

A Look Back at Our Beginnings

The Lake Street Studio Years

1989 – 1999 (Installment One)

Changes and celebrations abounded in early 2018. As our Winter/Spring 2018 newsletter announced, we are now known as the Glen Arbor Arts Center, a fitting new name reflecting that we are more than an association; we are a destination for artists and art lovers alike—a place for the community to gather for arts-related education and creative experiences. Our new mission statement emphasizes our focus on community, and our lively new logo draws inspiration from our woodland setting in the heart of Glen Arbor. We also moved into our newly renovated facility, which doubled our space, allowing for more events, classes, concerts, lectures, and exhibits year round.

As we celebrate the many changes the art center has undergone, it is important that we take time to remember and to celebrate our beginnings—the visions and traditions our dedicated founders brought to the Art Association. And so, in this first installment of our history, we take a look back at the formative years.

It was summer 1983, when Becky Thatcher called Ananda Bricker and suggested they plan a potluck dinner at the Bricker homestead on Little Glen. They invited all the artists they knew. Becky recalled that “the evening was magical—on the lake and under the stars.” Midge Obata was also there. She knew then and there that she wanted to live in Glen Arbor full time. Midge hosted the potluck picnic the following year.

This group of artists began meeting informally every Tuesday morning at the Soda Shop, now the Western Avenue Grill. According to Ananda, they “ate, gossiped, and talked about how to market their art.” The first Studio Tour was in 1984—five “studios” opened with several artists exhibiting at each location. The Glen Lake Artists Cooperative also grew out of this group of artists. The artists initially operated a gallery at the Homestead Resort during the summer and fall months and then moved to a more permanent location in the Arbor Light building. This was the first art gallery in Glen Arbor.

This group continued to meet for breakfasts, eventually adding dinners at Art's Tavern in the winters. Then, in 1987, Midge got a call from a local realtor about the Wescott property located on Lake Street that was about to go on the market. It included an old, run-down garage. Midge called Ananda and Suzanne Wilson, who purchased the garage and two lots, while Midge purchased the adjacent property, which included a small frame home and a dilapidated shack. Lake Street wasn't what it is today. As long-time board member Sarah Taggart wrote in her richly textured essay on the origins of the Art Association, "only Art's Tavern, the then unsteeped Lutheran Church, and the Arbor Light gift shop kept lifelessness at bay." But this trio envisioned reinventing these spaces as studios. We now know the garage as Lake Street Studios, and the shack as Midge's Thread Shed.



Artists at The Soda Shop

Ananada's husband, Ben Bricker, happened to be in Africa with the Peace Corps when he received word from his wife explaining that she and Suzanne had purchased the property. He quickly began planning how to convert the space into useable studios. With almost no funds—Ananda had depleted their cash reserves to purchase their portion of the property—Ben scrounged around for materials. He found discarded windows, piles of weathered siding, and two old wood stoves for heat in the winter. The renovations began to take shape, and painter Suzanne and silversmith Ben were able to move into their studio spaces, along with potter John Huston.

While Ben and friends were renovating the garage in 1988, the Leelanau Conservancy was just getting started. Ananda, wanting to explore ways to protect the ecologically valuable property behind the garage, called the Conservancy, which soon became interested in preserving several ancient trees, an old swale, and a small marsh. With the help of Suzanne's husband, Don Wilson, conservation easements were placed on the ecologically sensitive areas of the property. Five lots were eventually platted and sold privately as a site condominium project. The newly expanded and renovated GAAC now occupies two of those lots.



Ben Bricker at Lake Street Studios

Then, in 1989, a client of local accountant Richard Sander wanted to donate money to support local artists. The donor remains anonymous, but the gift has reaped rich rewards for the Glen Arbor arts community. The Glen Arbor Art Association was created to receive this gift for the purpose of furthering the arts in the community. The Art Association's bylaws were registered on October 30, 1989. It was then that Lake Street Studios and the Glen Arbor Art Association officially became separate entities.

The first Board members were Suzanne Wilson, who served as president, Ananda Bricker, Ben Bricker, Midge Obata, Richard Sander, Barbara Sander, Barbara Siepker, and Becky Thatcher. For the next 10 years, the newly formed non-profit's home was Lake Street Studios—rented space in the office that consisted of a small desk and a shared telephone. Board meetings, according to Becky, tended to be “informal and a lot of fun. But we got the job done!” The annual meeting was often a potluck picnic behind Lake Street Studios. The Art Association reprised this tradition for the 2017 annual meeting.



Ananda Bricker & Suzanne Wilson

The founders' vision to further the arts in the community proved prophetic. The Lake Street Studio years, our first era, provided the foundation for many of the GAAA programs and events the community has come to experience and appreciate: summer art classes, the Manitou Music Festival, the Artist-in-Residence program, and the publication of the *Dunes Review*. This was also when the Art Association began its partnership with the National Park Service to restore Thoreson Farm as a place where artists could learn and practice their craft in the natural beauty that surrounds us.

The founders also began planning for the future. As early as fall 1992, the first board held a strategic planning session at Sarah Taggart's home. Discussions included the possibility of renting or purchasing property so that the art association could have a home of its own. In December 1999, Sarah donated the property, one of the five platted lots behind Lake Street Studios, to realize this vision. Plans were soon underway to construct what became the initial Art Association facility on this property. With a secure foundation, the founders stepped back from the day-to-day operations of the Art Association and let a new generation take the lead. And so with the new millennium, the second era began when the association had its first permanent home.

We hope you've enjoyed this brief look back at our early history, our first era, which we've compiled from notes prepared by Ananda Bricker and Rob Turney; an article in the GAAA Fall 2000 newsletter authored by Sarah Taggart; and recent discussions with Beth Bricker, Cherrie Stege, Midge Obata, and Becky Thatcher. The accompanying photographs are from Beth's and Cherrie's family pictures. As we open our doors to an exciting future, we are indebted to those who made this possible.



Parade with GAAA in Glen Arbor

Future installments of our history will focus on the next era, a building of our own, and then the Art Grows Here campaign that led to our expanded facilities. We'll also highlight various people, programs, and events that have characterized the Art Center, as well as interviews, remembrances, and reflections of the many volunteers who have given their time and talents to further our mission.