

Actress wills pair of old homes to her hometown

Milford Historical Society grateful

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As Miss Emily Baldwin on the 1970s television show "The Waltons," Mary Jackson often invited friends and neighbors to her huge Victorian home nestled in the mountains.

And now after her death, Jackson's home in Oakland County will be shared by friends and strangers as the largest gift ever to the Milford Historical Society.

Jackson, a native of Milford, donated her two houses in the town to the society before she died in Los Angeles from Parkinson's disease in December at age 95.

The residences are on Canal Street, about five blocks from downtown Milford.

One is the house she was born in, which dates to 1876; the other is a smaller house near the residence that was built for a caretaker in the 1950s.

Mary Lou Gharrity, treasurer of the Milford Historical Society, said the board would likely sell or rent the smaller house and use the money for the upkeep of the historic residence.

She said even though the group had known about Jackson's wish to donate the property for about 10 years, getting the home was still a surprise.

"You never know what the outcome will be in situations like this," Gharrity said Wednesday. "We are pleased about it, and it will be a challenge for us. It was very generous of her to donate the homes."

Gharrity said the 150-member volunteer society would likely use Jackson's birth home for storage and office space, but the plans are still up in the air.

Gharrity said the group wants to do some repair work to the house, including replacing windowsills and doors, before a decision is made on its future.

She also said the actress, despite living most of the year in Los Angeles, was a member of the historical society for many years, and donated several items to the group's museum, including a handwoven wool coverlet that dates to the 1840s.

"She is someone who was originally from Milford and who made a success of her life and remembered their hometown and gave back," Gharrity said. "Many times, people forget where their roots are, and she did not do that."

Jackson was best known for her "Waltons" role as one of two elderly Baldwin sisters who lived together and made bootleg whiskey they referred to as "the recipe."



This is the Milford home that actress Mary Jackson of the 1970s show "The Waltons" grew up in. Jackson bought the home in the 1970s and willed it to the Milford Historical Society. She died in December. (REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press)

A quick look at Jackson's filmography

Besides her role in "The Waltons," Milford native Mary Jackson also appeared in numerous stage productions, television shows and movies. Her credits include:

1992: "Leap of Faith," with actor Steve Martin. Jackson played a woman in a wheelchair healed by a scam artist reverend.

1990: "The Exorcist III," in which she played Mrs. Clelia.

1988: "Big Top Pee-wee" with Pee-wee Herman

1980s: Episodes of TV shows like "L.A. Law,"

Before hitting Hollywood, Jackson graduated from Milford High School in 1927 and attended Western Michigan University, where she studied drama and literature and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1933.

Christopher Smith, a Milford attorney representing Jackson's estate, said Friday that the late actress originally wanted to donate the home to the National Trust for Historic Preservation because she put a large amount of money into restoring it when she bought it in 1974.

Smith said Jackson decided to give the 2,000-square-foot, three-bedroom residence to the local society after the national group said it would eventually sell the home and use the money for other projects.

He said the state-appraised value of her birth home is \$250,000. The smaller house was appraised at \$150,000.

"Ms. Jackson had no family and no children or siblings to leave her estate to," Smith said. "It was the home she was born in, so she was pretty attached to it ... and it was important for her to keep it in its original condition when she passed."

Gharrity said the group does not have any plans to remodel the exterior.

As part of the deal giving the historical society the houses, any exterior changes would have to be approved by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"This is the largest donation anyone has ever made" to the group "and we are all very grateful," she said. "We will do our best to keep it up."

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"Hill Street Blues,"
"Magnum P.I." and
"Highway to Heaven."

Source: IMDB.com

About the Milford Historical Society

The organization was founded in 1973 and has 150 members. Milford residents created the society to help preserve the township's history and heritage. The group sponsors home tours, does research projects and promotes local architectural preservation.

The society opened a museum at 124 E. Commerce St. in 1976 in Milford. The museum is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m. until the end of November. It reopens in May.

For information on the society, call 248-685-7308, or go to <http://www.milfordhistory.org/>.