



A Brief history of the Olney Art Association

1974 - 2014

Past Presidents

1977 – 1978	Regina Syrjala
1979 – 1980	Rosemary Millican
1981- 1982	Ed Longley
1983 – 1984	Tracy Coleman
1985	Ruth DeYoung
1986	Bill Schmidt
1987 – 1988	Barbara Piegari
1989 – 1990	Dick Ray
1991- 1992	John Bartley
1993 – 1994	Genevieve Roberts
1995 – 1996	Marcia Davis
1997 – 1998	Jacqui DeMoss
1999 – 2000	Fran Hudelson
2001 – 2002	Nancy Leak & Jane Preece
2003- 2004	Nancy Leak & Jane Preece
2005	Debby Wolfe & Jane Preece
2006	Debby Wolfe
2007 – 2008	Ingrid Barnes
2009 – 2010	Donna Larventz & Jane Preece
2011	Sherry Jose & Donna Larventz
2012	Sherry Jose & Debby Wolfe
2013 – 2014	Karen Norman & Peggy Tadej

ORIGIN OF THE OLNEY ART ASSOCIATION

The Olney Art Association came into existence in 1974 as an outgrowth of Ed Longley's very successful one-man show ("The Olney Scene") in October 1973 at Brooke Manor Country Club. That show had been developed by Ed as part of a sabbatical year activity when he was Associate Professor of Art Education at the University of Maryland. In searching for a show site Ed became friends with Brooke Johns, long-time resident of Olney, who operated Brooke Manor Country Club, and it was Johns who arranged for the use of the Club for Ed's 1973 show.

It was of further good fortune that Regina Syrjala, also a member of a prominent Olney area family, saw Ed's show with Martha Johns (oldest daughter of Brooke Johns) and, impressed with what they saw, they originated the idea of an Olney artists' association and discussed the desirability of having a group exhibit the following year if enough Olney artists could be brought together. Regina was designated to lead such a group and in May 1974 five artist (Barrett, Brown, Edsall, Longley, and Mannakee) exhibited work at Brooke Manor Country Club under the theme "the Maryland Scene". This was the beginning of a loose association know as Artists of Greater Olney. It was not until two years later that the more official title "Olney Art Association" came into being.

Of particular note is the fact that neither Brooke Johns nor Regina Syrjala were painters. Yet without them the Olney group of artists might never have come together. The interest of Brooke Johns and Regina Syrjala in the arts, their community spirit, and involvement in Olney area affairs all played a significant part in the development of the art group. It should be pointed out; however, that there might have been no Johns-Syrjala involvement in an Olney art organization had not Ed Longley unknowingly planted the seed for such a group with his 1973 show of 30 paintings at Brooke Manor Country Club. Ed's show might truly be called a serendipitous event.

EARLY YEARS (1974 – 1978)

Between 1974 and 1978 the Olney Art Association was a loosely knit group of artists who met periodically at the homes of different members to critique each other's work, discuss art related topics, and socialize in an informal atmosphere. Until 1976 there was no constitution, no hard and fast rules and regulations, and no elected officers. When the group first met as an informal organization Regina Syrjala became the leader and continued in this role through 1978, being designated as president in 1977. Many of the early meetings were held at Regina's home, now known as the Woodlawn Mansion. The artists-of-greater-Olney group grew from five members in 1974 to about 25 in 1978. A membership fee was set at \$10 per year in 1974.

The principal event of each year was an annual show, initially held in the spring but later moved to the fall. The number of participating artists grew from five in 1974 to 20 in 1978. All shows were held at the Brooke manor Country Club. A modest entry fee was charged for each

show. None of the shows was juried but entries were selected on an informal basis by the members themselves. Only two-dimensional work was exhibited in 1974 but in 1975 three-dimensional work (ceramics by Fred Ropko) was added to the show.

In 1976 a constitution was developed and in July of that year the organization became known officially as the Olney Art Association (OAA). It is worth noting that the first constitution, which set forth the general aims of the organization, called for the election of officers, established an executive board, and developed a modus operandi, continues as the basic guide for OAA operations today.

EVOLVING OPERATIONS (1979 TO 1992)

In 1979 informal meetings continued to be held at the homes of different members, but as the membership grew attention was turned to finding space that could more readily accommodate the larger groups of people. With the construction of the Olney public library in 1982 it was perhaps not surprising that library space should be requested for OAA meetings. From 1983 through 1985 some meetings were held at the library but others continued to be held informally at members' homes. By the end of 1985, with a total membership of more than 40, all regular meetings were moved to the Olney library. Executive Board meetings continued to be held at the homes of different Board members.

An OAA newsletter, which began in 1977 and was first distributed on an irregular basis, continues to be an important instrument of the OAA, covering announcements, schedules of shows, information on programs, news about members, and other appropriate art related information. It is now put out on a regular schedule six times each year, in even months.

The annual fall show has always been a premier event of the OAA, and although such shows have been held since OAA's founding, it was not until 1986 that the constitution specified that such a show was required to be held each year.

Since the implementation of the first constitution in 1976, the OAA has been managed by an Executive Board composed of the officers plus chairpersons of various committees. From 1979 to 1986 Board meetings were held on an "as needed" basis but beginning in 1986 the Board began meeting on a regular bimonthly schedule in even months of the year. With the substantial growth in membership from five in 1974, 50 in 1991, to over 80 today (November 2014) it was inevitable that the very small, friendly, informal gatherings of the early years would evolve into somewhat more formal meetings now held on a regular basis at the Olney public library. Yet the group today is still small enough that a considerable degree of informality still flavors the regular meetings. Regular meetings, always with a planned program of art related interest, are held in odd months of the year.

Despite its growth over the years the total OAA membership is relatively small compared with some other County art groups. It has thus been possible to maintain a modest dues structure. The early membership fee of \$10 per year existed until 1978 when it was raised to \$12. An increase to \$15 per year was made in 1984. The current dues are \$25 per year.

In 1986 OAA president Schmidt appointed three members as a committee to review the OAA constitution and to recommend any changes that might be appropriate to the growing organization. After a long and careful review of the existing constitution the committee, composed of Barbara Hails, Dick Ray and Tracy Coleman, made several recommendations there were adopted in January 1987. The most important of these were:

1. Two classes of membership were established: a) Regular and b) Associate. A limit of 50 was set for regular members. Existing members were grandfathered into regular membership at their choosing. Since 1991 most members are regular members.
2. Screening of work was implemented as a requirement for new applicants to become regular members in the association. This was done to assure high quality art work of new regular members who would be eligible to enter the annual juried member's show.

In addition the revised constitution spelled out for the first time that an annual juried members' show would be required, that Executive Board meetings would be held on a regular basis (bimonthly), and that nonjury exhibition opportunities would be offered when interest, facilities, manpower and financial resources permitted. These nonjuried shows are open to associate as well as regular members.

ANNUAL JURIED MEMBERS' SHOW

The annual juried members' show is OAA's major event of the year and is now held in either October or November at the Woodlawn Conference center in Sandy Spring. Except for 1974 and 1975 the annual show has been held in the fall. In the early years the shows were nonjuried, but in 1979 jurying became a part of each show and continues today. The first shows were held at Brooke Manor Country Club, but with management changes at the country club in the late 1970's that space was no longer available on a regular basis and other sites had to be sought. OAA was fortunate to find other places to exhibit work and there was no break in the continuity of annual IN 1985, through the dedicated efforts of John Bartley the OAA was able to obtain exhibit space at the newly renovated mansion at the Woodlawn Conference Center in Sandy Spring. The mansion has been the site of all of OAA's fall shows since that time. In exchange for providing paintings for the mansion walls throughout the year the OAA enjoys the privilege of holding the fall art show at no cost for the use of the building. Wall space limits the two-dimensional pieces of art work for the annual show to about 60. In addition, there is space for ceramic work and sculpture. It is of interest that except for 1974 all annual shows have included pottery and/or sculpture in addition to the two-dimensional work.

In the 1980s the annual show became a premier art event not only for the OAA but for all of Montgomery Country. Part of this is due to the mansion setting, which, short of a professional gallery, is rather inspiring. The credit for the success of the show goes to the many individual members who carry out certain less than glamorous tasks such as arranging the food table, decorating the dining room with flowers, greeting visitors and answering on a very personal basis any questions regarding the show and the OAA, publicizing the event, and helping to hang the show. The fall show at Woodlawn is well advertised with between 200 and 300 people visiting the show each year. Sales have been modest (with a 20 percent commission going to the OAA treasury). A tradition since the 1980s has been the awarding of prizes for various works selected by the juror.

A History of the Annual Show Locations:

- 1974 – 1979 Brooke Manor Country Club, Olney, MD
- 1980 Town Center Gallery, Rockville, MD
- 1981 Brooke Manor Country Club, Olney, MD
- 1982 Rockville Civic Center, Rockville, MD
- 1983 Tusculum Farm Barn, Unity, MD
- 1984 Rockville Civic Center, Rockville, MD
- 1985 – 2014 Woodlawn Mansion, Sandy Spring, MD

A History of Juried Shows and Individuals who have served as Jurors:

- 1979 Ursula Gill, Maryland College of Art and Design
- 1980 Alice Pritchard, Georgetown Art Gallery
- 1981 Phyllis J. Henkelman, Exhibit Specialist, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission
- 1982 Dick Harryman, Director, Maryland School of Art and Design
- 1983 Ed Ahlstrom, Montgomery College, Rockville, MD
- 1984 Val Lewton, Chief of the Design Unit, National Museum of American Art
- 1985 Bernard Loiselle, Director, Municipal Art Gallery, Rockville Civic Center, Rockville, MD
- 1986 Robert Cohen, Montgomery College, Rockville, MD

1987 Kenneth Marlow, Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria, VA
1988 Virginia Mecklenberg, Curator, National Museum of American Art
1989 Oscar Chelimsky, Maryland School of Art and Design
1990 Joe Mayer, Artist and Teach, Washington, D.C.
1991 Margaret Graham Kranking
1992 Ursula Gill
1993 Ed Glynn, Dean of MD. College of Art & Design
1994 Denny Arant
1995 John Winslow
1996 James Adkins
1997 Kathleen Moran
1998 Judith Ahlstrom, artist and teacher
1999 Yolanda Frederikse
2000 Orest Poliszczuk, Professor of Modern Sculpture, Montgomery College, Rockville
2001 Kay McCronan
2002 Tadeusz Lapinski, Prof. of Art, U of MD.
2003 Jane Simanis
2004 Margaret Graham Kranking
2005 Michael Sastre, artist
2006 Sumita Kim, Asst Professor of Art at Montgomery College, Rockville
2007 Eric Butters, Washington D.C., teacher and painter
2008 Judy Hanks-Henn, Registered Landscape Architect
2009 Dianne Bugash, painter & teacher
2010 Judith Kahn

2011	Jordan Bruns
2012	June Linowitz, artist & gallery director
2013	Gavin Glakas, painter & teacher
2014	Glen Kessler, painter & teacher

OTHER SHOWS

Library Shows: The concept of a show at the Olney Library was developed early in 1983 by Marilyn Henry who served as OAA liaison with the library staff and did the ground work needed to get the show off the ground. The first library show was held in April 1983. Each library show is exhibited for about six weeks with paintings appropriate to various planned themes (e.g., “Springtime”). Although most library shows feature the work of OAA Members, outside groups are entitled to use library space and on occasion, when requested, other art groups have exhibited their work. The Library shows were temporarily stopped in September 2009 for renovation and resumed in 2014 as a regular part of OAA activities with six week rotations for 17-20 paintings. They have been well received by the public and by library personnel noted by the number of sales in the year at five.

Woodlawn Annual Shows: In 1986 the OAA initiated a program of hanging two-dimensional art work in the Woodlawn Mansion as part of an agreement under which the mansion would be provided without charge for the annual juried member’s show in the fall. Paintings were changed approximately every two months. About 15 paintings appropriate to the décor of the 19th century manor house, were needed for each show. The show chairman requested work from three to five artists for each show, going through the membership list in alphabetic order seeking appropriate work. The summer social event in July 1990 was held at the Woodlawn Conference Center at which time several OAA artists painted Woodlawn scenes on location that were brought together as one of the bimonthly shows. The Woodlawn management was especially pleased with the show. Woodlawn is now the host for the annual juried show.

Nonjuried General Membership Shows: In 1987, the revised constitution provided for holding nonjuried general membership shows when it was convenient to do so. This allows members an opportunity to exhibit their art work, the revised constitution now barring them from entering the annual juried member’s show. The first two general membership shows were held in

October 1988 and August 1989 at the Rockville Civic Center. The third was held at the Friendship Heights community Center gallery in Bethesda in June 1990. All work entered in these shows was exhibited. Because sites for holding shows are very difficult to find the OAA was unable to hold a general membership exhibit in 1991. Continuing efforts are being made to locate suitable space for member shows. Those listed below are ones that have taken place in the past and at the bottom are some that are current.

Sandy Spring Museum: The Sandy Spring Museum has hosted OAA members for many years, and about 40 paintings are displayed in the late summer.

OAA TODAY

Since about 2001, the Olney Art Association has elected co-presidents to handle the association business. In 2004, the board elected to raise the dues to \$25 for regular members and \$15 for associate members. In 2009, a website was instituted and all correspondence including the newsletter is received electronically. In 2011, the board proposed to no longer have “associate” and “regular” members. OAA became unlimited. The membership voted to: 1) eliminate the jurying process for OAA membership; 2) Eliminated associate status; and 3) Change to an unlimited number of “members,” and open the association to allow more participation. A general membership was established for \$25 per year. OAA remains one of the recognized and outstanding art organizations in Montgomery County. Its success is attributed to the volunteer work of a large number of members too numerous to mention individually, with a few noted below. The drive for excellence in artistic work and the development of programs for the enjoyment and instruction of its members have been notable attributes of OAA activities. Bringing certain aspects of the visual fine arts to the local community, especially through various exhibits, has also been a worthy accomplishment of the association.

SPECIAL MEMBERS OF THE OAA

Special mention of certain OAA members is being noted due to their major contributions to the ongoing operations of the association.

Brooke Johns – for providing exhibition space for Ed Longley’s 1973 show at the Brooke Manor Country Club, was instrumental in the founding of OAA. With Johns’ help the newly emerging organization was provided space for annual shows for several years and this encouraged the artists’ group to continue its efforts to develop an increasingly successful community art organization.

Ed Longley - was a founding member of the small group of the original “Artists of Greater Olney”, which later became the Olney Art Association. Since the passing of Ed in December

2006, Sharon Longley contributes \$200 for the “Best in the Show” award that is named on his behalf. Ed’s one-man show at the Brooke Manor Country Club in 1973 inspired the idea of an art association for the greater Olney area but he has been almost continuously involved in operations of the association since its inception, serving as president in 1981-82. In addition to carrying out many of the task required for continuing success of the organization he has provided an historical perspective that has helped guide the association as it evolved over the years. In recognition of his efforts Ed was presented with a plaque of commendation in 1990. Not to be forgotten in his talent as an outstanding watercolorist whose work has sold well over the years. His 1973 show of 30 paintings, 17 of which were sold, is an early milestone of his recognition as a successful artist.

Regina Syrjala – ignited the spark that was responsible for what ultimately became the Olney Art Association. It was she, along with Brooke Johns’ daughter Martha, who recognized the desirability and opportunity for an art organization in the greater Olney area. She worked diligently to get the art organization established and for several years was the leader of the group (president in 1977 – 1978), often holding meetings in her home in support of the association’s activities. It seems only fitting that the annual juried members’ show is now held at Regina’s old home (the Woodlawn Mansion), presently owned by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission and renovated as a conference center.

John Bartley – (President 1991-1992) prepared the original “Brief History of the Olney Art Association” and provided this presidential postscript in August 1991. “The idea of preparing a document on the history of the Olney Art Association has been discussed on several occasions in recent years but serious efforts to accomplish this were not put into motion until 1991 when Dick Ray and Ed Longley were asked if they would undertake this task, with Dick having the primary responsibility for preparing the text and Ed serving in a major advisory capacity. The brief history narrated above is based on their search for and review of newsletters, newspaper clippings, and other records still available as well as on personal discussions with early OAA members. Because written records were incomplete, considerable reliance was placed on personal interviews. Despite some difficulty in obtaining pertinent historical information, the final document itself to be an accurate reflection of the OAA’s past and will serve as a permanent record of earlier activities. In addition to the information presented here an addendum is being prepared that will include biographies sketches of OAA members, photographic records of various activities, clippings of newspaper articles, copies of show programs and announcements, and other material related to OAA’s history.

Jane Preece – was a Rossmoor Art Guild teacher for about ten years. She taught drawing, acrylic, and watercolor painting at the Montgomery County Public Schools and continued teaching at Leisure World after retiring. Jane was an active member of the Olney Art Association and holds the record for serving as Co-President 7 years. Jane was the “Best in Show” several times and was a friend and teacher to many of the OAA members. ⁱ

¹This addendum was updated in 2014 with the assistance of Sally Drew who went through past minutes to assist in the update, Craig Whitt who provided past newsletters, Karen Norman who edited the final version and Peggy Tadej who pulled it all together. To all those individuals who have contributed historical data used in preparing this history of the Olney Art Association, our deepest appreciation.