

## History: Andrew Carney, benefactor of Carney Hospital, was "one of Boston's great Irishmen"

by Anthony Sammarco

**T**he Carney Hospital on Dorchester Avenue near the Lower Mills is a vitally important service that provides medical services not just for Dorchesterites, but to residents from throughout the metropolitan area. Spanning a large tract of land, the hospital is today one of the largest in Boston; however, it began in 1863 with a modest gift from Andrew Carney.

Andrew Carney (1794-1864) was born in Ireland of humble, God-fearing people. He was apprenticed as a youth to learn the tailoring trade, and after his emigration to this country in 1814, he secured a position with the firm of Kelley and Hudson, tailors on State Street in Boston. Laboring long hours, he later joined with Jacob Sleeper and opened his own clothing business, which not only succeeded, but prospered.

For over two decades, Carney and Sleeper provided not just "ready made" suits, a novelty at the time, but expert tailoring. The partners had opened their shop on North Street in the North End of Boston, and Carney's industrious and economical nature contributed to its success.

After their business was dissolved in 1845, Andrew Carney held positions of honor and trust in Boston. With no further business concerns to occupy his time, he took great interest in banking and assisted in the founding of the Bank of the Republic and the Safety Fund Bank (now the Bank of Boston). He was a director of the John Hancock Life Insurance Company and assisted in the founding and in the funding of Boston College, which was then located on Harrison Avenue in Boston, adjacent to the Immaculate Conception Church.

Carney was considered a responsible and respected man in Boston and contributed liberally to numerous charities. One business associate said that Carney was "one of Boston's many great Irishmen" and another said he was "one of God's best noblemen." With such accolades during his lifetime, one might consider his success, after such humble beginnings in Ballanagh, County Caven, Ireland, as the impetus for his interest in the less fortunate.

In 1863, during the Civil War, the Carney Hospital



was founded "to afford relief to the sick poor; and, though it is in charge of the Sisters of Charity, it receives patients of all religious dominations. Chronic, acute, and other cases are received, contagious diseases alone excepted." The hospital, once the elegant Howe Estate on Dorchester Heights in South Boston, had not just an elevated site with cooling breezes and magnificent panoramic views of Boston and the Harbor Islands, but convenience to downtown Boston.

Founded upon the premise that it should be "a hospital where the sick without distinction of creed, color or nation shall be received and cared for." Carney's gift of \$13,500 enabled the purchase of the property, and the conversions necessary to provide medical services for

the poor and immigrant classes of Boston.

The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, after the request of Bishop John Williams, were presented with the hospital and began their care for the medically needy on June 9, 1863. Its director was Sister Ann Alexis, who was superior of the Orphan Asylum on Camden Street in Boston, and is said to have been "very quiet, but most active, energetic, and skillful [as a] manager." With an addition to the former mansion in 1868, the Sisters of Charity commenced a hospital that supplied a much needed service in Boston.

After his initial donation had allowed for the purchase of the Howe Estate and the supplies necessary to convert it to a hospital, Andrew Carney continued to donate large sums of capital to ensure that the hospital provided medical care to those who could not afford it elsewhere. His total donations amounted to \$75,000 by the time of his death in 1864, an enormous sum in the mid-nineteenth century when an affluent family might expect \$300 annually.

Carney's intention to endow the Carney Hospital did not materialize, for he died prior to signing the codicil of his will bequeathing further monies. However, though his involvement with Carney Hospital was for only a short period of time, his commitment and interest in a hospital that would provide medical services and convalescence for those who need it "without distinction of creed, color or nation" was to ensure its continued efforts. Today, the Carney Hospital, which had moved to Dorchester in 1957, is still associated with the Daughters of Charity, and attracts a diverse staff who serve an equally diverse patient base. It seems that Andrew Carney's vision of the mission of the Carney Hospital still holds true to this day. We salute not just Carney Hospital, but the man who was "a kind-hearted, whole-souled, generous friend and protector" to all.

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