

96-year-old shares trove of local history

By Kris DiLorenzo

Aleta Reid, 96, of Dobbs Ferry, is a walking history book. The former board member of the Ardsley Historical Society caused a stir when she arrived at the Society's open house event, "120 Years of Ardsley History," held at the community center on Nov. 13. The program, attended by approximately 50 visitors, featured displays of photos, maps, and artifacts going back even further than a century, to the Revolutionary War.

Reid could identify many of the people pictured, and remembered many of the scenes as if they had happened yesterday. Shown a photo of a group of schoolchildren dancing around a maypole, she pointed out herself. "That was taken in 1926 at the end of kindergarten year; I was 6 years old."

Though Reid has lived in Dobbs Ferry since age 2, and still lives in her parents' home on Northfield Avenue, she is in the Ardsley School District. "I attended school in Ardsley, from kindergarten until I graduated [high school] in 1938," she told the Enterprise during an interview in her living room. Her school, at 700 Ashford Avenue, opposite Ardsley Village Hall, is now a 39-unit condominium.

"I made the honors list sometimes," she recounted, "not all the time. I was a serious student." She was also, for the most part, a good girl. "Well, I tried to be," she noted.

Reid's parents, Andrew and Aleta, moved from Claremont, N.H.; her mother had lived in Dobbs Ferry before.

Reid's history straddles Dobbs Ferry and Ardsley, though she said, "Ardsley really seemed like my hometown." When she was growing up, the current site of the Concord Road Elementary School was fields, what is now the middle school property was a "health farm," and the high school campus was "a pickle farm." Joseph Coggins' Dairy was not far from her home, and the circus visited Dobbs Ferry annually. "It wasn't Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey," she explained, "but they had animals."

Her childhood games were hopscotch and jump rope. At age 12, Reid helped out at her father's Liberty Food Store at 458 Ashford Avenue in Ardsley, along with her mother.

Reid recalled that when she was a teenager, "There was bowling, and I tried that a few times. I didn't get very far." She also attended school dances, worked behind the scenes on a high school play ("I wasn't part of the act"), and took a senior class trip to Washington, D.C. "All through the four years of high school we were earning money toward the trip," she remembered.

After high school, Reid didn't opt for the traditional choice of becoming a wife and mother. "I went beyond what they taught in the high school," she said. "I went to Packard Business School in New York City for commercial classes. I loved the shorthand and the typing, and then I

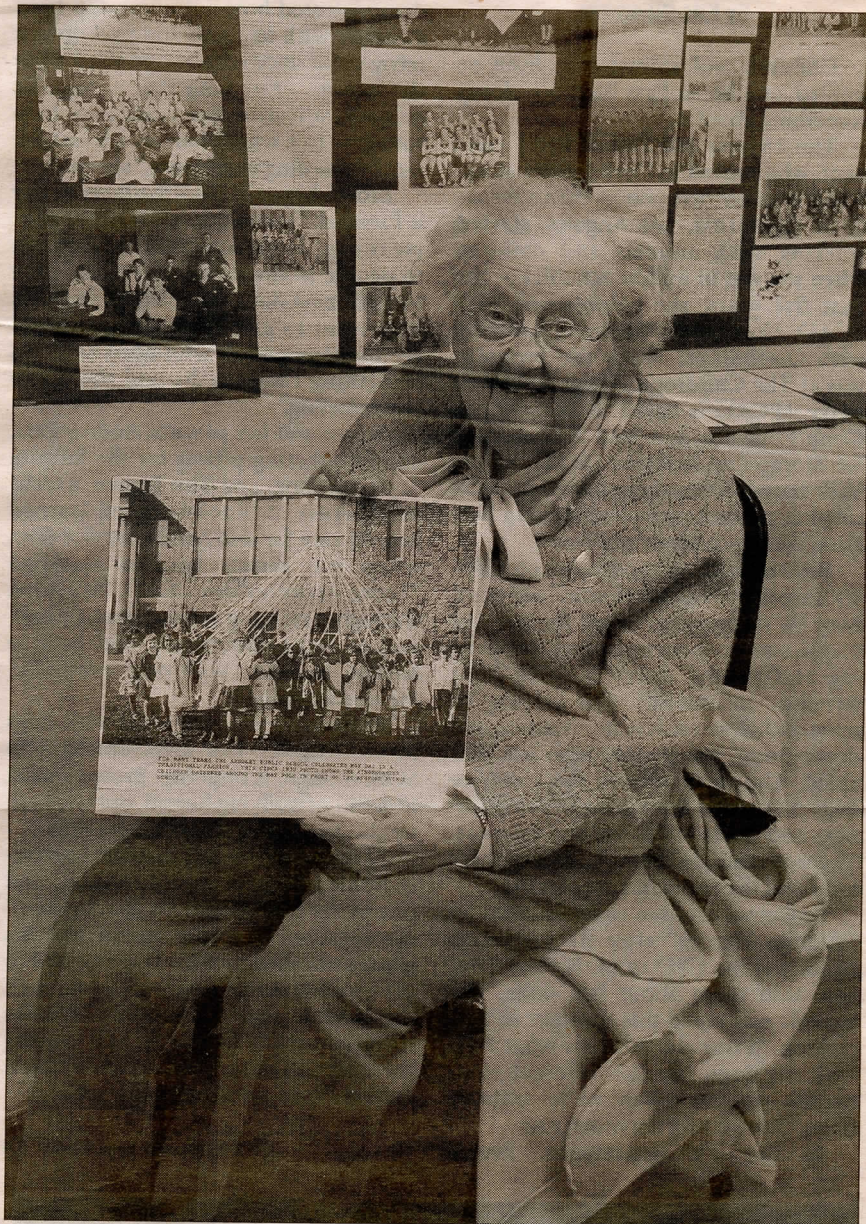


PHOTO BY STEVE WITTENBERG

Aleta Reid holds a photo of herself and other students dancing around a maypole outside the Ashford Avenue School in 1926.

didn't have a phone at the house or at the store, the bank manager came over to speak to my father in the store and said he would like to see me. My dad explained that I was visiting up in Croton. So through my neighbor, he got a message to me that Mr. [John] Vredenburg wanted to see me, so I got the next train back to Dobbs Ferry, and went down to the bank very quickly. It was a short interview."

Reid was hired by the First National Bank of Ardsley in August 1939, at \$12 a week. "I was there 41 years," she added. "I

didn't know it was going to last that long!" During her tenure at the bank, Reid was promoted from teller and bookkeeper to assistant treasurer, while the bank went through two mergers and moved from its ground-floor location in the McCartney Building in Addyman Square to the site of the current Chase Bank at 500 Ashford Avenue.

"I walked to work for the first 20 years," she joked, "and for the second 20 years I drove a car."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

Reid

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

A longtime parishioner of Ardsley United Methodist Church, where she formerly taught Sunday school, Reid has witnessed dramatic changes in the area since she was a child: construction of the Saw Mill River Parkway (begun in 1926) and the New York State Thruway (1954-55); the fire department's acquisition of "Old Betsy," its 1928 Seagrave pumper; and the disappearance of three ferry lines, from Tarrytown, Dobbs Ferry, and Yonkers that crossed the Hudson River to Nyack, Sneden's Landing, and Alpine, N.J., respectively.

A rash of development in the River-towns is the latest change. "I'm amazed, because the price of building is so expensive," she stated. "I don't know how they can afford to build — and they're not just building little 2-by-4s. They have some beautiful big houses up on Euclid Avenue."

Though she no longer drives her 1989 Toyota Camry, Reid made an observation about the Ashford Avenue Bridge: "I wish they could get it done quicker. At the commuter time, that's when it's really jammed up. I don't know any other way they could have done it, unless they made an overpass over the parkway as they did in Elmsford, then they wouldn't have needed it. Too late now."

Back when she did drive, Reid took long road trips with relatives to Texas and Florida. She also went on a group tour to the British Isles, visiting England and Scotland.

Her routine nowadays is simple: she takes her pills, has breakfast, then sits at her dining room table to write letters and notes, "and answer all the junk mail I get a lot of." Reid is firm about never touch-

ing a computer. Her nephew Robert, who lives in Elmsford, joked that she left her bank job the same day the first computer arrived. "I get by all right by the old-fashioned way of writing letters and getting letters back," Reid affirmed. "I keep the post office in business buying all the stamps. Of course, the phone is great for keeping in touch with a lot of people." Afternoons are filled with visitors and sometimes a trip to the doctor.

There are a lot of people in Reid's life, because her family has expanded exponentially. She was the oldest of four children; her brothers Andrew and Alexander are deceased (Robert is Alexander's son), and her sister Allison lives in Massachusetts. Reid now has seven nieces and nephews, 13 great-nieces and great-nephews ("at the last count"), and six great-great nieces and great-great nephews.

Her family also has been involved in Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry, as members of the police force, fire department, and school system, among other public services. Robert, for example, spent 42 years in the Ardsley Volunteer Fire Department, and is a former chief.

Reid was active in the community, receiving awards from the Lions Club, the Kiwanis Club (who named her Woman of the Year in 1980), a citation plaque from then-Mayor Richard Fontana, and one from the Ardsley-Sector Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

Though she goes to bed early these days, Reid is glad for one invention in her lifetime: television. Her favorite show is "Everybody Loves Raymond." She doesn't like much else of what she sees on TV, but she is faithful to the series: "I've seen them all, and I watch all the reruns."

As for her divided loyalties between Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry, she said, "I think both towns are a great place to live."