



John Simmons: The Measure of a Man

Denise Doherty Pappas

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While cultural critics today question the economic value of a college education, nearly 150 years ago a radical tailor in Boston never doubted it. Rather, this Rhode Island native, son of a Revolutionary War Hero, and a man who did not graduate from high school, carefully accumulated a fortune and then gave it away—founding a women’s college that would ensure the “fairer sex’s” ability to enjoy an independent livelihood. *John Simmons: The Measure of a Man* is an engaging biography of the foresighted early adopter of ready-to-wear clothing, a discrete Yankee, whose legacy, Simmons College in Boston, has produced over sixty thousand graduates: leaders in health care, social work, library science and business administration. Why endow a college at a time when higher education for women was considered unnecessary and unwise? Like most great stories, John’s includes a little religion, a little sex, and a little mystery. The book reveals the social milieu, the struggles and the achievements of pre- and post-Civil War Boston. Inventors, abolitionists, social reformers and scoundrels all crossed John’s path. Clothing industry history, Unitarian history, and literary luminaries in Boston are featured in this book. As one of the wealthiest men in the Northeast, and father of four sons and two daughters, John predated Warren Buffett in his inheritance strategy: he left his offspring comfortable but not wealthy. Why he did this may never be known, but this compelling biography sheds new light on the life and times of John Simmons. Through his example readers can consider how they wish to pay it forward, what legacy they will create.

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