

### About the Artist

Marion Abbott Gunderson has lived near Rolfe, Iowa, since 1945 when she and her husband Deane moved to a Pocahontas County farm three miles from the Gunderson homeplace where Deane's parents lived. Deane and Marion have six adult children who are fourth-generation Iowans. Marion grew up in Ogden, Utah. However, her family's history in the Marshalltown area predates the Gunderson lineage in Iowa.

Marion's mother, Helen Loomis, was the daughter of a railroad dispatcher in Sioux



Marion Abbott Gunderson, 1941.

City. Helen was valedictorian of her class and went to Iowa State College where she met Jim Abbott from Utah. The two married and lived in Utah, where he was a chemist for a mining company, then worked in the family wholesale hardware business.

As a teenager, Marion dreamed of going to an art school such as the Chicago Institute of Art; however, her parents talked her into enrolling someplace more "practical." That was Iowa State where Helen and Jim had met and Marion would major in applied art and meet Deane.

After graduating in 1939, Deane moved to Waterloo where he worked for John Deere Tractor Company. In 1941, after Marion's graduation, the couple married and made their home in Waterloo. Later they and their three children moved to the farm southwest of Rolfe.

Marion speaks of her early interest in art:

I became interested in art when I was a young child. It was during the Depression years, and I was thrilled to get a new box of crayons. One day the babysitter and I searched the house for enough money to buy a new box. Another vivid memory is of the time when my mother and I rode the train from Ogden to Sioux City, probably a two- or three-day trip. I had a new box of crayons and a new coloring book. Nothing could have pleased me more.

During junior and senior high, Marion was always able to schedule art classes. She says she learned most of the basics from her high school teacher, LeConte Stewart, who was a renowned artist.

When she enrolled at Iowa State, Marion was already in tune with much of what was being taught in the art classes. In those days, the art program was part of the College of Home Economics, and the art majors took all the courses — chemistry, nutrition, home management, etc. — that were required of other home economics students.

While at Iowa State, Marion had the fortune to study under the university's beloved sculptor, Christian Petersen. She remembers, "I was not very successful but got an A in the class because he expected all of us to do our best work, and we did the best we could do."

Regarding her vision for life after graduation, Marion says:

I don't know what I thought I would or could do with an applied art degree when I was out of college. Fortunately I didn't have to make that decision. For the most part, my painting and art pursuits have been purely for my own entertainment.

She also had the opportunity to study art during her early years in the Rolfe area. She acknowledges that the person who

influenced her the most as a watercolorist was Cathrine Barr, a professional artist and watercolorist from Connecticut who spent summers visiting relatives and giving watercolor lessons in Rolfe. Marion says,

I learned almost everything I know about watercolors from Cathrine. Her classes were about six-weeks long and often on location. At one time, she had 50 or more students from Rolfe and surrounding areas.

During those years, I was a mother of six children but found time to paint and did most of my solo painting at night. I especially loved to paint floral scenes but found still life items as well as buildings and landscapes that interested me.

Cathrine's classes evolved into the Barr Art Association. The students I remember most from those days are Darlene Brinkman and Lena Vaughn from Rolfe and Percy VanAlstine from Gilmore City.

Marion exhibited her paintings with the Fort Dodge Art Guild, with Darlene

Brinkman at the Mason City Public Library, at the Memorial Union at Iowa State University, and at other galleries. Marion has also enjoyed other media such as batik, acrylic painting, and crewel stitchery. She continues to paint occasionally with one of her daughters, Martha, during her visits at the Gunderson farm.

When the popular movie *The Music Man* was released in 1962, Marion saw it and was impressed with the spunky love song that the smooth-talking traveling salesman, Professor Harold Hill, sang to the River City librarian, Marian Paroo. She thought to herself, "Mmm, Marion the Librarian – why not." A vacancy opened at the Rolfe Public Library in 1963, and Marion Gunderson began working as an assistant to the head librarian Flossie DeVaul. Marion continued at the library and was the director until she retired in 1998. She claims she loved every minute she devoted to the library. She also has personalized license plates on her car that say "LIBRARY."

Marion provided the impetus, through a financial gift and vision for a new library, to the fund-raising drive for Rolfe's new community center. Construction began in January 2003. The building is designed to house a library, city offices, and a large

meeting room. Marion has also been an ardent genealogist and developed a substantial archive of local history materials at the library.



Marion Abbott Gunderson, 1998.

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