

Interpreting the History of Jack London

Presentation created by:

Al Stumpf

Lou Leal

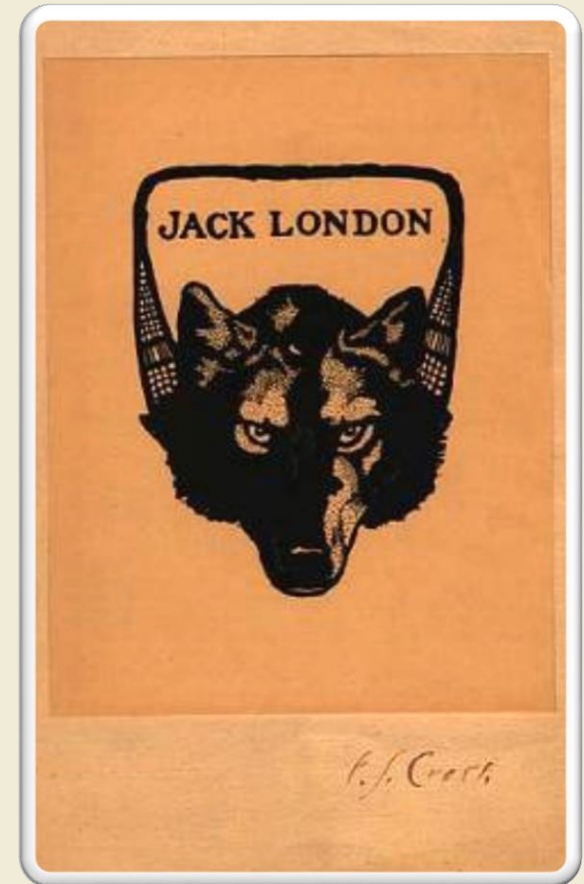
Greg Hayes

Larry Houghton

August 16, 2008; revised August 2018



Born January 12, 1876-Died November 22, 1916



Flora Wellman, mother



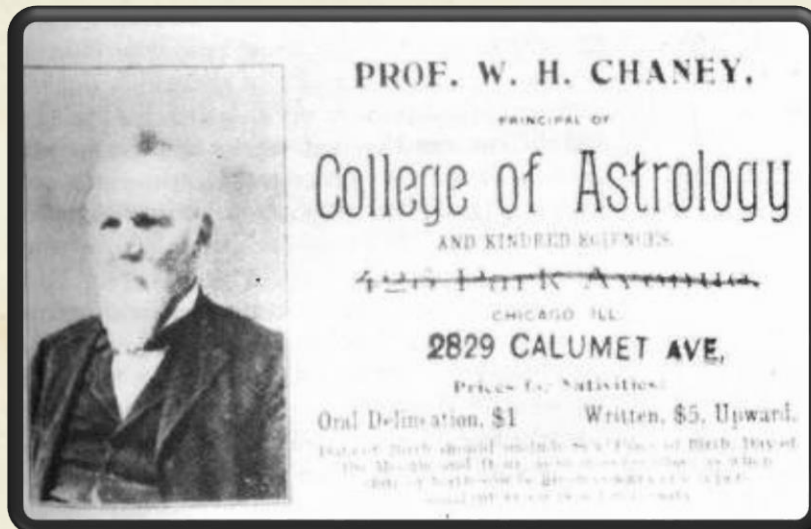
- Born August 17, 1843
- Wealthy Ohio family
- Well-educated
- Fever stunted her growth
- Ran away at 16
- Ended up in San Francisco
- Spiritualist and séance medium
- Attempted suicide before Jack's birth [Ω](#)

Virginia Prentiss, Jack's foster mother



- Wet-nursed Jack until he was 10 months old
- A lifelong friend
- Loaned him money to buy first sailboat, used for oyster pirating [Ω](#)

William Chaney



- Born 1821, Maine
- Politics, journalism and law
- Wandering astrologer
- A “rascal”
- Driven out of town [Ω](#)

John London, stepfather



- **Born 1828, Pennsylvania**
- **Married at 19, had 9 children**
- **Wife died**
- **Moved to California with 3 children to save son**
- **Married Flora Wellman**
- **Adopted and raised Jack ^Ω**

The Many Faces of Jack London



Adventurer and Sailor
Writer and Journalist
Socialist Lecturer
Innovative Farmer [Ω](#)

A Remarkable Life

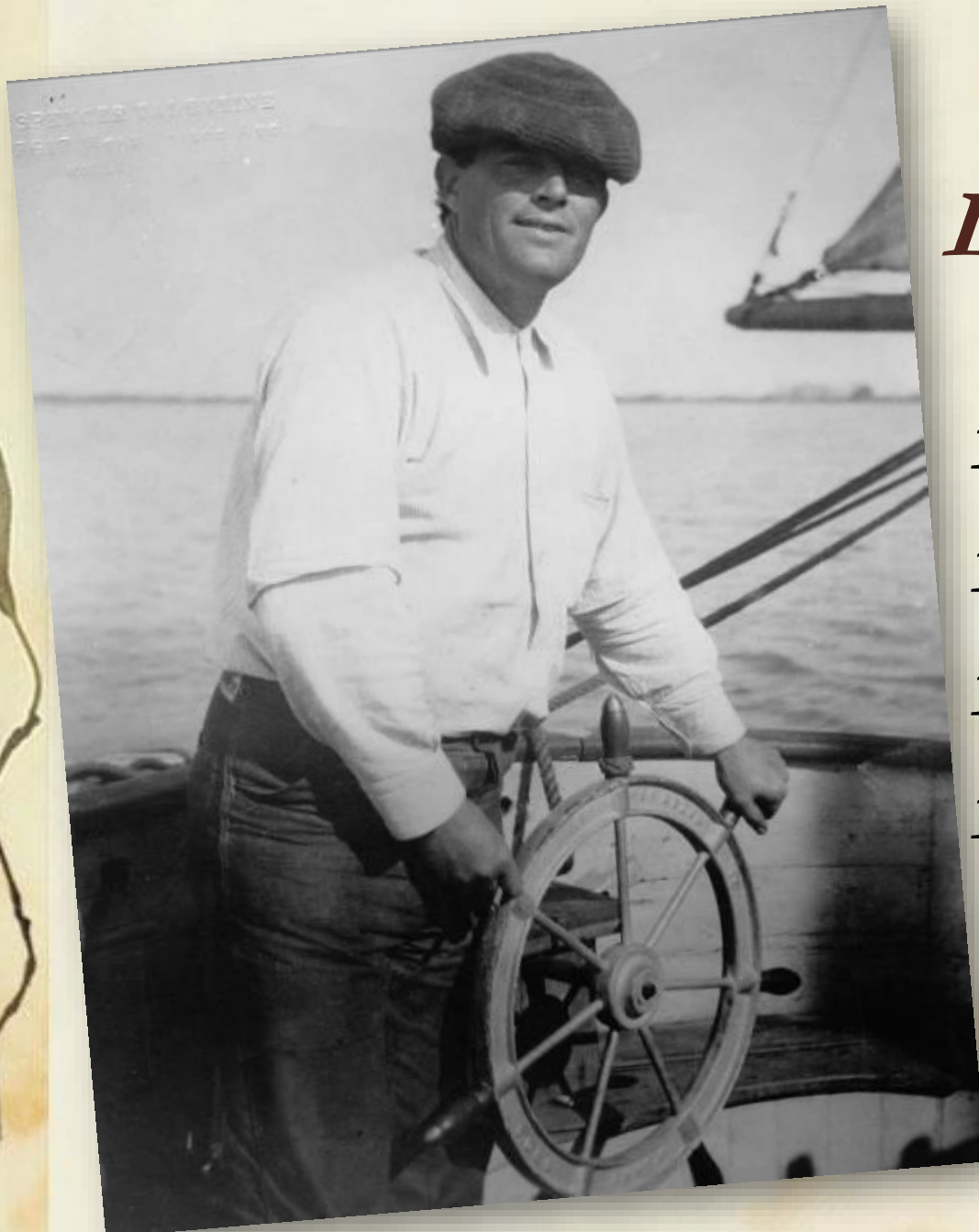
- **Rose from poverty to fame and riches**
- **Wrote American classics**
 - 51 books published
 - 19 novels, 188 short stories and essays, 3 plays
 - Many movies based on his life and stories
 - Sold millions of books at home and abroad
- **One of the highest paid authors of his time**
- **Died at the age of 40** Ω



An early life filled with adventure

- Oyster Pirate, age 15
- Fish Patrol, age 16
- Able Bodied Seaman, age 17
- Tramping across America, age 18
 - Spent a month in jail
- Seeking gold in the Klondike, age 21 [Ω](#)





Lifelong Sailor

1891 - Razzle Dazzle

1903 - Spray

1907 - Snark

1910 - Roamer

Growing up poor . . .

- Family moved often
- Became a “work beast” at an early age
- Attended small rural schools [Ω](#)





↑
Jack



Education

- Mostly self-educated
- Finished grade school
- 2 years high school
- 1 semester UC Berkeley
- Read constantly all his life
- Found friend and guide in Oakland librarian Ina Coolbrith [Ω](#)

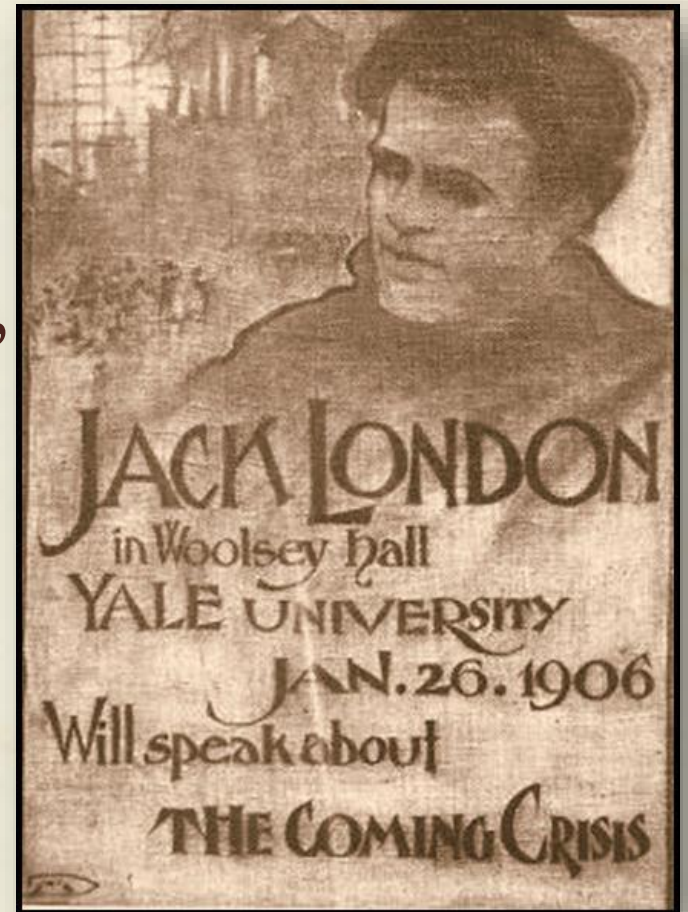
Ina Coolbrith

- Librarian, Oakland Public Library
- Jack's "Literary Mother"
- Born 1841, Illinois
- Entered California by covered wagon, 1852
- California Poet Laureate, 1915 [Ω](#)



The Socialist

- Labeled the “Boy Socialist”
- Arrested for speaking without a permit
- Traveled country giving speeches
- Ran for Board of Education and Mayor of Oakland [Ω](#)

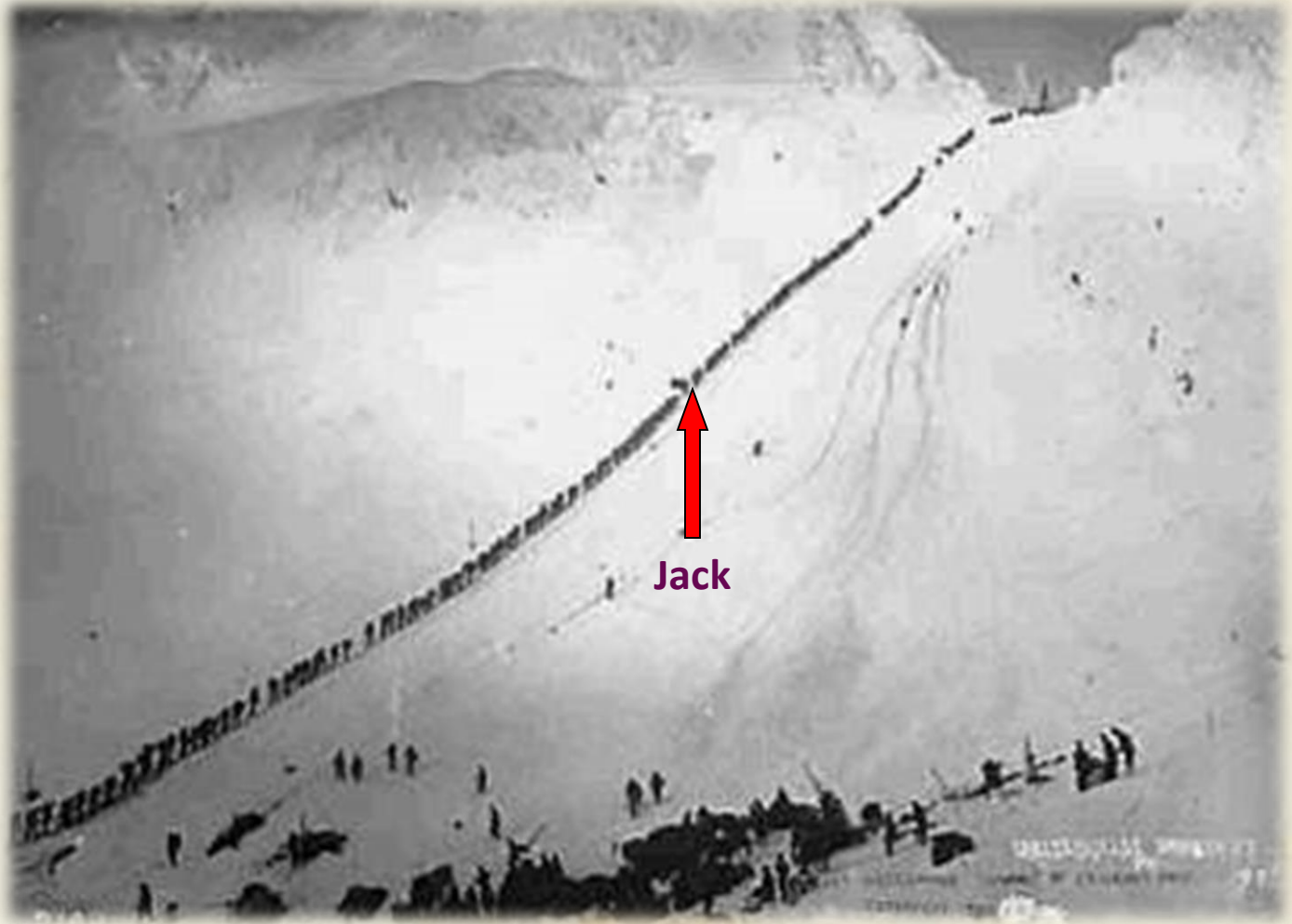




The Socialist Platform

- Collective ownership of railroads, mines, factories, telegraph, etc.
- [No mention of collective ownership of banks]
- Public Works for the unemployed
- Pensions for elderly and injured workers
- Shorter work week: one day off a week
- Safer work place
- No child labor under age 16
- Equal suffrage for men and women [Ω](#)

The Klondike Gold Rush, 1897



Chilcoot Pass

Becoming a Writer

- No education, no mentor
- Studied other writers in books and magazines
- Wrote short stories, novels, poems, plays
 - 1893, “Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan,” \$25 prize
 - 1895, wrote for high school “Aegis”
 - 1899, “To the Man on Trail” earns \$5
- Submitted hundreds of manuscripts
- Got hundreds of rejections^Ω



The Hard Road to \$ucce\$\$

- 1898, “To the Man on Trail,” \$5
 - 44 rejection slips
- 1899, “A Thousand Deaths,” \$40
 - 266 rejection slips
- 1899, “An Odyssey of the North,” \$120
- Little money, local fame [Ω](#)

1900

- Marries Bess Maddern
- Meets Charmian Kittredge
- First published book, *Son of the Wolf*, brings fame
- Total year earnings: \$2534
- 108 rejection slips [Ω](#)



The Son of the Wolf

Marriage and Children

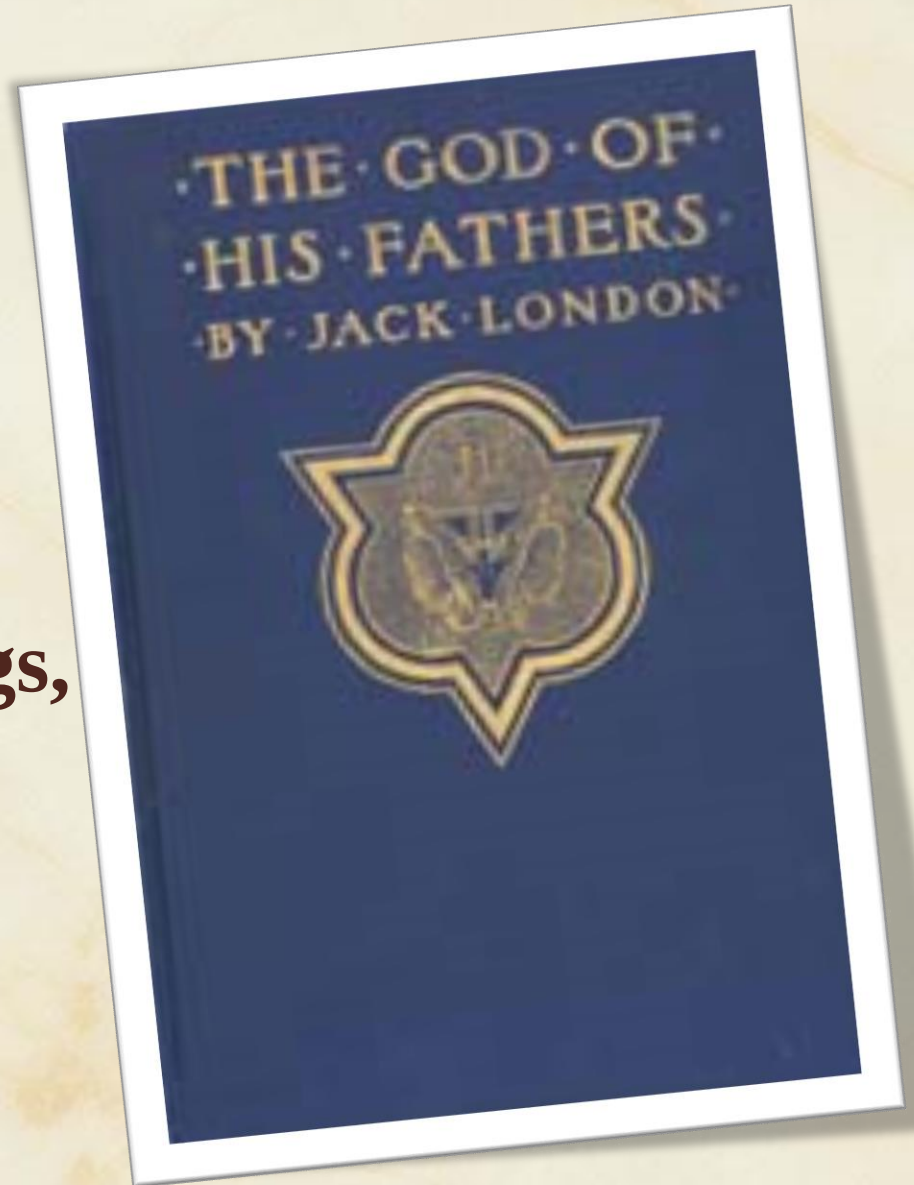
- Young, attractive, slender and athletic
- Blue-black hair, hazel eyes
- Married April 7, 1900
- Divorce final on November 17, 1905 [Ω](#)



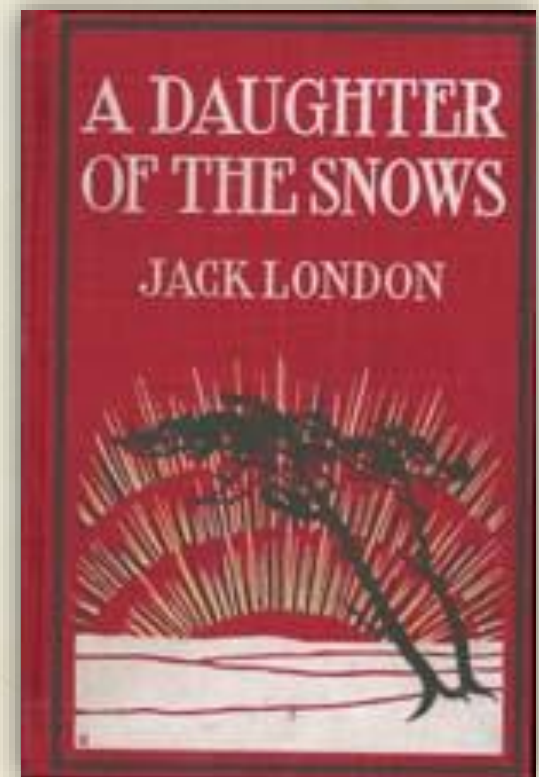
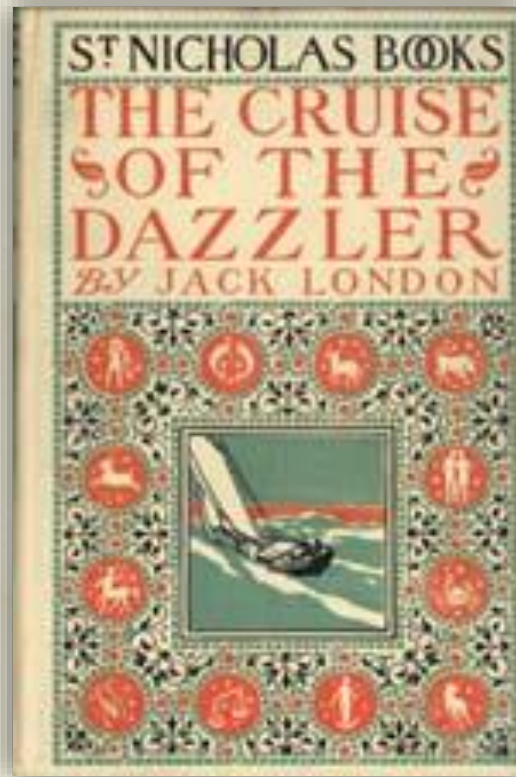
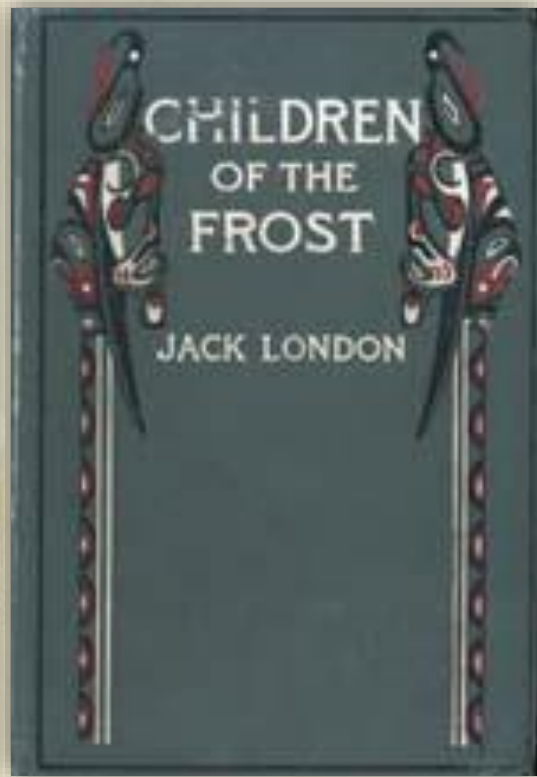
Bessie Maddern

1901

- Daughter Joan is born
- Total year earnings, \$2650 [Ω](#)



1902

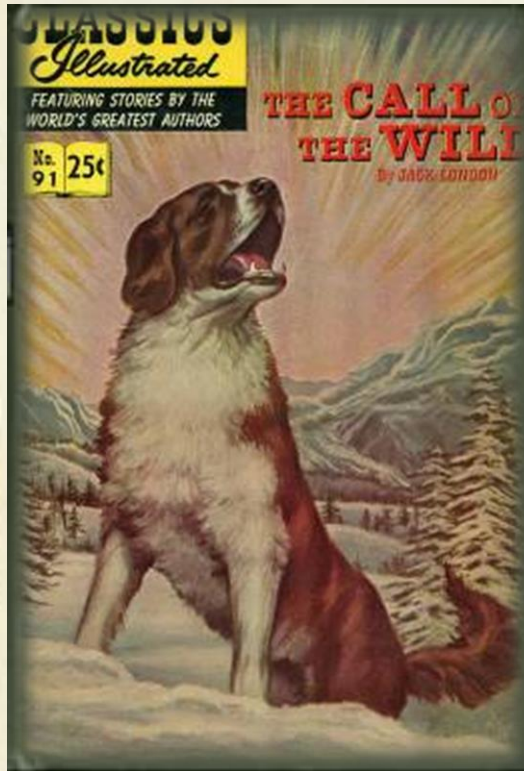


- August, travels to England
- Writes *People of the Abyss*
- October, daughter Bess is born [Ω](#)

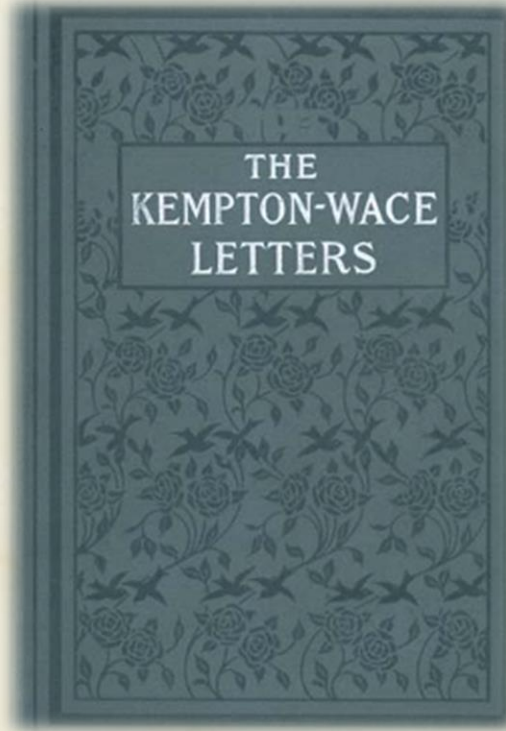
The People of the Abyss - 1902



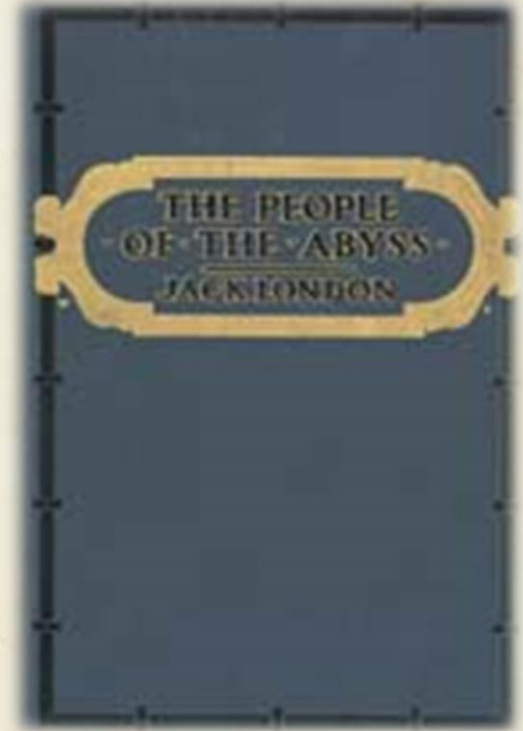
1903



Call of the Wild



(with Anna Strunsky)



People of the Abyss

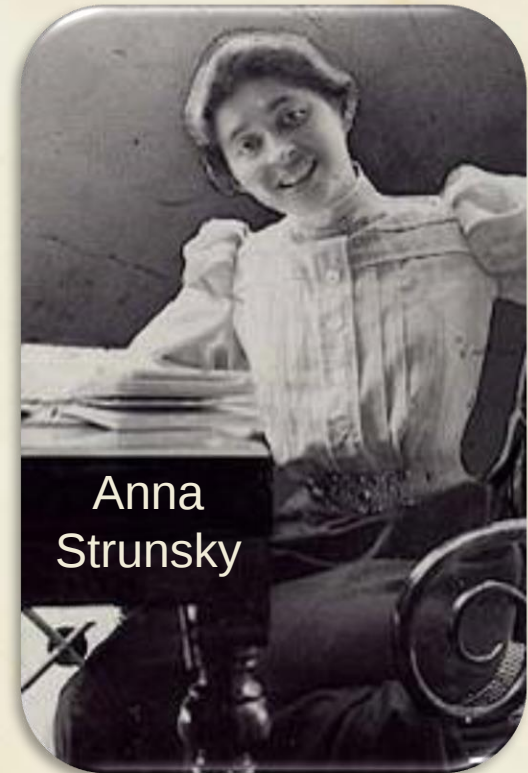
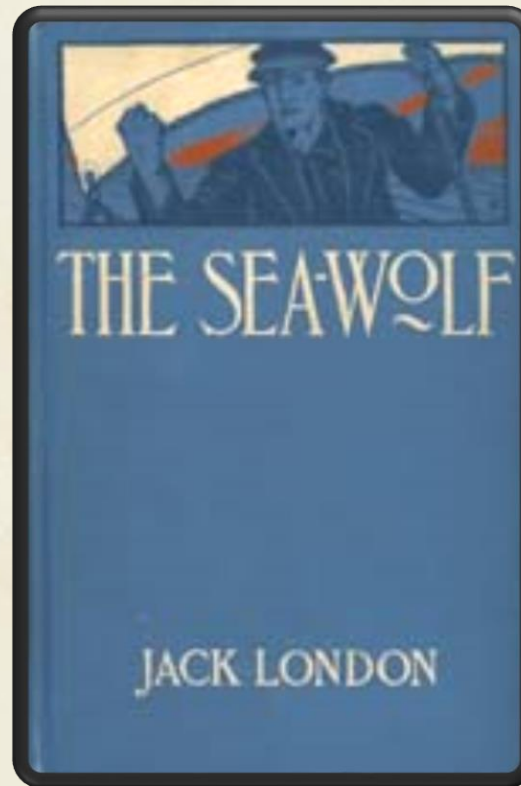
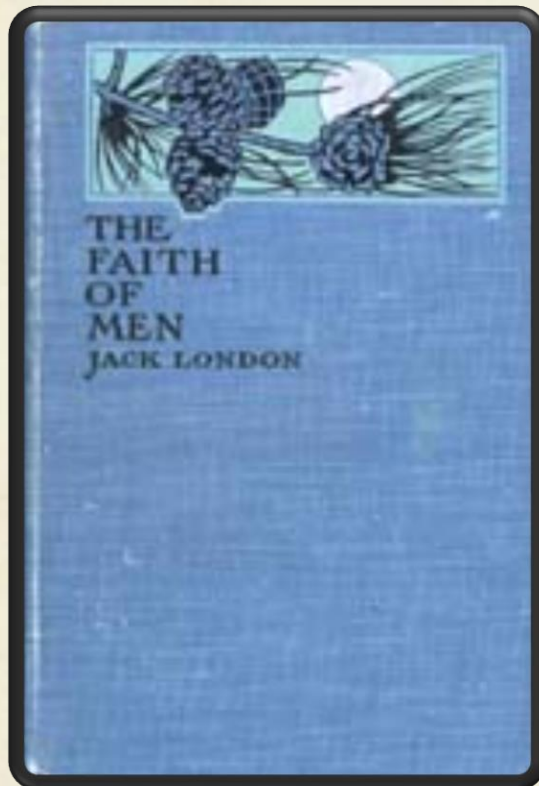
- Separation from his wife Ω

Jack with Daughters



Becky and Joan

1904



- Travels to Japan to cover Japanese-Russian war
- Bessie files for divorce – grounds: “Desertion” ^Ω

Jack in Japan and Korea



Charmian Kittredge



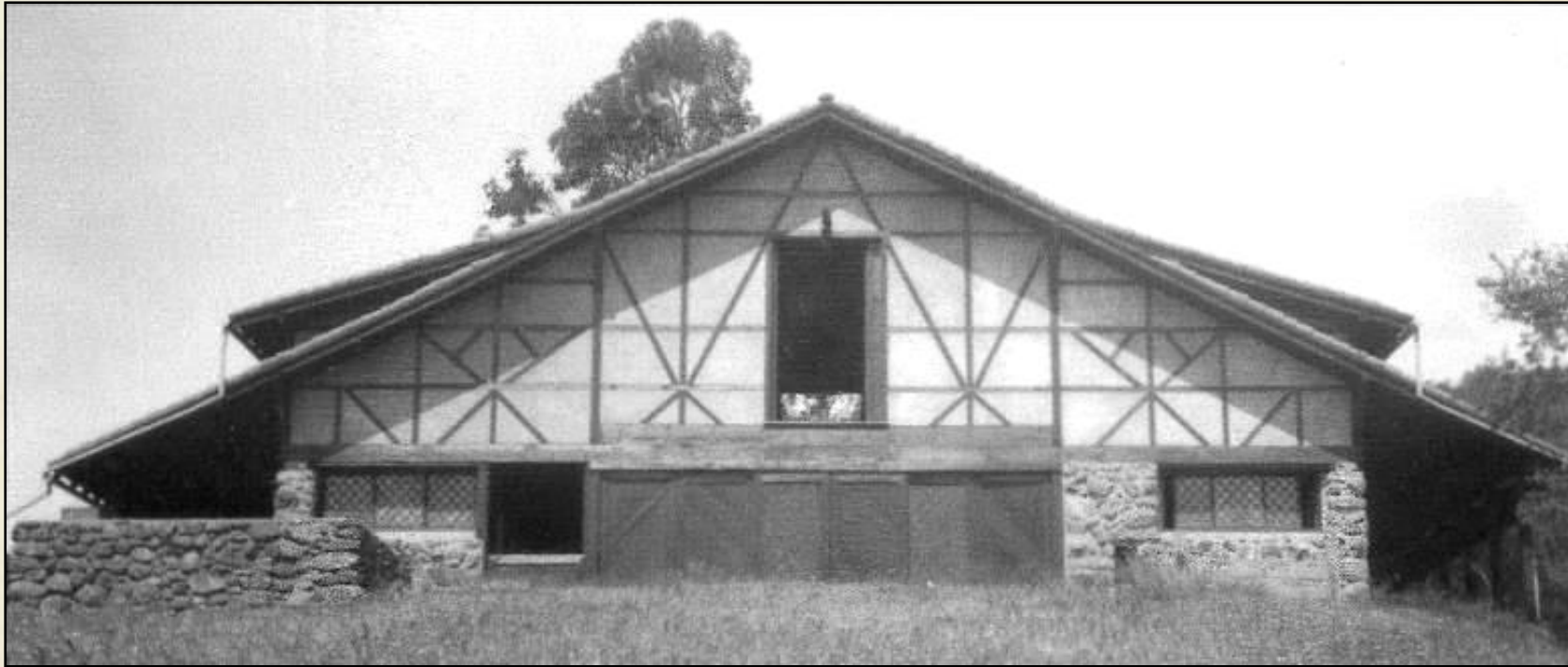
The “Stenographer”





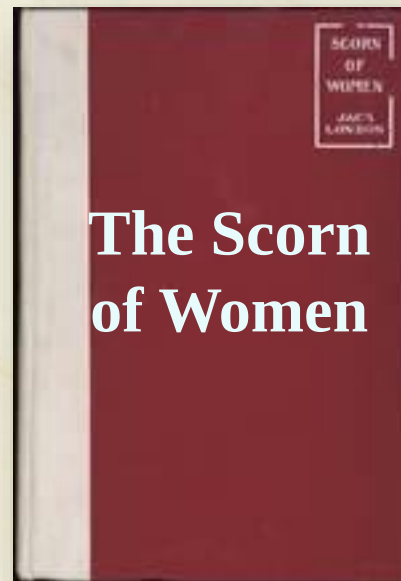
- Buys Hill Ranch in Glen Ellen, first of seven land purchases
- Jack and Charmian marry November 19 (two days after divorce became final, provoking moral outrage nationwide)
- Honeymoon in Jamaica [Ω](#)

**First London-built structure on
his ranch:**



**Swiss chalet-style barn
partially destroyed in 1906 earthquake**

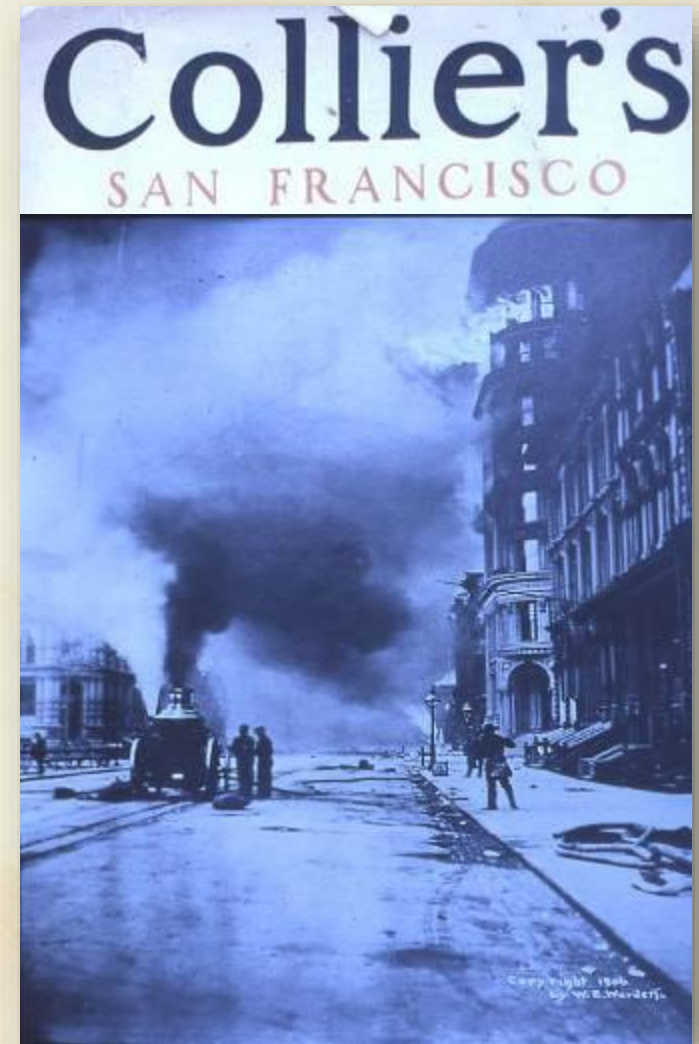
1906



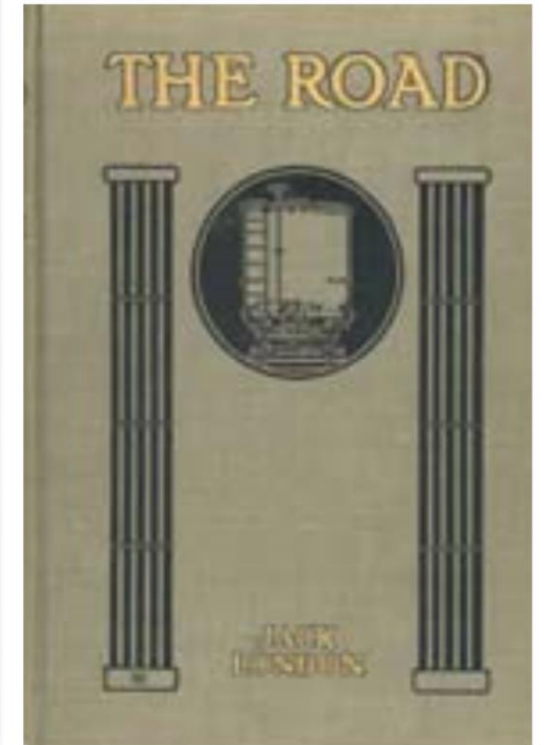
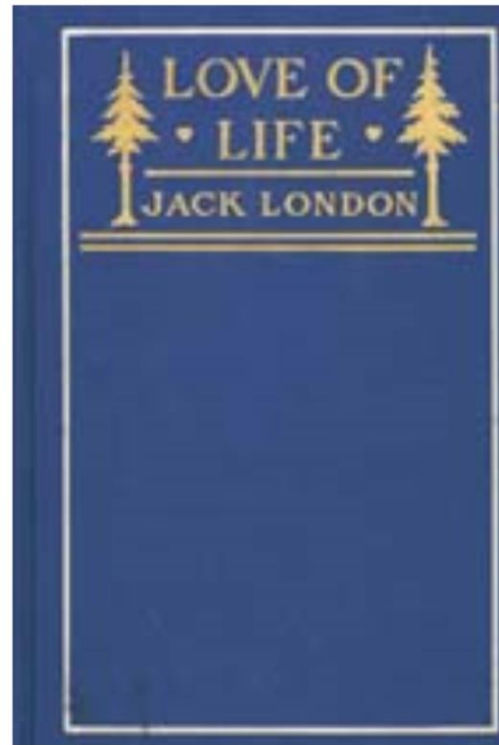
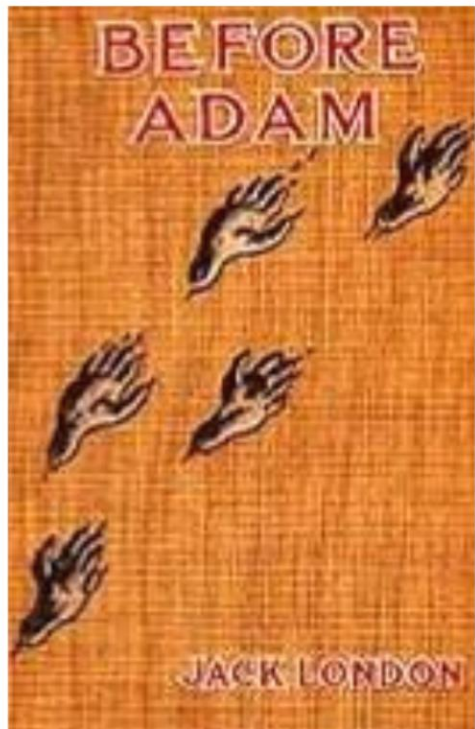
**The Scorn
of Women**

1906 Earthquake

- April 18, 1906
- Jack, with Charmian, travels to Santa Rosa and San Francisco
- Photographs disaster, writes for magazines
- Impresses on Jack necessity to build Wolf House on a strong foundation [a](#)



1907





Planning the *Snark* cruise

- ◆ 7 year trip around the world
- ◆ Financed by publishers
- ◆ Hawaii, South Seas, Egypt, Europe, America
- ◆ Ketch: 55 ft. over-all, 43 ft. at waterline
- ◆ 4 watertight compartments, aux. engine
- ◆ 10 knots under sail, 8 knots under power
- ◆ Cost estimate: \$7,000 (actual: \$30,000) ^Ω

Jack with frame of *Snark*

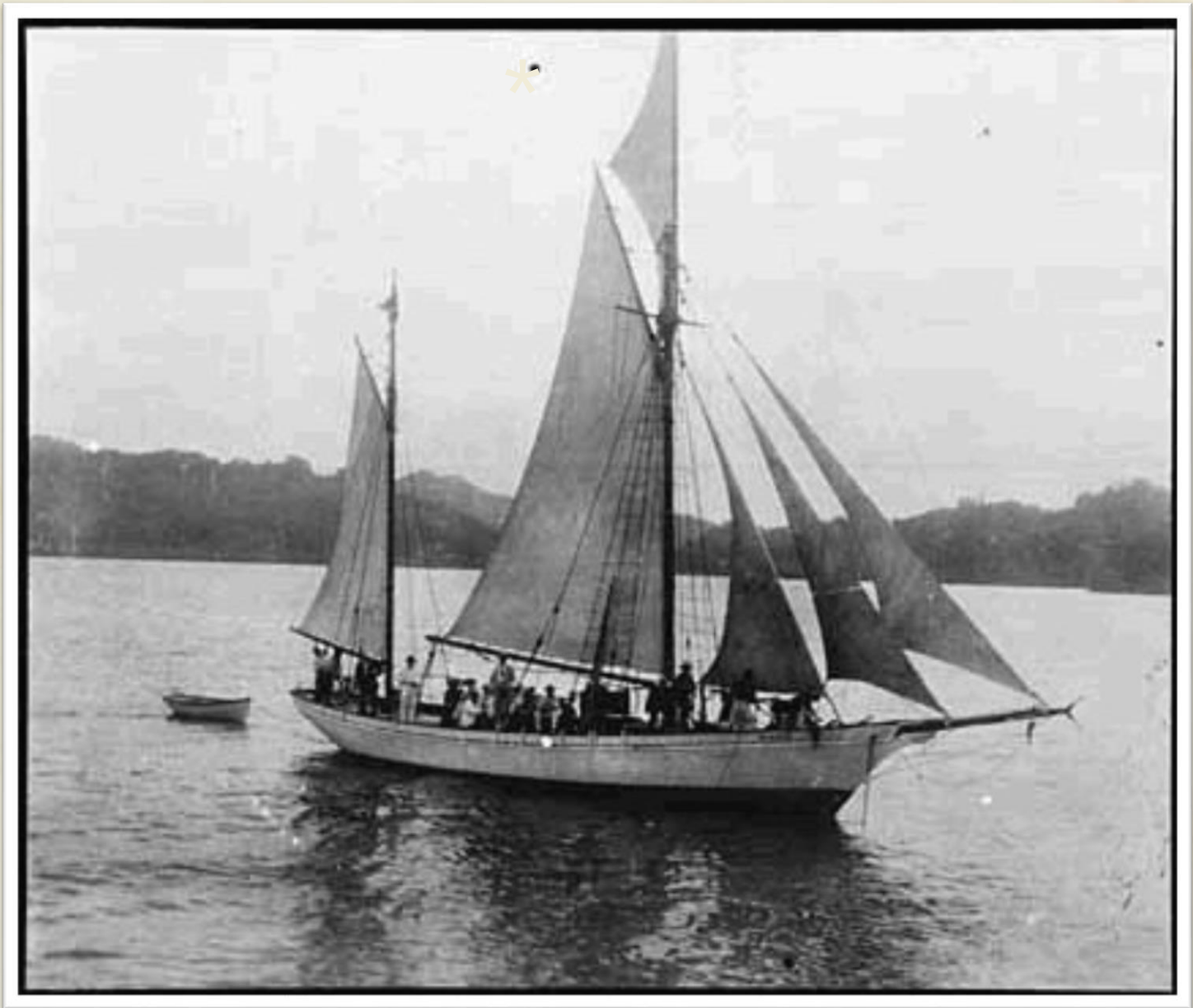


The *Snark* – an embarrassment

- Long delays and cost over-runs
- Boat handled poorly
- Engine never worked well
- Leaked seriously during leg to Hawaii
- Incompetent navigator
- Required expensive repairs in Hawaii



The *Snark*





The Cruise of the Snark

- Cast off for Hawaii, April 23, arrived May 20, 1907
- Spent 5 months in Hawaii
- Week with “The Lepers of Molokai”
- On to Marquesas, Tahiti, Bora Bora, Pago-Pago, Samoa, Solomons, Australia

1907 - Leaving for Hawaii



Jack and Charmian on board



Learning navigation



Charmian at the wheel



H

A

W

A

I

I



Islanders with gramophone



A study in survival!



Chamman photo's the man-
eaters in Solomons. V. just
not far behind her. with
his camera.

Charmian with Islanders

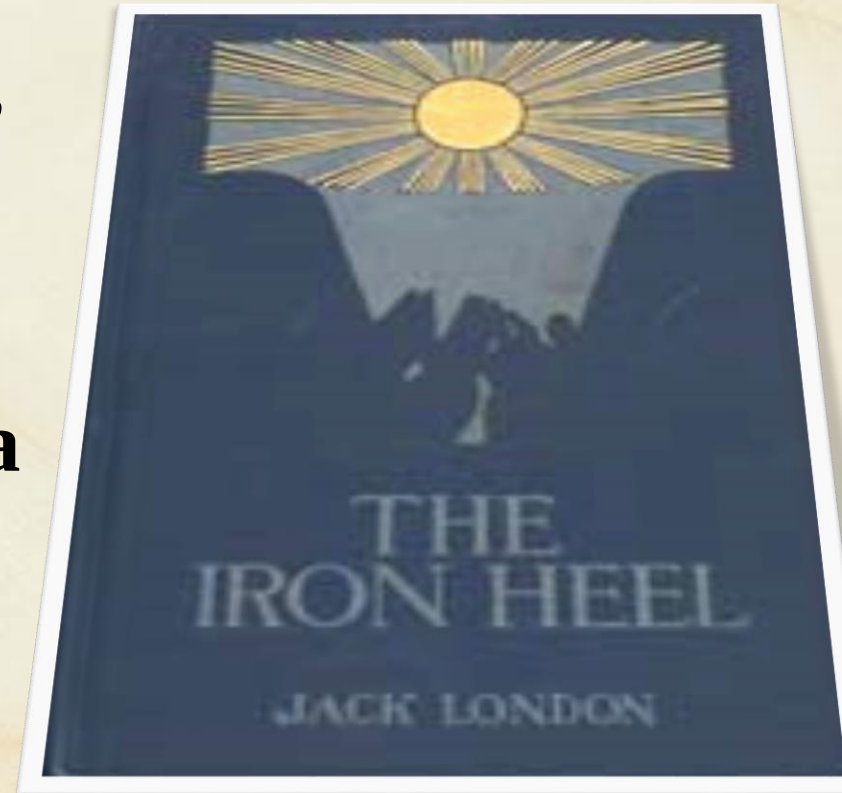


1908

▶ Cruising the Pacific, Jack becomes ill with “yaws”

▶ Travels to California briefly to resolve financial problems

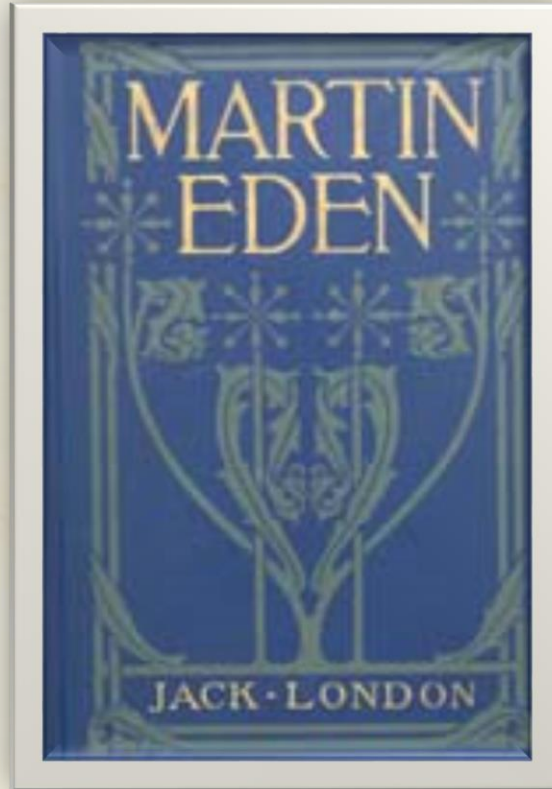
▶ Returns to Australia Ω



Jack & Charmian in Australia, 1909



1909

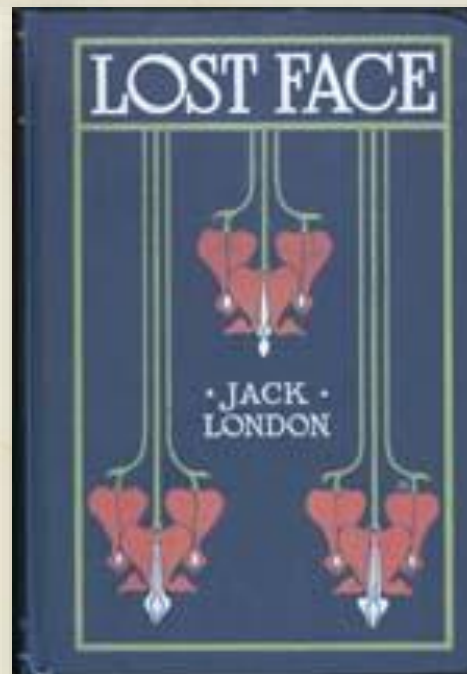
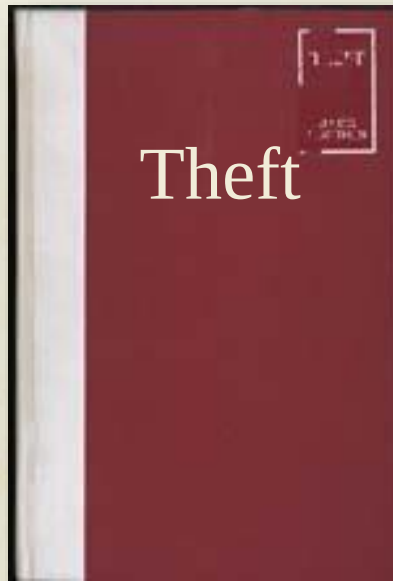


- **Returns to Oakland, arrives in July**
- **Sells *Snark* for \$4500**
- **Expands Beauty Ranch ^Ω**

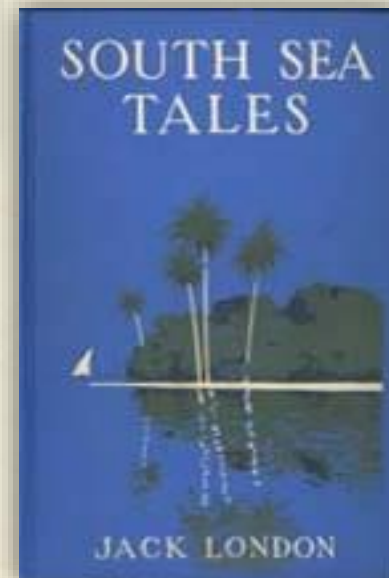
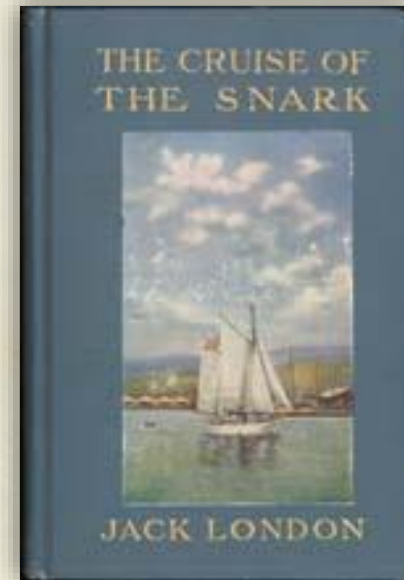
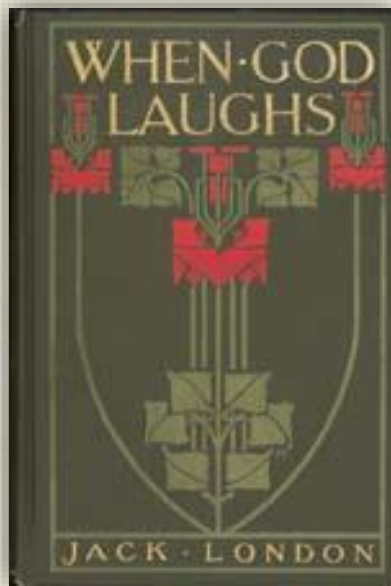
1910

Theft

- Charmian delivers baby Joy
- Joy dies after only 38 hours [Ω](#)

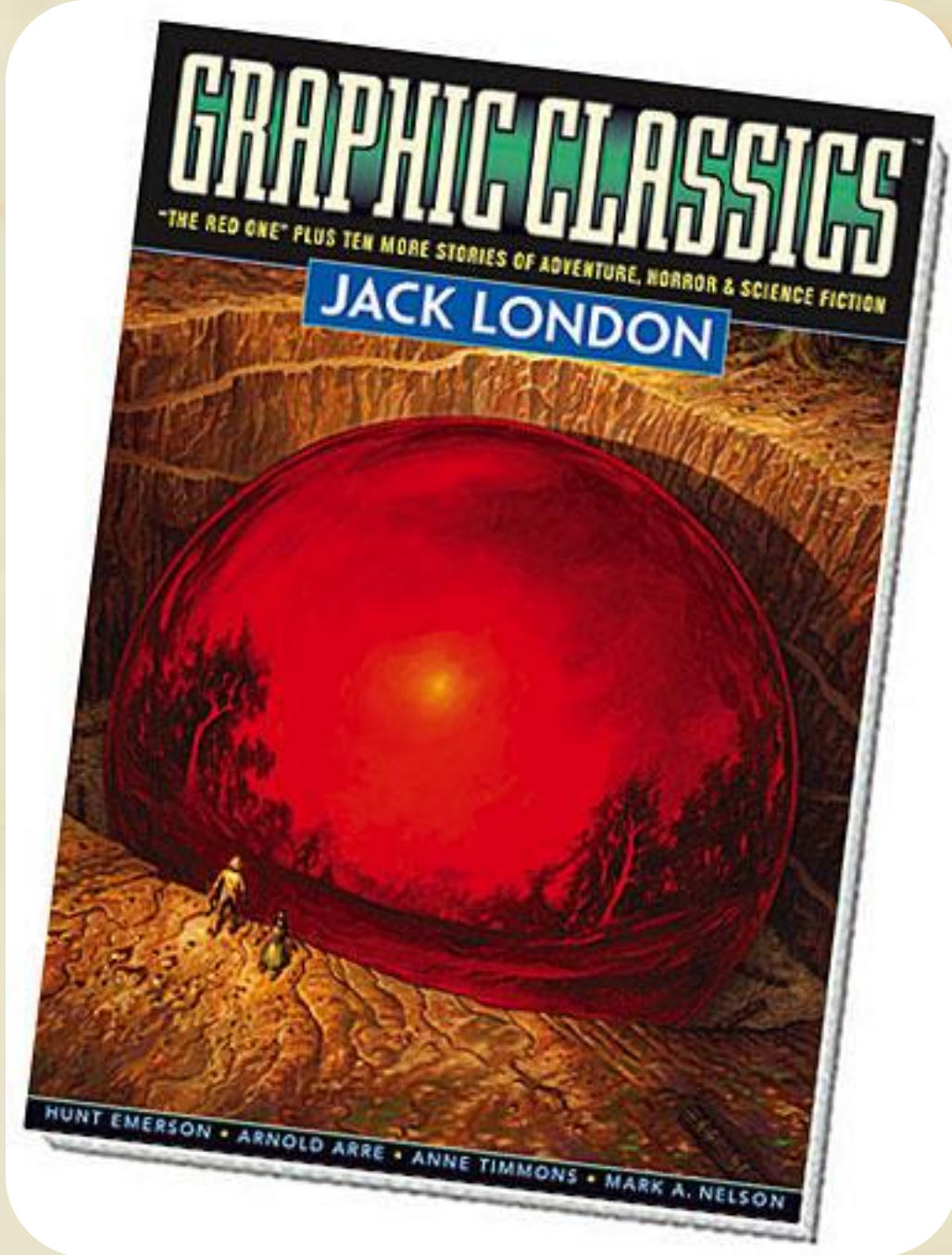


1911



- April, work begins on Wolf House
- September, move into Cottage ^Ω

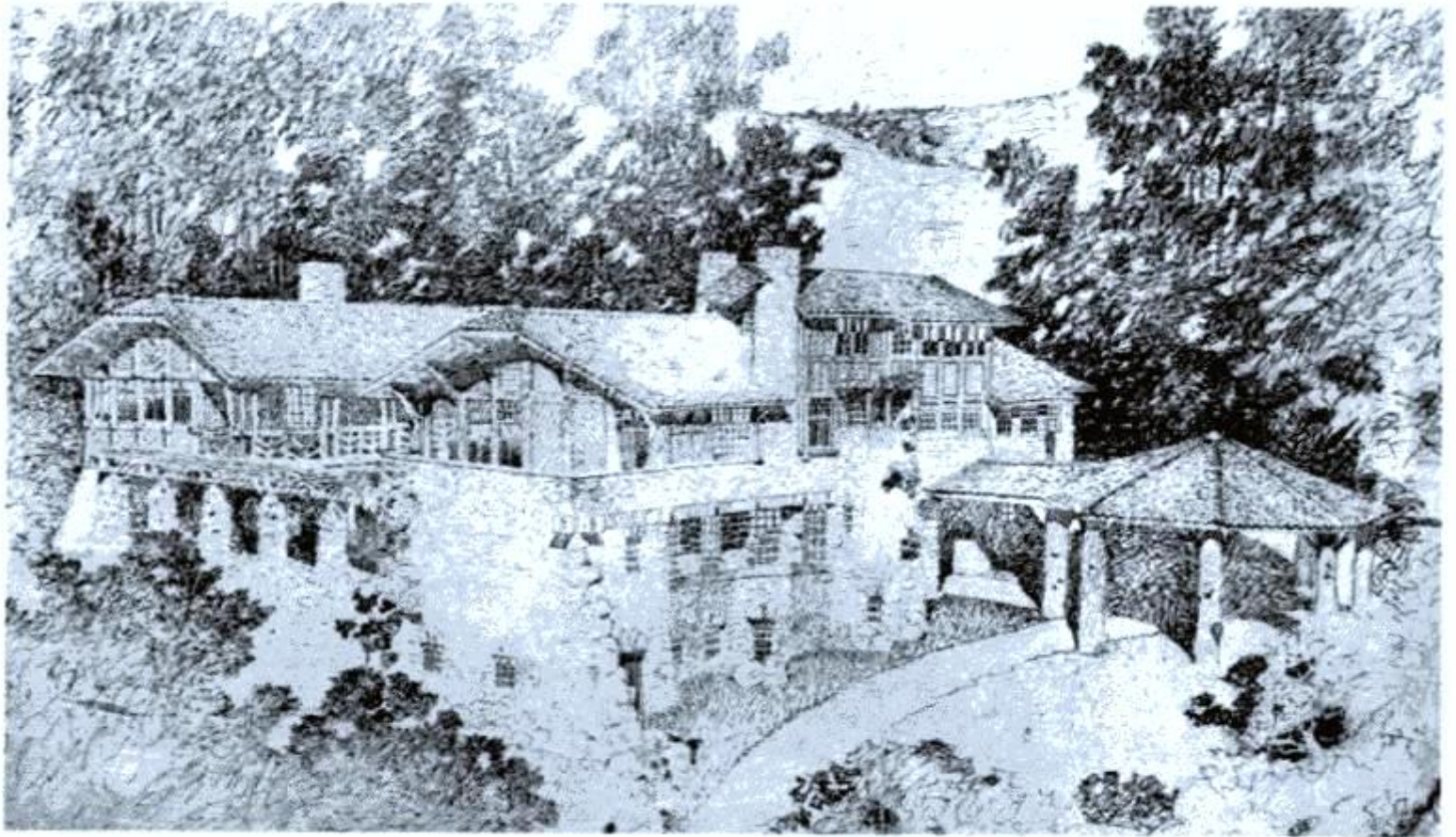
1911



Jack and Charmian at Home



Wolf House drawing by Architect Albert Farr



Building the Wolf House

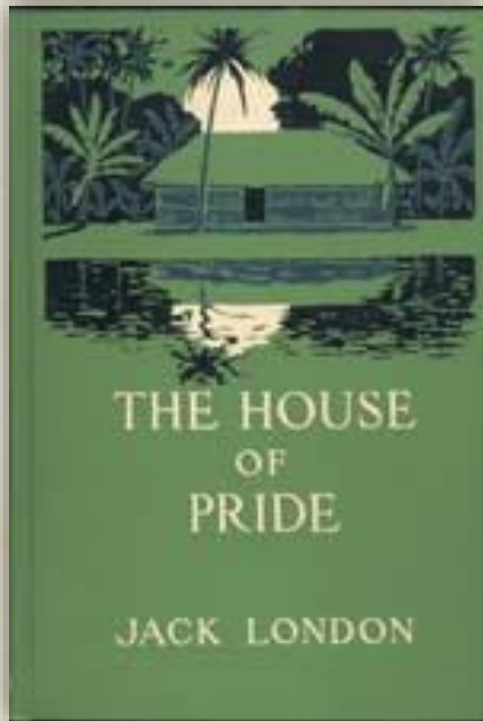


**San Francisco
Architect Albert Farr**

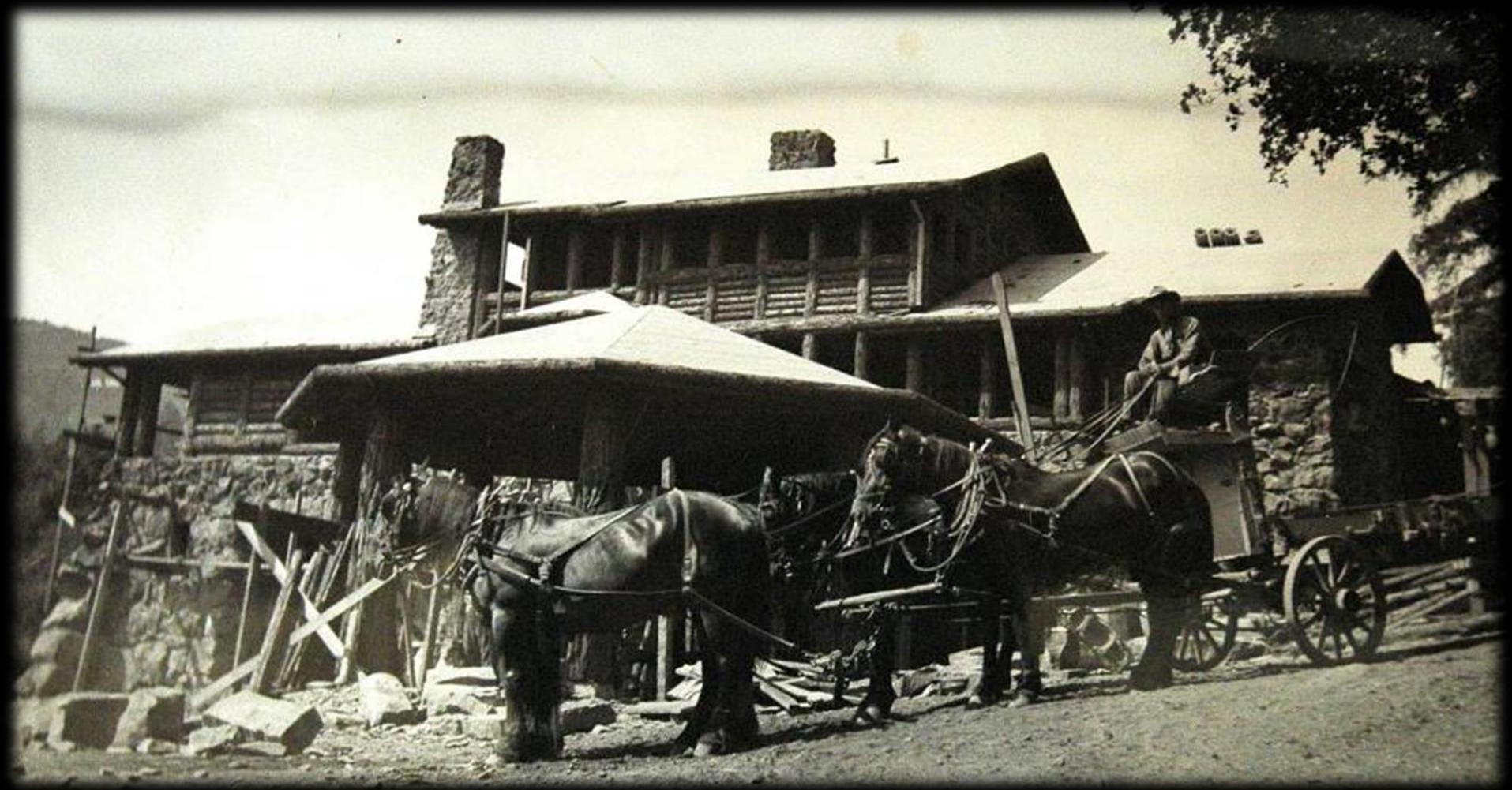
- ✓ Construction begins in 1911
- ✓ 15,000 square feet of living space
- ✓ 4 stories tall
- ✓ Built with volcanic rock, redwood logs, tile roof
- ✓ 26 rooms, 9 fireplaces
- ✓ Cost approximately \$50,000



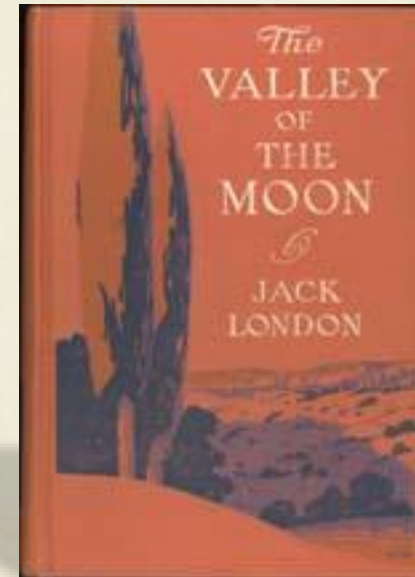
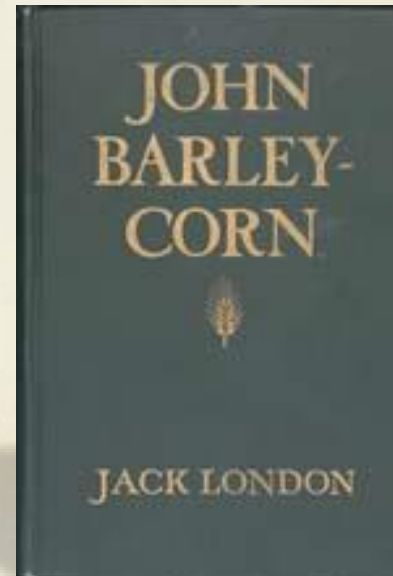
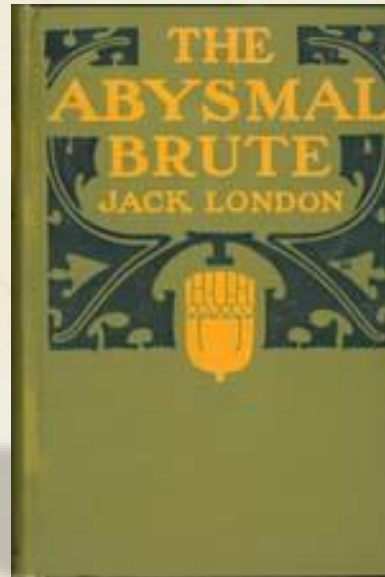
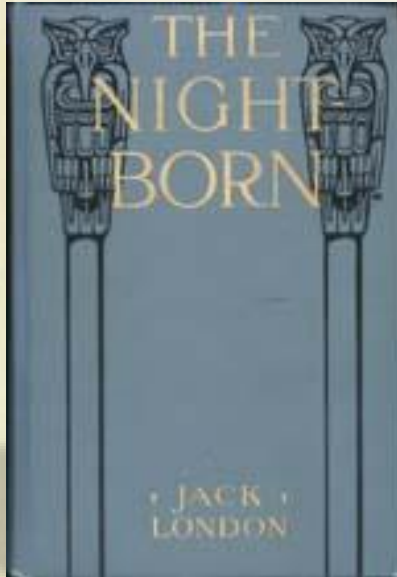
1912



- Sail from Baltimore to Seattle aboard the *Dirigo*, 148 day voyage
- Charmian miscarries second baby [Ω](#)

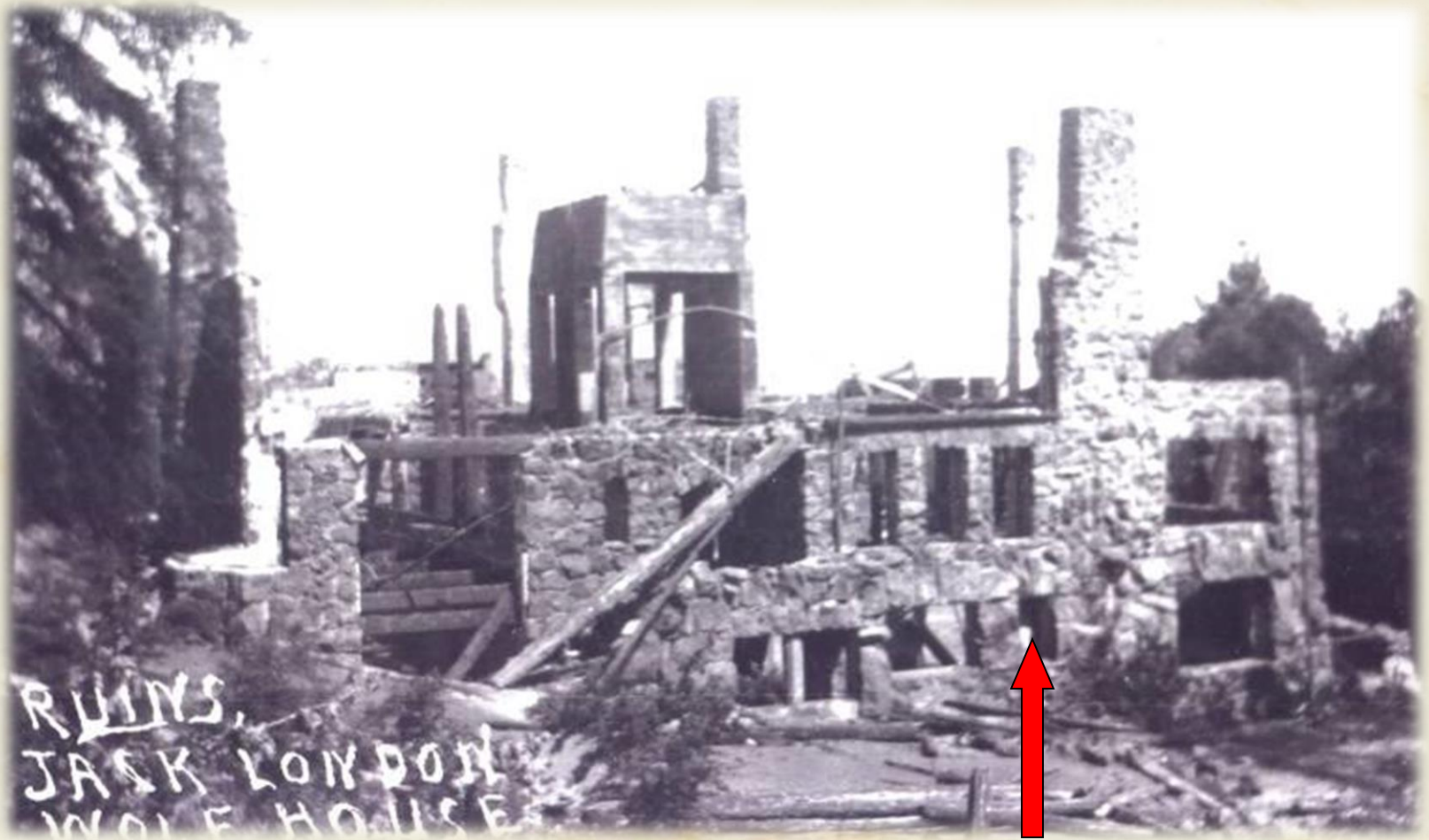


1913



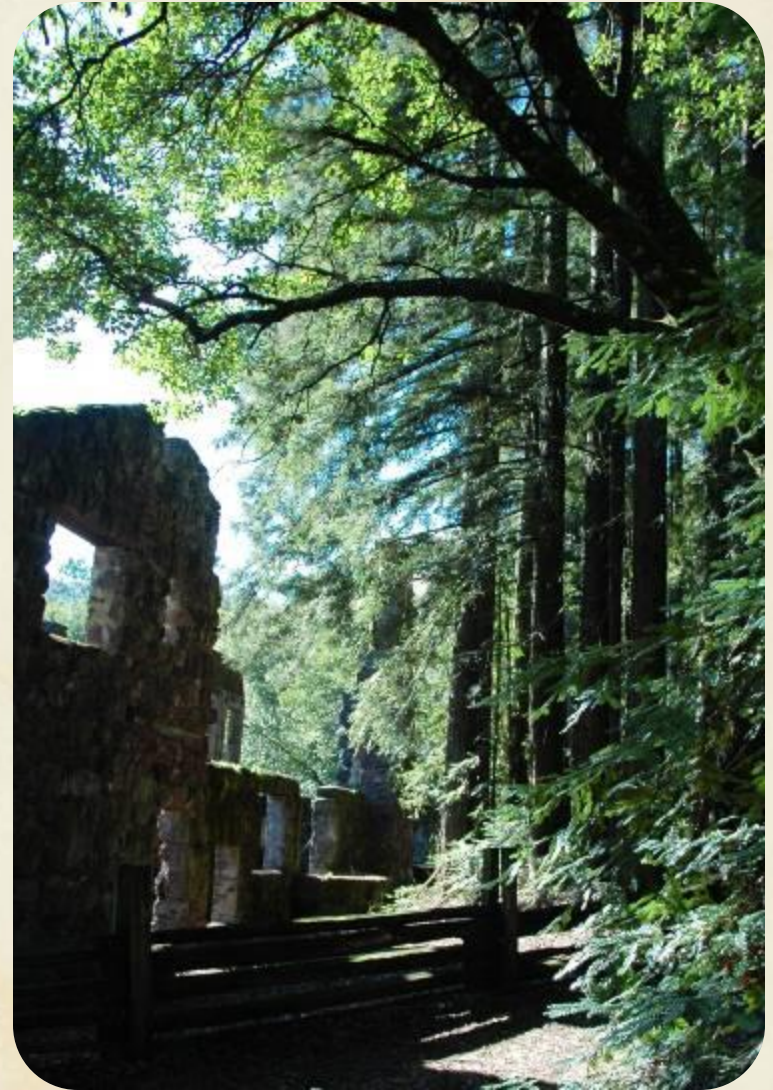
- July: appendectomy, serious kidney damage found
- August: Wolf House destroyed by fire [Ω](#)

Wolf House after the Fire



Fire and Ruin

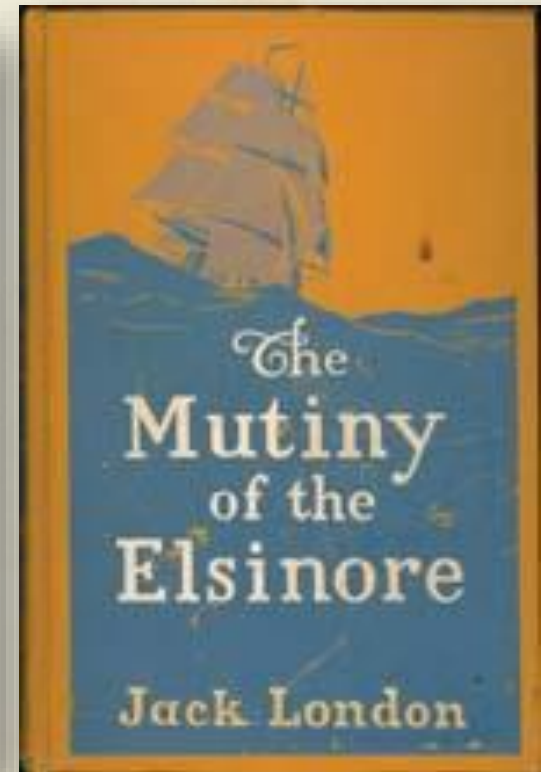
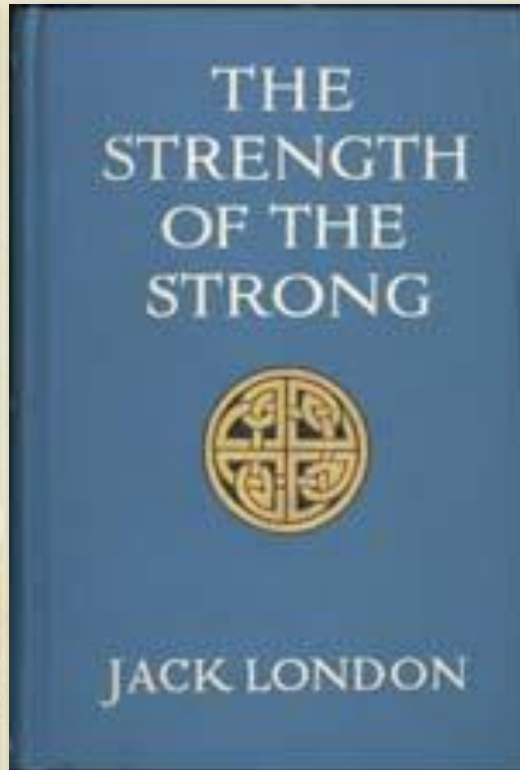
- August 22, 1913,
Wolf House burns
- Probable cause:
**spontaneous
combustion**
- Total insurance only
\$10,000
- Poor finances, poor
health prevent
rebuilding ^Ω



Wolf House Ruins



1914



- **April, Jack leaves for Vera Cruz to report on Mexican Revolution**
- **Ill from dysentery and rheumatism**
- **Cruises Sacramento River, September - January** ^Ω

1915



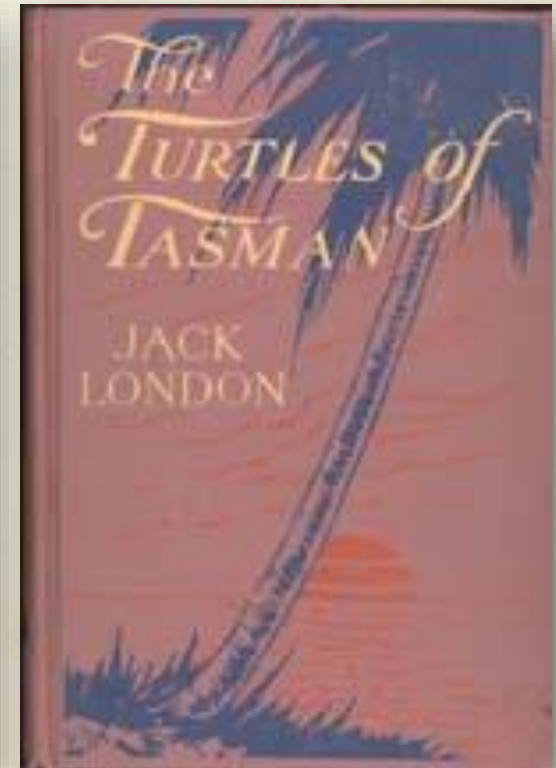
The Scarlet Plague

- Jack in declining health
- Honolulu, March to July ^Ω

1916



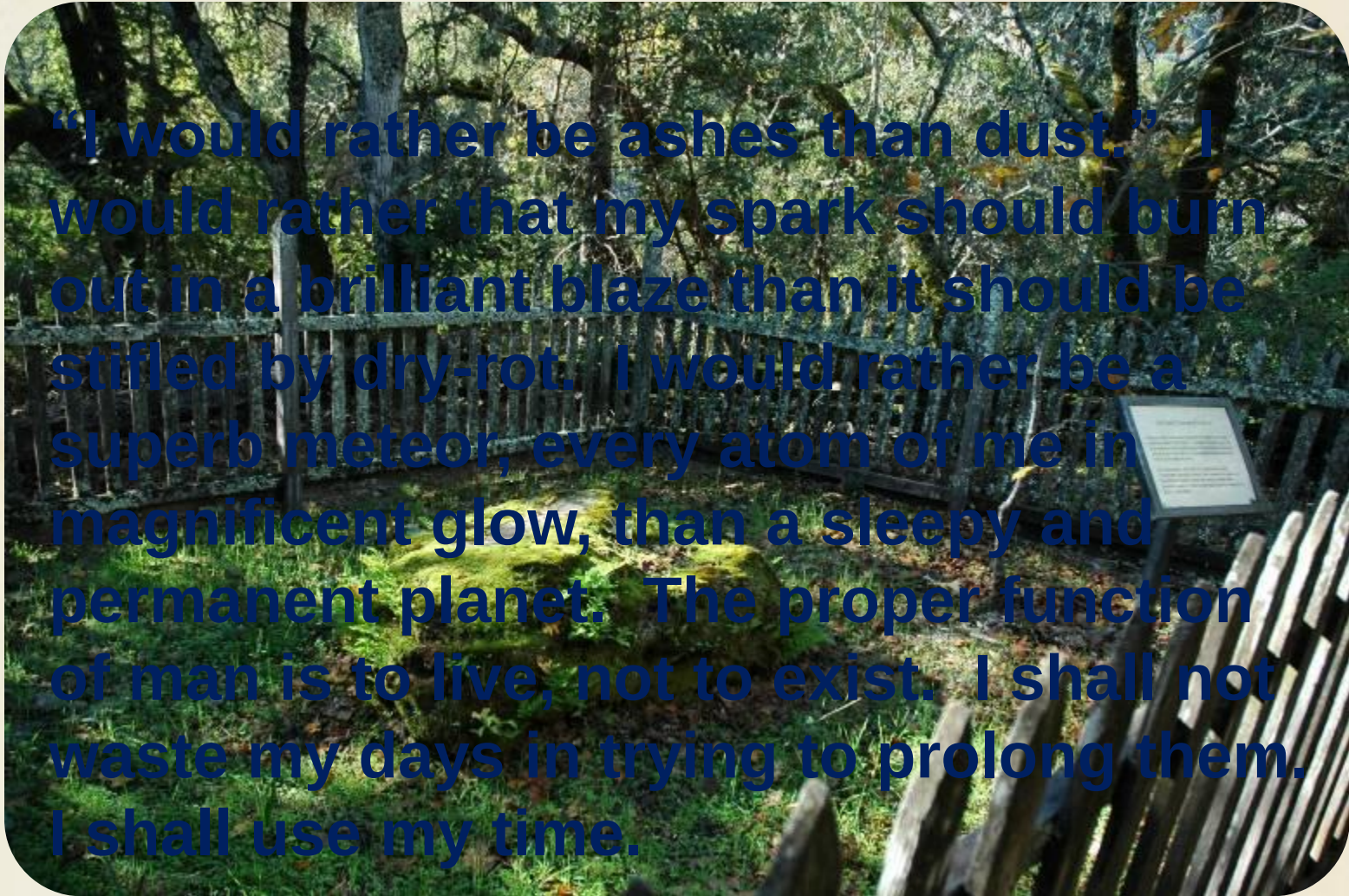
The
Acorn
Planter



Jack London dies November 22 of severe uremia.

He was 40 years old.

The Jack London Grave Site



"I would rather be ashes than dust." I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time.

❖ **Jack London, 1876 - 1916**

1 PLACE OF DEATH

California State Board of Health

State Index No.

COUNTY OF SONOMA

BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS

Local Registered No. 345

TOWN OF Glen Ellen

STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

OR

CITY OF (No.)

ST.; WARD

If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number, and fill out Nos. 11A and 11B.

2 Full Name Jack London

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3 SEX male 4 COLOR OR RACE white 5 MARRIAGE MARRIED (Write the word)

5a HUSBAND OF Chasman K. London

5b WIFE OF

6 DATE OF BIRTH January 12th 1876 (Month) (Day) (Year)

7 AGE 40 years 11 months 20 days If LESS than 1 day, hrs. or min.

8 OCCUPATION (a) Trade, profession or particular kind of work. (b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer) author

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or country) San Francisco

10 NAME OF FATHER John London

11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) Pennsylvania

12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Flora Wellman

13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) Ohio

14a LENGTH OF RESIDENCE At Place of Death 10 years - months - days (Primary registration district) In California - years - months - days

14 THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE

(Informant) Eliza Shepard (Address) Glen Ellen, Sonoma Co

15 Died Nov 23 1916 H. W. Gottenberg Subreg

Died Dec 1 1916 R. G. Hagler Reg. or Deputy

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

16 DATE OF DEATH November 22 1916 (Month) (Day) (Year)

17 I HEREBY CERTIFY That I attended deceased from July 1913, to Nov 22 1916; that I last saw him alive on Nov 22nd 1916; and that death occurred on the date stated above at 7:45 P. M. The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows:

Uraemia following renal colic

(Duration) years months 1 days Contributor Chronic Interstitial Nephritis

(Duration) 3 years - months - days

State whether attributed to dangerous or insanitary conditions of employment No

(Signed) William P. Porter M. D. Nov 22 1916 (Address) Oakland

*State the DISEASE CAUSING DEATH, or, in deaths from VIOLENT CAUSES, state (1) MEANS OF INJURY; and (2) whether (probably) ACCIDENTAL, SUICIDAL, or HOMICIDAL.

18 SPECIAL INFORMATION FOR HOSPITALS, INSTITUTIONS, TRANSIENTS OR RECENT RESIDENTS

Where was disease contracted, if not at place of death?

Former or usual residence.

19 PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL DATE OF BURIAL Oakland 14th St 12th Nov 1916

20 UNDERTAKER ADDRESS H. F. Bates Sonoma

