



Betty Moran at home, 2006 (Photo: Phil Underdown)

## BETTY DONAHUE MORAN

by Wendy K. Rudder

Betty Moran has a hunch that it was the daily dose of Cod Liver Oil she took as a child that is responsible for her good health, mental alertness, and continued vitality that she still enjoys at the age of 88. She and her friends (most of whom have outlived relatives and other friends) recently discovered that all of them had followed this regimen when they were growing up, including her neighbor, who is 96.

“Longevity did not run in my family,” Betty notes, “So maybe there’s something to that.” Whether Cod Liver Oil was a magic formula or not, there’s no question that Betty is still a vibrant, intelligent, and open-minded woman, whose life has reflected her concern for

others, her love of teaching, and her strength of character.

All of Betty’s grandparents were born in Ireland. In her younger days, one might have guessed this, looking at her blue eyes and her white-blond hair, which she referred to as “tow head.” These days, her hair is more a silvery white, but her eyes are still a sparkling, bright blue and she’s still as petite and slim as she ever was.

Betty’s father, Philip Donahue, was born in Gardiner. He attended a one-room schoolhouse near Ireland Corners. Her mother, however, was born and raised in the city of Kingston. She taught school for a little while, until she married. Together, the Donahues ran a 60 acre dairy farm, right in the heart of Gardiner, and raised four children. Betty was the oldest of these children, the only daughter, christened, Mary Elizabeth Donahue, but known as Betty for as long as she can remember.

Betty was very close to her father. One of her saddest memories of him is when he was ill with cancer. He died in the early 1940’s, while she was still a young, unmarried woman. After his death, her mother sold the farm.

Although her family didn’t have much when she was growing up, Betty never felt deprived. There was always enough food from the farm, for one thing. And, Betty says, “everyone had that way of life, we didn’t know we were poor.”

The farm life also provided occasions for some fun and whimsy now and then, such as a clothing fad that swept the area when she was a teenager. The Gardiner Feed Mill, (which stood next to the railroad, just north of the Main St, in the center of the hamlet) provided a continuous supply of discarded muslin feed sacks, which were put to great use by many of the local girls. These sacks were already decorated in lively colors and patterns, and with only slight alterations, could be sewn into perfect dresses.



Betty Donahue as a young girl  
(Photo courtesy Betty Moran)



The house where Betty Donahue (Moran) was born in 1918. The house is still standing and is occupied by Bart & Doris Colucci on their working farm. (Photo courtesy Betty Moran)



Betty (3<sup>rd</sup> from right) and her classmates at Gardiner School, circa 1930

(Photo courtesy Betty Moran)

## CAREER FIRST, MARRIAGE SECOND

Betty graduated from New Paltz High School at the age of 16. Following her mother's example, she became an elementary school teacher, beginning her career when she was only 19. Unlike most women in those days, Betty continued her education beyond high school. She attended a three-year teacher-training college in New Paltz, called the Normal School. This later evolved into SUNY New Paltz.

Betty recalls that most of the students at the Normal School were either local, like her and several of her friends, or from Long Island. There were five women from Gardiner who attended the Normal School together. The depression was on and the students who commuted used to carpool together from their various communities in order to save gas. Fortunately, the school was free in Betty's day.

Her first position was as a teacher for grades 1-8 in the Scotchtown Elementary School, located between Goshen and Middletown. This school was part of a group of the "rural schools" in the region. Locally, the rural schools also included the Tuthilltown School, (still standing on McKinstry Rd.) as well as the Guilford School where her mother had taught, (now a private home on Guilford Schoolhouse Rd.) the Gardiner School, (now the town court and meeting hall) and the New Hurley School (currently private property on the corner of Denniston Rd. and Rt. 208). There was also the Rutsonville School, (on Tillson Lake Rd) the Libertyville School, (near the current site of the Ulster County Fairgrounds) and the Kettleborough School, the school her father had attended, still standing near Ireland Corners and Rt. 208 (then called New Paltz Road).

The era of the "rural schools" ended sometime in the late 1930's or early 1940's, when the districts consolidated and bigger, more centralized schools opened, serving larger communities instead of specific neighborhoods. With these schools came a "new wave" of teachers, as Betty remembers, including a few men, who weren't off fighting in World War II.

One of Betty's classmates at the Normal School was Pete Ostrander, from Walden. They taught together in Walkkill. Pete was a kindergarten teacher who eventually became the principal of that school. He was so popular and remembered so fondly that an elementary school was named after him there.

Betty's teaching experience in Walkkill was both challenging and rewarding. It was her second teaching position. After teaching a combination fourth/fifth grade class, she became frustrated that so many of her students could barely read. She called the New York State Dept. of Education in search of a course to train her to teach reading. Much to her dismay, there weren't any.

She didn't give up, however. She pursued her desire to enhance her teaching skills and found out about a course at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State). She applied to take two intensive summer courses and was accepted. One summer in the mid-1940's, after completing the school year, she boarded an Adirondack Stages bus from New Paltz to New York City, where she would then take a Greyhound to PA. To a young woman who had never been out of Ulster County, traveling by herself to another state to live and study among strangers was both very exciting and scary. She recalls being very homesick that summer.

She spent eight weeks at the University, but only the first two days were in classes. On the third day, Betty was called out of the class by the program's director. Because she was an experienced teacher, she was offered an opportunity to "...work in the great clinic" to gain the expertise she sought through hands on experience, instead of taking the class. This clinic was renowned throughout the region for its innovative approach to teaching reading. This was an invaluable learning experience for her, and one that she remembers with great pride.

For the next seven or eight years Betty applied what she had learned at Penn State to her teaching in Wallkill. Then another great opportunity presented itself. Ulster County BOCES advertised for a reading teacher. Betty was hired and placed at Duzine Elementary School in New Paltz. She taught reading and headed up a tutoring program utilizing faculty wives from the college and other community members. She stayed in this position until her retirement in 1985, ending a teaching career that, including time out to raise her children, spanned 35 years.

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Thinking back to her early years of teaching, Betty "...was having such a good time and enjoying what I was doing..." so much that she hardly noticed that, as time went on, other women her age were quitting to get married and have children. This included all of the four other women with whom she had attended the Normal School. It wasn't until she was 29 -which in 1947 was almost the equivalent of being "an old maid"- that Betty married Jim Moran, another teacher, who was also born and raised in Gardiner.

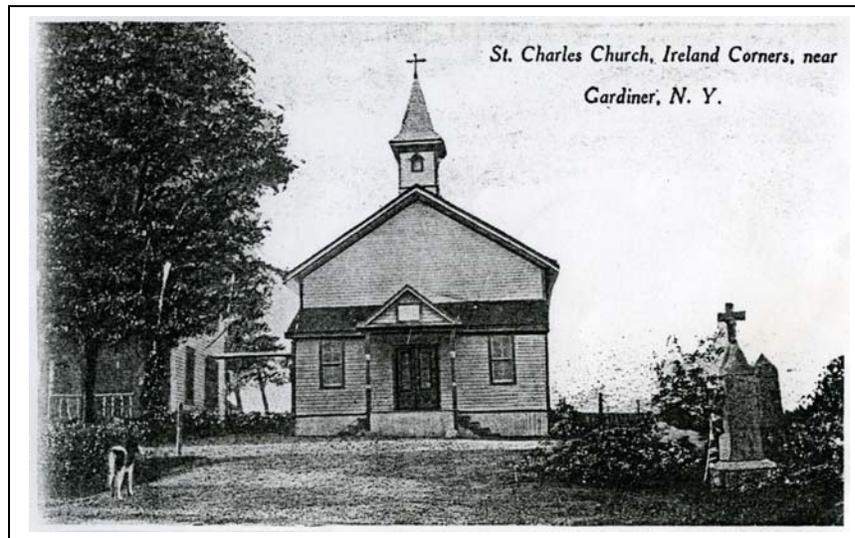
She recalled that having children later than most of the women around her was one of her biggest challenges. "It bothered me," she admits, "that the women I knew had already had children years earlier. It was hard to be my age and have babies when everyone's children were older."

Betty's first child, Ann, was born when she was 30. Her oldest son, Mike came three years later and then Marc was born three years after his brother. They were a close family, as most families were in those days, Betty says. All of her children have either remained or returned to the Mid Hudson area. Her two sons, in fact, live right in Gardiner.

Betty and Jim had known each other since childhood. His family owned the local general store, aptly named, Moran's General Store (located where Majestic's Hardware Store now stands). The four-year age difference between Betty and Jim was enough to keep them from becoming anything more than acquaintances while they were growing up. Some years later, at a mutual friend's wedding, everything changed. Betty remembers that wedding as the day when that spark was ignited between them. Even though each had gone to the affair with his/her own date, they decided to start going out with each other right afterward. And the rest, as they say, was history. Their marriage lasted almost fifty years, until Jim's death in November of 1997.

While most weddings are memorable occasions, especially to the bride and groom and their families, Betty and Jim's would stand out in a great many people's memories. In fact, their wedding day made the history books, but not for reasons one might expect.

The wedding was scheduled for a Saturday, a couple days after Christmas, 1947. St. Charles Borromeo Church in Gardiner and the neighboring Ireland Corners restaurant, (both still operational in their original locations) were reserved and all set up for the affair. But one of the worst blizzards of the 20<sup>th</sup> century decided to hit that day, “holding up everything,” as Betty says, and making it impossible for friends and relatives from New York City and beyond to make the trip to Gardiner. Even the local families could not get to the church because of the terrible weather. They were forced to postpone the wedding until the next day, after Sunday mass.



The church where Betty and Jim got married in 1947. It still stands near the corner of Route 44/55 and Route 208. Only a few renovations have been made to the outside.  
(Photo courtesy Betty Moran)

## **GARDINER: NOT JUST A FARM TOWN**

It wasn't just the Donahues who had a farm in Gardiner, according to Betty, but most people in the town were farmers when she was growing up. Her family's farm did have the distinction of being the only one right in the town, located just south of where the Gardiner Library presently stands, on Farmer's Turnpike. The pastures where their cows grazed are now part of Majestic Park.

Farmers didn't spend all their time on their farms though. There was a vibrant community life in Gardiner as well. For instance, Betty told how a simple trip to the post office usually lasted a half hour. A quick hello was rare. People would stop and talk to each other, sharing the latest farm or family news. As Betty puts it, "We all used to know each other's business." There was a genuine concern about friends and neighbors; a connection to the community that she doesn't see or experience in today's world.

And even in the small town of Gardiner, there was lots of commerce. Many stores and businesses in the hamlet area were "alive and kicking." She seems to remember all of them: a drug store; a butcher shop; a grocery store; a gas station; more than one mechanic's garage, (including the two story building next to the library that is almost completely renovated into retail space); a lumber yard, a feed store, the Borden Creamery, (the latter two next door to each other on what is now First Street, adjacent

to Main St.) a veterinarian office, a newspaper office that published a weekly newspaper, and even a funeral parlor. She lamented that the once stately Gardiner Hotel (the current site of Pasquale's Restaurant and the Gardiner Town Offices) was torn down many years ago. It was a popular spot, likely frequented by every resident of Gardiner at one time or another, since it housed both a saloon and an ice cream parlor.

Dr. Stevens was the local, Gardiner doctor, whom Betty knew from early childhood. "Dr. Stevens delivered me during the flu epidemic. He treated me, my family and just about everyone in the town, going from house to house with his horse and wagon." Eventually, he caught the flu himself and died from the disease. His death saddened the whole community.

The beloved Dr. Stevens had a son who followed in his footsteps, taking over the medical practice for several years before moving away. There was also Dr. Voss, who also practiced in the town for many years. The latter had his office in the hamlet (where the veterinarian, Lyle Goodnow and staff now have their office.)

About the town's veterinarian, Betty said, "He was as important to the town as the doctor, because of all the farm animals." She remembers two vets, Dr. Fleming and later, Kip Hoppanstadt, who, at the age of 92, is still alive, and living in New Paltz. His brother is also a veterinarian whose practice is still open, on Rt.32, just south of Kingston.



The Gardiner School which Betty attended until her graduation in approximately 1934. The building is currently the Town Justice Court and Town Hall. (Photo courtesy Betty Moran)

## **LAWS MEANT TO BE BROKEN**

During prohibition, Betty recalls, "We had stills all over the place." This included one that bordered on the edge of her family's property. "It was apple country, so it wasn't hard to make liquor," she adds. Just about everyone in the town knew about the stills. But no one ever got turned in to the authorities.

She tells of some kids that she knew who had stumbled on a still while doing some trapping in the woods off Sand Hill Road. The owners paid them off to keep quiet.

One summer evening, a short time later, she and some friends were sitting on her front porch when the federal agents conducted a raid. As they barreled through her property toward the still, anxious to catch the operator red handed, everyone watched. No one said a word. They knew full well that the agents weren't going to find a thing. The still owners had been tipped off and they had done a good job of getting rid of any incriminating evidence. The agents destroyed a few pieces of machinery but were unable to make any arrests. This conspiracy of silence, Betty knew, resulted, at least in part, from people having that "dollar in their pocket to keep quiet."

Betty also remembers visiting a speakeasy in downtown Kingston when she wasn't quite ten years old. She and her mother had come from her grandmother's funeral. Betty describes walking up a dimly lit stairway holding her mother's hand. When they got to the top, her mother knocked on a door. There was a narrow slit in the door in which a moveable section slid open after the knock, and a face appeared on the other side. Young Betty was "petrified" at this. "I knew something wasn't right because everything was so secretive," she added. Inside the speakeasy she could relax a little, for all the friends and relatives of Betty's grandmother were gathered there.

## **THE TRAIN: A BIG PART OF BETTY'S LIFE**

The Wallkill Valley Railroad and New York Central Railroad trains brought a lot of activity to Gardiner. They ran right past the Donahue family farm and stopped at the station, just around the corner. They brought produce, supplies for the stores, and passengers to and from the town.

Betty has many fond memories of the train. Even as a little girl, she used to walk, as she put it, "up one side of the rails and down the other." Her family knew most of the conductors and engineers, as they were from Kingston, where her mother had grown up. She could always rely on a friendly wave from them as their trains passed by.

She recalls that the high school students used to take the train to school in New Paltz. Some families had cars but the roads were mostly dirt and difficult to travel on.

Then there were the hobos, Betty fondly recalls, for whom hopping on trains was a way of life during the depression. They waited until the trains had slowed down or stopped and jumped on the cabooses or in between train cars. Though this practice was illegal, it was tolerated, nonetheless.

Betty's family had a favorite hobo. His name was "Old Larry" and he'd stop by their farm at least a couple times a year. "He was intelligent, refined, and well-read," she says, "always carrying a newspaper in his pocket." Old Larry would spend his winters at a monastery in Garrison, NY and hop the train to this area in the spring. He usually ate a meal with the family, fascinating them with his stories, then spending the night in their barn, on a bed of hay, and jumping the train to New Paltz the next day.

There was a mystery about him that they all found intriguing. Invariably, after his stop at Gardiner, Old Larry went to New Paltz in order to visit a college professor whose name was Miss Nichols. No one knew what the connection between Old Larry and Miss Nichols was, but it was evident that there was something between them.

### **NEXT DOOR TO THE PRISON**

The Walkkill Prison was built in 1934, when Betty wasn't yet twenty. It brought a lot of changes to the area, most obviously, the influx of people, who would be taking jobs in the prison, mostly as guards. Many of the guards, of course, had families, which meant more children in the schools. Betty taught many of these children in her classes.

Walkkill Prison was an honor prison or, as Betty termed it, "an open prison". The inmates were allowed to work outside on the prison farm. Since security was less restrictive at this facility, escapes were common, according to Betty, averaging 3-4 times each farm season.

She recalls one escape that involved the Gardiner community. Apparently, a very resourceful inmate made it to Gardiner and found himself a vacant house to hide out in. The house, (which still stands on Rt. 44/55 just west of Rt. 208) was owned by a doctor who lived in New York City and spent weekends in the town. The lucky escapee not only discovered that the cupboards were full of food, he also found money, clothes, and black shoe polish to cover his light hair. Thus disguised, he went into town several times to buy whatever he needed. He lived this way for about a week, says Betty, until he was finally apprehended.

During the Big Band era, Walkkill Prison hosted public dances once a month. Although it didn't start out that way, it was the prisoners who actually entertained the townspeople at most of these events. Betty notes that it was a piano player from Kingston who inspired the inmates to become musicians. He would come and play solo at the local dances. Soon he began teaching the inmates to play instruments. It didn't take long for them to start a prison band. Once the band was formed, they needed a regular gig to keep them in practice, and they found one: the monthly public dances.

### **FRIENDSHIPS & MEMORIES**

Another place that Betty remembers enjoying music was the Ritz Theater in Newburgh. Since most people didn't have cars, she and her friends had to be resourceful in finding a way to get there. The most reliable ride they found was with the Walkkill butcher. He would drive to Newburgh to pick up his meat on a regular basis. She and a friend used to hitch a ride with him. He would drop them off at the theater to take in a concert while

he took care of business. By the time the performance ended, he'd be outside waiting to take them home.

Betty, like many other women at the time, made a significant contribution to the war effort during World War II. She had a good friend, Hazel Evans, with whom she taught school in Walkill. Hazel had grown up on a dairy farm in Skaneateles, NY. One summer, Hazel went back home and invited Betty to go with her. The two of them rented a room together at the home of an older couple and got jobs at the Carrier Factory in Syracuse, known mostly for producing refrigeration and air conditioning equipment. For the war effort, this factory was converted into one that produced airplane parts.

Each morning they would bring the lunch that the landlady packed for them. When they arrived at the factory they would don their goggles and torches, and begin work, soldering metal for the airplane parts that would later be shipped to the military. This was certainly a far cry from the classroom, but no less important. Betty refers to that summer as her "Rosy the riveter" job.

Betty and her dear friend Hazel remained close from their teaching days, until Hazel's death, two years ago.



From left: Bess Majestic, Betty Moran, Harold Marks and Mary Tubbs Decker in Gardiner in 2003 (Photo courtesy Betty Moran)

## THE HUDSON VALLEY HISTORY PROJECT: GARDINER

A few years ago, Betty Moran joined the Gardiner Historical Society because she wanted to help preserve Gardiner History. She has contributed both information and photographs that were used in Carlton Mabee's book, *Images of America – Gardiner and Lake Minnewaska*, published in 2003.

When she was contacted about sharing her personal story for this project, Betty gladly accepted. She also provided the photographs on these pages from her personal collection.

It has been a great privilege to meet Betty Donahue Moran and learn about both her personal history and that of the community of Gardiner. Hers is a life that has reflected her energy and dedication to the people and career she loved. It is a life that makes for a poignant chapter in Gardiner's history. In Betty's own words: "Preserving the past is a noble gesture –you're never going to get it again."

-Wendy K. Rudder

### **Author Wendy K. Rudder**

Social worker Wendy K. Rudder is the executive director of Jewish Family Services of Ulster County, a small, non-profit agency that deals mostly with senior citizens. She has also been, for the last ten years, a freelance writer whose articles have been published in various local magazines and newspapers. She is currently working on her first novel. For the most part, writing is her passionate hobby. Wendy is married to Ed Rudder and has lived in Gardiner for all but two of the last 18 years. They have two sons , one attending New Paltz Middle School and the other, New Paltz High School.



Interviewing Betty Moran was very natural for Wendy. She does a lot of interviewing at work, but rarely has the opportunity to write essays about the people she works with. "Meeting and talking to Betty [Moran] for the Hudson Valley History Project was a wonderful experience, and I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to do so," says Wendy.

Wendy Rudder was so inspired by the relationship that evolved out of interviewing Betty and writing her story that Betty found her way into one of Wendy's poems. We have included it below.

### **Blackberry Ink**

I walk the path; dense with green, and sheltered by trees.  
Scattered on each side are dots of color: orange, violet, bold yellow and a sprinkling of lacy white.

I spot some little red berries.

These turn out to be blackcap raspberries, as yet unripened.

A closer look reveals a few ripe ones; plump and purplish black.

But I have no container, so I don't pick them.

Later, along the road, I notice more bushes;

These abundant with dark berries.

I have an idea.

I drag the dog by his leash toward the town hall.

A friendly, dog-approving lady cheerfully finds me a cup.

Overgrown weeds surround the bushes;

Those stringy green invaders that tickle my legs.

Reaching the thorny branches, I pluck the succulent berries; their juice seeping onto my hands, staining them dark purple.

A car slowly passes, the occupants giving me curious glances.

I know the driver: my friend Betty.

Her farm once stood at this very site.

When I finish, I give her some berries, a token repayment for the many gifts her land has yielded.

Betty is happy and surprised with my small offering.

"How do those bushes survive right along the road like that, with the dirt from all the cars?"

"There are more," I say. "But my cup wasn't big enough to gather them."

She gives me a bigger cup.

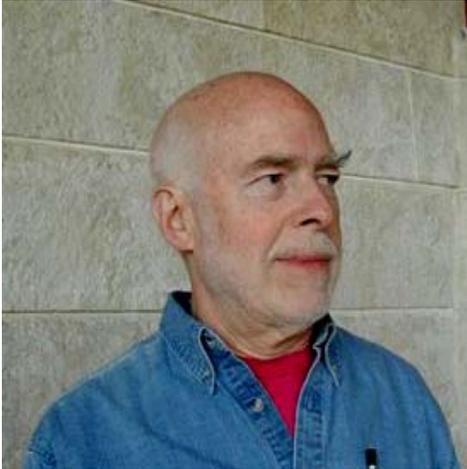
And I return to the patch of bushes,

Where I pick the berries,

One by one,

As my hands turn the color of blackberry ink.

-Wendy K. Rudder



**Raymond D. Smith, Jr.**

Hudson Valley History Project: Gardiner

**Editor**

Before retiring twelve years ago Ray spent 37 years as an international banker and credit officer at Bankers Trust Company in New York City and London. He and his wife, Anne Allbright Smith, moved to Gardiner three years ago.

Ray was an English major in college and during his undergraduate years was, at one time or another, either editor or managing editor of every student publication on campus except the yearbook. He is an avid reader and enjoys writing. He began working with the Hudson Valley History Project in 2006 as the editor for "Betty Moran," by Wendy Rudder.