Who Was Johns Hopkins?

Johns Hopkins was the second of eleven children born on a large tobacco farm in Anne Arundel County Maryland on May 19, 1795 to Samuel Hopkins and Hannah Janney. His first name, Johns, was the maiden name of his great-grand mother, Margaret Johns. His family called him "Johnsie"

His family were devout members of the Society of Friends. They were inspired by the growing anti-slavery movement within the Society of Friends, and in 1807, made the decision to free their slaves and have their own family members do the farming. Consequently, Johns Hopkins was taken out of school at the age of 12 to help run the family farm.

Realizing that the family farm may not be enough to support the entire Hopkins family, Johns was sent to assist his uncle in a wholesale grocery business. Johns flourished there.

As a young man, Johns Hopkins fell in love with his first cousin Elizabeth Hopkins, but they did not marry due to the Quaker tradition which forbade marriage between first cousins. The two agreed never to marry anyone else, and they remained friends throughout their lifetimes.



Johns Hopkins at age 40

From portrait in the Johns Hopkins University

With the decision made not to marry and raise a family, Johns Hopkins turned his full attention to business. He built a business with two partners and later brought in two of his brothers. Their business sold tobacco and corn whiskey (labeled Hopkin's Best) and other groceries. As his wealth grew, he moved into money lending, and eventually became president of Merchants' National Bank of Baltimore. He was later named director of the First National Bank, the Mechanics' Central Bank and National Union Bank.

He was the director of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad, which he saved from closure during the tumultuous economic times surrounding the Civil War, both in 1857 and in 1873.

Johns Hopkins supported Abraham Lincoln's election. His summer estate, Clifton, was the location where the first American North Civil War campaigns were organized. Clifton was often used as a meeting place for Union sympathizers and officials. Hopkins helped to fund the continued presence of Union troops in Maryland throughout the course of the Civil War.

During his lifetime, he was dedicated to the public welfare, and he funded the building of libraries and schools.

In the wake of the Civil War, Johns Hopkins became increasingly aware of Baltimore's growing need for a hospital. In writing his will in 1870, he designated seven million dollars toward the building of a hospital, medical college and nursing college. In addition, he made provisions for the building of a university, and for the Colored Children Orphan Asylum. His will included funds for scholarships for the poor in states where Hopkins conducted business and made his fortune.

Johns Hopkins died on December 24th, 1873. The first of his bequests to be completed after his death was the Johns Hopkins Colored Children Orphan Asylum in 1875. Johns Hopkins University opened in 1876. The Johns Hopkins Hospital and School of Nursing opened in 1889. The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine opened in 1893.

Johns Hopkins believed that his wealth was a trust to benefit future generations. He is quoted as saying: "like the man in the parable, I have had many talents given to me and I feel they are in trust. I shall not bury them but give them to the lads who long for a wider education."

References

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