

[https://www.laconiadailysun.com/community/lake\\_style/scriven-arts-colony-pays-tribute-to-bon-vivant-of-gilmanton/article\\_abe032cb-0c1a-5913-bec2-dac1b6427ebb.html](https://www.laconiadailysun.com/community/lake_style/scriven-arts-colony-pays-tribute-to-bon-vivant-of-gilmanton/article_abe032cb-0c1a-5913-bec2-dac1b6427ebb.html)

## Scriven Arts Colony pays tribute to bon vivant of Gilmanton's past

May 11, 2016



By ADAM DRAPCHO, LACONIA DAILY SUN

GILMANTON — Bill Donahue's grandmother, Jane Scriven Cumming, passed away nearly two decades ago. Yet, he has been constantly bumping into her memory since moving into his family's historic home in Gilmanton in 2014.

The home at 452 Route 140, a stone's throw from the Four Corners intersection, has been in Donahue's family, on his mother's side, since his great-great-grandfather bought it in 1905. Used seasonally by his family, the home loomed large in the lives of his grandmother, his mother and

even for Donahue, who spent the summer of his 18th year living with his grandmother in Gilmanton while his parents were traveling abroad.



Donahue wrote about that summer for "The Smart Set," a magazine published by Drexel University, in 2008. His grandmother, he wrote in the article, was, "Born a society girl, she had never really shed the starry-eyed thrill and the dramatic flirtatiousness of a debutante. She was forever in search of a party."

Cumming loved to host, and as a great host, found a way to make each guest feel like a valued and interesting part of the mix. Donahue has had nearly daily reminders of his grandmother since he moved to Gilmanton. People will talk to him when he's about town, or send him an email, to say how much they enjoyed spending time at a Cumming-hosted event. "Any time you mention my grandmother, people mention stuff like that. So, I was trying to bring that spirit back."

Last year, Donahue began paying tribute to Cumming's spirit by founding the Scriven Arts Colony, which invites people to fill the seats and couches in the property's antique barn for events featuring special guests. Donahue hosted two events last year, a screening of a silent film, led by Jeff Rapsis; and a reading by Rebecca Onion, who grew up in Gilmanton and was recently named Slate.com's history writer.

Donahue is stepping things up for the second year – such as a recently acquired lectern and microphone – and has scheduled seven events. The season begins this Saturday, May 14, with a reading by Minneapolis writer Frank Bures, a friend of Donahue, who recently debuted his first book, "The Geography of Madness." The season closes on Oct. 31, with a haunted house. In between will

be events such as a slide show with photographer Matthew Nighswander, a 60th anniversary discussion of the still-controversial Grace Metalious novel "Peyton Place," a poetry reading, a film screening, and the Taste of Gilmanton dinner.

The season opener on May 14, featuring Bures, will begin at 5 p.m. For information on other events, visit [www.scrivenartscolony.com](http://www.scrivenartscolony.com).

With the exception of the dinner, there's no charge to attend an event at the Scriven Arts Colony. As Donahue said, that's how his grandmother would have done it.

"For me, it was important that it was free. The gestalt of it is to be in her spirit," he said. "The doors were always open to everybody. She had a sparkling spirit."

Jane Scriven Cumming was 94 when she died, in 1998. She was married three times, and lived in Washington, D.C., when she wasn't in Gilmanton. Cumming is known in town for the picnics and cocktails she hosted. With help from her daughter, Barbara Donahue, Cumming wrote "Gilmanton Summers: Memories of a new Hampshire Village in the Early 1900's," a book still available through the Gilmanton Historical Society.

John Dickey, president of the Historical Society, said "Gilmanton Summers" is a memoirs that includes many period photographs of the neighborhood around the intersection of routes 140 and 107. Dickey said the book is one of the volumes treasured by the society. "She takes you house by house around Gilmanton Corners," he said.

He added that Cumming was "an amazing woman ... vivacious, outgoing, full of life, she was the center of community activity ... She tried to include many people in her numerous gatherings, and made everyone feel welcome, including children." He is an enthusiastic supporter of the Scriven Arts Colony and considers it a "fitting tribute" to Cumming.

After the summer of 1982, which Donahue spent at 452 Route 140, Donahue went to Colby College in Waterville, Maine, then spent the following 28 years in Portland, Oregon, as a magazine writer. His articles have appeared in a wide range of publications, including The Atlantic, The New Yorker, Wired, Playboy, Financial Times and Runner's World. He's currently working on an e-book about Oney Judge, a slave owned by George Washington until her escape in 1796. She lived the rest of her life as a free woman in Greenland, New Hampshire.



By 2014, Donahue had grown tired of Portland, which by then had become famously cool – too cool, in fact. "The city had become such a Mecca for the creative class that it had lost much of (its) original, unrehearsed charm and became sort of Disneyfied ... it was time to try something different," he said.

Meanwhile, as he was considering a new home, the family home in Gilmanton was calling out for a caretaker. Donahue's initial intention was to come for a short visit, to attend to some needed maintenance, but the structure soon charmed him.

"It's charismatic, it's got a story," he said. "I felt that the stars were aligned. The house needed me and I needed the house."

While restoring the structure, Donahue was equally moved to restore the spirit of the space, to again make the home a place where people could come together for a memorable, pleasant and provocative evening, the kind that Cumming was known for.

"She was the life of the party," said Donahue.

**Jane Scriven Cummins (above), who died in 1998. The Arts Colony's second season will begin with an event on Saturday evening.**