

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE  
MARIN COUNTY FREE LIBRARY  
Anne T. Kent California Room**

Original recording available at the Anne T. Kent California Room

© All materials copyright Marin County Free Library. Transcript made available for research purposes only. All rights are reserved to the Marin County Free Library. Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the:

Anne T. Kent California Room  
Marin County Free Library  
3501 Civic Center Dr. #427  
San Rafael, California, 94903

---

**INTERVIEW WITH RUTH BOERIKE WHITE BOWIE**

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent  
January 28, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: Ruth Boerike White Bowie (RB)  
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 28, 1976  
TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Wednesday, January 28th, 1976. Continuing the Oral History program at the California Room, Marin County Library at Civic Center, we are today at the residence of Ruth Boerike White Bowie at 501 Via Casitas in Greenbrae, California. Mrs. Bowie, a long-time resident of Marin, has been active in many charitable endeavors in this county as well as in San Francisco. And today she has agreed to share with us her reminiscences of not only her life but of the "Garden of Allah" which was her beautiful residence of many years in Mill Valley. Joining me today in this interview is Mrs. Thomas Kent of Kentfield, California. Good afternoon, Mrs. Bowie.

RB: Good afternoon, Carla. It's nice to have you here.

CE: Well thank you. Would you tell us, Ruth, where were you born?

RB: Born and raised in San Francisco. I was born in 1888. I'm now 87 years old.

CE: Were you born in your family residence, or in hospital?

RB: Oh no, I was born at our residence.

CE: At your residence. Were your parents born in California?

RB: No, my father was born in Austria, and my mother was born in New England.

CE: What was your father's name?

RB: William Boerike, William. My father had a middle name but he didn't care to use it so he was always known as Dr. William Boerike.

CE: What brought him to California?

RB: Well, his mother died in childbirth in Austria and his father brought him over when he was two or two and a half to three years old and so he was always brought up an

American, you see. And his father married again after a few years and he had five more children, so my first husband had half sisters and brothers.

CE: Where was your home standing at the time of your birth in San Francisco?

RB: I don't know.

CE: It wasn't the famous 1812 Washington Street?

RB: No, it wasn't.

CE: That was later?

RB: Yes. Maybe I'll think of it later.

CE: That's alright, Ruth. I understand you had a twin sister and five brothers, is that correct?

RB: Five brothers, yes.

CE: What were their names?

RB: William Fay. William F. is my father and my mother was a Miss Fay, so it made a very good name William Fay Boerike; he was the oldest of my five brothers. And my second brother was Harold Edwin Boerike and he died in 1927, having married a New York widow and she was a typical New Yorker: lived and dreamed and everything that meant anything to her was social; she was a social butterfly. And she did nothing but entertain all the time, dinner parties, dinner parties, and entertain. She would sleep until noon everyday, but my dear brother Harold had to be down on Wall Street office before eight so he just absolutely didn't get enough sleep and so of course his health gave out and when he became sick my father came on from San Francisco to see what condition he was in. And when he arrived he turned to my brother and said, he called him Hallie but his name was Harold, he said, "Hallie you're a sick man. You should be in bed." He said, "I don't want to go to bed, Father. I know if I go to bed I'll never get up."

CE: Well tell me who are your other brothers, briefly?

RB: William Fay, Harold Edwin, Garth Wilkinson, Charles Kayland and Arthur Thatcher.

CE: Are any of your brothers still alive?

RB: None, they're all gone.

CE: You survived them.

RB: I'm the only surviving member of the family.

CE: Tell me, Ruth, you lived for a while in a house that was quite an architectural jewel designed by Willis Polk at 1812 Washington Street. Would you describe the house briefly?

RB: Well here is a picture of it.

CE: I see, I see.

RB: It's a picture of the house. It's the Boerike home and we were all born and raised there.

CE: Tell me, did the house survive the earthquake and fire of 1906?

RB: Well, it was set for dynamiting, of course, but it was not done because the fire ended at Van Ness Avenue and it was on Washington between Van Ness and Franklin, so it was spared.

CE: I understand, Ruth, that you went to a fashionable girl's school in San Francisco, Miss West's.

RB: Miss West's, yes.

CE: Where was that located?

RB: Van Ness Avenue and the corner of Pacific. It was private school, you know.

CE: Was it similar to the Sarah Dix Hamlin School or perhaps it preceded it?

RB: The Hamlin School was on Jackson, wasn't it? We went there for a little while but Mother had a little preference for this Miss West's School on Van Ness Avenue, so we went there but we were almost going to --

CE: And then you went east to Boston and what school did you attend there?

RB: It was the Waltham New Church School. You see, we were all Swedenborgian. You see, Lyon's Street Church in San Francisco, the Church of the New Jerusalem. And we were all baptized, married, funerals, everything at that church, and still are. I'm the only one left in the family, and --

CE: And that church has been in San Francisco that long?

RB: Well, not quite that long. No, it was built --

CE: But this Waltham School was run by the church?

RB: It was a New Church School.

CE: Was it a theological school or a finishing school?

RB: Well, kind of both. I guess it really was. It was a theological school but also a finishing school.

CE: Well, how did you happen to get to Briarcliffe Manor on the Hudson?

RB: Well, my mother wanted us to go to society school. You can't call it a society school but where debutantes and all that where and I think my mother thought Waltham's was too much church connected with it. She kind of wanted us as prospective debutantes.

CE: To be polished for matrimony.

RB: Yes, at a New York finishing school, so that's how we happened to go there.

CE: Tell me Ruth did you take a trip abroad after you graduated from school?

RB: Well, we really never had a graduation, you see, because when we were at Waltham, it was just Waltham School and Briarcliffe was a finishing school. They didn't have a graduation in those days. I never will forget that Maud Wilson Sutton in San Francisco, the Sutton Family, her father wanted her to go to college but she was content with us and she was going to be a debutante, you know. So when her father said to her, "Maude I'd like to have you go to the University of California College." And she said, "I don't want to go there." And he said, "I will give you four hundred dollars if you'll go." That was a lot of money in those days. And she said, "Mercy, Dad, do you think I'd accept four hundred dollars and not be a debutante?" That's how much it meant in those days you see.

CE: Well what year did you go abroad, Ruth? 1906 wasn't it?

RB: Well we were in Dresden in 1906 for the fire and earthquake in San Francisco; we happen to be in Naples. In Naples, my father came over to bring my twin sister and me home and we were in Naples, and of course Mount Vesuvius was affected just like San Francisco being right under, you see.

CE: So even though you were removed from your home you had an explosion there, the eruption of Vesuvius.

RB: Well, it wasn't as bad as San Francisco but there was something that took place on Vesuvius. But the headlines of the Neapolitan paper, the paper that morning, the way we got the news was "San Francisco Wiped Off the Map."

CE: You must have been terrified.

RB: We certainly were. Mother and five brothers were in San Francisco. It took three days before we --

CE: You got the cable across and returned.

RB: And it just so happened they had just moved to Mill Valley.

CE: They weren't in the city that day?

RB: No, but the house was set for dynamiting and everything.

CE: Oh, dear. Well now let's get along with your life, Ruth. Where did you meet your future husband, Ralston Lowell White?

RB: Well that was in Mill Valley. We --

CE: Did your family always have a home in Mill; Valley

RB: Well yes, from 1904 on, a summer home in Mill Valley.

CE: As well as your townhouse?

RB: Yes, we spent summers there.

CE: Where was your summer home located in Mill Valley?

RB: At the junction of Tamalpais and Summit Avenue and Mr. Worcester, the minister of the Swedenborgian Church, was the one who chose the site. Father was his doctor and everything and Father told that he wasn't going to let his family go up to the Sierras anymore. We went up there for a while but then I think Father was nervous about having mother and five children up in the Sierras.

CE: So far away.

RB: Yes. So he decided and Mr. Worcester said, "I have just the place to tell you to go and I'll show you where to buy the place." And that's how it was. Mr. Worcester who picked the site of our home in Mill Valley and so that's where we were.

CE: So as a young girl you went over there, and then how did you come about you met Mr. White?

RB: Oh, well, at the Blithdale Hop.

CE: Oh, the Blithdale Hop.

RB: My goodness they had it every Saturday night.

CE: Dolly Jenkins told us about the Blithdale Hop.

RB: Oh really? Have you interviewed her?

CE: Yes we have, Ruth. So was he at one of the famous dances?

RB: He certainly was. That was the great social event for all the Mill Valley young people. One night at the Blithdale Hop. And so I met Mr. White and he said to me, he said to me, let me see, how does that go? I didn't dance with him much because it was so busy, but anyway, he said to me, "Miss Boerike," he said, "I'd like to take you to the Garden of Allah." And I thought to myself, "This is so sudden. The only Garden of Allah I knew was in Africa." But he said, "I will call you and take you to the Garden of Allah." There was nothing for me to do but see what developed. In a few days he called up and said he wanted to see me and so he came and we walked from the Boerike home which was on Tamalpais and Summit, just a mile walk, and that avenue we walked along now is named after my husband, Ralston Avenue.

CE: And you walked over to the Garden of Allah?

RB: To the site of the Garden of Allah, there wasn't anything there, and Ralston took me up there and he looked up at Tamalpais and said, "This is my Garden of Allah" and he was reading Robert Hichen's book *The Garden of Allah* and loved the book.

CE: I see.

RB: See? And when he looked up at Tamalpais and he thought about Robert Hichen's book he said he took a deep breath and said to himself, "This is my Garden of Allah." That's how it got its name. That's how he took me there. And so when he died in 1943 and when I gave it to, as his memorial to the church, I wrote on the deed of trust, I said, the name must never be changed.

CE: Well, after he showed you the property, then the normal events transpired and you were married?

RB: Yes, that's right.

CE: I understand you had an extraordinary honeymoon.

RB: Well we had a very unusual one. The point was that we were married on April 6, 1910 and so we traveled the usual honeymoon way for months. We went to, you know, what's the name where the Coronado Hotel --

CE: San Diego.

RB: San Diego and we went to Santa Barbara. We went to --

CE: All the conventional places.

RB: Typical honeymoon. And then we got to Paso Robles after we had been married a month, why, we were both outdoor people and Ralston liked to ride, so we bought horses down there, and decided we would ride the rest of the way home, from Paso Robles along the Monterey Trail. Of course now it's a big highway, of course, but it was nothing but a trail and we rode along on horseback. And we invited, when we were going to ride home, we invited my twin sister and my brother Garth, my third brother, to come along and join us. They were really anxious to do so. There were really four of us that rode on horseback from Paso Roble to San Francisco.

CE: Well that's a four hundred mile trip.

RB: It took us about four weeks.

CE: Four weeks. Where would you stay at night?

RB: Camped.

CE: You camped. Isn't that wonderful?

RB: We took camping equipment and we all slept on the ground and cooked our meals. You know, we were all very young.

CE: What a wonderful, wonderful experience.

CE: The honeymoon, we were married in April; and before it was over it was the middle of June.

CE: Would you describe Mr. White and give us a brief history of his background for us, Ruth?

RB: Yes I can. Ralston White was born on August 27, 1877. He was ten years older than I. I was Ruth Boerike, Ruth Ellena Boerike and my twin sister and I were born on May 13, 1888.

CE: Well where was your husband born?

RB: He was born in San Francisco.

CE: Where did he get -- Ruth, tell us about his parents.

RB: Well his parents -- I think I read this - Ralston Lovell White was born August 27, 1887, San Francisco.

CE: Don't read it so quickly.

RB: The only son of Lovell and Laura Lyon White, pioneer Californians. Coming to California in the fifties from Iowa. They settled in French Corral in the Sierras where Mr.

White ran a general merchandise store. After burying their three children, a boy and two girls, all under three years of age who died within three months of each other, from diphtheria, the Whites moved to San Francisco. Mr. White became immediately connected with banking and he remained in this field the rest of his life. He died January 30, 1910. He was Cashier and President of the San Francisco Saving Union for forty years until the time of his death. The San Francisco Saving Union later became the American Trust Company as it did unite with Wells Fargo Bank. After fourteen years since the death of their three children Mrs. White gave birth to their son Ralston Lovell White, this made him seem like an only son. The birth of this son gave untold happiness to Mr. and Mrs. White, who worshipped him. Ralston was born on the first anniversary of the day Mr. William C. Ralston, one of the founders of San Francisco, one might say, was drowned in San Francisco Bay. Mr. William C. Ralston was a close friend of Mr. Lovell White so he named his son after his great friend. The coincidence of his birth and the death of his great friend probably inspired this namesake thought.

CE: How did Mr. White acquire that lovely acreage in Marin County at Mill Valley?

RB: After he worked at the Bank in San Francisco for two years and earned the money, he couldn't continue that kind of career.

CE: He didn't want to follow his father's career?

RB: No, he did not. He wanted to be an out-of-doors person. So his father was really quite broken-hearted about it so Ralston took the eighteen-hundred dollars that he'd earned in the two years at the bank, and he went around the world and he was gone for two years. And he lived in Italy; that's where he learned Italian. And his first language was French, and his mother took him over as a baby. Then he arrived home. And then, having been separated from his mother and father for two years, they were so delighted that he came back that Mr. Lovell White was then reconciled to the fact that his son wouldn't be a banker and so then he became interested in becoming the owner of the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. Because, somewhere written down -- He worked over in Mill Valley and became the President of the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. The Tamalpais Land and Water Company was acquired through these gentlemen, early Marin Countyites, they bought the land from Throckmorton.

CE: Oh yes, the Englishman.

RB: Yes, the Englishman. They bought it from Throckmorton. And he had borrowed a thousand dollars from the bank and so they --

CE: Well that was Mr. White's father's bank wasn't it? San Francisco Saving Union?

RB: Yes, it was his bank. I don't know if he owned it all but it was his bank.

CE: Well, they were interested in making a sub-division, then?

RB: Yes. The minute they got the property from Throckmorton, then they immediately wanted to sub-divide and that was the beginning of the development of Mill Valley that ended up making Mill Valley. And they thought it was just going to be just a little village on the ground floor. But then after the big fire and the earthquake of San Francisco, why, Alice Eastwood, they became very interested in building on the sides of Marin County, you know, and they developed homes up on Magee and Summit Ave. and Tamalpais Avenue and then Mill Valley really began to grow. And that was in 1905, I think. But let me see, how it came --

CE: That's ok, Ruth. After you had gone to this famous hop in Mill Valley and had met your future husband and he had shown you the land which he called the Garden of

Allah and you were married, and -- How did it come about that you acquired Willis Polk as the architect? And would you describe your home to us?

RB: Oh well yes.

CE: I want you to just describe it a little bit. What was the acreage it was sitting on?

RB: It was sitting on -- Well, you see, the Tamalpais Land and Water Company owned all that area, right up to the Mountain Railroad track and right on down to almost to Homestead Valley, which used to be Mill Woods, you know, and they owned all that territory and so that was owned by the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. And so when Ralston took me up and showed me this Garden of Allah, you know, and said, "This is my Garden of Allah," and everything, that's where we decided to build.

CE: Well tell me what was the house like? Would you describe it?

RB: Well it was steel and concrete.

CE: Was that innovative for its time?

RB: Very. It was the first, only steel and concrete house, I think, in Marin County.

CE: How did you get all that material up the hill?

RB: Well that came on the Mountain Railroad. The roads were too narrow in Mill Valley. They were just dirt roads for horse and buggy, you know, and everything. They couldn't possibly have done -- So Ralston, being the Vice President of the Mountain Railroad, the Crookedest Railroad in the World, why, it brought up all the material. And right above us, why, the train stopped and we had a slide that came down from the railroad track to our area and --

CE: All the material came down that way.

RB: Yes, came down. It was very easy then to haul it down.

CE: Was it an exciting project for you, Ruth?

RB: Well, no.

CE: The creation of this home?

RB: Oh yes, that part was, but getting the train worker -- I have some wonderful pictures.

CE: In your photograph album you have some wonderful shots of the house under construction and there's the leveled area which has been bulldozed off at the mountain and you have this slide coming down from the railroad. And here you have, which is certainly innovative for its day, steel construction three-stories high. Beautiful photographs. How long was the house under construction?

RB: Oh, it took nearly two years.

CE: Couple of years?

RB: Yes about two years to build, because, you see, everything had to be brought up and it was quite a house to build, really. It was only intended to be a two story house; that's all Mr. White and I -- We didn't have a family and we wanted to have a two story home but my dear husband, with all due respect to him, couldn't stand the heat, so when the house was being built he said to me, he said, "Ruthie, I could never be happy sleeping on this second floor unless we had an attic above us so that the second floor would be at a good temperature." So that's how we happened to put on the attic. Well, as it turned out, it was a very good decision for the church because the church has now turned the attic of the Garden of Allah house into the men's dormitory and they keep sixty and eighty people overnight there, you see, now. The attic is for the men and the second floor is for the women, you know.

CE: Well perhaps now is as good a time to mention or to discuss what happened. Now I understand, Ruth, when Mr. White died in 1943 -- Tell us what you did to preserve the Garden of Allah in his memory.

RB: Well the point was I had ten members living with me for ten years. You see, I was broken-hearted and my niece, Jean Barnard, was just married and she and Jack Barnard came and lived at the Garden of Allah. And Larry, he went to the war in the forties, but he lived with us until he went to the war and then I kept two children, members of the Swedenborgian Church, I kept them just to help out the family and all together it added up to there were nine of us living there, and the children helped with -- Of course those were still the depression days and so we didn't have any servants or help so I did the cooking for them all and the children helped with the dishes and we all did work together. And so we were together there until 1952 when I gave the Garden of Allah -- Then the children, Jean and Jeff, wanted to have their own home and Larry was going to get into -- He had been in the war and he had met this English bride over in England and so they wanted their home and so it was very apparent I wasn't going to have all the members living there anymore and I couldn't live there alone. So then I gave it to the California Academy of Sciences and they had it for about three years, two or three years and they loved it. The reason I selected that to give it to is because the California Academy of Sciences has a memorial for Ralston's father, Mr. Lovell White. His mother gave it to the California a memorial there, so I thought it would be very appropriate for the --

CE: The Academy of Sciences. Were they delighted with the bequest?

RB: They certainly were delighted but regrettably their income was restricted to be spent in the City and County of San Francisco so they had to give it up painfully. They hated to give it up. Yes, so then I gave it to the United Church of Christ or the Northern Group of Congregation Church, whichever. But it's now own and operated by the United Church of Christ and the entrance to the Garden of Allah in Mill Valley -- The entrance as you turn in to the private property says, "Garden of Allah, The Ralston L. White Memorial Retreat, United Church of Christ." That's the entrance gate.

CE: What a wonderful thing to do.

RB: So and then the University of California, after I had given it and everything, called me up. They wanted to buy it. And they said, "Mrs. White, would you be interested in selling your Garden of Allah?" The California Academy of Sciences said they need a place near Berkeley but at the same time big enough and able to be a place where they can do a lot of outdoor something. And I said, "No, I made it my husband's memorial." And they said, "Oh, would you refuse four-hundred-thousand dollars?" which of course was a lot of money then. And I said, "I certainly would refuse; it's a memorial to my dear husband and it will ever remain there." So of course that was the end of that; I never was offered again anything.

CE: Would you tell us again Ruth, this is the Swedenborgian Church?

RB: No, no, they didn't offer, this was the California Academy of Sciences.

CE: No, no, no, dear, the church you gave --

RB: Oh, the United Church of Christ? Oh no.

CE: Had nothing to do with that?

RB: Oh no, no, because, you see, that's the reason the Church couldn't maintain it in any way. I would have loved to have given it but they couldn't do anything. They didn't have enough money to do it.

CE: Do they use it as a teaching place or a retreat?  
RB: They use it for everything.  
CE: Use it for everything.  
RB: Weddings, they have so many weddings there now.  
CE: How many people can it accommodate?  
RB: Well they keep sixty people.  
CE: Sixty people?  
RB: But of course the way they do it is, they have bed after bed, you know.  
CE: Dormitories.  
RB: Yes, dormitories, yes, exactly. And the men have all kinds of bed up in the attic.  
CE: Do you remember some particular gala events that were at the Garden of Allah?  
RB: Well, the wedding.  
CE: When you were there?  
RB: Well, my niece, my twin sister's daughter, Jean Barnard, was married there.  
CE: That was a gala event.  
RB: There were four-hundred guests, four-hundred guests.  
CE: How did you get them there? How did they come?  
RB: Well they came up the roads, they were wide enough, and the automobile in those days went up and down, so they came up; there were four hundred guests.  
CE: And I imagine you had an orchestra?  
RB: Oh I'm sure we did.  
CE: Regular reception?  
RB: Yes.  
CE: Was Christmas a gala time at the home?  
RB: Well family time.  
CE: Yes.  
RB: That was always confined. My father and mother were great on family, Christmas gatherings.  
CE: Did your husband have to entertain a great deal in regards with his work? Were you in a position to be a hostess often?  
RB: Well, he was such an outdoor person that he had a baseball field up above the Garden of Allah, a full-size baseball diamond, and he had constantly over the Rotarians and the two or three different groups, all for baseball. And then I used to entertain them afterwards, not a full meal, but, you know, refreshments and things like that.  
CE: Did you have a staff helping you?  
RB: Well we always had just two servants: a cook and a second maid. But if we entertained big groups we'd always get an extra one to come up from Mill Valley for the occasion, you know, an extra maid or something.  
CE: Did you ever have any outdoor affairs, like at the Fourth of July, or barbecues?  
RB: Oh, yes, yes we had barbecues. We had a swimming pool that held three-hundred and fifty-thousand gallons of water and I swam in it for fifty years and it was never heated. It was sixteen feet deep and ice cold water, it never was warmer than --

End, Side A

CE: Tell me Ruth, did you have a swimming pool at your property?

RB: We certainly did. The creek came down from Tamalpais and Mr. White and I were very fond of swimming and so we dammed the canyon up and they had a big dam and the pool held three-hundred and fifty-thousand gallons of water and had two diving boards and a bridge across which my husband decided to have taken down because he felt that when they went off these diving platforms up high and the bridge connecting, he thought they might hit their head on the dam, you know, and he didn't want to take that chance. So he took the bridge down. I have a picture of it in the album. But the two diving platforms were left and the people dove off of them and everything.

CE: Was the pool heated?

RB: Oh certainly not, never.

CE: How deep was it?

RB: It was sixteen-feet deep at the deepest part and then it went on up to about five-feet at the further end..

CE: Did you use it often?

RB: I swam for fifty years in it and Mr. White and I went in I think everyday. We swam for nine months, from April to the first of December, then we emptied the pool because the rains were very heavy, not like this year. The rains were very heavy so we got the water out and it was just a creek going through the - -

CE: Well it certainly kept you in marvelous physical condition -

RB: It certainly did.

CE: Looking around your home today I see on the terrace you have a stationary bicycle.

RB: Oh yes, yes. I've gone eleven thousand miles on it, but Dr. Bowie did a thousand before he died. That's where I do all my reading; when I'm bicycling I'm reading and when I'm climbing the Bret Harte Boulevard I take my transistor and listen to the news. I have to do two things at once, absolutely.

CE: You've got too much going on, Ruth. Well now, tell me, I understand there was a period where you lived abroad, about 1929 to 1939 during the depression.

RB: It was 1933 until 1940, I think it was, it was seven and a half years.

CE: Well where did you go?

RB: We lived in Munich. And you see, Mr. White, when the crash or 1929 came, you see, Ralston had to put all he owned -- He was president to the Tamalpais Land and Water Company and had large tracts of land all over and he had to pay taxes on it but he couldn't sell anything because there was a big depression. So he had everything going out and nothing coming in and so there was nothing for us to do but to rent the Garden of Allah, leave our Finnish gardener there, Alfonse Hopper, who took care of it for forty - five years, to leave him there and rent the Garden of Allah and for us to live in Europe on a dollar a day each where we lived for seven and a half years in Munich. And we bicycled five thousand miles all through Europe, you see, that's the only means of transportation we had besides walking. And we went all over. We went to the coronation of Edward VI in England and we went to Scotland and Wales. We went through Austria, Italy. We couldn't get into Spain because something was tied up in some way but we went all through France and Italy and of course we spoke three languages because Ralston spoke perfectly French and Italian, and I spoke German because my father and I used to read German, my father having been born in Austria. But of course Ralston learned German too; he was a natural linguist. But I never learned -- Well I knew a little

French but I didn't know any Italian, but with our three languages we could bicycle a thousand miles and whenever we wanted to stop at night we'd ring a doorbell and say, you know, "May we spend the night? We will pay you for it and everything." We never had any trouble because we spoke the languages, you see.

CE: Do you recall, Ruth, who rented your home in Mill Valley?

RB: The first people --

CE: Who had the money to rent such a lovely place?

RB: I know, well, the rent, it was very, very minor. The first people who rented were the Priests, Mr. and Mrs. Priest in Mill Valley. But they didn't stay long; they found it difficult transportation, so they gave it up. Then it was rented to -- But the renting never lasted. Most of the time the house was just used for certain occasions but it wasn't --

CE: Wasn't really lived in.

RB: No it really was not, so it was really a great loss, you see, and that's the reason - poor Ralston, he paid off every dollar and he died. He paid off his last -- He had a heart attack March 1943 and I thought he was doing very well and all of a sudden he had a thrombosis. Is that what they call it, thrombosis? And that was September and it occurred on a Wednesday, I think it was, and I took him over to the Marin hospital. He lived only two days and then he died the 26 of September, 1943, but he was only over at the Marin Hospital a couple of days cause he was getting along pretty well after his first heart attack in March.

CE: Well, when did you come back from Europe about 1939, did you say?

RB: Or 1940. Yes.

CE: Just before our involvement in the war.

RB: Yes.

CE: I understand you became involved in some World War II war efforts, the Interceptor Command?

RB: Oh the Interceptor Command, yes. But I sent a hundred -- Oh that was in the First World War, a hundred thousand dollars to the fatherless children of France.

CE: Well we should go back to World War I. We've been so busy talking about your husband but I understand that you've been always involved in charitable things, Ruth, and in World War I is it true that you raised a hundred thousand dollars for French widows and orphanage?

RB: Fatherless Children of France Organization.

CE: How did that come about? Where did you do the work, here or did you go abroad?

RB: No I did the work around here. I wasn't always actually raising money. I did a lot of work for the organization in different ways and Mr. Brunswick, who is a native San Franciscan, he was so impressed that I was responsible for a hundred-thousand dollars being sent over, why, when he went to France he negotiated with somebody over there so that they sent me a medal and as very wonderful letter from the French Government thanking me for my work.

CE: That's wonderful. And then, always you've been involved. I understand you have been active in the Junior League of San Francisco.

RB: That's right, the Junior League and also the --

CE: You've been involved teaching at Sunny Hills when it was an orphanage?

RB: Yes, that's right.

CE: How did you get interested in that?  
RB: Well I don't know.  
CE: Because you were living in Marin at that time.  
RB: In Mill Valley, yes. Oh I went up there regularly and taught up there.  
CE: What would you teach?  
RB: Well I think it was just children, I think it was grammar school. Of course, I never was paid.  
CE: A credited teacher?  
RB: No, I never was, no.  
CE: Are there other organizations that you became interested in when you were living in Marin? How about the Marin Music Chest?  
RB: Well, I think I did work for that too. It's hard for me to remember; I was always busy at some sort of charity work.  
CE: And of course your church work.  
RB: Yes, oh yes, my church work. Well I did a lot of work for the United Church of Christ.  
CE: Yes.  
RB: Oh, I did some other work on Marin County. I don't know what it is now, but anyway, it was --  
CE: You made the contribution in World War I by raising money for the French widows, then World War II comes along and you want to do something again.  
RB: Yes.  
CE: How did you get in that Interceptor Command? Was that a command located in the Stock Exchange Building in San Francisco on Sansome and Montgomery?  
RB: Montgomery and California, I think it was. Well I don't know how I got --  
CE: As I recall, I did some time there, too, you went on this mezzanine and they had this huge plotting board and you sat around and all of the planes and ships coming in prior to December the 1st, 1941, all were plotted on this board. What hours did you work there?  
RB: Oh well, I don't remember.  
CE: Don't remember. Well that was a valuable contribution you did.  
RB: Well whatever the normal amount of hours were expected I did, but I can't remember exactly.  
CE: Well now tell me, after, you said your husband died in 1943, and you were a widow for ten or eleven years.  
RB: Eleven years.  
CE: What did you do then? Did you stay on --  
RB: Oh that's when I lived at the Garden of Allah and I had all the family and these two church members and I was the cook for them all and the children helped with the dishwashing. We all lived there and did gardening and everything and I did a lot of charitable work then too but I can't remember exactly what it was but I was awfully busy, of course, mostly house work because it was such a big family.  
CE: Pretty soon you met and married another gentleman, Doctor Robert C. Bowie. How did that come about?  
RB: Well that came about because my homeopathic doctor -- Oh I was walking in the Alps. I went over and walked in the Alps and invited my fourteen-year-old little nephew

to come over and join me and walk and he was delighted to do it and he came over and we were walking in the Alps. And by the way my nephew Steven Buck, he fell in love with Europe and so he became a -- He is a, now what is he?

CE: Is he a citizen of another country?

RB: Oh no, no, he isn't a citizen but he did his work in Beirut and in Africa. He was there a long time because he fell in love. He was doing his life work over there.

CE: What was his life work?

RB: It was connected with -- He was in Beirut.

CE: Was it music?

RB: No it wasn't music, it was land, I think connected with land development.

CE: Anyway, you were over there in Switzerland, in the Alps.

RB: Yes, and my brother wrote me and said, "Ruthie, why don't you come back from Switzerland and join us and fly to Rio de Janeiro where the World Congress of Homeopathy is going to take place?" And my brother Charlie and his wife were going; my twin sister and her husband were going but they weren't doctors. And Doctor Schmid -- Oh no that was the next time I went with Doctor Schmid. But anyway I came home, Stephen Buck, my fourteen-year-old nephew, he had to go to high school, so I brought him to New York and to his home in Scarsdale. He lived in Scarsdale, New York. And then I joined Charlie, my brother, and his wife, and my sister and we flew to Rio de Janeiro.

CE: Well had any of your brothers followed your father's profession?

RB: Two doctors.

CE: Two.

RB: Two homeopathic doctors: Doctor Garth Boerike, he settled in Philadelphia and Doctor Charles Boerike in the East Bay.

CE: So you went down to this convention in Rio.

RB: In Rio de Janeiro and it was a doctors' convention. My twin sister and her husband were there and he wasn't a doctor, so my twin sister and her husband and I, we stayed at -- We all stayed at the Gloria Hotel. And we just were having a good time down there while the doctors' convention took place because we weren't doctors, you see. And then -- But one time I was talking to a doctor at the Gloria Hotel and he looked up and said, "Oh Mrs. White!" Of course, I was Mrs. White then. And he said, "Oh, Mrs. White," he said, "here comes a Doctor Bowie from Colorado. You must meet him. And he's a very delightful person." So he walked towards us, you see, and then I thought to myself, "Why, he is quite jaunty," but I didn't say it, you know, but he was walking quite briskly. Both my husbands were ten years older than I. So Doctor Bowie came along and I was introduced to him and so we had a little talk and then I didn't anything more of him; he was a busy doctor down there and I didn't know that I had made an impression on him whatever. But he left a day earlier than I did, from Rio de Janeiro, and when he came up and said goodbye to me he said "Goodbye, Mrs. White." He said, "It's been very nice meeting you. Will you write to me?" and I was bowled over when he said that because I had hardly seen him or known him or anything. And I said "Well I'll be glad to send you a California Christmas card." I said, "I live in California, San Francisco. I'll send you a Christmas card." But that didn't do. When he got back to Colorado he started writing to me, you see, to Mill Valley. He wrote and wrote. And finally at Christmastime I sent him a Christmas card; he came out in person. That's when we became engaged and we were

married in April '55. He came out and became engaged to me and then he went back to Colorado, of course because he was a busy doctor. And then came out and we were married in San Francisco at the Swedenborgian Church in April 3, '55. And Ralston White and I were married at the Swedenborgian Church April 6, 1910, so both my marriages were at the Swedenborgian Church.

CE: Tell us a little bit about that church.

RB: Oh it's the second in the United States for weddings.

CE: What's the first one?

RB: Oh, the Little Church Around the Corner in New York City. It has more weddings than the Swedenborgian Church. The Church of the New Jerusalem on Lyons Street between Washington and Jefferson, it's the second in the United States for --

CE: Why do you think it's so popular, in your opinion?

RB: Well because it's so beautiful. Have you never been to it?

CE: Yes, I have been there.

RB: It has that lovely open fireplace and four Keith pictures, you know, spring, summer, autumn, winter. And then the lovely pulpit there and the stained glass windows and then --

CE: It's a beautiful place.

RB: It has a little narrow window up where the caller takes place and that little narrow window came from England, from the -- Oh I can't think of it, that famous church, the one in England.

CE: Canterbury? Westminster?

RB: Oh I can't remember, but anyway it came from a famous church in England. It's just a little narrow strip and was sent to Worcester when he was minister there, you know. So they're very proud of that little narrow church there, a window there with colored glass.

CE: Well tell me Ruth, when Doctor Bowie came out and you were married, did you go back with him and live in Colorado or did you --

RB: We lived the summers in Colorado and the winters in the Garden of Allah. You see I had given the Garden of Allah then to as my first husband's memorial but I always kept a tiny little corner and I still have that, because --

CE: Sort of your own apartment or suite?

RB: Well it's got a bedroom and then we added a little addition so Larry, my nephew, has his desk there and it's fixed up so that I can entertain there, offering tea or wine or something. Don't forget the wine there.

CE: Yes, we shall have it shortly.

RB: Yes, so I entertain there every now and then. And Doctor Schimdt, my homeopathic doctor in San Francisco, he loves to come over to the Garden of Allah and walk all over the hills and then he comes to my little corner there. I give him something to eat and drink and he brings his wife and three children so I do quite a little bit of entertaining there.

CE: Would you be good enough to tell us --

RB: Pardon me, I just want to say that this little corner place that I have is only mine while I'm alive. Then when I die it belongs to the United Church of Christ.

CE: Would you tell us -- Sometimes perhaps you would be good enough to take Mrs. Kent and me over to see it.

RB: Oh I'd be delighted anytime. Just give me a little notice. Anytime to the church service if you'd like to go.

CE: Yes.

RB: Or I could go during the week too, but it's nice to go to the church service, then they always serve coffee and cookies and things in the parish room.

CE: Do you happen to know the road it's located on now?

RB: Oh it's on Lyons Street. It's on Lyons Street in San Francisco.

CE: No, no, dear, the Garden of Allah. Is it on the street? Does it have a street name?

RB: It's called Bayview Avenue. I can look it up in the telephone book.

CE: That's alright.

RB: See, there are three streets in Mill Valley named after the White family. Ralston Avenue is named after my first husband; Lovell Avenue is named after his father, Lovell White; and Lyon Place is named after his mother; she was Laura Lyon. So there are three streets named after the White family.

CE: Could you explain simply what a homeopathic doctor is?

RB: Oh my goodness just don't get me started on that. I don't dare open my mouth here because there's nothing but allopathic doctors here.

CE: Well you could tell us simply? A lot of people don't know what that is.

RB: Well in the first place a homeopathic doctor does not become a doctor until he has studied three years longer than allopathic doctors. It's that much more difficult. A homeopathic doctor treats the patient, not the disease. And a homeopathic doctor always knows that nature does eighty-percent of the work and after the homeopathic doctor has treated the individual, the patient, not the disease and let nature do eighty percent of the work, then the homeopathic doctor asks you every possible symptom that you have, and then he knows how to treat you. And the same disease treated by a homeopathic doctor might be different medicine given to different people because he asks the individual everything, and then he knows what medicine belongs to that group of symptoms. It's very marvelous. Oh goodness sake, look at me at 87 years old.

CE: Well I marvel at your physique.

RB: Well sure. I've never taken a sleeping pill in my life. I've never taken anything and I've --

CE: You've walked all your life.

RB: All my life, ridden horseback, went swimming, climbed Tamalpais twenty times. We all did that, the Boerike Family. We all climbed up on top of Tamalpais. And I played tennis at the Garden of Allah. We had a wonderful tennis court, and Helen Willis played there and Tilden played there. It was the only two tennis courts in Mill Valley. They were full size. One was at the Garden of Allah and the other was the Billings Court down in Blithdale Canyon. The Billings had a full size. But only two tennis courts in Mill Valley that were full size. So Helen Wills and they all wanted to, they all wanted to play.

CE: Well I think today -- You say you're 88?

RB: I'm 87. I'll be 88 on the 13th of May.

CE: But didn't you tell us earlier that you walked from your residence here at the Tamalpais across up that steep hill in Greenbrae and back?

RB: Oh yes, of course. I go to the top of the Bret Harte Boulevard.

CE: Well what's that distance?

RB: It's about two miles.

CE: Each way?

RB: To go up to the top of the Bret Harte Boulevard, but then I turn right or left. If I turn right I come down 101 Highway, or if I turn left I come down Julian Hill. What's the name of it?

AK: Wolfe Grade.

RB: Wolfe Grade, yes that's where I come down.

CE: Do you do that often?

RB: Well three or four times a week. Of course over the holidays I'm too busy, so may extras and parties and programs, but now I'm getting back to normal.

CE: Do you have a particular diet?

RB: Oh, nothing. I pay no attention to food. I'm so sick of people talking about food; I go nuts. They absolutely -- They follow their diets: "Oh, I can't eat this. I don't eat that." Because they go to these allopathic doctors and the doctors give them these diets and everything. And I always say, sure, allopathic cures you quickly, they give you those strong pills and medicines and it cures you quickly but it builds up future trouble and that's the reason so many of you now, at the Tamalpais, they can hardly walk.

CE: Well do you enjoy food? Do you enjoy eating?

RB: Oh I enjoy it very much but I skip meals.

CE: You skip meals?

RB: Oh, all the time because I don't want to put on weight. See this morning I weighed 118 and I don't want to gain weight. So if I go to my scale -- I'll show you my scale. And I get on every morning and if I go up a half a pound or anything, then I skip a meal. But it makes me a little light-headed because now I'm too old to skip meals and my homeopathic doctor, Doctor Schmidt, in San Francisco, he really forbid me to do it but I disobey him because I'm the daughter of a doctor, the sister of two doctors, and the widow of a doctor, so I feel I can be my own boss. See, I want to give you something to drink here.

CE: Well thank you so much, Ruth. This has been a delightful afternoon. This concludes our interview with Ruth Boerike White Bowie. And this is Carla Ehat of the Moya Library Guild.