

Marilyn P. Curry

December 18, 1930 – June 9, 2021

Research has proven the importance of friends, but today, Agawam, and I, have one less. Our good friend, Marilyn Curry, is gone, at 90 years old.

Marilyn was not an Agawam native. She used to tease me that although we both arrived in Agawam in 1964 (I as a newborn), no matter how long she lived here, she would always be considered a newcomer. I told her there were some people in town who would consider us both newcomers; my family has been here for only 100 years.

Newcomer or not, no single person in the long existence of this town has done more to promote and protect its history than Marilyn Curry. Marilyn embraced this town, warts and all, and immediately dove into the preservation of its past. Marilyn's dedication to the history of Agawam can only be described as historic itself.

She and her husband Dick shared a love of history and moved into the c.1760 John Stockwell/Artemas Beebe House at 6 South West Street with their family, including their children, Debora and Rick. They joined the recently formed Agawam Historical Association, of which they were Active members, *with a capital A*. Marilyn became president of the organization, and while some presidents served multiple terms over a span of a few years, Marilyn served multiple terms over a span of *decades*, in *every* decade from the 1960s on. Marilyn was president during two of the association's most significant achievements: the opening of the Agawam Historical & Fire House Museum on Elm Street, and the purchase of the c. 1757 Thomas Smith House on North West Street, both of which occurred in 2002.

During the 1970s, she, Dick, and other association members conducted the first inventory of historic resources in town, documenting many of the town's earliest homes for the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Many of these inventory forms can still be found on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) website; the information they collected is used to this day in historical research.

Marilyn was instrumental in the formation of the Agawam Historical Commission in 1979, serving as its first chair and continuing in that capacity for many years. She served as chair of the History Book Committee, which commissioned the first comprehensive history of the town, Edith Lafrancis' landmark *AGAWAM, Massachusetts A Town History*, published in 1981. For many years, she and Dick wrote the very popular "In Old Agawam" column about the history of Agawam in the *Agawam Advertiser*. Marilyn's knowledge of early American and Agawam history was unparalleled. She was a direct link to Edith and the descendants of early Agawam families she had gotten to know when she first moved here.

I met Marilyn in 1988, when I was invited to serve on the Anne Sullivan Memorial Committee she had recently organized. At the time, Marilyn was only a few years older than I am now; I was just beginning to become involved in town affairs. The effort to raise money for the Mico Kaufman sculpture *Water* depicting Helen Keller and Feeding Hills native Anne Sullivan took much longer than Marilyn had expected (raising money in this town always does) but the end result was Agawam's first public sculpture, a beautiful bronze work that was installed in Feeding Hills Center in 1992. Of Marilyn's many accomplishments, bringing this work of art to town held a special place in her heart.

I often wondered over the years why Marilyn had decided to ask a clueless twenty-something year old to serve on that committee, and it took me 30 years to ask her. She told me when she was looking for members, she asked longtime school committee member Roberta Doering to serve. Mrs. Doering wasn't able to at the time, but it was she who suggested to Marilyn that I might be a good choice. At the time, I was a year into my first term as a school committee member – clumsily learning my way through Agawam politics. Marilyn had assumed I had always known of Mrs. Doering's endorsement – and beamed with delight at being able to finally fill me in. Both Marilyn and Roberta took me under their wings as I became more involved in the community – how lucky was I to have had the support and encouragement of these two remarkable women?

As I got to know Marilyn during those fundraising years, I discovered my hometown had a historical association and a historical commission (Who knew?) – two organizations I would soon become involved with, allowing me to work alongside Marilyn and learn, learn, learn. I would eventually succeed her as chair of the Agawam Historical Commission (talk about big shoes to fill!), and her unwavering support and ultimate confidence in me helped me appreciate the small victories and accept the challenges and disappointments (of which there are many) of the position.

Marilyn freely shared her historical knowledge of the town, answering questions about people, buildings, events, and the ever-present mysteries that historical research uncovers. I was eager to contribute to the history of the town and Marilyn was a mentor sine qua non. At historical commission meetings, she was a living reference library and her vast institutional memory of all matters Agawam was invaluable. Marilyn reviewed drafts and proofs of each of the four books of local history I compiled, and provided stories, photos, and research. My most recent book was dedicated to Marilyn in honor of her valued friendship and for all she had done for me, and for the town.

Marilyn was a trustee of the Whiting Street Fund, a longtime fixture at the polls on election day, and served the town in numerous other capacities over the years. Her faith was of utmost importance to her, and she was very active at Sacred Heart Church. She was fiercely proud of her Irish heritage — as a Fitzpatrick who married a Curry, I suspect she had no choice.

Marilyn and I worked together on the Agawam Sesquicentennial Committee and I served alongside her on the board of trustees of the Captain Charles Leonard House for more than 20 years. Her pride, love, and devotion to the Captain Leonard House was legendary – as was her strict adherence to potato salad recipes and aversion to plastic dishware – and her presence kept the board on its toes and on its best behavior at all times. The only thing that might distract her attention from a board meeting would be a Red Sox game — she loved her Sox! Her absence from the May 2021 tag sale was one of the few Leonard House events over the past 40 years she did not attend.

Marilyn quickly became a dear friend of our family. She attended my wedding to Laurie and sewed a beautiful heirloom christening gown worn by our sons, Joseph and Bailey. She never forgot a birthday, anniversary, or St. Patrick's Day, most recently sending us a shamrock that she had grown herself, which will be treasured always. Kind and remarkably thoughtful, she remembered Joe and Bailey at each of their life's milestones, and for years left a wrapped present for them on our front porch every Christmas Eve. Her generosity extended to our pets as well. She loved animals, having had several cats and dogs during her years in town, and beamed upon meeting our two newest kittens, Simon and Daisy. She promptly ordered us/them a laser and "Tower of Tracks" cat toy – and genuinely delighted with each feline update.

In 2016, I was chosen by the Agawam St. Patrick's Committee to receive its Citizenship Award. Knowing that Marilyn was not only a member of that committee, but the previous year's recipient, and that she would be the person presenting the accompanying bright green sash to me at the ceremony ensured the honor was especially meaningful. Again, those huge shoes!

In recent years, health issues forced Marilyn to slow down, something she resisted with every fiber – she liked to get out and get things done. I was her chauffeur to historical association/commission and Captain Leonard House meetings and events, and I cherished the time in the car, where I would always learn something new about town history on the way home. There was an added bonus that she would usually send me home with something fresh from her kitchen – which was truly a treat, as Marilyn was a fantastic baker. She would hand over each perfectly wrapped treat with a mischievous little smile. I suspect she knew how good her baked goods were. *Sinfully* good. It was due to Marilyn and her treats that I developed an appreciation of the importance of doilies.

The isolation of the coronavirus pandemic was difficult for Marilyn. Being unable to participate in the civic activities that were so integral to who she was coincided with worsening health issues. I never heard her complain, but I know it bothered her. After we were both vaccinated (she received her second dose on St. Patrick's Day, of course), I made a point to visit more often. On one visit this Spring, we discussed the preservation work being done at the Thomas Smith House Garage. She hadn't been there since before the project was started and she asked if I would drive her out there once she felt up to it. That is a ride I will always wish I was able to make with her.

Marilyn's family meant so much to her, and I extend my deepest sympathy to Rick, Fran, and her entire family. Always remember that smile of Marilyn's – she was so proud of her grandchildren and loved you all so much.

Laurie reminded me that Marilyn's friendship was a gift – and that she spent the past 30 years preparing me for this moment. Perhaps that is true, but it does nothing to lessen my sadness. I am so fortunate to have known Marilyn. Even more so that she considered me her friend. She was a true and loyal friend – to me, and to this town – and her absence will forever be felt. In her determined, stubborn, and quiet way, Marilyn left an enduring mark on her adopted hometown, and shoes that are impossible to fill.

David Cecchi
Agawam, Massachusetts
June 10, 2021

From the Agawam Center Cemetery gravestone of Mercy Leonard,
wife of Captain Charles Leonard, who died January 28, 1819 at age 55:

*Farewell bright soul, a short farewell
Till we shall meet again above
In the sweet groves where pleasures dwell
And trees of life bear fruits of love
While the dear dust she leaves behind sleeps in thy bosom, sacred tomb!
Soft be her bed, her slumbers kind, and all her dreams of joy to come*