Biographical Sketch of Johns Hopkins

Johns Hopkins was born on May 19, 1795 on a tobacco plantation (“Whitehall”) in Anne Arundel County, Maryland to Samuel Hopkins and Hannah Janney. His first name, Johns (not John) was a family name derived from the name of his great-grandmother Margaret Johns who married Gerard Hopkins.

In 1807, the Hopkins family, who were members of the Society of Friends (Quakers), freed their slaves, which required that John had to discontinue his formal education in order to help out on the plantation.

In 1812, Johns went to Baltimore to work in the wholesale grocery business of his uncle, Gerard Hopkins. After seven years with his uncle, Johns Hopkins went into business with three of his brothers, forming the wholesale provision house, Hopkins Brothers. The firm shipped goods via Conestoga wagon to North Carolina and Virginia in exchange for whiskey, which was sold in Baltimore under the brand of Hopkins’ Best.

Johns Hopkins, made his great fortune by wisely investing his money in various ventures, most notably the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, of which he became a Director in 1847 and Chairman of the Finance Committee in 1855. He was also President of Merchant’s Bank and a Director of many other banks.

In 1867, he gave consideration to the disposition of his great wealth and, on August 24, 1867, he incorporated The Johns Hopkins University and The Johns Hopkins Hospital.

After his death on December 24, 1873, his will was probated, and his fortune of seven million dollars was divided equally between the two institutions that bear his name.