

A black and white portrait of an elderly woman, Frances W. "Frannie" Peabody, seated in a dark, ornate chair. She has short, wavy, light-colored hair and is wearing glasses. Her right hand is raised to her chin, and her left hand rests on her lap. She is dressed in a dark suit jacket over a light-colored, vertically pleated blouse. A pearl necklace is visible around her neck, and a white ribbon is pinned to her jacket. The background consists of light-colored, patterned curtains.

**Frances W. "Frannie" Peabody**

*Frannie Peabody turned personal tragedy into a crusade to reach out to gay men and to benefit people with AIDS.*



**F**rannie Peabody was born in 1903, but her life as an AIDS activist began in 1983 when her grandson was diagnosed with the disease. At that time AIDS was still considered a marginal disease that only affected people at the fringes of “respectable society.” Mrs. Peabody worked passionately to bring AIDS into the mainstream and made us see that this devastating disease can touch any life, as it had touched hers so deeply. She will long be remembered as a founder of the Peabody House hospice and The AIDS Project, dual organizations that now comprise the Portland-based Frannie Peabody Center.

Upon returning to Maine from her grandson’s funeral in 1984, Mrs. Peabody turned her grief into action. She recognized that Maine was completely unprepared for the inevitable arrival of the epidemic sweeping the nation. In 1985, she joined a small support group of gay men in the basement of a local church. As an 82-year-old woman, she worried that she might not be welcome, but

she was – with open arms. Together, they started The AIDS Project, an organization providing prevention information, case-management services and advocacy.

Despite the promising development of The AIDS Project, Mrs. Peabody felt compelled to do more. She found that many of the patients she counseled and comforted were ostracized by their families and friends. Even when family members were involved, as was the case with her grandson, she saw how incredibly challenging it was to provide care in the advanced stages of the disease. It became clear that many men and women in the community lacked the emotional and financial resources to be cared for with dignity during the final days of their lives. She dreamed of providing hospice care for these people, but for that she needed more funding.



When Mrs. Peabody called for help with her vision, the community took note. As a member of the National Society of Colonial Dames

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and Greater Portland Landmarks, and the recipient of many community and national honors, she was in a position to organize a luncheon for Portland’s most influential and powerful leaders. Mrs. Peabody talked frankly and made her guests see that AIDS wasn’t just a “gay issue.” The event marked a turning point for AIDS

activism in the State as businesspeople, media figures, and members of Portland’s oldest blue-blood families rallied to the cause. Five years later, Peabody House, the only residential care facility in Maine for people with AIDS, admitted its first residents.



## **Frances W. “Frannie” Peabody**

Since its doors opened on Valentine’s Day 1995, Peabody House has been a sanctuary for many people in need. Mrs. Peabody described it as “a place where people can go and feel safe and have a homelike atmosphere...where they can relax and feel wanted and loved and cared for.” The mission of the Peabody House is to provide holistic care, supportive services, housing, and education to people living with and affected by AIDS. The renovated three-story house can accommodate up to six residents at a time and includes a guest room so visitors can stay close-by. More than 150 volunteers join the professional staff in providing compassionate quality care.

Mrs. Peabody was involved in a variety of charitable causes for most of her 98 years, but nothing touched her heart the way her work with AIDS patients did. While she didn’t set out to be a role model, she became one of Maine’s finest; bringing public attention to a misunderstood epidemic and inspiring people to become personally involved – by reaching out to gay men and others disproportionately affected; by offering hands-on care, services, prevention education, fundraising, and friendship to people living with AIDS. Mrs. Peabody stayed active in Peabody House and the community until just days before her death on June 26, 2001. She served as Grand Marshal of that year’s Portland Pride Parade, a smiling example of how much we can accomplish when we work together as a community.