin. I don't see why they shouldn't do something to help them, but it must be very complicated to try to allocate money that way, and how to help people without just writing them a check or something. Anyway.

MG: Back to the League of Women Voters, what other way were you involved in community organizations?

RL: Well, we were members of the Community Church.

(Begin Tape Side B)

and I taught Sunday School over the years. And Roger worked on a committee that worked with the Quakers. He, as I said before, was on the Planning Commission and the Park and Rec Commission several times and on the Flood Control Commission for the County. Then we adopted our daughter when she was a year old. She was born in '52 and [then] Roger was afflicted with polio. But anyway, Jeannie wanted to be a Girl Scout, or a Blue Bird, so I was a Blue Bird mother (chuckles), just to get her into that. She also then later she took some courses with Joyce Gross, who taught [design and] sewing. I didn't do anything with that though. In the League of Women Voters, you keep pretty busy. Whenever we were sent East, I joined the League in the East. We didn't switch to a church when we went East.

MG: What was Mill Valley like back in the last Sixties and Seventies?

RL: Oh, it was very much a small town. The elections were important. I think people felt proud if they were asked to serve on a commission. I am sure they are now. I'm sure they do. Women had more time then than they do now, because most of them, many of the mothers work or have careers. It's just a different way of living. Then we had the Firemen's picnic and at Boyle Park and hayrides. Our family did a lot of hiking up on the mountain. We took the trail down from Pantoll all the way down to the beach. There is still that beautiful trail you can go on. We both belonged to the Mill Valley Tennis Club, and we played a lot of tennis, too.

MG: What about the influence of rock-and-roll and drugs in those years in Mill Valley?

RL: Well, drugs did move in here, and the kind of people you saw on the street and around Lytton [Square] were kind of frightening. Sometimes you'd be driving along the mountain and look down in the canyon and there would be children ...

(Knock on door - tape interrupted)

Talking a little about the drugs. It was personally a tragedy for us, because our older son, who resented being adopted, did get involved. We spent lots of time trying to get him counseling and helping him and buying him cars, and he finally then married his girlfriend and moved to Utah and worked there. However, he died, and it was an alcohol-related death. He had no children.

Our daughter lives and works in the City now and has a very nice life. She's very happy, [with] many friends, [and] helps us with our income tax, which is a big deal. But our younger son Bill was born to us when I was forty. We moved to Novato when he was ten. At that time the schools in Mill Valley, especially this Middle School, were not too well organized or disciplined. I as a substitute teacher had taught there, and I was just shocked. The way that school was laid out, children were not really held accountable, because physically it was very a poor layout. I'm sure they've straightened it out now, because these schools are so good now. But anyway, Bill didn't want to go on the bus. He was smaller then, and later on he shot up, so we moved up to Novato, and I thought, "Oh, this

is awful. It has sidewalks (laughs). But we found a house with a swimming pool two blocks from a very nice tennis club, and so we became acclimated and lived there for about seventeen years. Then we moved up to the Gold Country, up to Nevada City.

MG: Back when we were talking about Mill Valley, you were saying you would be hiking on the mountain looking down?

RL: Oh, yes. And we'd look down sometimes you'd see people – children – who had come out [to California,] the flower generation, and they were living there. And they were hitchhiking a lot too. They had more clothes on when they hitchhiked. But it was so weird, you know, because they were just living close to nature that way, probably polluting things and having fires where they shouldn't. This went on for a number of years.

The churches here in town rallied around, and we all tried to pick up these kids and save them. [With] hitchhiking, if you get picked up, it goes on your record. We took them to the Episcopal Church, as this church had a place where you could sleep, and we all made casseroles (they ate at the Methodist Church), and the Episcopal Church had a place with two [monitored] dorms where teenagers could sleep. They could make phone calls to their home, to their folks, because we just tried to keep them from getting into The City, into the Haight, because that's where they could get more than marijuana, I guess. Anyway, it was a very sad time, I think, in many ways.

MG: There must have been quite an influx of these people, if there were these facilities set up to help them.

RL: Oh, yes. Kids poured out to San Francisco from all over the country, because they thought they would find love and peace. And they, for many reasons, were unhappy at home. They didn't realize what they might be letting themselves in for. You know, all the downside of the flower time.

MG: What about your involvement with the Mill Valley Community Church?

RL: Oh, well, Gordon Foster was the padre, the minister. He was just a marvelous man. The Overstreets came and the Dimitroffs came, and it was more of a, in a way, a Unitarian approach. When you join the church, you don't say the Apostle's Creed, you just say that the man named Jesus was a great leader, and we try to live the way he taught us and share and help other people. At that time, it was not involved with the United Church of Christ. It has since joined up and become affiliated with the United Church of Christ. It was very active. There were many young people who went there, and Gordon was such a great padre. He had an imaginative youth program.

(Laughs.) A funny thing happened. It wasn't funny, but...The Christian Science Church sold their little church there on the corner [of Olive and Lovell Avenue] to the Community Church and then the Christian Science Church built the big lighthouse

church out there on the road, on Camino Alto. Well, the kids at the Community Church wanted to have a coffee house, so they set up a coffee house in the basement of the Christian Science Church. Our daughter Jeannie, who was about fourteen, wanted to go to that coffee house. And I thought, I didn't like the sound of it too much, because well, anyway... We said, "Well, if you take the course with Gordon Foster, and when you graduate that course, which required two or three months meeting every week and learning the Christian tradition, the Judeo-Christian tradition, then you may go to the coffee house."

And just the week before she was going to get to go, it so happened that the naughty, the rebels...or the bad element who used to come to the coffee house, was caught. They had broken open a hasp and some locks, and there they were upstairs on the altar, smoking pot. They were caught. So the elders of the church, or whatever, I don't know if they're called elders, anyway, they shut down the coffee house. Jeannie was really disappointed.

At that time, you see, also Dr. King¹⁶ had been shot and killed, and Jeannie wanted to have black friends, but the black girls wouldn't be friends. She had one black friend. He was a homosexual in her dancing class. Because this is the way it was. In fact, her class was the first graduating class from Tam to even have a prom [after Dr. King's death.] What they did was that they hired a boat. They had a party on the bay on a boat. A big boat, because they wanted to have a graduation party. Those were very, very bad times, not just with drugs, but the killing of Dr. King divided the children at Tam High.

MG: Do you recall incidences at Tam around those kinds of issues?

RL: Well, one heard that the black girls were mad at the white girls, because the white girls tried to take their black football player boyfriends away. No, Jeannie was with a group of positive girls who played tennis, and she was in dancing and she was a fair student, so she didn't go with a rowdy crowd at all, and she'd seen the way her older brother had acted, and I guess she just decided that wasn't for her.

MG: How did the Community Church get involved in setting up The Redwoods?

RL: Oh, well, one time at the congregational meeting, Bob Scott, for whom the garden is named, and Bob Jenkins and Yolanda Hurley came and presented this idea to the congregation: "any non-profit organization can apply for federal funds to build a retirement home, and we think Mill Valley needs one." So [the congregation voted,] and then for about three or five years, we had to pay so much a month (laughs). We got to put our money where our mouth was. And they started working on it. It's just that one little church that built this facility for 350 people, which is endowed, you know. You have to be interviewed, of course, to come here. You're expected, more or less, to take part in the program. But that's how it got started.

¹⁶ Dr. Martin Luther King was shot and killed on April 4, 1968.

MG: How involved were the church members in planning the facilities?

RL: Oh, they were very involved. The men, some of the men, must have been terrific at raising finances, because once you build it, you have to furnish it. I mean, you have to have tables and cooking equipment and so that means, borrowing more money and paying back what you already owe, et cetera, et cetera. They still retain one or two members on the Board of Directors of The Redwoods, so that things go in a positive way.

What I do here is I am in charge of the Spanish class on Saturdays, because we lived for that one year in Peru, and I had to learn Spanish. And then, as I say, I play the piano for these little vaudeville things that come up.

MG: Do you recall what other places they had thought of locating The Redwoods besides here?

RL: I don't know that much detail. It might be in some minutes. There is a Bill Eichorn who was the minister for a while after Gordon retired. He's a minister over on the [Tiburon] Peninsula of the United Church of Christ. He might know more of that detail. Doris Jenkins is a resident here. She may or may not know, because Bob Jenkins was very active and Bob Scott died last year. His widow does not live here, but she might know how much work they must have put in. Yolanda Hurley worked for the part of the [federal] government that granted [these loans], and she was aware of the possibility. She died a year ago. Yolanda Hurley.

MG: So that's why...?

RL: That's possibly why they were alerted, because she knew all about it, and how to get the right forms and get them all filed.

MG: I see. How long have you been living here?

RL: We'll be here two years May 10th.

MG: It was originally set up approximately when?

RL: I think it was built in '72. I should know that more, but...that's about when it was built. 1972.

MG: In all the times that you've lived in Mill Valley, you've lived here and moved away and come back, what changes have you seen? What are the most significant changes?

RL: Well, the type of store, retail establishment, is the biggest change. The traffic. We sold our car last year. We had a Jeep Cherokee for a while, and the traffic was bad. But Mill Valley, I think, attracts sensitive people and a wide range of people. I can't say that, as we were talking about Miller Avenue, Mill Valley becoming more precious (laughs),

but you know, it's where everyone wants to live, because of the commute, so very, very wealthy people live here, but they're all good hearted.

Sometimes Roger and I take turns pushing each other in a wheel chair, and one day we went down to the bank here on Miller, and people just saw that we might need help going up a little hill or something, and they just came and helped us. Just spontaneously. There's only one hippie place left (chuckles). Little Momma's Restaurant on Miller Avenue. It's just a beautiful place. We can't do the hiking, not even to Cascade Falls anymore. I played too much tennis, and Roger had polio, so we can't quite get out as much as we want to. [We don't walk very well.]

MG: Your husband got his polio when he was on the Planning Commission, is that right?

RL: Yes. And he was on a committee at church, and he was working at Chevron, and that's a competitive place, really. And so it took him a year [to recover,] but he had a wonderful therapist named Bill Polapolis, who said, "If you'll do what I tell you to do, you will go back to tennis, you will go back to skiing, and you won't have a limp." And so Roger did what Bill said. He was in a butterfly tank a lot, and the March of Dimes paid for everything.

For a while in my life, I've been much influenced by Christian Science, which took me a long way. It brought me a long way. [The Polio Foundation] asked me then to be the head of the March of Dimes the year after Roger was ill. And I thought, well, Mary Baker Eddy gave money to hospitals, so I said, "Yes." Then I could do work on the telephone, and it was just a matter of recruiting people and [collecting] the money and all that, you know, so I certainly did. I'm no longer a member of the Christian Science Church, but I try to follow the positive way of thinking. I watch my thoughts, [but] I never thought I'd take as much medicine as I do now.

MG: Back then when he got polio, it was quite a dangerous disease, is that correct?

RL: Oh yes. There wasn't anything you could do except the hot packs and the Sister Kenny treatment. It's a blessing that the little white sugar pills or whatever they gave us was discovered and that Dr. Salk found the vaccine.

MG: What was the Sister Kenny treatment?

RL: Sister Kenny was an Australian woman, nurse, and she started [her method] when she was treating [polio patients]. She found out, especially [with] children, to use warm water and butterfly tanks and hot packs to get the muscles to work. That [method] came to our country, [for] polio was there, too. In fact, it still is in some parts of the world.

MG: Looking back on Mill Valley again, is there anything that you would like to mention about your experiences here that we haven't talked about?

RL: Oh, well, I enjoyed it in the League of Women Voters when I was Voter Service Chairman. There was one time, it sort of ties in with what was this Indian ...the Pomos' headquarters up in Healdsburg. Before they acquired it, it was owned by the CIA, and the building that they took over had at the top of it a revolving... kind of a [listening] machine that picked up everybody's phone messages.

At one time, it must have been in the Sixties, we had the Independent Progressive Party here, the IPP, the Hallinans¹⁷ were in it, and other people. Babs Dreyfus' husband¹⁸, who took the Fifth. Anyway, there were a lot of problems with the IPP, and I remember chairing a candidates' meeting, and a very Right Wing man got up and was spouting about this innocuous little Socialist that the IPP was sponsoring. I think it was for the State Senate, and the Right-Winger said, "If anybody in this auditorium wants to recognize Red China, let them stand up." (Laughs.) He was completely out of place, so I kind of had to gavel him down. Later on, I found out that the CIA had been monitoring everybody's phone, especially the IPP [people,] because of Jane Fonda having gone to North Korea¹⁹ and wanting them to win the Korean War. So...

MG: So where was this revolving thing?

RL: It was on top of the building. The Pomo Indians acquired this property. Five acres outside of Healdsburg, where they have their Center²⁰ now.

MG: But it could pick up phone calls here.

RL: Yes, all in this whole area.

MG: I see.

RL: Of course, it was taken down [later].

MG: How did you find this out?

RL: Well, I remember a professor from Sonoma State [David Peri] whose grandmother had been a Coast Miwok moyen or religious leader, and he was on the Board of that particular institution of the Pomos, [YA-KA-AMA]. I don't remember quite how I found that out, but as with Alcatraz, when a property is no longer used by the Federal Government, Indians have the right to take it over, and since that CIA outpost was no longer in use and that listening device had been taken [down], there were enough people who wanted to help the Pomo people, so their children would have more positive role

¹⁷ Vincent Hallinhan ran for U.S. President in 1956 as a candidate of the IPP.

¹⁸ Benjamin Dreyfus was one of several labor attorneys called before the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in San Francisco during the McCarthy era.

¹⁹ Jane Fonda's visit to North Vietnam was highly controversial during the Vietnam War.

²⁰ YA-KA-AMA, 6125 Eastside Road, Forestville, CA 95436.

models, helped them write the letters and get the hearings and acquire that property, so now they have it. I wrote it down somewhere. I can't remember now the name of it. It means in Pomo, Our Land, because it was their land. It's their land [now]. For a while, they were raising fish. You could buy fish [there]. Then, as I say, I went up there to give them the copyright to the book, but they just didn't have the interest or skills to take it over.

MG: Back when you were involved with the League of Women Voters, you mentioned something about Mr. Dreyfus taking the Fifth?

RL: Yes.

MG: What was that...?

RL: Well, one time, one of the military men who was up at the top of the mountain, one of the Air Force men, came to Cora Bjornstrom, who was the President of the League of Women Voters, and said, "We're concerned that you have Mrs. Dreyfus as one of your members, because..." That was the time of McCarthy,²¹ the McCarthy from Wisconsin. She said, "Yes, she is a member. It's her right to be a member, but she's not on the Board of Directors, and we watch anybody that is too far to the Left. She is the head of a study group, but it's an innocuous study group." (I don't remember quite what she was.) "And we're not breaking any law." Cora²² was a very patrician person, and so she quieted this man's fears, and maybe she pointed out to him, I don't know, "What right had he to come to question us?" That's the way the times were then.

MG: [Babs Dreyfus'] husband had been interrogated?

RL: Yes, he was a member of the Teamster's Union²³ and the Teamsters were being interrogated. I don't know quite what it was all about, except we were up on a little weekend trip visiting a state park, and Babs was telling me, "Oh dear." (I forget her husband's first name.) "He's just taken the Fifth Amendment to not incriminate himself, and I hope people don't think the worst." Because when you take the Fifth, like with Enron, then people jump to the wrong conclusion, as if you're guilty.

MG: What other kinds of impact did the McCarthy years have on Mill Valley?

RL: Well, during the Vietnam War, there was a very brave woman whose name is Ruth Downing, and she would write letters and the American Legion people would call her up

²¹ Joseph McCarthy, a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, created a nation-wide atmosphere of fear using witch-hunt tactics to search out Communists and sympathizers during the Cold War.

²² Cora^{MOTHER} had grown up in Throckmorton's Homestead ranch house. Her^{GRAND} father was Throckmorton's ranch manager.

²³ Benjamin Dreyfus was a labor lawyer who represented unions.

[and harass her.] As with many of us, first we were for the Vietnam War. Then we started seeing that we were wrong and that the French got out and we better get out, because it was [Vietnam's own] revolution. The French helped us with ours. So we [Roger and I] never entered marches, but Ruth and her daughter would go on marches, and they were completely unafraid. She was completely unafraid. That's the only other occasion that I know of anybody in Mill Valley being upset by McCarthy. [We wrote letters to our Congressmen against the involvement in the war.]

MG: Well, those were actually in the Vietnam War years.

RL: Yes, that was later.

MG: Later.

RL: That's right. It was not the McCarthy era. It was the Vietnam time. We had some dear friends come through. He was in the Army stationed in Vietnam. He was an officer in charge of propaganda, and they visited us and found out now that we had changed our mind, and we thought we should get out of Vietnam. Ginny and I cried, and they had a young Vietnamese woman with them from a wealthy family, and we said, "We're sorry. *The Stars and Stripes*²⁴ is publishing things that aren't true, and we have no right any more to be there. Our boys are dying and they're mostly ...you know, many blacks are dying, and so we feel we shouldn't be there now." But later on, they saw what the decision was, [and at last, we left Vietnam.]

MG: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

RL: Oh, let me think. No, I think that's a very complete interview.

MG: Well, thank you so much. We very much appreciate it.

RL: Well, thank you for coming.

²⁴ Newspaper of the U.S. Armed Services.