

Betsy Park

Our relationship with Amenia has to be understood in the context of our sense of "place," strong in both my husband and myself, and in the chance we had in 1965 to move into the house that we still live in today. This house was built by Jabez Flint in 1813 for his family; he and seven subsequent generations of Flints were born, lived and died here, until economics and changes in farming practices caught up with them in 1963, and they lost the farm. My husband Jamie and I came to the area in 1964. His first job was teaching music at Ed Pulling's Millbrook School (then for boys only), even though his field of expertise was English Literature, with a bent towards Chaucer. Through a lucky series of events we were able to buy the Flint house, now divested of its original 500 acres of farmland, and moved in after the birth of our first child in July, 1965.

We have lived largely unconventional lives in this starkly simple but very beautiful house. We raised two daughters here, survived a major winter-night house fire in 1970 (thanks to the wonderful efforts of the Amenia and surrounding Fire Departments, and the Flint's galvanized roof, which prevented the fire from breaking out of the top of the house) and progressed through a series of careers. These included the academic (Jamie continued teaching, while pursuing advanced degrees at Trinity and Yale) and at Bennett College in the 1970's. He resigned from his administrative post at Bennett shortly before the college closed in 1977 to pursue an increasing interest in musical composition, and I stepped out to work, employed by the Millbrook Hunt for the next 27 years, until retiring in 2004. In 1977 our roles reversed, in a way that was probably ahead of the times. He took over much of the daily chores of parenting and the increasing job of maintaining our very large vegetable garden, while I was in charge of the day to day operations of hounds and horses at the Hunt. This career, as well as a childhood spent in a conservation-minded family, has certainly informed how we as a family feel about open space and uncontrolled development.

This seems like a bare-bones resume, but our lives here are continuously influenced by those of the people who came before us. Gilbert Flint's daughter, Catherine Leigh, lived down the hill in the 1960's (in the cottage now owned by Maxine Paetro) and her daughter BethAnn babysat for our two young daughters. Through her we learned something of the family and its history (Catherine was also the Town Historian for many years) and were continually aware of their lasting presence in the persona of our (their!) house, and of our surroundings. They planted the long row of sugar maples along the road that bears their name. Our house is surrounded in May by the tall old-fashioned lilacs, white and lavender, that they planted around the doors and in the back yard. Our house is cooled in summer by the now gigantic silver maple that they planted about a century ago on the site of an old well in the side yard. We

enjoy the fruits and blooms of an ancient quince tree near our vegetable garden, and on, and o. Someone was interested in horticulture...we have avalanche lilies (native to the Rockies) under the silver maple, Rocky Mountain columbines in the garden, and Filipendula Venusta growing wild on the edge of the lawn.

Through the years, and with the arrival of the Internet, our Flint connection has, interestingly, become stronger. One family member, Louise Cox, now retired in Kitty Hawk, S.C. has been the family spokesperson, and has shared many details of family life on Flint Hill.

In the 1990's, a series of Flint Family reunions brought the entire re-uning clan to our door. They trooped through the house, gawked at the wardrobe still remaining in our daughter Darcy's old room upstairs (apparently the source of much family legend) and admired the massive granite carriage block that still commands the driveway by the south door. The house, in Flint family history, oral and otherwise, commands a central place. We heard tales of survival...Catherine's father, Gilbert, then aged six, was missing during the Blizzard of '88 (they walked to school) and was (obviously) found safe days later. The men of the family took turns, during great storms, driving teams of oxen up and down the road to keep it clear so they could get the milk out, and during the worst blizzards they strung a rope to the barn for guidance. Following their visit, they would invariably line up in front of my perennial border and ask Jamie to take their picture. Eventually, they included him in their pictures, adding him to the family as an "honorary Flint."

The Flint family history seems so remote, today, as to be a fairy tale... except that, in fact, we were living in the house in the late 1960's when there were memorable storms. On one occasion, wind-driven snow came in through the upstairs window casements and lay 4" deep on the bed.

Today, as a result of a phenomenal increase in the value of real estate, we find ourselves inhabiting an extremely valuable property. The tide that has lifted the boats of those who have invested in property along Route 22 has raised ours also, with one major difference, we need to LIVE in our house, not sell it. People often come to our door to ask if the house is for sale. Last week Jamie's Scottie raised the alarm, and he realized that there was a strange car in the driveway, a woman was hurrying across our (disheveled) ground cover. When he asked what he could do for her, she told him how much she loved the house, and that she was just measuring the front door, and by the way, was the house for sale? We wondered what she would do if she knew about the milk snakes in the cellar (which sometimes make their way upstairs), the bats in the attic, the swifts in the chimneys, the rat traps under the downstairs bathroom and the carpenter ant hatch that occurs every spring in the master bedroom upstairs. To say nothing of the stream that races through the cellar, the siphons under the kitchen crawl space, and the occasional leak upstairs dating from the 1970 fire and untraceable.

We remain here by living as simply as possible. The thermostat for our oil burner is set at 58 degrees, the optimal temperature to keep pipes from freezing. We gather 'round the kitchen woodstove, wear our clothes until they are no longer at all presentable, raise and preserve all our own vegetables, own few gimmicks (only three channels on the TV) and drive our vehicles until they drop. Are we "rich?" Undeniably, very. We have good health and six wonderful grandchildren, the eldest two of whom we share with those famous Depot Hill millionaires, Jack and Betty Rooney. This house has become an intense focus and an object of love and respect for our own extended family, who all try to come for every Christmas. Our surroundings are beautiful. We have been able to pursue interesting jobs that we love. We can still go fishing and hunting, and we've been able to do all this in this small town called Amenia.

Looking at my fellow IA Board members I do in fact see "rich people." We are all involved community members, committed to this place and to its preservation, growth and good fortune. We're looking at a century that is going to bring unimagined changes, and I hope to see as much of it as possible from right here, where we are. Thanks!