

The Young Woman's Home Association and Jessie Castle Roberts

Jessie Castle was born in 1871 in Chicago. Her father, George Castle, was a talented businessman who founded the Kohl-Castle Company. This company operated theaters and amusement houses ranging in taste from the Chicago Opera House and Haymarket Theater to more modest vaudeville venues. Jessie's mother and father divorced when Jessie was still a child. Jessie's mother remarried a Mr. Bennett and the family lived in Ohio until Jessie married Thomas Reed Roberts on July 18, 1900. The wedding announcement described Jessie as the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett.

The newly married couple made their home in Detroit. She had a particular interest in the Young Women's Home Association and in the YWCA, whose first home in Detroit was at the Young Woman's Home. When George Castle died in December, 1917, in Florida, he left the bulk of his estate, estimated at about \$1,000,000, to his wife and to Jessie. At that time Jessie was 46.

The Roberts at some time in their marriage began to live in the summer at Detroit's Statler Hotel; they wintered in California. In 1927 they moved to San Diego, where she was known as a philanthropist. Her obituary in the San Diego paper described her as an organizer and honorary member of the San Diego Philharmonic Association and the San Diego Symphony Orchestra.

She died August 30, 1934, after a short illness. She was 63. Her husband remarried the following year and moved to Hollywood, where he died in 1937 at the age of 76.

Jessie Castle Roberts' will provided for her estate to be divided into seven trusts to benefit named individuals. Each individual was to receive income of a specified amount, the highest being \$5000 annually. Beneficiaries of these trusts extended to children or grandchildren born during the lifetime of Mrs. Roberts. If there was additional income from each trust over and above what the named beneficiaries received, that money was to be divided into 6 parts and disbursed to Young Woman's Home Association, Crittenton Hospital, Children's Hospital and Harper Hospital (all in Michigan) and The Salvation Army and Resthaven Preventorium for Children in California.

When the named beneficiaries of one of these named trusts died, the trust itself was closed and divided among the six charities, and this has been the source of the majority of YWHA assets. In 1974 the Jessie Castle Roberts Fund of YWHA was over \$137,000 and accounted for more than half of the assets, even after the sale of the building.

The last transfer of assets that we have detailed records of was in 1984 upon the death of Cornelia Beckham, and amounted to nearly \$90,000. Since that time two other trusts have terminated and the stocks disbursed. The Zella F. Gray trust ended in 1994 and about \$32,000 was distributed to YWHA at that time. Florence Harbach died March 3, 2002, but we do not have records pertaining to that distribution. (Some of our financial records were lost in a flood, and the current trust manager, JPMorgan Chase, cannot access such old archived material without an account number.)

There is one named trust left for the benefit of two sisters, both in their eighties. The \$5000 annual income payment is divided between them, and the six charities receive any income over that amount.

At the death of the second sister the remaining principal and cash will be divided among the charities and the trust will be terminated.

Ann Nicholson, Historian

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