

Gladys Posselt Ondříček

March 6, 1894 (Albany, New York) - October 10, 1982 (Boston, MA)

A Special Tribute to a Forgotten Teacher (Updated 8/15/09, 2015 & 10/26/20)

By [Arthur Houle](#)

The life and times of "high profile" teachers are generally well chronicled. For example, a simple Internet search yields much on the legacy of [Leonard Shure \(1910-1995\)](#), one of my principal teachers as an advanced piano student. I owe a great debt to all my teachers, and could easily write tributes to all of them. But it is often the private teacher ("in the trenches," as we say) who makes an invaluable, yet often overlooked, contribution to our pianistic development. Gladys Posselt Ondříček is one such teacher. I studied with her for only 2½ years as a teenager (9/6/69 to 1/24/72), yet her influence was profound. Without her tutelage I may never have been accepted into Shure's studio later on. So I am distressed to find scant references to Gladys Ondříček on the internet. Until recently, I did not even know her birth date or time of death. I am indebted to her niece, [Diana Lewis Burgin](#), for informing me that Mrs. Ondříček was born in 1894 and passed away on Oct. 10, 1982. Sadly, Professor Burgin also related to me: "I think I was the only person present at her burial" (see 2/11/07 email below).

Here is what I could glean about my teacher's (and her husband's) life:

According to [Diana Burgin](#), "In her youth [Gladys] played violin and viola and also sang. In her mastering of different instruments she seems to have been following her father's lead. He knew how to play every instrument in the orchestra EXCEPT the piano. The older girls in the Posselt family had a trio, The Posselt Trio, which played in and around Boston... a nice flyer [of them] will eventually be [posted] in my [photo gallery](#)." This scenario reminded me of my own family when I was growing up; we had five pianos in the house and various members of my household played piano, organ, guitar, violin, harmonica, flute, accordion and spoons (O.K., so we can quibble as to whether spoons qualify as music, but my dad was pretty darn good with them!). We often gathered around the piano on Sundays and holidays to sing and play - a tradition that is, sadly, far less in evidence today. We *made* music; today we too often passively *consume* it, barely aware of its pervasive "background" presence. I yearn for a society wherein "music free" restaurants, supermarkets, and shopping malls will be as common as "smoke free" establishments - not because I hate music, but because when I listen to music, I want to *listen* to music! Rarely does this unremitting wash of music lift

my soul; it has, instead, the effect of dulling the senses. Well, now that I got that off my chest...back to our story of Gladys:

While Mrs. Ondříček was a student at [New England Conservatory](#) she won the Samuel Endicott Prize for Composition for her composition, "Five Pieces for Pianoforte." She graduated in 1922; in 1972 NEC gave her a Certificate honoring her 50th anniversary as a graduate.

On August 23, 1926 [Gladys Posselt married](#) Emanuel C. Ondříček [\[bio\]](#) (1880-1958), a noted violin virtuoso and teacher, in Providence, Rhode Island. They evidently took [residence in Boston, MA as of 1929](#). According to [public records](#), Emanuel apparently emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1910; he was from a family of renowned Czech violinists, two of whom were Stanislav (who taught in Russia, Zagreb and New York) and [František](#) (1857-1922). Emanuel [became a U.S. citizen in 1923](#). He concertized in Russia, Vienna, Pest, the Balkans, Berlin, London, and the United States. He founded [Ondricek Studios of Violin Art](#) (New York and Boston), where he taught with his sisters, August and Mary. He was a teaching assistant to [Otakar Ševčík](#) (1852-1934), who was in turn a student of [Eugène Ysaÿe](#) (1858-1931). Late in his life, [Emanuel Ondříček](#) was appointed as a professor of violin at Boston University.

Both Gladys Ondříček and her husband were evidently content with being wonderful teachers, with or without the limelight. Regrettably, neither has been immortalized to any appreciable degree online* (though this may change as [Diana Burgin's website](#) evolves); each lacks an entry on Wikipedia.

Mrs. Ondříček was a student of (and assistant to) [Heinrich Gebhard](#) (1878-1963) for ten years; Gebhard's musical ancestry goes to [Franz Liszt](#) (see below, next to last page). Gebhard was one of the most renowned piano & composition teachers in Boston in his day. He taught many eminent composers such as [Leonard Bernstein](#) (1935-1939) and [Alan Hovhaness](#) (1911-2000). He was also the author of "[The Art of Pedaling: A Manual for the Use of the Piano Pedals](#)," a book dedicated to his teacher, [Theodor Leschetizky](#), with a forward by [Leonard Bernstein](#).

Her private teaching studio was located on [246 Huntington Ave. in Boston](#) (the Steinway building), close to [Leonard Bernstein's](#) studio, until late 1972 when she retired (she was, however, coaxed out of retirement from time to time to give lessons sporadically thereafter). She lived for some time on [137 Park Drive](#), Boston, MA 02215 but spent summers at White Horse Beach in [Manomet](#), a seaside village of Plymouth, MA. At some point she taught at [Boston University](#). She had three sisters - [Ruth](#) (born 1911-2007), Marjorie and Grace - and one

brother, Emil. Ruth was active as a violin recitalist from at least 1917 to 1987; Emanuel Ondříček was her first violin teacher.

Before I proceed with my personal account of Gladys Ondříček, let me put it into a better context by relating a brief account of my life before my lessons with her.

I was born 2/5/55 in [Lowell, Massachusetts](#). Lowell was the childhood residence of [Ed McMahan](#) as well as the birthplace of the industrial revolution (with, back then, all its resplendent pollution) and [Bette Davis](#), who once paid this lovely tribute to her place of birth: "I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts and I was there for two months of my life...Thank God my family took me out of there." (Something tells me the Lowell Chamber of Commerce is not using that particular quote a whole lot.)

My first piano teacher was my mother, [Beatrice Laurette Dupré Houle](#) (1925-1994), who started me at the age of seven (1962). Lessons with her lasted for three months. My next teacher, Mrs. Antoinette Alexander Boudreau (May 23, 1891-December 31, 1966; wife of Frank Melvin Boudreau, 1891-1964), put me through all the old Schaum method books. Tragically, she died in a terrible car accident on New Year's eve, 1966. I was then referred to Anna Scannell (July 27, 1886-August 23, 1990), considered by many to be the best teacher in Lowell. I studied with her from 1/7/67 to August of 1969 and learned a great deal, particularly about the importance of counting and good fingerings.

Miss Scannell had hardy genes, for she passed away in 1990 at the age of 104. (Just think - when Miss Scannell was a baby, [Grover Cleveland](#) was the U.S. President and Idaho had not yet been admitted into statehood!)

Miss Scannell also had a great sense of humor. True story (I was there): at her 100th birthday celebration (1986) she got a tongue-in-cheek marriage proposal from Jack Payne, a relatively spry 80-something (?) bachelor. Jack (all in good fun) said, "So Anna - when are ya gonna marry me?" and Miss Scannell shot back, "Oh Jack, you KNOW I'm waiting for someone older and more mature!" Miss Scannell's niece, Louise Dunn, also confided to me that the last time Anna Scannell went to church, she asked for a double shot of the wine!

My lessons with Miss Scannell lasted two years. In 1969 she made a very selfless decision to personally introduce me to Madame Ondříček, whom she regarded as a better teacher. I have always been grateful to Miss Scannell for this sacrifice. She could have easily continued to coast along with me. Certainly it did not enhance her prestige to give up one of her "prize" students (I often performed last on recitals). At the time, I did not think Miss Scannell's referral was extraordinary. But now, having seen how possessive teachers often are with students, I appreciate

what Miss Scannell did. She put the interests of her students ahead of her own, which is something I have always tried to emulate. Despite her advanced age, Miss Scannell personally escorted me from Lowell to Boston by train (a 26-mile trip) to audition for Madame Ondříček.

Like any teenager, I was nervous but full of youthful naiveté and ebullience. For the audition I played Chopin's ever-popular [*Polonaise in A-Flat, Op. 53*](#), fully expecting that my pianistic greatness would be abundantly evident. But whoever coined the expression "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" must have had me in mind. In hindsight, I realize that my playing was "musical" but quite immature and sloppy otherwise. The air that Mrs. Ondříček let out of my sails could have knocked over a house! I was devastated. Nonetheless, she must have seen some potential, for she accepted me into her studio. Furthermore, knowing that I came from a struggling family of eight children, she charged me half price for lessons. I was told this was rare for her. I've never forgotten her generosity; I've tried to reciprocate with some of my own deserving students over the years. After she retired, she gave away her music to her students; I inherited a fair amount of these valuable scores (with her annotations). Needless to say, my students (who borrow this music) and I are grateful.

So what were the lessons like? Ondříček was a dying breed of teacher. For one thing, she never looked at the clock. Lessons could go on for ninety minutes, two hours, perhaps even more. I kept the copybook wherein Mrs. Ondříček wrote her detailed weekly assignments; they chronicle an astounding amount of theory, technique ([Cramer](#), [Tausig](#), [F. Wieck](#), [Bertini](#), etc.) and repertory ([Bach](#), [Brahms](#), [Chopin](#), [Grieg](#), [Mendelssohn](#), [Schumann](#), [MacDowell](#), [Albeniz](#), [Hugo Reinhold](#), [Mozart](#), [Cyril Scott](#) and [Beethoven](#)). Here's a sample written assignment: "Compose a short (minimum 4 mm.) chord skip melody exercise (any key) and harmonize with principal triads (roots in the bass)." Another one involved transposition: "[Chadwick](#), p. 6, no. 3 transpose up two whole steps." She was the kind of teacher that a young Beethoven would have had - someone who was well rounded and taught MUSICIANSHIP, not just piano. What private piano teacher today assigns four-part harmony writing assignments to precollege students?

Little wonder I sailed through my college theory classes years later. (I never got less than an "A" for any theory-related course throughout my three degrees in piano performance; ironically, I cannot say the same for my grades in piano performance!) In addition to rigorous theory, Ondříček's technique assignments would make a Russian-trained pianist flinch. I started teaching at the age of thirteen and have taught just about every level of student, including doctoral graduate students. Yet I cannot recall ever encountering a student whose technical training surpassed what Mrs. Ondříček assigned to me in those 2½ short years! In addition to the standard scales and arpeggios, I was, for example, expected to play

scales in double thirds (all major and minor keys, solid and broken), chromatic minor thirds (also solid and broken), and countless exercises that were ingeniously tailored for specific pieces. At that time I thought this was all pretty normal piano teaching. Only later did I see how today's "age of specialization" has artificially separated the various components of music teaching into separate classes - applied classical repertory coaching, chamber music, theory, musicology, composition, improvisation (if we're lucky), etc., all nicely compartmentalized. But rarely do we get a real synthesis of these elements, all from one master mentor, as in bygone days. And sadly, the pace of life today makes it a challenge to spend sufficient time with every student. If I could, I would outlaw half hour lessons! (Alas, J. S. Bach taught his students every day of the week, not merely once a week, as is the norm today.)

Madame Ondříček was not shy about writing all over our music scores. (At least she wrote in pencil; Miss Scannell, my to my annoyance, would write on my scores in pen!) It was a weekly ritual that before each lesson started, she would hand you her personal score (the "sacred text" in my mind) - riddled with her pencil marks - and have you copy every single annotation into your score. (If a fly died on her score, you better not neglect to copy that same smudge onto your music!) This was before the days of easy access to photocopy machines. I often muse that technology is not an unmixed blessing, for there was something about laboriously copying those marks that made me THINK about each and every facet of the music - fingerings, pedaling markings, and overall musical interpretation. Perhaps using a copy machine instead may have hindered this development.

Ondříček was big on "blocking" (which was also referred to as "chunking" by two poster presenters at the 2009 National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy). She would take a pencil and put a bracket over *anything* that was identifiable - e.g., a broken chord, scale pattern, or simply a group of notes that fell under a fingering pattern. You would then play it as a "block" (or "chunk") rather than how it's written out. Early on I realized how vital this is for sight-reading development. As long as the brain is processing notes individually, we are doomed to read slowly; it is the equivalent of reading words letter by letter. Ondříček's approach eventually led me to revolutionize how I now teach scales in class piano (see, in particular, p. 8-13 of "[Blocking scales & arpeggios](#)" for a rather innovative approach to blocking scales hands together in parallel motion; see footnotes therein for easiest-to-hardest sequence).

Lessons with Gladys were full of probing, questioning and analyzing the musical text. Most importantly, her goal was to ultimately empower students to go through this process on their own. The cumulative result of this approach (and here I must also credit [Leonard Shure](#) and others, such as [Victor Rosenbaum](#)) is that today I

tell students, "I don't teach - I facilitate learning. My goal is put myself out of business by helping YOU *learn how to learn.*"

One remarkable difference about the teaching styles of Mrs. Ondříček and Leonard Shure is this: Shure demonstrated constantly at the piano, whereas if Ondříček ever did, I have no recollection of it. While Shure's approach was highly effective, Ondříček's methods were, in their own way, at least as effective. Perhaps Ondříček's advancing years made her reluctant to demonstrate at the piano. In any case, she must have been a terrific pianist, for here is a list (sent to me by [Diana Lewis Burgin](#)) of concerts that featured Diana's mother, [Ruth Posselt](#), violinist, with Ruth's sister, Gladys, at the piano (this includes Ruth's 1923 Carnegie Hall debut when she was 11 - not 9 as widely reported - as well as a benefit concert in Jordan Hall on 3/9/32 that was presented to raise money to send Ruth to Europe):

Ruth Posselt, violinist, accompanied by Gladys Posselt (Ondříček), pianist

- March 6th 1923, Carnegie Hall debut, New York
- Nov. 1, 1923, Phenix Hall, Concord, N.H.
- Jan. 5, 1928, Musicale at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Irving L. Symmes
- Nov. 28, 1928, The Chaminade Club, Manchester, N.H.
- April 13, 1930, Second Concert of The Schubert Memorial, Baltimore (?)
- December 3, 1930, Westfield Women's Club
- March 19, 1931, Pembroke College in Brown University, Providence
- May 1, 1931, Women's Republican Club of Massachusetts, Inc., Boston
- May 7, 1931, Schubert Memorial, Chestnut Hill, PA
- Dec. 15, 1931, Highland Glee Club of Newton, Newton, MA
- March 9, 1932, Jordan Hall, Boston, MA
- April 2, 1933, Gardner Museum, Boston
- March 18, 1937, Plzna Czechoslovakia
- Apr 2, 1937, Teplitz-Schoenau, Czechoslovakia

This concert list is part of Diana's research into her mother's performing career as well as her [archive](#). Diana Burgin also informed me that Ruth and Gladys made a Victor recording in 1930. The chance to make it was part of Ruth's winning the Schubert Memorial Prize in 1929, which was a significant catalyst for her career. The music included Wieniawski's *Sielanka* and Fibich's *Poem*. Diana has kindly offered to send me this recording. The sound quality (being an old 78) is surely not, of course, up to today's standards. Nevertheless, I am very grateful to Diana; hearing this recording will be my first opportunity to hear Ruth and Gladys perform!

Mrs. Ondříček was much more than just a piano teacher to me. She was a delightfully eccentric and wise mentor who offered life advice, proclaimed her childlike love of newspaper comics, railed against the Vietnam war (prophetic)

and fluoridation (well, no one's perfect), did exercises on her studio floor with the television exercise lady, and cared about every student as a unique and complete person, not merely as a piano student. When I confided to her that a girl had broken my heart (see 7/23/75 letter below), she ruefully quoted Plato: "Love is a grave mental disease." On one occasion she asked me, "Have you suffered any real tragedies?" I answered, "Yes, Mrs. Boudreau died in a horrible car crash with an oil tanker, but other than that - no, not really." She then lamented, "That's too bad." I was horrified, until I realized that she wasn't really wishing me ill per se - only that I would develop the personal and musical maturity that comes with experiencing tragedy. It was just her typically quirky way of getting a point across. In rare unguarded moments she confided her own life's tragedies - e.g., the death of her beloved husband, getting mugged in Boston (if memory serves, she rarely emerged from her apartment after that trauma), and her declining health in her last years (see letters below).

Ondříček was a great "confidence coach." She knew I was already, even as a teen, teaching beginning students. So one day she demanded to know, "Are you getting the 10% teacher discount from the music store?" When I said no, she ordered me back to the store with these instructions (accompanied by quite theatrical gestures): "You tell them, 'I am MISTER Arthur Houle, piano teacher. Could you please give me the teacher discount?'" Madame Ondříček was not the kind of mousy personality who melted into puddles in the presence of greatness. She once wrote of the time she ran into Leonard Bernstein on an elevator. He asked who she was. Ondříček, apparently put off by his tone, replied, "Spaghetti!" (See her account of this in the 7/29/76 letter below.)

Ondříček was a staunch atheist. (This always brings to mind that one-liner, "I swear to God I'm an atheist!") Harboring no delusions of an afterlife, she asserted, "When you're dead, you're dead." This shocked me, for she was one of the most loving, generous and (in the truest sense of the word) "religious" people I have ever known. Over the years I have pondered this apparent paradox, wondering to myself: Let's say you have two children. One of them does good deeds naturally, like it's second nature (I imagine Gladys was such a child). The other will only be good if you offer rewards for good behavior and punishment for bad deeds. Which of these two children is truly the more moral? Food for thought, regardless of one's religious beliefs (or lack thereof).

I recently unearthed one of my old diaries; my entry for January 1, 1972 (a month shy of age 17) is touching:

"I owe a lot to Mrs. Ondricek not only because she is a great piano teacher but because she is also a saint, a character-and-a-half and a real human being! [Her] favorite [expressions] stick out in my mind, like 'lone

wolf,' (that's me), 'don't know beans from pork,' 'the way the monkeys do,' 'it's worth it,' 'work like the dickens,' 'a session,' 'straight and narrow path.'...there's meaning in her words and a lifetime of experience, hardship, sorrow, joy, care, and warmth to back them up. She very prudently cautions me about my health and tells me not to be a sissy. She [always] means well and knows how to give a compliment - with reservations, of course (so it won't go to my head). She's a real inspiration to anyone and everyone."

To that little list of favorite expressions I could add another that I recall: "THIS is the thing...", whereupon she would expound on something with passionate emphasis. Also her fondness for "so-so" to describe something or someone not quite up to her taste or standards.

Ondříček's terrific sense of "joie de vivre" was infectious. She was, of course, quite severe on many occasions. But her criticisms were always accompanied by a loving twinkle in the eyes, and never truly "angry." I appreciated this, for I must confess that I have always had, in the words of one witty friend, a "slightly warped sense of humor." (I denied this vehemently, heatedly countering that I always strive for a "TOTALLY warped" demeanor!) What Ondříček and others imparted to me is that seriousness and discipline can go hand in hand with fun and humor. I must be carrying this torch to my own students, for one of them recently penned this priceless tongue-in-cheek description of my teaching:

"A lesson with Dr. Houle is an experience unto itself. Mix one part joy, one part nervousness, several parts demonstrations of elusive techniques, lots of cheerleading, and a good helping of music history and theory, and there you have it - a one hour piano lesson that goes by so quickly it feels like only three!"

I hope this little homage will help bring at least some recognition to a very deserving piano (and violin) teacher. If anyone can give me more biographical details of Gladys Ondříček's life I would be most grateful.

Gladys Ondříček was a pivotal influence in molding me into the teacher and person I am today. I will always be grateful and cherish her memory.

*Some web citations of Gladys Posselt Ondříček:

- [Website of Diana Lewis Burgin](#), her niece. When completed, this will be the best and most substantive resource for pictures and information about the Ondříček family.

- Citation by a piano student, [Bonnie von Reis Doe](#) (link later deleted).
- Gladys Ondricek accompanied [Charles Castleman](#), violin ("violin prodigy") on the 1950-1951 Celebrity Series of Boston. [Castleman](#) was a student of Emanuel Ondříček and later Chair of the [String Department](#) at [Eastman School of Music](#). See the email from Professor Castleman below.
- An account of the summer of 1942 with [Bohuslav and Charlotte Martinů](#). See email from Dr. Rybka below.
- Reference to her marriage in Providence, Rhode Island.

I kept in touch with Gladys via letters throughout the '70's (1970 to 1979). Below are excerpts from letters she wrote. They fill in additional details about her life and views (one letter had a scathing opinion of a renowned Boston teacher; since she wrote "I say this in confidence," and the teacher is still alive, I am not including it here). Many are poignant, for they chronicle some of the difficulties and tragedies in her declining years:

7/15/70 from Manomet, MA:

"...I hope you're...building up your health (plenty of clean fresh air, exercise and the right kind of food) and then I trust you are seriously improving your piano repertoire - practising correctly and listening with your 'physical' ears as well as using your creative imagination."

8/11/71 from Manomet, MA:

"...I'm afraid to ask if you've really done four hours a day [of practise] - so I won't ask you. I'll just hope! As I've said before, it's easy to plan but to carry the plans out is an entirely different matter..."

...take good care of yourself...plenty of physical exercise...eating right...

Most of the 'beach boys' and 'hippies' down here are neglecting their eating - hot dogs, potato chips and Coke are all right for a while - but!!..."

8/26/71 from Manomet, MA (Note her reference to the Percy Grainger edition as the "genuine" thing! Then again, I had an abbreviated version of the piece at the time, so perhaps she was simply clarifying that she did not want me playing that anymore.):

"What - a! What - a!... You wrote that you had actually studied 4 hours per a twenty-four hour period! That's a real accomplishment Yes! - as I mentioned before, you should plan to study the genuine Concerto in A Minor (Percy Grainger edition - Schirmer) by Edvard Grieg... You'll have to practise carefully as there are many phases [phrases?] to be conquered. You will need [to] gain a certain technic, besides musical insight..."

*[Much ranting and raving about the evils of fluoridation ensued here.]
...Too much jogging for you! Isn't walking about as good?..."*

12/11/72 from 137 Park Dr., Boston:

"...For many reasons I decided to cease teaching and so gave up my studio at the Steinway building (over which the Park Plaza promoters are still squabbling whether they'll demolish that lovely historical place or whether the city council will oppose this project which has been in progress for a long time).

...In September I had a bad accident - I had planned (the 14th) to bring my sister (paralyzed) supplies, etc. to the nursing home -- I got a tankful of high test gas and was about to enter the Westland Ave. Garage to get my necessary Inspection Sticker when suddenly as I was making my left turn a N.E. Telephone truck crashed headlong into my Corvair. The driver was going illegally fast and probably didn't see me -- anyway -- I was taken to City Hospital, etc. was there a couple of hours -- and of course being indestructible (more or less) recuperated from a crushed chest (I would not let the doctor take the 4 stitches in my nose.) I had a bad time for two months...I gave up on my car...mechanic wanted \$400 to fix the fenders - well! I've missed my car very much! - A friend, (Mrs. Follett) has driven me twice to see my brother in the Plymouth hospital - (on and off with a heart condition) and then often to Somerville where my sister is...

I've been told that no one is irreplaceable but I wonder! I have recommended 3 piano teachers to my former pupils who keep phoning me of their dissatisfaction - Two young men even came to my apartment (forbidden). One of my former artist pupils recently gave a recital in Washington, D.C. and I had two other planning N.Y. concerts.

I'm very interested in current events, newspapers - especially the editorials. I love all kinds of books --- some of the 'dirty' books that I saw a few of my pupils reading, I bought and after reading destroyed them and threw them in the public trash barrels - they were so 'polluted.'

...I hope you keep learning - I was always proud of what you did at the studio."

1/20/73 from 137 Park Dr., Boston:

"...Too bad I didn't know you were at the [Arthur] [Rubinstein](#) recital or I would have looked for you. A former artist pupil sent me two \$10 tickets as a holiday present so I invited Mrs. Follett of Wenham. We had fine center seats and could hear everything. Just to see all those hundreds of people crowded in [Symphony Hall](#), the audience almost breathing down Rubinstein's neck and to realize they had all come to hear a single pianist play classical music was really dramatic -- and how the audience rose like a patriotic gesture when he acknowledged the ovation; and what 'pep' Artur had! More vitality and vigor than many young people. Since we were 'gallivanting' in the hall, I missed the first two encores...

[Gladys herein scolds me for my so-so grades in college at that time.]

Alexandra (former pupil - I think you might have met her once - wife of Dr. Mark, neurosurgeon) called for me to drive me in her Rolls-Royce to her son Daniel (whom I taught many years - home for his college vacation) in Brookline -- he said he was at the point of death for an Ondricek lesson - 'Balognie' [sic]! how funny! Anyway I'm going once more to their gorgeous 'castle' and will hear Daniel again...How is Miss Scannell? Hope to see you soon."

8/3/73 from Manomet, MA:

"...My only brother Emil died in February and as I was mixed up in a lot of his affairs, I've been busy writing 'tactful' letters to lawyers, undertakers - probate court, banks, etc. It's a long, sad story and I won't burden you as it's still in the process.

I was driven to Manomet by Mrs. Follett of Wenham, a dear friend. I'm spending the summer here to keep my equilibrium which gets rather low in June..."

8/6/73 from Manomet, MA (after congratulating me for writing a letter to the editor of the Sunday Boston Herald):

"...Now what about writing something against fluoridation?..."

8/29/73 from Manomet, MA:

"...the great pianists play [[Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata](#), 3^d movement] with the same facilitations that I teach. One would never realize it unless you knew it really well..."

P.S. ...my nephew Richard [W.] Burgin¹ has been a 'globe' correspondent since June - but he only writes one article a week. (One of these was about the Hindu boy.) I thought the review about the 'guru' was very truthful - did you read about the 15-year-old boy being a guru? I've read a lot about him in the Herald so I was extra interested."

¹Note: [Richard Burgin](#) (the elder) married [Ruth Posselt](#) on July 3, 1940. Their son, Richard W. Burgin, to which Gladys refers above, is now (according to Wikipedia) a fiction writer, the author of 12 books and editor of the literary magazine [Boulevard](#). He was a founding editor of New York Review of the Arts.

5/29/74 from 137 Park Dr., Boston:

"...Good for you, liking the [Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 2](#). I think it is lovely, too; when I taught at B.U. [Boston University] Miss Hoyt (from Chelmsford) performed this, also the [No. 3 Prokofieff Concerto](#) as one of her graduation numbers in recital. You seem to be going real fast in learning the piano repertoire (very much faster than I'm doing on the 'touch system of typewriting'). And already the Debussy Preludes and the Chopin Ballade. I know your technic comes easily, but is your musical meaning good, too?..."

As for the appoggiatura business (as you know, the word comes from the Italian 'appoggiare' meaning to lean.) Chopin, according to my dusty books, must have been inconsistent because he wrote that you must play the appoggiaturas to the make the composition sound well. So, how does the piece sound to you (according to your taste and knowledge)? On the beat or before the beat?..."

On the flip side of the stationery paper on which this letter was written, this was printed at top:

JUST PERFECT GOLF TEE COMPANY
WHOLESALEERS OF HIGH GRADE

GOLD TEES, PENCILS, SPIKES, GLOVES, COVERS, JACKETS, BAGS, CAPS,
ACCESSORIES, ETC.
BOX 110, MANOMET, MASS. 02345

Referring to this, Gladys wrote: "...My [only] brother [Emil] had no idea of departing as he had this stationery ordered shortly before he etc. [died]..."

8/17/74 from White Horse Beach, Manomet, MA:

"...I have been spending the vacation days [here] since July 6th, when Mrs. Follett, my friend, brought me down with all my baggage, etc. It seems good to do nothing but paddle and paddle and paddle and walk along the beach, etc....

I, too, read the autobiography of [Schnabel](#) and shall re-read it on my return to the city. I've also bought some of the 'dirty' books, just to see why the theatres are always crowded with movies made from these books, - for instance '[The Exorcist](#),' '[Butterfield 8](#),' etc.; I had to know the 'why' of things. Terrible strange!!

Good for you! Writing music you think is good; it probably is good. Don't think that just because an artist plays a certain composition and edits it that he is going to play it exactly so. Don't you realize that facilitation or sounding better is the reason why artists change their playing to 'fit'? And [Rubinstein](#) is no exception. I used to 'worry' about the same things, - no help from any of my teachers except Mr. [Heinrich Gebhard](#) with whom I studied and assisted for ten years, after graduating from the N.E. Conservatory with two diplomas for teaching and a degree for solo, etc. One of my former pupils ([Luise Vosgerchian](#)) has tenure at [Harvard University](#) (no degree) and has been teaching and playing there for many years. Alan Summers (honorary admission) was in her class but said he didn't learn anything because he had already learned from me.

So, change the edition if it's for the better; no one will be the wiser unless he knows the edition more than unusually well...Besides, there are many mistakes in some of the older editions.

My sister ([Ruth Posselt Burgin](#) [1911-2007]), artist in residence and violin instructor at Florida State University, visited me here at [White Horse Beach](#), - the Burgins, [Ruth](#) and [Richard Burgin](#) (former associate conductor of the [Boston Symphony](#), resigned to take over violin master classes at F.S.U.) had a panel at [Tanglewood](#) during the [Koussevitzky Centennial](#) and stayed here at the beautiful [Mayflower Inn](#); they had a double apartment, etc. with their little white poodle Cybelle and since they wanted to spread out with all their things, did [not] want to inconvenience me at all. They drove me everywhere (I had no car) - Plymouth, Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, - visited my paralyzed sister at the Bellevue Hospital in Brookline, etc., No dogs, - but I took Cybelle in my arms in the hospital anyway, because she is not a dog, - but a toy. My sister Grace loved her.

Arthur dear, when I return to the city, I will telephone you...

P.S. I'll write more later, - I walk and walk and walk. Are you still interested in fluoridation? I get hundreds of pamphlets and articles sent to me. Shall I send them to you? No or yes?"

8/29/74 from White Horse Beach, Manomet, MA:

"Your [busy] summer reminds me of many I spent, playing at the Atlantic Hotel with the [Fiedlers](#) - studying harmony during the mornings, then playing a two-hour session of classical music with Gustav, Benny, [Arthur](#), besides a cellist and clarinetist, [Emil Arcieri](#), also of the Boston Symphony, but alas - now dead! After an afternoon on the beach we 'took in' a band concert, also a swim, we had another two-hour session of music and then from nine to ten a real program (supposed to be extra fine). So you see my summers passed quickly.

And my White Horse Beach vacation of 8 weeks has gone too fast! It's a good thing these cool, drizzly days came at the end of my vacation as then it's easier to pack up and not be entertained by the lovely gray cat who has been wandering around here lately; she sits on my back piazza all the A.M., then leaves for parts unknown, returning the next A.M. Animals usually find their way to my house; maybe they 'smell' that I like them..."

7/23/75 from White Horse Beach, Manomet, MA (in response to my having my heart crushed by a girl):

"...I was telling two of my friends of your June predicament - they both thought I was referring to a man 45 or 50 years old; when I said you were only 20, one of my friends said you had not lived yet and that no female was worth all the misery and suffering endured by males.

Of course you remember Plato, the wise old philosopher who wrote that Love is a grave mental disease. I believe him. This doesn't help you any, I realize, but you have to adjust. That's what helped me most when my husband died. The president of the [Leschetizsky Association](#) wrote me a most helpful letter and said I would have to adjust to life.

And to think you are only twenty years old.

I understand everything and I do care what becomes of you, Arthur.

Please let me know about things...

P.S. [regarding her bad typing] Am learning the 'touch system' of typewriting but I don't seem to improve."

8/14/75 from White Horse Beach, Manomet, MA:

"...Mr. [Gebhard](#) could teach [today's] artists if they would listen to him and were not so conceited. Too bad he had to go [died 5/5/63]; I saw him the week before, and he was the picture of health.

...I had a fine letter from Andrew Heath, a graduate of Harvard College, class of '50, - he was the piano soloist on Harvard night at the 'Pops' with [Arthur Fiedler](#)....a big success..."

7/29/76 from White Horse Beach, Manomet, MA (in response to a letter in which I related how [Leonard Bernstein](#) had made a big scene at [Tanglewood](#), swearing at the Boston Symphony Orchestra in rehearsal, etc.):

"...I know L. Bernstein talks 'foul'...this is an 'act.' And I remember when my sister [Ruth](#) [1911-2007] was his soloist and after the concert

was over they went back-stage for interviewing, reporters, etc., Bernstein would not 'allow' my sister [Ruth](#) to have her picture taken with him because he said he was paying for it etc. He also used to have a studio next to mine at 250 Huntington [Ave., Boston]; once, when I was in the same elevator alone with him, he asked me my name (he knew who I was) and I replied 'Spaghetti.' He just looked at me. (I suppose he thought I would 'fawn' over him, etc.)

...religion is a very dangerous subject. I have lost many so-called 'friends' because of it. and now, in the name of religion, [people kill]...and each side is praying to the 'Lord'...I am ashamed of the human race...

There is much to learn at [Tanglewood](#). Just keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. Oh, dear.

Naturally, I wish you well."

5/25/77 from 137 Park Dr., Boston (Some of my original music was being broadcast on Boston radio stations; poor Gladys could not seem to get the reception or timing right.):

"Dear Arthur; You were very kind to write me those letters and to send me the criticism written by George and Sophia Gerusi [? handwriting is not clear with 'Gerusi']. They were both my pupils, only I called her Sophie in those days. She studied piano and George studied harmony. At that time Sophie was the more literate. I presume through the years George has improved. They would have written more about you if they knew you had studied with me. I [tried to] listen in to you radio broadcast, but all I could hear was [Emil Gilels](#) - that Russian pianist who pounded out (I should say thumped) the [Liszt Sonata](#). I waited and waited and shifted the dials back and forth but could not hear anyone that sounded like Arthur Houle. Was the radio station WJUL?

Right now, I am concerned about [Ruth](#) who had a major operation last week. I phoned Florida twice - she had to cancel all her concerts and teaching at the University. My other sister Marjorie was taken to the hospital in great pain with a bowel obstruction. I am waiting to hear from her friend Elizabeth.

My other sister Grace in the Longwood Nursing Home (Brookline) almost choked to death on a piece of orange I had prepared for her. (They are never served oranges.) I ran for the head nurse who stuck her finger way down Grace's gullet while thumping her back and while Grace's face was purple - she pulled up a piece of gunk which had lodged in her throat...

I have heard some of [[Bela Boszormenyi-Nagy](#)]'s master classes and do not estimate them very high. And I'm not prejudiced..."

8/18/77 from White Horse Beach, Manomet, MA:

"...I'm at White Horse Beach mostly for my health. A sprained back, etc. from a serious fall. A friend of mine fell on the ice last winter and it took him 3 months to recover. I've had to forego all the wading, paddling and swimming which I enjoy so much - But I'm not complaining as my sister [Ruth](#) (with all that vigorous operation) and her husband Richard (not driving) drove here north to White Horse and stayed two days. [Ruth](#)

is full of concerts and although she feels miserable will have her violin overhauled in Philadelphia.

Let me know your latest news - won't you? I'm so 'banged up' with band-aids from cuts, scratches and bruises, I can hardly write..."

7/28/78 from 137 Park Dr., Boston (perhaps writing of a stroke?):

"Although I received your card (violets) and letter, I had a shock in the meantime. Dr. Weiner said it would be 4 more months if I could use my right hand. It took me 2 hours to [write] this [short handwritten note].

Hope you like [Lake Kezar](#).²"

²Note: I spent the summer at [Quisisana at Lake Kezar](#) in Maine. It is a summer resort; I attended boats by day and played concerts in the evenings.

Updates:

Soon after I posted an earlier draft of this tribute, I received this email (3/15/06):

"Dear Dr. Houle,

By chance, I came across the excellent and touching tribute to your former piano teacher, Gladys Posselt Ondříček. I may have a little information about her as I believe she and her husband (Emanuel Ondříček) were friends of the Czech composer, [Bohuslav Martinů \[1890-1959\]](#). Emanuel Ondříček was the brother of the Czech violinist, [Frantisek Ondříček](#). After Martinu arrived to the US in 1941, they all met at Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard. Then the following summer, 1942, the Martinus [Bohuslav and Charlotte] stayed at Manomet on Cape Cod where Mrs. Ondříček (Gladys, I assume) had inherited a house from her father. At that time, Martinu was composing a concerto for violin da camera (commissioned by [Paul Sacher](#) in [Basel](#) [Switzerland]) that was to be performed by [Ruth Posselt](#), [1911-2007] who may have been the sister of Gladys.

My father was a very close friend of Martinu, and I am working on a biography of the composer. I happened to look on the web today because people in Prague sent me a [photo of the Martinus taken in 1941 with an unknown young woman \[at left\]](#), and I wonder if that could be your beloved late piano teacher. I am hoping that all of this seems to fit with what you already know. Perhaps others have supplied you with additional facts about her...

Respectfully yours, F. James Rybka, MD, Sacramento, CA."

The picture to which Dr. Rybka refers may indeed be Gladys Ondříček (at left, grabbing her hat). It looks familiar, so I believe it is her. However, the picture is

somewhat grainy (and I only knew Gladys in her advancing years), so I cannot be sure. [Ruth Pierce Posselt Burgin](#), to which Dr. Rybka refers, was indeed the younger sister of Gladys. For more pictures and information on the Ondříček family, see the [website of Diana Lewis Burgin](#), Gladys Ondříček's niece.

This email came from Gladys Ondříček's niece, [Diana Lewis Burgin](#), on 2/11/07:

Dear Mr. Houle,

Today I happened to read your lovely words about Gladys Ondricek on the internet. Gladys was my aunt (and also my first piano teacher), the older sister of my mother, [Ruth Posselt](#), herself an American violinist.

Gladys has been much on my mind of late because I am currently researching my mother's life, and for the first part of it they did a lot of playing together. In fact, Gladys' husband, Emmanuel Ondricek was my mother's first violin teacher. I thought what you said about Gladys was very evocative of her – I always felt close to her and have quite a bit of memorabilia from her, including, I think, mention of you. You might be interested to know that she was born in Albany NY in 1894 and died in Boston on October 10, 1982 – I think I was the only person present at her burial.

If you have any other memories of Gladys that you would like to share I would be delighted to hear them and if I can, in return, tell you anything more about her, I would be very happy to communicate with you electronically.

I am not a musician, but definitely a music lover and in some ways, perhaps I should have pursued music more persistently. I studied with Gladys for about 6 or 7 years in childhood. Needless to say, I know longer can play the piano, or any other instrument, but in my incipient older age, I have taken up the violin – a most quixotic enterprise. In real life, I am a professor of Russian and have taught at UMass-Boston for over 30 years.

Once again, thank you for remembering Gladys – I'm quite sure she would be pleased.

*Best wishes,
[Diana Burgin](#)*

I am indebted to Professor [Charles Castleman](#), Chair of the String Department at Eastman School of Music, for informing me that Mrs. Ondříček also taught violin. (It's a testament to her humility that I did not know this until he told me!)

Here is what he wrote (7/16/09):

"I am so gratified and edified by your tribute to Mrs. Ondricek. She was my sole violin and piano teacher from 1945-1949, with violin progress supervised by her husband Emmanuel until I was included in his studio in 1949. I continued with him until his death. In 1950 and 1951 my concerts with her collaboration included Jordan Hall in Boston and Town Hall in NYC debut recitals. While her piano student, I also attracted national attention on that instrument. Life magazine proposed a feature article, until they found that I was concentrating on higher profile violin performances.

Her choice of violin repertory for a precocious child was so apt -- short character piece after piece -- offering stylistic awareness, interpretative satisfaction, and the chance to concentrate on specific technical and musical issues. When I 'graduated' to Mr Ondricek at age 8 or so, Mendelssohn Concerto and other longer works entered my repertory.

A wonderful student of hers was the late [Luise Vosgerchian](#), whose achievements included appointment as the long time head of the Harvard Music Department, confidante of many immortal composers."

Professor [Castleman](#)'s mother, age 94, wrote this (8/6/09):

"Dear professor Houle:

I read with delight your tribute to Gladys. My memories have to do with wonderful students and devoted teachers giving to each other of their talents and their love of music and the making of it. I remember spontaneous parties at [Manomet](#) (their summer home on Cape Cod) after lessons and swimming on the beach. How we shared. There were students who rented a cottage to get intensive lessons in the summer. One of them gave lessons to the local people and was paid in chickens. We all benefited--the suppers were delicious. The Parcheesi games were competitive and for blood. Both the Ondriceks protected Charles from our discipline. The philosophical discussions held on the beach -- or the time Charles took his raft too far on the ocean and my Huck Finn protested that the Coast Guard didn't need to rescue him -- memories come rushing. -- Thank you for remembering two great people.

-- Evelyn Castleman"

This follow-up email from Gladys Ondříček's niece, [Diana Lewis Burgin](#), was sent to me on 8/8/09:

Dear Arthur,

I was simply thrilled to read your updated memories of Gladys. I especially enjoyed the quotations from her letters – they sound absolutely like her and are a useful addition to the letters I have that she wrote to my mother. She was my mother's accompanist for many years from the times of her earliest Wunderkind appearances to the time she went off to Europe.

I have two small requests of you. I am currently working hard on a biography of my mother [Ruth Posselt] as well as a giant photographic exhibit for [my web site](#), which contains a section on my parents' careers in music. Would you be kind enough to create a link to [my site](#) in your article on Gladys? I would appreciate it and will of course create a link to your site on mine. I think you will enjoy the photo gallery when it is up and running, hopefully, by fall. There will be many pictures of Gladys in the family snaps section as well as of all the Posselts in their youth. I will be sure to announce the opening of my photo gallery as soon as it's ready.

The second request I have of you is to change my mother's birth date - [Ruth Posselt](#) was born in 1911 (not 1914). I realize she is widely listed as having been born in 1914 but that date is simply not correct. I tried to change it on Wikipedia but they refused to accept my evidence!

Once again, thanks for the super work on Gladys. She was a remarkable lady, a true original.

Best wishes for the rest of the summer and the coming school year!
[Diana](#)

I am grateful to everyone who helped make this tribute possible. I take sole responsibility for any errors or omissions, however. It is a work in progress.

Dr. Arthur Houle
Professor Emeritus, Colorado Mesa University
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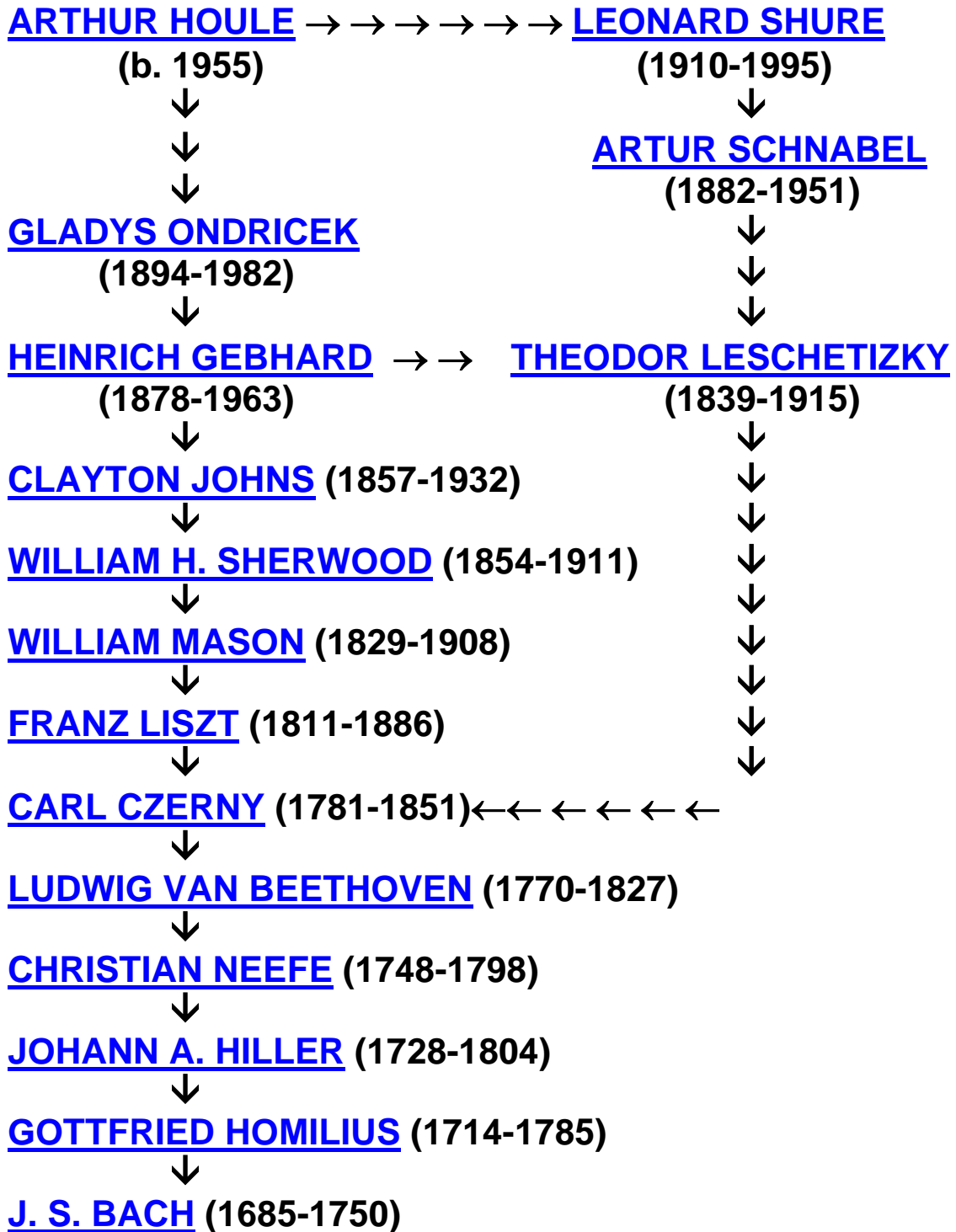
Gladys Posselt Ondříček & Cybelle in the 1970's, Tallahassee (Courtesy of her niece, [Diana Lewis Burgin](#))



Gladys & husband, Emmanuel, 1924 (Courtesy of her niece, [Diana Lewis Burgin](#))

See [here](#) for more photos.

HOULE MUSICAL TREE:



ALTERNATE TREE:

ARTHUR HOULE

(b. 1955)



KENNETH AMADA

(1931-2015)



MORIZ (or: MAURICY) ROSENTHAL → → CARL (or: KAROL) MIKULI

(1862-1946)

(1819-1897)



FRANZ LISZT

(1811-1886)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

(1810-1849)



CARL CZERNY

(1781-1851)



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)



CHRISTIAN NEEFE

(1748-1798)



JOHANN A. HILLER

(1728-1804)



GOTTFRIED HOMILIUS

(1714-1785)



J. S. BACH

(1685-1750)