

The History of Demarest Parkway
& The Demarest Name
Town of Elmira
Scott W. Deming- Town Historian

In May of 2010 the Demarest Parkway Association will celebrate their 70th anniversary. Demarest Parkway is named after Mark W. Demarest who inherited the land from his mother Arline Lewis Demarest. The homes on the southern end of Demarest Parkway were built between 1940 and 1957. According to recollections from the original residents, the association was formed in 1940 by Minnie Demarest (Mark's wife) and Alpheus Underhill (one of the original home owners) to control the development of the lower portion of Demarest Parkway. Post Depression and pre-WWII housing tended to favor smaller, less expensive homes. They wanted to develop lower Demarest Parkway with the same quality and approximately size of homes that were located on upper Demarest Parkway and West Water Street. There were also concerns that cottage development along the river on the streets south of West Water Street would continue up lower Demarest Parkway. The association wanted to continue the parkway island concept from upper Demarest Parkway to lower Demarest Parkway. As a result of these concerns the association filed the protective covenants and the neighborhood committee agreement in the Chemung County clerk's office on May 24, 1940. The neighborhood committee would be required to approve any changes to these original covenants. A photograph of lower Demarest Parkway from 1949 (see photo below) shows the street still under development and the cottages that existed along the Chemung River at the time.

The Demarest name can be traced back to David deMarets who arrived in America on April 16, 1663 from Germany. David was born in 1620 at Beauchamps, France. When he was a young man the family relocated numerous times moving from France to Holland. They fled to Germany in 1651 due to the fear of war between France and Belgium and seeking assurances of protection and hope of religious freedom. David arrived in America in 1663 and first settled in a Huguenot village on Staten Island where he remained for two years before relocating to Harlem, NY. Staten Island at the time was sparsely settled and open to constant attacks from the Indians as well as attacks from the English. David organized the French Protestant Church on Staten Island and was recognized on a tablet to his memory at the Huguenot Church at Huguenot Park. In 1665 they relocated to Harlem, NY where David took an active role in town affairs. He was appointed to his first public office of Overseer in 1667 and later went on to become Magistrate and Constable. His name is mentioned frequently in references to the History of Harlem. David relocated from Harlem and purchased 2000 acres of land between Hackensack and the Hudson River in 1677 which later came to be known as the French Patent. The land was acquired from the Tappan Indians with the understanding that 45 families would settle there. David was a prominent citizen of the Hackensack community for fifteen years while in New Jersey and died in 1693 at the age of 73 years of age.

Mark W. Demarest (who Demarest Parkway is named after) is a ninth generation descendant of David deMarets mentioned above. The generations of male Demarest descendant's births can be traced from Mannheim, N.J. to Kinderkamack, N.J. to Schraalenburgh, N.J. (now Dumont, N.J.) to Catskill, New York where they spent 60+ years (3 generations) after the Revolutionary War, to Elmira, New York on May 10, 1835

(according to the History of Chemung County by Ausburn Towner) to Lawrenceville, Pa. where they show up in the 1860 US Census and then back to Elmira. The first presence of the Demarest name in the Town of Elmira was John Henry Demarest (Mark's grandfather and seventh generation Demarest was a lumber merchant while living in Catskill, New York) from the 1870 US Census where his occupation was listed as a farmer at 66 years of age along with his wife Eliza, 58 years of age. His son Woodman Demarest (Mark's father and eighth generation) was also listed in 1870 in the Town of Elmira as a farmer at 38 years of age with his wife Arline (aka Caroline) age 26 with one son Mark age 1. In the 1880 US Census Woodman is listed in the Town of Elmira at 49 years of age with his wife Caroline age 37 and son Mark age 11. In the 1910 US Census Mark Demarest is listed in the City of Elmira on West Church Street in the 1st Ward as a bookkeeper-fire engine maker at age 41 years of age with wife Minnie age 42. Minnie's parents (Samuel and Cora Banks) and sister (Elizabeth Banks) are shown as living with them. In the 1920 US Census Mark Demarest is listed as living in what appears to be his father Woodman's house in the city of Elmira on West Church Street in the 3rd Ward with his wife Minnie, his father Woodman (now 88 years of age), his father-in-law Samuel and his sister-in-law Elizabeth. Mark Demarest died on July 28, 1932 and Minnie Demarest died on September 19, 1941. They are both buried in Elmira's Woodlawn Cemetery.

The land that Demarest Parkway was built on can be traced back to the original owner Adam Sly who occupied a 320 +/- acre piece of property in the Town of Elmira. Adam was one of the early settlers coming to Elmira after the Revolutionary War along with John Hendy. It was quite common for soldiers who fought in the area under General Sullivan and General Washington to return here when the war was over. The family names of Sly and Demarest can be found in the regiment listing of General John Hathorn of Warwick, New York who fought during the revolutionary war and led the Battle of Minisink. It was after the defeat at Minisink that General Washington ordered General John Sullivan and General James Clinton to lead a huge military expedition against the Iroquois nation in the Finger Lakes Region. The Iroquois were defeated and their lands were confiscated. After the war land was given to thousands of war veterans in lieu of pensions and back pay. Prior to the revolutionary war John Hathorn was part of the surveying team that surveyed the borders between New York/New Jersey and New York/Pennsylvania as well as Chemung County following the war. He had a very successful political career as State Assemblyman, State Senator, Assembly Speaker and a member of the House of Representatives. He died in 1825 and is buried in the Warwick, NY cemetery.

In 1866 the lands of William T. Post were deeded to Arline Lewis Demarest shortly after her marriage to Woodman Demarest on March 21, 1865. This was a 61.5 acre parcel or approx 1/5 of the "Old Adam Sly Farm" (see diagram of land parcel). It is unclear what the connection between William T. Post and Arline Demarest may have been or whether this land was a wedding gift. What is known is that William T. Post was the son of Catherine Hathorn Post and the grandson of General John Hathorn discussed above. He went on to become NYS Assemblyman from 1864-1865 and Elmira Postmaster from 1867-1869. From Arline Demarest the land was then passed down to her son Mark Demarest.

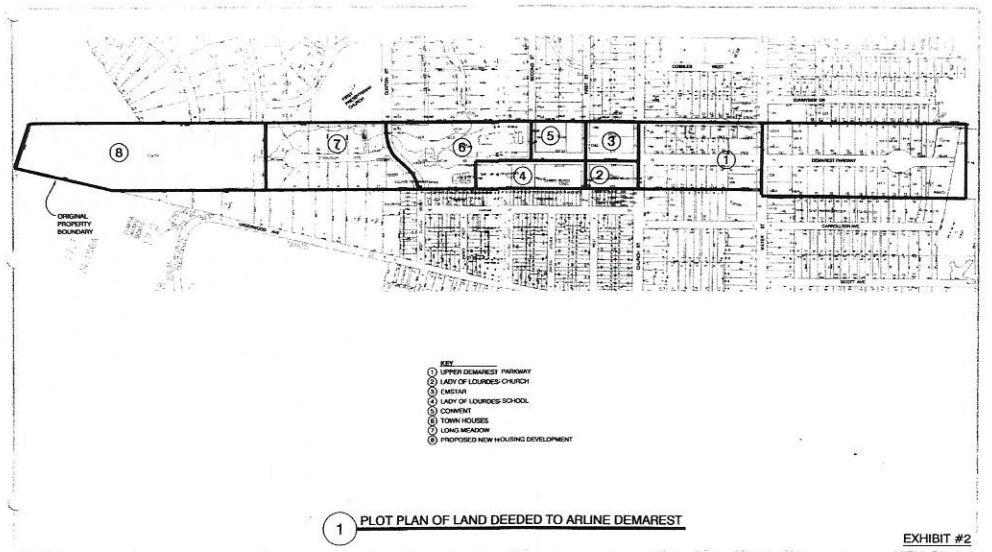
Information for this article was taken from the History of Demarest Parkway by James E. Barr, The Demarest Family by the Demarest Family Association of Hackensack N.J. published in 1964, the Steele Memorial Library and its website, US Census Records and various other internet websites.

Writer's Note: In the article on Carr's Corners in the Fall of 2009 Town Talk the arrows incorrectly showed the locations of the Carr's Corners School and the Farmer's Club. This error occurred during the formatting of the newsletter.

I continue to look for historic subjects (people, places, homes, historical events, old schools, family history, etc) about the Town of Elmira to write about. If you have any suggestions or information for future articles please e-mail them to me at demingsw@yahoo.com or call me at 607-732-1177.



1949 view of Lower Demarest Parkway from the Southside of the Chemung River
 (Photo compliments of Dr. Louis Lodico)



Plot plan of the land deeded to Arline Demarest from the Chemung River (on right)
 north to the base of the hill