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Women of Long Island:
Clare Boothe Luce (1903 – 1987),
The Long Island Connection

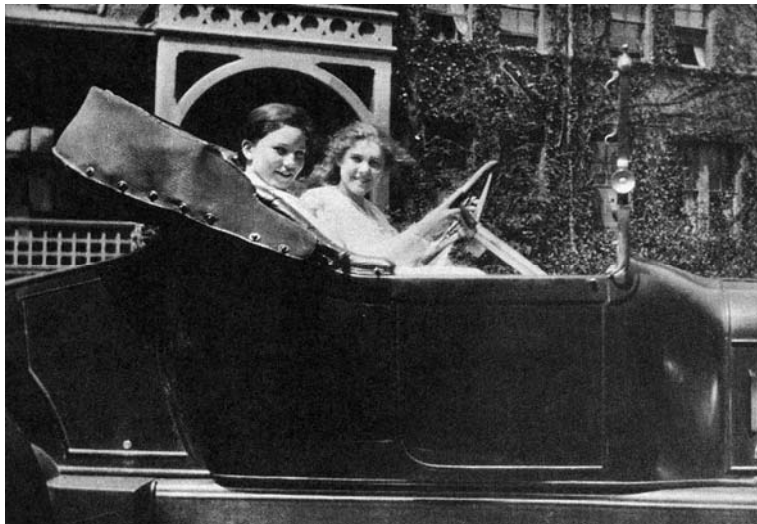
by Judith Ader Spinzia

Clare Boothe Luce is a name well-known to most but even those who knew the Luces well may have known little of Clare Boothe or Clare Boothe Brokaw. A playwright, author, politician, journalist, and diplomat, she was renowned for her beauty and elegance, her wit, and her native intelligence. While most of us live a life; she lived many lives under many hats and a portion of the fabulous journey through life taken by that accomplished woman was spent on Long Island. A search for the facts about her early years and the years spent on Long Island are thwarted by a rather concerted effort at revision along the way by Clare herself and by the savage attacks of her critics who resorted to outright lies and slander. For the hardcore critics, who could hardly deny her beauty, her intelligence becomes guile and her social ambitions translate to the ambitions of a gold digger, her talents are denied and her accomplishments are frequently evaluated in terms of the men in her life. Instead of letting these enemies defeat her, Clare took what she had, what she had been taught by her mother, and utilized the sexist element to access the rarified air of business and politics. Once there, she applied herself to the task at hand and showed her critics that there were definitely brains beneath the facade.

Born Ann Clare Boothe in New York City to Anna Clara Snyder, a chorus girl and actress, and William Franklin Boothe, a piano salesman and rather unsuccessful violinist, Clare and her older brother David's early years were spent traveling with their show business parents.¹ As a result, both had little formal elementary education except during the period when they attended the Ward Belmont School in Nashville, Tennessee, and when they briefly lived in Chicago where they were enrolled at the Chicago Latin School while William Boothe, then using the alias of John J. Murphy or Murfé, was playing with the Chicago Grand Opera Orchestra.²

Ann finally left William when Clare was nine years old.³ The responsibility to support and educate David and Clare was now the exclusive responsibility of the socially ambitious Ann, who

seemed to care little for David or his prospects. She poured her efforts into marrying and finding a comfortable economic and social position for herself through which she could then “launch” Clare.⁴ Positioning Clare for that launch was to be her next big project. Using money she had inherited from her father John Schneider (Snyder), Wall Street returns on the money William had sent as support, albeit irregularly, and her earnings as a saleslady in a jewelry store, Ann entered David in military school in Wisconsin and took Clare on a tour of Europe to expose her to culture and the Continent.⁵ No matter their financial situation, no matter where they slept and ate, no matter that they traveled second class, the masks of society were firmly in place and Ann was leading Clare ever “upward.”⁶ It was on this trip that Ann met Joseph Jacobs whose wealth derived from the growing success of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. According to Clare, Jacobs may well have proposed to Ann on the voyage home. He was from that day on a part of Ann’s life and provided for her and the children.⁷



*Clare Boothe [driving] with Elizabeth “Buffy” Cobb
in front of St’ Mary’s Cathedral School, Garden City, New York, c. 1916*

Although educating Clare does not seem to have been her real goal, Ann managed to enroll Clare in St. Mary’s Cathedral School for Girls in Garden City. The fact that Clare’s grandfather Boothe was a clergyman allowed Clare to attend the diocesan school utilizing the school’s tuition courtesy policy.⁸ As a scholarship student at St. Mary’s Clare was at a disadvantage socially but she was a good student who escaped into writing and books, reading everything in sight, especially philosophy, poetry, and the classics. She consumed all that she encountered with quiet enthusiasm, filing it away for future use.

Biographies frequently state that Clare attended St. Mary’s Cathedral School and subsequently attended and was graduated from Castle School, also referenced as Miss Mason’s School, in Tarrytown, New York, at the age of sixteen.⁹ While Clare did attend St. Mary’s from 1916 to 1918 and

did transfer to the Tarrytown school, leaving the school at the top of her class in June 1919, she did not technically “graduate” from high school and joked about the eight or nine honorary college degrees conferred upon her in light of the three years of high school she had completed.¹⁰

Ann pursued marriage for herself once Clare had completed an education adequate for social acceptance. Although she continued to have a close relationship with Jacobs, a relationship which did not end until her death, she turned down his proposal of marriage stating that his religion would be an impediment to her plans for Clare.¹¹ In the fall of 1919 Ann underwent an emergency appendectomy



and fell in love with her doctor, the head of internal medicine and chief of staff of Greenwich Hospital in Connecticut. Ann married Dr. Albert E. Austin and moved, with her children, to Old Greenwich, Connecticut.¹² She returned to her agenda and the launch of Clare was again underway.

Clare [left], Dr. Albert Austin, and Ann Snyder [Boothe] Austin either at their departure for Europe, November 1920, or upon Clare and Ann’s return in 1921

Dr. and Mrs. Austin and Clare set off on a tour of Europe in November 1920, this time in style. While sailing home on the *Olympia*, Ann, ever the opportunist, positioned deck chairs next to gossip columnist and author Elsa Maxwell and socialite suffragist Alva Smith [Vanderbilt] Belmont.

Charmed by Clare and having lost her young assistant Inez Mulholland, the dynamic suffrage leader recruited Clare into the woman’s rights movement. Clare was invited to the Belmont estate *Beacon Towers* in Sands Point, Long Island, and, later to



*Seneca Falls, NY, July 1923
Clare at far left in second row right
behind Alice Paul; Alva Vanderbilt Belmont
third from right in front row*

the Woman's Party Headquarters in Washington to meet Alice Paul.¹³ As Alva's assistant and personal secretary, she accompanied Mrs. Belmont to Seneca Falls, New York, to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Woman's Rights Conference. Resplendent in helmet and goggles, Clare dropped leaflets from a World War I Jenny while flying over nearby Schenectady to advertise the anniversary celebration. She contributed youth and vitality and did attract attention to the cause as Alva Belmont had calculated.¹⁴

Clare had also met the James Stewart Cushmans on board the *Olympia*. In June of 1922 Cushman, a socially-prominent philanthropist invited Clare to hear the dynamic young clergyman Harry Emerson Fosdick preach at the Riverside Church in Manhattan. Seated beside her was George Tuttle Brokaw. At the conclusion of the service, George drove Clare to the station to catch the train back up to Greenwich and drove to Greenwich the next week to visit her and meet Dr. and Mrs. Austin.¹⁵ In 1923 Clare married George, twenty-three years her senior, he forty-three and she twenty. Clare had not chosen to marry Brokaw; her mother brokered the society marriage. George was the son of Isaac Vail Brokaw, who with his brother William Vail Brokaw had founded the Brokaw Brothers Clothing Company. Its profits, beginning as a supplier of uniforms for the Union Army during the Civil War, created a fortune that resulted in the establishment of several estates on Long Island's North Shore.¹⁶ George, an attorney, playboy, and troubled alcoholic, and Clare, a naïve child now "society matron," moved into the large c. 1910 Neo-Georgian house on Middle Neck Road in Sands Point formerly known as *The Lindens*, a house that had been designed by Augustus N. Allen for Julius Fleischmann, an heir to the Fleischmann yeast fortune. Clare may not have found happiness here, but her mother Ann certainly felt that Clare had been successfully launched into society and she could cross another thing off her list. George sold the Sands Point house in 1926 for a reported \$300,000 and the Brokaws built *Sunnybrook* on Wolver Hollow Road and Ripley Lane in Upper Brookville.¹⁷



George Tuttle and Clare Boothe Brokaw on their return from Europe, 1923

Clare suffered several miscarriages, credited by some, including George's second wife Frances, to George's violent behavior when inebriated.¹⁸ Always contrite after these episodes, George pleaded with Clare to remain but finally, after six years of marriage, Clare moved out and went to live at the

Stanhope Hotel in Manhattan with their daughter Ann, then four years old. This temporary and unsatisfactory arrangement ended with a Reno divorce in 1929. Clare had respected the unreasonable request made by George's mother that she not leave George until the senior Mrs. Brokaw had died.¹⁹ On a \$25,000 after-taxes annual income, a modest alimony considering George's worth was estimated at about \$12 million, Clare Boothe Brokaw rented a penthouse apartment at 444 East 52nd Street in Manhattan and began life again.²⁰

Clare's first job was as a caption writer for Condé Nast's *Vogue Magazine* for which she was not paid. A few weeks after she started the job Nast viewed her work and put her on the payroll at a \$35-a-week salary.²¹ A career was born; she moved from *Vogue* to *Vanity Fair* and in 1933 she became managing editor of *Vanity Fair*.

In 1933, while still at *Vanity Fair*, Clare had written the book *Stuffed Shirts*. Writing ideas continued to percolate in her head precipitating Clare's decision to write full time. She resigned from the magazine in 1934 and threw herself into the life of a playwright, writing *Abide With Me* in 1935, generally considered to be a thinly-disguised story of her marriage to Brokaw; the highly successful and somewhat biographical *The Women* in 1936; and *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*, which was named one of the ten best plays of 1938.²² *Margin of Error*, published in 1939, was followed in 1940 by *Europe in the Spring*. Additionally, she wrote the screenplay for *Come to the Stable* in 1949, which was nominated for an Academy Award, and in 1951 she wrote the stage play *Child of the Morning*. In 1952 *Saints for Now* was published for which she is listed as editor, not author.

As she changed hats from her role as magazine editor to author, Clare and Bernard Baruch became close and devoted friends or, as some might say, the next man entered her life. He and Clare were both intimately involved in FDR's "New Deal" at the highest level. Baruch, a successful speculator and financier, had created a persona of statesman and advisor in much the way Clare invented and reinvented herself. Sitting on a park bench in Lafayette Park across from the White House offering intellectual advice to presidents, Baruch became a character listened to by most, understood by some, and acknowledged positively by both the political world and society. Since he would not divorce his wife, who was mentally ill, his relationship with Clare seemed hopeless. Hopeless it was not and their close relationship continued until his death in 1965. Baruch's estate *Hobcaw Barony* in South Carolina



The Brokaws during happier days

adjoined the Luces' estate *Mepkin Plantation* where they had built their home *Claremont*. One might say that Bernard Baruch was to Clare as Joseph Jacobs had been to her mother Ann. Ironically, Baruch's wife died just six months after Clare married Henry Robinson Luce, the publisher of *Time*, *Fortune*, *Life*, and *Sports Illustrated*.²³ Clare and "Harry," as he was known, were married on November 23, 1935, shortly after Luce had been granted a divorce from his wife Lila R. Hotz Luce.²⁴ Harry and Clare seemed relatively happy in the beginning of their marriage but despite the fact that they worked well together, Harry lacked the vitality and intellectuality to keep pace with Clare. She turned to Baruch, thirty-three years her senior, for the rest of his life. Bernard Baruch died in 1965 at the age of ninety-four; Harry died two years later as the age of sixty-eight.

The Long Island years were now part of the distant, often revised, past. Clare became a national figure. After her work with the Roosevelt administration, Clare returned to journalism, traveling and writing as a foreign correspondent for *Life*, teaming with her husband Harry Luce. In 1942 she again took up residency in Connecticut to run for the seat in the United States House of Representatives formally held by her stepfather Dr. Albert E. Austin, representing Connecticut's Fourth Congressional District. She won and was re-elected in 1944. Appointed by President Eisenhower in 1953 as



Clare Boothe Luce in her library

Ambassador to post-war Italy, the first woman to receive an ambassadorial appointment to the government of a major power, Clare's "stateswomanship" was remarkable for its successes and its controversy. She served until 1957. In 1973 she was appointed to the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board by President Nixon and continued to serve on that board under both Presidents Ford and Reagan. Clare Boothe Luce lived out her later life in Hawaii and died at the age of eighty-four in Washington, DC, on October 9, 1987.

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ENDNOTES

1. According to Clare, William's father, born Booth, added the e to the family name to distance himself and his progeny from John Wilkes Booth to whom the family may or may not have actually been related. Clare thought the small deception was infinitely amusing and that it was ultimately ineffective since a large percentage of correspondents throughout her life and at least one biographer misspelled Boothe. Wilfred Sheed, *Clare Boothe Luce*. (New York: Dutton Publishing Inc., 1982),

p. 38. Although members of the Boothe family have denied Clare's story in regard to the addition of the e, genealogical records show that a terminal e was used by their ancestors prior to 1840 and then reinstated in the era of William's father which, of course, does not confirm Clare's explanation of the change in spelling, nor does it disprove it. Sylvia Jukes Morris, *Rage to Fame: The Ascent of Clare Boothe Luce*. (New York: Random House, 1997), pp. 20, 495.

The preoccupation with and seemingly endless speculation about Clare's legitimacy hinges on the lack of tangible evidence in the form of a marriage certificate for William and Ann. Wikipedia's biographical entry for Clare Boothe Luce begins the section on her early life "Ann Clare Boothe, the illegitimate child of ..." William had been previously married to Laura O. Brauss from whom he was not legally divorced until April 1907. The document states that he and Laura, who had been married in New Jersey on November 7, 1886, had not been cohabitating since 1901. A New York State divorce decree was granted to Laura on the grounds of adultery. According to Morris, at that time he was legally prohibited from remarrying in New York State "until the said Laura O. B. Boothe shall be actually dead." Morris, pp. 24-25. Since Laura went on to have a successful career as a writer for the *New York Sunday World*, William would not have been free to marry Ann under New York State law even after the 1907 divorce. Morris, pp. 495-96. One source says that William and Ann eloped in 1894. Ralph G. Martin, *Henry and Clare: An Intimate Portrait of the Luces*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1991), p. 28. Other sources repeat Clare's insistence that her parents were married in a civil ceremony in 1902. David was born in March 1902 and Clare was born on March 10, 1903, according to the birth certificate signed by Dr. George A. Leek. Morris, p. 15. Clare's steadfast position that her parents were married in 1902 is understandable. Even if they had been married in a civil ceremony, Ann's Roman Catholic parents William and Louisa Schneider (Snyder), who were vocal in declaring their daughter to be "living in sin," would not have recognized the civil marriage any more than they would have recognized a "common law" marriage; even if William had divorced Laura before marrying Ann, there could be no acceptance of their daughter's union with a divorced man of another religion. William's father John William Thomas Boothe, a fundamentalist Baptist minister, also did not recognize William and Ann's union as a marriage. In addition to being vehemently anti-papist, Pastor Boothe despised the theater and theater people. Stephen Shadegg, *Clare Boothe Luce: A Biography*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), pp. 12-13.

Carolyn Wells Kraus, "A Discourse of Female Bastardy," University of Michigan, PhD. thesis, 1998.

2. Martin, pp. 29-31, and Morris, pp. 28-29, 31-36.

3. Morris, p. 39.

Stephen Shadegg, p. 26, states that Clare did not know whether her parents were actually divorced. Wilfred Sheed, p. 39, states that her parents were divorced in 1913. Both biographers had access to Clare Boothe Luce for verification. Ralph Martin, p. 31, states that Ann Clare Snyder Boothe divorced William citing desertion and was granted a formal divorce on those grounds in 1913. These conclusions are highly suspect since no divorce decree was found in Clare's personal papers, although the divorce papers for the dissolution of William's marriage to Laura O. Brauss were present. And, as stated in endnote #1, there is no documentary evidence of William having married Ann after his 1907 divorce from Laura. Statements dating and confirming a legal divorce between Ann and William can not be confirmed.

4. William Franklin Booth claimed to have sent money to Ann for the support of David and Clare, a claim that Clare dismissed based on the poverty in which Ann and the children lived. Sheed, p. 40.

Clare claimed to have met her father on a train as she was traveling down from Connecticut to New York City to attend a play with a friend. According to Clare, he sat down next to her, identified

himself as they approached the tunnel to Grand Central Station, they talked briefly, and she never saw him again. She claimed that she took the next train back home and confronted her mother who had told Clare and David that their father had died ten years earlier. Clare also said that she supported her father near the end of his life when his music school in California had to be closed because of his illness. Shadeeg, pp. 24-26. Others deny her claims of support. Morris, pp. 150-53.

5. Shadeeg, p. 16.

Sylvia Jukes Morris, who interviewed Clare and who had unrestricted access to Clare's papers, states that Clare admitted that by 1913 her mother had probably become a call girl. Morris, p. 44. Whatever, the truth of the matter, there was no doubt that their standard of living ebbed and flowed with the comings and goings of Ann Snyder Boothe's gentlemen friends. Sheed, p. 40.

6. Shadeeg, p. 16.

7. Sheed, pp. 40-41.

8. Martin, p. 34.

9. Shadeeg, pp. 21-24 and Sheed, p. 46.

10. Sheed p. 46.

11. Sheed p. 41.

The relationship between Ann Clara Snyder Boothe and Joseph [alternately referred to as Joel] Jacobs continued after her marriage to Dr. Austin. She was with Jacobs when she died in 1938; the car in which they were riding was struck by a train when it became stalled on the tracks at a railroad crossing.

12. Shadeeg, pp. 27-28.

13. Shadeeg, pp. 32-33 and Sheed, p. 52.

For information on Alva Smith Vanderbilt Belmont's estate *Beacon Towers*, see Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia, *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*, vol. I. (College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2006) – Belmont entry. See also Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia, *Long Island's Prominent South Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes in the Towns of Babylon and Islip*. (College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2006) – Vanderbilt entry – for information on the Vanderbilt's Oakdale estate *Idlehour*. Oliver Hazard Perry and Alva Smith Belmont's estate *Brookholt* in East Meadow is discussed in a forthcoming book by Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia, *Long Island's Prominent Families in the Town of Hempstead: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*.

See also Raymond E. Spinzia, "In Her Wake: The Story of Alva Smith Vanderbilt Belmont." *The Long Island Historical Journal* 6 (Fall 1993), pp. 96-105.

14. Shadeeg, pp. 34-37.

15. Shadeeg, pp. 34, 37-38.

16. For information on other members of the Brokaw family, see Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia, *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*, vol. I. (College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2006) – Brokaw entries.

The Brokaw name had been changed from Broucard to Brokaw. *The New York Times* March 20, 1939, p. 17.

17. Spinzia, *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families*, vol. I, p. 93.

The Sands Point estate on Middle Neck Road was subsequently owned by Charles Schwartz and purchased in 1938 by Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt II.

The *Long Island Society Register, 1929* lists the Brokaws' address as Valley Road, Brookville. Wolver Hollow Road is said to have been casually known as "Valley Road" by locals which could account for the Register address entry. The Brokaws were living at *Sunnybrook* at the time of their divorce.

The Hagstrom's Street, Road and Property Ownership Map of Nassau County, Long Island, New York, 1946 lists Henry Fonda as the owner of the Brookville house on forty-six acres.

18. Henry Fonda in collaboration with Howard M. Teichmann, *Fonda: My Life*. (New York: NAL Publishers, 1981), p. 119.

19. Shadegg, pp. 46-47 and Martin, pp. 80-81.

Eloise Elvira Gould Brokaw, George's dotting mother, was said to have been fully aware of his abusive personality and behavior.

20. Shadegg, p. 49.

The Brokaw family brokered the divorce settlement since George had not chosen to give Clare a financial settlement nor had he chosen to establish a trust fund for their daughter Ann Clare Brokaw. Shadegg, p. 49. At Ann's unfortunate death at age nineteen in 1944, the \$425,000 trust fund was awarded to Frances de Villers Brokaw, George's daughter by his second marriage to Frances Ford Seymour, the daughter of Eugene Ford and Sophie Mildred Bower Seymour.

George died in 1935, in a swimming pool of a sanitarium in Hartford, CT, where he was being treated for a nervous breakdown and alcoholism, just four years after he had married Frances, twenty-eight years his junior. Shadegg, p. 96. He was fifty-five at his death; Frances was twenty-seven. She subsequently married the actor Henry Fonda with whom she had two children Peter and Jane (baptized Lady Jayne Seymour Fonda). Frances committed suicide in 1950 in Craig House, a sanitarium in Beacon, NY, shortly after Henry Fonda had requested a divorce in order to marry Susan Blanchard, the daughter of Dorothy Hammerstein and step-daughter of Kings Point resident Oscar Hammerstein II. Peter Collier, *The Fondas: A Hollywood Dynasty*. (New York: Berkeley Books, 1992), p. 65 and Fonda, pp. 194, 196-202.

21. Shadegg, p. 55.

22. *The Women* was made into a film in 1939. George Cukor directed an all-female cast including Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer, and Rosalind Russell. In 1956 it was remade as a musical called "The Opposite Sex" in which the single-gender concept of the stage play and the first film was abandoned.

23. Sheed, p. 63.

24. *The Los Angeles Times* November 24, 1935, p. 1.

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