

## Alice E. Folker

1865 – 1945

(Mrs. George  
Folker)

### MOTHER, INDEPENDENT WOMAN, COMMUNITY CITIZEN

Alice Elizabeth Roberts was born in Radstock, Somerset in 1865, a village near Bath, England. We don't know anything about her early life other than when in her early 20s, she was living in Paris, France, where she met a fellow Englishman and her future husband, George Newton Folker who was from Brighton in Sussex. In 1887, their marriage ceremony took place in the British Embassy in Paris. This photo suggests the service was formal and celebratory.

Within a year and still living in Paris, their first child, Howard Stanley Folker, was born. Soon after Howard's birth, the family immigrated to America. Spitz's Mill Valley book says that they sailed to California around Cape Horn with their infant, and they became US citizens in 1889.

George and Alice are listed together as having bought a lot at the 1890 auction in Mill Valley. Since George was a distant relative of Sir Isaac Newton, he called his home at 149 Throckmorton Avenue, *Newton's Cottage*. It had a wall of blue basalt rock quarried from Cascade Canyon. By the turn of the century, they had had four more children so we can assume the cottage was probably getting crowded. Mill Valley's premier builder, Harvey Klyce, is recorded as having made additions to *Newton's Cottage* in 1899.

An 1898 voter-registration record lists George's occupation as "jeweler". However income to support a family of seven was earned, we do know it was not enough. Spitz's book says there survives a copy of a 1902 letter from banker Lovell White of the San Francisco Savings Union demanding payment of \$67.50 on five months of back interest. They were not able to pay it and consequently, the Folkers lost *Newton's Cottage*! We do not know how Alice felt about Lovell White, but the same year ownership of her home was in jeopardy, she joined her neighbors Agnes Cappleman, Louise Coffin, Molly Eloesser and Carrie Seaman to become part of the women's club Laura Lyon White was helping to organize.

We can only assume cause and effect here, but losing their home probably affected the Folker marriage. Spitz's book says that after the loss of *Newton's Cottage*, George left to be a lighthouse keeper at Point Reyes, but we know from census records that Alice moved to another house nearby with the children. The 1910 federal census lists her as divorced and the head of the household of five children with Howard now working as a machinist on the local steam railroad.





We do not know the date of this photo, but we do know it is Alice Folker and some of her children. Since we know that she had two daughters, one born in 1890 and another in 1894, and that a youngest son was born in 1896, we can assume this photo was taken circa 1902 and that it was taken at or near her Mill Valley home, either outside in the yard of Newton's Cottage or the rental she moved to when George became a lighthouse keeper at Pt. Reyes.

For years Alice remained an active member of Mill Valley's Outdoor Art Club, even during the few years she lived in San Francisco. Although divorced and a mother of five, records in our archives show that as late as 1922, she was one of two ladies who *"made delicious sandwiches which were sold at the Kentfield Grape Festival for the benefit of the San Anselmo Orphanage. They netted \$40.00."*

The Federal Census of 1920 lists Alice as living in San Francisco, divorced and head of a household containing her four younger children, all of whom are working. The occupations listed were dental nurse, traveling salesman, dressmaker and machinist. However, the 1930 census has Alice back in Mill Valley, listed as mother-in-law living with the family of her daughter Mildred in a residence on Elma Street, very near the site of Newton's Cottage, her original Mill Valley home. Her son Howard, who had once worked on the mountain's *"Crookedest Railroad"*, died in 1929.

By the 1940 Federal Census, Alice was living in San Francisco with her daughter Dorothy, a widow and the head of a household also containing Alice's son Grover. This census also lists Alice as a widow although we know that George Newton Folker did not die until 1943. Alice Folker died at age 80 on August 8, 1945 in San Francisco. Alice Folker was born soon after the end of the Civil War and died three months after the end of World War II in Europe and just days before its end in Asia. In her lifetime, the world went from cannons to atomic bombs. Alice's life had its disruptions as she faced more than a few of life's challenges. Hers was clearly a life of purposeful work. However, in the columns where census takers record occupation, in all the decades she was counted, for Alice Elizabeth Roberts Folker the occupation column was either left blank or recorded as "none". Perhaps there wasn't room to write *mother, independent woman, community citizen*.

In the next installment of The Serial, **"The 35 Ladies Project"**, you will read about the OAC's first President whose memorial still graces our garden.