

**DORRIS MARJORIE  
LAFFERTY  
CURTIS  
1908-2006**



**FOLK-ART  
PAINTER,  
AUTHOR AND  
SONGWRITER**

Dorris Curtis was a nationally recognized folk-art painter, author and songwriter. Inspired by folk art painter Grandma Moses, Curtis began painting at 65 after retiring from teaching.

Dorris Marjorie Lafferty was born in March 1908 in Foyil. She grew up on the family farm, and much of her folk art is based on memories of her early years. She graduated from Foyil High School in 1925 and immediately enrolled in Oklahoma State Teachers College in Tahlequah.

She met her husband George Curtis, while traveling home for holiday visits. A widower with a three-year-old daughter, he was a telegrapher at the Fort Gibson railroad station. They were married in July 1926, and had a son the following year. For several years, the Curtis family moved frequently to towns along the Central Division of the Missouri Pacific Railroad between Little Rock and Coffeyville, Kansas.

Curtis started teaching elementary school when the family moved to Van Buren. Not long after the family moved to Conway, Curtis enrolled at Arkansas State Teachers College, now University of Central Arkansas (UCA), where she received a bachelor's in education in 1940. With the outbreak of World War II, Curtis resigned from teaching to work for the railroad for fifteen years because it paid significantly more money than teaching. She received a master's in education in 1962 and continued teaching first grade until her retirement in 1973, at the age of 65.

While teaching, Curtis also served as vice president of the Arkansas Writers Convention. She composed country songs and sent recordings to Nashville publishers. Her songs "Cry Baby Cry" recorded by the Wilburn Brothers and "Blabbermouth Sidewalk Stroll" recorded by Chuck Bowers were released by Decca Records in 1968.

Art came naturally to Curtis, using it whenever possible in her teaching. Approaching retirement, Curtis reasoned, "Grandma Moses started painting without formal training when she was seventy, creating memory pictures of her childhood. Why can't I do the same?" Unlike Moses, Curtis wasn't a self-taught artist. She enrolled in art classes at UCA, where she completed the equivalency of a degree in fine arts.

She also attended classes at the Art Center in Little Rock, along with Milford Zornes in Mexico, as well as read art books and joined art clubs as she developed her craft. She also traveled extensively and visited great museums in Europe and America. She had a one-woman art exhibit at the Women's Exchange in Memphis in September 1973, exhibited in Chicago's R. H. Love Galleries in 1985 and was the great artist on PBS's show American Art Forum in 1988 and 1990.

Curtis became a published author in 1985 when the UCA Press released her young adult novel "Skammy, Prince of Troy" based on her extensive study of Greek mythology and Homer's Iliad. In 2004, the University of Arkansas Press published "Come Walk with Me: The Art of Dorris Curtis", featuring photographs of her paintings and anecdotes to go with them. Curtis died in August 2006 at age 98 in Conway.

Although she attended art workshops throughout her life, it was not until she retired that she was able to focus on painting and produce a large collection of artwork inspired by Grandma Moses. Her paintings are exhibited at UCA's Torreyson Library and she established an art scholarship there in her name. Royalties from her 2004 book help the UCA foundation maintain and exhibit her collection.