

1969?

Late Helen Keller Lived In Wrentham 13 Years

By Beth Monast

WRENTHAM — During the earlier part of the week, the flags in Wrentham were flown at half mast in honor of Miss Helen Keller, a woman who touched not only the hearts of the world, but left special meaning and memories for the town of Wrentham.

Stricken at the age of 18 months with a severe illness that left her deaf and blind and soon because of her deafness unable to speak, Miss Keller overcame her physical handicaps to devote her life to others. Of her 87 years of struggle and dedication, Miss Keller spent a total of 13 years residing in Wrentham, beginning in the autumn of 1904 until 1917 when financial difficulties obliged her to sell her Wrentham farmhouse and move to Forest Hills, New York.

The farmhouse that Miss Keller and her teacher, the late Anne Sullivan Macy, resided in during their residency in Wrentham is actually the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stuart E. Cottrell located at 349 East St. When Miss Keller purchased the home, by selling some shares of sugar stock which Mr. J. P. Spaulding of Boston had given

to her and her teacher about ten years prior to moving to Wrentham, it was actually one large home, although today it has been divided into the Cottrell residence and the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Birmingham. The two homes were connected by an L-shape wing. Miss Keller moved into the farmhouse shortly after her graduation from Radcliffe College.

The roomy, old, neglected farmhouse was surrounded by seven ragged acres of land. Miss Sullivan converted two pantries and a dairy room of the home into a study for Helen. The study had a glass door through which Helen could step out into a cluster of pines. She was also found many times sitting on a balcony that opened out of her upstairs bedroom.

Shortly after Helen and Anne moved into the house, Miss Sullivan and John Macy, a journalist who had helped Helen with the composition of her book entitled "The Story of My Life," were married in the sitting room of the white farmhouse by Dr. Edward Everett Hale. The wedding ceremony was spelled into the hand of Helen.

Miss Keller was not confined to her Wrentham home, for

through the help of a wire that Mr. Macy had stretched from tree to tree across the field surrounding the home. Helen was able to wander freely on the grounds by using the wire as a guide.

It was when Anne, Helen and John were rebuilding old walls on the property, that Miss Keller became inspired to write her long poem entitled "The Song of the Stone Wall," about the Yankee builders who had been her forbears.

Not long after she moved to Wrentham, she was asked to write a series of essays for the "Century" about her ideas of the world around her. The essays were later published under the book title of "The World I Live In."

Often Helen would be seen driving a horse and cart through the winding roads of Wrentham or sitting by the shores of what is known today as Lake Pearl. Not to mention her occasional rides on her tandem bicycle. She once wrote, "I can never quite accustom myself to the bewildering vicissitudes of life, but, despite the shadows upon it, both my teacher and I feel that all that was loveliest in

Wrentham days is ours for ever.

One of the common aspects of the Keller home were the many dogs that made up the household. The first animal to be seen on the residence was a dog named "Pitz" that was brought by Helen from Cambridge when she moved to Wrentham. A year after making her residence here, the dog passed away and he was buried on the premises at the end of the field under a white pine tree. A French bull terrier named "Kaiser" was next to join the household. Rhode Island Reds, bought from a Mr. Dilly who resided in the home now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Marcellino of 243 East St. were next purchased by Helen, although her attempts in raising chickens failed.

A Great Dane named "Thor" was then purchased to reside in the enclosure built for the chickens, and Helen turned her attention then to raising dogs which proved more successful than her encounter with chickens. Besides her kennels of Great Danes, Miss Keller also owned a Danish Baron named "Hans", a Scottish dog called "Darky" and an English bred cob horse named "King."

Besides all the care and time Helen gave to her pets, every autumn she would put a ladder against one of the apple trees that the Macy's had planted as part of their apple orchard, climb as high as she could and shake down the apples that she would then put in barrels for the winter. A few of the one hundred apple trees planted by the Macy's still remain on portions of the seven acres of land that surrounded the Keller home.

Although Helen once said about Wrentham and her farmhouse, "No matter where I go I shall always think of it as home," in 1917 she left her "home" to make her residence in Forest Hills, Long Island. She was forced to sell her Farmhouse when her money became depleted. Following her move to New York, the Keller home, together with the homes which are today the residences of Mr. and Mrs. Marcelino and Mr. and Mrs. Birmingham were bought by the Jordan Marsh Co. The Boston department store company used the three homes for several years as a rest home for their female employees.

Helen did not forget Wrentham or the many people who became a meaningful part of her life, for she wrote often to the friends she made during her residence. In a letter that is now in the possession of George Sumner Perry through a bequest in the will of the late Sumner Farrington, journalist for the Boston Globe and Pawtucket Times who resided in Wrentham on the site which is now the location of the Municipal Building on South St., Helen wrote; "I have not forgotten, you nor has Teacher or Polly. Indeed we talk about you often as we look back upon the years we spent in dear, beautiful Wrentham." She went on to

write, "It nearly broke my heart to leave Wrentham with its long familiar fragrant piny woods. We feel very homesick when we have time to think of ourselves." The letter was dated December 15, 1917, and although typed, it was personally signed by Helen, a dedicated woman who shed hope and light into the lives of the deaf and blind.

Helen Keller at the Red Farm in Wrentham

Sep 23 1951

The following is an excerpt from a recent discussion held by the Wrentham Council on Aging.

Helen Keller was born at Tuscumbia in 1880. She was born with normal hearing and sight, but lost both as a result of a severe illness while still a small child.

A special teacher was obtained for her from the Perkins School for the Blind. Anne Sullivan was a remarkable woman. She was born in abject poverty and was placed in the Towsbury State Almshouse in early childhood. She attracted the attention of one of the trustees who arranged for her admission to Perkins, as her eyesight was minimal. An operation later corrected her sight problem, after which she returned to Perkins as a teacher until being chosen as private teacher for Helen Keller, with whom she spent most of the rest of her life.

In 1896 Helen and her sister Mildred were enrolled in the Gilman School in Cambridge, where Helen was to be prepared for entrance into Radcliffe College. The school year 1896-7 went well and they were scheduled to return in September 1897 for another year.

Helen's father, Captain Keller, had died during the year and it was decided that Helen and Mildred would not go south to Tuscumbia that summer. They

spent most of that summer with a friend in Brewster on Cape Cod. The final three weeks before returning to school were spent with the Chamberlins at the Red Farm in Wrentham.

The Red Farm is the large Red House on Franklin Street opposite Lake Archer now owned and occupied by the Thomas Murray family. At that time there were about 25 or 30 acres in the property with a long frontage on King Philip's Pond — now Lake Archer.

Joseph Edgar Chamberlin was Assistant Editor of the Youth's Companion. He also wrote a column for the Boston Transcript called "The Listener". One source claims he was the Transcript's Literary Editor. Boston's Literary Lights often gathered at the Red Farm. In the summer they enjoyed picnics under the big Linden in the front yard. (More on that Linden later.) Helen already knew many of them as both the Boston and Cambridge Literary Circles had taken an interest in her education and supported her in many ways (including financial). She knew such famous writers as Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, etc. well.

I do not know when Helen and Anne first became acquainted with Mr. Chamberlin, but in 1893 when she had written a sketch which she



Helen Keller

hoped to have published in the Youth's Companion, she sent it directly to him. It was published — the January 1894 issue and by 1897 she was calling the Chamberlins Uncle Ed and Aunt Ida.

Helen greatly enjoyed her vacation at the Farm, going for walks through the fields and woods, and swimming and boating with the

The Observer

Chamberlin children.

The school year 1897-8 did not start off well and by Dec. Mr. Gilman and Anne were so at odds Anne finally left. Mrs. Keller came up from Tuscumbia and evidently didn't help matters at all, first siding with Mr. Gilman and then with Anne. Finally, Helen and Mildred left the Gilman School and took refuge at the Red Farm. Mr. Chamberlin knew the Manual Alphabet and talked with Helen and calmed things down. The girls did not go back to Cambridge but remained in Wrentham. A Mr. Keith was hired as a tutor. Anne came to Wrentham and once again peace reigned. Keith came out from Boston to Wrentham three times a week. Mr. Chamberlin also tutored her. She remained at the Red Farm until October 1898 when Anne took rooms for them at a boarding house on Newbury St. in Boston where Mr. Keith was able to work with her daily. There were also other tutors in Boston.

Helen passed her examinations for entrance into Radcliffe in June 1899 but did not enter until September 1900. Radcliffe was evidently not enthusiastic about having Helen as a student and put numerous stumbling blocks in her way. They must have changed their minds about their famous pupil, later. Also, Aunt Ida was urging her to start a deaf-blind school. She and others were much interested and tried to raise money. However, there were many difficulties and the plans were abandoned.

During the summer of 1899 Anne and Helen obtained a cottage on Lake Wallomonopoag also then called Whittings Pond — now Lake Pearl. Mrs. Keller and Mildred journeyed up from Tuscumbia and all spent a few days at

the Red Farm before going to the cottage.

There were two Wrentham trees which interested Helen. First, the big Linden under whose shade they liked to gather. One summer day while Helen at the farm there was a terrific thunderstorm. That tree was struck and split down the middle. Helen, of course, could not see the lightning but could feel the vibrations of the thunder and was frightened when the Linden was struck. With props under the remaining limbs that tree stood until the 1950's even surviving the 1938 hurricane.

The other tree was the King Philip or Wrentham council oak. There were two great oaks in the neighborhood of the Red Farm. One near the corner of Franklin and May Streets, the other on a bluff overlooking Lake Archer. Both were gathering spots for the Indians of the area who met for Councils under their spreading branches. The second would be the oak which Helen enjoyed walking to. In her "Story of My Life" she says that King Philip breathed his last under it. In this, she was misinformed as History tells us that King Philip was killed by a renegade Indian of his own tribe at his home in Mt. Hope, R.I.

Helen Keller was in touch with Mr. Chamberlin as late as 1932 but the family had long since left the Red Farm and Wrentham.

John Macy who later married Anne Sullivan helped Helen write "The Story of My Life".

Sources of information:

Helen Keller's "The Story of My Life"; Joseph P. Lash's "Helen and Teacher"; old friends and Wrenthamites who are no longer living.

This was prepared for Senior Citizen Discussion Group.

A second look at Sullivan, Keller story

Wrentham woman sheds some light on 'Cousin Annie'

By Heather A. Swails
Staff Writer

WRENTHAM — Hands wet with sand, the 5-year-old girl watched as two women walking along the beach approached her. She sensed that there was something different about one of the women, and she was frightened of that difference.

The lady was old. She spoke to the girl in strange, muted tones and when the girl responded, the lady's companion tapped her fingers frantically into the old one's palm. Then the old one reached out with time-worn hands to touch her, and the girl's fear suddenly gave way to an overwhelming sense of warmth and comfort.

Little did Wrentham resident Cathleen Mansfield Burke know then that 29 years later she would begin three years of research into the intertwined lives of Helen Keller, the old woman she met that day on Connecticut's Fairfield Beach, and Annie Mansfield Sullivan, a distantly-related maternal cousin of Burke's and the



Cathleen Burke

woman who Keller affectionately called "teacher."

What began as a reluctantly executed, graduate-level genealogy project at Southern Connecticut State University, where Burke earned a master of science degree in counseling psychology, has ended in a three-act play devoted to the life of "cousin Annie," a Massachusetts

native who co-owned and occupied a home on Wrentham's East Street with Helen. Burke has also established a foundation dedicated to this little-known "miracle worker" whose educational talents brought light into a little girl's soundless and sightless life.

Focusing on Annie

Just last week, Burke put the finishing touches on the play that was three years in the making. Once the copyright papers come back and Burke has become an official member of the Dramatists Guild, it will be rushed to the director's waiting hands at the Richfield Workshop for the Performing Arts in Connecticut, where it will open in April. But her ultimate dream is to see the play that she has called "Teacher" go to Broadway, with Anne Bancroft, who portrayed Annie in William Gibson's "The Miracle Worker," topping the bill.

"They say everybody has a book in them. I had a play in me," said Burke, commenting that Gibson's play has always bothered her. The problems with the Gibson play, she said, are that Annie's history and character are obscure and that the play does not show how Annie taught Helen. Annie, whose own sight was never normal after suffering from trachoma in early childhood, has

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Burke

continued from page 1

been an obscure figure in Helen's shadow and, Burke believes, deserves much more credit than she has been given by history.

Burke's play details the 70 years of Annie's life and inevitably tells of the 50-year relationship between Annie and Helen. "You can't have one without the other," Burke said.

'Cousin Annie'

Living and breathing by this philosophy, Burke is disappointed that Annie is often excluded when it comes to talking about Helen. A Wrentham memorial stone, for example, celebrates pupil but not teacher, she pointed out.

The oversight, Burke says, is just one piece of the puzzle of Annie's obscurity and one of the reasons she herself felt compelled to tell the story of Annie first, and then of Annie and Helen together. "I always told my mother I had something big to do in my life. I think this is it," said Burke.

Burke's undying devotion to "cousin Annie" and her pupil does not end with the completion of "Teacher." The relationship has become a lifelong one for her as president and founder of the Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation.

Less than a year after she moved from Connecticut to Wrentham, Burke received approval of her non-profit founda-



This photo of Annie Sullivan, left, and Helen Keller was taken in 1899.

tion from the state. Since then, the foundation and the play have earned the support not only of the American Foundation for the Blind, but also of the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston and the museum at Ivy Green, Helen Keller's birthplace. Burke has also earned the support of many in town, including Cable 8, which will be doing a 20-minute segment on Burke and her projects for the "Around and About Wrentham" program. It will be aired on Sundays and Tuesdays from Dec. 13 to Dec. 22.

The purpose of the foundation is "to honor and preserve the memory and work of Annie Mansfield Sullivan, a native of

Massachusetts and pioneer in education," Burke said. She said she and her board of directors would like to purchase the three adjacent East Street properties owned by Annie and Helen between 1904 and 1917.

Some of the ideas for the properties have been a museum and gift shop at 349 East St., a restaurant/bookstore called Keller's Landing at 361, and either a library resource center, a school for blind and deaf children or a bed and breakfast at 343 East St.

But to start, the foundation is focusing on acquiring 349 East St. and restoring the interior as a Sullivan-Keller museum.

Wrentham Recalls Helen As She Recalled Wrentham

HELEN
HELEN

By LOLA JESS

WRENTHAM — Again on June 27, Wrentham remembers Helen Keller for that would have been her 80th birthday. Early in June of last year Wrentham flags flew at half-mast in her memory.

She was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, Ala. the first child of Captain Arthur H. Keller (of the Confederate Army) and his second wife, Kate Adams Keller. At the age of 18 months, this bright, normal baby had scarlet fever, which left her blind and deaf. She developed a violent temper which she vented, at times, on her doll Noney, but at other times she petted and adored the doll.

Baby Sister

A baby sister, Mildred, was born when Helen was five years old, and Helen was jealous and resented the attention the baby

was getting that used to be hers alone. When she found the baby in the cradle where she had liked to rock her doll, she tipped the cradle over, and her mother came in just in time to catch the baby before she fell to the floor. The Captain realized they needed professional help in training Helen, for they had failed completely at the dining table and everywhere.

Captain Keller wrote to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell in Washington. Bell was greatly interested in helping the handicapped, and advised the Captain to write to Michael Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institute in Boston. Dr. Bell's own mother was deaf.

In 1887 Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, then head of Perkins Institute, had admitted eight-year-old Laura Bridgeman, who had been stricken with scarlet fever and was left blind, deaf and

without the senses of taste or smell. He began Laura's training with braille-type letters and tapping on her hand.

Much Learned

Much was learned through the teaching of this child.

Anne Mansfield Sullivan, born in Springfield, Mass., in 1866, became almost totally blind at three years of age. She had graduated from Perkins Institute shortly before Capt. Keller asked for a teacher for Helen, her sight had been partially restored, and she had just six months to prepare to teach this child.

Anne found Helen's tantrums very hard to cope with, and asked the family to leave the dining-room while she wrestled and fought Helen until she forced her to fold a napkin or eat with a spoon, sometimes taking two exhaustive hours, but each session met with some success, and, when she asked the parents to let her live alone with Helen in the small cottage, they reluctantly agreed. In two weeks Anne made a real start toward calming and training her pupil so her education might begin.

Went To Church

Helen was almost eight years old when the family decided she must go to church, but it was a most embarrassing day for everyone. She started to kiss children. When the communion service began she smelled the wine and sniffed so loud that everyone in the church could hear. When the wine was passed to her neighbor he had to stand up to prevent her taking it away from him.

When Helen was about 12 years old, she and Miss Sullivan went to Boston to further her education. She visited the Perkins Institute often and had the use of all their books and facilities, yet she never joined the regular classes, though she spent three months there at one time.

Helen visited the Red House

at 430 Franklin St. many summers, and sometimes in the winter, where the Chamberlins lived. She loved to play tag and other games with the children of the neighborhood. She learned to swim and dive and row a boat, and loved tobogganing. Through the years many famous writers stayed at the Chamberlain House. Helen knew many famous people, Mark Twain, Graham Bell, Henry Ford, Charlie Chaplin, Luther Burbank, Eleanor Roosevelt, Andrew Carnegie among them.

To Inauguration

She went to Grover Cleveland's inauguration in 1903, also to Niagara Falls and the World's Fair in Chicago.

In 1904 Miss Keller purchased the home at 349 East St., Wrentham, with money she received from selling some shares of sugar stock which J.F. Spaulding of Boston had given her. Helen and her teacher moved to Wrentham in the autumn of 1904, and remained until 1917. Shortly after they moved into this farmhouse, Miss Sullivan married John Macy, a journalist who helped Helen compile her book, "The Story of My Life," which has been printed in over 30 languages. The couple was married in the sitting room of the white farm house by Dr. Edward Everett Hale. The wedding ceremony was spelled into the hand of Helen.

24 Years Old

Helen was about 24 years old and had just graduated, cum laude, from Radcliffe College, when she moved to Wrentham. She had specialized in German, French, Latin, English, and Greek and Roman history.

When Anne, Helen and John were rebuilding some old walls on the place, she wrote her poem, "The Song of the Stone Wall," about the Yankee builders who were her ancestors.

One of Hein's favorite remarks when speaking of genealogies was "There is no king who has not had slaves among his ancestors, and no slave who has not had kings amongst his."

Helen drove a horse and cart through the winding roads of Wrentham, enjoyed a spin on her tandem bicycle, rode horseback and was often escorted uptown by her two Great Danes on leashes. They piloted her and protected her as the seeing eye dogs do their owners today.

Dog Story

The story of Helen Keller's dogs would fill a book. Dr. Alexander Graham Bell loved animals, and took Helen to visit Boston Terrier kennels in Brookline and bought her "Sir Thomas Belovedore," which she renamed "Phiz," as she said she cared little for titles. Phiz died a year later, and was buried at the end of a field under a white pine tree.

A French Bull Terrier named household. Helen tried raising Rhode Island Red chickens, bought from a Mr. Dilly who lived next door, but this venture failed.

A Great Dane, "Thora," was purchased to live in the chicken enclosure, and Helen turned to raising dogs, which proved more successful than the chickens. She also owned a Danish Baron named "Hans," a Scottish dog named "Darky," and an English bred cob horse.

Lecturer

Helen Keller could knit, crochet, play chess, checkers and cards (with special sets) and accomplished more than many people with all their senses. She lectured through throughout the United States, Canada, Scotland, England, Yugoslavia and Japan, on behalf of the blind. She was awarded the Achievement Prize of \$5,000 by the Pictorial Review magazine in 1931. She served on the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, and wrote several books, including her biography.

Two pantries and a dairy room at the Wrentham farm house were converted into a study for Helen. The study had a glass door through which she could step out into a pine grove.

She loved to sit on her upstairs balcony. It is so hard to realize that she saw nothing and heard no birds singing or any other sound, yet she loved nature. The smell of the pines and flowers and the feel of the warm sunshine or a passing breeze were a real delight.

Long Walks

There were seven acres of land about the farmhouse and Mr. Macy stretched a wire from tree to tree so Helen could take long walks alone and become acquainted with trees and other landmarks.

As Mrs. Macy grew older, her health became impaired and Polly Thomson served as Helen's secretary. Mrs. Macy was sent to a tuberculosis sanitarium for six months. During that time, Polly Thomson went home to Scotland for a visit and a man became Helen's secretary and interpreter. Her mother came north to stay awhile. Helen became very lonely and rather desperate as she entered her thirties. Her male secretary often sat and held her hand, and one day he told her he loved her and asked her to marry him, so he could take care of her and help her always. She accepted and they took out a marriage license, but decided to keep their love and intentions a secret until Mrs. Macy was well, when she would be the first to know.

Mother Angry

But a reporter saw their names at the town hall and had it printed in all the papers. Mrs. Keller was furious, and sent her lover away and took Helen home to Montgomery, Ala. They corresponded awhile, but never met again. Helen called her romance "a brief space when she danced in and out of Heaven wrapped in a web of high imaginings" which "remains a little island of joy surrounded by dark waters."

Anne Sullivan Macy died in October, 1936, at the age of 76.

Helen was broken-hearted when her East Street home had to be sold in 1917 for financial reasons. She wrote often about her favorite town as "it nearly broke my heart to leave Wrentham with its long familiar fragrant pine woods."

The Jordan Marsh Company of Boston purchased Helen's home with two others, which were used several years as rest homes for their female employes.

She said "No matter where I go I will always think of Wrentham as home."

Today and always, Helen Keller brings hope to millions — a very special persons whose accomplishments show others the way to a full life.

Remembering Helen Keller

BY STEPHEN PETERSON SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

Monday, July 12, 2010 2:15 AM EDT



This 1888 photo shows Helen Keller when she was 8 years old, left, holding hands with her teacher, Anne Sullivan, during a summer vacation to Brewster. (AP)

WRENTHAM - The town was visited recently by a Japanese public TV crew, which toured the town doing a documentary on legendary deaf and blind woman Helen Keller.

The group - which included two producers, a cameraman and an assistant - filmed several locations, most involving Keller's stay in town. She lived on East Street (Route 140) from 1903 to 1917 and spent summers in the town stretching back to 1896.

Keller, who died in 1968, became a world-renowned advocate for the disabled as an author and speaker.

The Japanese filmed at three houses with a Keller connection, as well as Lake Archer, where she spent a lot of time swimming and boating, according to local historian Gregory Stahl, who acted as a host with assistance from resident and student Anastacia Luce.

"They also heard some personal Helen Keller Wrentham stories that nobody else has, and met a few people whose ancestors knew Helen and Anne Sullivan," Stahl said, referring to Keller's teacher, Anne Sullivan. "We had a great time."

Filming was also done at the Helen Keller Memorial uptown, which was put up by the Wrentham Lions Club. Keller challenged Lions Clubs International to become "Knights of the Blind" at a convention in the 1920s, and to this day the Lions' primary mission is raising funds for blindness related issues, Stahl points out.

Stahl, a Lion himself, notes a few of the local Lions Club's charter members knew Keller.

The international visitors also read up on Keller at the Genealogy Room at the Fiske Public Library.

They also were to film at other locations, including elsewhere in Massachusetts, Alabama, Connecticut, and New York. The 90-minute documentary - in Japanese, of course, is geared more towards Keller's personal life and is being produced by NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation, which has an office in Los Angeles.

"It is fantastic," Selectmen Chairman Stephen Langley said. "There will be a little bit of history of Wrentham in the Orient."

New picture discovered of Helen Keller

Rare photo gives glimpse into her early life with her teacher Anne Sullivan

BY MELISSA TRUJILLO
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — Researchers have uncovered a rare photograph of a young Helen Keller with her teacher Anne Sullivan, nearly 120 years after it was taken on Cape Cod and tucked inside a family album.

The photograph, shot in July 1888 in Brewster, shows an 8-year-old Helen sitting outside in a light-colored dress, holding Sullivan's hand and cradling one of her beloved dolls.

Experts on Keller's life believe it could be the earliest photo of the two women together and the only one showing the blind and deaf child with a doll — the first word Sullivan spelled for Keller after they met in 1887 — according to the New England Historic Genealogical Society, which now has the photo.

"It's really one of the best images I've seen in

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

After the miracle

This 1888 photo released by the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston shows Helen Keller when she was 8 years old, left, holding hands with her teacher, Anne Sullivan, during a summer vacation to Brewster, on Cape Cod.

The Sun Chronicle 3/6/08

HELLEN
KELLER

1963

Helen Keller Celebrates 83rd Birthday Quietly



HELEN KELLER

HASTON, Conn. (AP)—After a bustling life, Helen Keller had decided to relax a little.

So there won't be any special fuss today—her 83rd birthday.

But there was no rest for the mailman as he bore his heavy burden to Miss Keller's sprawling old house, Arcan Ridge.

Greetings to the blind and deaf author came from the humble and the great. There also were bouquets of roses, Miss Keller's favorite flower.

"You are one of the select company of men and women whose achievements have become legendary in their own time," wrote President Kennedy.

In recent years, Miss Keller has limited her activity but she continues as a consultant to the American Foundation for the Blind.

Helen Keller was cremated (1968)
& her urn is located in
National Cathedral in Washington.

Sun Chron Nov. 12, 2000

A splash in Wrentham



MIKE GEORGE / THE SUN CHRONICLE

A piece of history in Wrentham

Jean Nall, president of the Wrentham Historical Society, holds up the top of Helen Keller's bathing suit, which was recently donated to the organization. Keller spent many summers in Wrentham.

Helen Keller memorabilia returns home

BY STEPHEN PETERSON
SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

WRENTHAM

While a new generation will meet Helen Keller in a TV movie tonight, a memento of one of Wrentham's most famous residents is coming back to the town she thought of as her home.

It was discovered decades ago in an old boathouse and bathhouse on Lake Archer, just before the small building was torn down.

The item was a bathing suit belonging to Keller, the deaf and blind woman who transformed the way the world views disabilities.

Stuffed away in a box and kept for years out of town by members of a family who knew Keller, the suit was donated recently to the Wrentham Historical Society.

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► WRENTHAM: A slice of Helen Keller's past given back to her 'home'

FROM PAGE A1

"For us, it is kind of nice because she lived here," Jean Nall, president of the historical society, remarked of Keller. "It is kind of precious."

Keller's local roots stretch back to 1896, when she and her nearly-lifelong teacher, the equally-famous Annie Sullivan, used to spend summers in Wrentham on Red Farm on Route 140 (Franklin Street). It was a time when Wrentham with its lakes was a bustling summer resort.

Sullivan used to take Keller swimming and the two used the bathhouse of the Winter family, according to Nall.

Two brothers in the family built the little house and a sister, Christina, was friendly with Sullivan. Sullivan was given a key to the bathhouse and Keller would leave her bathing suit hanging in the building, Nall learned.

One day Keller and Sullivan left town, and the suit was left in the bathhouse until the family had to take the cabin down, Nall added. "They put the swim suit in a box and didn't think anything of it," she said.

Christina's younger sister, Elsie Winter George, kept the suit for years. Her daughter, Margaret Brown, continued to hold it in the family until recently giving the bathing suit to her sister Ida Meikle, who lives in California, Nall said. That sister inquired to Nall, a friend, if her society would be interested in the special donation.

The answer was yes, and when the sister made the trip out to Wrentham in September for the Center School's reunion of all classes, she brought the suit, Nall explained.

The black bathing suit with matching stockings ("You had to be covered up completely," Nall said) is now preserved in the genealogy room in the Fiske Library.

The day the society received the bathing suit, it was displayed at a society-sponsored presentation at the library by an actress portraying Sullivan. "That tied in very nicely," Nall said.

If the society had a case for it, it could be displayed for public viewing in the library, Nall added.

A bathing suit that belonged to



Above: The bathing suit. Below: Helen Keller's home



Elsie Winter George was also donated to the historical society — also a vintage turn-of-the-century bathing suit.

While that suit is in poor condition, Nall described Keller's as being in good shape.

"I don't get many things like that," Nall said. "People have things and they don't realize how exciting it is for other people to have them."

It is the first object of Keller's that has landed in the hands of the society.

Aside from the house on Route 140 (East Street) where Keller and Sullivan spent 14 years from 1903 to 1917, there isn't anything

Loturco, chairwoman of the board of directors of the local Annie Sullivan Foundation, said of the donation. "I think it is very generous of them to donate."

Keller's stay in Wrentham, according to her writings, was among the happiest years of her life, Loturco said. "She loved Wrentham."

A memorial on the common has the words from Keller, "I shall always think of Wrentham as home," Loturco added.

Born in 1880 in Alabama, Keller went deaf and blind at 19 months as a result of a fever.

Sullivan had been blind herself but had her sight restored through operations and was matched with Keller as a teacher. Through Sullivan's perseverance and skill, Keller learned sign language to communicate and how to read and write in six languages. Sullivan became known as the "miracle worker."

"People don't realize what Annie overcame," Loturco said. "Helen used to say her teacher was the one who brought her out of the dark."

After graduating from Radcliffe College, Keller became a best-selling author and lecturer. She played a key role forming the American Foundation of the Blind and American Civil Liberties Union. She also was one of the first to fight for child labor laws. "They knew everyone," Nall said of Keller and Sullivan. "Helen became so famous. She met everybody."

Loturco added: "They probably were the most famous and honored" of any town residents.

Keller's and Sullivan's names have been in the news lately as neighboring Franklin recently decided to name a new school complex after both of them.

"THE MIRACLE WORKER" — the television remake of the play and film — airs at 7 tonight on channels 5 and 6 on ABC's "The Wonderful World of Disney."

Some residents launched a petition to get a different name, some pointing out Keller believed in socialism.

"A socialist is a person who believes in equal rights," Loturco countered, mentioning social security is a form of socialism.

Recently, the school committee in Franklin stood by its deci-

sion to name the elementary and middle schools after the pioneers for the disabled — something suggested by students.

"Both made substantial contributions to education and the world. How appropriate to name two schools after them," Loturco said. "These two women forever changed how people perceive people with disabilities. They taught the world people can overcome disabilities."

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Human Nature in the Bible

David—Shepherd, Poet, Soldier, Statesman

By WILLIAM LYON PHELPS



Ladies Homes Journal
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Page 20

PHOTOGRAPH BY HARTBOON, FROM THE "Portrait"

"THE Bible is the book of all books I love," said Helen Keller, the world's most famous deaf and blind woman, recently. "I should like to have my picture taken with my Bible." But Miss Keller's Bible is not like yours, for she sees not with eyes but with her sensitive finger tips, and the volume of St. John's Gospel with which her photograph was taken for the American Bible Society was printed from American Braille type, a system of raised dots that indicate letters.

"What is your favorite chapter, Miss Keller?" she was asked. Miss Keller joyously turned to the ninth chapter—the story of the opening of the eyes of a man born blind. Swiftly her fingers traced the raised dots until she reached her favorite fourth verse: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

Then she turned to the first chapter and read aloud the fourth and the ninth verses: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

When one of the Army and Navy Testaments was given to her by the society's representative, with a word concerning Bible distribution throughout the war, Miss Keller said: "I am so glad that the Bible is being distributed everywhere. When Christianity is spread throughout the world then brotherhood will come to the nations. I am so glad to do this for the Bible."

THE SURVEY

Hail Helen Keller

THIS year Helen Keller, last year Jane Addams—The Survey has no quarrel with the honorable committee which designates the recipient of the annual Achievement Award of The Pictorial Review, an award which, along with many kind words, carries the neat sum of \$5000. And \$5000, as any one will admit, does, in these days, butter parsnips. The award was made to Miss Keller for "her constant devotion, through the past twenty-five years and down to the present day, to the cause of those who like herself were deprived of sight and hearing." Of the active and effective quality of that devotion there can be no question. But Miss Keller's service goes beyond her participation in events. Her achievement is not only in doing but in being. She is a person but she is also a demonstration. Thus the award to her becomes a recognition of the courage and resolution of everyone who like Helen Keller breaks through the limitations of cruel physical handicap into the fullness of free active life.

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WESTWARD

BY A. EDWARD NEWTON

I

WITH characteristic indirection we began our course westward by going south. A charming lady, a daughter of Virginia, had been induced by someone in Richmond 'to ask Mr. Newton if he would deliver a lecture there, on any subject which pleased him'; such profits as might arise were to go to the 'unemployed.' My usual terms — smiles and tea — being immediately agreed to, we journeyed to the one-time Capital of the Confederacy and were most graciously received. I would not seem to boast of the F. F. V.'s who did me honor, of luncheons here and dinners there, or of the many juleps I first sniffed, then tasted, and then, like Oliver Twist, asked for more.

I was particularly pleased to renew my acquaintance with Ellen Glasgow, whose novel, *The Romantic Comedians*, should be read by every man of middle age who is thinking of getting married and who feels that the laws of nature have been suspended in his behalf. At her house I met James Branch Cabell, the author of the famous *Jurgen*, of which I have two copies, both unread — one, a first edition with a dust wrapper, and the other, the beautifully illustrated edition published by John Lane. I was able to tell him a story which amused him greatly. A Richmond girl, who several years ago married a Philadelphian, confided to me, one evening at dinner, that only recently had Richmond indulged itself

in a real, honest-to-God public library. I expressed my astonishment and said, 'What did you do when you wanted to know anything?' 'Oh,' was the reply, 'we didn't want to know very much, and, if we did, we just called Mr. Cabell up on the phone.' Now that is what I call being real neighborly.

Our visits to Brandon and Shirley and Westover, and several others, were delightful, but the beauties of these famous houses on the James River need no description from me. They bespeak a civilization that is gone forever, and with it much that is beautiful. I have long since given over the wish I once had of living in an historic house, a house in which history — literary, social, or political — has been made. Now, fully convinced of the importance of a man to himself and to no other, what history I cannot make for myself I do without. But old places where things happened, 'where the lightning once came down,' as Le Gallienne has it, have always interested me enormously. When I hear of these historic places passing into alien hands, I feel sad, indignant, or amused, as the case may be. What right has a rich New Yorker to take Warwick Castle, say, for the summer? A developed sense of humor would protect him from such a blunder.

Of Jamestown, the first English settlement in America, founded in 1607 by Captain John Smith, but little

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remains. The tower of the church in which Pocahontas was married to John Rolfe — so the legend goes — and a few tombstones did not detain us long, but Williamsburg, the ancient capital of Virginia, is different. It is a lovely old place owing its chief distinction to the College of William and Mary, which almost ties with Harvard as being the oldest institution of learning in the United States. The original buildings, which are very fine, are said to have been erected from plans by Sir Christopher Wren. Williamsburg is a place of such peace as has to be sought for these days. It is, practically, just one long street, the Duke of Gloucester Street, which runs for a mile or more in a straight line from the campus, in the centre of which is a quaint old statue of an early colonial governor, Lord Botetourt.

The college has been the Alma Mater of governors without end and three Presidents of the United States, but it is chiefly fortunate in having attracted, some few years ago, the attention of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who decided to buy up and re-create not only the college, but, in effect, the whole town. The work was reverently and vigorously undertaken. Some of the buildings which were falling into decay — for the college was not adequately endowed — were pulled down and re-erected, as much as possible out of old materials. The result is delightful: a new-old village has arisen; nothing has been changed, not a false note has been introduced, but the college and the town have been given a new lease of life. Millions have been and are being spent — judiciously.

It seems that wherever I go in my travels Mr. Rockefeller has just preceded me, writing his name as one who loves his fellow men. And not upon the college buildings alone, for the fine old courthouse, the parish

church, — famous in the annals of Virginia, — the blacksmith's and many other shops, the inn, even the prison for 'poor debtors,' have been torn down and reconstructed. Perhaps Mr. Rockefeller is providing a home for himself in his indigent old age. I hope he may be happy in it — he deserves to be. What other man since the world began has been so universal a philanthropist? It may be said that no man should be permitted to accumulate so colossal a fortune as his; in the future it will be more difficult, — I hope impossible, — but he did not make the times in which he lives, and, recognizing his responsibilities, he has done what he can to ameliorate them.

At the risk of wearing out our welcome we would have stayed longer in Richmond, but we were tied to an hour. My 'lecture' was well attended; there were no serious casualties, and immediately it was over we were motored to the railway station and entrained for Philadelphia, which we reached early next morning. To go while the going is good is an excellent habit; I govern myself with few rules, but this is one of them. As my old friend, Hawley McLanahan, used to say, 'There is one thing I like about the Newtons: when they say they are going, they do not disappoint you.'

II

We had heard California calling us for years, and at last had decided to heed its call. The idea was to follow the course of the empire in early February and March, there being too much weather in these months in Eastern latitudes — but things happened. In the first place, Helen Keller was to receive an honorary degree from Temple University (curiously enough, the achievements of this amazingly accomplished and useful woman had never before been so recognized) and I had

been asked to present her — an honor which carried with it the privilege of entertaining her for a day or two. What I feared might possibly be an inconvenience turned out to be a delight which will long be remembered.

In a census of living Americans distinguished above their fellows, conducted, as I remember, by the *New York Times*, there were five men in the second rank and only two names, Thomas A. Edison and Helen Keller, in the first. Miss Keller has been called, and I think with truth, the most wonderful woman in the world. Many guests have been entertained at Oak Knoll, but none of such distinction as Helen Keller. So amazing is her personality that in two minutes one forgets that she has neither sight nor hearing nor speech — for her speech has to be translated. But she is so agreeable, so gay, and she looks at one so frankly with her great blue eyes, her mouth is so expressive and such a beautiful soul is revealed by her smile, that one forgets her great afflictions and instantly becomes her slave. This was the effect she had upon Alexander Graham Bell, Mark Twain, and Professor Einstein; this was the effect she had upon every member of our household.

I have said that I stayed home from California to present her for an honorary degree conferred by Temple University. Upon the platform to receive a degree at the same time was the governor of the state, Mr. Pinchot, seated by the president of Temple, Dr. Beury. The mayor of the city was to present the governor. Dr. Beury, in his introductory remarks, felt called upon to speak, chiefly, about Helen Keller. When the governor was presented for his degree by the mayor he was buttered, *ad nauseam*, by his orator, who then turned his attention to Helen Keller. The governor, in accepting the degree, said it was an honor to receive

a degree at the same time as Helen Keller. Finally, when my time came to present Helen Keller, everything had been said. So I began by informing the audience that the three miscreants who had spoken before me had stolen my act and had been clumsy with it.

'Now,' said I, 'if you wish to hear Helen Keller's accomplishments eloquently presented, listen' — and I went on to repeat what had already been said. But I went further. It had originally been suggested that Miss Keller's teacher, Miss Sullivan (who later became Mrs. Macy), should also receive a degree, but she had declined the honor; she said she was not worthy, did not wish to seem to detract in any way from the recognition of her pupil. She was reasoned with, but remained firm. She would not even come to Philadelphia. Polly Thomson, Helen Keller's secretary, would accompany her. I told of Mrs. Macy's obduracy. I said, and truthfully, that her pupil had had the urge to break out of the dark into the light, whereas the teacher had voluntarily entered the dark in the hope of dissipating it for the pupil; that Mrs. Macy had taught herself much in order that Helen Keller might learn more, and that it was Temple's good fortune to recognize the greatness of both women; in a word, that the English, French, German, Greek, Latin, mathematics, philosophy — all that Helen Keller knew and was, she owed to Mrs. Macy. And, I continued, occasionally one settles important matters by voting upon them, and I asked that all who agreed with me that a degree should be conferred upon Mrs. Macy, by force if necessary, should signify the wish by standing.

The immense audience rose as one man — all but one woman: Mrs. Macy herself remained seated, with tears of happiness rolling down her face. Polly Thomson had spotted her in the

audience. Neither Polly nor Helen nor anyone else knew that she had come over, alone, from New York to see her pupil honored. She certainly disproved the old adage that listeners never hear any good of themselves. Next year Mrs. Macy will accept a degree; we shall have another party. I am already looking forward to it.

I cannot bear to leave this subject. Delightful Polly Thomson, Miss Keller's secretary, travels with her everywhere. She talks into Helen's hand and Helen into hers as fast as I can dictate a letter. They can also read each other's lips. Between them they can do anything. It is well known that a person deprived of one set of faculties has others abnormally developed; especially is this the case with Helen Keller. She enjoys music through vibrations. As she walks through a garden she can name the flowers on either side from their perfume. I walked with her through a conservatory; by chance she touched a flower. 'Ah,' she said, 'the parrot plant!' It was; I had never heard of it before. We went to a dinner; after we were seated someone asked her how many people were at the table. 'How should I know?' she replied with a smile. 'I have met twenty.' We were a party of twenty-two; two people had not been presented to her.¹

After Helen's party was over, there remained but one — two other things to keep me in Philadelphia. On the twenty-third of April,² three hundred and sixty-eight years ago, one Mary Arden, in Stratford-on-Avon, was brought to bed of a boy. This boy turned out to be no less a person than the greatest of the sons of men, William Shakespeare. It is obligatory under the last will and testament of Edwin Forrest, America's greatest tragedian, to celebrate the birthday of Shake-

¹Mr. Newton's mathematics are his own.

²The traditional date. — Error

peare in a fitting manner at the Edwin Forrest Home for superannuated actors and actresses. In these celebrations I was seriously implicated. Moreover, there was to be a dinner given to the Shakespeare Society of Philadelphia by Edgar Scott on the evening of that same day; Edgar being one of our baby members, the rest of us being mostly old codgers who, while suspecting, unreasonably perhaps, his knowledge of 'The Bard,' were willing — nay, eager — to show our confidence in his ability to give us a dinner 'fit to ask a man to,' as Dr. Johnson once said. And here and now 'I'll tell the world' (*Measure for Measure*, Act II, Scene 4) that this confidence was not misplaced.

One of our members, the Honorable James M. Beck, the eminent lawyer and orator, who has denied himself the pleasure of scholarly retirement for the sake of representing a thankless Philadelphia in Congress, came up from Washington to add lustre to the occasion. I suppose the fact is that he was glad to absent himself for a few hours from the petty squabbles which make up the life of our politicians in the Capital City. It was a delightful occasion. Finally and at last, all my little chores were cleaned up, and on April 24, 1931, we started westward.

III

Our first stop was Chicago. John Ruskin, whom I never much loved, says somewhere that railway traveling is really not traveling at all: it is merely 'being sent to a place, and very little different from becoming a parcel. I had occasion to think of this remark several times as we were speeding over some of the most uninteresting landscape in the world, in that section of these United States called the Middle West. I could not get through this part of my journey fast enough. English