The Biography of Anna Jaques

Born in 1800, Anna was considered very frail and lived in many ways as an invalid in her youth. She seldom left her home, and it is not known if she ever travelled any further than the vicinity of the Newbury's.

The Jaques family was known for being highly successful farmers who owned large tracts of land and made their living selling salt hay from the Great Marsh that stretches from the Merrimack River all the way to the area around Ipswich. After the Civil War, they wisely invested their land holdings and profits into gold prospering into a well-established anchor on the North Shore.

Born into the family of Enoch and Joanna Jacques, Anna was the youngest of her four siblings. Her brothers continued that family tradition of industrious prosperity. She ironically saw each of her brothers and sisters die before her many of them suffering from long illnesses. Each time, they would heir their money into her hands until she was sadly alone.

Sarah J. Hill wrote in 1982, that after seeing much "suffering and death in her own family, she was instilled with a mission to relieve other's suffering."

She never married and now with no heir to bequeath her now sizeable fortune, she was determined to leave a legacy of benefits to the local community. She began to approach charities and by her early 80's had already donated $30,000 (10-20 million in today's currency!).

But she still had more to give. According to Edith M. Howe in a Newburyport Daily News article in 1947, recounts the events that led to the creation of the Anna Jaques Hospital.

Dr. Francis Howe was making a medical visit to Anna in 1883 and afterward, was being led out by the housekeeper. She mentioned to him that Miss Jaques was greatly concerned about where to leave her remaining fortune. Quick as a flash, he mentioned that she could donate for the creation of a hospital that was badly needed in Newburyport. The housekeeper asked how much money would be needed for such an endeavor. He relayed that information.

One week later, Anna Jagues gave Dr. Howe $22,000 in City of Boston bonds to establish a hospital for the benefit of Newburyport. Shortly thereafter, $3,000 in Massachusetts bonds were added with an additional request,

"To gratify the urgent wishes of many friends, I request that the within named hospital be called the Anna Jaques Hospital, instead of the Jaques Hospital."

In today's money, this was a vast sum!

The original hospital was housed in the former Bagley Estate, a large Federalist mansion on the corner of Broad & Monroe Streets.

The hospital admitted its first patient, a mill worker named Mary Roddy, on May 7, 1884.

Anna Jaques was on hand to witness the hospital's opening. She died of pneumonia less than one year later on January 24th, 1885, at her home at 28 Parker Street in Newbury. She was 85 years old when she passed.

When the obituary was published, she indicated that the following wish would be recorded to the community,

That the “Hospital would stand as a monument that would carry down her name to future generations...so that many a poor sufferer will bless her memory when everything else of her is forgotten.”

And so it has become a monument, a symbol of healing! The hospital stood for many years and then was moved up onto Pillsbury Hill (Rawson Hill) where it stands today. Regrettably the Bagley Mansion was demolished, and there is just an empty lot where it stood. With larger quarters and more modern facilities established over the years, the institution has indeed been a regional legacy to Anna Jaques as it serves the Greater Newburyport Area and beyond.

References:

“Who was Anna Jaques?” by Lynne Hendricks, Newburyport Magazine, Spring 2010 Issue, pp 52, 53.

Yankee City – Faces from Our Past, by Sandra J. Hill, 1982

Newburyport News, Article by Edith M. Howe, 1947.