

Eleanor Gerhardt of Mill Valley
By Cathy Gowdy · November 09, 2012



Mill Valley grocery store belonging to Louis Gerhardt & a partner. Louis is in the wagon. The building is located on Throckmorton Avenue. The store was later owned by the Canepa family.



Louis Gerhardt (middle) and the Mill Valley Volunteer Fire Dept. at a house fire. ©Christine Goldsmith



Eleanor Gerhardt with children, Edgar & Rosa
© Christine Goldsmith



Rosa Lee Gerhardt with the Tamelpa (Mill Valley) Chapter of the Native Daughters of the Golden West © Christine Goldsmith

I was recently contacted by a South Dakota lady to help prove that Eleanor Gerhardt and Eleanor Tompkins were one and the same. They were. The journey to prove it was fun.

First I had to find a marriage record for Eleanor Galleher to Louis E. Gerhardt. It turned out they married in San Rafael on June 15th, 1909. I located death dates for both and also obits. Though Eleanor died as "Eleanor Tompkins," neither of these two husbands are named in her obituary. I checked the Marin County index to marriages through 1950 but failed to find another marriage listed.

Louis Gerhardt, Eleanor's husband, died in his Mill Valley home in January of 1938. His obit gives his birth place as San Francisco, and names his wife, Eleanor, children, Rosa Lee Lewis and Edgar Louis Gerhardt, as well as a sister, Mrs. Arthur Mahn.

Eleanor [Gerhardt] Tompkins died in Novato on February 6, 1973. Her obituary mentions her daughter Rosa Lee Mar[t]in.

I decided to learn more about Eleanor's husband, Louis E. Gerhardt. In 1900, Louis was living in Sausalito with his mother, Marie, and her husband John G. Buss. Louis is listed as stepson to John. John owned a bakery and Louis worked for him.

Louis married Eleanor and they lived in Sausalito in 1910; he and a partner ran a retail grocery establishment. World War I came around and he registered in 1918. The information provided on the registration form is that he was born September 10, 1881; worked for Italian Swiss Colony of San Francisco; was of medium height and weight; had blue eyes and brown hair; had a disabled left hand; and his home address was 8 Old Mill Street, Mill Valley.

The 1920 census lists him and Eleanor in Sausalito where he was a clerk in a winery. Living with them were their two children, Edgar, age 9, and Rosalee, age 7, and Louis's mother-in-law, Rose Erwin, a 47-year-old widow.

The 1930 census shows Eleanor and Louis and the kids living in Mill Valley where Louis worked as a house painter and Edgar as an automobile mechanic.

The 1940 census shows that after Louis died, Eleanor continued to live in Mill Valley on Old Mill Street. With her was her married daughter, Mrs. Wm. Lewis, who was working as a bookkeeper. Her son, Edgar Gerhardt, and his wife, Mabel, were living nearby on Throckmorton Avenue.

Edgar Gerhardt lived in Mill Valley until his death in 1960, pre-deceasing his mother. Edgar's obituary states that "He is also survived by his mother, Mrs. R. B. Thompkins (sic) of Novato, a sister, Rosa Lee Martin, Novato, and by six grandchildren." So my primary task was complete – Edgar's mother, Eleanor, had married a Mr. Tompkins. Though I still don't know when or where they were married, I have discovered that Mr. Tompkins' first and middle names began with "R. B." Further, I have found that a "Robert B. Tompkins" died in Napa County on November 13th, 1964. A death certificate might provide the name of Robert B. Tompkin's wife and establish whether he was Eleanor's husband.

I was also interested to learn from Edgar Garhardt's obituary that he was a captain with the Marin County Fire Department at the time of his death, and that either he or, more likely, his father (Louis), had been a charter member of the Mill Valley Volunteer Fire Department. According to the family, it was Louis Gerhardt who inspired Edgar to become a fireman.

Eleanor Tompkins, Rose Erwin, Louis and Edgar Gerhardt are all entombed together in the old mausoleum at Mt. Tamalpais Cemetery.

Proving Eleanor's marriages was the missing bit needed for my correspondent to join a Lineage Society, "First Families of Ohio." Eleanor's mother, Rosa Laughlin, was the great granddaughter of William Laughlin, one of the original settlers of Columbiana County, Ohio before 1810.