



## MARTIN LEE THOMPSON

(OCTOBER 27, 1867 TO JANUARY 11, 1955)

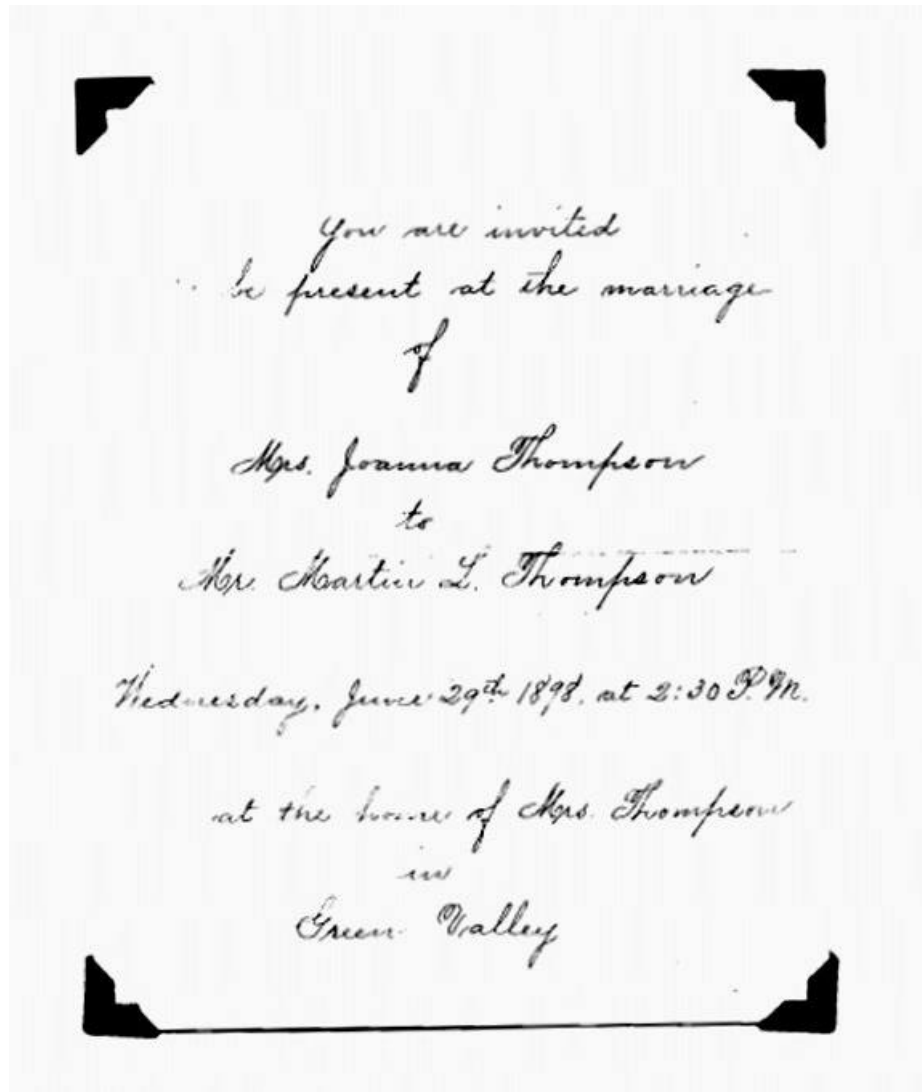
**D**ue to an accident, Martin Lee Thompson was born prematurely near Salinas, California on October 27, 1867. His mother, Sarah, and others were boiling fat in a cauldron on an open fire, part of the process of making soap. Somehow the pot tipped over and burned Sarah. She was pregnant at the time of the accident and shortly thereafter gave birth to her son, Martin Lee Thompson.

At the time of the accident there lived with the Thompson's a black couple named Ike and Cooper who had apparently been slaves belonging to the family at some time in the past. Though they were free, they chose to remain with the family. Ike was the cook and her husband was Cooper who was a teamster. It has never been really clear to me just how this relationship worked with the Thompsons.

Ike took the infant Martin and nursed him, since Sarah was not able to do so after the accident. Ike would take fresh cow's cream into her mouth and then let it dribble down her lip while Martin sucked on it to get the needed nourishment. Being born prematurely, the baby was extremely small and Ike carried the baby between her breasts during the first critical weeks. In later years Martin became a very good cook and always attributed his cooking skills to having learned from Ike. Ike and Cooper are buried in King City though I've not been able to find them. That's probably because I never learned their surname. There was supposed to be a "colored" section of the cemetery, but I have been unable to locate it.

Martin was always somewhat different in stature and personality than the rest of the Thompson family. He was never fat; he stood about 5 feet 5 inches in height and weighed about 150 pounds, though in his late years he weighed near 190 pounds. His brothers were six feet tall and his sisters were all fairly tall women. It was always said that Martin was the smallest (sometimes referred to as the "runt of the family") because he was born prematurely. He had a fiery temperament and was not much of a talker. You were never fully sure why he was mad, unless it was at you! He had a dropped eyelid on his right eye, which meant he only had partial vision in that eye. He could have had a simple surgery to correct the disfigurement, but he refused to have it done. He never wore glasses and could read a newspaper until he was in his 89th year. He wore a modified handlebar mustache from the time he was a young man. His daughter, Nellye, always said he wore the mustache to cover a disfigured lip. If this were true, no one ever saw it. He loved music and played the violin or fiddle, and when he was a young man he would often play for dances. He was good at ranching and was an excellent horseman who could rope and herd cattle with the best of the cowboys. His real love was cattle ranching.

Martin was basically raised in the King City area near Thompson Canyon on the west side of the Salinas River. As a young man he and a friend decided to go to Big Sur on the coast. They had their horses and a pack mule and started out. Somewhere along the way, the mule stumbled and fell on the rugged terrain and was lost along with all the provisions. After a day or two without food they stumbled into an Indian village. The Chief invited them to eat. Martin said it was the best stew he ever ate and complimented the Chief on what a good rabbit stew it was. The chief replied that it was not rabbit but rather a dog stew. Martin, always a lover of dogs, became sick to his stomach and never forgot the incident.



**Wedding announcement was sent to Frances Thompson Mazza. Written by hand by Joanna Thompson.**

When his older brother, William, died in Watsonville, he was living in King City and working for his father. When Pleasant Thompson saw that his daughter-in-law, Joanna, was having a great deal of difficulty running her ranch, he sent Martin up to help her out (around 1893). Martin remained at the Green Valley ranch for about five years and at last asked his widowed sister-in-law to marry him. They were married on June 29, 1898 at Joanna's home in Green Valley.



***Joanna Hushbeck Thompson and her husband, Martin Lee Thompson. The little girl is Barbara Jean Atkins (my older sister). Picture was taken about 1930 in front of Thompson residence in Green Valley (Watsonville).***

As stated in the biography of William Robert Thompson, the Green Valley ranch was about 63 acres of orchards of various kinds but mostly apricots. Martin and Joanna were able to make the small ranch a profitable operation and they began raising their own family along with Joanna's children from her marriage to William. But Martin was not really happy being a farmer. His real interest was in raising cattle. Around 1900 Martin and Joanna bought about 1000 acres of land west of King City and moved there, renting out the Green Valley ranch to two tenant farmers. Martin bought the cattle in Watsonville and drove them south to King City, which took several days. Toward the end of 1903, one of the tenant farmers died in Watsonville and the other was not able to run the Green Valley ranch, so Martin and Joanna moved the family back to Watsonville. After a period of time Martin and Joanna left Watsonville for the King City ranch to resume the cattle operation. They left the running of the Green Valley ranch to the three older children: Edna, Will, and Ray. I'm not sure how long this arrangement lasted but it wasn't long before Edna married Stillman Wheelock, who's family owned the

adjoining farm in 1908. And in 1910 when Will married Lydora Bell Apperson, he moved to Los Angeles. Ray felt he could not run the ranch alone, so he gave up and moved into town. He started driving a taxi, which was located at the old Mansion House Hotel.

For the rest of their lives, Martin and Joanna divided their time back and forth between the ranches in King City and Watsonville. Neither ranch was a moneymaker but it kept them going until their later years when low income, high taxes, and the depression took their toll on everyone, not just the Thompsons.

About 1920 Martin and Joanna tore down the old house in Green Valley, built by William Thompson, and he rebuilt a nice three bedroom home which is still standing (1998). Their son, Ray Thompson, helped in the rebuilding process by doing all the cement and plaster work on the new house.

This small house became crowded when daughter Nellye moved in with her two children, Malcolm ("Mac" or "Scotty") and Barbara in 1927, after the death of her



***Martin and Diana Mae Wilson-Beavers taken in 1947. Diana Mae Wilson was his great grand-daughter. She was the daughter of Barbara Jean Atkins -Wilson-Angell.***

husband, James Atkins. Son Gene Thompson and his wife, Ida, were already living with Joanna and Martin. In June of 1926 daughter, Eunice Thompson Gawehn, gave birth to her daughter, Ruth (Erna Ruth). Eunice contracted tuberculosis and was sent to a sanitarium in Los Gatos, and her infant daughter came to live with Martin and Joanna. Eunice died on August 12, 1927 at the home of her parents and was buried in Watsonville. Her husband, Ernest Gawehn, having no way to care for an infant, left his daughter in the care of her grandparents thus, setting the stage for a tragic legal battle over custody a few years later. Though the house was crowded and there was little money, it certainly was not an unhappy time. I suppose what made it all work was that the adults worked at jobs and the grandparents raised the children and ran the ranch. Malcolm and Barbara always look back at those times with great affection and warm memories.

1931 was a landmark year for Martin and Joanna. Events took place that changed their lives forever. Ernest Gawehn remarried and decided he wanted to have his daughter, Erna Ruth, live with him. Martin and Joanna, having had the child since she was just a few weeks old, objected and thought it only right that the child continue living with them. From what I've been able to determine, Martin and Joanna were misled by lawyers and other family members who advised them to fight for legal custody of their granddaughter. A bitter and emotional court battle ensued between the Thompsons and Ernest Gawehn. The Thompsons actually kidnapped Ruth and took her to Los Angeles to keep her out of the hands of her father. Eventually the law caught up with them and they had to surrender Ruth to her father. Because of the



***The Thompson Family. Left to right: Gene, Nellye, Eunice, Ray (behind Eunice), Edna, Will. Edna, Will and Ray were the children of William Thompson and Gene, Nell and Eunice were the children of Martin Thompson. Their mother was Joanna Hushbeck Thompson.***

hostility shown by the Thompsons during the court proceedings, there was a restraining order issued by the court that they could not contact Ruth or her father again. Ruth was whisked off to Hawaii by her father, and she lived there for several years. She never saw her grandparents again. Joanna and Martin were devastated. The trauma caused by the loss of this child was probably the underlying cause for the rapid decline in Joanna's health, and she died at her home in Green Valley.

After Joanna's death on June 30, 1942, the Green Valley ranch and the King City ranch were divided up among the five living children. Edna, Will and Ray were each given acreage from the Green Valley ranch. Nellye received the Green Valley house and furnishings. Gene got the King City ranch in total.

Later, Gene and Nellye traded, and Gene took the Green Valley house, Nellye the ranch. Edna, Will and Ray sold their portions, and Gene eventually sold the house to the neighboring Buach family.

Martin moved into town with his daughter, Nellye, and lived with her until mid 1954, when he went to live with his son, Gene, in Watsonville where he lived until his death on January 11, 1956. There was a bitter fight over Martin's care between Nellye

and Gene and they didn't speak to one another for over 30 years. They did finally reconcile before they died.

Martin Thompson was buried in the Watsonville Pioneer Cemetery near his wife, Joanna, daughter, Eunice, and brother, William, in the Thompson plot.

**MARTIN and JOANNA THOMPSON had three children:**

1. **SARAH EUNICE THOMPSON** was born at the Green Valley ranch on August 12, 1899. She was quite short in stature and always had a tendency to be stout. She was of a rather dark complexion with dark brown hair. Like all the Thompsons, she was a very talented musician and was well known for her piano playing. My mother told me that when she and Eunice were growing up, she would send her in to play the piano while mother sang as she cooked for the family. Eunice was in the first class to graduate from the new high school building in 1918 in Watsonville. The building was torn down after the 1989 earthquake. Eunice became a bookkeeper and eventually worked for Peterson slaughterhouse where she met and then married Ernest Gawhen, who worked as a butcher. There has always been an empty space in our family starting with Eunice's death on August 12, 1927 (her 29th birthday) and then the loss of her daughter, Erna Ruth, who reportedly died in 1961 of cancer without ever knowing the true feelings of her mother's family.
2. **NELLYE ELIZABETH THOMPSON** was born at the King City ranch on January 19, 1903. She was the only child not born at the Green Valley ranch in Watsonville. She died in King City on February 19, 1983 a month after celebrating her 80th birthday. (See Chapter 9 for separate biography.)
3. **MARTIN EUGENE THOMPSON** was born on a famous day in California History, April 18, 1906. That was the day of the great San Francisco earthquake. The Green Valley ranch lay about a mile from the San Andreas Fault, so when the earthquake hit that morning, the house was shaken so badly that everyone ran outside. Joanna was frightened and went into labor. Edna helped her into the washhouse and she gave birth to Gene there. Gene, being the last child and only son of Martin, was spoiled by his doting parents. He married Ida Butler of Watsonville and they had two children, both of whom died as infants. As a young man, Gene was well known on the rodeo circuit along with his cousin, Thomas Lee Hushbeck. He had a couple of encounters with cattle ranching but was never very successful. In his later years he was somewhat disabled due to the injuries suffered on the rodeo circuit. Gene died in Watsonville on April 24, 1979.



*Sarah Eunice Thompson Gawhen*

