

KENTFIELD & ROSS

LIVING

Mary
Clifford Gilardi:
Memories of
Mid-Century
Marin



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Kentfield & Ross Neighbors,



Chet Klingensmith
Publisher

April is a beautiful time in Kentfield and Ross. The days are longer, spring is in full bloom, and there is a renewed energy in our neighborhoods as gardens brighten, events return, and families spend more time outside enjoying all that makes this area so special.

This month, I'd like to begin by recognizing Mary Clifford Gilardi, a beloved member of our community. Mary taught art to generations of Kentfield children over two decades and grew up in Kentfield herself, carrying many memories of Marin in the 1950s. She remains active with the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society and is also an accomplished artist whose botanical work has been included in the Mount Tamalpais Florilegium. Mary and her husband live in Kent Woodlands, and we are fortunate to have residents like her who help preserve both the creativity and history of this special place.

In Ross, important conversations continue around the future of the Ross Fire Station and Civic Center facilities. Recent Town reports provided further analysis of the material presented earlier this year by the Friends of the Ross Firehouse, noting that while it may be useful for advocacy and illustration, additional technical work is still needed around feasibility, cost, timeline, and permitting. Since then, a Citizens Advisory Committee has been meeting regularly to help address these issues, and we appreciate the residents who have stepped forward to participate in that process.

This year also marks the 100th anniversary of College of Marin, one of the great institutions in our backyard. For a century, COM has helped students launch careers, transfer to top universities, and strengthen the broader Marin community. Its continued investment in students and workforce development is something we can all celebrate.

Spring also brings a full community calendar. The Ross Property Owners Association continues its efforts to support downtown Ross, and local events like Spring Fling, Live on the Common, the Ross Spring Dinner, and the Garden Walk offer wonderful opportunities for neighbors to gather and connect.

Thank you, as always, for reading and for supporting the local people, businesses, and organizations that make Kentfield and Ross such extraordinary places to call home.

Chet, Publisher
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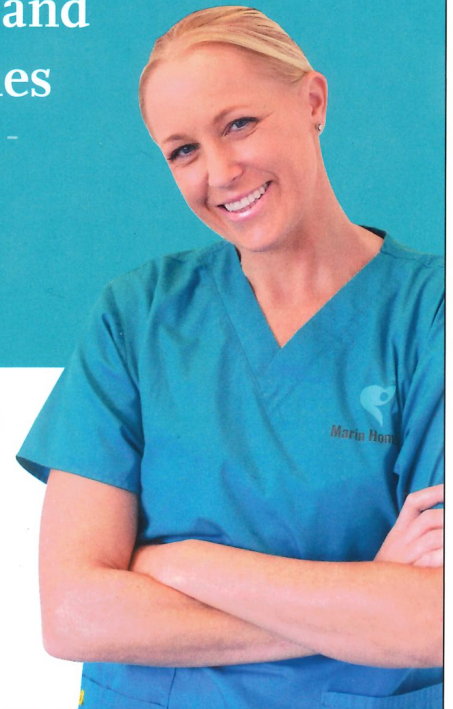
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Mary Clifford Gilardi: Memories of Mid-Century Marin

By Ann Peckenpaugh Becker | Photos by Laura Kudritzki Photography

Mary Clifford Gilardi, the Art Teacher who taught two decades of Kentfield children, grew up in Kentfield and has many memories of Marin in the 1950's. She's an active member of the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society. She's also an artist whose botanical images are included in the Mount Tamalpais Florilegium. Mary and her husband live in Kent Woodlands.

You've said that when you were little, the intersection of Highway 101 and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard had only stop signs. No traffic lights, no highway overpass.

Yes, Marin County in the 1950's was very different! My family moved to Kentfield from San Francisco in 1948. I'm a 5th generation San Franciscan on my mother's side. On my father's side, his parents were born in Ireland. I'm the second-oldest of ten children. We lived on Altamira Court. In the historical society book, that area is called Alta Mira Park.

What book is that?

It's the Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society's book, *In the Heart of Marin: The History of Kentfield and Greenbrae, California*. It chronicles the history of these two Marin County Communities. One is old and the

other new, and they are bound together by a common school district, and each host important county institutions — including Marin Health, The College of Marin, and a major medical center.

The book contains information and stories from personal interviews about Kentfield's earliest years, its land and the people up to the present time. It tells of Greenbrae's early existence of hilly pastures dotted with dairy cows and oaks and how it became a thriving community.

What was it like to grow up here in the 1950's?

We roamed and rode our bikes all over. Sir Francis Drake was only a two lane road and not as busy as now. We would slide down the hill near our house on cardboard boxes, build forts, and have buckeye fights. We would hike up our side of the hill and hike down on the Dominican Priory side to Laurel Grove. In those days that hill was covered with trees, not houses.

We would ride bikes to Phoenix Lake or the Corte Madera Creek to catch Pollywogs. The creek wasn't lined with concrete yet. We knew it was time to go home when the 5:00 horn blew at the Fire House or when my mother blew her whistle.



We took swim lessons at Paul Daly's Swim Club on Magnolia. In those days, everyone would leave their bikes on the grass, not locked up, to spend the day swimming. Later, Paul Daly's moved closer to Marin General Hospital and they added tennis in the 1970's. It has since become the Bay Club Ross Valley.

Describe Kentfield in those days.

Kentfield was a thriving town during the 50's and 60's. You could find almost anything you wanted without leaving town.

At the intersection of College Avenue and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, which is what we called "Kentfield Corners," there were two gas stations. One was the Flying A, owned by the Berthinier's, with attendants in white jackets and little hats. That was located where Taqueria also once was. On the opposite corner, there was a soda fountain called Caesar's. My father liked their Root Beer Floats. And there was a drug store. I bought my first Brownie camera there, after saving up my babysitting money. It was \$12.50. There was a bakery and a Five and Dime store close to the drug store on SFDB. They sold little live turtles at the Five and Dime.

The Kentfield firehouse was almost exactly where it is now. On the east side was a gas station and on the west there was a library and the Ross Valley Dress Shop. That's where I got my dress for the Senior Ball.

We also had two grocery stores, College Market and Guascos. Guascos was where the Guesthouse restaurant is now. My mother had food delivered to our house almost every day from the College Market which was located next to Berthinier's Flying A and of course the Milk Man came almost every day to our house.

Mr. Thiercof's stationary store, Mullers Hardware, and an automotive repair shop where Half Day Café is now were all on College Avenue. Just over the bridge on the creek was the Eat&Run drive-in that served hamburgers with a special sauce.

What were you like as a child?

I liked to be busy. I'd always have something going on. I liked arts and crafts and making things. And I did have a lot of younger brothers and sisters so I was often busy doing things with them. I especially liked to play teacher with them.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Kent School for Kindergarten. Kent was K-8 at that time. From there I went to St. Anselm School in San Anselmo. I took the school bus and our Driver was also a Ross Policeman.

I went to Marin Catholic for high school. My class, the class of '64, was a really good class and I've stayed in touch with many. I met my husband at MC. We went to the Senior Ball together.

From there, I went to College of Marin, which is what so many of us did back then. In addition to our classes, there were a lot of fun activities. I was a football songleader. There were rallies every week and they brought in groups like Jefferson Airplane and Peter Paul and Mary.

After my two years at COM, I went to Lone Mountain College (San Francisco College for Women). It's now part of the University of San Francisco. I was an Art Major with a History minor and my goal was to be a Teacher. I got my teaching credential through Dominican College.

When did you start teaching?

My first teaching job was in 1968. I had been married for about two weeks when I started teaching at Blessed Sacrament School in San Rafael. I was assigned a fourth grade class with 57 students. I made arrangements with another teacher to teach my class Music in exchange for me teaching her class Art. I taught there for four years while my husband attended law school. Then I stopped working for a while to have a family.

Tell us about your family.

My husband is Richard Gilardi and we've been married 57 years. We have three children and they all live close by. Our oldest is Megan. She and her husband Tom Harvey have two children, Piper, who is a Junior at UC Boulder, and Thomas who is a senior at Redwood. Megan is a Travel Advisor with Megan Harvey Travel. Our second child is Matt. He is a plumber who lives in Fairfax. Our youngest is Molly. She is an Attorney who lives in Corte Madera.

When did you return to teaching?

In 1987, I was hired to be the first Art Teacher at Bacich Elementary School. But before that, I volunteered for many years, beginning at Ross School.

My husband and I bought our first home in 1976. It was on Glenwood Avenue in Ross. Megan and Matt attended Ross School and I became active helping the Art Teacher, Molly Mangan, in her classroom coordinating volunteers and occasionally substitute-teaching for her.

When we moved to Kentfield in 1984, I volunteered in the Kentfield schools, starting as an "Art for Bears" volunteer at Bacich Elementary School.



Tell our readers about Art for Bears.

Art for Bears was a volunteer program started by Moms to bring art into the classroom. I quickly became one of the volunteer coordinator's of the program. As the coordinator, we met with the volunteers and gave them information and supplies for projects to be done in the classroom.

Art for Bears received the Golden Bell Award in 1987. It's an award given by the Marin County School Board Association intended to recognize exemplary education programs in Marin County and the individuals who make them possible.

Describe your Art Room in those days.

Even though I was the Art Teacher, I didn't always have a classroom. Some years I pushed carts loaded with art supplies all over the campus.

When was your new Art Room at Bacich built?

The construction for the new Library, Computer room and Art Room was completed in time for the 2019-2020 school year.

Bob Caine, the Superintendent, let me work with the Architect on the design. I wanted a lot more windows, a second sink, higher counter space for me to work on which would also allow for more cabinet space below, and a second entrance/exit door. This addition led to the building of a deck off the Art room and the Library. The result was a wonderful light-filled room.

I remember that you offered parents lots of opportunities to help.

When I was hired as the Art Teacher, I wanted to continue to use the many parent volunteers to assist me in the classroom. I continued calling it "Art for Bears."

I also started "Artist of the Month," which was a way to get even more art into the school. In this program, we introduced students to major works of art and helped them to begin to understand basic artistic principles. The program also helped the students to recognize the artists by their style and techniques and see the artists as real people.

I trained parent volunteers to go into the classroom and give presentations about artists, their lives and their work and then have an art activity pertaining to the work of the particular artist. We had a cart of supplies for the volunteers to take into the classrooms.

"Artist of the Month" began in 1992 with a group of about 45 parent volunteers and by 2002 we had expanded to over 150 volunteers. The program received a Golden Bell Award in 2002.

This sounds like a dream job.

I taught at Bacich for 20 years and I loved my job. The administration allowed me to create my own schedule which allowed me to work on special projects with classes and grade levels. It was a dream job but a lot of work too.

But you eventually did retire.

I retired after twenty years at Bacich. But as soon as I retired, I was helping in my granddaughter's preschool classroom and then followed her to Neil Cummins, in Corte Madera. I worked in both of my grandchildren's classrooms there, until they went on to middle school. I also substituted occasionally for the new Art Teacher, Barbara Libby-Steinmann, at Bacich.

What else does an Art Teacher do in retirement?

I take art classes, I paint, and I travel. I studied oil painting at College of Marin. Then I received a Botanical Art Certificate at Filoli in Woodside in 2013. That certification required work in watercolor, colored pencil, pen and ink, graphite, and the science of botany. My final project consists of five botanical watercolor rose paintings.

I also belong to a group of painters called "PaintingV" which meets every Friday to paint all day in a classroom at COM's Indian Valley campus in Novato. This would not have happened without the wonderful help of Jonathan Eldridge the President of COM who listened to our needs and helped with solutions. Jonathan truly works with the community.

I belong to the Marin Watercolor Society, The American Society of Botanical Artists and the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Botanical Artists (NCalSBA). I have paintings in two NCalSBA Florilegiums – Alcatraz 2017 and The Mt Tamalpais Florilegium which is ongoing and has been exhibited at the Marin Art and Garden Center and College of Marin.

What is a florilegium?

A florilegium is a collection of botanically accurate plant portraits documenting a sampling of the flora growing in a specific area. The Alcatraz Florilegium represents plants on Alcatraz. We were taken there on the employee boat and all the sample cuttings were made by the rangers. I have two paintings in the Alcatraz florilegium and I have five paintings in the Mount Tamalpais florilegium.

Tell us about the Mount Tamalpais florilegium.

That florilegium documents a large sampling of the more than 1,200 native plants growing in the Mt. Tam watershed, including some of its rare and special status species. I'm one of the program managers of the ongoing project.

What does the Marin County Watercolor Society do?

We gather to paint and sketch, including plein air painting, which is painting outdoors, capturing the light and colors as they are in that moment, rather than from memory or a photo in the studio. We also have occasional indoor workshops, outings to museums and art studios, a yearly "paint away" in Pacific Grove, and exhibits in various venues throughout the County.

Please tell our readers about your documentary about the landscape painter who captured Marin in the 1930's –1960's.

Rebecca Sylla and I collaborated on a documentary, "Visions of Marin, George Demont Otis, American Impressionist," which I wrote and narrated and Rebecca put it all together in a beautiful video production with photos, music and interviews. We were also able to have a wonderful exhibit of Otis's work at the College of Marin Gallery in 2016.

Otis painted plein air scenes all over Marin County for 30 years. He and his wife Clara built a home in Kentfield in 1932 at 907 Sir Francis Drake Blvd. on the banks of the Corte Madera Creek. The home was unfortunately torn down in 1967 due to the widening of SFDB and the channelization of the creek.


Otis was an American Impressionist Painter, famous for his landscapes that now act as historical documents showing us what Marin County was like many years ago. Two of his paintings were displayed at the White house commemorating the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and are now in Presidential Libraries.

Watching that documentary is like stepping into a "time machine" and going back to Marin County in the 1930's, '40's, and '50's.

Yes, his paintings of early Marin capture what this area was once like. It's available to see on Vimeo.

You're also active in the Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society.

KGHS is an all-volunteer non-profit dedicated to seeking, preserving, and sharing the unique history of Kentfield and Greenbrae and the surrounding areas. We're funded entirely through donations, memberships and partnerships. We sponsor lectures, exhibits, classroom programs and community events featuring our collection

Laura Kudritzki 
PHOTOGRAPHER + DIRECTOR

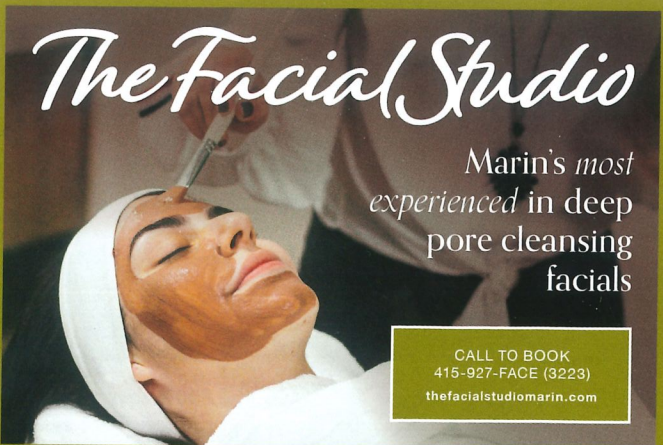
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KGHS holds an annual community celebration every May, in partnership with Bon Air Center. It brings together more than forty local groups who provide information about their organizations. The event includes traditional Maypole dancing, performances by student musicians from local schools, fire trucks, food and prizes. This year it will be held on Saturday May 16th.

Thanks to the generosity of Andrea Schultz and the Bon Air Center, we had a gallery space at the Bon Air Center for many years, where we displayed/housed our pictures and archives and held gatherings. Due to full center occupancy now, we no longer have that space. We are still offering events and programs to the public. Our e-mail list is the best way to stay informed. Sign up at www.KGHS.org

In addition to In the Heart of Marin, which I mentioned earlier, KGHS has also published a book of oral histories and a book of historical reflections.

My first emphasis was to work on research interviews for In The Heart of Marin. When I was asked to find the art for the cover of the book, that led to discovering the artist George Demont Otis. His painting "Tamalpais-Kent Estate" graces the cover.

We're currently working with Jonathan Eldridge, the President of COM, on several events for the College's Centennial year. We held an event in September in which we unveiled an 1871 painting by the artist Joseph Lee. Titled "Ross Landing," the painting depicts Kentfield and its surrounding landscape with incredible accuracy.

The painting is on loan from KGHS to the college and hangs in the administrative center for all to see. Dewey Livingston has created an informative map of the "then" and "now" to help viewers orient themselves.

We hope to one day have a museum on the Kentfield campus of College of Marin to house and display artifacts from our collection and those of the college to be enjoyed by everyone.

My final question: What do you like best about living here?

I can't imagine living anywhere else. We've travelled all over the world and it's always wonderful to come home. It's just the most beautiful place there is. It has absolutely everything – the weather, the beauty of the mountain. I've always had a view of Mt. Tam and I love it.

For more information about the Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society book, In the Heart of Marin, and their other books, visit: www.kghs.org/bookstore

For more information about organizations Mary mentioned:

The Mount Tamalpais Florilegium:
maringarden.org/mt-tam-florilegium/

The Northern California Chapter of the Society of Botanical Artists: www.asba-art.org

The Marin County Watercolor Society:
marincountywatercolorssociety.com/about-mcws/

The American Society of Botanical Artists and the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Botanical Artists. www.asba-art.org

To watch the documentary on George Demont Otis and see his landscape paintings of Marin County in the 1930's-1950's:
vimeo.com/188102799

To see more of Mary's paintings:
marycgilardpaintings.blogspot.com



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