



## Barbara Cooley McNamee Dudley

August 27, 1920 - December 17, 2011

Rensselaerville-Community leader and life-long Capital District resident Barbara Cooley McNamee Dudley died peacefully Saturday at the age of 91 at her home in Rensselaerville, the village whose character, traditions and institutions she had helped define for over 70 years. The cause of death was a brain tumor, which became apparent suddenly in mid-September following spells of dizziness. Since then, she hosted what was a nearly continuous house party, with dinners often seating a dozen or more at table, as she gathered her family and friends to share in the celebration of her life. “Usually people wait until some one dies to hold the wake. But I want to go to mine,” she said on several occasions. “So I’m having it right now!”

Dudley’s life was one of continual enterprise and reinvention. Over the course of her long life, she was a journalist, a political activist, a second-hand and rare book dealer, a university trustee, an investment banker, and in the final decades of her life, a leading citizen of Rensselaerville, devoting herself to the practical and personal welfare of the village and those who live there.

Still, it was her family that was the true center of her life. She was married and widowed twice: first in 1942 to Daniel Vincent McNamee Jr., a lawyer and president of the First Albany Corporation, who died in 1977; and second, in 1982, to architect George Austin Dudley, who died in 2005. She and Dan McNamee had four sons, and two daughters, one of whom died as a small

child. However that was just the beginning: In addition to her own children, she and Dan McNamee also helped raise three nieces, and after her marriage to George Dudley, his four children and their families also became enfolded into the family circle. Dan McNamee once commented that managing their large household was equivalent to running a small business, which may have been an understatement.

Dudley was born on August 27, 1920, the day the 19th Amendment establishing the women's right to vote took effect. She felt this coincidence as providential; a graduate of the Albany Academy for Girls and Bryn Mawr College, she was a life long feminist and particularly in her later years, became a mentor to many younger women, offering a generous ear and no-nonsense advice many describe as pivotal in their lives. A number were also part of her women's tennis circle, nearly all decades younger, who struggled to match her energy and remained mystified that she could still outsmart them at the net.

The first female "copy boy" on the Albany Times Union, Dudley became a journalist in Washington DC during World War II, covering developments in the rapidly changing aeronautics industry. However, like many women, she was forced to give up her job to a returning GI. Moving back to Albany, she became a coordinator of the presidential campaigns of Adlai E. Stevenson in both 1952 and 1956, a founder of the World Affairs Council and active in the League of Women Voters. In the 1960s, she became the first woman elder of the First Presbyterian Church in Albany, joining Rev. Robert C. Lamar on the Civil Rights March on Washington in 1962. She also launched an annual second-hand book sale to raise money for scholarships for Bryn Mawr College, which soon evolved into a permanent shop that thrived into the new Millennium. Along the way, she became a licensed appraiser of rare books and an acknowledged expert on paper and bindings.

Following the death of Dan McNamee, she joined First Albany Corporation, passing three New York Stock Exchange licensing exams within 18 months, and serving as an active Chairman of the Board until her retirement at the age of 70. Also a director of Fleet Bank, she was one of only four women in America serving as senior executives of a New York Stock Exchange member firm.

Her youngest son, Giles McNamee, joined her for the prep classes, and worried she would be unnerved by some of the biz slang that tended to be a tad coarse. "Spreads and straddles? No problem," he remembered. "She didn't bat an eyelash."

After the "heart-breaking" early death of Dan McNamee from cancer, her remarriage was yet another reinvention, and what she described as a "true love match." With George Dudley, she traveled widely to Europe, the Middle East and the Orient, donning a Burka in Kuwait and a bamboo construction helmet in Shanghai. With all the architectural wonders, she remembers being appalled by the restrictions on women, which in Saudi Arabia required an original copy of their marriage license to share a room and excluded her from the hotel swimming pool.

Together, Barbara and George Dudley planned additions and improvements to Hickory Hill, the farm she had inherited from her parents, George and Myra Cooley, and worked to get funding for badly-needed repairs to the village water system and persuade the NYS Department of Transportation to build a graceful new bridge across the Ten Mile Creek, in keeping with the setting.

Perhaps closest to her heart was the Presbyterian Church, which had been at the center of her summer life in the village since they moved there in 1937. With a strong intellectual tradition, ministers used the Rensselaerville pulpit as

a forum for ideas, and over time Barbara Dudley took over responsibility for filling the roster of extraordinary visiting preachers each summer. She used the themes and even the choices – that included blacks, women, gays, Catholics, Jews and more recently Muslim theologians – as an opportunity to push for social change.

In the last year of her life, she and her childhood friend Time Magazine researcher Nancy Chase undertook the challenge of writing a history of the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church, whose congregation dates back to 1792, finding rich, previously untapped sources, that grew into a fascinating and detailed portrait, with an “iconic role in the life of a small American town.”

A draft of the manuscript was completed in the last week of her life, edited and bound and put in her hand on the day she died. “Now I can go,” she told a friend. “Everything is moving along as it should.”

Calling hours will be Monday December 19, 2011 4pm - 7pm at the family home, Hickory Hill, in Rensselaerville and Tuesday December 20, 2011 4pm - 8pm at 34 Willett Street, Albany.

The funeral will be Wednesday 12/21 - 11am at the First Presbyterian Church 362 State Street (corner of Willett St), Albany.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church – Steeple Fund, P.O. Box 47, Rensselaerville, New York, 12147.

Barbara C.M. Dudley is survived by her sisters Dorothy Cooley Mulleneaux Beal of Fairfield Iowa, Janet Cooley Sloss of Gloucestershire England, and Robin Cooley Krivanek of Tampa Florida; by her four sons, Daniel V. McNamee, III, of Rensselaerville, George C. McNamee of Albany, Roger B. McNamee of Woodside California, and Giles W. McNamee of Boston, and her

daughter, Dardis McNamee of Vienna Austria; by her nieces Clare Yates of Albany, and Lauree Hickok of Queechy Lake; and by her step children George B. Dudley of West Haven , Sally Dudley of Palo Alto, John Dudley of Short Beach, Connecticut and Samuel W. Dudley III of Rensselaerville.

To leave the family a special message on their guest book, obtain directions or memorial card, or share a photo or E-card with them, please visit [www.McveighFuneralHome.com](http://www.McveighFuneralHome.com).

# Previous Events

## Visitation

DEC **19**. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Hickory Hill  
Hickory Hill 194 Cooley Ro  
Rensselaerville, NY

## Service

DEC **21**. 11:00 AM (ET)

First Presbyterian Church  
362 State Street  
Albany, NY

# Tribute Wall



“ *Barbara Cooley McNamee Dudley*

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October 08, 2023 at 09:24 PM



“ *Dan, George, Dardis, Roger and Giles,*

*No matter how well they thought they knew her, I am quite sure that everyone who attended the funeral of Barbara Cooley McNamee Dudley yesterday left having learned something new, and something very special about her. I know I did, and if I have any regret, it is only that I did not know more about her life during the years that we were friends. Such are funerals – they make us more aware of those we have just lost.*

*Thank you all for so admirably carrying out the wishes of your mother in all the large and small details that made yesterday's joyous funeral (an oxymoron if there ever was one) so special and memorable. She would have been hugely proud of all of you, while those of us who came to pay her a final homage, were left realizing how truly blessed we were to have had her friendship while she was alive.##imported-begin##Carol Bullard##imported-end##*

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December 22, 2011 at 09:03 PM

CV

*George, I am Christine Vrooman alias Christine Howard. You probably don't remember me but I am a former employee of the First Albany Corp. Research Dept. working beside Nancy Gardner, back in 1996 -1998 I think. . While I was employed there I was happy to work for you and your family. The staff were great as well. I met your Mother on more than one occasion and she was so nice to me and such a personable individual, as well as beautiful. I think of your company often whenever I an African American single mother, try to invest in stock. Of course, I never really could afford to invest but it was fun learning how it works. Thereafter, I worked for the State OAG's office until I retired in 2007. I just read about your Mother demise while doing a search & find a company which replaced First Albany.*

*I am sorry for your loss. My regards to you and your family. Bless you.  
Christine Howard Vrooman.*

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**Christine Vrooman** - September 13, 2024 at 10:15 PM



“ *What a lady.....class #1.  
She will be missed, but what an inspiration to so many.*

*Love to you all*

*Mary Lou##imported-begin##Mary Lou McNameeGroll##imported-end##*

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December 21, 2011 at 03:00 PM



“ Danno, George, Dardis, Roger and Giles.  
My friend since 1956 Crispin Hall, Troy forwarded the news of the death of Mrs McNamee.  
My stay with your family as au pair first three months in England 1955 and a year 1956 to 57 in Loudonville and later some weeks in France as guest became very important to me. The sincere ambition from Mr and Mrs McNamee for me to learn as much as possible of american life, traditions, language and politics, in short everything, has followed me during my life. Your parents trusted this young girl with the care of baby Roger, and the rest of you. I am grateful for the many years Mrs McNamee kept contact with me, and for the contacts with Roger and Dardis. Our wedding present from your family, red placemats with the American Eagle, has for 43 years been Christmastablemats in our home. This year it shall be with fond and specially grateful memories I shall put them on the table. I send you my warm thoughts and deepfelt condolences.  
Inge from Denmark (now living in Sweden)##imported-begin##Inge-Gerd (Möller) Lindstén##imported-end##

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December 20, 2011 at 04:38 PM



“ I send my deep sympathy to all of Barbara's family on behalf of Barbara's old friend and my father in law, Jack Busby, and on my own behalf as a fellow alumna and admirer of Barbara. I met Barbara as a 23 year-old "road warrior" for the Bryn Mawr admissions office and our paths have crossed many times since. Barbara embodied so much of what I value about Bryn Mawr- clear-sighted intelligence, an intrepid spirit, humor, leadership and elegance of spirit and manner. I feel fortunate to have known her.

Ruth Lindeborg, BMC '80 and Secretary of the College##imported-begin##Ruth Lindeborg##imported-end##

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December 20, 2011 at 03:33 PM



“ *To the McNamee Children*

*We bought your childhood home at 352 Loudon Rd from your mother in 1980. She could not have been more gracious and generous. We fondly recall how accomodating and helpful she was during the transition, telling us how to take care of the service people and introducing us to the neighbors. Over the years we loved reading Dardis' articles about growing up in the house and became great friends with Lou and Natalie Buchman who would regale us with the stories about the political,literary and artistic figures they met at your parents soirees. A legendary lady indeed!###imported-begin###Dale and Charles Roemmelt###imported-end##*

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December 19, 2011 at 05:07 PM



“ *What a life! She must have been a role model for many, including her niece, and my fiend, Lauree McNamee Hickok.###imported-begin###Elizabeth Bergin Hess###imported-end##*

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December 19, 2011 at 05:14 AM



“ *"Aunt Barbara's" influence is wider than can be imagined. Many of us who enjoyed her hospitality tried to follow her example. Her wake in the sea of life is wide, frothy and beautiful.###imported-begin###Mary Louis Goodfriend Davitt###imported-end##*

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December 19, 2011 at 02:59 AM