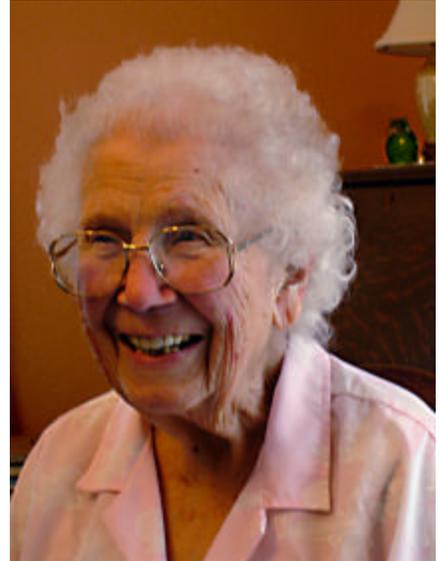


## BURNICE AUMICK

by Patty Lee Parmalee

Burnice Aumick was born Burnice Emma DuBois on July 27, 1917, in New Paltz. Burnice is a descendent of the ubiquitous DuBois clan and is also related to the Deyo and Hasbrouck families. Throughout southern Ulster County, there are streets named after her relatives - and now she lives on Aumick Road, named after her husband's family. Of course, when she married him in 1940 and moved to Gardiner, it was just called Number One Road. In fact, as Burnice recalls, "No one ever used the name 'Gardiner.' The place didn't really have a name. It wasn't Gardiner, it was just the farm at the foot of the mountain, out in the country, near Tillson Lake."



Burnice Aumick in 2007 (Photo: Patty Parmalee)

Burnice had grown up in town, living at 11 Oakwood Terrace in New Paltz. Her father owned a jewelry store on Main Street where he specialized in watch repair and hand engraving. She remembers a unique niche of her father's business: "It was a tradition in those days to have a hand-engraved name plate attached to the inside lid of coffins. My father received \$1.00 for each 'coffin plate.' That was a lot of money then. I remember one afternoon the undertaker came to our house in a hurry. He needed a plate made for that evening's 'viewing.' My father got right to work. When the undertaker came back, he was upset. He had given my father the wrong name. The plate was done and there was no time to make another. The undertaker said, 'That's all right, I will cover it with flowers and no one will ever know.' That poor man was buried with the wrong name."



Burnice Aumick's High School Graduation picture, 1934  
(Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

Her father died when Burnice was 12, and her only sister died at age five when Burnice was eight years old. "It was very hard on my mother," she says, typically not mentioning that it might have been hard on her, too. She and her mother were very close. After her father's death, Burnice's mother opened their house to female college students as there were no dormitories in New Paltz at that time. She charged \$5.00 a week for room and board; \$7.00 if they stayed the weekend. Mrs. DuBois cooked for the eight to ten students who typically lived with them at any given time. Burnice modestly says, "I just carried things to the table." Both were also talented seamstresses, but advanced arthritis in her hands prevents Burnice from sewing today.

After graduating from high school at age 17, she attended three years of Normal School (equivalent to four years of college today), and then spent two years teaching school in Walkkill – "little kids the first year, big kids the second year." Teaching appealed to Burnice because she had grown up surrounded by girls who were learning to become teachers.

Charlotte Aumick, a boarder in the DuBois home, became good friends with Burnice. One day Charlotte wanted to go to a dance at school and called to ask Burnice a favor: if Burnice would agree to go with her brother Ralph, he would get a date for Charlotte. She laughs, remembering: "It was real cute; the guy he got for Charlotte couldn't dance. So Ralph spent the evening taking

turns dancing with his sister and me.” A couple of weeks later Ralph called and asked Burnice if she wanted to go out - her first real date! Then he called the next Saturday, and the next ...

Ralph had gone to Rutgers for a year, and then to accounting school in Chicago. But when he and Burnice met he was going to school in Kingston. He had returned from Chicago to help his father rebuild the Aumick barn, which had burned down in 1930, possibly from arson. *[Author's note: I now live in that very barn.]*

So Burnice fell in love with the first man she ever went out with. Why did she love him? “He seemed like a very good catch. He was so *nice*. He came to see me when I was in the hospital after an ear operation.” A memory anchors that hospital visit in time. She remembers it was just when the Mid-Hudson Bridge was first built. He had taken the ferry over to Poughkeepsie, and when someone told him the bridge was now open, he returned to Ulster County on the brand new bridge. [The bridge was officially opened on August 25, 1930.]

And why did Ralph fall in love with Burnice? She is stumped. “He just seemed to like me - I don't know why.” Daughter Jan, sitting with us while we talk, says, “Everyone likes her. She's a sweetheart.”

They married in 1940 and Burnice moved from town to way out in the country, to a working 453-acre dairy farm. As a wedding present, Ralph's father had given him five acres of land on which to build a home for his future bride and family. He chose a site by a mountain stream where a farmhouse, barn, and dance pavilion once stood. “When we were engaged, Ralph showed me a picture of a cobblestone house he had torn from a magazine. Asked if I liked it, I said, ‘Yes - it is cute’. So, his father hired two men to replace him on the farm while he built the house for us.” Burnice is 90 years old now, and still lives in that cobblestone house by the mountain stream.



E.B. Aumick's delivery wagon in Port Jervis, NY, in 1915 (Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

***The location, to the west of the present Campfire Road, was once so remote that when Ralph Aumick's great grandfather died during a blizzard, it took 20 men two days to shovel a path so a horse and sleigh could take him to the funeral home.***

By marrying Ralph and moving to the Aumick farm, Burnice became part of another family clan. The Aumicks came from Port Jervis. Ralph's father, Everett Byron (E.B.) Aumick, knew shorthand and worked as a court stenographer, kept the books at the railroad station, and owned a general store in Port Jervis. He made his fortune selling the first margarine, “Good Luck Margarine,” during the Depression. When his health began to fail, his mother advised him to move to the country where the air was cleaner. He chose Gardiner because his mother had been born there, and her family still lived there on a farm in the mountains.

E.B.'s mother, Juliet, was a Lockwood. She had grown up as one of 12 or 13 children living on a small farm above and to the west of what is now Campfire Road. Originally, it had been just a dirt road called the Lockwood Road. The location was so remote that when E.B.'s grandfather, Dan Lockwood, died during a blizzard, it took a team of 20 men two days to shovel a path out to

the main road (Decker Road) to make room for a horse and sleigh to get through and take him to the funeral home.



The Lockwood House near the present Campfire Road, in 1918  
(Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

while attending business school there. Someone told him to look at the girls in the church choir, because that's where the "nice girls" were and he just picked one out. She was only 15 or 16 at the time. He didn't drink alcohol, but made bootleg liquor during the Depression. He was said to have had the best road in the town because he used booze as a bribe. Two more typical anecdotes that Burnice recalls: "Those years were tough and people had trouble getting enough gas and other provisions. It wasn't uncommon for people to steal gas from farm tractors late at night. Usually the dog would sound an alarm. If E.B. saw a light anywhere on his property, or even on the road, he would step out on his porch, open fire with his shotgun, and *then* yell, 'Who's there!?' The light would go out, and no one ever answered back." Sugar was another scarce item. E.B. took a ride one day: "He was gone most of the day - and came back with a 100-pound sack of sugar. We never knew where or how he got it. Don't misunderstand," Burnice says, "he served on many committees, including the school board. He was well-liked and known in the community."

***"If [Ralph's father] E.B. saw a light anywhere on his property, or even on the road, he would step out on his porch, open fire with his shotgun, and then yell, 'Who's there!?' ... no one ever answered back."***

"The Depression years were tough for everyone, but we were very lucky," Burnice recalls. "We had lots of milk and cream, eggs, chickens, beef, and vegetables. Ralph would also supplement

When he left Port Jervis and moved to Gardiner, E.B. initially bought 125 acres at the foot of the mountains, which included the old farmhouse (now #30 Aumick Road), and a barn. Within a few years, he had also purchased the Lockwood farm from his grandfather and more adjacent land to create the 453-acre Aumick farm.

E.B. seems to have been very competent yet also quite a character. He met his future wife, Melinda Atkins, in Poughkeepsie



Ralph's father, Everett Byron (E.B.) Aumick, taking the minutes at a town meeting in Pine Bush in 1941.  
(Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

The Aumick farm was a dairy farm. Acres of hay and corn were grown to feed the cows. The farm was home to a flock of chickens as well as a big garden that provided fresh vegetables in the summer and plenty for freezing and canning for the winter months. Besides the farm tractors, there were two work horses, Molly and Queenie. Though there was much farm work to do, Ralph did not want Burnice in the barn. But she had plenty of work in the house to keep her busy.

our meat supply with game that was in season. After a late night 'coon hunt in the mountains behind our house, I could expect to find the ice box filled with skinned raccoon carcasses in the morning. At first, I didn't know what to do with them. I had to learn how to cook these things (venison, rabbit, and raccoon) from Ralph's mother ... I never did *that* at home in New Paltz."

It seems that Ralph inherited a little of his father E.B.'s style, judging from the family story about the cat in the puddle: Ralph caught a barn cat "doing its business" in the cow feed wheelbarrow, so he grabbed it, painted its rear with turpentine, and threw it outside. About this time, E.B. was walking to the barn to do his evening chores and noticed a "strange sight." He came in the barn and called out, "Hey Ralph! I just saw a cat outside, sitting in a mud puddle - why do you think it would do that?"

***"I was reprimanded once by the caretaker for letting the fire go out in the wood stove. They didn't tell me that I had to keep the fire going. I thought I was there to teach the children, and the caretaker was there to take care of the stove."***

Burnice served as a substitute teacher for a few weeks in the one-room country schoolhouse on Tillson Lake Road. The school served the Gardiner neighborhood known as Rutsonville, and was a very different experience for Burnice. She recalls, "I was reprimanded once by the caretaker for letting the fire go out in the wood stove. They didn't tell me that I had to keep the fire going. I thought I was there to teach the children, and the caretaker was there to take care of the stove."

But mostly she settled into farm life, working harder, she says, than she ever did teaching. She had to learn "country ways" - gathering up, cracking, and picking out black walnuts, hickory nuts, and butternuts for holiday breads; and canning enough corn, tomatoes, pickles, peaches, pears, cherries, and applesauce to last until the next season. In addition to cooking three large meals each day, Burnice cleaned the house, baked breads and pastries, sewed and patched clothes, knit, and raised four children. During income tax season, she would help Ralph in his accounting business, by hand-copying and typing income tax returns. Many of his clients were farmers who had many pieces of machinery - and even large numbers of cows - to depreciate each year. This involved pages and pages of depreciation schedules - and there had to be three copies of each page. "All of the cows had either a name or number. Some of the names were very cute, and some I would not repeat. I just copied what I saw."

What did Burnice do for fun? When she was a young girl and teenager, living in New Paltz, Burnice was active in the Girl Scouts. There she learned all about plants, the stars, and tying knots. She became a life guard and was a counselor for younger girls during the summers.

"I would look forward to an occasional Saturday afternoon, when my girlfriend and I would walk downtown to window shop. We each were given a nickel to spend. You could buy three pieces of candy for ten cents. We would put our money together and each pick one candy that we liked and split the third piece. We thought that was a clever idea."



Burnice on Oakwood Terrace,  
New Paltz, 1939  
(Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

After marriage and children, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July was a treat for the Aumick family. Every year they would pack a few snacks, put the kids in the back of the pick-up truck, and drive up to the old Lockwood farm to watch the fireworks at Tillson Lake roller rink and at the Shawangunk Valley Firehouse.



Ralph Aumick building the foundation for their new home in July 1940 (Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

They didn't travel, except for an occasional trip to the Catskill Game Farm or a drive up the mountain for a Sunday picnic and huckleberry picking. "We would go to the Ulster County Fair each summer to watch the boys show their calves for 4-H. Farmers didn't travel much. The cows had to be milked at a regular time, twice a day - it didn't matter if you were sick or the weather was bad. There were days when Ralph had to walk down to the barn in hurricane weather because the road was flooded and the bridge was washed out; or the road was impassable because of the high drifts and blowing snow of a blizzard. If the electricity was out, the cows had to be milked by hand using kerosene lanterns for light. Because there were very few residents on our road, and we were at the end of the town line, the town

plows would not reach us until well after the storm was over, sometimes two days later. A few times Ralph had to use the tractor to plow the road from the barn to Decker Road so that the milk truck could pick up our milk cans."

Burnice was an active member of the Women's Guild at the Shawangunk Reformed Church and also a member of Eastern Star. Ralph and his father E.B. were both Masons. "I was such a goody-goody," says Burnice. The whole family was musical. Ralph's father was a fine classical pianist, while Ralph's mother loved to play ragtime and church hymns. Ralph played the violin in church and Burnice played the piano - another favorite activity she's given up because of her arthritis.

The first three Aumick children came three years apart: Robert (Bob) in 1941, Ralph W. (Bill) in 1944, and Janice (Jan) in 1947. Then, seven years later, Stephen (Steve) was born, in 1954. Except for Robert, they all live on Aumick Road. As the children got older, they left for college and then on to jobs other than farming. "Bob loved mechanics and machinery better than the animals and had a spirit for adventure which often got him into trouble." Burnice recalls two of Bob's many curious adventures when he was young. "Once he put his finger in the barn water pump when it was running to see how far the plunger came



By August 1940 Burnice was able to pose with the frame of the house. (Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

back. It came back far enough to almost crush his finger! Another time, he poked a girdle rod into an electrical outlet and got a real *charge*. He was always up to mischief ... like the time he told his brother Bill to jump out of the hay loft into a pile of hay on the barn floor. Well, Bill missed the hay pile and sprained his ankle badly. As he got older, if Bob wasn't reading, you could find him in the farm shop fixing machinery and working on his car."



The house nearing completion, 1940 (Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

After graduating from Pine Bush Central High School in 1959, Bob attended the State University College of Forestry at Syracuse University [now the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry], then joined the Air Force in hopes to fly planes. Unfortunately, he was grounded because of poor eyesight. Deciding that he didn't want to farm, be a forester, or a career serviceman, Bob moved west. He settled on a Pawnee Indian Reservation in Oklahoma and made a career of driving 18-wheelers cross-country. Burnice says, "He tells me that he likes the wide open roads out west ... there are way too many people and cars here in the east."

"Unlike his brother Bob, Bill enjoyed working with the farm animals, growing crops, and gardening." After graduating from high school in 1962, Bill attended the SUNY Institute of Technology at Delhi and studied agriculture. He returned home and farmed with Ralph, Sr. for a few years. Realizing that farming was not going to be a profitable occupation in the future, Bill married and left to attend Ohio State Veterinary School. His wife became pregnant with their only child, Rachel, and was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at the same time. Bill changed his major to landscape horticulture in order to graduate sooner and return to the farm to be close to his family. Meanwhile, Ralph's parents, E.B. and Melinda Aumick, passed away, leaving the farmhouse empty. Bill and his family moved in and Bill remains there today.



The Aumick house in 2005 (Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)

Burnice says Jan "was hard to keep track of. Wherever her brothers or dad were, she wanted to be there, too. I could not keep her in the house. She loved to drive the farm machinery and help with the hay and corn harvesting. When Jan was about 12 years old, she found my old metal clarinet in the attic and that was it. She would practice two-three hours every day. I would take her to West Point every Saturday for music lessons. She decided while in high school that she was going to be an instrumental music teacher." Jan graduated from Pine Bush Central High School in 1965, received masters' degrees in music education and computers in education, taught in Connecticut

for 32 years, and is now retired and lives with Burnice. "Although Jan lived and worked in

Connecticut, she maintained a room in my house and has come home every summer, holidays, and frequent weekends.”

“We also kept a room for Steve while he was going to college and after he came home, until he built his own home from an existing machine shed on the farm. Steve enjoys building things and growing trees and vegetables. We always had a huge garden full of fresh vegetables. He planted hundreds of spruce seedlings and later sold the young trees to all his new neighbors on Aumick and Campfire Roads.” After graduating from high school in 1972, Steve decided to study surveying at SUNY Alfred Technical School. He returned home to find the surveying business at a standstill. So, off to SUNY New Paltz for a B.A. in chemistry. After graduating, Steve secured a job with IBM. He is married and has one daughter, Carla.



Burnice and Ralph, 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, 1980  
*(Photo courtesy Jan Aumick)*

“In the '80s, Ralph decided to sell the cows and just harvest the hay fields in the summer when he could get help. This worked for a few years, but with increased taxes and failing health, Ralph decided to sell the farm.” He sold the land and barn to Peter Bienstock in one piece. Peter subdivided the property and developed the lower land and Campfire Road lots, then resold the mountain land which is now part of Minnewaska State Park Preserve and is protected from development. “The kids were so afraid of the mountain being developed that they didn’t want him to sell it,” Burnice says, “but Ralph assured them that no one in their right mind would build up in the mountains .... too many rocks and not enough soil. We are forever grateful for the ‘Save the Ridge’ campaign, that development did not happen.”

In 1990, Ralph became ill. He gave up smoking and his tax business, but did not improve. The doctors were unable to tell Burnice what was wrong, and they couldn’t do anything for him. He was in the hospital for two weeks and died in June, five months before their 50th anniversary.

Burnice doesn’t complain. Asked what she misses, she seems not to think in those terms, and instead reminisces about the telephone “party line” where eight people shared one phone line and one lady always listened in. Perhaps the past is not always better than the present: “The roads are getting better,” she says. She can’t sew or play the piano anymore but she reads a lot, three children live nearby, the family dog is good company.

Burnice Aumick, it seems, is a cheerful, uncomplaining woman with a wealth of good memories, and no regrets.



**Patty Lee Parmalee**

**Writer**

Patty Parmalee, author of the Burnice Aumick story for the *Hudson Valley History Project Gardiner*, has divided her time between New York City and Shawangunk since 2002. She now lives full-time in the renovated Aumick Barn. (Although originally part of the same farm, the two Aumick sons' homes and the barn are technically in Shawangunk, whereas Burnice and Jan Aumick's house is in Gardiner.)

Patty has a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of California at Irvine and wrote the book *Brecht's America*. She is better known locally, however, for her role as a

coordinator of Save the Ridge, a movement that saved over 2,000 acres of the Shawangunk Ridge from development.



**Barbara Whitney Petruzzelli**

**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 in Newburgh, NY. 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.