

Hetty Green “the Witch of Wall Street”

Henrietta (Hetty) Howland Robinson Green was born Henrietta Howland Robinson on November 21, 1834 and died, on July 13, 1916 with an estimated fortune, in today’s dollars, worth \$17,000,000,000. She was recognized as the richest woman in the world at that time, aka “the witch of Wall Street”, and in her own right a financial genius in the areas of real estate, railroads and money lending.

Hetty was born into a Quaker family in New Bedford, Massachusetts and learned at an early age the skills of investing and accounting from her family. Upon her father’s death she was well prepared to handle the huge amount of wealth that she inherited from him and later her aunt. Hetty’s family had earned their money from the thriving whaling industry and the bustling maritime trade which could be found at that excellent deep water harbor.

Hetty married Edward Henry Green, from a wealthy Vermont family, but she eventually left him due to his unwise investments in trade in the Orient, which resulted in a loss of \$26,000,000, they had two children. Although Hetty was brilliant in her investing skills, she is most remembered for her excessive “Yankee” frugality. She saw herself as a person who understood the value of the dollar and was up against stiff male business competition and developed an abrasive personality. Many criticized her with less than kind stories of stinginess and extreme penny-pinching. When she traveled it was always the cheapest way, paying only to have the hem of her black dress washed since it often became dirty from the dusty streets, and using the bank lobby as her office rather than pay rent.

Perhaps the most heartbreaking story of her parsimony was refusing to pay doctors 50 cents to tend to her 14 year old son’s dislocated knee, which resulted in gangrene setting in and the eventual amputation of his leg.

Hetty Howland Robinson Green died July 3, 1916 in New York City from apoplexy and was buried in Bellows Falls, Vermont. Her fortune was divided equally between her two children, Ned and Sylvia who gave or willed every cent to friends and charity.