



Gladys and William DuBois circa 1995.
(Photo courtesy Gladys Dubois)

GLADYS DUBOIS

By Peter Beuf

Gladys DuBois looks much younger than her age would suggest: she is imperially slim and moves gracefully. When we met, she was dressed in a natty dark sweater and pressed slacks, with jewelry both elegant and understated. Her taste was reflected in the décor of her house, a country colonial furnished with comfortable antiques meant to be used. Paintings and pictures decorated the walls and a grandfather clock kept time with a comforting rhythm.

She is 91 years old going on 30. But the notion of age as a marker became absurd as we talked. Gladys at any age is a beautiful and intelligent woman with a dry wit and a reserved manner who only

needs to be asked the right questions to reveal a wealth of information, insights, and emotions.

Gladys DuBois was born Gladys Place in Brooklyn on December 22, 1915. Charles and Alida Place were model parents, according to Gladys, who was an only child. Her father managed the Valspar Paint Company which took up two city blocks in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. Her parents were “very much a part of (her) life.” Her mother stayed at home with Gladys and they were very close. Gladys considered her father both a friend and a mentor. Her father’s parents lived with the Place family in an apartment located a few blocks from the paint factory. Her grandfather was the C.E.O. of the Valspar Paint Company and both he and his wife doted on their granddaughter.

Gladys would visit the paint factory on Saturdays where she would greet the horses that were used to transport the paint to distributors. She was fed cookies and generally spoiled by the staff. Valspar continues to manufacture paint to this day.

Gladys described herself in these formative years as a “happy, spoiled brat” who had a “wonderful” childhood. In 1927, she attended the Manhattan parade celebrating Charles Lindbergh’s successful solo trans-Atlantic crossing. She wore a white dress and waved a small American flag.

Charles Place was descended from French Huguenots and Alida was of German ancestry. Both of their families had lived on Long Island for several generations. Gladys’s French Huguenot background is ironic because she went on to marry a man whose ancestors were French Huguenots as well. She has not explored any connection between her father’s people and her husband’s family.

“She is 91 going on 30. But the notion of age as a marker became absurd ... Gladys at any age is a beautiful and intelligent woman with a dry wit and a reserved manner.”

When asked about any mischief she had engaged in as a child, Gladys hesitated and then revealed that she had once cut the limbs from her father's pine trees to make whisk brooms and, on another occasion, had made peanut butter in her grandmother's coffee grinder. Surely there must have been something else she had done. She took a deep breath and said, "I smoked cigarettes during college." It's a good thing the Tobacco Institute doesn't know about Gladys, because if they did, we would see her picture on the back of every cigarette package. "Did you ever drink?" I asked. "I am not a drinker," she replied, but did admit that she treats herself to a Brandy Alexander once a year on her birthday. Now we were getting somewhere.

Recalling these venial sins brought us to her college years and her first encounter with her husband, William DuBois.

At the age of eighteen, Gladys visited friends in the New Paltz area. She had been an excellent student who excelled in English and math during her primary and secondary years of education and her friends convinced her to attend the Normal School in New Paltz. At the time, the school was a three-year teacher's college located where the SUNY New Paltz campus is today. The Normal School building is now van den Berg Hall which serves as the primary classroom facility for the School of Business at the college. Gladys was ready for a change. She was tired of the "hustle and bustle" of the city and "country living," as she then perceived it, appealed to her.

At the Normal School, she became the editor of the *Paltzonette* which was the school's monthly magazine, and she was appointed to an honorary teaching society in recognition of her achievement in the Elementary Education program. Four months into her freshman term, she met William DuBois who would be her husband for 66 years.



Gladys and William DuBois in Amityville, Long Island in 1936.
Photo courtesy Gladys DuBois.

On January 12, 1935, Gladys was skating with friends down at the flats near the steel bridge in New Paltz when she ripped her pants "from stem to stern." While she rested on a log, a friend skated up to her with one of his buddies, who was also a student at the school. The other young man was wearing a tan suede windbreaker and came to a hockey stop in front of her. This boy was a very good skater and he knew it. Gladys described him as a showoff, but in the same breath said that there was something about him that piqued her interest. He asked why she wasn't skating and she remembers replying with something to the effect of "None of your business." A few days later, he invited her for a ride in his car which she accepted. The next time she looked on the student bulletin board, she saw that he had posted a newspaper comic strip of a girl skating into a gate. Across the bottom of the cartoon was written: "Hope you can take a joke. Will you come to the basketball game with me?" Again she accepted. It

wasn't long before Gladys and William were smitten with each other. They were married on September 17, 1937.

After Gladys graduated from college, she and William moved to Lake Ronkonkoma on Long Island where she taught elementary school. They settled into their new life as teachers. In their free time, they water skied and cruised Long Island Sound on their friend's 28-foot motor boat. They attended movies, shows, baseball games, and the World's Fair in 1939. The General Electric exhibit impressed her the most-some day soon everybody would have a black and white television and, if they were lucky, a machine that washed dishes.

While they enjoyed the salad years of their youth, they were ready for a change. In 1942, William's uncle Lambert Jenkins made him an offer he couldn't refuse. "It was during the war and Uncle Lambert needed help. "He told us that if we came up here he would give us the farm, which he did." The young couple packed up and headed north. When they arrived, they had their work cut out for them.

The farm was, and still is, located between Routes 32 and 208 on Jenkinstown Road in Gardiner. The road and town were named after the original Jenkins family. In the 1800s, Jenkinstown had been home to a general store and several houses. There had been both a grist mill and a saw mill across Jenkinstown Road from the farmhouse, down along the Plattekill Brook.

"While the men milked, Gladys cooked, canned, churned butter, plowed, and picked vegetables, depending on the time of day and the season. She sized eggs and held a candle behind each one to see if the egg contained a chick or a yolk."

By the time Gladys and William arrived, the store still existed, but many of the houses had been reduced to their foundations. The farmhouse that they were to live in was a wreck. The roof leaked, the windows were broken, there was no heat, no electricity, and no plumbing. There were, however, plenty of rats-big ones who were reluctant to relocate. William was a talented carpenter and he began the painstaking task of restoring the house while they lived with relatives.

They farmed their 150-acre parcel from 1942 until 1948. William had farming experience, but Gladys had not. There was much work to be done, starting at dawn every day. William and his full-time farm hand, Lou Bevier, milked the cows. They had 21 of them and until the time when milking machines were invented, sometime around 1945, it was a time-consuming task. In addition, they had 2,000 chickens (Rhode Island Reds and White Leghorns), two draft horses for plowing, Springer Spaniels for hunting, and 21 barn cats. While the men milked, Gladys cooked, canned, churned butter, plowed, and picked vegetables, depending on the time of day and the season. She sized eggs and held a candle behind each one to see if the egg contained a chick or a yolk.

The DuBoises ran a "general farm" which meant that they produced milk, eggs, and vegetables. The produce was taken into town and eventually to New York City. The milk was canned and taken to the creamery located on Main Street in Gardiner. The creamery was one of the social hubs of the farming community: milk and gossip were exchanged liberally.

It may sound idyllic, but Gladys felt otherwise. "There is a difference between admiring the flora and the fauna and getting down on your knees and picking green tomatoes until your hands turn

green.” “But surely you must have enjoyed some of it,” I insisted. Gladys was firm, “I did not like the drudgery of farming.”

The land she and William were given came with an abundance of tales from the past: in the winter of 1888, two mill workers got lost in a blizzard on their way home from work. Only one returned that evening. At the saw mill, an employee lost his arm which was promptly buried in the small cemetery located on the farm.

While Gladys and I talked, I had the peculiar sensation of being stared at. Above the fireplace hung a portrait of a gent with a dour expression and well-trimmed mustache and beard who looked as if he trucked no nonsense. This was another Lambert Jenkins, but not the Uncle Lambert who gave the farm to Gladys and William. The Lambert above the mantel was the son of Lambert LaRue Jenkins who purchased the 150 acres of land that became Jenkinstown and the Jenkins farm back in 1791. Lambert LaRue Jenkins had married a widow with four children and they had seven children of their own. When he died, he left his wife with 11 children to raise. His son Lambert was a miller and built a stone house just down the road from the DuBois’s farmhouse. He lived to be 103 years old. (It would seem that Lambert had been a popular name in the 18th and 19th centuries.)

The house Gladys and I were meeting in had originally been a cabin built by the grandson of Lambert LaRue Jenkins. The foundation of that cabin is the cellar of the farmhouse. Because Jenkins’s grandson had no children, he left the farmhouse to his nephew who turned out to be none other than William’s Uncle Lambert.

Slave labor was used to maintain the farm, the grist mill, and the saw mill in the 1800s. This was not a surprise because New York had been one of the last states in the Union to abolish slavery. I visited the slave quarters located behind the stone house which now contains bicycles and miscellaneous yard tools. What struck me was how small and spare the structure is: no more than ten square feet with a dirt floor and no insulation. I don’t know how many people lived in this shack, but it seemed crowded for one and the winters must have been desperately cold.

The young DuBois couple led an active social life. In the evenings and on weekends, they attended the cinema on Main Street in Gardiner. Some of Gladys’s favorite stars were Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Will Rogers, who was acquainted with Gladys’s grandfather. But by far the most popular entertainment of the time was the minstrel show. Local amateur entertainers performed at the college auditorium. They would sit in a row of chairs at the front of the stage and warm up the audience with jokes addressed to “Mr. Bones” and others. Singing and dancing followed as the blackface players entertained farmers and students alike for the entire evening.

“The young DuBois couple led an active social life. In the evenings and on weekends, they attended the cinema on Main Street in Gardiner.”

I asked Gladys about the racial make-up of Gardiner in the ‘40s. Although almost everybody was white, one of the few black families in town lived and worked on the Jenkins farm now owned and operated by the DuBoises. Lou Bevier lived with his wife, Mary, and their four children on the farm. Gardiner was no different from other towns in the northeastern United States before the civil rights movement: blacks were tolerated but viewed with suspicion. It is

difficult for someone from a younger generation to see minstrel shows as a benign form of entertainment, but in Gladys's time it was just another event.

To a large extent, Gladys and William were buffered from the lingering effects of the Great Depression and the war. The farm provided them with sustenance, so they were not without food during the nationwide rationing campaign and their produce supplied them with a steady income. World War II did, however bring change to the community. Before the war, Gardiner's farmers had mostly been staunch Democrats with whom Governor Franklin Roosevelt was very popular. Roosevelt had, in fact, been a friend of the Jenkins family and a guest on the farm before Gladys and William arrived, but that was before he was elected president and instituted the draft. Residents of Gardiner did not want their sons and husbands to go off to fight in a war on foreign soil. So the Jenkinses became Republicans, which suited Gladys because her family had been Republican.

The Jenkins and DuBois families had been political and social leaders in the New Paltz/ Gardiner community for generations. Gladys quoted her husband as saying, "They were like fleas on a dog,"-they were everywhere. William DuBois's mother's family owned the Jenkins farm. His grandfather, William E. Dubois, owned a farm and a large cigar factory in New Paltz. The cigar factory was located on Prospect Street and employed approximately 200 people. (Incidentally, the DuBoises named Prospect Street after Prospect Park in Brooklyn.) Cuban

girls were brought to New Paltz to hand-roll the cigars. There were distribution facilities in Key West, Florida, and on Wall Street in Manhattan. Their cigars were popular and the two biggest sellers were the "Huguenot" and the "Patentee." These cigars were appropriately named because William E. DuBois was the direct descendant of one of the Huguenot Patentees who settled in New Paltz in the 17th century.



Gladys and William DuBois circa 1950 at the Gov. George Clinton School in Poughkeepsie. She and William were both teaching 8th grade; she English, he Social Studies. Photo courtesy Gladys DuBois.

The DuBois family farm and factory in New Paltz was part of the original land grant that was given to Louis Dubois in 1688. That 2,000-acre parcel spanned across New Paltz clear to the Hudson River. The house that now stands beside the Moriello pool in New Paltz belonged to William E. DuBois, farmer and cigar maker. When William and Gladys DuBois returned to the New Paltz area in 1942, William was continuing a family tradition. As time progressed, it became apparent, however, that farming was not what William and Gladys wanted to do for the remainder of their lives.

Gladys's recollections of her early days in Gardiner brought out her observation that the most important changes in her life had come about by accident. It was by accident that she had attended the Normal School. It was

by accident that she and William had taken up farming and it was also by accident that she and her husband left the farming life.

The couple had begun to move away from agriculture and into woodworking after a few years on the farm. They manufactured toys and chairs. Shortly after they switched their emphasis from sod to wood, William was offered a job in Poughkeepsie teaching 8th grade at the Governor George Clinton School. Soon Gladys was offered a job at the same school as a substitute. Both William and Gladys had trained to become teachers. They decided, with the support of their family, to work full time away from the farm. With a young daughter and mounting responsibilities, the stability of careers in education was too appealing to turn down. Once they stopped farming, the farm ceased to operate as a business.

William ultimately became a principal, but he had a wide range of interests outside the classroom. He was a master carpenter, a historian, an avid hunter, and he loved to play chess. Yet perhaps his greatest talent was investing. Gladys said, "My husband was a teacher by vocation, but the stock market was his avocation." William DuBois was a bit of a Renaissance man.



Gladys and William in a church in Upstate New York in the early 1990s. Photo courtesy Gladys DuBois.

When Gladys started teaching, her salary was 25 dollars a week and she had to pay her own substitutes. When her career in education concluded 21 years later, she retired as the Teaching Supervisor and Coordinator of Special Projects for the Poughkeepsie City School District with a commendation from President Nixon for her work. One of her many accomplishments included the establishment of an outdoor learning program for gifted children. The camp was held on an 800-acre camp in Wingdale in rural Dutchess County where 5th grade children were taught geology, biology, and art through hands-on experiences with the environment.

Gladys witnessed a great change in the socio-economic structure of Poughkeepsie during her career. When she started, the city was wealthy. Smith Brothers' Cough Drops, Lumb's Woodworking, and Vassar Brothers Hospital were successful enterprises employing thousands of workers. Students were dropped off in limousines at her school. But the economic climate shifted and Poughkeepsie went from "mansions to rooming houses." When asked if she knew why this had happened, she didn't have an answer, but the question seemed to sadden her.

Here are some of her thoughts on the state of education today: "Too many children are relying on computers. We need to get back to basics. There are too many tests, but there are not enough basic subjects being taught." She does not hold the state's Regents curriculum in high regard. Although she enjoyed her work, "it was a relief to retire." Her professional life was important to her, but her family was and continues to be paramount.

Gladys and William loved each other deeply. He was the focus of her life and she was the center of his. "We lived for each other. I was his first girlfriend. He saw me on that log and that

was it-love at first sight. It is the kind of thing you read about in novels but we lived it. And he never raised his voice at me.” About her husband’s death: “It devastated me and it still does. I am still so depressed by it I don’t think I will ever get over it. On the surface I have everything, but if I could have him back I would give everything in the world.” William DuBois died on October 23, 2003 after a long and painful struggle with cancer.

“Gladys has never dieted, but does exercise regularly. She swims half a mile every day in her backyard pool and cross-country skis in the winter. She keeps her mind fit by reading constantly. Gladys is “perpetually interested in all things.”

Since her husband’s death, Gladys has drawn strength from her family. She attributes her long and healthy life to her husband, her loving family, and her friends. Her true life force seems to emanate from great-grandsons Alex, 14, and Dillon, 6. They visit every day after school and Dillon in particular keeps her on her toes with his probing questions and bold pronouncements.

Gladys’ whole family is close at hand. Her only child, her daughter Dianne Gleichenhau, lives on Hasbrouck Road in Gardiner and was a 5th grade teacher for 38 years in Poughkeepsie. Both of her granddaughters live on the farm. Lauren Rooney lives in the stone house that Lambert Jenkins built. She owns and operates the Jenkinstown Spa by the Brook across the street near the site of the old store and mill. Gladys’s other granddaughter, Lisa Wilson, is the Adult Administrative Coordinator for the Cerebral Palsy Center in Kingston. She lives just down the street from Gladys and Lauren in a house built for Gladys’s parents in the 1950s. Gladys’s grandson, Keith Gleichenhau, is a chef who lives and works in High Falls.

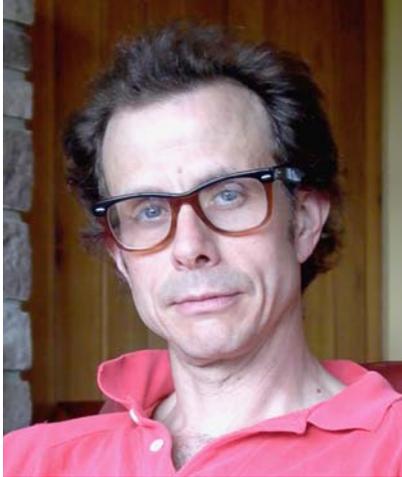
What other factors might have contributed to such a long and vital life? She has never dieted, but does exercise regularly. She swims half a mile every day in her backyard pool and cross-country skis in the winter. She keeps her mind fit by reading constantly. Gladys is “perpetually interested in all things.” A pianist with a passion for Rachmaninoff, she is also an enthusiastic bridge player.

Gladys, despite the loss of her husband, lives a privileged existence surrounded by her caring family. But the passing of time is a constant reminder to her of the future we all share: “I have to depend on my family. Most of my friends are dead or in nursing homes.” She believes in God and has been a devoted member of the Free Reform Church of Gardiner since she moved here.



Gladys and William in front of their home on Jenkinstown Road with their Granddaughter Lauren, her husband Dean and their infant Dillon in 2001. (Photo courtesy Gladys DuBois)

Gladys is a remarkable woman who has witnessed drastic changes in the world as well as in local history. She was horrified by the A-Bomb and still is. She believes that women have made tremendous strides in her life time, but she believes they have a long way to go. She thinks there will be a woman president soon, but probably not in the next election. And finally, when I asked if she would have done anything differently in her life, her simple and direct reply was, "Not a thing."



Peter Beuf

Writer

Peter Beuf, author of the Gladys DuBois story for the *Hudson Valley History Project Gardiner*, is a resident of Gardiner. Now a carpenter, he used to teach Latin. He is an avid rock climber, hiker, and writer.

(We tried very hard, but could not get Peter to say more about himself)



Barbara Whitney Petruzzelli

Hudson Valley History Project: Gardiner

Editor

Barbara Whitney Petruzzelli, editor of the Joe Katz, Gladys DuBois, and Burnice Aumick stories for the *Hudson Valley History Project Gardiner*, is the library director at Mount Saint Mary College. She has edited a number of books and articles, including *Real Life Marketing and Promotion Strategies for College Libraries*, published by the Haworth Press in 2006 and *Strength/Beauty/Spirit* by G. Steve Jordan, published in 2003. She and her husband Lou have lived in Gardiner since 2003 with their son, Matthew, who is

a senior at New Paltz High School.