

Homestead Valley's Rich Art Heritage Part One of Two

By Suz Lipman

Homestead Valley is just one of Mill Valley's many distinct neighborhoods. Tucked between Miller Avenue and GGNRA lands, it is home to roughly 1,100 houses, a community center, and an extremely rich history of artists and contributors to Mill Valley's artistic life.

Homestead's famous past residents include Beat generation writer Jack Kerouac and (Beat and current) poet Gary Snyder, both of whom lived in a cabin above Montford Avenue, bordering the current Pixie Trail. Snyder, a Buddhist, dubbed the site Marin-An. Kerouac lived there in 1956 and the three-day going-away party when Snyder departed for a Japanese monastery is described in Kerouac's book, "The Dharma Bums". Another Kerouac title, "The Scripture of the Golden Eternity", is said to have been written largely at Marin-An.

Pulitzer-prize-winning playwright Sam Shepard also lived in Homestead, at 33 Evergreen Avenue, with then-wife O-Lan Jones and son Jesse. He lived there from 1977 to 1983, when some of his most distinct plays ("Buried Child", "Curse of the Starving Class", "True West", and "Fool for Love") were written and produced.

Jazz singer and songwriter Jon Hendricks lived in Homestead in the early 1970s. Dubbed "The James Joyce of Jive" by Time Magazine, he is famous for his "vocalese" technique, adding lyrics and other voice riffs to jazz instrumentals. Hendricks accompanied and influenced many top musicians and was in the trio Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. He also taught at local universities and was jazz critic for the San Francisco Chronicle.

Jazz pianist Dick Fregulia currently lives in Homestead. He has performed in various San Francisco restaurants and clubs since the late 1950's, as a soloist, sideman, accompanist, and leader of his own jazz combos. A retired Tam High English and journalism teacher, he has also composed for films and produced his own and others' recordings.

The Community Center's Executive Director Les Lizama is a multi-faceted artist as well. He has worked as a bassist, vocalist and writing collaborator with Link Wray, John Cipollina, Eddie Money, and others, and now performs with the Bay Area group Don Forbes and Reckless. He is the long-time Resident Lighting Designer for the Ross Valley Players. Les also serves on the Board of Mill Valley's

O'Hanlon Center for the Arts. Another local musician, Jan MacNichols, plays French Horn with the Las Gallinas Sanitary District Band.

Another Homestead figure is filmmaker and photographer Phil Greene, who taught at the San Francisco Art Institute after apprenticing with Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange. Phil's films about artists and writers include one about Ansel Adams called "California Dreaming". He offered novelist Louis B. Jones ("Particles and Luck" and "California's Over") a room in his home to complete his work. Phil and his wife Cappy, who died in 2002, were also very involved within the community. Another local photographer, Paul McKown, has had work published in many outdoor and travel magazines.

Abstract painter Frank Bacher, 87, has also lived in Homestead for some time. He has exhibited his paintings around the world, from the Guggenheim Museum in New York to the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival. Bacher is also a renowned printmaker and (in another connection to the Beats) created the silkscreen art for many of Beat poet Kenneth Patchen's 1st edition books.

Homestead is home to three animation professionals. Eileen O'Neill is a lighting design specialist for Pixar Films who most recently worked on "Wall-E." George Evelyn directs Disney Channel's "Higglytown Heroes" and was an animator for the 1983 John Korty movie, "Twice Upon a Time", which was created in a house at 200 Miller Avenue (which is not in Homestead Valley.) The movie's producer was George Lucas, who lived in Homestead from 1970 to 1973 with wife Marcia. Their house at 958 Vernal Avenue had an office and a small editing room in the attic. Lucas shot 1970's "THX 1138" and 1973's "American Graffiti" in various Marin and Sonoma locations, including the Tam High Boys Gym. Another local animator, Lippy, has created short films for Nickelodeon Networks, among others. He curated a recent outdoor film series in Homestead called "Movies in the Meadow".

One of Homestead's younger artists is 19-year-old dancer Graham Maverick, who was recently selected to apprentice with the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago. Graham, who studied at the San Francisco Ballet School, grew up on the site of Gary Snyder's Marin-An. Graham's mom Deborah also performed ballet professionally and now teaches. His dad Maverick is an essential local open space caretaker and a bluegrass musician.

Most people probably don't know that the Marin Theatre Company also started in Homestead -- in Brown's Hall, Homestead's first community center, now the site of the Buddhist Temple of Marin at 390 Miller Avenue. (The property was annexed to the city of Mill Valley in 1947.) In 1960, after the building fell into disrepair and was in danger of being sold, a group of neighbors led by Jo

Schlesinger saved and refurbished their community center building, and then produced at least one fundraising event each month. These included plays, lectures, art shows, concerts, and dances.

Actor and social activist Will Geer (perhaps best known from TV's "The Waltons") performed morality plays and later his famous Mark Twain monologue at Brown's Hall. Local actors formed a company called The Homestead Players. One member, Sali Lieberman, led the effort to create the Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts in 1966, which performed plays at the Mill Valley Golf Clubhouse. The group changed its name in 1984 to Marin Theatre Company, and began constructing its current building at 397 Miller Avenue, which includes the 99-seat Sali Lieberman Theatre.

In 1973, Homestead neighbors again rallied to create a community center at 315 Montford Avenue, where traditions like the winter Candlelight Concerts continued until 1978. An outdoor Labor Day Music Festival began in 1962 and continues to this day. Other Homestead Center events, past and present, include indoor and outdoor movies, Medieval banquets, Oktoberfests, community holiday gatherings, book clubs, quilting groups, yoga classes, and more.

More Homestead Valley artists will be featured in Part Two of this article next month. Much of the historical material was supplied by Chuck Oldenburg. His articles on Homestead history can be found at <http://www.millvalleyhistoricalsociety.org/history-of-homestead-valley.html>. If you wish to contribute an article about your neighborhood's art heritage or other local artists, please contact Suz Lipman at sooz@well.com. "Arts in Mind" is a series from Kiddo! that explores arts and arts education.