

Kingston Chronicles Edition 2

In our first article on Sanborn Seminary, we focused on its beautiful architectural features. Today, we will learn more about the great philanthropist who made the school a reality...Major Edward Stevens Sanborn. The founder, who carried the title of Major from some militia experience, was born in Kingston, attended local schools, and presumably worked at his father's tannery and on the large farm. After settling in Boston at the age of 35, he retained residence in Kingston, maintained an active interest in town affairs, served one term in the Legislature (1879) and subscribed generously to both churches.

His Boston life was recently featured on WMUR "Chronicles" with Fritz Wetherbee, where the show portrayed Mr. Sanborn as the proprietor of five houses of ill-repute in the West End of Boston, worth at that time \$250,000. The exact nature of his Boston business was unknown to his neighbors, but the Town of Kingston was grateful for his many contributions. It was well known that his will included provision for the construction of a new school in his hometown. When he failed with his bid for re-election to the New Hampshire Legislature, Major Sanborn was furious, revising his will to leave \$40,000 to Dartmouth College and the rest for members of his family.

Also unknown to neighbors and relatives, was his "working relationship" with Julia A. Hilton. As a veracious young reader and one of ten children on a farm in Wells Depot, she dreamed of escaping to the big city. At 19, this strikingly beautiful young woman moved to Boston. Census records from 1870 indicate that she was employed as a domestic servant, but her ability to lend her family thousands of dollars and to purchase the Wells estate when they lost it to foreclosure lends credence that she may have had other sources of income. Julia met Edward in Boston, he was 50 years old, but they developed a sincere attachment to one another, setting up residence in one of his opulent homes. However, they never married. In polite society, she was known as his housekeeper, but in truth, the two were equal partners and inseparable for 17 years.

Shortly after revising his will in 1880, Sanborn became ill at his Boston residence with alleged "softening of the brain." His family did not approve of his Boston lifestyle or his relationship with Miss Hilton and saw this as an opportunity to end both!!! They made plans to declare him incompetent and have him committed to an insane asylum. His counsel, Gen. Gilman Marston of Exeter, successfully proposed moving him to a country residence in Malden, where he recovered, regained his health and angrily struck back at his family. He also rethought his gift to Dartmouth and decided to leave the bulk of his money to his hometown for a new school, where both his name and that of Julia Hilton could be forever memorialized.

In 1883, plans were readied for the new school – land was purchased and the erection of the main building began. Edward no longer hid his relationship with Julia – she attended meetings with the trustees and helped to supervise the construction. With her own money, she designed and furnished the school library. Edward commissioned a white bust of his beloved and one of himself to be prominently displayed at the Sanborn Seminary.

The Seminary Building was almost ready for occupancy when Miss Hilton died in April of 1885. Her will left the Wells homestead to her brother George and \$1,000 to each of her living siblings. The rest, \$75,000 was bequeathed to Edward Sanborn, the "love of her life". Edward's health deteriorated quickly after Julia's death. He became withdrawn and lost his will to live. On September 4, 1885, Major Edward Stevens Sanborn was found dead at one of the homes he had shared with his companion, Julia A. Hilton.

Edward left Sanborn Seminary an endowment of \$175,000 as well as the \$75,000 he had received from Hilton's estate presumably for "her library". Both wills were contested – Julia's family objected that Sanborn exerted undue influence on their sister; Dartmouth College and Sanborn's heirs claimed that his despicable lifestyle and his absurd relationship with such a woman stood as proof that he was indeed insane. The courts disagreed and both wills were approved. These objections delayed the opening of the school until 1888.

Edward's bust still sits in the Main hallway of the Seminary with the inscription: "This Seminary was founded and endowed and this building erected by Edward Stevens Sanborn in token of his regard for his native town and his appreciation of education." Quoting from Sanborn's obituary: "In the room on the second floor designed for use as a library, there is a fine life-size marble bust of Miss Hilton." The disappearance of Miss Hilton's bust remains a mystery, perhaps suggesting a hope that history would forget she ever existed.