

## **Meg Curry Gregg**

By Louise T. Gantress

The Curry family settled in South Carolina in the mid-1700s. They were patriots during the American Revolution, supporting the new Republic. Their opposition to slavery led to subsequent relocation over time that included Indiana and Kansas. The property on Mead Road was originally a part of the Smith farm, and was first sold in 1845 to V. Vitstock, changing hands several times until 1929 when Meg's parents, R. Eugene Curry and Margery Metheny Curry, bought it and brought the family to Armonk. At the time, the Curry home was the only house on Mead Road. The Kaiser chicken farm was at the corner, on Round Hill Road. Meg now lives in the home with her husband, Don Gregg.

Meg is the eldest of the four Curry children four children. The family immediately involved itself in the small community. Her father was a founder of the Banksville Community House, and with others established the North Castle Library (where her mother served as a volunteer librarian) and the North Castle Historical Society. Her uncle, John Steuart Curry, is a well-known painter in the American Regionalism" or Regionalist style.

Armonk was a smaller community at that time. Residents were employed locally, either by shops or farms. Conyers Farms produce of fruits and vegetables were sold in New York City. Local businesses included a blacksmith, two groceries, a drug store, and a stationery store, which sold newspapers. By contrast, Meg's father was unique in that he was one of the first commuters to New York. Walter Gifford, the CEO of AT& T and a town benefactor, was a neighbor. "Mr. Gifford allowed us to swim in his pond," Meg fondly recalled.

Mothers did not work outside the home, and if families had a car there was only one. Meg remembers deliveries of milk, bread and the weekly visits to the house from the fishmonger. "We were isolated. Parents did not permit children to bicycle on Route 22, so we couldn't go into town. This was the reason the Library began a bookmobile service. During the day we used our imagination to play, and read books. At night we listened to the radio. Our favorite programs were Jack Armstrong all American, Dick Tracy, I Love a Mystery and The Shadow." Movies were a special treat, and required a trip to White Plains.

As a girl, Meg was one of forty children to attend the two-room Middle Patent School that housed eight grades. "It was only a mile, so we walked," she said in a tone that indicated it was neither remarkable, nor a hardship. Her mother prepared a lunch of roast beef or chicken. At school Meg would swap lunch with a daughter of the manager

of Conyers Farm. The family was Finnish, and accustomed to fish, so through lunch swapping Meg discovered tuna fish sandwiches. She remembers school trips to museums in New York City.

Her childhood was a happy one. Meg recalls an early epiphany, at age eleven, when her mother permitted the children to greet the New Year by banging pots and pans while listening to the radio. "I realized that there has to be more to life than this," she said. Her social life revolved around home, her neighborhood and St. Stephen's Church. Strong family values directed her early life. "We had support and love from our parents, encouragement to do well, an expectation to excel at school and the importance of contributing to our community and, of course, our faith." Her father's contributions to the town were recognized with the naming of a street after him, R. Eugene Curry Road, off of Bedford-Banksville Road.

Back in the days Armonk enjoyed a reputation referred to as Barmonk due to the thirteen bars. "Some parents told their daughters not to go to Armonk. It was prohibited due to the many bars," Meg reminisced. Some of these bars, such as the Log Cabin or Blue Gardens, were well known for the big bands that played there, with the music carried on radio. Others, like the Oxbow (on the site of present day Opus 465) were notorious. Meg celebrated her seventeenth birthday at the Log Cabin. Residents had no fear for their safety, since Police Chief Hergehan stressed law and order and was himself famous for capturing bank robbers as they fled through town.

During World War II Meg and her family went to North Carolina where her father was stationed in the Navy. After the war the family returned to Armonk. Upon their return they family encountered an unfamiliar and exotic item: pizza. "We didn't know what it was." Meg went to high school in Pleasantville. "There was only one stop where we got the bus to school, in front of the Nichols Stationery Store (now Hickory & Tweed's bike shop). Boys took one bus, the girls another. We girls sang on the way to school. There was only one return bus, due to a late bus for sports. Only the boys had sports. Pleasantville was not a social scene for us. We were called "Armonk monkeys."

There was no car culture. Social life revolved around family, the neighborhood and church. Community events such as the Memorial Day Parade and the Firemens' Clambake were major social functions. Her first job was as a waitress at one of the clambakes. She also had a summer job in 1947 at Geung's Department Store in White Plains. The Armonk Airport, with its frozen custard stand, was another draw and many people came from all around to view the planes or take a ride. Her future husband, Donald Gregg, came to see the planes with his family from Hastings-on-Hudson, but they didn't meet in Armonk.

Meg went to Middlebury College and after graduation went to Washington, D.C. It was there she met Don Gregg. They married and embarked upon an international life where they were stationed in Saipan, Tokyo, Japan and Rangoon, Burma and Seoul, Korea. Meg credits her family's strong values in supporting their overseas life. "They visited us in Japan, Burma and Korea," she said. Anyone who has lived as an ex-patriot understands such support is essential. For thirty-three years the couple lived in Washington, D.C. when George H. W. Bush became President he appointed Don as the U.S. Ambassador to Korea.

In 1995 the Gregg's came to Armonk. For Meg, it was a happy return to her home, a feeling Don shares. The town continues to be the center for the extended Curry/Gregg family, including their three children and five grandchildren. "There have been many changes since the 1930's. I think the arrival of IMB in the early 1960's began Armonk's evolution from a congenial small village to a successful suburban community."

Given the community spirit which resonated in the family, and following in her father's footsteps, Meg volunteers her time. She serves on the board of the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery, and is a member of the Friends of the Library, the North Castle historical society, and is a supporter of the Banksville Community House. She and Don attend St. Stephen's Church, where they were married in 1953. She also participates in three international societies, the Korea Society, Foreign Policy Association and a Japanese American woman's group called Nadashiko Kai. As one would expect, Meg is an elegant, articulate and poised woman who is a mainstay in our community.