

May 16, 2020

At a recent Fund for the Diaconate ZOOM meeting, Keith McCoy shared some information about a deaconess he learned of who wrote several bestselling mystery books at the turn of the last century. After a bit of digging, with assistance from the intrepid Wayne Kempton, archivist of the Diocese of New York, we found out the following information about this fascinating woman. Now, there are several gaps in what we have uncovered so far, but maybe someone out there in deacon land can fill in the open spaces.

Deaconess Anna Maynard Barbour was born in Mannsville, NY in 1854. Her father was a dentist named Fayette Maynard and her mother was Jane E. Cutler Maynard. Anna was a very bright child and excelled academically. In 1870 her father died and she and her mother went to live in Geneva, NY with maternal uncle and her mother. Jane Maynard died in 1883. After that Anna took a course in Syracuse (not sure what school) in stenography and set off on her own landing in St. Paul, Minnesota. She supposedly was a very good stenographer and never lacked for work. In March of 1893 she married W. James Barbour in St. Paul.

They lived in various places in the Northwest landing in Helena, Montana where Anna began her writing career. She wrote mystery novels. These included "Told in the Rockies", "That Mainwaring Affair", and "At the Time Appointed". They sold very well, one of which was translated into German and Danish. Her husband greatly encouraged and supported her writing. Unfortunately, he died in May of 1903 in Philadelphia within a month of the publication of her third novel. W. James Barbour's body was transported to Geneva, NY where it was interred at Glenwood Cemetery.

Soon after both her husband's death and the publication of her final novel, "Breakers Ahead", Anna began her studies at The Church Training Deaconesses Home in Philadelphia graduating from the program in 1908. She was set apart as deaconess by Bishop Ozi William Whitaker the following year. From there she was assigned to a post in Boston, The House of Mercy.

Houses of Mercy were institutions that operated from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th.

They were ostensibly to house "fallen women". However, many women entering were just unmarried pregnant women, an unacceptable situation at that time. In the report of the House of Mercy to the Diocese of Mass convention in 1910, A.E. Wheelwright writes, "...the House of Mercy is a shelter for those girls who, whether from ignorance, from weakness, or from whatever cause, have taken the first false step, and who might fall into lower depths if a helping hand were not stretched out to them..." In 1910 Anna is listed as "Deaconess-in-charge". She wrote of the work thusly, "This is a work in which joy and sorrow go hand in hand; there is much to gladden, much to depress-but the former outweighs the later."

Deaconess Barbour would go on to file reports on the work of the Boston House of Mercy in 1912 and 1913.

The next record uncovered about Deaconess Barbour, places her at a St Andrew's in Sewanee, Tennessee in 1917. And finally, a copy of a brief obituary from the local paper in Geneva, NY noting her passing on May 10, 1941 in St. Paul, Minnesota where she was living at the Church Home for Aged Women. Anna was 84 years old. She is buried in Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Any additional information that could fill in the empty spaces would be appreciated.

BTW: you can buy one of her novels from Amazon to read on your Kindle for about a buck.

Link to her books

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Anna+Maynard+Barbour&i=stripbooks&ref=nb_sb_noss