

C.A.V.I.S.
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Historic Houses

Gilbert Home a worthy preservation

By PAUL KENYON

Good news it is that the Gilbert Home is to be preserved as a working building containing lawyers' offices.

This three-story structure of about 15 rooms at Western Avenue and Angle Street is one of the everyday treasures of downtown Gloucester, partly because its substantial beauty is so easily enjoyed by passersby.

The house has a characteristically historic background. It was built in 1750 by Nathaniel Ellery, according to Mary Brooks' knowledgeable folder entitled "Through Old Gloucester; From Market Square to Meetinghouse Green," published in 1923.

"In after years it was occupied by the Gilbert family and was willed to the city for its present purpose by the Addison Gilbert whose generosity founded the hospital which bears his name," continues the reference.

Technically the bequest was put in the custody of a board of trustees, which has maintained the old folks' home for nearly 100 years. Changing conditions caused their recent decision to turn the real estate into a charitable fund, as was done in the case of the Huntress Home on Prospect Street several years ago.

Addison Gilbert, who never married, had business interests in Boston as well as Gloucester. He was active in civic affairs as a selectman, assessor, town moderator, school committeeman and state representative, and president of the City National and Cape Ann Savings Banks.

Lookout



Paul Kenyon is the retired associate editor of the Times.

He left \$28,000 for various other civic purposes, including funds which enabled the Cape Ann Scientific and Literary Association to buy the Capt. Elias Davis house on Pleasant Street, adding Historical to its name and interests.

Alfred Mansfield Brooks tells in "Gloucester Recollected" about his boyhood impressions of the Gilbert house: "What I liked was its quantities of blue and white Canton china, two oil paintings of Naples, and its occupants now and then giving me an apple on a red and white peppermint stick. What I disliked when I got to be 10 or 12 was Mr. Gilbert telling me that if I saved my pennies the dollars would take care of themselves."

Brooks wrote also about Gilbert: "Addison never got over an affront. He did not speak to Eliza Haskell

from the day she refused to marry him when she was 18 to the day of her death at 75. Their paths constantly crossed in the houses of friends, at church and on the street, and as Eliza said, 'He looks stony at me still.' More than once at dinner, after one of his late morning calls, I heard Grandmother comment, 'But Addison's bark is worse than his bite'."

After the death of Addison's father, in 1860, his stepmother, Mary Hayes Gilbert, spent the rest of her days in the Gilbert house with her stepson and niece. She ruled the roost until she got too old, when she about-faced and turned the ruling over to Addison. He loved to rule. And this was the first time for him in 50 years under his own roof.

One occasion when Addison Gilbert did not rule was the first election when Gloucester changed from a town to a city, held Dec. 1, 1873. The Republican nominee for mayor was Gilbert, who at first declined but was prevailed upon to accept, according to James R. Pringle's "History of Gloucester." Robert R. Fears, the Democratic candidate, won, 1095 to 698.

Added Pringle, "This result was somewhat of a surprise, and Mr. Gilbert's defeat was no doubt due in a great measure to an over-confident remark when he publicly accepted the nomination. 'I know I shall be elected; I feel it in the air.'"

Addison Gilbert died in 1888, seven months after his stepmother died at the age of 101.