

MARJORIE WALKER:

ARTIST, BOHEMIAN, ISLANDER

Marjorie Walker (1906-1992), a wealthy New Yorker by birth, sailed through the Salish Sea when she was seventeen and vowed to return. That promise was realized twenty-six years later in 1949 after establishing herself in the East as a landscape artist and animal portraitist.

Remembered as San Juan Island's first academically-trained professional artist, Marjorie shared her art and studio with generations of island children and adults.

Walker was an artist of diverse talents—ceramics, oil and watercolor landscapes, pastel paintings, and sculpture. Students in her classes considered her an outstanding and knowledgeable teacher. Friends remember her as an unpretentious and independent individual with a passion for art who was kind, generous, and non-judgmental with a wonderful sense of humor.

Marjorie Walker's legacy is alive in the memories of islanders and in her artwork which still graces many island homes.

For more information about Marjorie Walker and photographs of her work visit

www.fridayharbor.org/MarjorieWalker.

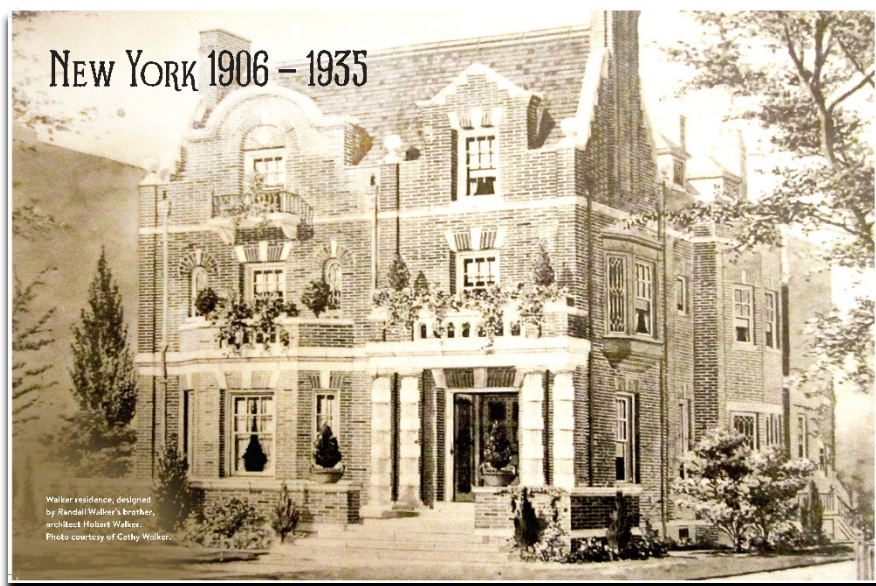


Marjorie Walker with young Afghan hound.
Photo courtesy of the San Juan Historical Museum.

The Town of Friday Harbor's Arts Commission and Historic Preservation Program worked collaboratively to create this installation. Special thanks to Jeff and Alicia Carnevali for the use of their building and to Emily Geyman, Julie Capron, Megan Kilpatrick-Boe, Robin Jacobson, Julie Greene, and Sandy Strehlou for research and writing. Thanks also to the San Juan Historical Museum and the Walker/Ickes families for providing photographs and information about Marjorie, Jean, and Timmie Walker and their extended family; Tim Dustrude for photography; and Chris Minney of Tif and Gif Creative for graphic design. Last but not least, many thanks to the islanders who shared Marjorie's art and their memories of her life on San Juan Island.
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PANEL 1


NEW YORK 1906 – 1935



Walker residence, designed by Randall Walker's brother, architect Hobart Walker. Photo courtesy of Cathy Walker.

"The Walker family was extraordinary. They were financially successful in their respective fields but are also remembered for the contributions they made to their communities. The Walkers were a close-knit and loving family who valued freedom of thought, travel, and creativity."

Cathy Walker,
niece of Marjorie and Jean Walker




Art Students League of New York, circa 1920s. Photograph: unknown.

Marjorie Walker was born in 1906, the second of four children of New York industrialist Randall Oakley Walker and Mabel Condit Walker. Her father’s success in manufacturing provided the family a grand brick residence in Brooklyn, New York, and a place within New York’s high society. After graduating from the exclusive Brooklyn Female Academy (now Packer Collegiate Institute), Marjorie spent six years traveling extensively and attending studio classes at the Art Students League which has produced influential artists including Calder, O’Keeffe, Rockwell, and Pollock.

PANEL 2

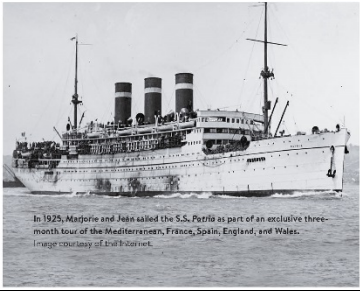
TRAVEL 1923–1929




Painting of the San Juan Island coastline. Courtesy of Romona Jones.

"Our first summer, 1923, we went to Alaska on a ship. We came through this area just at sunset. The mountains were pink, Victoria's lights were coming on, and it was absolutely enchanting. We decided we had to live here someday."

"Marjorie Walker to Sell Her Works,"
Jo Bailey-Cummings,
The Islands' Sounder, November 4, 1987.



In 1925, Marjorie and Jean sailed the S.S. Potlatch as part of an exclusive three-month tour of the Mediterranean, France, Spain, England, and Wales. Image courtesy of the Internet.



Marjorie's passport application. Image courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Documents Administration.

Marjorie’s father valued life experiences as much as traditional education. Given the choice of college or extensive touring, Marjorie and her older sister, Jean, chose to travel the Mediterranean, Europe, and the American West. Fresh out of high school, Marjorie joined Jean on a nationally publicized, six-week, cross-country tour through Canada, Alaska, and the western U.S. sponsored by *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* newspaper. Their group reached near-celebrity status with governors and mayors inviting them to dedicate new parks, bridges, and other attractions along the way.

PANEL 3



"I remember a wonderful childhood at Faraway Farm. It was the perfect place for kids to grow up. It's no wonder that Jean and Marjorie chose the similarly idyllic setting of San Juan Island to call their home."

Cathy Walker,
niece of Marjorie and Jean Walker

"I used to do children's portraits, but I found them very tiring and nerve-wracking. The parents all wanted the same toothless grin...that isn't a natural expression. It was somewhat easier to paint dogs without the awful strain of a fond parent."

"Marjorie Walker Recalls an Artist's Life,"
Rebecca Smith,
Friday Harbor Journal,
July 12, 1977.



Portrait of an Island Labrador. Courtesy of Julia Capron.

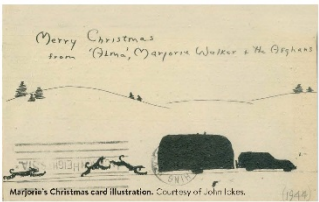
Faraway Farm was a 350-acre rural property near Stockbridge, Massachusetts, purchased by Randall Walker as a family retreat and eventual retirement home. By the mid-1930s, Marjorie and Jean were living there full time. Jean raised poodles, corgis, and Afghan hounds for national competitions including the Westminster Dog Show at Madison Square Garden. Marjorie earned a following as an animal sculptor and portraitist creating intricately detailed figurines of the major breeds and portraits of award-winning purebreds on the dog show circuit. She also painted the landscapes around the farm and village.

PANEL 4



ALMA SILVERMOON 1945

"Visiting Alma in West Stockbridge,"
Helen I. Rawstron,
The Berkshire Courier,
February 8, 1945.
Marie Gilman-Tassone,
photography

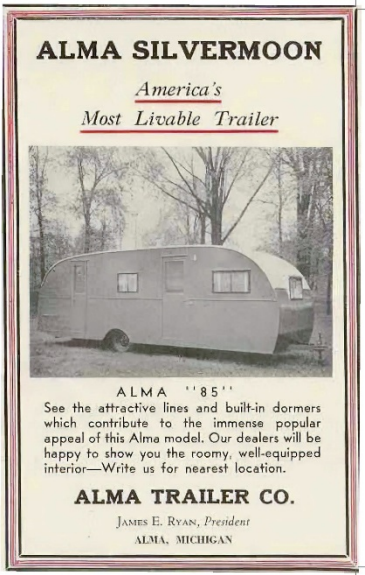


Marjorie's Christmas card illustration. Courtesy of John Loken.

"The [Alma] will be the traveling studio in which Miss Walker will tour the country seeking canine subjects for her artistic abilities and at the same time enjoying the pleasures of travel."

"Visiting Alma in West Stockbridge,"
Helen I. Rawstron,
The Berkshire Courier,
February 8, 1945.

Alma Silvermoon
advertisement.
Courtesy of Jürgen
Eichermüller, PhD.



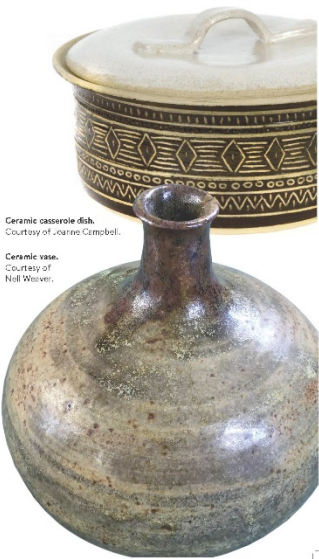
After spending the war years at Faraway Farm, the sisters purchased a modern travel trailer and began traversing the country going to dog shows. The stylish, new Alma Silvermoon trailer came with all the amenities of home and was perfect for a traveling art studio. At times Marjorie chose to live in the Alma after her arrival on San Juan Island, parking it just steps away from Jean's house on False Bay Road.

PANEL 5



“Marjorie has written and illustrated a book about ferries; she has sculpted from local clay; she has made sweaters using the wool from her own sheep. For years she taught lessons in oil and watercolor painting, sculpting, pottery, drawing, and silk screening in her rose-covered studio on False Bay.”

“Marjorie Walker to Sell Her Works,”
Jo Bailey-Cummings,
The Islands’ Sounder, November 4, 1987.



Ceramic casserole dish.
Courtesy of Joanne Campbell.

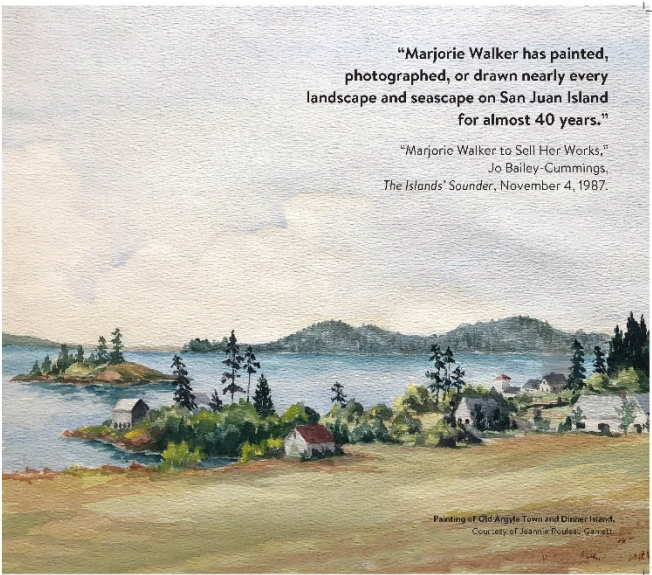
Ceramic vase.
Courtesy of Nell Weaver.

In 1949, more than twenty years after sailing through the San Juan archipelago, Marjorie, Jean, and Marjorie’s son, Timmie, moved to San Juan Island. Their first home was a windowless log cabin purchased sight-unseen from an advertisement in the *Friday Harbor Journal*. Marjorie’s life was now one of frugality and rustic living. In 1957, Marjorie’s parents purchased land for their daughters and Timmie on the high-bank shore of False Bay. Here they shared a small house, the Alma Silvermoon, and an art studio Marjorie named The Little Different Studio.

PANEL 6



Painting of the old cannery net shed.
Courtesy of Roseana Jones.



“Marjorie Walker has painted, photographed, or drawn nearly every landscape and seascape on San Juan Island for almost 40 years.”

“Marjorie Walker to Sell Her Works,”
Jo Bailey-Cummings,
The Islands’ Sounder, November 4, 1987.

During her years on San Juan Island, Marjorie was a Cub Scout leader, local art show exhibitor, and art teacher. She taught painting, ceramics, and other classes to students young and old. Children gravitated to her Little Different Studio—the first island art destination to be listed on a local tourist map. She was happiest making art in the studio looking out over False Bay. Marjorie was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in the late 1980s and was eventually unable to create the art that had defined her life. She died on July 17, 1992, at the age of 86. Jean passed away in 2001, Timmie in 2002.

“We loved to do everything — and we did.”

“Marjorie Walker to Sell Her Works,”
Jo Bailey-Cummings, *The Islands’ Sounder*, Nov. 4, 1987