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### Obituary of Frances W. Peabody (Frannie Peabody), 98, of Portland.

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Frances Peabody  
1903-2001

"She was quite a lady — quite a dame."

—Mary Lou Sprague



Staff photo by David MacDonell

Frances Peabody leads the Southern Maine Pride parade in Portland earlier this month at age 98. She became the state's best-known AIDS activist late in her life and founded Peabody House, a hospice for people with AIDS. "She just worked miracles," says U.S. Rep. Tom Allen.

## Grande dame of activists dies

● 'Hurricane Fran' Peabody was a lifelong volunteer known for her compassion and for leading the start-up of AIDS services in Maine.

By JOSHUA L. WEINSTEIN  
Staff Writer

Frances Peabody was already old, had already led a distinguished life, when a new and feared disease called AIDS killed her grandson.

She already had a stack of awards from Greater Portland Landmarks, from the Sweetser Children's Home, from the National Society of Colonial Dames of America. She already had

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Frances Peabody took up the cause of AIDS patients when few people would discuss it. 10A  
The life and times of Frances Peabody: a look back at her hardships and accomplishments. 10A  
Peabody taught us that no challenge is too great to stop working on behalf of others. Editorial, 8A

served on boards, had published articles, had been feted.

But at 81, the illustrious Peabody — who traced her family to the Mayflower — took on a new mission that brought her renown and accolades, that made her a beloved figure in Maine. The old lady with the cobalt blue eyes became the state's best known AIDS activist.

She was admitted to Mercy Hospital during the weekend and died Tuesday at 1 p.m. She was 98.

"In Maine, Frannie was the driving force behind AIDS services," said Mary Luke, executive director of Peabody House, a hospice for AIDS patients. "Before her, there was nothing. There were patients, but no services in Maine."

Even in the days just before her death, Peabody was busy.

On June 21, she attended the Peabody House Board of Trustees' annual retreat. Five days before that, she was grand marshal of the Southern Maine Pride parade, decked out in a pink leather boa.

Her family called her "Hurricane Fran," and

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# Helping to put a human face on an epidemic

Frances Peabody started The AIDS Project at a time when many were afraid to speak about the disease.

By JOSHUA L. WEINSTEIN  
Staff Writer

It may not be possible to overstate Frances Peabody's importance in the effort against AIDS in Maine.

She took on the cause when few people were willing to discuss it. She made it possible for polite society to become involved.

And even when some people became complacent, she was dogged.

"Frannie was such a huge, driving force that kept so many people inspired and motivated, it's a loss that I can't measure," Mary Lake, the executive director of Peabody House, said Tuesday.

Peabody House, which is named for Frances Peabody, is a hospice in Portland for AIDS patients.

Executive Director Mary Lake stands in front of Frances Peabody's portrait Tuesday at Peabody House, a hospice for AIDS patients in Portland. "In Maine, Frannie was the driving force behind AIDS services," says Lake. "Before her, there was nothing."



Staff photo by John Faring

## PEABODY

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she took life by storm. Before AIDS came along, she, like her mother, was an active volunteer.

During World War I, she and her friends rolled bandages for the Red Cross.

"We were very proud to wear the white kerchief on our heads with the red cross in the middle of our foreheads," she told the Kiwanis Club of Portland in 1997, while accepting a volunteerism award.

She held volunteer jobs throughout her years at Smith College. In the 1930s, when she and her late husband, Millard Peabody, lived outside Boston, she served on the board of the Students House, a home for low-income women who came to Boston to go to college.

During World War II, she volunteered for the Red Cross in Washington, where her husband worked at the time. And when she and her husband moved to Falmouth Foreside in 1951, she continued.

Historic preservation was vastly important to her, and she was national accreditation chairwoman for the National Society of Colonial Dames and a founder of Greater Portland Landmarks.

"When she had a cause, she was willing to commit herself totally," said Mary Lou Sprague, who knew Peabody for more than 30 years and suc-

"She started The AIDS Project and she is one of the founders of Peabody House," Lake said. "It was her vision to have a place like Peabody House."

Deborah Shields, executive director of the AIDS Lodging House and former executive director of The AIDS Project, remembered Peabody's work as well as her vision.

"She was out there," Shields said. "She would help with client lunches, she co-facilitated a couple of the support groups, she did a lot of fund raising."

Peabody visited residents of Peabody House weekly and, until the past few years, brought them homemade custards. She celebrated their birthdays and mourned their deaths.

Shields also said that Peabody, who traced her family lineage to the

Mayflower, "brought constituencies that wouldn't have come in otherwise, the, if you will, grande dames of Portland. . . . She just made it so much less scary and more palatable for people. Who could say 'no' to a nice, 90-year-old grandmother, talking about her grandson who had died from AIDS?"

And, Shields said, even when some people footed themselves into thinking the epidemic was over, Peabody was vigilant.

"She was never lulled into complacency," Shields said. "There are a lot of folks out there who say, 'We have drugs, it's treatable.' Well, the drugs have hideous side effects. A lot of people can't take them, they only last for so long in terms of suppressing the virus."

George Priou, executive director of The AIDS Project, offered similar thoughts.

He said many people believe that with new therapies, AIDS is not

*She visited residents of Peabody House weekly and brought them homemade custards. She celebrated their birthdays and mourned their deaths.*

deadly. He said that donations to AIDS charities are declining while people continue to become infected.

Peabody recognized that, he said. "She used to say there's a new generation every day that we have to educate," he said.

Lake, of Peabody House, noted that people still die from AIDS.

"We've had three deaths already this year at Peabody House," she said. "It's not like you can just take a pill and everything will be all better."

In a written statement, Andres Ives, executive director of AIDS Action in Washington, D.C., said that "in a time when Americans are supposedly complacent about AIDS, Frances showed the world that it is never too late to get involved in the fight. She will forever be linked to a countless number of individuals catapulted into the epidemic by the death of a loved one, and represents a growing number of people over the age of 50 being exposed and responding to the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS."

"Her 15 years of activism will be missed, but her spirit will be carried on in the lives of those touched by her pioneering work and dedication."

Staff Writer Joshua L. Weinstein can be contacted at 791-6368 or at jweinstein@pressherald.com



FRANCES WILSON PEABODY

1903-2001

**1903**  
Born in Washington, D.C.  
Grew up in Santa Fe, N.M.

**1925**  
Graduated from Smith College with a bachelor's degree in government and art history.

**1927**  
Married Millard S. Peabody. He ran the Massachusetts manufacturing firm of E.E. Taylor Shoe Company.

**1937**  
Taylor Shoe moved to Augusta. That same year, The Peabodys had three children stricken with polio. One daughter was bedridden for two years.

**1945**  
At the end of World War II, Mr. Peabody moved the rest of his operations to Freeport.

**1951**  
The family moved to Falmouth.

**1950s and 1960s**  
After raising her four children, Mrs. Peabody became involved in historic preservation and compiled by Beth Murphy, library assistant

Yet she was humble. A week ago, she had breakfast at her home with Portland's police chief, Michael Chitwood. Over muffins and coffee and fruit and toast, the two friends laughed and reminisced. They talked about her plans to attend her 77th college reunion next year and she told the chief, at his request, how she founded Peabody House. "She's got that certain laugh about her that just caught you, just hit you right in the heart," Chitwood said. "What a lady."

Peabody's life was marked by both great difficulties and great accomplishments.

After her first child, a daughter, was born, her second child, a son, died of crib death at 3 months old.

"In 1937," she said during her Kiwanis speech, "our three children came down with polio. We were very fortunate that only one, our oldest, was badly paralyzed. We learned that

preservation. She fought for the restoration of the Portland Museum of Art's McLellan-Sweat House and the historic Tate House in Portland's Stroudwater section.

**1962**  
Millard S. Peabody died.

**1970s and 1980s**  
Peabody was actively involved in Greater Portland Landmarks and the Maine Historical Society.

**1984**  
Peabody's 29-year-old grandson, Peter Vom Lehn, died of AIDS.

**1985**  
Helped found the AIDS Project.

**1994**  
Peabody House opened at 14 Orchard St. in Portland. It was named after Frances Peabody, one of its five founding trustees. It serves as a hospice for as many as six people in the advanced stages of AIDS.

**1998**  
Gov. Angus King declared April 18-25 as Frances Peabody Week.



Staff art

there was magic and strength that came from concerned, thoughtful family members and friends. When they heard about our daughter's condition, we received notes and telephone calls from all over the country from friends, even friends of friends who had never met us, assuring us that Charlotte would walk again."

After years of physical therapy and two operations, her daughter did, in fact, walk with braces and crutches.

Peabody is survived by four children, Charlotte L. Pauling of Geysersville, Calif.; Barbara B. Peabody of Albuquerque, N.M.; Millard S. Peabody Jr. and E. Louise Peabody, both of Southampton, N.Y.; eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Funeral arrangements were incomplete Tuesday night.

Staff Writer Joshua L. Weinstein can be contacted at 791-6368 or at jweinstein@pressherald.com

*Most people were afraid to discuss AIDS, and terrified to be associated with it. Peabody had no such fear.*

in earlier times - if you've ever been in her home, it was a beautifully restored Victorian home - when you think of how she grew up and where she grew up and the rather genteel circumstances. . . . and yet she became a social activist in the '80s and '90s with total determination and comfort. How many people do we have like that?"

Herman noted that Peabody's prestige removed some of the stigma from AIDS charities. "Frannie Peabody's life and late-in-life mission gave others permission to be AIDS activists," she said.

Peabody was lauded for her work. She was the 314th award recipient in former President Bush's daily Points of Light program. She held honorary doctorates of humane letters from the University of New England, St. Joseph's College and Bowdoin College. Former Gov. John R. McKernan proclaimed Nov. 30, 1990, "Frannie Peabody Day." Last year, the AIDS Action Council awarded her its National Leadership Award.

ceeded her as accreditation chairwoman for the National Society of Colonial Dames. "She was in there doing it. She didn't just sit by the side and not participate. . . . She was quite a lady - quite a dame."

In the 1990s, when she was in her 80s and 90s, she flew around the United States, speaking with chapters of Colonial Dames, advocating for the organization to become an accrediting agency for museum houses.

But she was best known for her work with AIDS.

When her grandson Peter Vom Lehn died from the disease, Peabody realized that Portland had no resources for people with AIDS. It was in the early days of the epidemic. Most people were afraid to discuss AIDS, and terrified to be associated with it. Peabody had no such fear.

She organized a luncheon at the Cumberland Club, a bastion of "respectable society." The AIDS Project, Maine's first agency dealing with AIDS, grew from that.

Peabody kept working. She founded Peabody House, a hospice for people with AIDS, which opened on Valentine's Day 1995.

"She just worked miracles," said U.S. Rep. Tom Allen, a Democrat from Portland who represents Maine's 1st Congressional District. "Somehow she had the ability to attract people to the cause and keep them motivated."

"Frannie spanned the ages," said Mary Herman, wife of Gov. Angus King. "Here's a woman who grew up