

NSCDA-West Virginia Founders

In the first E-Dispatch from NSCDA, members were reminded of our national society's beginning: *On a spring afternoon on April 8, 1891, 30 friends and relatives joined cousins Fanny Crawford and Anne Wharton at Fanny's home on Locust Street in Philadelphia. Their aim: to discuss forming an organization of women that paid tribute to our colonial ancestors and to their courage in laying the foundations of our country. On that spring afternoon, The National Society was born!* A year later, the idea of a society with historical and patriotic purposes had caught fire all around America.

In West Virginia, the patriotic fire was lighted by two dynamic sisters - Henrietta Cotton Wilson and Nannie Cotton Woodman - daughters of prominent Charleston, West Virginia physician Dr. Joseph Cotton and wife Sarah Fitzhugh Cotton. Henrietta was the leader who gave the call to 11 other women. The twelve ladies who joined Henrietta at her Charleston home on April 21, 1900 were enthusiastic and inspired to preserve what was valuable in the nation's history! These daring West Virginia FOUNDERS took the necessary steps for incorporation, publishing a Constitution and By-Laws, and holding their first Annual Meeting in 1905.

SARAH PENDLETON RENSSELAER ELECTED FIRST PRESIDENT

(MRS. EUGENE VAN RENSSELAER)

Sarah Pendleton Van Rensselaer from Berkley Springs was elected the first president. Henrietta assisted her, as vice president, conducting most of the meetings in Charleston because of Sarah's travel distance. The early meetings were held in homes, with later meetings held at the Parish House of the Episcopal Church and the YWCA. Sarah was devoted to her office for 12 years.



HENRIETTA COTTON WILSON – SECOND DAMES PRESIDENT

FIRST LADY OF WEST VIRGINIA (1885-1890)

(MRS. E. WILLIS WILSON)

According to historian Julia Barber, by 1913, membership soon grew to 130 because of Henrietta's "personal magnetism, patriotic zeal and leadership skills." Society records indicate that Henrietta possessed the rare qualities of a presiding officer including tact and dignity, an unfailing humor and a gift as a raconteur. She further brought distinction to our state and society as the First Lady of West Virginia as wife of the ninth Governor, E. Willis Wilson. Henrietta served as Colonial Dames vice president from 1900-1912, and president from 1912-1915, which office she held until her death.

*A doll representing First Lady Henrietta Cotton Wilson wearing her inaugural ball gown is featured in the West Virginia Museum's Doll Collection.

THE FOUNDERS' PATRIOTIC AND HISTORICAL PROJECTS

- The TWELVE CHARTER MEMBERS immediately initiated plans to establish historical markers around the state to honor the heroic patriots who risked their lives to build the early forts that resulted in western Virginia settlements. The first Colonial Dames marker was a sundial erected along the banks of the Kanawha River honoring Charles Clendenin, one of the pioneers who founded Charleston.
- The Dames offered prizes for essays in one-room schools on historic and colonial subjects to cultivate in youth an interest and appreciation of colonial times.
- At meetings, the Dames historian or a Dames member read essays about various colonial settlements such as the founding of Jamestown. Henrietta Cotton Wilson read a diary of her grandfather's overland trip from Boston to Marietta, Ohio; another member read a paper on frontier patriot Ann Bailey who helped the settlers in colonial Charleston.
- To promote good citizenship, the Dames prepared 10 traveling libraries containing books and writings to help the immigrant population learn about America, the Constitution and democracy. Their purpose was to make new immigrants feel welcome in our great nation.
- The West Virginia FOUNDERS funded all the national projects of NSCDA including the George Washington Memorial, the Sulgrave Manor Restoration Fund (ancestral home of George Washington), the National Red Cross, War Relief efforts, the education of Indian girls, aid to French orphans, as well as many other patriotic and humanitarian projects.
- As a communication tool, the historian prepared a circular letter each year that was sent to the national organization. Copies of these letters were distributed to all the state societies setting forth the work of the various societies.



NANNIE COTTON WOODMAN

THIRD WEST VIRGINIA COLONIAL DAMES PRESIDENT SERVED 21 YEARS

(MRS. FRANK WOODMAN)

Nannie Cotton Woodward was elected president following her sister's death in 1915 to carry on the work of the FOUNDERS. During her presidency, all the Colonial Dames monuments commemorating the settlers were placed at key sites in West Virginia. Serving for 21 years as president, she was named Honorary and Advisory Life President by the West Virginia Society. She retired from the presidency in 1936 at the age of 80. The West Virginia Society honored her with this tribute: *With each succeeding year she has become more endeared to us. She has inspired much of our pleasurable and ever-growing achievement. She is known for her marked executive ability, her trust and faith in humanity, her exemplary character, her honesty of purpose, her unselfish kindness and helpfulness. She has always been able to broadly interpret the relations of the government to its people. She often took from her own purse to support projects of the State and National Societies.*

When Nannie retired from the presidency in 1936 at the age of 80, the course of work established by the 12 FOUNDERS OF 1900 and the members was complete.

*Mr. and Mrs Frank Woodman lived in a Queen Anne style house on Kanawha Boulevard built in 1891 that is now occupied by a law firm. (See "Historic Houses of Charleston" in *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*.)



ISABELLE (BELLE) GOSHORN MACCORKLE

COLONIAL DAMES VICE PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY OF WEST VIRGINIA

Isabelle (Belle) Goshorn MacCorkle (1851-1923) served NSCDA-West Virginia as vice president from 1911-1912. Through her mother's lineage, Belle joined the Colonial Dames of America in the early 1890s and also joined The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in The State of West Virginia. Her mother's family arrived in Plymouth Colony in 1630 and later settled in Martha's Vineyard. Her father, W.F. Goshorn, produced a successful dry goods company located on the banks of the Kanawha River across the street from the Kanawha County Court House. Her grandfather owned the Goshorn Ferry and both businesses were located near Goshorn Street. Belle's Uncle Jacob Goshorn was the first mayor of Charleston. Belle had traveled the world before marrying William A. MacCorkle on October 19, 1881. When he was elected Governor of West Virginia in 1893, she graciously served as First Lady through 1897. The MacCorkles were the first to reside in the state Governor's Mansion located in downtown Charleston. After her husband's tenure as governor, they enjoyed traveling and collected items from many countries for the mansion they would build in 1905 called Sunrise. She died at their home Sunrise on September 12, 1923. In Governor MacCorkle's book, *The Recollections of Fifty Years*, he describes his marriage to Belle as a "happy union." They had two children, William Goshorn MacCorkle and Isabelle Brooks MacCorkle. Belle has three great-grandchildren – John MacCorkle, Ike Smith, and Chris Smith – all currently living in Charleston.

*A doll representing Isabelle (Belle) Goshorn MacCorkle wearing her inaugural gown as First Lady is featured in the West Virginia State Museum's Doll Collection

The FOUNDERS and members from 1900-1936 established a foundation for the future of the Colonial in West Virginia. FOUNDERS research is a continuing project of The West Virginia Colonial Dames.

TWELVE NSCDA-West Virginia FOUNDERS (1900)

Henrietta Cotton Wilson called the 12 charter members together for the first meeting of the West Virginia Society at her home in Charleston on April 21, 1900. Sarah Pendleton Rensselaer from Berkley Springs was elected president. The TWELVE FOUNDERS established a Constitution and ByLaws with assistance from the Virginia society. The FOUNDERS hailed from various parts of the state including Charleston, Wheeling, Lewisburg, Romney, Parkersburg, Richlands, Page, Bramwell, Morgantown, Elkins, Buchannon, Martinsburg, Clarksburg, Fairmont, Lost Creek and Berkley Springs. By 1913, the membership had grown to 130.

- Sarah Pendleton Rensselaer (Mrs. Van Rensselaer)
Berkeley Springs, West Virginia (died May 9, 1923)
- Henrietta Fitzhugh Cotton (Mrs. E. Willis Wilson)
Charleston, West Virginia (died January 26, 1915)
- Minnie Burdette Walker (Mrs. Andrew Walker)
New York, New York
- Sallie Aston Cotton Donnally (Mrs. William Boyd Donnally)
Charleston, West Virginia
- Mary Louise Kellar Markell (Mrs. Frank Markell)
Araby, Maryland
- Mary Clarkson Langley (Mrs. Augustus L. Langley)
Charleston, West Virginia (died May 10, 1929)
- Ellen Frances Coolidge Daniels (Mrs. Frank Jacob Daniels)
Charleston, West Virginia (died June 16, 1924)
- Sallie Ann Dorsey Price (Mrs. George Edmund Price)

Charleston, West Virginia

- Nannie Maria Cotton Woodman (Mrs. Frank Woodman)

Charleston, West Virginia

- Mrs. Samuel L. Flournoy

Charleston, West Virginia

- Gertrude Venable Thayer (Mrs. Garland Todd Thayer)

Charleston, West Virginia

- Miriam W. Donnally

Charleston, West Virginia (died April 11, 1915)

*From Colonial Dames Archives (Records of 1913)

*The NSCDA-West Virginia Website Committee will continue researching the
FOUNDERS OF NSCDA-West Virginia.