

The hometown
newspaper for
Menlo Park,
Atherton,
Portola Valley
and Woodside.

The Almanac

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■ Health & Fitness Here comes the sun:

Taking steps to reduce skin-cancer risks is increasingly important and surprisingly easy.

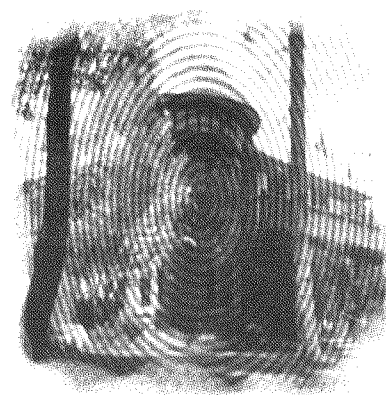
Woodside mystery house

Historic **Why Worry mansion** that once belonged to the Roths has both history and mystery.

Now it can be yours for \$20 million. | Page 14

Why Worry mansion

still holds secrets



Who built the Tudor mansion occupied by the Roths from 1925 to 1937? Now restored, the 'best kept secret in Woodside' is on sale for \$20 million.

By Marion Softky
Almanac Staff Writer

Current photos by Carol Ivie
Old photos courtesy Woodside History Committee

A) Lurline Roth Coonan, granddaughter of steamship magnate William Matson, remembers growing up in the historic Woodside mansion before her family moved to Filoli. Still living in Woodside, she's looking forward to her first great-grandchild this week. If it's a girl, she will be the fifth Lurline in the family.

B) The dark shadow across the signature stone turret suggests the mysteries still surrounding the Why Worry mansion and its occupants.

C) This old water tower had a pipe that Lurline Roth and her sister, brother and friends used to slide down. The tower was demolished during renovation.

Just as individuals may lead many lives, so too can old houses, over time, shelter vastly different people under vastly different circumstances.

Take Why Worry, the old Matson-Roth house in Woodside. Built near the turn of the 20th century, it has already had four distinct lives; now it's about to embark on a fifth. The half-timbered Tudor-style mansion at 3763 Woodside Road is on sale by John Arrillaga for \$19,995,000.

From 1925 to 1937, the 10,000 square-foot mansion with its six-car garage, swimming pool, water tower, tennis court, and elegant horse establishment, starred in the high life of the Peninsula. Then the Matson-Roth family moved to an even more impressive mansion at Filoli. They sold the mansion on 4.6 acres, but kept Why Worry farm, with its horses, carriages and barns for the pleasure of Mrs. William P. Roth and her three children.

While the Matson-Roth era is well-documented, the other three periods of the house are clouded by mystery. Who built the house and lived in it until Mrs. William Matson, widow of the steamship



magnate, bought it about 1924 for her daughter, Lurline Matson Roth?

Also, there's still a lot to learn about ownerships from 1937 until 1997, when the estate was sold at auction in probate court for \$2.9 million to Santa Clara County developer John Arrillaga, who has restored it to historic elegance.

According to San Mateo County Assessor's records, the property was sold in 1940, 1949, and 1967. Records of other sales are still buried in the Recorder's files, says Terry Flynn, deputy county clerk-assessor-recorder.

On December 15, 1967, the Society of the Precious Blood sold 4.6 acres to five Clothiers — three unmarried sisters and two unmarried brothers — for \$123,000, Mr. Flynn reports.

By 1996, Dr. Robert Clothier, a physicist who had worked on the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb, and later taught mechanical engineering at San Jose State University, was the only one left. The rest had died.

In 1996, Dr. Clothier suffered a stroke in the kitchen, and the estate was taken over by a conservator for disposition and sale. Dr. Clothier now lives in a retirement home in Redwood City.

Over those last years, the estate became overgrown, and the house deteriorated.

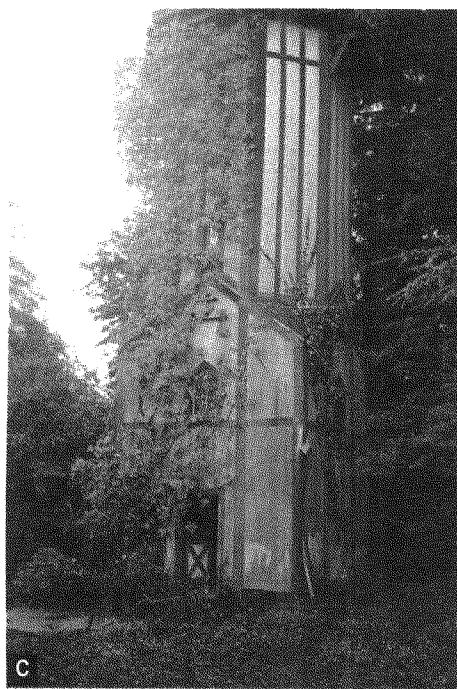
Timmy Gallagher, a friend of the Roths during their Filoli years, remembers visiting the Why Worry horse farm and seeing the overgrown vegetation on the other side of the fence. "It was spooky," she says.

By the time Dr. Clothier left, the estate was a disaster. The garage had no roof, the house had so many leaks that water cascaded down the interior staircase and central fireplace; there was no electricity, and the furnace hadn't worked for years; in places clutter reached the ceiling; the tennis court was a small forest.

And people in Woodside forgot the Why Worry mansion ever existed. It became the best-kept secret in Woodside, until it was offered for sale early in 1997. The announcement for the sale of a 38-room Tudor mansion on 4.6 acres to be sold "As-is in its present condition" for \$2.6 million, finally drew people's attention.

"It was the great mystery in Woodside," says Tom Rogers, curator at Filoli. "It disappeared from the face of the earth."

At an open house and tour April 29, Re-





altor Skip Cashin showed off the estate, which has been extensively restored by purchaser John Arrillaga. The house was elegant. A tile patio and fountain replace dirt and bushes; the garage has a new slate roof; a beautiful new swimming pool replaces the curved 1920s pool; there is a golf-course-quality lawn, and a tennis court with no trees. Only the water tower is gone.

Mystery: Who built it?

The history of the Matson-Roth house is a work in progress. Piecemeal records, second-hand accounts, historic archives, and recollections of old-timers, present inconsistencies and gaps. Deadline pressures do not leave time to comb records dating back before 1900 in the County Recorder's files, where all transactions are presumably stored and available to the enterprising researcher.

So who built the house?

The easy answer is that Captain William Matson, the Swedish immigrant who founded the Matson Navigation Co., built

it in 1898. That's what Dr. Robert Clothier told Realtor Mel O'Neil. It appears in the real estate descriptions of the property.

But it's probably not so. Lurline Roth Coonan of Woodside, grand-daughter of the shipping magnate, says her grandmother, Mrs. Matson, bought it for her mother, Lurline Matson Roth, the Matsons' only child. Mr. Matson had died in 1917. "Grandmother gave it to Mother. We

stayed in the Folger house while it was re-modeled," says Mrs. Coonan who was 3 or 4 years old at the time.

Mrs. Coonan further believes her grandfather had a farm in Fremont in addition to his house in San Francisco. "Mother grew up on the farm. She spent the summers there," she says.

Other Roth family members agree. Mrs. Coonan recently talked to her brother William Matson Roth, now living in Ireland; he agrees their grandmother bought it, she says. The same conclusion is in the oral history given by Lurline Matson Roth in the Bancroft Library. She also said her mother built new stables because there weren't any.

Notes written on records from the county Assessor's office indicate a portion of the house was built in 1898, and it was added to and re-modeled about 1918, says Mr. Flynn.

Why Worry?

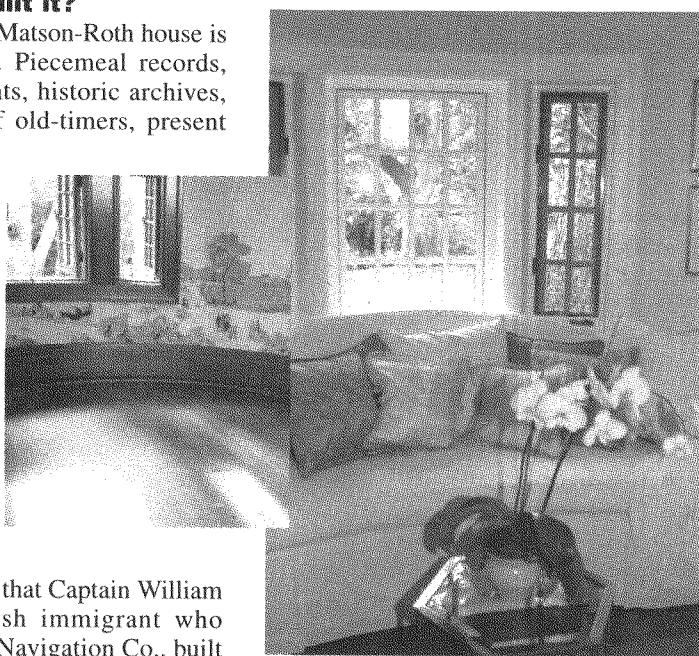
When Mrs. Matson and the Roths moved into their new farm in Woodside, so the legend goes, family members were

Richly restored, the half-timbered house looks out on an elegant new swimming pool. In 1997 (insert) the house was badly run down, and one of the first pools in Woodside needed replacement.

The garage had no roof, the house had so many leaks that water cascaded down the interior staircase and central fireplace; there was no electricity, and the furnace hadn't worked for years; in places clutter reached the ceiling; the tennis court was a small forest.

The turret room, which now makes a cozy sitting room was once (insert) decorated with dark wood molding and elegant frescoes. The formal dining room also had frescoes; its original tile floor is now hardwood.

See **WHY WORRY**, next page



A TASTE OF THE PENINSULA

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WHY WORRY

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debating what to name it. Finally Mrs. Matson said, "Why worry about it?"

The name stuck.

During the Matson-Roth years, Why Worry became a happy home for three growing children, as well as a famous equestrian center. Mrs. Roth won shows all over the country, riding her American saddlebred horses and driving her hackney ponies.

Mrs. Roth got her love for horses from her father, who used to race trotting horses, Mrs. Coonan says. "Grandmother helped Mother get her first horse, Chief of Longview. He was never defeated."

Mrs. Coonan's memories of Why Worry are dim but very happy. With one of the first swimming pools in Woodside, the three Roth children — Bill, and the younger twins, Lurline and Berenice — had plenty of company from neighborhood kids. Plus lots of fun with horses. "We loved that," she says.

Other Woodside old-timers also remember happy times as children at the Roths. Peter Pond still cherishes a little silver cup engraved: "Junior Doubles Tennis Championship, July 1928, Virginia Allen and Pete Pond."

Bob Harris, Bill Roth's close friend now living in San Francisco, remembers Mrs. Matson was ill and bedridden. "They would roll her out in her bed to look at the pool," he says.

Mrs. Coonan also recalls lunches and picnics, and her brother's little clubhouse by the tennis court, now fixed up. "We used to slide down the pipe in the water tower," she says. The water tower has been torn down.

Mrs. Coonan remembers her family added a wing to the house. This included what they called "the Spanish room," now called the ballroom, with a big fireplace, and bedrooms above.

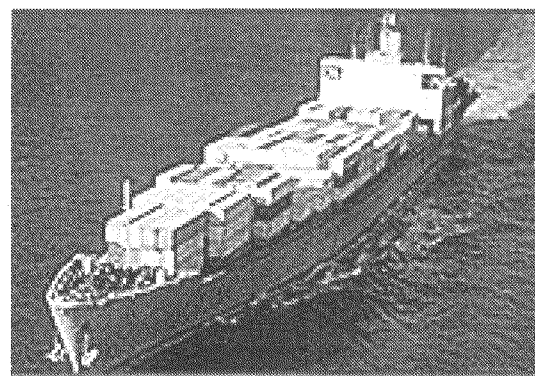
The Roths also entertained. Once the Swedish Olympic team came to stay. Mrs. Coonan also speaks of parties in the wine cellar behind the water tower. "They shot clay pigeons over Bear Gulch Creek," she says.

Among her great childhood pleasures was riding the train with her father, William P. Roth, who headed the Matson Navigation Co. after Mr. Matson. "I would go to Redwood City and take the train to San Francisco, and come back with my father."

The Roth children loved living at Why Worry. A special favorite was the sleeping porch on the second floor. "We didn't want to leave Why Worry. We had so many happy times," Mrs. Co-

Continued on next page

Lurline: ships and women



Since the 1890s, the Matson line has had a ship named Lurline and William Matson has had descendants named Lurline.

The name Lurline threads the history launched by a Swedish orphan who ran away to sea when he was 10, and founded a shipping empire that still hauls cargo around the Pacific

Young William Matson (1849-1917) came around Cape Horn to Gold Rush San Francisco on the Bridgewater, according to his grand-daughter Lurline Roth Coonan of Woodside. There, the young man began working for sugar king Claus Spreckels. Soon he was sailing Mr. Spreckels' ships. "Grandfather became a great friend," Mrs. Coonan says. "He used to deliver sugar up the Sacramento River for Mr. Spreckels."

Actually, it was Mr. Spreckels who built the first Lurline. The name comes from Lorelei, the siren who sat on a rock in the Rhine and lured sailors to their death. "The shipbuilder had a flair for poetry," says Mrs. Coonan.

Mr. Spreckels was already trading with the Kingdom of Hawaii, and soon Captain Matson was sailing Spreckels ships to the Islands.

In 1882, Captain Matson bought his first ship, the Emma Claudina, and began trading with the big island of Hawaii. The Matson Navigation Co. was born. With help from Mr. Spreckels, he built a larger brigantine in 1887, and named it Lurline.

Captain Matson even met his future wife sailing to Hawaii on the Lurline. Lillie Low was a school teacher going to teach with missionaries; later she married the captain. They had one daughter, and named her Lurline. When she married William P. Roth, their first daughter, Mrs. Coonan's mother, was named Lurline.

Meanwhile, Capan Matson, followed by his son-in-law, William P. Roth, built the Matson Navigation Co. into a premier cargo and passenger line in the Pacific.

Captain Matson must have been quite a visionary. According to the Matson Web site (www.matson.com), he pioneered cold storage, electricity and the use of radio on ships in the Pacific. His first steamship, the Enterprise, was the first offshore ship in the Pacific to burn oil instead of coal. The need for oil for his ships led him into oil exploration, and he built the first oil pipelines in California.

As trade with the Hawaiian Islands prospered, the islands became popular with tourists — with help from Matson ships. The next Lurline, which joined the fleet in 1908, could carry 51 passengers.

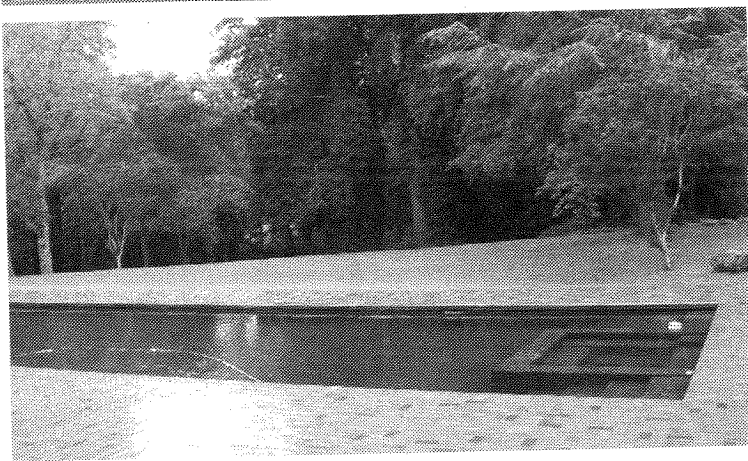
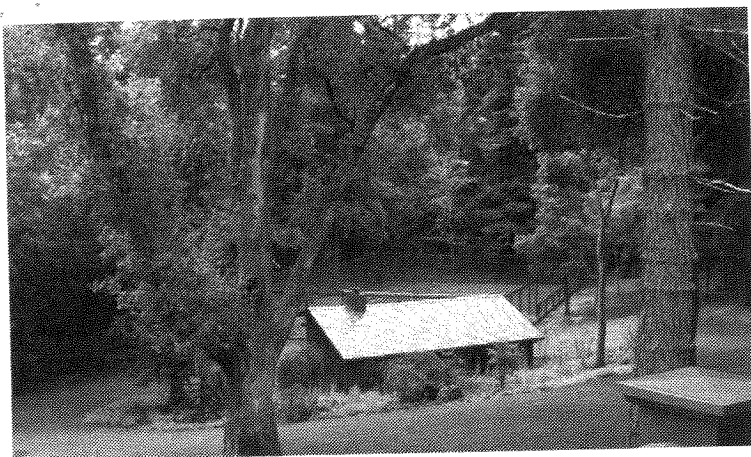
For more than 60 years, Matson ships popularized cruising to glamorous Hawaii. Travel photos and advertisements featuring the newest Lurline promoted the glamour of pearly beaches and palm-ringed lagoons.

During World War II the company's four passenger liners and 33 freighters joined the war effort. The passenger ships carried 736,000 troops on 119 voyages covering 1.5 million miles.

Since 1958, the Matson company has pioneered the development of container ships. The latest Lurline is a container ship, says Mrs. Coonan.

The name Lurline has also followed generations of Matson descendants. Mrs. Coonan is expecting her first great-grandchild this week. If it's a girl, she'll be the fifth Lurline.

— By Marion Softky



Views from the house show a guest cottage by the tennis court, above. This used to be William Matson Roth's clubhouse, sometimes referred to by family as the "brathouse." Past the new swimming pool (lower picture), the view leads across a manicured lawn to lovely woods.

Continued from previous page

nan says. "But I came to love Filoli."

The next 60 years

The history of the Why Worry house from 1937 to 1997 is spotty.

An e-mail from Nancy Helms reports that her grandfather, Lloyd A Johnson, purchased part of the farm from Lurline Matson Roth on July 30, 1940. Mr. Johnson founded National Motor Bearing Co. in Redwood City.

Nancy moved in with her

grandparents at the age of 2 months and lived there until 1945, when they sold the property to Dr. and Mrs. John Adams. She remembers horses, cows and chickens.

"We lived pretty much off the land during the war," she writes. "I remember the hired man who had a trained goat who no doubt ate the surplus produce. I have fond memories of shopping with my grandmother at the Neuman store (now Roberts). In fact, my uncle was engaged to one of the Neuman twins (who ran the store) but sadly he was killed in

France before they could announce their engagement."

The Assessor's records show the 1940 sale of 24.5 acres for \$35,000, says Mr. Flynn. Then nothing until 1949, when 4.6 acres were sold by Adams to Elkins for \$37,500.

The next note on the Assessor's records is the 1967 sale to the Clothiers. The Assessor has no record of when the monks bought the property. But, says Mr. Flynn, the Assessor does not keep record of all land transactions; those are kept by the Recorder.

Lots of local people remember the monks. Mr. O'Neil, who got much of his information from Dr. Clothier, says they had a confessional by the front door, and held weddings in the ballroom, or in the grotto by Bear Gulch Creek.

For a while, the monks operated a radio station that broadcast to the Far East, Mr. O'Neil says. "There was a huge, huge transformer in the basement. I wonder how they got it down there."

In the 30 years the Clothiers had it, the property went seriously downhill. Yet elegant furnishings, tiffany lamps, two pianos, and several musical instruments suggest a cultured life before time and health closed in on the family. Contacted in his Redwood City home, Dr. Clothier says, "We were very happy there. That was a great place to live." **A**

■ YOU CAN HELP

Any clues?

If anyone can shed light on the history of the house, we'd be interested in knowing. Information and suggestions may be sent to Marion Softky at the Almanac, 3525 Alameda de Las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025; or e-mail msoftky@almanacnews.com.