



*Ms. Burke
MAY 1 1994*

Cathleen Mansfield Burke pauses during a tour of the yard of her cousin's former home, which Annie Sullivan shared with Helen Keller. (GLOBE PHOTO / MICHAEL QUAN)

Cousin's spirit fills bid for museum

By Doreen Iudica Vigue
GLOBE STAFF

WRENTHAM - The lights flicker in the apartment that was once the bedroom of Helen Keller, and, like many of the other little things that happen in her life, the new occupant takes it as a sign.

"She does that sometimes," Cathleen Mansfield Burke said calmly as she sat beside a fireplace bedecked with photos of Keller and

Wrentham home would honor Keller, teacher

her teacher, Annie Sullivan. "She likes to let me know I'm on the right track."

A native of Connecticut, Burke, 38, is a distant relative of Sullivan. Through a remarkable series of events, Burke found her way to Wrentham three years ago and embarked on what has become an all-consuming mission: To open a museum in the house

Sullivan and Keller shared here in the early 1900s, and honor Sullivan for the educational "miracles" she performed with Keller, who was blind and deaf from infancy.

Burke, who has a master's degree in counseling psychiatry but had been working as an ophthalmic technician, has quit her job to devote her efforts to The Annie Mansfield Burke Foundation, which she established three years ago to raise money for the museum.

She also has nearly completed a play about
MUSEUM, Page 5

1/3

MUSEUM

(Continued from Page 1)

the women's life together. The play is titled "Teacher," the name Keller called Sullivan, and Burke is hoping it will be both a theatrical and financial success.

Burke's biggest project has been trying to acquire the white-stately home on East Street, where Keller and Scoville lived and where she is now a tenant. She is appealing to state philanthropic organizations, such as the Trust for Public Land, and local banks to help finance the \$700,000 purchase, and is gearing up to launch a fund-raising campaign to help with the down payment.

Her landlord, John R. Niro, said last week he has held off putting the property up for sale, giving Burke a chance to arrange financing for the museum.

"We've given Cathy a lot of time to put something together, and we wouldn't have done that unless we felt we wanted her to be the owner," Niro said. "Everyone thinks this is a worthwhile cause, and we're all hopeful she can pull it off."

If the deal goes through and Burke converts the building — now housing 12 apartments — back into a single-family home complete with period furniture, the museum would be the only one of its kind to honor Sullivan. Keller's home in Alabama is open to tourists, but Sullivan, who was born in Agawam, has never had a home-stand put on public display, according to Burke.

She would like to refurbish and open portions of the house to the public by June 21, when World Cup soccer fans converge on nearby Foxborough, Burke said.

Burke has been dogged in her work on this "crusade," as she calls it, voraciously researching the lives of Sullivan and Keller before, during and after they lived in town, and drumming up support locally for the endeavor.

A friend donated the sign in front of the Sullivan house that lets passersby know who lived there, and Burke has designed a line of T-shirts, sweatshirts, greeting cards and coffee mugs bearing Keller and Sullivan's likenesses to further promote the home.

In her apartment, Burke has stripped the floors to the original wood and restored the red brick and white marble fireplace that had been painted black.

So deep is her dedication, Burke legally changed her middle name to Mansfield, to match cousin Sullivan's.

"They are my marriage, they are my life," Burke said of the women.

There is a large network of supporters in town, including elected officials and business-owners who back Burke's efforts and have contributed either financially or through services to her cause.

For the most part, residents feel a museum to honor Sullivan would be a welcome addition to a town already rich in history. Wrentham is home to a 300-year-old Congregational church, was burned down during the King Philip War and, with its two lakes, was the summer destination of Boston socialites and artists at the turn of the century. Today, it is a bedroom community of 9,465, where stately Victorians surround the town common and antique shops dot the side streets.

"When people find out the house exists, there is real surprise and excitement," said Leigh McStay, who works at the Wrentham Antiques Marketplace where Burke has sold greeting cards and other items to boost the foundation's coffers.



GLOBE PHOTO MICHAEL...

Cathleen Mansfield Burke holds a photo of her cousin in the Wrentham home she hopes to convert into a museum honoring Annie Sullivan's work.

"I think a museum would be of great interest to people here and in surrounding towns. People would love to know that kind of celebrity lived around here, and they would love to be able to get inside the house to see how they lived," McStay said.

Burke is driven by the desire, shared by Keller, to give Sullivan the recognition she so deserved for teaching Keller to communicate and to learn, opening the door for her to become a national heroine.

Although they are very distant maternal cousins, Burke said, she came to know, love and admire Sullivan — along with Keller — through her research and feels "spiritually connected" to both of them. It is this very emotional and somewhat mystical link that altered her past and that she said is now guiding her future.

"They are my guardian angels, they communicate with me, they want me to start this museum so people will understand their relationship, and they want to finally have Anne's story told," Burke said.

"When I first stepped foot in this house, I had a sense of warmth. I felt I was being enveloped, being hugged. And I started crying and I knew at that point it was up to me to save this house."

Burke began her research into Sullivan and Keller reluctantly. She was studying for her master's degree at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven in 1980 and was assigned to do a genealogical chart of her family. She said she had always known Sullivan was a distant cousin, but was unimpressed even after seeing a movie about Sullivan and Keller.

"I saw the 'Miracle Worker' when I was a kid and all I thought about Annie was, 'Wow, what a witch.' I thought she was really rough on Helen and she wasn't the kind of person I wanted to be related to."

Burke said the family-tree project forced her to delve into Sullivan's life, and the more she learned, the more she wanted to know. "I thought if I knew more about her, maybe I would learn more about myself," Burke recalled.

She grew eager to read every book, essay and article ever written about the women, to see the "Miracle Worker" and other films on the women's lives, and to conduct her own research into the pair, with a special emphasis on

May 1
1994
Cont

May 1, 1994 cont

Sullivan's pioneering work.

The paper and picture trail she accumulated eventually led her to Wrentham in 1990. She knew the women had owned the property on East Street together, living there for 10 years until 1917, and she wanted to see it for herself.

That weekend trip with a friend became the turning point in her life the minute she stepped into what is now her apartment, but was once Keller's bedroom, she said.

The sensation of being hugged was both eerie and comforting, strange yet familiar, Burke remembered.

"I had met Helen Keller on a beach in Connecticut when I was 5 years old," said Burke, explaining that Keller summered in Easton after Sullivan died and liked to walk at Fairfield Beach, where they had their encounter. "She walked over to us and I remember not wanting

to go to her because she talked funny. But she touched me, my shoulders, and gave me a hug, and when I came into this apartment, I felt that same kind of touch. It was her."

Burke took the sensation as a sign, she said, and moved her life from Connecticut to Wrentham in a matter of months. She lived down the street until Keller's bedroom apartment became available, found a job and has steadfastly worked toward fulfilling her "crusade."

"I love these women more than I have loved anyone in my life," Burke said, her eyes misting. "I talk to them every day, I pray to them that they guide me in the right direction. I often wonder, 'Why am I part of this scheme? Am I really meant to be, or, do I want to be?'"

"Then, I'll get a sign," she said, "and I'm sure this is where I should be; where they want me to be."

Helen Keller fan looks for boost from World Cup

BY JANET SCHOELER
FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

WRENTHAM — A local woman is hoping World Cup soccer tourism can kick her dream of a Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan museum into permanent reality.

Cathleen Burke has been granted a three-month permit to operate the museum in two rooms and a hallway of an East Street home where Keller and Sullivan.

Burke is refurbishing the rooms and will charge admission while World Cup soccer matches go on at nearby Foxboro Stadium.

She plans to use the funds for future maintenance and hopes to buy the house and apply for a permanent museum permit from the planning board.

Literature and photographs from 1904-1917, the years Keller and Sullivan spent there, will be on display.

The blind and deaf Keller learned to speak, read and write from Sullivan and went on to become an inspiring lecturer and writer. Their story is memorialized in the play and movie "The Miracle Worker."

Burke said local resident Thomas DiPlacido donated funds for renovations. Two businesses are loaning period furnishings. Besides the rooms to be used as a museum, the house has six apartments with eight tenants.

Historic Site

SC JUNE 8, 1994

Keller museum almost a reality in Wrentham

4/27/1994
Gazette

By Heather A. Swails
STAFF WRITER

WRENTHAM — A sign on the brick pillar at the head of the driveway proclaims it the "Historic Home of Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller." From the window of Keller's former bedroom, Cathleen Mansfield Burke has watched many unfamiliar cars pause there, then turn up the driveway of 349 East St.

She knows what they're looking for — a sign that says "Museum entrance," or something like that. Burke smiles to herself, because the possibility of a museum dedicated to the famous teacher and student has become very real.

In June, Burke hopes to open Sullivan's and Keller's former bedrooms, which are both encompassed by her second-floor apartment, to World Cup and other visitors. Founder and president of the Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation, Burke also hopes to obtain the house, which the present owner must sell for financial reasons, and begin realizing her museum dream.

"I think World Cup is a start. If it works out the way (the foundation) thinks it will, we will keep the rooms open and hopefully begin gradually to renovate the rest of the house," said Burke, who claims Sullivan as a distantly-related cousin.

With the help of the Country Traders' Guild and historic photographs of the interior of the house, which are included in resident Ed Davis' private collection of old photos and postcards, Burke plans to transform the rooms back to their 1917 appearance and have them open by June 21.

Kathy McStay, co-owner of Wrentham Antiques Marketplace, said she and other guild members

are excited about the possibility of a museum and have offered to support Burke's project in any way they can. The partnership, said Burke, will likely involve temporary loans of period furnishings and accoutrements to outfit the two bedrooms for World Cup.

"They have been really great. I really appreciate the help," said Burke. "I admit, I'm no miracle worker. I need the help."

Burke would like to begin renovation of the two bedrooms by May 1. She is hoping for local volunteers to donate their expertise in restoration or help in other areas of the project.

"It will be especially helpful if previous owners of the house would contact me to discuss any changes they made and help me piece together the original look of the house," said Burke.

Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller lived in the house at 349 East St. from 1904 to 1917. In her writings, Keller spoke of the house as their "happiest of homes."

At the request of the Trust for Public Land, Burke is developing a business plan detailing the transformation of this house into a museum dedicated to Keller and Sullivan.

The trust, a national non-profit land conservation organization, has expressed interest in loaning the money the Sullivan Foundation needs to buy the house, which is being marketed at \$250,000. A local bank has also expressed interest in backing the loan, but a spokesman for the bank declined comment on the venture until things are more formal.

"The trust, when there's a piece of historically significant property that's in danger, such as this one,

often loans the money needed to save it," said Burke. "Because this property is zoned commercial, anyone could come in here and totally renovate the house into condos or even level it and build something new."

Although the house was converted into a six-apartment building by previous owners, Burke said it wasn't gutted, so returning it to its original state won't be difficult if the foundation is successful in obtaining the house. Once the foundation owns the house, it will be eligible for state and federal grants for renovation and preservation of the property.

"It's 90 percent sure that this is going to happen. If the business plan is approved by the trust and the bank, the foundation will have the house," said Burke, who is meeting with representatives of the trust and bank in early May to discuss the plan. "If things go as planned, we'll have it in full operation by April 1995."

The foundation, said Burke, would have to pay the loan back within, at most, a year and a half. Besides admissions and profits from a planned gift shop, Burke said, the foundation would raise the money through fund-raisers — possibly one with Anne Bancroft, an honorary member of the foundation — and a local production of Burke's three-act play about Sullivan's life and her 50-year relationship with Keller.

Burke envisions a museum where actors will reenact scenes from Sullivan and Keller's life in Wrentham, such as Sullivan's wedding. She is optimistic that the museum, which she points at as one-of-a-kind, would draw many people. Burke's optimism is shared by



PHOTO BY HEATHER A. SWAILS

Cathleen Mansfield Burke says a sign, donated by her friend Patricia LoTurco, that proclaims 349 East St. as the former home of the famous teacher and student has already attracted attention from passersby.

many residents and antique dealers in town.

"We're always getting positive feedback from her flyers (on Keller and Sullivan) we have here (at the Antiques Marketplace). People are constantly asking if the museum is open yet," said McStay. "A lot of people never knew Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan lived in Wrentham. They're always surprised and pleased to learn that little tidbit of

history."

Besides educating the public about Sullivan and Keller, one of Burke's goals with the museum is to show people that obstacles can be overcome, just as they were by Sullivan, who suffered her own health problems, and her deafblind student.

"The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it. That's the message I want people learn," said Burke.

...2011

Sullivan/Keller Museum opening its doors in Wrentham

Teacher, student make symbolic return to home

By Heather A. Swails
STAFF WRITER

WRENTHAM — It may have taken her longer than she originally thought it would, but Cathleen Mansfield Burke is finally starting to make good on a promise she once made to "Cousin Annie."

On June 21, Burke is throwing the doors ajar on that promise — a museum dedicated to Annie Mansfield Sullivan and Helen Keller at the East Street home the famous teacher and student shared for 13 years.

"Everyone I've talked to is so excited about it. It has been a long time in coming," said Burke, who claims Sullivan as a distantly-related cousin.

With each volunteer who clambers up the stairs to Burke's second-floor apartment, the Sullivan-Keller Museum takes on more shape.

It will begin with Sullivan's and Keller's former bedrooms, now in the process of renovation and restoration, which will be open to World Cup and other visitors on a

temporary basis — temporarily.

"World Cup is a start," said Burke, who is hopeful that the initial opening will lead to a permanent, full-fledged museum. "If everything works out, we will keep the rooms open and hopefully begin gradually to renovate the rest of the house."

Helping the museum become a reality is William Casbara, a Plainville contractor who is replacing the ceilings in both rooms, and repairing and replastering walls with materials donated by DiPlacido Corp. of Wrentham.

"There's 150-year-old horse-hair plaster up there that has to come down," said Burke, who recently took down the drop-ceiling panels to reveal a badly deteriorated ceiling with large chunks of plaster already fallen, as well as sagging and broken laths.

Other volunteers are also helping the museum promise to Cousin Annie come true. Louise Comeau of Medway and Sandy Burnes of Norwood last week joined Burke in removing wallpaper not original to the rooms, and former Selectman William Arnold has volunteered to help them paint this week.

By the 19th, said Burke, Sullivan and Keller will be "moving" back in. With pe-

riod furniture and accoutrements loaned through Wrentham Antiques Marketplace and With Heart in Hand, as well as the support of other members of the Country Traders' Guild, the rooms will be transformed back to their 1917 appearance — the last year Sullivan and Keller were the Wrentham house they referred to as their "happiest of homes."

"I have photographs of the interior taken by Jordan Marsh at that time," said Burke. "Jordan Marsh bought the home from them, furniture and all, so it's a good guess that the photos show the rooms as they looked when Annie and Helen lived here."

Burke has been in contact with Jordan Marsh in the hopes of obtaining more photographs and recovering some original furnishings. In 1917, the company 1917 bought the house, co-owned by Sullivan and Keller, and the one next door, owned by Sullivan, for use as rest homes for vacationing employees.

Burke has a three-month permit to operate Sullivan's and Keller's bedrooms as a museum, which will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. In the meantime, she is working to obtain the entire house in the name of the Annie Mans-

field Sullivan Foundation, a non-profit organization of which Burke is president and founder.

"The foundation is hopeful that it will become the owner of the property by June 30," said Burke, who is in negotiations with a local bank, the current property owner and the Trust for Public Land.

The house is being marketed at \$250,000 and must be sold by the end of the month for financial reasons. The trust, a national non-profit land conservation organization, has expressed interest in loaning the money to the foundation with possible backing from a local bank.

Burke, who is staying in a cabin donated by Florence Johnston of KOA Kampground in Wrentham during the renovation process, said she is especially pleased with the support she's received from the community.

"I really appreciate all the support. Helen used to talk about the character of the town, how wonderful it was, and how much like a family people were, always helping each other," notes Burke. "It's still true today. There are a lot of wonderful people out there."

(Historic site)

C.G. 10 JUN 1994

Helen 1-21-94

SC June 26, 1994

Restored museum rooms open

BY JANET SCHOELER
FOR THE SUN CHRONICLE

WRENTHAM — Two partially restored rooms and a hallway at 349 East St. officially opened to the public Friday as the Sullivan-Keller Museum, a tribute to two women, Anne Sullivan who taught the blind and deaf Helen Keller to speak, read and write.

The museum evolved from Cathleen Burke's quest to give recognition to Sullivan and Keller, while preserving a place they lived from 1904-1914.

It is also Burke's apartment, which she rents in a building with six apartments and eight tenants.

The Greek revival style house was built in 1845 by Gardiner Blake.

The museum has a 90-day permit, and Burke is hoping World Cup soccer games visitors from nearby Foxboro Stadium will stop by the museum, for which she charges \$4 for adults and \$2 for children under 12.

Two visitors from Argentina came Friday, she said.

The two rooms represent Sullivan and Keller's bedrooms, and will be furnished to match how they looked when the women lived there, she said.

All the furnishings have been loaned or donated and restoration

work done by volunteers and donated funds, she said.

Currently, Keller's bedroom has a refinished floor, with white wicker rocking chair, lamp, table and dressing table, and a wrought iron bed. The bed is on loan from Heart & Hand, South Street.

Burke said she plans to add a desk. Furnishings were matched to old photographs.

The floor shines with its recent restoration, and Burke said she plans to wallpaper the unfinished walls and hang lace curtains.

Sullivan's bedroom has partially repainted walls, a pine spool bed with Amish quilt, on loan from Wrentham Market Place Antiques, South Street, and a pine and cane rocker donated by economic development Chairwoman Patricia LoTurco.

A pine chest and mirror will be added to the room, she said.

Signs of renovation in progress dwell in the rooms, but framed photographs of Keller and Sullivan on table tops in Keller's room lend an historical ambience, as does the fine marble fireplace.

Brochures and a video about the two women are also on display, with T-shirts and note cards for sale.

U.S. Aug 10, 1994

Helen Keller

Sullivan-Keller Museum open to public

WRENTHAM — The Sullivan-Keller Museum at the former Wrentham home of Annie Mansfield Sullivan and Helen Keller is now open to visitors. Located at 349 East St. in Wrentham, the developing museum currently features the two women's bedrooms and a hallway of the house they shared for many years around the turn of the century.

Take a tour and learn about Sullivan and Keller's extraordinary lives from Sullivan's cousin, Cathleen Mansfield Burke. Museum hours are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Admission is \$4 for adults and \$2 for children under 12.

State Sen. Cheryl Jacques recently agreed to serve on the The Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation Inc.'s board of directors. The foundation operates the museum, and is headed by its founder, Cathleen Mansfield Burke.