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INTERVIEW WITH WILHELMINA GILBERT

by Carla Ehat & Virginia Borland
November 16, 1974

INTERVIEWEE: Wilhelmina Gilbert (FL)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Virginia Borland (VB)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 16, 1974

CE: Today is Saturday, November 16th, 1974. We are here at the residence of Mrs. J. B. Rice, honoring the birthday, the 97th birthday, of her father, Mr. Eugene O'Connor. Also at this delightful party this afternoon is Mrs. Louis J. Gilbert, Willa Gilbert, Wilhelmina Gilbert, who also has lived in Marin County for many years. She was born in San Rafael on March 24, 1887, and hopefully she will share with us today some of her reminiscences of Marin. Good afternoon, Mrs. Gilbert!

WG: Good afternoon. Well, my first memories are of the Lucas family, both in Marin County and Bolinas. We used to drive on Sunday afternoons, in the surrey with the fringe on top, out to the Lucas Valley Ranch. They were friends of my father's and mother's and long-standing friends. My father, unfortunately, had several fires, and when one house, the first house, was burned down before I was born. The next morning Mrs. Lucas sent her coachman in to get the whole family and take them out and my family stayed six weeks at the Lucas Ranch until the new home was provided for them. Mrs. Lucas was particularly sympathetic because her first ranch home was burned down.

CE: Now tell me, Mrs. Gilbert, I understand your father came from England around 1857. Is that correct?

WG: No, No, '60s. He came in the late '60s, in 1869. He came by way of Australia, and he's seen the beauties of Tasmania and Hobart. But when he came to Marin County and saw Mount Tamalpais and Bolinas, he said, "This is where I'm going to spend the rest of my life."

CE: You know, it's interesting, digressing for a moment, many people who we've interviewed have been well-traveled people before they settled here in Marin. We talked

to a family who had lived in Portugal and they decided to settle in Marin because it looked like little Portugal to them, and it must be an unusually beautiful place, in comparison with the rest of the world.

WG: My father had gone, as a young man, from England to New York and he worked in some capacity for the Colgate Company. The Civil War was declared and he said, "This is no place for an Englishmen to make his living," so he went back to England, then went to the gold rush in Australia. When he was in Australia he visited around among the islands, and in those days the natives wore nothing but loin cloths. He saw how much they could use various articles and he chartered a ship and came up to San Francisco and bought the things that the natives would use and took them down there. I have still one of the papers of his sailing.

CE: You mean a manifest of his cargo.

WG: Well, not of the cargo but his permit. It was when Tahiti was still under the French and Queen Pomare who was the last of the native queens. She gave my father a paper giving him the freedom of the islands with her signature upon it, and you know I have lost that paper and it was very valuable to a collector.

CE: Well, don't you think you possibly have misplaced it?

WG: No, no, it's just gone, but anyhow he came to San Francisco and settled here.

CE: Well, he seemed to be a born merchant. What business did he eventually go into?

WG: He eventually went into the furniture business. He supplied everything, anything for the home: pianos, sewing machines, insurance. They had a factory where they made mattresses, and all that sort of thing. Well, anyhow, he retired from that when I was really quite young. He was much older when I was born; I think he was in the fifties when I was born.

CE: Do you have sisters?

WG: There were four girls in the family.

CE: That's right, I understand from Virginia they were all musical, yourself included.

WG: No, my eldest sister, Evangeline, became a very fine singer. She was well known around the Bay. She was head of the Pacific Musical Club in San Francisco and prominent in the San Francisco Musical Society.

CE: What was your maiden name?

WG: My maiden name was Sale, Willa Sale.

CE: S-a-l-e?

WG: S-a-l-e.

CE: Is it true you played the viola?

WG: No, I played the violin. My first violin lessons were taken in the house that the Kuechlers afterwards lived in. Do you know the Kuechlers, the A.W. Fosters' oldest daughter? Then later I went to San Francisco for my music lessons, and I remember one afternoon -- I usually came home on the 5:15 ferry and that particular day was so miserable, that I came home on a boat earlier and had I been on the 5:15, I would have seen the sinking of the San Rafael.

CE: Oh, we've heard stories of that. Mabel Wosser, who lives in Sausalito, told us a bit of that story. Her father who was an engineer on the Princess and that is an historic day.

WG: Well, our neighbor, Mr. Clifford, had just bought himself a new overcoat which he said he needed very badly. He was on the 5:15, and when the two ships came together,

their windows were right opposite each other, and the men broke the windows of the two ships apart, and he took his new overcoat and laid it across so the ladies wouldn't be cut by the glass, and then he forgot to pick it up, and he got home with his old overcoat, not his new overcoat.

CE: Well, some people were saved from that collision.

WG: Oh yes, but it was a very serious accident.

CE: Was your musical interest just an avocation with you or had you aspired to serious study?

WG: Oh, no. I went over to take my music lessons from the first teacher of Kathleen Parlow. The violinist who became the world's outstanding woman violinist in later years. I usually stayed over Saturday afternoons to be with Kathleen, but that particular day I came home early because the weather was so very poor. To go back earlier about going out to the Lucas Ranch, they owned all of the land from the Catholic cemetery to the other side of St. Vincent's. They gave St. Vincent's, you know, to the church.

CE: That I didn't know.

WG: Yes. Well, many people thought the Miller family gave it, but Dody told me herself after we went over to see her, after her 90th birthday, that they had given St. Vincent's. They were very hospitable, there were always many people there and they had a summer home in Bolinas. I can remember going over to Bolinas, when I was a tiny child, and first seeing the ocean.

CE: What was your reaction to that?

WG: Well, I ran home; the house was right near the beach. It was right near the house that later Lawrence Moore owned and Mrs. Newhall's, on the entrance to the beach at Bolinas. I ran back saying the ocean was throwing itself at me, and I was afraid. Well, my mother became very good friends of the Waterhouses, who, I guess, Mr. Waterhouse was the first citizen of Bolinas.

CE: His daughter, Marin Waterhouse Pepper, has written a history, I think of this area.

WG: Oh, yes, in fact I delved into that yesterday. I got out Marin's book and started to read it again. She really wrote a good book. She wrote well and it was interesting and she certainly studied her history.

CE: Tell us when you said you were born in San Rafael, where did you eventually live? Did you stay in the house you were born in long?

WG: No, my father bought ten acres of land in the west end of town on the ridge that runs up from San Quentin, and he built his house right on the crest of the ridge and we had a very beautiful view of Mr. Tamalpais and the bay.

CE: Near San Quentin?

WG: Well, it was on the same ridge but it was in back of West End Station, and it adjoined --

CE: Is that what they call Reservoir Hill?

WG: Yes, right in back of Reservoir Hill. My father owned, the reservoir was on the edge of his property right up to the top of that hill, ten acres.

CE: Is that where you spent most of your formative years?

WG: No, when I was very young, two houses that were built there, were burned down. I remember we were spending the summer at Bolinas. We were spending the summer at a boarding house that the stage driver, Mr. McGovern, owned. In fact I listened when Marin Waterhouse was interviewed on the television as the author of her book Bolinas.

Many of the old timers came in and talked to Marin and Efie McGovern, the son of that stage driver, spoke to her. I hadn't thought of that name for years. Well, anyhow, another interesting thing about Bolinas, I remember one day when I was about ten, we went down to the ocean and the ocean was very angry. There was a terrific undertow, full of gravel. The sky was dark and it was almost a greenish gray and very few people ventured in. My sister Katherine was a good swimmer. She went in. I was so nervous about her being in there and I walked home around the bluff, and as I got into the town I heard a swish and three tremendous waves came into the bay. And it was the backlash of that tremendous earthquake that killed thousands in Japan. And it wrecked in the Bolinas Bay, it wrecked many of the -- As I was passing by I saw many of these boats, sailboats being thrown over on their sides. I was terrified.

CE: Three thousand miles away.

WG: At first people thought that was not so, but I have read since, that there is that backlash that goes clear across the Atlantic Ocean.

CE: Well, now tell me, Mrs. Gilbert, when you would go out to visit Bolinas how would you go, by train, stage, or what?

WG: Sometimes we would go by stage, but usually we would go with our own horse and buggy. We would go over that lovely road, before Alpine Dam was made, past Liberty's.

CE: Oh, you were on the road that went up to the Summit Inn. Did you remember the Summit Inn?

WG: Oh, very well. We were on the road that started up from Fairfax, a very narrow grade, then later on it went over the property that is now the golf course.

CE: Yes, but didn't it wind up at the Summit, what is now the Panoramic.

WG: No, there is no connection in those days, but later on when they built that, then there was a connection to the Summit. There was a lodge up on the Summit.

CE: I thought it was called Summit Inn. Judge Martinelli told us that. Does that ring a bell?

WG: Do you mean the inn was on the Bolinas Road, or the hotel on the summit of the mountain?

CE: No, no, the little inn that was on the Fairfax-Bolinas Road.

WG: I remember the place, and I remember him coming out and speaking to the people as they passed by. Sometimes we'd go over, some of us driving in the surrey, and my sister following on horseback.

CE: Tell me, going back just a moment to your father's life, he came here from England, went into business, got into the furniture business. Would he distribute it to all people in Marin and San Francisco area? Where was he headquartered?

WG: Well, his first building was next door to Grosjean's. He owned the whole building, between B and C Street, it was on the south side.

CE: But he did get started in San Rafael rather than San Francisco?

WG: Yes, in San Rafael. But later he built a building on the other side of Fourth Street, between A and B which, later, two stores were broken into one, and made into the first movie theater after my father sold it, after we moved away. We moved away from here in 1903, when I was a senior in high school.

CE: Moved to where?

WG: To Alameda.

CE: You mean you left marvelous Marin to go to Alameda?

WG: Well, with -- My father had long retired, and my sister, who had graduated from the University of California in 1901, and had first taught in the Belvedere school for a year. There were just two teachers in the school; that was all.

CE: You don't recall her. Let's see, I just interviewed last week Mrs. Harry Allen and she spoke of such warm affection for her teacher in Belvedere, who came from San Francisco everyday by ferry. In the winter months when they would go back to the city, they would commute on the ferry with this woman to attend class.

WG: Miss Boynton.

CE: Miss Boynton!

WG: Well, Miss Boynton had taken a leave of absence and Mr. Furlong, who was the superintendent of schools, appointed my sister who was just out of college and an old friend of his daughter, Amy, who became Mrs. Orey Short, to the Belvedere school. She only stayed there a little while; then she went over to teach in Alameda. My mother said my father was retired and I was about ready to enter the University of California.

CE: You, too, went to the University?

WG: Yes, both of us. So mother said, "Let's move over to Alameda." Eva did not like boarding, so we moved to Alameda. I'd like to say something about the San Rafael schools. When I was six and a half I fell in love with my teacher; her name was Edwina Dufficy. I just adored her. And after that term, she joined the convent. Then when I got into high school, her sister, Veronica Dufficy, taught me three and a half years of Latin, and I loved her, too.

CE: We interviewed Eleanor Murray who was a Latin teacher at San Rafael High School. Do you recall that name at all?

WG: Eleanor Gilogly was in my sister's class in San Rafael High School. She was a bright girl. But I want to say about San Rafael High School, there were less than 100 pupils there, when I was there, but we had a fine faculty. John Drew, who later founded the Drew Coaching School and private school in San Francisco, and Cornelia McKinne who later was head of Hamlin School in San Francisco, taught us, and they were excellent teachers.

CE: You mean Cornelia McKinne Stanwood taught at the San Rafael School?

WG: She taught English and Civics, and she was an excellent teacher.

CE: Well, this interests me greatly because my sister taught for fifteen years at the Sarah Dix Hamlin School, and Mrs. Stanwood never told her this story. She was an extraordinary woman.

WG: She was. I think she was just out of California.

CE: She came from Marysville.

WG: No, no, she was from San Francisco.

CE: Maybe she went to Marysville when she married.

WG: She went to Marysville when she was married. She boarded with the Lichtenbergs in San Rafael. You know, the Lichtenbergs that have that lovely old home, Elsa Lichtenberg Johnson.

CE: I knew her sister, Lila McKinne. Prior to her death she was very active in the Sierra Club. Did you know her sister, Lila?

WG: No, but I've heard of her.

CE: She turned over the school to her after her death and she ran it as a business.

WG: I did meet her brother. I met his wife in Berkeley and she showed me pictures of Cornelia when she was a young girl.

CE: She was an extraordinary teacher.

VB: Where was the San Rafael High School?

WG: The San Rafael -- All the schools were grouped around, except the B Street school, where I started, were grouped around 4th and E Street. The old grammar school was on 4th Street, the Episcopal Church on the corner, then they built the new high school. When I was a little girl I think it was a Mr. Smyth came to San Rafael, and he established the high school. It was first upstairs in the Fourth Street Grammar School. It was when I moved from the B Street School to the Fourth Street School. It was just that time that the high school moved from the upper story into its own building on E Street.

VB: When would that have been?

WG: Oh, it's hard for me to think right off.

VB: Well, what grade were you in?

WG: I guess when I was in the 3rd or 4th grade. I think Miss Bachelor was the teacher. The high school formerly had been only three years, and then it became a four year course. My sister graduated from San Rafael High School, I think in 1897. Amy Furlong was in her class, and James Wilkins, of the Wilkins Ranch in Bolinas, which is a famous spot, he was in the class. I still have the graduation picture. Well, anyhow I got a better education in San Rafael High School than I received when I went to Alameda High School, where I finished out my senior year. I thought the teachers were much superior. Of course there were smaller classes.

CE: Well, tell me, Mrs. Gilbert, before we get over to Alameda, going back to these ten acres that your father purchased, why did your father purchase these particular ten acres?

WG: Well, he liked to have a lot of space around him. I think he wanted to build a nice home. We had a vineyard and an orchard.

CE: And where had you lived previous to that?

WG: I was born on E Street, where my father had lived before he bought the property on the hill. This hill is on the same range that, running along farther, Virginia's parents, the Borlands bought, and Mr. O'Connor owned. It's that same range of hills that runs from San Quentin out to San Anselmo. We had a very pleasant home up there.

CE: Is the home still there?

WG: Two homes there were burned down. Then my father said he never wanted to build a large home again. He built a smaller home which he rented, and then later after leaving San Rafael, when I was a senior in high school, I came back to San Rafael, when my children were little and they had the pleasure of roaming those same acres that I grew up on when I was a child. We remodeled that small house and lived there when I lived in San Rafael for the second period of my life, which was, I think I was over here about '14. I came back in 1914. My son was born here in 1915 and we moved away about 1926 or '27.

CE: So you had two brief periods here.

WG: And then I came back to San Rafael and lived one more year.

CE: I see. Now, Virginia, you wanted to ask Mrs. Gilbert something about the schools.

VB: Yes, I did want to ask you, there was some scandal about that high school or at least about the E Street School, that it fell down. Could you tell us something about that.

WG: It wasn't the high school. First when they decided to make that the educational center they moved the Episcopal Church away from the corner of 4th and E, and I'll digress to say that years ago kitty corner across from the Episcopal Church was the Presbyterian orphanage, before it moved to San Anselmo, I remember it very well. And some of the orphanage children used to come over to the grammar school. But when I was living here the second time and my children were in school, after the Episcopal Church was moved, a beautiful brick building was built with many beautiful gables; it was very attractive. But unfortunately it was not very well designed or built, because when the first rain came, rain poured down onto the students and they had to dismiss the class, and the school was later torn down.

VB: Now was that the grammar school?

WG: Yes, I think it was about when Jack left the -- The Short School had four grades, and it was when he was in the next grade, when he was promoted to that school and they were all so proud of this beautiful new building, and it had to be demolished.

CE: I had never heard of that. Mrs. Gilbert, I understand through Virginia that your father knew William T. Coleman and there was something to do with planting eucalyptus flats from Australia. Would you tell us about that, please?

WG: Well, I think some of the first eucalyptus that came into the county William T. Coleman had and I think he planted those trees out on that Coleman tract, which is adjacent to the convent where they have their Sunday concerts. They call it Meadow. Do they call it? No, that's not -- What do they call that?

CE: Forest Meadow?

WG: Yes. My father had a flat and he planted them all around our property. Later some of them became a great menace. I remember one of them falling down on the roof of our house one rainy day.

CE: Are we talking about the ten-acre property now?

WG: Well, this is when I came back again. When I came back the first time we built a smaller house.

CE: Where?

WG: On part of that ten acres, the back lot, the lot between our property and the O'Connor's and Virginia's, my father had sold by that time to a Mr. Trost, and he had a couple of summer homes. We had to pass through the Trost property, which was private property, to get over to Virginia's, I remember.

VB: But it's the same hill, basically, isn't it?

WG: Yes, Another thing about that hill, when I was a little bit of a girl we used to be somewhat frightened when early in the morning, Jenny, our maid, would call our attention to the fact that San Quentin guards were out searching for escaped prisoners. The guards wore blue uniforms and they had rifles over their shoulders, and they searched all over our property. And one time, later on, that was when the prisoners were still wearing black and white striped suits, the tenant who was living in our house on the top of the hill was out hunting rabbits and he had a gun with him. It was Lionel Smith. His sisters lived here for a long time in San Rafael. Well, he was out hunting rabbits and here among the redwoods he found a prisoner in his black and white stripes. The prisoner said, "If you go back and tell, I'll shoot you." And then another time a convict changed his clothes and left his suit on the Brown's property. Do you remember where the Brown family lived? It was through the Brown's that I met the Borland's. They all lived in San

Francisco as neighbors together. Mrs. Brown had a very pleasant place up there and she was a very remarkable woman. I thought she was an old lady. Of course I was just a little girl and it seemed that at the time she was only in the early thirties. She came over with her four children. She used to read all of the advertisements in the real estate advertisements in the Sunday papers, and would buy property and sell property. That's how she raised her four children here. I remember the girls were great friends of the Wickman family; people must have talked about the Wickman family in the old days.

VB: Hadn't Mrs. Brown's husband been killed?

WG: Yes, he had been an engineer on a steamer, I believe, and the ship had been lost in Coos Bay. But she was a very courageous woman. It was on her property; they got up one morning and one of their pieces of garden furniture they found this black and white striped convict's suit. He must have stolen a suit of clothes somewhere and left his old ones on the lawn chair. This was all on the same hill.

CE: Well, that is an extraordinary story.

VB: Mrs. Gilbert, I have heard that on our hill, I choose to call it our hill when you're not there I call it my hill, there was once a park. Now, on the telephone, when I was talking to you the other day, you said that that was called San Rafael Park. Will you tell us something about it please?

WG: Yes, there were two parks. There was Schuetzen Park which was a larger one, and San Rafael Park which was at the foot of our hill. It was off what is now Marquard Avenue. I think the white house still stands there. The Schears lived in there, a family named Schear.

VB: How do you spell that, Mrs. Gilbert?

WG: S-c-h-e-a-r. Many groups used to come over from San Francisco and have Sunday picnics, and they were really a little bit rowdy.

CE: How did they get there, by excursion train?

WG: They came in excursion trains that were open cars. They had no windows and no glass.

CE: What are we talking about, sometime after 1906?

WG: No. Well, there were two ways to get to San Rafael. There was the narrow gauge and the broad gauge. The narrow gauge came from San Rafael to West End Station, to B Street. They came in on that train, and they would have special trains that would bring them in, in the morning. And they would walk along this dusty West End Avenue to the park, and they were all very sober when they arrived, but I can't say they were in that same condition when they went back.

VB: Mrs. Gilbert, would that have been about 1900?

WG: Oh, it was before that, it was when we lived up on top of the hill.

CE: 1890s?

WG: Yes, in the early 90s. We were never allowed out when those picnics were going on. But once in awhile, there were more quiet picnics. For instance, the Columbia Park Boys would come over and have a weekday picnic there.

CE: Well, did they have a dance pavilion?

WG: They had a big open dance pavilion.

VB: And where was that? Where was that located?

WG: That was right, very close to the white house on Marquard Avenue.

VB: In front of it or in back of it?

WG: It was in back of it. They had swings, they had little summer houses where the people used to eat their lunch. On Fourth of July, the merchants of the town usually had a picnic there. And my father, being a businessman in San Rafael, we used to take a lunch and eat it in one of these houses, and just stay a little while. I remember walking up and seeing young men swinging their young ladies on the swings and going up farther and seeing in among the rocks, a spring, which is the spring that now supplies the water for Virginia's swimming pool.

VB: Yes, that's right. That's true.

WG: I don't remember when it went down, whether it was torn down or whether it burned down, that I don't know. But I do know that we would hear the music on Sundays floating across the hill.

VB: Would that be a kind of German music?

CE: Was it like the Scheutzen Park, German Music?

WG: No, it was like ordinary dancing music. "Casey Would Waltz with the Strawberry Blonde," and all those old tunes.

CE: Well, not being a Germanic, it didn't have to change its name. The Scheutzen Park did, to California.

WG: But Scheutzen Park was a larger park. I remember the night that burned down. We were living up on the top of the hill then, and Mr. Anderson, who at that time was a tenant of ours, he was head of the San Francisco normal school. He came running up and he said, "Louis, do you know that I just heard the Scheutzen Park is burning down?" So Louis and Mr. Anderson hopped into the car and rode off and saw Scheutzen Park burn, and we watched the flames leaping up in the air.

CE: You know it's so interesting, there are so many edifices that have been destroyed by fire in the Bay area.

WG: My father had four fires.

CE: Well, you know we were talking to Eleanor Murray, this Latin teacher who I spoke of. She was talking about when the San Rafael Hotel burned down, and it was during the daytime and Mrs. Kent was with me, and her husband happened to be there that day with a millimeter movie camera and took photographs of it, which she gave to Virginia and the California History Room.

WG: Well, that reminds me of going to the Hotel Rafael. I used to go out there; I was fascinated by tennis when I was a little girl, just watching it.

CE: You would be in today.

WG: Principally because being an Episcopalian, and Dr. Hall was the minister, and Miriam Hall, his daughter, had played tennis with the Sutton girls in Pasadena, where they had lived before coming to San Rafael. I wanted to see Miriam Hall play tennis so I went out. I used to walk out there.

CE: From your home?

WG: I could have driven. I could have harnessed up Winnie and driven out, but I used to walk.

CE: Who is Winnie?

WG: Winnie was a horse.

CE: Your own horse?

WG: Yes. I could have harnessed Winnie up and driven out or ridden horseback out to see them, but I used to walk out and sit there and watch May Sutton and Violet Sutton

and the Sutton girls play tennis. And they were the first tennis players, women, who played like men. Their father had been an English Army or Naval officer who had retired to Pasadena, and had taught them.

CE: He really trained the girls.

WG: Yes. Then later I met one of the Suttons at Golda Meyer's house in San Francisco. She was a minor player in San Francisco, and I remember meeting the Suttons at her home later on.

CE: Golda Meyer. That's an interesting --

WG: She became Golda Gross, later. She was quite a -- She used to play with Hazel Hodgkis Whiteman.

CE: What are your recollections of that hotel? Was it an exquisite grounds?

WG: Well, I have mentioned Kathleen Parlow, the violinist who came to San Rafael and later who became such a famous musician. She studied with Leopold Auer and was a friend of Mischa Elman and all those players. When she first came to San Rafael she played once at the Rafael Hotel, and I remember my family going there to hear her. I remember also going out there and walking in the maze.

CE: I have heard about that maze.

WG: Oh, that was --

VB: Tell us about the maze. We had a reference question in the library about that maze. That is, what was it? We finally find out what it was. We've never heard anybody describe it.

WG: Well, it was cypress trees that they kept well-clipped.

CE: In a hedgerow?

WG: In a hedgerow and, of course, you'd take a lead and you'd come to an end, and you'd have to go back again.

CE: Well, I understand from Warren Landon, from the San Francisco Theological Seminary, that unless you had a string following you, you couldn't get out.

WG: Well, we did; we got in and we got out. Warren Landon brings back a name. Mary Landon was in high school when I was.

CE: Oh, mercy, you know everybody.

WG: Parker Wood was in high school, and I know the Independent, from time to time, published many pictures, old school pictures of San Rafael, and Virginia used to send them to me. I have them all in a scrapbook still.

CE: Well, tell me, did you ever get up in the tower of the San Rafael Hotel?

WG: Yes, but that is a very vague memory.

CE: Well, it's interesting because every city has a high place for people to go and look out and this was the high spot, I presume, in San Rafael.

WG: Then when I came back to live in San Rafael in later years, my husband and I used to have Sunday dinner there at Hotel Rafael. That was before it was burned down.

CE: It was destroyed in 1923 or '8, wasn't it?

WG: Well, I think it must have been '8, because we left here in 1925 or '6, along in there, and we used to often go there for Sunday dinner. Another place we used to go for Sunday dinner was Pastori's. It was a delightful place to go; good food and such attractive lovely gardens. It was fun to go there Sunday evening and have dinner.

CE: Tell me, would you digress a moment, Mrs. Gilbert, and tell us when you married Louis J. Gilbert and a little bit about your children? You have a son, Jack. Is that correct, and a daughter, Betty?

WG: I have a daughter Elizabeth, yes.

CE: Well, tell us about your husband first, Louis. Where did you marry Louis, in San Francisco?

WG: No, we moved to Alameda and I met Louis through a neighbor who lived across the street, had taught Louis when he was in grammar school.

CE: Was he an Alameda boy?

WG: Yes, he was an Alameda boy. His father was a pharmacist and later had his own wholesale drug house. Well, Miss Foye had always kept in touch with three or four of her favorite pupils, and when we moved to Alameda she was giving one of her reunions for her favorite pupils, and she invited me over because I was the age of some of them, and that's where I met Louis. That was when I was a freshman in college, but I didn't marry him until I was out of college.

CE: And you have had two children. Is that correct?

WG: Two children, yes.

CE: I understand Jack is here today, is he not?

WG: Yes, well, Betty, first, I'll talk about her. Both are graduates of the University of California. Betty went to a law school. She did not want to teach; she thought she'd take a business course. She always learned very quickly. She learned shorthand and typing in six weeks, I think, and then told her father she'd like to work for an attorney. She thought she'd like to be a legal secretary, and when she was a legal secretary, she became interested in law, so she went on to San Francisco Law School, and she became an attorney. Jack, when he finished the University of California, went to work for the Zellerbach Paper Company and he went right up to the top.

CE: I understand he just recently retired. Is that correct?

WG: Yes, he was a Senior Vice President and director of Crown Zellerbach, and just recently retired this year.

VB: I think we should say that is really Juan Baptiste Gilbert the Third, isn't it? Would you tell us something about the house that's known as the Gasberg House? Did your father build that house?

WG: Well, I believe that as a young man in England, my father had learned how to build, but he never did that here. However, when he bought these ten acres and built on the top of the hill, at the foot of the hill, which was close to West End Station, he had several houses built, which he rented. The largest of these is the house which is now known as the Gasberg House. When his second home on the top of the hill was burned, he took some time to enlarge that house, and that's where we lived from the time our house was burned until we moved to Alameda. We lived in the house that is known as the Gasberg House.

CE: Virginia, is that Gasberg house still standing?

VB: The Gasberg House is still standing and Mrs. Gilbert, you'd be interested to know, it's now painted a lovely shade of lavender.

CE: Is that the one in back of Hill Haven?

WG: I think it was made into apartments afterwards.

VB: I don't know; it was bought by that -- a certain corporation. I think they have since sold it, but it was written about in the Chronicle. I don't recall the name. Well, anyway, it's this lavender, but it looks enormous and it's being well kept up. Somebody has bought it. I don't know who owns it now, but of course all the Gasbergs seem to be gone.

WG: Well, my sister, Eva, loathed that house. She loved the home on the top of the hill where she had her own riding habit. I can always picture Eva riding horseback. She really rode beautifully. She learned to ride on the Lucas Ranch, when she went out there those six weeks when the first house burned down. In fact, when she was out there one morning the Lucas' found her missing. They hunted and hunted and she was so lonesome for San Rafael, that she had gotten on one of the Lucas' horses and ridden back into San Rafael. I think she was only 6 or 7 years of age.

CE: Well, I want to go back a moment. You said that you were always intrigued with the view. Was your home on this ten acres high enough that you could overlook Mount Tamalpais as well as San Rafael?

WG: We saw Mount Tamalpais and we saw the Bay view.

CE: You were right on the crest, then.

WG: Yes, right on the crest. We had porches, and from the upper porches we could see across the Bay. I remember on Sundays we used to see way in the distance, and the little white sail boats sailing in the Bay; nothing like the number that sail on it now. In fact, my son sails on one of these boats, and recently they went out of the Golden Gate and I was very nervous, but they got along all right.

CE: When you lived in this residence had the San Francisco Theological Seminary buildings been built as yet?

WG: Oh yes, I remember when they were built. I remember when they were built; I remember San Anselmo when it was a tiny little town, when there were just one or two houses. There was a beautiful old ranch home on the way out toward Fairfax. There was nothing else out there then.

CE: There was a station. That's about it?

WG: Yes, Yolanda Station was just being built up a little bit. I remember that. There were just dirt roads, none of them paved. The Ross Valley always was lovely. One thing we used to do in the early days when we were in high school was to have picnics. This little group used to have picnics on such days as Washington's Birthday or Decoration Day, and in the winter the same little group would have house parties. I remember one Washington's birthday walking up Mount Tamalpais with one of the teachers chaperoning. There were about twelve of us. We walked up the Mill Valley side from the Mill Valley station, and we came down the Ross Valley side, took the train home from Ross Valley. And twice I walked to Bolinas, believe it or not. Both times we were given a lift to the top of the Fairfax Grade. We had rented the Waterhouse's studio, several of us girls.

CE: Was that the studio that was near the old Flagstaff Hotel on the water?

WG: Yes, my father and mother spent their honeymoon in the Flagstaff Hotel.

CE: Oh, I'd love to hear about that. Now that was tilted off kilter when the 1906 earthquake occurred, but tell us about that, what they remember of that hotel.

WG: I just remember that it was always there and they had spent their honeymoon there, and that's all I know.

CE: The other day Mrs. Kent gave us something from the Daily Alta California, and I really think I should loan it to you. It's dated June 21, 1885. Now, that's two years before you were born, I realize, but it's a charming article appearing in the paper of life in Ross Valley, which they describe as the picturesque suburb southwest of San Rafael.

WG: One of our favorite picnic spots was Lake Lagunitas. Sometimes we would walk to Lake Lagunitas from the Ross Valley Station. We'd walk up past the filter where the water was aerated, I remember that very well. My father had a friend, a Mr. Hinkle, in San Francisco. He was the brother of that Hinkle who gave Hinkle Park to Berkeley.

CE: Oh, John Hinkle Park?

WG: Yes, John Hinkle's brother. They used to often come over to our house on weekend. We would have a picnic and they'd go fishing on Lake Lagunitas; I remember that very well.

CE: Do you ever remember your family or father talking about Ross Landing?

WG: Oh yes, I remember, too, my father and mother remembered when ships went right up to the head of the Bolinas Lagoon, to the bottom of the Wilkins Ranch. My mother remembers when ships went right up there.

CE: Well, there was a great deal of lumber that was brought there, put on lighters and put up into the ships, gasoline schooners, that sailed from Bolinas to San Francisco. We find we must conclude our visit with Mrs. Louis J. Gilbert today. The ceremony honoring Mr. O'Connor has pre-empted this interview and hopefully in the future we can get together again with Mrs. Gilbert and her reminiscences of Marin County. This ends today's interview. Thank you.