

Jane Stanford – the middle of her story

The Stanfords lived a flamboyant life compared to the other members of the Big Four. Leland lavished Jane with many jewels; one, a diamond necklace valued at one million dollars. (A lot of money in those days.) Jane bought Leland a custom built luxurious private railroad car which they used to travel back and forth to the east coast. They treated the Atlantic Ocean like a pond as they traveled abroad almost yearly, often to take the waters at spas. Jane had always been interested in education, even before her son's death, and established and funded six kindergartens in San Francisco, and two in Menlo Park and Mayfield. She also supported hospitals, churches, and museums.

In 1885, at the Stanford's San Francisco mansion, the endowment document was read to the chosen trustees stating that the object of the university was to qualify students for "direct usefulness in life" and to advance the "cultivation and enlargement of the mind." The Leland Stanford Junior University was founded. This was to be a university for rich and poor and therefore no tuition fees. (This changed in 1920.) Leland and Jane spent the next few years traveling across the nation visiting the most prestigious universities. While in Indiana they found their president, Dr. David Jordan. With 5 million spent on the first buildings, the school opened to 415 students in 1891. One of these students was Herbert Hoover.

Leland died two years later at the age of 69. From that time on, Jane's life and Stanford University became as one. To make things worse for her, the estate was sued by the U.S. government because of the liability of \$15,237,000 in railroad construction liens (not yet due) . Also, debts and gifts provided in Stanford's will amounted to \$18,000,000. While the suit was pending the estate could not be distributed, so it was up to Jane to keep the university solvent. For the next five years Jane spent most of her time trying to get this financial mess straightened out. The probate court allowed her \$10,000 monthly, about the amount she needed to support her household, but now she had to provide professor's salaries and other university expenses as well. By cutting her staff she managed to survive and still support the university. She still had all her jewels and in 1897 sailed to London for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and hoped to be able to sell her jewels to the assembled crowned heads. But there were no buyers. In 1897 she deeded the house on Nob Hill to the university as long as she could occupy it until her death. The mansion in Sacramento was deeded to the Catholic Diocese. After five years of litigation she won the suit against the estate and now had time and money to travel to Europe and Asia and also to Soda Springs. She would leave her railroad car at Soda Springs Station, then go visit her dear friends Timothy and Ann Hopkins at their home on the American River.

With the suit settled she poured money into the university, emphasizing the role of new buildings rather than increases of staff or better salaries for professors. This period in Stanford's history is often referred to as the Stone Age. This led to conflicts with Dr. Jordan, but in spite of this he remained her best friend.

Her role in the university was absolute. She appointed the trustees, decided on how the moneys would be spent, and at one time ruled that never, at no time, would more than 500 female students be allowed. (This was altered in 1933 to the same proportion of men and women as in 1899, and in 1973 the court granted a petition filed by the Trustees permitting the admission of students without regard to sex.) She put all her jewels at the disposal of the university to be sold and to establish an endowment fund, the income from such to be used to provide books for the new library. The fund still exists today as the Jewel Fund.

After the building of the Memorial Church, she felt it was time, at 75, to turn the university over to the trustees. This she did in 1903. In 1905 she was to give the address for the dedication of the new library when she returned from Hawaii. But that brings us back to the end of the story. Her speech was read posthumously.

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