

## **Helen Gilman Noyes & Emily Gilman Noyes NSCDA-MN Founders**

Sisters Helen Gilman Noyes and Emily Gilman Noyes were among the founders of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Minnesota. Eldest sister Helen was appointed by national NSCDA president Mrs. Howard Townsend as chairman of the Minnesota group when the group was forming. In March 1896 Helen called a meeting of fourteen women at her home, and by October they had adopted articles of incorporation, by-laws, and had set annual dues at \$1. By the end of November, Helen had resigned as chair due to ill health, but recovered by 1904, when she was elected NSCDA-MN's second president. During her four years as president, she led the group as it turned from study of colonial history to providing education in local history and began the tradition of giving by the chapter to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, which continued for over fifty years.

Helen and Emily were daughters of Winthrop and Abia Gilman. Their father, Winthrop Gilman, was born in Marietta, Ohio in 1808. Educated in Philadelphia, he began his career in New York City, traveling to cities in the west for business. After his marriage in 1834, he settled in Alton, Illinois, where his first five children, including Helen, were born. Helen, born in 1843, was the fifth of 13 children, and was the eldest daughter. When abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy was murdered in Alton during a riot in 1837, Winthrop's warehouse burned down, which began a reversal of fortune for the family. In 1840 his firm, Godfrey, Gilman & Co, failed. He moved to St. Louis and started a wholesale grocery and shipping business and then to New York City, where his last six children, including Emily, were born.

Helen Abia Gilman married Daniel Rogers Noyes of Lyme, Connecticut, in December 1866 in the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City. In 1868 the young couple moved to Minnesota, where Daniel went into business as a wholesale druggist with partner Edward H. Cutler. The business did well and the family moved to the fashionable Summit Avenue neighborhood, residing at 366 Summit. There Helen had six children, five of whom survived.

Helen was involved in numerous organizations, such as House of Hope Church, Town and Country Club,

Alton, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River from the slaveholding state of Missouri, had been settled by pro-slavery Southerners. When Elijah Lovejoy moved there from St. Louis and started his anti-slavery newspaper, the *Alton Observer*, he quickly faced opposition. Lovejoy stored his printing press in Winthrop Gilman's warehouse. On the night of 7 November 1837, a pro-slavery mob set fire to the warehouse. When Lovejoy fired shots attempting to defend it, individuals in the mob returned fire. Lovejoy was shot five times and killed. When his brother pushed for having the murder prosecuted, it was revealed that several jurors and the judge had been a part of the mob, and the perpetrators were found not guilty. John Quincy Adams said Lovejoy's murder gave "a shock as of an earthquake throughout the continent."



Figure 1 D.R. and Helen Noyes home at 366 Summit, where the first NSCDA-MN meeting was held. It was demolished in 1925.

Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

Women’s Work Exchange, New Century Club, Harvest Festival, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Both Helen and Daniel were involved with the St. Paul Society for the Relief of the Poor for over twenty years. They served on the inaugural board in 1881, and in 1898, Daniel became Treasurer of the board. The Society included a free employment bureau for adults and a sewing school for girls aged 5-15 years old. To be placed with “good families where they usually are advanced as servants of the better types,” the girls from the sewing school had to be “efficient at sewing, understand

the care of children, and be good housekeepers.” Each of the 200+ students could keep the garments they made out of donated cloth for the price of five cents each.

Within a few years of arriving in Minnesota, Daniel Noyes invited his younger brother Charles Phelps Noyes to join him in the business. Charles had gone to work as a bookkeeper in 1860 at the age of 18 for Winthrop Gilman’s company, Gilman, Son & Co. in New York City. However, he soon left New York to start a dry goods store in the west and spent four years in Port Huron, Michigan. When Daniel invited him to join the business in St. Paul, Charles agreed. He arrived with his wife Emily - Helen’s younger sister and the daughter of his former employer.



A discussion group of serious-minded St. Paul women exploring social and cultural issues. Emily Noyes is on the right; Helen Gilman Noyes (Mrs. Daniel Noyes) is seated at left at the table. Fredericks & Koester photograph, Minnesota Historical Society.

Emily Hoffman Gilman, born in 1854, was the tenth child of Winthrop and Abia Gilman. Emily married Charles Noyes in New York on 1 September 1874. Four of her siblings had died in infancy and she lost two of her six children as well.

When Emily and Charles first arrived in St. Paul, they lived on Dayton Avenue, near where the Cathedral is currently located, and had the first two of their six children, Julia Gilman Noyes and Katherine

McCurdy Noyes, there. One cold winter's night, fire destroyed an entire row of houses, theirs included, and the family was driven out. In 1887, they had a house built at 89 Virginia Avenue. Designed by noted architect Cass Gilbert, it still stands and is featured in St. Paul walking tours today.

Noyes Brothers continued to do well and the sons of both brothers joined it. The Noyes brothers were also early investors in St. Paul companies such as West Publishing and St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance and served on numerous boards. Charles served on the Executive Committee of the Minnesota Historical Society from 1873 until his death in 1920, and was President from 1915-1918. He co-authored a family history book of the Noyes and Gilman families, *Noyes Gilman Ancestry*, published in 1907, with his wife Emily.

Emily served as President of the Women's Welfare League, of which she was a founder, in 1913, and Vice President of the Minnesota Women Suffrage Association. Once women succeeded in getting the vote, Emily became a founding member of the Ramsey County League of Women Voters. She is one of the twenty-five Minnesota women commemorated on the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Memorial on the grounds of the Minnesota State Capitol.



Figure 2 Winthrop Gilman, 1860

Helen and Emily's father Winthrop Gilman died in 1884. After Winthrop's death, the widowed Abia Gilman lived with various of her children around the country. She died in Washington DC in 1902. Helen Gilman Noyes died 10 February 1917 and Emily Gilman Noyes died 9 September 1930.

### **Colonial Ancestor**

The Honorable John Gilman (1624-1708) was born in Hingham, England, and came to America as a youth of fourteen years with his family on the *Diligent* in 1638. His parents were Edward and Mary Gilman; five siblings came in addition to John. From Hingham, Massachusetts, John Gilman moved to Exeter, New Hampshire, where he and his brother Edward had a lumber business. He served on committees that laid out the boundaries of Exeter for several years beginning in 1667 and was named lieutenant in the Exeter, New Hampshire militia in 1669. When New Hampshire separated from Massachusetts in 1680, John became councillor and served in the House of Representatives, becoming Speaker in 1693. He died in 1708 at the age of 84.

Other descendants of John Gilman in the NSCDA-MN include Agnes Blake Davis, Jessie Gilman Ordway, Sally Ordway Irvine, Alex Ordway Bjorklund, and Harriet Davis Weyerhaeuser. The Dames in John Gilman's lineage descend from three different children. Agnes Blake Davis descends from John Gilman's daughter Elizabeth Gilman Ladd. Jessie

Gilman Ordway and her granddaughters Sally Ordway Irvine and Alex Ordway Bjorklund descend from a second daughter, Sarah Gilman Dudley. The remaining Dames Gilman descendants, Helen Gilman Noyes, Emily Gilman Noyes, and Harriet Davis Weyerhaeuser, descend from John Gilman's son Nicholas Gilman.

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