

# Sullivan Foundation makes progress in honoring 'Teacher'

By Heather A. Swails  
STAFF WRITER

WRENTHAM — Cathleen Mansfield Burke has her eyes on a very special house.

Founder of the non-profit Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation, Burke hopes someday to acquire the house at 349 East St. where Annie Mansfield Sullivan and her pupil Helen Keller lived for 13 years after Keller's graduation from Radcliffe, and turn the property into a museum dedicated to the memory of the famous pair.

It's a dream that has edged a little closer to reality in the nearly four years since Burke began pursuing the venture. She's currently trying to get the house listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Once this house is on the registry, it will give it national recognition. But more importantly, we'll be qualified to get federal and state grants for renovations, and maybe even for purchasing the house," said Burke, who is a distantly-related cousin of Annie Sullivan.

Purchasing the house is her biggest concern, said Burke, who has been writing endless letters to such groups as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Peabody Foundation in search of possible grants.

"It's a very long process. The people think it's (the museum) is a good idea, but they tell me it's not going to be easy. Nobody has the money right now. It's all dried up," said Burke. "But I've got to keep trying."

The foundation recently acquired tax exempt status, which means if the house was purchased by someone and donated to the foundation, it would be a tax write-off up to its assessed value. The two-acre property is worth approximately \$650,000.

Burke continues to write letters seeking grants and support, organizing the foundation's efforts from what was once Helen Keller's bedroom on the second floor of the East Street house where she rents one of several apartments.

She has already spoken with state Sen. Cheryl Jacques, who has expressed interest in the endeavor.

Burke is also preparing documentation on the foundation's work to send to local congressmen and sena-

tors who might be able to help.

Meanwhile, the now two-year-old foundation is becoming more

active, letting the community know about its efforts and beginning to raise some funds. There are five members on the board of directors, including Board of Selectmen Chairman William Arnold.

Some funds were raised at this year's Wrentham Day, where the foundation sold T-shirts silkscreened with drawings of the house, and of Sullivan and Keller together in Wrentham. Greeting cards with photos of Sullivan and Keller in Wrentham were also sold. A photographic-historic display was recently shown at the post office for about two weeks. At the same time, the foundation's new merchandise was offered for sale at various stores in town.

Burke will give a talk on Sullivan and Keller at a "talk and tea" at the Wrentham Antiques Marketplace this December. She is also scheduled to go on Tom Roque's WDIS 1170AM radio show on Oct. 21 from 7:30 to 8 a.m., and will give a lecture for the Holly Club in the near future.

In the meantime, Burke is working to complete a three-act play dedicated to Sullivan as a pioneer in special education. She started the play about four years ago and has only three scenes to go. The completed scenes of the play, called "Teacher," are currently in rehearsal at the Richfield Workshop for the Performing Arts in Richfield, Conn.

Burke says any funds raised by the production, which is planned for spring, will go towards the museum effort. Once that happens, then she can pursue the rest of the dream — to acquire the house next door, which was briefly owned by Sullivan, and possibly create a special education center for blind and deaf children — one of Sullivan and Keller's own dreams.

"But we can only bite off so much at a time," said Burke.

To volunteer or donate to the Sullivan/Keller museum effort, or for further information on the foundation, call Burke at the Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation, 384-6287.



**THE ANNIE MANSFIELD SULLIVAN  
FOUNDATION, INC.**

**349 East Street  
Wrentham, MA 02093  
(508) 384-6287**

Helen Keller was a darling unselfish loving woman who believed deeply and wrote often of her desire that Annie Sullivan should be honored above her. Annie refused all praises given her and pointed to Helen as one would point to a great work of art.

Helen once wrote, "Sickened by the unthinking adulation bestowed upon me, I rejoice in the appreciation of those who have perceived Annie Sullivan's inventive endeavor to retrieve a life from triple disaster and give it form and comeliness. No slight task this!"

Moved by Helen's desire to give Annie Sullivan her rightful place in history and in full agreement that this should be so our Founder and President Cathleen Mansfield Burke established The Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation Incorporated in Wrentham, Massachusetts on January 28, 1991 in order to honor and preserve the memory of these two great women.

The foundation is working toward purchasing their former home as a living museum in their memory.



**Your partner in printing:**

11 East Central Street  
Franklin, MA 02038



*Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan share a quiet moment at their home in Wrentham, Massachusetts in the early 1900's.*

"I can never quite accustom myself to the bewildering vicissitudes of life, but, despite the shadows upon it, both my teacher [Annie Sullivan] and I feel that all that was loveliest in the Wrentham days is ours forever."

*Helen Keller in  
"Midstream" 1929*

## FIRST THE TEACHER . . .

Annie Mansfield Sullivan was born Johanna Sullivan on April 14, 1866 in the Feeding Hills area of Agawam, Massachusetts.

By the age of four Annie was legally blind from Trachoma, an eye disease which eventually leads to blindness.

Orphaned at the age of nine she was sent to the Almshouse in Tewksbury, Massachusetts where her desire to be educated grew out of the enjoyment of being read to by the prostitutes there.

In October 1880 she entered the then Perkins Institution in South Boston. And though she was often on the verge of explosion she graduated as class valedictory in 1886.

After several eye operations Annie's sight was partially restored. She was asked by the schools director to go to Alabama as a governess and teacher to a deaf-blind and mute six and a half year old girl. And on March 3, 1887 she arrived in Tuscumbia, Alabama to begin her work in earnest.

## THEN CAME THE PUPIL . . .

Helen Adams Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama on June 27, 1880.

When she was a child she was very bright even advanced. But at the age of nineteen months she contracted a fever that left her deaf and blind and eventually unable to speak. In a world of darkness and silence she became as she put it "a phantom."

She acted often like a wild animal with no knowledge of right or wrong no knowledge of anything. Her parents didn't know how to communicate with her nor could they control her.



**349 EAST STREET  
THE HOME IN WRENTHAM**

In 1896 Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan came to Wrentham to stay for the summer with friends on Franklin Street. And they spent the year 1897-1898 there as well. During the summers of 1898-1903 Annie rented a cottage on Lake Wollomonapoag. In 1903 Annie purchased the home and seven acres at 349 East Street with sugar stock that she and Helen jointly owned. In 1907 Helen purchased six and a quarter acres of land between East Street and Woodlawn Road. In 1914 Annie purchased the home and seven acres at 343 East Street and rented it out. In 1917 Annie and Helen sold all their property to the Jordan March Company who used the home as a rest (vacation) place for their employees from 1917-1941. Helen and Annie had many happy years in Wrentham. Helen wrote three books from this house and Annie married John Macy in the sitting room of the house.

Speaking of the house Helen said, ". . . the house . . . is so endeared to me . . . that no matter who lives in it and no matter where I go I shall think of it as home."

## TOGETHER THEY OVERCAME MANY OBSTACLES . . .

From the day Annie arrived in Tuscumbia she continually spelled into Helen's hand. Though her pupil made no connection between the word and the object. On April 5, 1887 at the well-house Helen had in a flash connected the word being spelled into her hand with the water rushing the other hand. After that Annie and Helen embarked upon years of education that culminated in Helen graduating cum laude from Radcliffe College in 1904.

Helen wrote ten books and several articles with Annie's assistance.

These two gifted and brilliant women went on to educate the public on issues concerning the deaf and blind. They lectured across the continent, made a silent film, worked the vaudeville circuit and worked for the American Foundation for the Blind.

Only the love, intellect and devotion of Annie Sullivan could bring Helen Keller into the world a whole functioning human being.

They lived and worked together for fifty years.

Cathleen Mansfield Burke  
220 West Street  
(508) 384-6287  
Wrentham, MA 02093  
September 14, 1990

Ms. Anne Bancroft

0405

Dear Ms. Bancroft,

I do hope that what I have to say will interest you and I ask you to indulge me with some of your valuable time.

I am involved in the process of giving a very special woman her rightful place in history, by turning her home in Wrentham, Massachusetts into an historic site. The property will contain a museum, educational center and school (as was her wish) for the teaching of blind and deaf children. In addition, I am writing what I hope will be the definitive play about her life.

She is not unfamiliar to you, as she is a woman you so brilliantly portrayed on Broadway a number of years ago. I am speaking of Annie Mansfield Sullivan. She was the greatest of all Teachers and truly the epitome of the name Teacher.

She was a trend setter in the field of education. She believed that, "every child has hidden away somewhere in its being noble qualities and capacities which may be quickened and developed if we go about it in the right way." And, in 1893, as the pioneer of special education, she stated, "a handicapped child should be treated as a normal child." And, "no child who could be taught should be institutionalized."

Today these principals are central to the education of the special needs child. And the belief in normalization has opened up endless possibilities for millions of children.

Annie Sullivan should not be forgotten, but she often is. When asked, most people don't know who she was unless Helen Keller's name is mentioned, and then many still don't know.

Teacher, (as Helen called her during their fifty years together) has been overlooked. She, unlike Helen, does not have an historic site named after her, is not in the Women's Hall of Fame, or Who's Who in America and her name remains absent in other areas as well. This is a sad fact when one considers all that she gave and the magnitude of her being.

Helen, was often disturbed because Teacher's name was not before hers, as she felt it should be. This lack of recognition

is due in part to her own choosing. In the words of her friend and biographer Nella Braddy Henney, "She has allowed herself to love intensely only one person, and she has been content to remain in the shadow of that person. The one bright thing in her life, as she sees it, is Helen."

"She has always been afraid that somehow or another she might be elevated above Helen." However, in her later years Teacher felt slighted. In 1933, Temple University gave her and Helen honorary degrees. She refused, at first, to accept it and said, "honors which would have transported us with joy if they had come earlier have no thrill in them, especially when they are forty years overdue... In youth I would have gone round the world for a compliment. Now I am indifferent."

And at the ceremony, as the press gathered around Helen Teacher stated, "Even at my coronation, Helen is queen." The time has come to let the light shine on Teacher, of course, without overshadowing Helen. Teacher's story must be told, for the "real story" of her life has never been told.

She was a most fascinating and gifted woman. And her memory should be honored and preserved. My love for and devotion to this distant Irish cousin has caused me to write to you.

Ms. Bancroft, my hope is that your connection to this great lady will cause you to support the endeavor of turning her property into a memorial to her.

I am presently forming a non-profit organization, "The Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation, Inc." I have begun the process of filing the necessary forms with the Massachusetts Secretary of State. In order to properly file I must list a board of directors.

Ms. Bancroft, it would be an honor to have you on that board. I believe, Ms. Bancroft, that you are someone who would look out for the proper running of an organization bearing the name, Annie Mansfield Sullivan. Having you on the board would greatly benefit Teacher's foundation. And I am sure Teacher would be pleased and honored to have you.

I've begun writing one of several grants for the funding of this project. But, until the non-profit organization is formed, I cannot submit the grants. Therefore, I will be eagerly awaiting your response. If you cannot be a board member, but do support the plan, I would appreciate a letter of support that I could submit along with the grant proposals.

I began my research in June 1989 and moved from Westport, Connecticut to Wrentham in March 1990. I came to Wrentham to visit Teacher and Helen's former property and to do research in September 1989. I immediately knew this is where I belonged.

Four months ago, courtesy of the finance company that owns Teacher and Helen's former home, I spent a week there. It was to say the least, a very spiritual experience.

To give you an understanding of the property I am speaking of I have enclosed photographs of the houses Teacher owned in Wrentham, all of which are currently up for sale. Also, copies of the original deeds and a description of my plans for the property. In addition, I have enclosed an article our local newspaper published on my research and writing about Teacher. Also, when published I will send you a copy of the series of articles the Woonsocket Call Newspaper plans to run on my work for Teacher, the article a freelancer with the Boston Globe is writing and a magazine article I am working on.

Teacher and Helen lived in Wrentham for twenty years. Fourteen of those years were spent in the house that Teacher purchased in 1903. In this house they spent the best years of their lives. Helen wrote three books from here and Teacher married John Macy in the living room of this house. In this house their friends spent many happy days, among them where Alexander G. Bell, Mark Twain, Edward E. Hale, Jack Reed and Emma Goldman. The home in Wrentham was, as Helen stated, "Our happiest of homes." And there are still many more reasons why this home must be preserved.

Ms. Bancroft, it has been said that, one can move mountains if one only believes in what they do and feel in their soul the love, power, courage, strength and determination to do it. If this is so then my dream for Teacher will come true. I hope you can find it in your heart to join me in that dream. Let us give Annie Mansfield Sullivan a miracle. It's about time she got those four curtain calls.

Sincerely yours,

Cathleen Mansfield Burke

*ANNE BANCROFT*

SEPTEMBER 27, 1990

IT GRIEVES ME TO DECLINE YOUR LOVELY OFFER IN YOUR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, 'THE ANNIE MANSFIELD SULLIVAN FOUNDATION'. BUT I AM UNABLE TO GIVE ANY TIME TO ANY MORE ORGANIZATIONS. ALL I CAN OFFER YOU IS MY NAME ON THE LETTERHEAD, IF THAT WILL HELP YOU.

I THINK THAT THIS IS SUCH A WORTHY AND NECESSARY HONOR TO THIS VERY SPECIAL WOMEN, ANNIE MANSFIELD SULLIVAN.

I AM APPALLED THAT SHE DOES NOT HAVE AN HISTORIC SITE...IS NOT IN THE WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME OR EVEN IN WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA.

I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT ANNIE SULLIVAN WOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING GREAT IN HER LIFETIME IF SHE NEVER MET HELEN KELLER, AND THAT HELEN KELLER WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN RESCUED FROM HER DARKNESS IF IT WERE NOT FOR ANNIE MANSFIELD SULLIVAN.

SINCERELY,

*Anne Bancroft*  
ANNE BANCROFT

A.B/GW

Cathleen Mansfield Burke  
220 West St., Box 891  
Wrentham, MA 02092  
October 12, 1990

Anne Bancroft

1402

Dear Ms. Bancroft,

It grieves me to know that you are unable to be on the board of directors of Annie Sullivan's Foundation.

I greatly appreciate your very timely reply and your heart felt support and the use of your name on your letterhead. I have always had the greatest respect for you and your work. And your letter to me has increased that respect two-fold.

I failed to mention in my letter that there are two other options available to you if you would like to be in some way a part of the Foundation.

You may be a board member and appoint a proxy to serve in your stead, or you may be an honorary ~~board~~ member. The first option would necessitate a very limited amount of time from you, the second option would not require any time at all. As an honorary ~~board~~ member you would be informed of all happenings and your input would be more than welcomed. Both options would mean that you would be listed as a part of the Foundation or if you choose your honorary status could be non-listed.

I offer this to you for two reasons, first your letter to me indicates that you deeply care about a memorial to cousin Annie but due to time constraints you cannot get involved in this project. Second, in the course of things it only seems natural that you be a part of Annie's Foundation.

You not only defined the role of Annie Sullivan, you also cared enough about Helen Keller to go to her Easton, Connecticut home upon the death of her companion, Polly Thompson, to see to it that she was alright and to offer her your help. Mrs. Winfred Corbally, Helen's nurse and companion during the last eleven years of her life, told me this story a few months ago. She is still touched by this and so am I. Mrs. Corbally is now ninety-four years old and is as sharp as a tack. She resides at the Lord Chamberlain Nursing Home in Stratford, Connecticut and is full of wonderful stories.

Ms. Bancroft, it is only fitting that you should be remembered and honored for the gift of yourself to Annie and Helen. You should have and do have a place reserved for you as an honorary ~~board~~ member.



Please strongly consider this offer. This may be best for you since appointing a proxy would call for time that you don't have. I will honor whatever decision you need to make.

If you decide to decline this offer I will continue to be saddened by your lack of presence in this Foundation. However, I do find strength and encouragement in the fact that I have your support. In today's society things are very different, so let me say up front that I am not asking for any money or for any time that you cannot give. You have my word on this. I am only speaking from the bottom of my heart.

With your permission I would like to keep you periodically informed of the progression of this project and any other plans that will serve the memory of Annie and Helen. Please advise me of your wishes in this matter.

I wish you continued success and much happiness always.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Mansfield Burke

*ANNE BANCROFT*

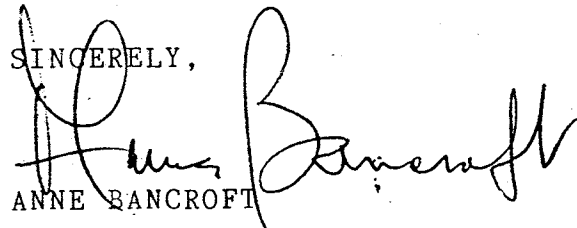
NOVEMBER 14, 1990

DEAR MS. BURKE,

I AM TERRIBLY SORRY BUT I CANNOT POSSIBLY GIVE ANY AMOUNT OF TIME. THEREFORE, THE OPTION OF AN HONORARY MEMBER WOULD BE THE BEST.

I WISH YOU MUCH LUCK AND SUCCESS IN THIS WORTHWHILE PROJECT.

SINCERELY,



ANNE BANCROFT

AB/GW

*My life and family are keeping me very busy, I am so sorry I can't send more!*

Cathleen Mansfield Burke  
220 West Street  
Wrentham, MA 02093  
December 14, 1990

Dear Ms. Bancroft,

Today I found your letter in the post office box that now belongs to cousin Annie's Foundation. I seldom check it for mail as the Foundation is in its beginning stages. Your letter was a very welcomed surprise to end another week of 5am-11pm work.

Thank you for choosing to be an Honorary Member of The Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation. I am thrilled over your decision and have a renewed feeling that my efforts to honor and preserve Annie's memory are going in the right direction.

You said you are sorry you can't give more. Ms. Bancroft, I believe there is no greater gift you can give then the gift of your spirit. Many people give in time and/or money, but few people give truly from the heart. Thank you for your heart felt support.

My prodigious task now remains to somehow make it all happen for cousin Annie. I do hope miracles are genetically inherited! I will keep you informed of any progress.

I wish you and your family the happiest of holidays and the best of everything in the New Year!

Sincerely,

Cathleen M. Burke



THE ANNIE MANSFIELD SULLIVAN FOUNDATION, INC.

Founded in 1991

"The way to knowledge and to love is through obedience."

HONORARY MEMBER  
ANNE BANCROFT

PRESIDENT  
Cathleen Mansfield Burke

TREASURER  
Deborah Lee Clark

CLERK  
Charles Thomas Booth

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
Lawrence Joseph Maraghy  
Judith Noreen Booth  
Deborah Lee Clark  
Charles Thomas Booth  
Cathleen Mansfield Burke

March 9, 1991

Dear Ms. Bancroft,

I do hope this letter finds you well, happy and enjoying life with your family.

I am writing to inform you that The Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation, Inc., as of January 28, 1991, has been legally recognized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a Non-Profit Corporation. I received the papers from the Office of the Secretary of State on February 21st and have enclosed a copy for you.

Just think it only took a Century for Annie Mansfield Sullivan to have her own Foundation! I just can't seem to get too excited over this new development because I know there is so much more to do. However, when I showed the printer how I wanted cousin Annie's stationary done I was thrilled with the result. I do hope you like it!

I did have a problem with the printer. He kept insisting on putting your name in lower case letters and he had the audacity to add parenthesis. After much debate I discovered he had done some work for the Bronski Theatre. It's a small world indeed. I told him what he could do with his lower case letters and parenthesis. I insisted that your name be in capital letters only. And I told him that a captial lady deserves capital letters. He agreed and after that he was putty in my hands. I have a date with him next Thursday night!

Stay happy and healthy and keep them laughing!

*I cannot find words to describe how much your support means to me. You inspired me to continue in my quest to establish The Annie Mansfield Sullivan Foundation, Inc. Now the dream is a reality.*

*My deepest thanks,  
Cathleen*

**BROOKSFILMS LIMITED**

March 22, 1991

Cathleen Mansfield Burke  
THE ANNIE MANSFIELD  
SULLIVAN FOUNDATION, INC.  
220 West Street  
Wrentham, MA 02093

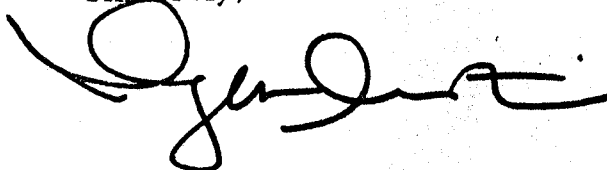
Dear Ms. Burke:

We received your letter of March 9, 1991, to Anne Bancroft, to which I am responding to on her behalf.

Ms. Bancroft is presently shooting a new movie and is unable to answer your letter personally however, she expressed how truly thrilled she is that at the inception of THE ANNIE MANSFIELD SULLIVAN FOUNDATION, INC. and is thankful for all you wonderful and devoted work on it's behalf.

As she said in her own words, Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Sincerely,



Dyan Austin  
Assistant to Anne Bancroft