

125 Years

A Mill Valley Timeline 1900–2025

From a budding rail town to a thriving hub of innovation, artistry, and community spirit—these are the moments that have shaped Mill Valley's first 125 years, from its incorporation to the vibrant town it is today.

Long before incorporation, this land was rich with life and story. The City of Mill Valley sits on ancestral lands where the Coast Miwok people lived for more than 10,000 years, their deep connection to the region predating Mexican and European settlement.

In the 1830s, land grants were awarded to John Reed and

William Richardson—ranchos that would become the city of Mill Valley by the end of the 19th century. The Tamalpais Land & Water Company acquired two thirds of Rancho Saucelito in 1889, subdividing a 3,790-acre portion into 500 properties. When 300 lots sold at auction the following year, residences sprang up—and the population swelled.

1900

On August 25, 168 male residents vote to incorporate the Town of Mill Valley at Grethel's Hall. Results are certified on September 1.

Population reaches approximately 900.

1902

Led by Laura Lyon White, 34 women form **The Outdoor Art Club** to protect Mill Valley's natural beauty.

Mill Valley installs its first streetlights.

There are 88 telephone numbers listed in the Mill Valley directory.

1903



Northwestern Pacific electrifies train service, including the branch line to Mill Valley.

The Outdoor Art Club's clubhouse, designed by Bernard Maybeck, is completed.

1904

The West Point Inn is built on the westernmost point of the Mt. Tam Railway.

1905

The Dipsea Race, America's oldest trail race, is officially held on November 19, with more than 100 runners (all men) registered.

1906

Refugees from the San Francisco earthquake and fires cause rapid growth in Mill Valley.

32 trains run up and down Miller Ave. each weekday.

Population reaches approximately 1,000 permanent and 1,000 summer residents.

The Keystone Building at 82-100 Throckmorton Avenue is built and remodeled in Tudor style in 1934.

Bill Brown opens The Brown Jug at Miller & Richardson (now Montford), today's 2 AM Club.

1907 1913

Scenic Railway builds spur to Muir Woods (gravity cars begin 1908); renamed Mt. Tamalpais & Muir Woods Railway in 1913.

1908

On August 5, Tam High opens its doors with 64 students (including 5 seniors), 3 teachers, and Principal Ernest Everett "the Duke" Wood.

Mill Valley's original Town Hall rises on Corte Madera Ave., where **City Hall** stands today.

Mill Valley's Lillian Harris Coffin helps form the California Women's Undertaking Company, the first business in California run entirely by women.

1910

The Outdoor Art Club donates a 105-foot wooden flagpole to what later becomes Lytton Square.

There are 329 telephone numbers listed in the Mill Valley directory.

1911

Carnegie Library, Mill Valley's first public

library, opens at 52 Lovell with Miss Lillian Gardner as librarian.

William Patterson, Tam High School's first Black graduate, creates the "Tamalpais Daily," the school's first student newspaper.

1912

The Tamalpais Conservation Club is organized to protect Mt. Tam and keep it open to the public.

Swiss-German couple Claude and Martha Meyer open the **Mountain Home Inn**.

1913

Mt. Tamalpais Scenic Railway adds spur line to Muir Woods using gravity cars; changes name to Mt. Tamalpais and Muir Woods Railway.

Mountain Play stages its first theatrical performance, "Abraham and Isaac" in the natural amphitheater on Mt. Tam, with 1,200 people in attendance.

A major fire burns for five days from Mt. Tam's West Point to East Peak. One newspaper warns, "Mill Valley is doomed."

Construction begins on "The Garden of Allah," a 16-bedroom home for Ralston and Ruth White, designed by Willis Polk. Today, it's the **Ralston White Retreat**.

The **United Methodist Church** is built at 260 East Blithedale.

1914

The Mill Valley Record begins weekly Saturday publication at \$2.50 a year.

1919

Scout Hall on East Blithedale is donated to the Boy Scouts.

1920

Mill Valley's population reaches 3,974.

Mail delivery service begins in Mill Valley.

1922

Mill Valley sees a record six inches of snow; Mt. Tam gets 32 inches.

1926

Mill Valley Rotary Club is organized.

1927



ELROY GARAGE, NOW MASTERS EUROPEAN & JAPANESE AUTO REPAIR, LUCRETIA LITTLE HISTORY ROOM

Frank Filippi opens the Elroy Garage, now home to **Masters European & Japanese Auto Repair**.

1928

Mt. Tamalpais State Park is officially established.

1929

The Great Fire of Mill Valley destroys 117 homes and burns over 2,500 acres to the edge of the business district.

The Sequoia Theatre opens with 1,200 seats – and a 12' x 70' "Mill Valley" sign painted on the roof to help guide pilots overhead.

The historic depot building is built by the Northwestern Pacific Railroad.

The Mt. Tamalpais and Muir Woods Railway closes permanently.

Genovese immigrant Frank Canepa arrives in Mill Valley and opens **Mill Valley Market**.

1931

The quarter-mile Richardson Bay span, known as the Redwood Bridge, opens to traffic. Expected to last for centuries, it is replaced after just 25 years.

Established as The Shoe Repairing Shop, Tony's Shoe Service is purchased in 1969 by Vartin Pirinjian and later passed to his son Misak, who still runs it today.

1936

New **City Hall** opens at 26 Corte Madera housing the fire department, police, city offices, and council chambers.

1937

Opening of the Golden Gate Bridge has a major effect on Mill Valley's traffic, tourism, and settlement.

Marin Optometry opens as Mill Valley's first optometrist.

1938

Mill Valley phone numbers have four digits.

1939



OLD 2AM CLUB, LUCRETIA LITTLE HISTORY ROOM

Mill Valley purchases the **Mill Valley Golf Course** for \$25,000.

Sunday, October 29 is officially proclaimed "Mill Valley Day" at the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island.

1940

Railroad passenger service ends.

1941

Mill Valley records 61 inches of rain.

1942

Mill Valley goes to war—with three months, 43 locals volunteer as air raid wardens.

1946

Peace is declared and new businesses open, among them **Vogue Cleaners**, still family-run today.

The Tam High School Clock Tower is dedicated to 55 alumni killed in WWII.

1948

Malugani's Tire Shop opens—still run by the founding family today.

The El Paseo complex, designed by Edna Foster and Gus Costigan, is completed and celebrated with a two-day "Fiestaval."

1950s

Population grows to approximately 7,241 with six elementary schools (Strawberry, Tam Valley, Marin Terrace, Park, Old Mill, Homestead), one middle school, one high school, and six churches.

1950

Mill Valley holds a two-day "Jubilee" to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its incorporation.

Martin Brothers Supply opens in Tam Junction and sells to Robert & Gina Tuckey in 2006.

1952

Safeway advertises large avocados at 22¢ each and ground beef at 65¢ per pound.

A two-year old, three-bedroom house with "magnificent" views is available for \$12,750.

Mill Valley's first female mayor is Miriam Cummings.

Railroad freight service ends.

1954

City acquires the bus depot at Throckmorton & Miller and the railroad right-of-way along Miller & Camino Alto.

1957

Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival, originally the "Harvest Festival," begins with artists exhibiting works in downtown windows; later moves to Lytton Square, then Old Mill Park in 1963.

1958

Population reaches approximately 10,500, up 38% in 8 years.

1959

Seven Coast Redwood trees are planted in Lytton Square.

A high-end home advertised as "architecturally designed, situated on a half-acre, and view of Mt. Tam" is listed at \$29,950.

1960

City Rec program for children begins, with tennis, crafts, dance, music classes, and day camps.

1962

Richardson Bay Bridge, constructed of reinforced concrete, replaces The Richardson Bay Redwood Bridge, made of redwood.

1964

Town & Country, now **Strawberry Village**, opens as a primary shopping destination.

Italian immigrants Salvatore and Maria Aversa open **La Ginestra**—named after Scotch Broom. The restaurant remains family-run to this day.

The City denies a proposal to build Marine World on 19 acres of wetlands near today's Bayfront Park.

1989

The Loma Prieta earthquake rocks the Bay Area; Mill Valley avoids the severe damage seen in San Francisco and the East Bay.

Lockwood's Pharmacy on Miller Ave., started in 1903, closes its doors.

Tam High changes its mascot from the Indians to the Red-Tailed Hawks.

1990s

Mill Valley's population grows to 13,000 with a median home sale price of \$445,300 and a median income of \$55,748.

1992

Whole Foods Market opens at Miller & Evergreen in the pre-existing Quonset buildings.

1996

The 1996 Bayfront Park Master Plan Amendment establishes a Dog Run; a year later, three acres at the south end are set aside for dogs and their owners.

The historical reconstruction of Reed's 1830s mill—now The Old Mill—is completed.

1998

The City expands the much-loved **Mill Valley Public Library**, adding 9,132 square feet of new space.

142 Throckmorton Theatre is restored, reviving a historic arts venue—once The Hub Theatre (1915), Odd Fellows Hall (1950s), and home to Saturday Night Movies (1970s).

2000

Mill Valley celebrates its Centennial with music, fireworks and a reenactment of the first Town Council meeting.

The **Curtain Theatre**, also known as Shakespeare in the Park, debuts with As You Like It.

Laurie Cohen founds the all-volunteer **Mill Valley Philharmonic** with 15 musicians.

2001

The five-acre Mill Valley Community Center opens its doors.

"Steps, Lanes and Paths" program is launched to restore historic pedestrian shortcuts.

2003

142 Throckmorton Theatre opens as a nonprofit multi-genre performing arts center.

Fernwood Cemetery, founded in the 1880s, is transformed into a 'green' cemetery under new ownership.

2007

Sweetwater Saloon closes its original location after 35 years.

2008

The City implements "green" initiatives to address global warming, plastic waste, and fossil fuel use in Mill Valley.

2012

A group of dedicated investors converts Masonic Lodge No. 356 into the **Sweetwater Music Hall**, reviving the beloved venue.

Matt and Jan Mathews purchase the 1892

Mill Valley Lumber Yard on Miller Ave. and begin transforming it into a retail village that honors its historic roots and ambience.

2013

Mill Valley adopts its first Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (2030 CAP approved in 2024); Mill Valley implements local ban on single-use plastic bags.

The **City of Mill Valley** adopts the Mill Valley 2040 General Plan, updating the 1989 plan to guide growth and development through 2040.

2017

North Bay wildfires impact air quality and raise fire safety awareness in Mill Valley.

Mill Valley completes the \$18.3 million Miller Ave. Streetscape Project, adding a continuous bike lane from Sunnyside to Almonte and improving access for all users.

2019

Hundreds of residents take part in the county's largest evacuation drill to date.

2020

The COVID-19 pandemic leads to shelter-in-place orders; the "8pm Howl" begins in Mill Valley during lockdowns, spreading nationwide.

Community steps up to help businesses with nearly \$100k in grants.

2021

Mill Valley begins pandemic recovery, reopening businesses through innovation—ecommerce, takeout systems, and repurposed public spaces for safe customer access.

2022



Phases I and II of the City's Downtown Project are completed, including pavement repairs, upgraded ADA-compliant curb ramps, rehabilitated sewer and storm drain systems.

Debut of the annual **Mill Valley Music Festival** at Friend's Field.

2023

Phase III of the City's Downtown Project is completed, improving the Downtown's paving and curb ramps.

City embraces permanent outdoor dining with widened sidewalks (**Piazza d'Angelo**, **Equator Coffees**, **Mill Valley Market** and expedited permits (**Bungalow 44**)).

Mill Valley Fire Department consolidates agencies with Southern Marin Fire Protection District.

2024

City leads with county's first youth e-bike safety ordinance.

Mill Valley emerges as a leader in DEI initiatives within Marin County.

2025

Mill Valley's population nears 14,000.

The Old Mill roof is restored with support from the City and generous community donations.

Mill Valley celebrates 125 years of incorporation with a 9494ALL event on September 1 featuring a historically themed parade led by the Cal Marching Band, live music, and more.