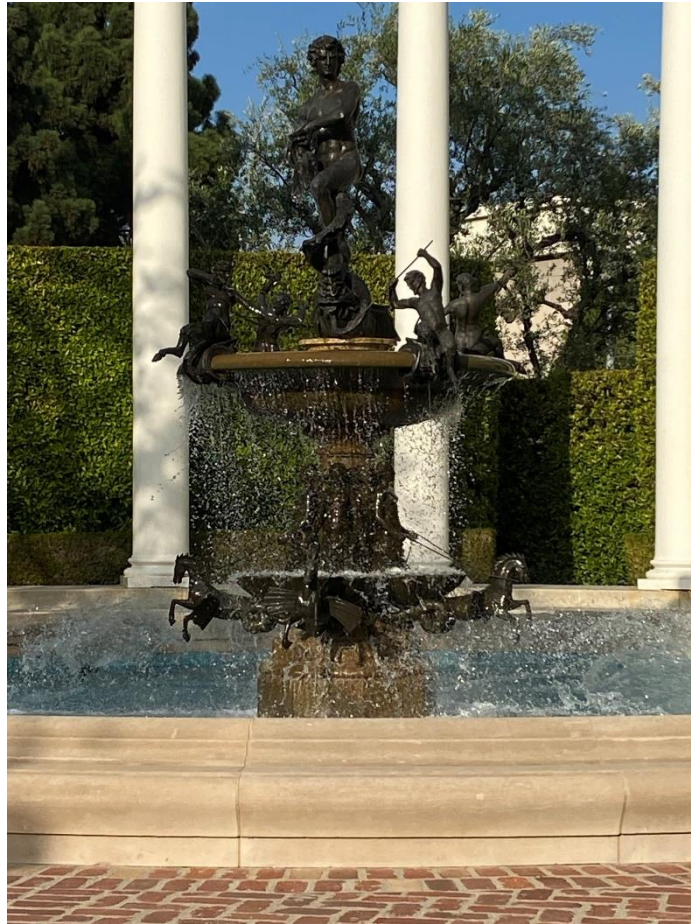


Four Lives of a Fountain

By Fran Cappelletti, Ross Historical Society/Jose Moya del Pino Library

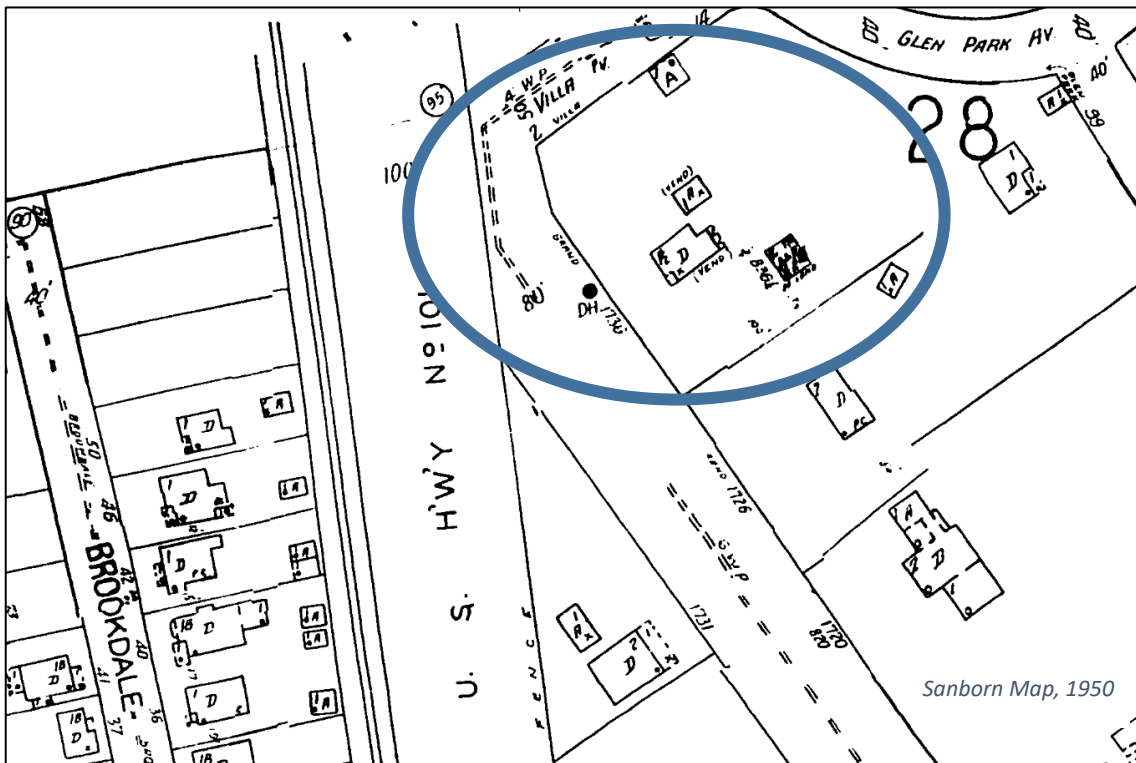
At the Marin Art and Garden Center, there are a number of interesting buildings and monuments to visit. From the 1864 Octagon House and Barn to the mid-century Art and Garden Fair buildings, they are significant enough to be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places. But this story is about one Center landmark present for just a few years, long ago. An Italian fountain, its history spans more than a century, with travels East to West and North to South.



Not Your Typical Souvenir

In June of 1960, the Independent Journal of San Rafael interviewed the owners of the fountain. According to them, it was purchased in 1929 by the Klopstock family of San Rafael during a trip to Florence, Italy. Made of marble and bronze, it was notable for its combination of creatures and figures, including satyrs, mermaids and heroic figure, perhaps Adonis or Ulysses, at the top. An unofficial estimate they gathered from the DeYoung Museum dated the fountain to 1850. After paying \$18,000 to purchase and ship it to California, the fountain resided in the gardens of the Klopstock home on Grand Avenue for many years. Decades later, Highway 101 was planned and built through the gardens, sparing the fountain by a matter of feet.

While records proving the age and origin of the fountain are not available and remain a mystery, the Klopstocks did travel abroad and a comparison of Sanborn maps from 1924 and 1950 show the subtle changes in the property as the freeway encroached through established neighborhoods and their property.



After Mrs. Klopstock passed away, the property changed hands, and the fountain was sold to Dr. and Mrs. Phillip Corin. Dr. Corin was a dentist and avid collector of art.¹ Mrs. Corin was the daughter of Abe Blumenfeld, well known in the community for running several theaters in San Francisco and Marin County along with serving as first president of the Jewish Community Center in San Rafael.² With future plans for their fountain, the Corins sought a temporary home for it.

A Short Loan Becomes a Long Stay

If you visit the Marin Art and Garden Center in Ross, California today, you will find attractive gardens and landscapes. Following the path to the Octagon House, you will observe the large reflecting pool dedicated to Gladys Smith, one of the Center's founders.



This was once the location of the house of Annie Worn, daughter of James Ross and wife of George Worn. Later owned and enlarged by the Kittles, who moved from San Francisco's Rincon Hill, the house remained the center of a multi-acre estate until a fire in 1931. The Kittles did not rebuild and the property lay vacant for over a decade. By 1945 when the Marin Art and Garden Center was founded, the pool area was simply flat, unimproved ground, hosting temporary structures for the annual Art and Garden Fairs from the late 1940s through the 1950s. This event also became the County Fair and continued in Ross through 1970.³

¹ "A Fountain For The Fair", Independent-Journal, June 25, 1960, M6

² "Abe Blumenfeld – A Movie Impresario", Independent-Journal, November 24, 1962, 9.

³ For more on the history of the Center, see the National Register nomination document at https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1067/files/CA_Marin%20County_Marin%20Art%20and%20Garden%20Center_DRAFT.pdf.

In preparation for the 1960 Fair, Dr. and Mrs. Phillip Corin loaned the fountain to the Center to be installed on the site. In short order, a small pool was constructed to welcome the temporary visitor.



While the fountain was only intended to be present for the 1960 Fair, it remained for several years and was notable enough to be featured in local marketing efforts.



Photo of Fountain at the Center from Marvelous Marin

The fountain even made the cover of the 1966 Marin County Telephone Directory.



Cover photo of the 1966 Pacific Telephone Directory for Marin County

The stay ended in 1967 when the Corins announced the sale of the fountain to Litton Industries of Beverly Hills.⁴ With the fountain removed, the pool remained until enlarged in the mid-1970s.

From County Fair to Beverly Hills

Litton was renovating and expanding their new headquarters on the campus of the former Music Corporation of America (MCA) at 360 North Crescent Drive, originally designed and later updated by famed architect Paul R. Williams.⁵ On September 21, 2021, the Beverly Hills City Council unanimously voted to designate the site as a local Landmark in their Local Register of Historic Properties⁶.

⁴ "Off to Beverly Hills, Graceful Fountain Leaving Marin Art, Garden Center", Independent-Journal, September 13, 1967, 1.

⁵ Williams had a long and successful career with projects ranging from small, affordable homes to the residences of notable entertainers to large commercial buildings. As a pioneering African American architect, he faced racism throughout his life, but established himself as an honored architect during his life and after. A history of the headquarters is hosted by the Paul Revere Williams Project at <http://www.paulwilliamsproject.org/gallery/1930s-office-buildings/>

⁶ See full list, including Litton/MCA, number 44, at <http://www.beverlyhills.org/departments/communitydevelopment/historicpreservation/localregisterofhistoricproperties/>

Specifically, a 2020 Beverly Hills Cultural Heritage Commission Report and Landmark Assessment Report detailed the eligibility of the buildings and grounds for Landmark status. As described in the report,

The formal sculpted gardens were created by the noted landscape architectural firm of Phil Shipley and Associates which helped in creating the campus-like grounds that reinforced the residential feel of the architecture, even though the main building contained over 30 offices, a radio station, and projection room.

MCA later sold their Hollywood complex to Litton Industries in 1964. Tex Thornton, President of Litton, hired Paul Williams to design a second, larger three-story building and parking structure in keeping with his original design intent for the MCA campus. A courtyard and central fountain were added to the property by Phil Shipley, the original Landscape Architect.⁷

Shipley had a long, successful career in Southern California. While he grew up in Ventura County, Shipley was also a 1933 graduate of the University of California, Berkeley. While it is unclear how the fountain was discovered in Marin for the MCA/Litton Headquarter project, Shipley did have a history of working on other projects with Thomas Church, who had a long history of projects in Ross, including early work at the Marin Art and Garden Center. A notable collaboration from 1970 is the Singleton Estate in Los Angeles, involving Church, Shipley and architect Wallace Neff.⁸

In 1987, a Los Angeles Times travel column recommended a visit to the Fountain, also noting that the adjoining colonnade came from William Randolph Hearst's Ocean House on Santa Monica's Gold Coast.⁹

Open to the public, the site remains accessible to the public and in fine condition, settled in place for over half a century. If you visit, you will likely find workers on lunch breaks and wedding parties taking photos with the fountain in the background. At other times you will have this long-lasting fountain to yourself.

The Fountain in Beverly Hills, Fran Cappelletti



⁷ Architectural Resources Group, "MCA/Litton Headquarters Complex Landmark Assessment Report," March 11, 2020, 3, included as part of the Cultural Heritage Commission Report, City of Beverly Hills Planning Division, June 18, 2020 at https://beverlyhills.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=4876&meta_id=431111.

⁸ As noted by the College of Environmental Design Archives of UC Berkeley, Thomas "Tommy" Dolliver Church is credited as the creator of the "modern California garden." His prolific career is documented in their archives at <https://archives.ced.berkeley.edu/collections/church-thomas>. Wallace Neff designed houses and public buildings in Southern California for over five decades. His archive is at the Huntington Library, <https://researchguides.huntington.org/arch/architect#neff>. For more on the Singleton project, see <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/singleton-estate>

⁹ "Taking a Sweetheart of a Stroll in Beverly Hills", Robert Pierson, Los Angeles Times, February 7, 1987, D2. Note that the article dates placement of the colonnade to 1964, predating the documented move of the fountain in 1967.