

The John Black Library Collection

Books donated from John Black's personal library may still be found today in the Saranac Lake Free Library. The books contain this bookplate and inscription:



"The mountain is Baker which looked down on John Black's years of curing ever filled with wide and varied reading. The tower above is Holder at Princeton -- John Black's university. The gun is of the kind he served in the War in France. The birch and pine are Adirondack trees that he loved. The shamrock and thistle represent his Scotch Irish ancestry. The buckeye is for Ohio, his native state."



Jessie Black with her children in 1909:
Robert, Roger, John (the oldest) and Donald.

In a Mother's Words

Jessie Baxter Black dedicated the room to her son in 1928, saying:

"The people here were so kind to us, the doctors, the people in the shops . . . I have continued to love this unique community in which he was so much interested, so frankly a health resort, the people taking it for granted that visitors are here because they are ill and being sympathetic. And that frankness and sympathetic understanding do so much to help the crushed and bewildered people who come."

"I wanted the room to be attractive, -- anything which bore the name of my beauty-loving son must be beautiful if we could make it so . . . And so I am hoping and longing that -- because John died -- this room, wrought to the last detail with the loving care and fidelity of one of his dear friends, will be a center from which will go more appreciation of what the doctors are to Saranac Lake and of what Saranac Lake can be to the people who have tuberculosis."

-- Adirondack Daily Enterprise, 1928

John Baxter Black

and the John Black Memorial Room of the Saranac Laboratory



HISTORIC SARANAC LAKE

89 Church Street, Suite 2
Saranac Lake, NY 12983
(518) 891-4606
www.historicsaranaclake.org



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John Baxter Black (1896-1923)

A Beloved Son

John Black attended Andover Academy and Princeton. He planned to work at the Ohio Brass Company of which his father, Frank Blymyer Black, was founder and president.

Then came the Great War, and in May of 1917, John Black sailed for France with the Princeton Unit to enter the American Field Service as a volunteer ambulance driver. Instead, he spent that summer on the Aisne front with the French camion service.

In October of 1917, John joined the American army at Paris. He was sent to the French Artillery School and was in active service in France until returning home ill with tuberculosis in May of 1918.

Sent to Saranac Lake for the fresh air cure in July of 1918, John and his mother stayed in the village for five years, renting three different houses.

By 1923 John was strong again. In May he went to Montreal for a final corrective surgery, expecting to go home cured. Tragically, John Black died on May 16, 1923, in Montreal, from infection following the surgery.

John was laid to rest near his family home in Mansfield, Ohio. His friend, the historian Alfred Donaldson, wrote the poem on John's gravestone:

“... I knew him in this battle of the porch,
Knew his poise, the bright
Intrepid smile that like a high-held torch
Helped others in the fight...”

The John Black Memorial Room



A 1928 photograph of the John Black Room, courtesy of the Adirondack Collection of the Saranac Lake Free Library

The Architect

Noted architect and friend from Princeton, Robert W. McLaughlin, Jr., designed the addition. McLaughlin graduated in 1921, after serving with the U.S. Navy during the World War. Diagnosed with TB, he was sent to Saranac Lake in 1922.

Working with G. G. Symes, McLaughlin completed the John Black room in 1928. In 1934, also as a gift of the Black family, he added the second floor offices and labs under the auspices of Holden McLaughlin Associates. Robert McLaughlin went on to a distinguished post as director of the School of Architecture at Princeton from 1952-1965.

The Portrait

The portrait of John Black pictured on the front was painted from a photograph in 1928. Courtesy of the Trudeau Institute, the portrait has been returned to its original location above the fireplace in the John Black Room.



The Saranac Laboratory today. The John Black Room and the second floor addition are on the left. Historic Saranac Lake has substantially completed the John Black Room and is establishing a history center in the building.

The Princeton Connection

One perceptive visitor to the John Black Room remarked that the space “looks like Princeton.” Indeed, the stylistic similarities are no accident. The room was designed by the Princeton architect Robert McLaughlin, and the Black family had close ties to Princeton. Two of John's younger brothers, Donald and Roger, followed him there. In the next generation, five of Frank and Jessie's seven grandchildren attended Princeton. After John's death, the Blacks dedicated a stained glass Tiffany window at the Princeton Chapel in his name.

Other Princeton contemporaries of John Black who volunteered for service in France include writers F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edmund Wilson, and John Peale Bishop.

Created by Mary Hotaling and Amy Catania, 2008, with research assistance of Sally Svenson, and information from Princeton University and John Baxter Black II. The family photograph is also courtesy of Mr. Black.