The Life of Jack London - A Timeline

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1876

January 12: John Griffith Chaney born in San Francisco to music teacher and spiritualist Flora Wellman and astrologist William Henry Chaney. Chaney denies paternity and abandons Flora.

January 12 - September 7: With Flora hospitalized in a mental health facility, young John Griffith Chaney lives with and is cared for by wet nurse Virginia Prentiss, an ex-slave.

September 7: Flora Wellman marries John London. Young John Griffith Chaney takes the surname "London" and returns to his mother.

1877

February 19: John London's daughters from a previous marriage, Eliza and Ida, join the London family.

1878

Jack and Eliza experience near-fatal bouts of diphtheria.

The London family moves from San Francisco to Oakland to escape a diphtheria epidemic.

1881

The family moves to a farm in Alameda.

1882

Jack attends West End Elementary School in Alameda.

1883

The family moves to a farm in San Mateo County.

1885

The family moves to the Livermore valley.

9-year-old Jack has already developed a passion for reading after discovering Ouida's Signa and Washington Irving's Tales of the Alhambra.

1886

The family moves back to Oakland.

10-yr-old Jack London works as a newsboy and takes many other odd jobs in order to help lift his family out of poverty. He also learns to fight.

Jack discovers the Oakland Free Library and becomes an avid reader under the guidance of the librarian Ina Coolbrith, who will be the future poet laureate of California and a major influence on Jack's life and literary endeavors.

1887

Jack enrolls at Cole Grammar School in West Oakland and befriends Frank Atherton who will one day write a celebrated memoir about his childhood adventures with Jack London.

Jack continues working as a newsboy and takes various jobs, including loading ice wagons, setting up pins in a bowling alley, and sweeping out saloons.

Heretofore known as 'Johnny', the 11 y.o. changes his name to "Jack."

1888

At age 12, Jack becomes a skilled sailor, navigating a skiff around San Francisco Bay, primarily as an oyster pirate at night.

1889

Jack enjoys a carefree summer visiting Frank Atherton's family, who have moved to Auburn.

1891

Jack graduates from Cole Grammar School.

Jack works at Hickmott's Cannery for a meagre wage.

Jack purchases the sloop Razzle Dazzle with a $300 loan from Virginia Prentiss.

Skilled, daring and tough, 14 y.o. Jack gains notoriety as the "Prince of the Oyster Pirates,"

1892

Jack 'switches sides' and joins the California Fish Patrol in Benicia as a deputy patrolman combating oyster piracy.
Jack frequents Johnny Heinold's 'First and Last Chance Saloon' on the Oakland waterfront and does odd jobs..
16 y.o. Jack embarks on his first tramping experiences, hopping a train over the Sierra Nevada mountains to Reno, Nevada, under the moniker "Sailor Kid."

1893

Jack signs on as an able-bodied seaman on the schooner Sophia Sutherland for a seven-month sealing voyage in the Pacific.
After returning from his 8-month voyage, Jack works ten-hour days at a jute mill for ten cents an hour.
17 y.o. Jack wins a $25 first prize in the San Francisco Morning Call contest for his article *Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan*. The story is subsequently published in the newspaper.

1894

Jack works shoveling coal for an electric railway power plant but quits after discovering he is being exploited by having replaced 2 men and doing the work of both of them for a meagre wage.
Jack leaves Oakland to join "Kelly's Industrial Army," a contingent of Coxey's Army marching to Washington D.C. to protest unemployment. He is becoming s young socialist,
After a month, Jack leaves the group in Hannibal, Missouri, and continues traveling as a tramp under the name "Frisco Kid." He visits the "White City," the remnants of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and relatives in Michigan.
Jack is arrested for vagrancy in Buffalo, New York, and spends 30 days in the Erie County Penitentiary.
Jack meets Frank Strawn-Hamilton, a notable labor organizer known as 'The Hobo Philosopher', in Baltimore at Druid Hill Park. 18 y.o. Jack is inspired by his street-corner orations, philosophical bent, and socialist views.

1895

19 y.o. Jack goes back to Oakland High School to get his high school degree. His articles and stories appear in the school's literary magazine, The Aegis.
Jack becomes known as the "Boy Socialist" of Oakland.

1896

Jack joins the Socialist Labor Party.
Jack intensely studies for university entrance examinations and gains admission to U.C. Berkeley. Saloon-owner Johnny Heinold pays his tuition and Jack attends for one semester before dropping out due to financial pressures and disillusionment with formal education.

1897

Jack's writing skills are evident and his letters to the editor are regularly published in local Bay Area newspapers.
Jack is arrested for speaking in public without the proper permit, but the case is dropped when the jury fails to reach a unanimous guilty verdict.
Jack runs unsuccessfully for a seat on the Oakland Board of Education as a Socialist candidate.
Jack works at the Belmont Academy laundry.
Jack travels to Alaska and the Yukon to seek his fortune in the Klondike Gold Rush. He is accompanied and financially supported by his half-sister Eliza's husband, Captain James H. Shepard.
Jack's story *Two Gold Bricks* is published in *The Owl* while he is away in the Klondike.
Jack's stepfather, John London, dies.

1898

Jack's story *A Thousand Deaths* is published in *The Black Cat* magazine. "The first real money I ever received."
Jack returns to Oakland on a harrowing trip, suffering from scurvy, and having found minimal gold in the Klondike.
Jack pawns his belongings, including his bicycle, to raise money.
Jack joins a gold rush in California, fueled by false news of a gold strike.
Jack decides to dedicate himself to writing and works diligently to hone his craft and increase his output.

1899

Jack's story "To The Man on the Trail" is published in the Bay Area literary magazine Overland Monthly.
Jack applies for but then declines a job as a mail carrier with the U.S. Post Office.
Jack begins corresponding with Cloudesley Johns, a socialist and outdoorsman who will influence him.

Jack meets Anna Strunsky, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who shared his socialist and humanitarian views. They would have a strong romantic connection and she would be a major literary and intellectual influence on him. Despite receiving numerous rejections, Jack manages to publish 24 essays, poems, and stories.

1900

Jack meets Charmian Kittredge during an interview with her aunt, Ninetta Eames, for a job as a writer at the Overland Monthly.

Jack breaks a luncheon date with Charmian to marry his former tutor and friend, Elizabeth ("Bessie") Maddern. They honeymoon on a bicycle trip to Santa Cruz.

Jack's first book, The Son of the Wolf, a collection of Klondike short stories, is published. He is now 24.

1901

Jack and Bessie's daughter Joan London is born.

Jack runs unsuccessfully for Mayor of Oakland as the Socialist Labor Party candidate.

Jack meets George Sterling, a writer and poet who will become a lifelong friend.

Jack receives his first journalism assignment, covering the National Bundes Shooting Festival for Hearst.

Jack's book The God of His Fathers is published.

1902

Jack travels to England to do undercover research on slum conditions in London's East End, gathering material for his book The People of the Abyss.

Jack travels through Europe for three weeks.

Jack and Bessie's second daughter Bess ("Becky") is born.

Jack's first novel, The Daughter of the Snows, is published, along with Cruise of the Dazzler, Children of the Frost, and the first version of his famed short story *To Build A Fire*.

1903

Jack falls in love with Charmian Kittredge, who will become his lifelong soulmate.

Jack and Bessie separate.

Jack makes his first visit to Glen Ellen where Ninetta and Roscoe Eames have a country inn called the Wake Forest Lodge in the Valley of the Moon. He becomes enamored of Sonoma County's beauty.

Jack purchases the sloop Spray.

27 y.o. Jack London achieves international fame with the publication of The Call of the Wild. The People of the Abyss and The Kempton-Wace Letters (co-written with Anna Strunsky) are published the same year.

1904

Jack travels to Yokohama and Korea as a war correspondent for the Hearst syndicate, reporting on the Russo-Japanese War. He is jailed and then released by the Japanese on suspicion of spying. He has a strong impression of Japanese imperialism and warns they will be a force to be reckoned with some day.

Bessie files for divorce, citing desertion and mistakenly naming Anna Strunsky as the "other woman."

Jack publishes The Sea-Wolf and The Faith of Men.

1905

Jack sails on the Sacramento River aboard his new boat, the *Spray,* with Cloudesley Johns.

Jack spends time at Wake Robin Lodge in Glen Ellen and begins purchasing land for his own "Beauty Ranch" nearby. He acquires the first 129 of his eventual 1400-acre estate.

Jack again runs unsuccessfully for Mayor of Oakland as a Socialist candidate.

Jack embarks on a lecture tour on socialism throughout the eastern and midwestern United States.

Jack and Charmian marry in Chicago, the day after his divorce from Bessie is finalized.

Jack and Charmian honeymoon in Jamaica and Cuba, interrupting his lecture tour.

Jack publishes War of the Classes, The Game, and Tales of the Fish Patrol.

1906

Jack resumes his lecture tour, speaking at Yale University, Carnegie Hall, and throughout the Midwest.

The couple return to Glen Ellen where the first building on Beauty Ranch, a barn, is completed. Jack revels in the farm and ranch life and experiments with innovative methods designed to promote sustainability, efficiency, and productivity. The ranch grows into a magnificent homestead and massive project that brings great joy but consumes Jack's fortune as fast as (and sometimes faster) than he can earn it.

Jack begins building the ketch *Snark*, inspired by Joshua Slocum's solo sailing trip around the world and a desire to follow in the South Pacific footsteps of literary giants Herman Melville and Robert Louis Stevenson.
Jack's mother, Flora, visits the Ranch with her grandson Johnny Miller (Ida's son). This is her first and only visit.
30 y.o. Jack receives a custom set of false teeth.
Jack reports on the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire for Collier's magazine.
Jack publishes White Fang, Moon-Face and Other Stories, and Scorn of Women.
The building of the *Snark* is fraught with difficulties, delays, and cost overruns. Jack's prodigious literary output enables him to pay the huge bills.

1907

April 23: The *Snark* finally sets sail from Oakland, heading out of the Golden Gate for the Hawaiian Islands and, ultimately, the South Pacific and beyond, with plans for a 7-year round-the-world voyage.
Jack publishes Before Adam, Love of Life and Other Stories, and The Road.
The *Snark* with great difficulty and uncertainty makes it to Hawaii, where Jack and Charmian become enamored of the land and the people. After 5 months exploring the islands, they continue their journey to the Marquesa Islands, the Society Islands, Samoa, Fiji Vanuatu (then New Hebrides), and the Solomon Islands.

1908

Jack is taken ill with malaria, yaws, and other tropical maladies and is forced to leave the *Snark* on the island of Guadalcanal in the Solomons after 20 months. He and Charmian take a steamer to Australia where Jack is hospitalized for 3 months.
Jack publishes The Iron Heel which is his indictment of capitalism.
The second and most famous version of the short story *To Build A Fire* - a story about a man freezing to death that Jack wrote in Hawaii - is published,

1909

Jack & Charmian reluctantly cancel the remainder of their planned worldwide journey due to Jack's health issues. After recovering in Sydney, Jack & Charmian return home via Ecuador, Panama, New Orleans & the Grand Canyon. The 2-year journey has come to an end but its literary output would continue unabated.
Jack sails the San Joaquin and Sacramento River deltas on the *Phyllis.*
Jack publishes the autobiographical Martin Eden.

1910

Jack's older stepsister, Eliza London Shepard, becomes the superintendent of Beauty Ranch. She will help manage most of his affairs for the rest of his life.
Jack and Charmian's daughter, Joy, is born - but dies 36 hours later.
Construction of Wolf House, a 16,000 sq ft 26-room stone and redwood mansion on Beauty Ranch, begins.
Jack reports on the Johnson-Jeffries world championship fight in Reno, Nevada.
Jack sails the San Joaquin River delta on the Roamer.
Jack visits friends at the artists' colony in Carmel.
Jack publishes Burning Daylight, Lost Face, Revolution and Other Essays, and Theft: A Play in Four Acts.

1911

Jack sails the San Francisco Bay on the *Roamer*.
Jack, Charmian, and valet Yoshimatsu Nakata take a vacation to Northern California & Oregon in a 4-horse wagon.
Jack consults with architect Albert Farr to discuss final plans for the Wolf House.
Jack and Charmian move into the small Ranch House on Beauty Ranch while Wolf House is being built.
Jack travels to New York City by rail.
Jack publishes The Cruise of the Snark, Adventure, South Sea Tales, and When God Laughs and Other Stories.

1912

Jack spends two months in New York City.
Jack and Charmian sail from Baltimore to Seattle on the Dirigo, rounding Cape Horn.
Charmian miscarries and learns she will be unable to have children.
Jack sails the San Joaquin and Sacramento River deltas on the Roamer.
Jack publishes The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii, A Son of the Sun, and Smoke Bellew.

1913
Neuadd Hillside, a prize-winning Shire stallion, arrives at Beauty Ranch.
Jack undergoes an appendectomy and receives a warning about his deteriorating kidney health, possibly due to mercury poisoning from the medication he took for yaws.
The Wolf House is destroyed by fire likely caused by spontaneous combustion, just 2 weeks before the Londons were to move in.
Jack takes solace cruising the Sacramento and San Joaquin River deltas aboard the Roamer.
The Londons attend the San Francisco premier of The Sea Wolf, the first feature-length film made in the U.S.A.
Jack publishes the autobiographical novel John Barleycorn about the trials of alcoholism, as well as The Valley of the Moon, The Night-Born, and The Abysmal Brute.
1914
Jack travels to Vera Cruz to report on the Mexican Revolution, contracting severe dysentery and pleurisy.
Jack returns to Glen Ellen to convalesce.
Jack publishes The Strength of the Strong and The Mutiny of the Elsinore.
1915
Jack attends the Winter Carnival in Truckee, CA in the Lake Tahoe area.
Jack suffers from acute rheumatism.
Jack visits the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.
Jack & Charmian spend five months in their beloved Hawaii.
Jack publishes The Star Rover and The Scarlet Plague.
1916
The Londons return to Hawaii for 6 months.
Jack attends the California State Fair in Sacramento.
Neuadd Hillside, Jack's prized stallion, dies.
Jack participates in a trial regarding water rights.
Jack resigns from the Socialist Party, primarily due to their opposition to World War I.
Jack experiences severe bouts of rheumatism with insomnia and failing kidneys.
November 22, 1916: Jack London, age 40, dies at 7:45 p.m. at Beauty Ranch. His death certificate lists the cause of death as "uremia following renal colic" and "contributory: chronic Interstitial nephritis". The extent to which his chronic alcoholism, morphine use in recent weeks, and/or his lifelong heavy smoking also contributed to his death are debated by medical forensicists.

Posthumous Publications
1916: The Acorn-Planter: A California Forest Play, The Little Lady of the Big House, and The Turtles of Tasman
1917: The Human Drift, Jerry of the Islands, Michael, Brother of Jerry, *The Red One*, *On the Makaloa Mat*
1920: Hearts of Three
1922: Dutch Courage and Other Stories
1923: Cherry (completed by Charmian London)
1963: The Assassination Bureau (completed by Robert L. Fish)

Charmian London would manage Jack's legacy and publish numerous works herself, including Our Hawaii and The Book of Jack London. She died in 1955 at age 84, surviving her beloved Jack by 39 years.