



**Durand Heritage Foundation (DHF)**  
**Quarterly Bulletin**  
October 1, 2025

FROM: Durand Heritage Foundation (DHF)  
TO: DHF Subscribers  
SUBJECT: Quarterly Bulletin, #2025-3

This is the third of three quarterly Bulletins scheduled for 2025. Next: 1 Jan 2026

## **“Features”**

John Durand Scholarship Program—spread the word to your scholars.

DHF Board activities—annual meeting forthcoming.

DHF Legacy Library addition:

Sept 1998 DHF Newsletter-#2 of 62 newsletters.

Msgr. Arthur H. Durand Autobiography-are you related? Yes!

Obituary: Joyce (Durand) Ripley (1936-2025)

Biography: Gilbert Durand (1900-1985)

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### **John Durand Scholarship Program**

Application information will be posted in the Jan 2026 Bulletin. Be sure and mention the scholarship to all your post-secondary students when you see them during the winter holidays.

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### **DHF Board activities**

The mandatory DHF annual meeting will occur this fall or early winter in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Send a note to [info@durandfoundation.com](mailto:info@durandfoundation.com) if you want to attend and we'll notify you when the time/place are firmed up.

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### **DHF Legacy Library additions:**

[Click here to view links to the items below](#)

**1. 1998 Sept. DHF Newsletter**

**2. Msgr. Arthur H. Durand Autobiography**

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## *Joyce Ennice Ripley*

December 4, 1936 ~ July 17, 2025 (age 88)



### Joyce Ripley Obituary

Joyce Durand Meier Ripley was called to her eternal home on Thursday, July 17, 2025.

The oldest daughter of Gilbert & Fern Durand and younger sister of Bob and Dick, Joyce learned fast to be a help to her mother when the twins, Jean & Joanne, were born. Next came Ron, Tom, Jim, Lynda, DeeAnn, & Roger who rounded out the family.

She caught the eye of Kenny Meier and after he served in the Korean War were married and made their home in Red Wing, Ladysmith, and finally Spooner where Kenny was a butcher for National Tea. Within six years they had Rebecca, Rory, Tammera, and Kurt who brought them much joy. Tragedy struck their lives when Kenny was killed in a car accident.

Joyce forged ahead as best as she could with four little kids in tow and moved to River Falls where her parents were living and worked at a hotel Gilbert built for his construction workers and rented rooms to college students.

Gilbert set her up on a blind date with a gentleman, Rod Ripley, who also experienced loss and was raising three kids, Bruce, Amy, and Marc, on his own. They built a new house, bringing these two families together in Spooner. They had three more children - Gerald, William, & John.

Joyce was involved in her kid's lives and served as a Girl Scout Leader, a member of the Spooner Memorial Library Board, hockey & baseball mom, Blood Mobile Chairperson, and on the Washburn County Historical Board. Working alongside her dad, Gilbert, at the cement block factory and the hotel, she had a great business sense and was Rod's administrative assistant for his surveying company, even sometimes being part of the field crew. Joyce always had a song in her heart and on her lips. Their big house on Riphill was open to family and friends and was the place everyone gathered.

She is survived by her 10 children, 26 grandchildren, 37 great grandchildren, and 3 great-great grandchildren, and her siblings, Jean Batte, Thomas Durand, DeeAnn McLellan, and Roger Elwin Durand.

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## Gilbert Durand (1900-1985) biography

Three of Gilbert's siblings (Mabel, Leo, and Louis) were featured in the DHF Newsletters between 1998 and 2024. He and four other sibs (Isabel, Willard, Walter, Don, and Max) never made it to the Newsletter pages but their biographies will be featured in these quarterly "Bulletins".

The Gilbert Durand story follows. Gilbert's story was written by Marilyn Durand Kunz and was included in the 1997 book "Descendants of George Durand and Eleanor Dubeau".

The document provides a detailed account of Gilbert Victor Durand's life. Key points include:

**1. Early Life:** Gilbert was born on December 11, 1900, in Faribault, Minnesota, the second of ten children. His family moved to Ross, North Dakota, in 1903, and later to Nary, Minnesota, in 1913.

**2. Childhood and Education:** Life was challenging, and Gilbert had to work hard from a young age. He dropped out of school in the 5th grade due to family responsibilities. His father, George, was abusive, and Gilbert left home at age 15.

**3. Marriage and Family:** Gilbert married Grace Hemmelwright in 1924, and they had three children: Mildred, Margaret, and Joseph. They divorced in 1943. Gilbert later married Mary Ann Will in 1945, and they had one daughter, Marilyn.

**4. Career:** Gilbert worked as a farmer, school bus driver, logger, and carpenter. He moved to California during the 1940s for construction work but eventually returned to Minnesota. He later became self-employed in carpentry, a skill he learned from his uncle.

**5. Later Years:** Gilbert was known for his humor and resourcefulness. He discovered late in life that his legal name was Joseph Gilbert Durand, not Gilbert Victor Durand. He passed away at age 85 in Duluth, Minnesota, leaving behind a legacy of hard work, humor, and family.

**6. Personality:** Gilbert had a strong work ethic, a great sense of humor, and a love for making others laugh. He was remembered fondly by his family and community.

# Gilbert Victor Durand

by Marilyn Durand Kunz  
November 1996



I will attempt to detail the events of my father's life the best I can. You see, Gilbert Victor Durand was already 46 years old when I came into his life. Therefore, most of his life's history has been told to me by others; including my two half-sisters Millie and Marge, and half-brother Sonny.



**Figure 27.** Gilbert, 8 months old, and Isabel at 2 years.

Gilbert Victor Durand was born the second of ten children to George and Eleanor Dubeau Durand on December 11, 1900, at Faribault, Minnesota. Gilbert was never sure where his middle name "Victor" came from, but that's what he was told, and it would be many years later when he found out that his real name was something different.

At that time, the family consisted of George, Eleanor, Isabel and Gilbert. They moved to Ross, North Dakota, in 1903 to homestead a farm there. Four more babies joined the family in North Dakota: Mabel, "Little" Willard (who later drowned and is buried in Ross, ND), Willard, and Walter.

Times were hard in North Dakota and George thought it best to move on. So, in 1913



**Figure 28.** At Ross, ND at time of auction. Left to Right: Gilbert on wagon, George, Eleanor, Isabel holding horse, Walter, Willard, Mable on horse.

the homestead and livestock were sold at auction and the family left North Dakota for Minnesota with one cow and the team of horses shown in the photo. Four more children were born in Nary, Minnesota: Donald, Max, Leo, and Louis. Life didn't get much better after the move.

It was hard work to make ends meet and put food on the table for 10 children. The kids were expected to work as hard as a grown person. Education became unimportant. George only allowed French to be spoken at home, so it was necessary for Gilbert and his siblings to learn to speak English as well as the four Rs. They were not able to attend school regularly because they had to help on the farm making learning difficult so Gilbert dropped out of school in the 5th grade. Many times Gilbert told me their mother would leave her work in the house to help out with the chores before George got back from town so the kids didn't get in trouble when everything he had expected to be done wasn't.

George's temperament became so abusive toward his children and his wife that during one argument Gilbert was ordered to get out and leave the farm. Gilbert was 15 years old at that time and on his own. It is not clear to me where Gilbert lived after that or what he did until he married Grace Hemmelwright in 1924.



**Figure 29.** Gilbert with horse.

Gilbert and Grace farmed in the Nary/Guthrie, Minnesota, area, 10 miles south of Bemidji. He also drove school bus, logged, and was always handy with carpentry. Gilbert always said he learned his carpentry skills from his Uncle Adam, his mother's brother. In 1940, Gilbert heard of a good living to be made in construction out West. At first, Gilbert traveled to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and soon after Grace and the children joined him. Soon it was on to Fallbrook, California, and construction of Camp

Pendleton.

Gilbert and Grace had three children: Mildred Amelia, born 3-4-24; Margaret (Marge), born 6-4-27; and, Joseph Gilbert (Sonny), born 5-23-32. Gilbert and Grace divorced in 1943, and Gilbert returned to Bemidji, Minnesota, where he worked at a local lumber mill. Grace passed away in 1977. Grace and Gilberts children's families live in CA and TX. Sonny lives in Omaha, NE.

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Now, I become a little more familiar with my father's life and will introduce you to Mary Ann Will, my mother.

It was soon after Gilbert arrived in Bemidji that he started taking his laundry to the Bemidji Laundry Co. where Mary had been working for almost 20 years. Soon they became acquainted and Gilbert was giving Mary rides home from work. I remember my grandmother Will telling me that she was getting pretty nervous about this situation and told Mary "what are the neighbors going to say about that car from California coming here all the time." My mother told her "not to worry because that car from California was going back to California." Well, it never went back to California, but went to Duluth where Gilbert got a job as a pattern maker at Clyde Iron Works. His younger brother Donald was already employed there and told Gilbert of the opening. Gilbert worked there for 14 years.

Gilbert now spent much of his time on the highway between Duluth and Bemidji trading his butter and sugar ration stamps for gasoline ration stamps as this was during WWII. This lasted until February, 1945, when Gilbert and Mary were married by the Justice of Peace in Superior, Wisconsin. Gilbert's brother Donald and his wife Leona witnessed the ceremony. They then made their permanent home in Duluth. Because Gilbert had been married previously, they were unable to marry in the Catholic Church until 1977.

It was now the end of WWII and housing was hard to find. For a while they lived in a garage, then an

upstairs apartment. Apartment life soon became crowded with a new baby. Gilbert's fourth child, Marilyn Lee, was born 1-6-46, and in March 1947 they found a house that would be their home for the next 40 years. It was a real fixer-upper. In fact, there were chickens living in the attic which would soon become the bedrooms. Fortunately, Gilbert was able to put his carpentry skills to work and almost rebuilt that little house. He built a couple of garages on the



Figure 30. Gilbert with Marilyn.

property and a playhouse for me.

Gilbert had a dedicated work ethic which I am sure was instilled in him from his parents. He and Mary were much happier spending their free time working around their home or helping a neighbor with a construction project much to my dismay because I thought we should be doing more fun things. But that was their fun, to work and improve what they had.

Gilbert was laid off in 1959 from Clyde Iron Works. When you are 59 years old where do you go. This was very stressful for him. He tried working in Minneapolis hanging sheetrock at Orin Thompson with his brother Leo, but that didn't work for very long. They didn't want to move to the Twin Cities area and the distance was becoming a burden. Gilbert then decided to start out on his own. He knew how to build things and gave it a try. When forced into it in this way, he soon learned he should have done it much earlier in his life. For the next 12 years, he was very successful and happy doing what he enjoyed. I will always remember the house he built for me at age 72.

Gilbert always wore a hat, probably due to the fact he was quite short of hair. It never seemed to bother him. He would always say that it was difficult to have hair and brains both. As you can see in the following pictures he liked to dress up and have his picture taken. It appears they would tease him about this. Notice his father (George) in the picture on the left rubbing it in a little.



As a young man, a great Saturday night was spent putting on a clean pair of overalls, a new shirt, and heading for the local dance. Never sitting one out.



**Figure 31.** Gilbert with George in background during one of George's lighter moments.

Gilbert had a great sense of humor and loved to laugh and make others laugh. This trait is very evident in all of his brothers and sisters. I would be remiss to not share some of those stories with you.

--In the 1950's Gilbert and Willard owned a pig together. There was much discussion at the time the pig was to be butchered as to which end of the pig each brother owned. Neither one wanted to be responsible for the pig's demise.

--In his later years, while living in a senior apartment complex, Gilbert kept the staff on their toes much of the time. He always had a story or a trick for someone. Because of that great sense of humor, I have no doubt that that is why he always got the best of care and a lot of attention.

--Some time after Grace passed away in 1977, Gilbert and Mary were able to be married in the Catholic Church. In order to do this certain documents had to be presented. One necessary document was a copy of Gilbert's birth certificate. After much searching, it was found and caused Gilbert a considerable amount of concern because he learned something he had never known before--his name was not Gilbert Victor Durand, but legally Joseph Gilbert Durand. He didn't know how the mixup occurred, but now his major concern was what was he going to do with all the carpentry tools he had acquired throughout his life that he had engraved with his initials G.V.D. Now he would have to change all of them to J.G.D. What a job he had ahead of him.

Gilbert died at the age of 85 years in Duluth, Minnesota. He had three daughters, one son, and eight grandchildren. Two daughters have passed away; Marge died in 1992, and Mildred in 1996. Mary Ann Durand died in 1984.

So, you see Gilbert was a fun person to know. I only wish I could have known him longer.

