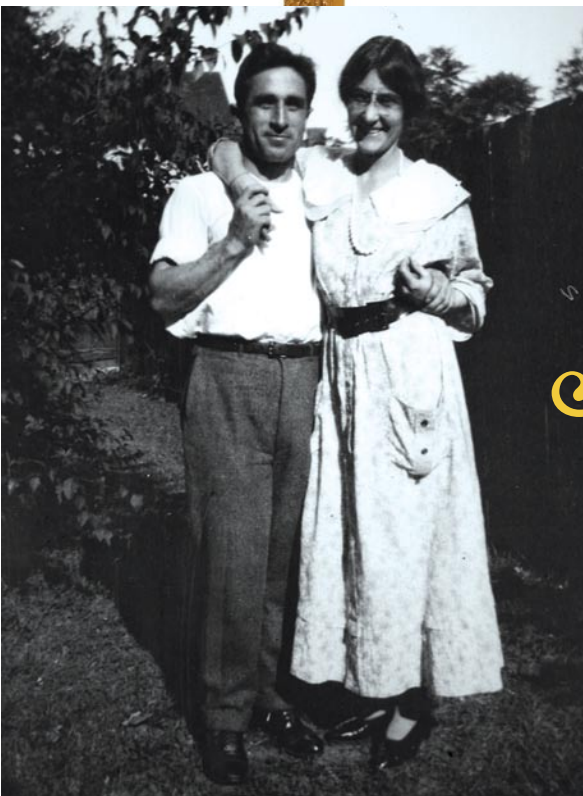




BROWN COUNTY ARTIST
Marie Goth
HER REMARKABLE
Life & Love

By Rachel Berenson Perry

(below) Marie and Varaldo Cariani, best friends or more? (right) Marie's self-portrait and her portrait of "Cari," both in middle age.



Marie Goth was a woman ahead of her time. She was a portrait painter in the early 20th century when men traditionally dominated that vocation. Moreover, she was a portrait painter in Brown County, where the other members of the legendary art colony were rural landscape artists.

While she may not have been the most famous painter in the colony, anyone in Indiana with an interest in art has heard or read about this unusual woman whose pioneering professional success and eccentric lifestyle—especially her ambiguous personal relationship with artist Varaldo Guiseppe Cariani—were fodder for gossip throughout her adult life.

Her portrait studio, a cabin north of Nashville, Indiana, became a magnet for people

Indiana's governors. Her expressive portraits hang throughout the United States.

Known locally for her eccentricities and frugality as well as her paintings, the dark-eyed Marie often wore hand-me-down clothes, served ice water and stale popcorn to visitors, and was loath to discard anything. A reporter for *The Indianapolis Star* wrote that when she served tea to the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra conductor, who was sitting for a portrait, the cups were cracked and the sugar bowl had a broken handle. And to this day speculation swirls around her relationship with Cariani. Living in adjacent cabins for decades, the couple's mutual devotion was obvious to all who knew them. Yet they never married.

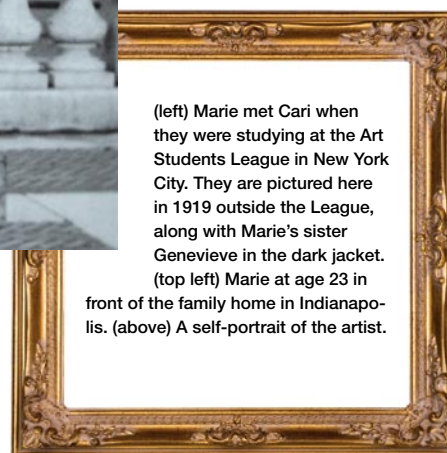
Marie made her daring choice to paint portrait commissions while attending the Art Students League in New York, where she studied for ten years with the well-known portrait artist Frank Vincent DuMond. Once her mind was made up, she never wavered from her ambition to be a first-rate portrait artist. Raised in an Indianapolis household of musicians—her father was a bass violinist for the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and her mother a talented contralto—Marie learned piano as a

TO THIS DAY *speculation swirls* AROUND HER *relationship with Cariani.*

from all walks of life during the heyday of the Brown County Art Colony, considered one the most important regional art colonies in the United States. During her long career she painted such luminaries as General Douglas MacArthur, movie czar Will Hays, Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley, and three of

youngster and briefly considered a career in music. “I wanted to pursue the piano by taking advanced instruction at Indiana University, but art is a jealous master and will not permit you to do anything else,” she wrote.

In New York, Marie painted small portraits while living at the Three Arts Club. “When a portrait was finished,” she wrote in an unpublished autobiography, “I would exhibit it briefly at the entrance of the Club dining room, and this was advertisement enough to help me with my expenses. My price was \$15.”



(left) Marie met Cari when they were studying at the Art Students League in New York City. They are pictured here in 1919 outside the League, along with Marie's sister Genevieve in the dark jacket. (top left) Marie at age 23 in front of the family home in Indianapolis. (above) A self-portrait of the artist.

“I REMEMBER *the first time I ever saw him,*
STANDING AT THE END OF THE HALL
ADJOINING THE PORTRAIT CLASSROOM.
He was surrounded by girls.” —MARIE GOTH

A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP BEGINS

It was shortly after arriving at the Art Students League in 1909 that Marie noticed Varaldo Cariani, known as Cari. “I remember the first time I ever saw him, standing at the end of the hall adjoining the portrait classroom,” she wrote. “He was surrounded by girls. He was very handsome. His coloring vivid as was his personality, and he had great charm though he was not conscious of it.”

Cari had arrived in United States from Bologna, Italy, with his family in 1894. His precocious drawing talent won him a Louis

Comfort Tiffany Foundation fellowship to study art while tending the lush flower gardens at the Tiffany mansion on Long Island. When he moved to Manhattan, Cari first studied at the National Academy of Design before transferring to the Art Students League, where he specialized in landscape and still life painting.

“I believe I fell in love with him at once, as everyone did,” Marie wrote in her memoir. “And somehow we were drawn together. ...It was wonderful just being near him.” The couple enjoyed long winter walks, ignoring icy winds, in Central Park or along Riverside Drive, and sketched along the Hudson River in warmer months. “Sometimes he would

telephone in the evening and ask what I was doing,” Marie recalled. “And I would say, ‘nothing in particular,’ and he would say, ‘Let’s do it together.’”

Their idyllic student life came to an end in 1917 when the intensely patriotic Cari enlisted in the Trench Mortar Battery of the American Expeditionary Force. Marie continued her studies at the Art Students League and received almost daily letters from him for the next 18 months. His letters filled her with horror. Cari, who fought in some of World War I’s bloodiest

battles, was surrounded by death. He and his fellow soldiers, trapped in the trenches for days without food, were forced to eat rats to survive.

BACK HOME IN INDIANA

Marie came home to Indiana for good in the spring of 1919. Her father, Charles Goth, was a renaissance man. In addition to being an accomplished musician, he was a skilled furniture builder and an excellent chef. With a brother, he owned and managed Crown Monument Company. And he adored Marie. When Cari returned to America, shell-shocked and disheartened, her father agreed to offer him a job as a stone carver. Marie's sister Genevieve bought a sketch from Cari to pay for his fare to Indiana.

The event that changed life for Marie and Cari was Genevieve's purchase of a summer home in Nashville in the fall of 1922. The sisters, with their father's solicitous approval,

found a quaint little cabin bedecked in climbing roses. Charles Goth spent the winter building chairs and tables to furnish the cabin. The following spring the Goth family loaded a truck with the furniture and cooking utensils and headed to Nashville.

"Cari was sitting up front with the driver. I can see him now," Marie wrote. "The wind blowing the brim of his hat back and he looking so interested in every bend of the road. It was a great and wonderful day!"

Cari moved into the cabin, and the Goth sisters continued to live at their parents' home in Indianapolis. Recovering from his post-war trauma, Cari found comfort in Brown County's rural hills. Most weekends, Marie and Genevieve would escape from the city to visit. "Cari met us at the driveway to help us in with our luggage," Marie later recalled, "[and] there on the kitchen table would be an extra large apple pie that he had made...."

Meanwhile, Marie was working

hard to establish her portrait business, setting up her studio in the family dining room in the Indianapolis house. When her mother could no longer climb the stairs, the dining room became Mrs. Goth's bedroom, and Marie decided to move her portrait studio to Brown County. Cari, who was disinclined to or dissuaded from sharing the cabin with Marie, scrambled to construct a chicken shack, where he slept until he could build his own small cabin on the Goth property.

Despite the Brown County Art Colony's recognized fame among artists in 1924, State Road 135 was only a cow path known as Three Notch Road when Marie took up residence in her cabin/studio. "No one could drive beyond my place as the road was just about impassable," she wrote. "It was rocky and rough and had furrows so deep they could break a wheel." Marie and Cari walked down this road to town for mail and groceries. "And when the creatures fell into the well and made it unfit to drink," she continued, "[we] walked down to the village pump to fill our pails with water...."

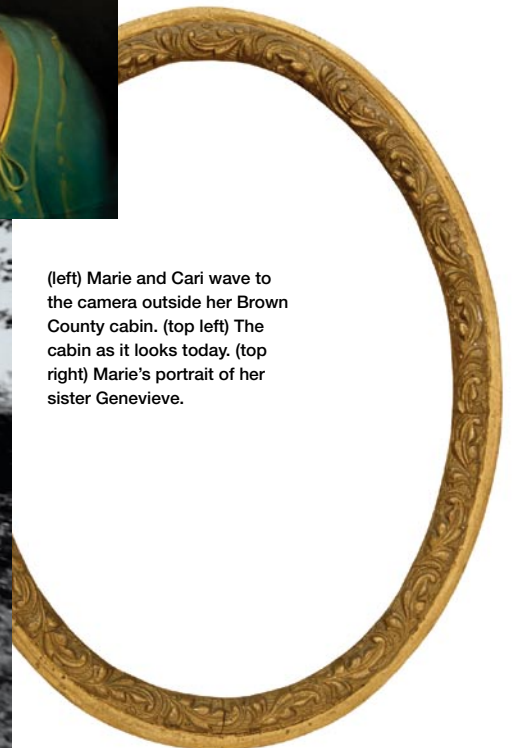


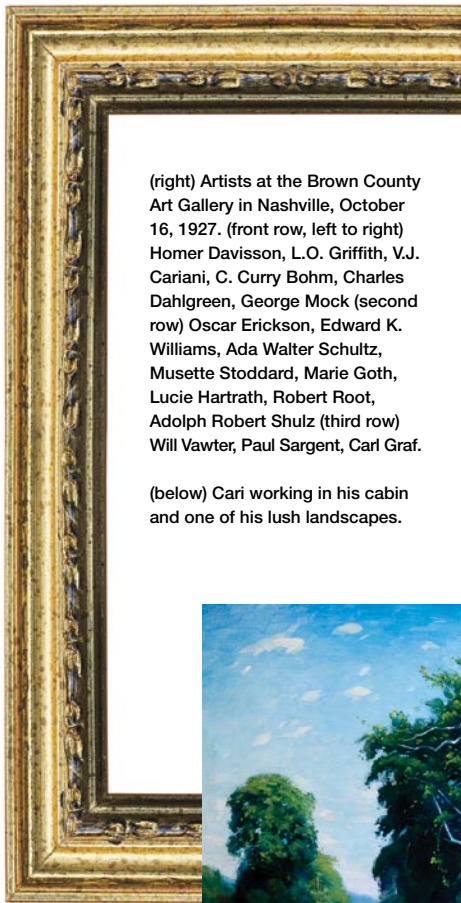
WHY THEY NEVER MARRIED

And so they lived for decades. Marie's determination to become a successful portrait artist remained foremost in her mind, and Cari cheerfully played a supporting role. "Cari took care of her. He did all the gardening and I heard that he did all the cooking



(left) Marie and Cari wave to the camera outside her Brown County cabin. (top left) The cabin as it looks today. (top right) Marie's portrait of her sister Genevieve.





(right) Artists at the Brown County Art Gallery in Nashville, October 16, 1927. (front row, left to right) Homer Davisson, L.O. Griffith, V.J. Cariani, C. Curry Bohm, Charles Dahlgreen, George Mock (second row) Oscar Erickson, Edward K. Williams, Ada Walter Schultz, Musette Stoddard, Marie Goth, Lucie Hartrath, Robert Root, Adolph Robert Shulz (third row) Will Vawter, Paul Sargent, Carl Graf.

(below) Cari working in his cabin and one of his lush landscapes.



“He was a very gentle and refined man, AND THEY WERE OF A VINTAGE THAT they were discreet. BUT YOU COULDN’T HELP BUT see her love for him....”

—AMANDA KIRBY

in her home,” Marie’s friend, artist Amanda Kirby, said in an interview with Carol Ann Weiss in *Skirting the Issue: Stories of Indiana’s Historical Women Artists*. “The way I understand it—he lived in his studio, which had no kitchen, and she in her home. They ate their meals together in [Marie’s] cabin. He was a very gentle and refined man, and they were

of a vintage that they were discreet. But you couldn’t help but see her love for him when they were together....”

In a 2001 interview with Weiss, Constance Graf Wilcox, a friend and cousin of Genevieve’s husband, emphatically agreed. “Marie and Cari were lovers,” she said. “Oh yes, it was accepted, well known, and some thought they were even married.” But marriage was never to be.

Explanations for the couple’s decision not to marry have ranged from Marie’s father’s disapproval, to platonic friendship, to their differing religious backgrounds. “I think Marie was interested in marrying Cari, and he was in love with her, but he was a devout Catholic and wouldn’t marry out of his religion,” the late Abe Eyed, a close friend and art columnist for the *Brown County Democrat*, told Weiss. The Goth family was Christian Scientist. It’s also possible that Marie’s decision to forego marriage and motherhood was fueled by her wish to be independent in order to fully pursue her career.

“The physical accommodations of her keeping house and all that stuff—she didn’t have time, and she knew it,” Eyed continued. “Cari made no demands on her.” Marie had acknowledged his contributions: “Cari was a



A self-portrait of Marie in her senior years.

most unusually fine character. He was always busy from early morning until night, painting, gardening, making frames for all of his paintings [and] all of mine.... Nothing ever seemed too hard for him to undertake....”

Cari’s attention to the practicalities of life allowed Marie to focus on her work. “It took 20 years of long-hour days of experimenting just to control my oils, so they wouldn’t be too runny, nor too tacky. This cannot be taught. You must keep working until you get it absolutely right,” she told Abe Eyed in a 1971 column. Marie would chat with her subjects

to her cabin to sit for portraits. “I don’t need to take a vacation,” she told Eyed. “Painting is both my work and diversion.”

When she wasn’t working on a commission, she solicited sitters whose appearance intrigued her. “Always on the lookout for an interesting face, she once convinced an artist from Chicago to sit for her during his visit to Nashville,” according to Carol Ann Weiss. “When their session was over, Charles W. Dahlgreen took the wet canvas off her easel, explaining he wanted to show it to the other painters then boarding at the hotel. Upon his return, Dahlgreen told Marie to finish her piece and enter it in the 1926 Hoosier Salon. She won First Place, Best Portrait in Oil.”

Against all odds, Marie succeeded as a portrait painter while becoming an essential part of the art colony. Her work brought distinction to Indiana and earned numerous honors from such

institutions as the National Academy of Design and Brooklyn Museum in New York, the Cincinnati Art Museum, and Hoosier Salon in Chicago and Indianapolis.

HER FINAL YEARS

Her determination to get what she wanted wasn’t limited to her career. In the spring of 1935, workers began building a new state highway past the door of her studio. Bulldozers and chain saws made quick work of all the trees lining the former lane, and her driveway was replaced with a mound of dirt. “[When it rained] there was an avalanche of mud all over my place,” Marie wrote. “I thought this was the end—certainly I’ll have to leave my beloved little Brown County studio.” She suggested that the workers dig a ditch to help with the drainage, but they refused.

Unfazed, Goth took her case to the family of Indiana’s one-time governor Paul McNutt, whose portrait she had recently painted. “The next day fourteen men came to my place and they put in a ditch, and there was no more trouble with water and mud after that.... It just goes to prove that one should know the right people.”

In addition to the “right people,” Marie’s supporters included other artists and many personal friends in the Nashville community, who looked after the elderly artist in her final years. Genevieve died in 1961, Cari eight years later at age 78. She missed him daily and could never bring herself to change his studio in any way.

When she was 87, two of Marie’s paintings were accepted in the juried 51st Hoosier Salon exhibition, but she died in January 1975 prior to the show’s opening. According to local sources, Marie became ill after being bitten by a brown recluse spider. She died from head injuries suffered after falling down a short stairway in her cabin.

Combining hard work with chutzpah, Marie Goth had reached her lifelong goal. In addition to her prominence as a portrait artist, she had been a charter member of the Brown County Art Gallery and founder of the Brown County Art Guild. She ensured its continuing heritage by leaving the bulk of her \$600,000 estate to the Guild. Her gift included all of her own artwork, as well as paintings by her sister, Genevieve Goth Graf (1890-1961); brother-in-law, Carl Graf (1892-1947); and Cari. The paintings, augmented by Marie’s personal journals, have been studied by historians and collectors ever since.

Perhaps her most valuable legacy to Brown County and the Guild was her series of eighteen Nashville artists’ portraits, now the finest documentation of the early art colony’s spirit. Originally displayed at the Indianapolis gallery of H. Lieber & Company in 1927, the exhibit received strong praise from *The Indianapolis Star* art critic, Lucille Morehouse: “Marie Goth’s ability as a portrait painter is proved conclusively in this exhibition of her recent work...the gleam of the eye, the half-smile, the spirit of fun and good humor, the air of thoughtfulness, of half-reticence—all have been caught by the artist’s skillful brush and serve their purpose in the delineation of character.”

One treasure remained. When Marie Goth died, 12 portraits of Veraldo Guisepppe Cariani were discovered in her collection. The first depicted the young and vibrant student at the Art Students League; the last was painted just before his death. ✨

Quotes attributed to Marie Goth are from her unpublished autobiography in the Brown County Art Guild archives, or from Marie Goth: Painter of Portraits, edited by M. Joanne Nesbit.

(right) Marie’s portrait of her friend Julia Lone Swigert, her neighbor in the late 1930s. Julia, now 96, lives in Austin, Texas. Her son Bill still resides in Nashville.

(below) The Brown County Art Guild in downtown Nashville houses the Marie Goth Collection. All of the original paintings accompanying this story can be found at the Guild along with several others.



during the first stages of each portrait session to watch their changing facial expressions. She then chose the pose that she thought captured the individual’s character. “Sometimes I work half a day for the right background,” she explained. “...And I have worked [as long as] a week on one hand.” And occasionally, after a person had posed long hours for a portrait, she refused to sell it, preferring to keep it herself.

BEATING THE ODDS

Her unrelenting commitment began to pay off. Neighbors, as well as prominent citizens throughout the state and the world, journeyed