

# Four generations

## *An interest in art continues in the Marlatt family*

By DAVID GREEN

Ruth Marlatt of Fayette has had a collection of old family photographs around the house for years and she finally decided there's a story to tell. It's a story of art covering four generations.

The tale begins with the grandfather of her late husband, Jim Marlatt. Wilhelm Simon Albrink was trained as an engineer and worked as a bridge designer with the Toledo-based company Standard Engineering and Contracting Company.

Wilhelm was often assigned to direct bridge building projects in the eastern United States. His wife, Fannie, and their daughter, Wilhelmina, often traveled with him. When bridges were being built in remote areas, the family often stayed in a tent.

Ruth's art tour begins in the University Gallery of the Fayette Opera House with a photo of Wilhelm and Wilhelmina, then one of Fannie, and then a photo of their daughter, young Willie at age 6. It's a black and white photograph, but it's been carefully colored by Fannie—an art practiced by many people before the advent of color photographs.

Next is a pair of photos of Willie—one is the original black and white, the other is the same photograph after coloring. Another colored photograph follows, showing how the process sometimes seems to transform a photograph into a painting.

Next comes a photo of a bridge-building crew and another showing a bridge under construction.

A photograph of Wilhelm's mother, Sophia, shows traces of cheesecloth around the edges, but the purpose of mounting a photo on cheesecloth is something Ruth hasn't been able to uncover.

Sophia was well-known as a singer and she often performed via the party line telephone.

"Someone from the family would call all of their friends who were on the same phone line and say, 'Sophia is going to sing!'" Ruth said. Then everyone would gather around the phone for a concert.

Moving into the hallway of the Opera House, Ruth points out more photographs taken while on the road, and at the back of the Rorick Room are what must be fake photographs created by Wilhelm. He was known as a joker, so it seems likely that some darkroom magic created images of family and friends standing on rocks in a rushing river, with no easy way to reach the rocks.

Nearly all of those photographs are more than 100 years old.

"The oldest and youngest family members

in the show were photographers," Ruth said. "In between they're painters."

Wilhelmina, well known in Lyons where she served as postmaster, started her artistic hobby with oil painting after she retired. One of the samples of her work shows a windmill that people often spotted when driving between Lyons and Metamora.

Next she decided to try water colors and she took classes when she visited her daughter, Marilyn Kirschner, who lived in Las Vegas.

Marilyn represents the third generation in the show and she joins Jim's younger brother, Louie. Louie worked as a mechanic and that shows through in the intricate details of the engines on the motorcycles he drew. Louie creates Christmas cards depicting various motorcycles—each one including details of the bike and engine on the backside.

Those are sold at the Antique Motorcycle Club of America Swap Meet at the the Fulton County Fairgrounds every July. The cards on display are borrowed from his next show.

There's also a painting depicting Louie's great-grandfather, Wilhelm Albrink, in a German military uniform.

Back into the opera house lobby are samples from the fourth generation, Ruth's daughter Rachel Donner. When she was 10 years old, Rachel created a small painting on wood that shows the house where Ruth's parents lived. Grandma Wirwahn was also an artist. A free-form painting that Rachel made for her brother, John, is also on display.

The tour ends where it started—with photographs. There are two displays of photos by Ruth's other daughter, Sarah Petrie, who had her own photo business before she became busy with children. Her photographs include a series of pictures from Fayette's old high school.

That leaves Ruth's other child, John, but don't look for his work. John tried pottery once, Ruth said, but he claims it's nothing that belongs in an art show.

The idea for the "Four Generations" show came to mind when Ruth saw similar artistic choices made by both Sarah and Wilhelm.

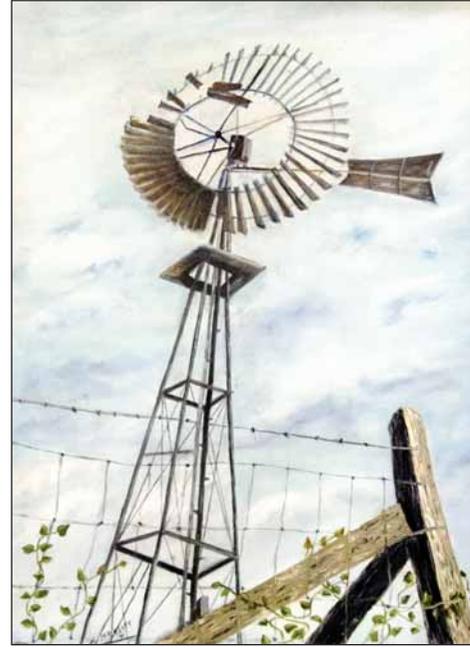
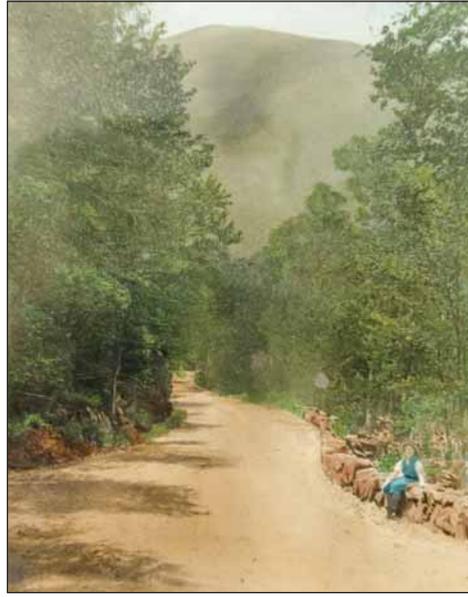
"I wondered how many families have artistic ability that is passed down from generation to generation," she said.

In her case, it's four and counting.

• The show "Four Generations of Art" will remain at the Opera House through June 20. The Opera House is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursday afternoons, and by appointment. For information, call 419/237-3111.



**COLORING**—Wilhelm Albrink, the grandfather of the late Jim Marlatt, always carried a camera in his travels as a bridge engineer. His wife, Fannie, learned to turn black and white photos into colored images long before color film was available.

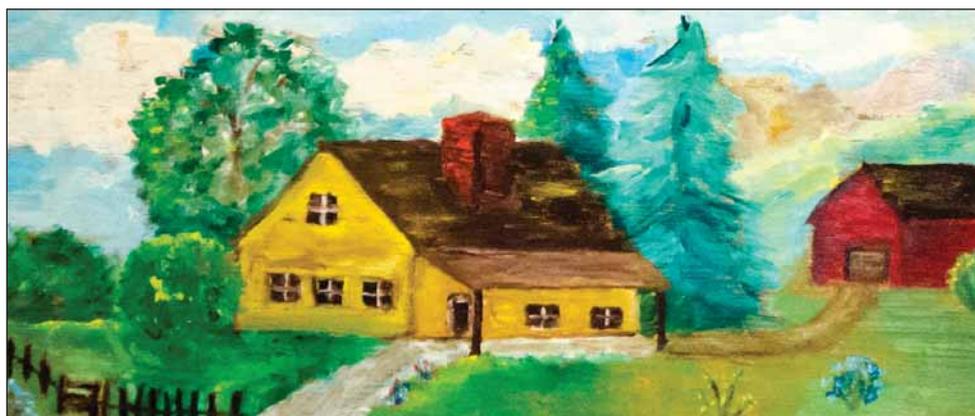


**ANOTHER** example of coloring a black and white photograph shows Willie sitting in a location in the northeastern U.S.

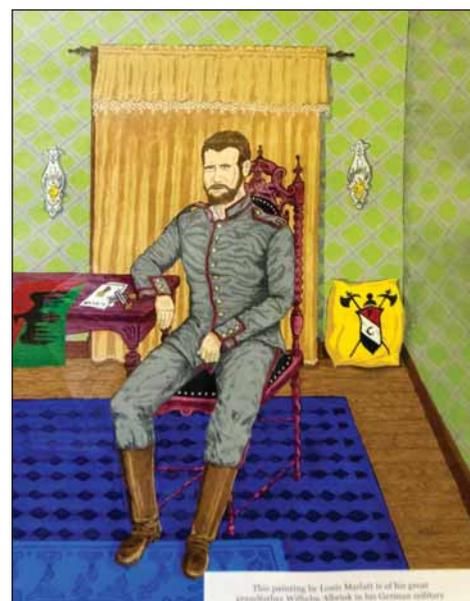
**WILLIE** Marlatt started her artistic endeavors with oil painting.



**WILLIE'S** daughter, Marilyn, painted scenes from the southwest after she moved to Las Vegas. She and her mother took classes together when Willie visited.



**LEFT**—Sarah (Marlatt) Petry favors photography, like her great-great-grandfather. **CENTER**—Rachel (Marlatt) Donner painted this scene as a child and she still enjoys painting. **RIGHT**—Louie Marlatt of Lyons favors painting motorcycle scenes, and he also does other works including this oil painting.



This painting by Louie Marlatt is of his great-grandfather Wilhelm Albrink in his German military uniform.