Helen Gould Shepard

1868-1938

Helen Gould Shepard was a selfless and inspirational figure whose primary goal was to offer her services to the community. Her major contributions include constructing shelters for the underprivileged, teaching sewing and cooking classes for children at the Lyndhurst estate, and establishing the first basketball court in Tarrytown.
Helen Gould Shepard

An Inspirational Heroine

When people hear the name Gould, they often associate it with the financial tycoon and millionaire, Jay Gould. Although Gould was a successful businessman who made great achievements with the western railroad system, it is his eldest daughter, Helen Gould, who has left a fine imprint in American history. By serving the community through her philanthropic projects, Helen Gould has been recognized as an admirable female figure of the early twentieth century. For nearly fifty years, Helen donated her time, money, and personal assets to those in need. As a society editor once claimed, Helen Gould was a petite, dignified, and charming character who had a “very pleasant face with eyes that reflected a gentle heart” (O’Connor 276).

Born in 1868, Helen Gould was the eldest daughter of Jay Gould and Helen Miller. In 1892, she inherited a large sum of her father’s wealth, including the Lyndhurst estate. Instead of utilizing Gould’s money for her own personal gain, Helen decided to donate her money to charitable work. Often adhering to the sentiment, “I expect to pass through this life but once, any good, therefore, that I can do, let me not neglect it – nor defer it – I shall not pass this way again” (Smith).

She began her services by making contributions to the Tarrytown community. In 1906, she constructed the Lyndhurst Clubhouse on Sheldon Avenue. This program facility was designed to offer classes in carpentry and cabinet-making for young boys looking to develop a skill in manual labor (Buxton and Canning 227). The clubhouse was unique because it contained the first basketball court in Tarrytown. Additionally, during holidays, Helen donated gift baskets to the underprivileged residents of Irvington and the Tarrytowns (Buxton, Helen Miller Gould). She felt that every individual should feel accepted in society regardless of their social status. Thus, she embarked on this holiday donation drive during the early twentieth century, a concept that mirrors our present-day soup kitchens and midnight runs.
Helen also dedicated her services to the welfare of children. For example, she built the Woody Crest shelter in Glenville, which was designated to help clothe and educate crippled children (Buxton, Great Philanthropist). Along with this, Helen opened her home to many young women on Saturday afternoons. During this time, she would often conduct sewing classes for aspiring seamstresses at the Lyndhurst mansion. She also helped to domesticate young males and females with her specialized cooking classes. Because these programs weren’t offered in public schools until 1916, she felt it necessary to make them readily available for young adults who couldn’t afford college tuition (Combining The Villages). Helen even adopted three orphans and one foster child with her husband Finley J. Shepard, which demonstrates that her kindness went beyond the efforts of the average humanitarian.

Not only did Helen work for the benefit of her immediate community, but she also made great contributions to the entire country by aiding in government and military projects. During the Spanish-American War, she donated 100,000 dollars to the U.S. government and 50,000 dollars to hospitals housing soldiers and sailors with yellow fever in Cuba (Combing the Villages). She visited hospitals with injured soldiers to shake hands and support the troops (Peters, Helen). Giving up many of her apartment complexes in Manhattan and Brooklyn to house invalid soldiers seeking treatment, she helped to build the naval branch of YMCA on Sands Point in Brooklyn (Peters, Loving Cup). Because of her continuous support of the American troops, Helen was declared a general officer of the American Army by the troops of Fort Leavermore in 1907 (Peters, Helen).

Through her efforts to serve society by helping the poor and aiding in public works projects, Helen Gould Shepard has become the image of the ideal American woman, and has earned an important role in the history of Tarrytown. Seldom does this world see remarkable figures such as Helen; people who are willing to give of themselves to benefit the well-being of others. From her former clubhouse that stands tall on Sheldon Avenue, to the religious paintings that remain a unique part of Lyndhurst, Helen has left her mark for the world to see. What started as a vision to help children became her lifelong passion, and because of her inspirational acts of benevolence, Helen has become the golden Gould of Lyndhurst.
MLA WORKS CITED


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