

# Mary Catherine Galbreath and her life

Mary Catherine was born August 10, 1837 to James Galbreath, a blacksmith, and his wife Nancy Cole Galbreath. She and her brother Robert Harvey, born in 1844 were raised in downtown Cincinnati at 26 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street. Mary Catherine had a good education for a woman of the day, attending the Wesleyan Female College from 1848 to 1854. She must have been good looking, with striking red hair (disapproving relatives called her 'the redhead'.)

Mary Catherine married, in 1855, Henry McNicol, a son of wealthy merchant Peter McNicol. Most of my information about this marriage came from George Carter Miller's journal. Henry proved far from right - Miller's entry of June 5th 1857 says " Henry McNichol left in the morning saying he would not eat another Brakefast, Dinner or Supper in the house - his fathers in law"<sup>1</sup> A little daughter, Claribel, was born September 19 1857 to the McNicols; and another journal entry of Oct 14th 1857 says "*Mr. H. McNichol left his wife June 5th and has acted like a demon ever since & this day his abused wife has been persuaded to try him again on his naked promise to do better which I fear will not stand good longer than spring.*"

There is a family story told by Catherine Eustis Peck that "Grandmother answered the door, and there stood a woman with a babe in her arms, and the woman said 'this is your husband's child.'" She continued, "Grandmother's red hair stood on end; she went upstairs, packed her belongings and went home to her parents." We don't know of any of Henry's children being born about that time, but ?could be. But she did eventually stay away from him.

James Galbreath died in December 1858, and by 1860 Mary Catherine and her little daughter were living with her mother and brother at 26 East 7<sup>th</sup> Street, across the street from George C Miller. Henry sued Mary Catherine for divorce on the grounds of desertion. But the court saw it differently and awarded Mary Catherine the divorce, costs and alimony in 1863<sup>2</sup>.

---

1

Journal of George Carter Miller - manuscript in the possession of the Cincinnati Historical Society. I don't know what he meant by this ...a usage no longer employed.

2 #24432 Action for Divorce filed 31 March 1863 (Henry McNicol v. Mary C McNicol) decree for defendant for divorce and alimony 19 Jun 1863 (Min 35 p 104) Cincinnati Abstract Co from the original burned in a courthouse fire 29 Mar 1884-

Peter McNicol had other children than Henry; one was Mary Ann, who in 1847 had married an up-and-coming young German named Herman Duhme; he had started a jewelry store and flatware manufactory which was becoming quite successful. The young Duhmes had a daughter Kate who succumbed to yellow fever at the age of five, and a son Francis who died as an infant, before having sons Herman Richard and Frank. Mary Ann Duhme was said to be afflicted with melancholia, but she also apparently went home to her parents when she and Herman disagreed; it is said that Herman finally told her not to come back, and they divorced in 1859.

We don't know when or how Herman Duhme and Mary Catherine met - perhaps through Mary Catherine's brother Robert, who worked for the Duhme Co. In any case Herman and Mary Catherine married in 1864, and Herman raised Claribel McNicol as if she were his own.



The next year Herman and Mary Catherine welcomed their daughter Charlotte, then two sons who died young, and finally in 1879 Albert.



Above are two pictures of Mary Catherine from about the time of her marriage - one a romanticized oil painting<sup>3</sup>, the other a photo. My favorite is a somewhat later one.

Aside from attending to her household, her husband, children and stepsons I know little about Mary Catherine during the interval between her marriage and Herman's 1888 death. In 1870 the family had 6 members and two servants. In 1880 the family included 6 people and an infant and had 4 servants including a coachman. I believe that she may have taken at least 2 trips to Europe with her husband, one in 1867 and the second 1878. I think, however, that it was a pleasant life.

Life changed when Herman died in August 1888 while they were on holiday in St. Clair Springs, Michigan.

After Herman's death Mary Galbreath Duhme became majority stockholder of Duhme & Company, and the business was managed by her brother RH Galbreath, and by Herman's son Frank and nephew Charles H Duhme.<sup>4</sup> Mary Catherine and Nancy Galbreath moved within a few months to a house in Avondale on Ridgeway Ave.<sup>5</sup> But

---

3

Estate of Catherine Lucking Wygant

4

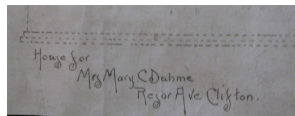
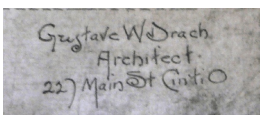
Cincinnati Silver 1788-1940 by Amy Miller Dehan with contributions by Janet C Haartz and Nora Kohl Cincinnati Art Museum 2014 p128

5

Monday Sept 3 1888 "Called with wife, sister Ruth and Priscilla on Mrs Duhme. Met Mrs Galbreath and Miss Lotta Duhme, a young lady of 22 yr. They have only one son. He was not present. Miss Belle, daughter of McNicoll, was ill.

Mrs Galbreath told of her riding out in the carriage to see the house Harvey purchased for them in Avondale on Ridgeway Ave, where they expect to remove this month. They seemed gratified with our visit. Mr Duhme's death was quite unexpected". The Diaries of John M Miller of Westwood/Cincinnati, Ohio compiled by Susan R Alexander, printed by BookCrafters, Chelsea, Michigan 1993

Mary Catherine soon decided to have a new house in an upscale neighborhood, Clifton; she commissioned a young architect, Gustave Drach, associated with the Beaux-Artes style.



The house was surely completed by the summer of 1892. “Tuesday September 20<sup>th</sup> 1892 “  
*...I went to call on Mrs Nancy Galbreath in Clifton. She lives in her house, a new one, of Freestone, gray & pretty, and prettily situated on Resor Ave; [she was] with her daughter Mary Duhme who has a divorced husband living - Henry McNicol- and is a widow of second husband Herman Duhme. Has also a daughter Mrs Ives of her first husband who has a sweet little child Robert Ives about two years old. Also a daughter Lottie & a son now at the Military School at College Hill about 12 or 13. Miss Lottie is a young lady of 20 perhaps, stout and wholesome, a good tennis player. They have a court and of course young men to come and help. [She] has a studio, is something of an artist. They showed us through [and] were glad to see us; offered us wine and peppermint cordial. [My] wife spilled hers on her dress<sup>6</sup>.”*

In 1893 the silver company was incorporated as The Duhme Company by Galbreath, Charlotte Duhme, Frank Duhme, Franklin Ives (who was the husband of Claribel McNicol), and EH Kleinschmidt.

In January 1896 Charlotte wrote her mother, “My dearest, dearest Mother,



*Today I am the happiest girl in the whole world, I am sure. The one drawback to my perfect happiness is my most loving thoughts of you.*

*But Mother, dear, your love for me is too perfect not to be glad with me that my stony heart has suddenly become so hot and active that it is painful. But I once promised you that I would never say "Yes" to any man until you knew him and all about him.*

*So I told Mr. Eustis that I could not say "Yes" until you knew him and approved.*

Charlotte and Charles Buckminster Eustis were married on June 4, 1896 in Cincinnati.

The Duhme Company was damaged by the Panic of 1893, and its fortunes staggered. It seems to have been operated at a loss from its incorporation, and in 1896 Herman and Frank Duhme, one-fifth owners, petitioned for the dissolution of The Duhme Co. It was finally found that RH Galbreath and Mary Duhme and Charlotte Duhme Eustis had concealed losses and otherwise attempted to milk the company of its assets. The company declared bankruptcy on March 5, 1897. In May the assets of the company were bought in the name of Lucille Elstun Duhme, Frank Duhme's wife; and of Mary Mazzone Duhme, the wife of Herman Duhme, in partnership with Herman Keck Jr., and Oscar Keck<sup>7</sup>.

The Duhme Company's dissolution coincided with the birth of Charlotte Duhme Eustis' first child, Catherine Jane, born on March 16<sup>th</sup> of 1897. Mary Catherine, about that time but certainly by 1900, left her beautiful Clifton home, which later was occupied by her daughter Claribel McNicol Ives. Mary Catherine moved, with her son Albert, to Minneapolis, living near Charles and Charlotte Eustis. In her later years she may have suffered some sort of dementia, and she died May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1906. She is buried in Spring Grove Cemetery, in Cincinnati, next to her husband Herman.

[Go Back to Index](#)

\_\_\_\_\_