

The Addison Gilbert Hospital Story:

Sea Figures in Hospital History



SAMUEL GILBERT
... Founded the fortune



ADDISON GILBERT
... Founded the hospital

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Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles the Times will publish during the next few weeks so that readers may become more fully acquainted with the Addison Gilbert Hospital.

The series will tell the hospital's story from its origin to its present day prominence as a health center for a wide area. It will tour departments, and present the men and women responsible for the hospital's development.

The origin and history of the community hospital that has served Gloucester and neighboring Cape Ann towns for 58 years, like that of many another enterprise in the area, is closely linked to the sea.

For the owners and crews of local fishing boats and clipper ships as well as tradesmen in far off lands, all unknowingly, had a share in laying its foundation a century and a half ago as they helped build up the fortune from which Addison Gilbert was to bequeath what was then a princely sum to establish a hospital.

The story goes back to the early 1800s when Addison's father, Samuel Gilbert, established a ship chandler business in Gloucester. That was the time when the lucrative Surt-nam trade was beginning. Gloucester vessels were plying to the Dutch Guiana province, as well as to other distant ports, with cargoes of fish and bringing back molasses, coffee, cocoa, fruit and other wares.

Outfitting these boats and supply-

ing them with groceries, made chandlery a profitable business. Addison Gilbert, born in Gloucester in 1808, joined his father in the business after attending the local schools and clerking for a short time in a Boston store. Later he branched out to other business ventures and investments that eventually made him one of the community's wealthiest residents.

Highly respected by his fellow citizens for his integrity and business acumen, he served as town moderator for many years before Gloucester's incorporation as a city in 1873. He was a selectman and assessor, a member of the school committee and a representative in the State Legislature. He also was president of the City National Bank and the Cape Ann Savings Bank.

Addison Gilbert died July 2, 1888 at the age of 79. He left \$100,000 for a hospital, \$75,000 for an old folks' home (now the Gilbert Home) and \$28,000 for other community and charitable causes.

The following tribute appeared in the first annual report of the Addison Gilbert Hospital for the year ending June 1, 1898: "The late Addison Gilbert was one of Gloucester's native born, solid citizens. Successful in business, he retired comparatively early; lived a plain, unostentatious life, participating in business affairs connected with his investments; held in esteem by his fellow citizens and honored by selection to many offices of trust, where he showed marked ability and conscientious and economical administration of all affairs entrusted to his care."

In his will, Addison Gilbert left his major bequest for the purpose "of establishing in the city of Gloucester a free hospital, to be built of brick, with grounds properly embellished, where may be admitted as patients such citizens and inhabitants of the city (and in case of emergency such others as the trustees may see fit) as may need medical or surgical aid and treatment. To provide gratuitously such aid and treatment for the indigent, and to receive in aid of maintaining said hospital such compensation as may be paid by patients who are able to make compensation."

In accordance with a preference expressed in the will, a corporation was organized to carry out the legacy and a charter was secured on March 13, 1889.

Those whose names appear on the charter and who constituted the first board of trustees were John Corliss, Sylvester Cunningham, John K. Dustin, George J. Marsh, Henry A. Parmenter, Allen Rogers and John E. Somes. Later vacancies caused by the death of Mr. Marsh and the resignation of Mr. Corliss were filled by the election of Charles H. Pew and Sylvanus Smith.

With a foresight that has been commended many times by succeeding governing boards and by patients, the trustees purchased the outlying 13-acre Jonathan Brown farm on Washington street as a site for the new hospital.

Located near enough to the center of the city to be convenient, yet far enough out to offer the therapy of fresh air and a splendid view, the extensive site has eliminated parking problems and made expansion

readily possible when necessary.

Designed by the Springfield architectural firm of Gardner, Pyne and Gardner, after consultations with the trustees and a committee of doctors, the hospital was completed in 1897 to honor through succeeding generations the name of its benefactor, Addison Gilbert. (Arrival of the first patient ahead of time and the story of another great benefactor will be told in the second article in this series next week.)