

LANDMARKS ART & GARDEN CENTER: A HISTORIC COTTAGE & ITS GARDENS

By Dave Gotz & Susan Cluff

Few people know the history of the Landmarks Art & Garden Center on Tiburon Boulevard with its charming gray cottage and beautiful terraced gardens. Unlike our other Landmarks historic sites, its story has had to be patch-worked together from old maps and pictures, oral histories, architectural and structural evidence. As one of the oldest buildings on the Tiburon Peninsula, circa 1870, it was given to Landmarks to preserve in 1994.

The tiny cottage was originally built as a bunk house for brickyard workers, part of the small rural community known as Hilarita named after Hilarita Reed Lyford who inherited part of the El Rancho Corte de Madera del Presidio. She and her husband owned several dairies on the Peninsula and a brickyard where workers scraped clay from the mudflats to mold into bricks that were fired and cooked slowly in kilns. When the railroad came to Tiburon in 1884, trains stopped at Hilarita station to pick up passengers, dairy products and bricks to deliver to the North Bay and onto ferries bound for San Francisco.

After the kilns stopped operating, the Reed heirs used the building to house dairy workers. In 1944, commercial artist William Newman and his wife Helen, an ardent conservationist, purchased the cottage and an acre or so of land which included "a collection of rabbit hutches, chicken coops, storage sheds and other cubicles of unknown ancestry." To turn it into a snug, comfortable home, they roofed over the area between the house and one of the sheds, knocked out partitions, painted and wallpapered the rooms, and updated the existing kitchen, converting the antique wood stove to gas and saving the simple wood cabinets and drawers.

The Newmans then created a beautiful country garden, using a 1946 plan created by noted landscape architect and botanist Leland Noel. William did much of the rock terrace work himself, laying some 8,000 bricks for the walks and patios. Helen placed every seed, plant and rose bush. High above the railroad tracks with gorgeous views of Richardson Bay and across to Mount Tamalpais, it soon became a showplace featured in garden tours and magazines.

Before she died, Helen bequeathed the property to the Landmarks Society "to be preserved, maintained, improved, and operated in perpetuity as a botanical and historical landmark and as a community art and garden center." The Society restored the rustic farm cottage making it structurally sound. Master gardeners and volunteers put in hundreds of hours to revitalize and replace the garden plantings, local residents contributed used bricks for additional terraces and pathways, and the Center opened in April 2002.

Today, the picturesque Art & Garden Center hosts art and garden classes, art shows, gardening lectures, and is a popular spot for weddings and private parties. Volunteers still work in Helen's gardens, and restoration, as you might expect with a 121-year-old farmhouse cottage, is ongoing.



Help Landmarks Society preserve our local history and keep it accessible for the community and visitors. To become a member, or volunteer, visit our website at www.landmarkssociety.org or call 415-435-1853. "The Tradition Starts With You!"

1. Bill and Helen Newman's comfortable cottage in the late 1940s.

2. After more than a decade of work, the Newmans had created a beautiful garden to surround their cottage seen here in 1960.



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