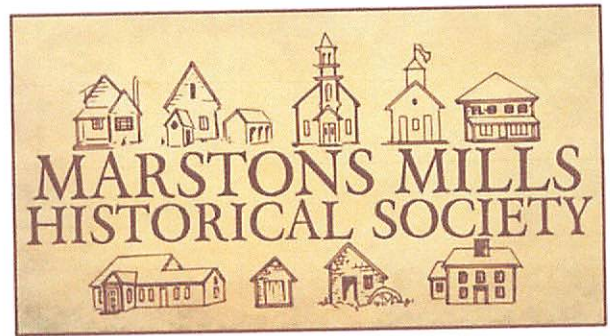


Marstons Mills Historical Society  
Interview with Kay Van Leeuwen  
(by Jim Gould & David Martin)  
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Kay Van Leeuwen, a resident of 458 Flint Road in Marstons Mills, was born Katherine Ella Sanborn in East Jaffrey, New Hampshire in January 1916. Her father was a contractor, and the family moved rather frequently, coming to Cape Cod on more than one occasion. She first came to the Cape at the age of 7 to live in Cotuit, on Main Street near Lowell Park, and attended the Cotuit School for a time.

She attended the School of Practical Art in Boston on Boylston Street, and studied under Philip Martin of the Boston Watercolor Society for four summers on Cape Cod. When he retired, she taught art as his replacement, sometimes conducting classes in her dining room. She belonged to the Cape Cod Art Association, and has entered her paintings in juried shows. Her principal medium is watercolor; her favorite subject is flowers. One of the Easter lilies hangs in the solarium of the Osterville Methodist church, which also has her picture of the Marstons Mills church. Many of her paintings were sold or given to others. She made many posters for community events.

When her family first came to Marstons Mills in 1942, the area near her home was mostly pasture and woods. There were fishing shacks on Shubael Pond, now torn down. There were only three houses on their road, the Morse dairy farm and the country house of Senator Cusick who had an estate in Osterville. The Cusicks cleared the woods and grew potatoes, keeping a tractor in a shed.

She and her husband bought the house she lives in in 1942, after a New Bedford couple had lived in it and decided that it was too lonely in the winter. When they first moved there, pasture land extended all the way to Shubael Pond. The deed of the house, however, interestingly first said "Edgewood Avenue, Osterville Heights." The road was not paved until the 1950s, after it was renamed Flint Street. The house was built in 1938 by the neighboring dairy farmer Henry Morse, who died while in the process of building it.

At this time, Marstons Mills was experiencing a real spurt in its population growth.

She married Jacob John Van Leeuwen in 1938; he was born in The Hague and was originally named Jacobus Johannes, son of Peter Van Leeuwen. Kay and John had five children—three girls and two boys—all of whom attended school in Marstons Mills. Peter was employed as a gardener at the Legg estate on East Bay Road in Osterville, where there is a lovely water garden now conserved by the Barnstable Land Trust. He and his wife Alida are buried in Hillside Cemetery, Osterville. John's uncle Leindert was a minister in Stoneham, and another uncle was a nurseryman in New Jersey. John was brought to the US at age six months during the First World War. Initially a mechanic who worked at the military reservation in Falmouth during World War II, he became a heavy machinery operator, driving a front-end loader for the Chandler Construction Co. installing water mains all over the Cape.

She worked at the Fair Acres Day Camp in the summer, which was also on Shubael Pond. Kay came from a naturalist family, and she was named for an aunt, Katherine Ella Dolbear, who introduced nature

teaching in the New Rochelle (NY) Schools. In 1950, the first summer that Connie and Arlene Fair opened their summer camp nearby, Kay volunteered, saying, "If there's anything I can do, let me know." The Fairs asked her to teach natural history to 40 children. She gave them notebooks and told them to record what they found. She took them out into the woods. One boy came back with a long trailing vine and said, "What's this?" When she saw it was poison ivy, she told the boy to put his hands together and march back to camp, where they washed him off. A strand of ivy had been hung over the doorway so that everyone could learn what was poison ivy. Trips were made to the beach to collect maritime specimens. On rainy days Kay taught painting.

The Rev. Peter Palches of the Marstons Mills Methodist Church and the Osterville Community Church asked her to teach and be superintendent of the Sunday School. Learning that there were only 15 children, she finally agreed. Rev. Palches then sent out an invitation to all Protestant families in Marstons Mills to send their children to the Sunday School. When Sunday School opened, there were 30 new children, making a total of 45 children—quite a difference from when she had first agreed to run the Sunday School! She filled that role for three years. To handle the large number she asked mothers of the children to help, and formed six classes, going from kindergarten onward. One could not expect the minister to feed five children for dinner, but Rev. Palches invited the whole Van Leeuwen family to breakfast at the parsonage.

A moving story involved Harvard botany Professor Stephen Hamblin (1884-1965), who showed up at her door one day with a *Sabatia* flower that he had collected at the edge of a pond (see note below). The professor asked her if she would use her art skills to paint its picture. She agreed, and when she delivered it, he asked if she would be willing to illustrate the entire book that he had assembled on flowers. Prof. Hamblin unfortunately died before he could publish the work. She was given the manuscript for the book and attempted to give it to Prof. Hamblin's sister-in-law, who said she did not want it. Years later, Kay's daughter Mary found the manuscript on a shelf in Kay's home; they agreed to donate the manuscript to the Harvard University Archives. Her painting of the *sabatia* flower was also deposited at the Archives.

Color photographs of eleven of Kay's paintings are attached to this oral history.

Note: The Plymouth Gentian flower is one of the *Sabatias* or Marsh Pinks, and is an endangered species, being found nowhere else in the world except near ponds in Barnstable, Massachusetts.



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