

Spanning the Gap

Park Profile:

Marie Zimmermann at her Farm

In 1944, Marie Zimmermann (1879-1972) closed her National Arts Club Studio and moved away from the New York art scene to her family's vacation home near Milford, Pennsylvania. She was in her mid-60's, a nationally acclaimed metal crafts artist with a half-dozen employees, coverage in national arts magazines, and exhibitions from coast to coast. For the next 20 years, she would alternate her residence from Milford in the warm months to Florida in winter. From park archives comes this portrait of a quietly unconventional artist during her retirement in Pike County.

Local people recall a small woman, plainly dressed in well-cut dark tweeds, often with a matching tweed hat. Or wearing riding pants, especially to go hunting.

The home she retired to was on property she had known all her life, a farm bought by her father when she was three. At the age of 13, Marie had camped out alone in the woods, fishing for her dinner. In 1910, she had designed a summer home for her family on the property in an eclectic smattering of Romanesque, Dutch Colonial Revival, and just plain playful styles. A gambrel roof, Dutch doors with big strap hinges, a tower reminiscent of a windmill, huge interior spaces of wood and stone: when Marie's brothers and sisters predeceased her in the 1930s, she inherited a home that was an artistic expression of herself a quarter-century before. It is hardly



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(Above) Marie as a young artist. (Below) Later years in Milford.



surprising that she never wanted to give it up.

Marie Zimmermann was particular, even demanding, but "knew what she wanted and was willing to pay for it." She tipped well, but she was also thrifty: she cooked leftovers, but hired good cooks too. She indulged her taste for fancy cars by decking a Ford body with a high-class chassis from New York.

"She didn't dislike anyone," but she preferred employees who served her efficiently and didn't linger around her or seek favors. Those that saw her only occasionally may have been awestruck, but those who worked in her home claimed they could go to her at any time and talk to her as if she were family. Long-time employees received handsome gifts, such as cars.

But mostly she was private, wanting no notice taken of her, no credit for her behind-the-scenes philanthropy to women's education, no obituary when she was gone. She came and went from her own house by a side door and brought her guests in and out the same way. She ate breakfast and dinner in her room, and lunch at the large table in her dining room in the sole company of her companion of many years, Ruth Allen.

Ruth was from California; a large, flamboyant woman with a commanding voice (she had been a stage actress) and an outgoing personality. It was Ruth who remembered the details of people's lives-- who was in school, and how they were doing. This kind and attentive memory failed her in the end, though. Older than Marie by perhaps 15 years, she declined early and "faded from the scene" that Marie, even in retirement, remained part of in the New York art world.

Ruth may have done some correspondence for Marie (*always* by longhand, *never* by typewriter!) and she took the photographs on outings, but for the most part the women had their separate routines. For Marie, this routine was inextricable from the



Hall and Living Room (*to left*) of the house. The doors at the rear lead to the kitchen area (*right*) and through the turret (*straight ahead*) to outside.



Living Room, perhaps about 1913, the first year the family used the house, but perhaps as late as 1930. The French doors to the outside do not appear to be installed yet.



Dining room, sometime between 1913 and 1930.



farm. Every day, there were fresh flowers to arrange, often in vases Marie had designed and fabricated herself, often from the rosebeds she had tended herself. Both the women spent a great deal of time reading, in their rooms or in the spacious living area outfitted with cushions and bright chintz fabrics. Marie liked travel books, which booksellers in Manhattan sought out for her and even delivered in person.

Marie hosted only a very few select friends, including a woman attorney and a woman physician. She did invite guests from New York--her cousins, her bookseller--but still might put them up at the nearby Hotel Fauchere in Milford and invite them only for a meal at her house. The owners of the hotel were in her small circle also; the Chols were French Swiss in origin, and Marie's family was from German Switzerland near Zurich. Marie saw to it that her guests at the hotel got fresh milk and vegetables from the working farm on her property. When guests visited with children, Marie quickly handed the infants off to her help to watch over, but the older children she took hunting and fishing. She gained admittance to Pike County's Blooming Grove Club, up till then an all-male bastion, and men recalled her accurate fly-casting with wistful admiration. And, perhaps with memories of her own independent girlhood, Marie let some of her property out for use by the girl scouts.

This passion for the outdoors, and for cut flowers everywhere indoors, may have been the source of Marie's only significant health complaint--recurrent headaches. As she grew older, though, the long yearly treks to and from Florida must have worn on her, for she commissioned one of her employees to buy and outfit a bus to make the ride in comfort. With her on this early "motor home" went frozen game meat from her hunts, vegetables from her farm, and, once, an unwieldy baby carriage for a gift.

What became of her art in these years? "She could look at anything and paint it" said a servant, and indeed she did make several paintings as gifts, but

Bedroom.



Marie Zimmermann's mother, also named Marie, in the house around 1920.



The mantel under restoration today.



Marie around 1950 with friends in the garden of her house, which she called *Whip-poor-will*.



Tending the flower garden around 1950. The barn is in

she also placed other artists' work in her home. Her great-nephew insists she worked in the cellar and that the farm had several rooms of wrought-iron objects she had made there. The private Marie, though, had a habit of destroying records, and there were no further exhibitions of her work in her lifetime. By the early 1970s she had moved permanently to Florida, and the federal government completed purchase of her Pike County home in 1974. The house is now within Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1985 a retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art presented 18 of her pieces, mostly of metal, and reawakened appreciation of her vision, skill, and versatility. Her final work of art--her independent and forthright life--was completed on her 93rd birthday, when she died in Florida. Though she had designed a mausoleum for her family in Milford cemetery, her ashes were sprinkled according to her wish along Adams Creek on the property where she had camped and fished alone as a teenaged girl

the background.



The flower garden around 1950.



The living room as decorated by Marie, around 1950.

Photographs of the interior of the house taken in 2007 when the house was successfully nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as a structure of national importance.

(Left) The front hall (compare view below, right) (Middle) Staircase (Right) Living Room.



(Left) and (Middle) Upstairs rooms and windows (Right) Fireplace (compare view above of Marie's mother)



(Right) Marie
(on left) with
Ruth Allen.



Though Marie Zimmermann left few papers, receipts from the house show purchases in the years she lived there to include items for horticulture and animal husbandry, furniture purchase and repair at shops in Brooklyn N.Y., and many purchases of books, especially on travel. The receipt on top is dated February 1, 1941 from a bookstore on Manhattan's East Side, and lists: *Sons of Sinbad*, *Venezuela*, *Eighteen Capitals of China*, *How I Found Livingstone*, *England was an Island Once* (noted "to Mrs. Lee"), *The Unobstructed Universe*, and *Strange Malady*.

The front porch, in Marie's day, commanded a view of the Delaware River.