

First Lady of Preservation

DAVID M. GRABITSKE

When Sarah Jane Sibley, wife of governor Henry H. Sibley, agreed to head Minnesota's branch of the national effort to save Mount Vernon, the estate of George Washington in Virginia, she launched the state's first historic preservation campaign. In 1858 Minnesota was in its infancy, and many roadblocks loomed in her path. Personal factors and forces far beyond her control would make success elusive. Her effort to raise money for preservation shows just how closely the new state was tied to national events and crises.

Interest in historic preservation in the United States was, at first, very low. Thomas Jefferson, for example, thought colonial buildings reflected the nation's architectural immaturity; replacing

Sarah Steele Sibley, Minnesota's "first lady of preservation," about 1864; (below) visitors enjoying a restored Mount Vernon, about 1890



them was to be encouraged. During the War of 1812, however, Americans began to look for solace and strength in the places associated with their first war with Great Britain. The tide of feelings welling up from the War of 1812 centered on patriotism, and historic preservation followed suit. In 1816 citizens saved Pennsylvania's Old State House, restyled "Independence Hall," from threatened demolition. Through the rest of the nineteenth century, successful preservation often depended on three factors: patriotism, women's leadership, and private initiative.¹

These factors were key to the campaign to rescue Mount Vernon. In 1853 Ann Pamela Cunningham, a South Carolinian, organized the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) to save, restore, and preserve the tomb and estate of George Washington. The dilapidated site was then in the hands of John A. Washington, the founding father's great-grandnephew, a slaveholder who was hosting tourists at the plantation. Cunningham initially organized a small group of women, mostly from Virginia and Georgia, to rescue the property not only from ruin but also from the threat that northern capitalists might purchase it for a resort. Soon, however, Cunningham realized that northern women wanted to be included—and the organization needed their help. As the contentious issue of slavery resisted resolution, the preservation effort matured into a cause with the added purpose of healing the nation's sectional rift

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Patriotic imagery drawing on historic preservation from the MVLA's August 1858 issue of the monthly Mount Vernon Record

through a patriotic endeavor headed by women—who were thought to be, by nature, above politics.

In 1856 the group, by then called the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union, gained a charter from the Virginia Assembly so that it could enter into a contract and hold title to the estate. John Washington had set the price for the mansion, tomb, outbuildings, and 200 acres at \$200,000 (equivalent to \$4.1 million today). The women increased their fundraising goal by an additional \$300,000 (\$6.25 million) for restoration and preservation costs.²

Cunningham then set about building her nationwide organization. She became the head, or regent, of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. Working with a small personal staff, she appointed suitable women as vice-regents to direct fundraising in their respective states. Each vice-

regent, in turn, appointed "Lady Managers" to assist her in whatever towns, counties, and localities she deemed necessary. In April 1858 the MVLA signed a contract with John Washington and made a down payment of \$18,000 on the estate.

Later that year, Cunningham's secretary learned from a Pennsylvanian living in Minnesota that "Mrs. Henry H. Sibley, wife of the governor of the State is admirably qualified for the office" of vice-regent. The unnamed gentleman was then asked to offer her the position. Sarah Steele Sibley was then 35 years old, the mother of four living children, and the wife of Henry Sibley since 1843. Her social position, education, and family connections qualified her for the job of vice-regent. Even before becoming First Lady, she was an acknowledged leader in the early society around Mendota, where her family lived. Her friends included wives of Minnesota's most prominent and influential men: Mary Bronson Le Duc, Mathilda Whitall Rice, and Anna Jenks Ramsey. Sarah's family also provided her with impressive, patriotic credentials. Her father and uncles had served in the American Revolution, and her siblings offered important local connections in business, politics, and society. In addition, Sarah's education made her articulate, well organized, and confident. She had learned in childhood to be generous with her time and talents and to govern her passions with Christian morality. She was well liked for her generosity, pleasant demeanor, and virtuous life—all necessary tools for charitable fundraising.³

Sarah accepted the position with typical nineteenth-century disinter-

est, writing to Cunningham: “Among the ladies of St. Paul you could have found many more efficient co-workers with you than myself, but I feel too deep an interest in the great and particular enterprise . . . to decline to do what I can to promote its success.” She optimistically added, “Every Minnesotian will be prompt to respond, to the extent of his or her ability, to a call for pecuniary aid.”⁴

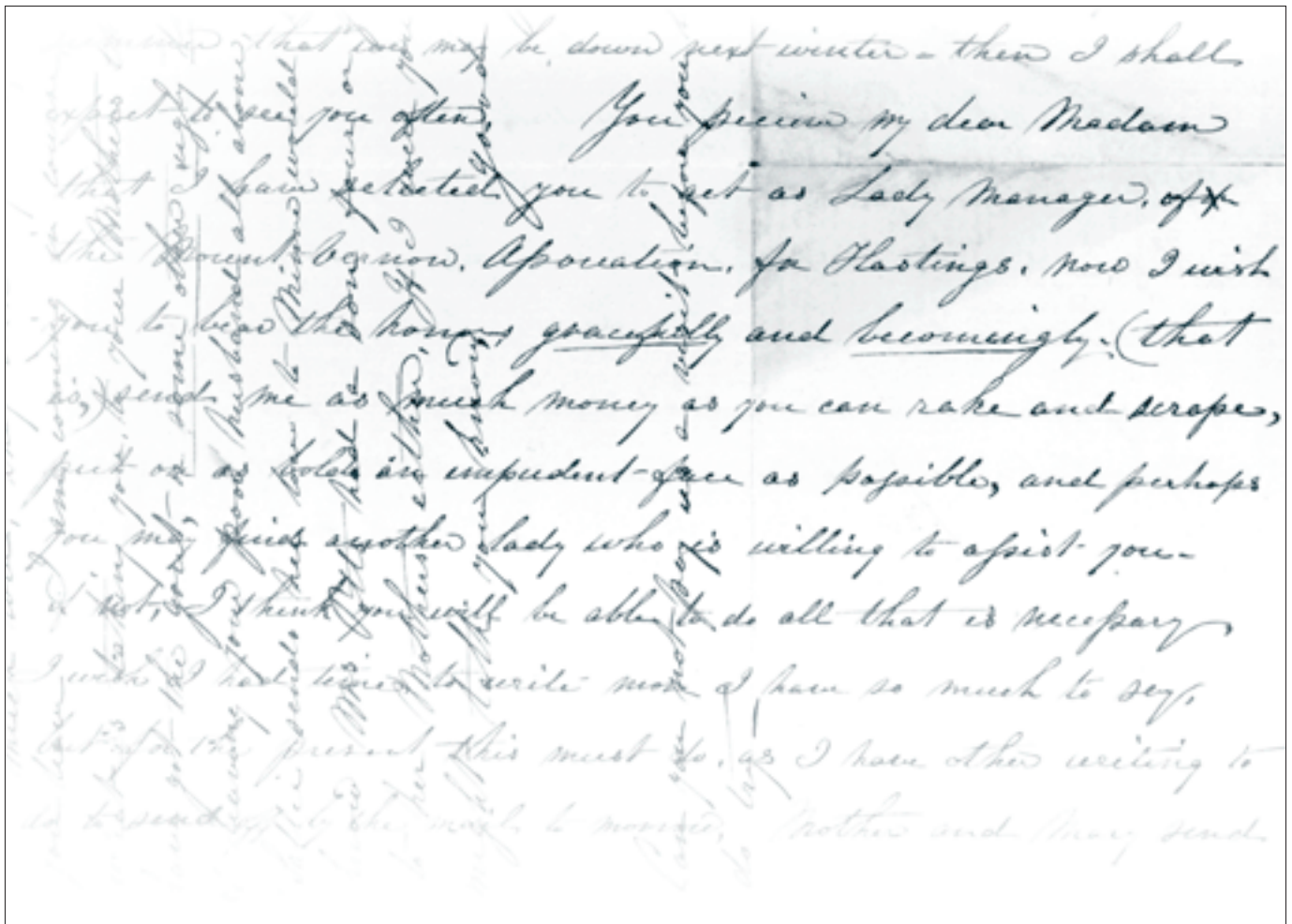
Thus began the preservation movement in Minnesota. Presciently, Sarah’s note hinted at one circumstance that would directly affect her success. The Sibleys lived in Mendota, near Fort Snelling and the early center of civilian culture in the area. By the mid-1850s, however, this town had been eclipsed by newcomers like St. Paul, six miles down and across the Mississippi River. As vice-regent, Sarah would have to overcome her distance from likely

donors. Other obstacles faced her, as well. Her foremost enemy was the lingering economic depression resulting from the Panic of 1857, when the land market crashed, banks closed, and hard currency all but vanished. Too, the image of Mount Vernon as a slave plantation overshadowed it as an object of charity, a major stumbling block to donations in Minnesota as throughout the North. Citizens had just as much difficulty then as now in distinguishing worthiness for preservation from veneration. In addition, Sarah’s cause faced opposition on account of her Democratic governor-husband’s policies and actions in an era of rising Republican strength and a faltering economy. None of these problems would compare to her struggle with a deadly ailment that ultimately stopped the Mount Vernon effort in Minnesota for 20 years.⁵

The first months of Sarah’s administration were spent appointing lady managers. By April, she told Cunningham, she had contacted 75 women, explaining that she had to appoint more women than was customary “since our counties are large and sparsely inhabited.” To her disappointment, only one-third responded, although most of these accepted. Among the appointees was Mary Le Duc. Sarah told her friend in Hastings, “I wish you to bear the honors *gracefully* and *becomingly*. (that is send me as much money as you can rake and scrape).” Mary’s husband William noted to Henry Sibley later that spring that “Mrs. LeD. is just now Exercised upon the Mt. Vernon association quest,” taking in \$20 that month. Another friend, Ann Loomis North, however, refused to serve, writing that she “must conscientiously and respect-



Burgeoning St. Paul, 1859



Page 2 of Sarah's letter to Mary Le Duc, asking her help in fundraising—and demonstrating Sarah's mastery of the difficult art of cross-writing, a paper-saving skill taught to both girls and boys of her era

fully decline. . . . I can give no aid to such an object without the assurance that it should no longer be a slave plantation." North may well have declined for an additional reason: Her husband, John W., secretary of the Minneapolis and Cedar Valley Railroad, was frustrated with Governor Sibley's opposition to the Five Million Loan—a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would stimulate railroad growth and the state's depressed economy. North blamed the governor for the railroad's troubles.⁶

While appointing lady managers, Sarah initiated a publicity campaign to coincide with Washington's birthday in 1859. The February 19 *Pioneer*

and *Democrat* printed a letter from Cunningham that spelled out the MVLA's successes and fundraising goals. Sarah then published a newspaper appeal to "The Ladies of Minnesota" saying that although eastern women had started the project, "those of Minnesota will not be backward in following their noble example." She extended the call to include the men of "military companies, Masonic lodges, and all other societies and organizations." Acknowledging the economic climate, Sarah assured everyone that "the smallest offering will be thankfully received." To prove the cause's legitimacy, she announced that the organization had a statewide advisory board of substantial men.⁷

Sarah coordinated her appeal with the Washington's birthday festivities planned by the St. Paul Mercantile Library Association, which sponsored regular lectures and agreed to make this day a benefit for Mount Vernon. Although originally scheduled for the evening of February 22, the event was hastily moved to 3 P.M. to accommodate the Pioneer Guard militia company. The guardsmen had just received new uniforms and were eager to show them off at a ball that evening. Moving the patriotic exercise to midday gave the Guard an additional chance to parade.⁸

Patriotic decorations, flags, and evergreen boughs lined the chancel of Rev. John Mattock's First Presby-

terian Church at the corner of St. Peter and St. Anthony Streets. Above the pulpit was a large portrait of George Washington encircled with boughs, below which read "Mount Vernon." Promptly at 3 P.M. a patriotic air was played, and then Rev. Edward Duffield Neill arose to speak the invocation and prayer. John B. Sanborn, president of the library association, read Washington's Farewell Address.⁹

Then came the main event. James Wickes Taylor, secretary of the Minnesota and Pacific Rail Road Company, delivered an oration in his "well known forcible and vigorous style," according to the *St. Paul Weekly Minnesotian*. He was originally to speak on the life and character of Washington, a talk similar to one that former Massachusetts Governor Edward Everett was giving throughout the North, the proceeds of which would benefit the MVLA. Instead, Taylor devoted his time to "Washington as the Representative Man of the West." He concluded that Washington's integrity was the glue that bound the geographically diverse union together. The Philharmonic Society closed the program with an ode by local poet Dewitt C. Cooley, set to the melody of the "Star Spangled Banner."

The library association raised \$70 for the Mount Vernon fund from the sale of 50-cent admission tickets and entrusted the sum to Sarah to remit to Edward Everett. The association, like many northern groups, did not want the perception that it supported a slave plantation in Old Virginia and thus "laundered" its donation by funneling it through Everett. The orator, who traveled the North giving his Washington speech 137 times between 1856 and 1860, firmly believed that supporting the preserva-

tion project would promote national unity and heal sectional discord. Sarah sent the donation to him on the first anniversary of Minnesota's statehood, May 11, 1859.

In June 1859 Sarah published another appeal for funds in the *Pioneer and Democrat*, reminding readers that the upcoming Independence Day was "peculiarly appropriate for soliciting aid." Although the infant state had been "embarrassed, and almost crushed . . . by the financial crisis," she chided: "Shall it be said that Minnesota has failed to do her part for the promotion of so sacred an object?" This notice also named the members of the male advisory board, a list that testified to Sarah's ability to engender cooperation. Her husband's bitter enemy within the Democratic Party, Daniel A. Robertson, served alongside future Republican governors John B. Sanborn and Henry A. Swift. Also included were some of Sibley's business contacts—Orange Curtis, Richard Chute, Alexis Bailly, and Martin McLeod—and family friends such as John S. Prince and William Le Duc.¹⁰ Nevertheless, building on the goodwill and patriotic feelings generated by the birthday observance proved difficult.

Throughout the summer, Sarah published regular notices of George Washington-related items in the *Pioneer and Democrat* to keep the project before the public. From the beginning, however, the campaign did not garner universal approval, as newspapers statewide noted. Republican organs opposed to Henry Sibley, such as the *Stillwater Messenger*,

Minnesota's contribution to the cause, printed in the October 1859 Mount Vernon Record

Minnesota.	
Vice Regent, Mrs. SARAH J. SIBLEY.	
COLLECTED BY The VICE REGENT.	
<i>St. Paul.</i>	
Dr. C. W. Bomp,	\$15.00
Mr. C. H. Oakes,	5.00
" Lamson,	1.00
" I. C. Don howe,	1.00
Mrs. R. W. Johnson,	5.00
" Mary Neill,	3.00
" Sarah J. Sibley,	3.00
(Mendota)	3.00
Total,	\$33.00
RECEIVED THROUGH Hon. E. EVERETT.	
From St. Paul Mercantile Library Association, \$70 00	
Proceeds of a Festival at Stillwater, by the following Lady Managers:—	
Mrs. C. H. Butler,	\$100.00
" Wm. Holcombe,	
" H. R. Murdock,	
" Sociate Nelson,	
" Harvey Wilson,	
" A. I. Van Vorhes,	
" Gold. I. Curtis,	
" W. C. Hempstead,	
COLLECTED BY Mrs. R. MARVIN,	
<i>Lady Manager.</i>	
<i>St. Paul.</i>	
Wm. C. Gray,	\$10.00
Mrs. R. Marvin,	1.00
E. Ellsworth,	1.75
(Canon Falls City)	
<i>Mendota.</i>	
Mrs. Mary McCollom,	2.00
Mr. John Curbaugh,	1.00
" S. G. Graham,	1.00
" Gilbert Graham,	1.00
" Neil Graham,	1.00
" Angus McDougall,	1.00
(Canada)	
H. H. Sibley,	9.25
Mrs. I. R. Lawrence,	1.00
(St. Anthony)	
Total,	\$30.00
COLLECTED BY Mrs. MARY E. LE DUC.	
<i>Hastings.</i>	
Mrs. S. Adams,	\$1.00
" E. B. Allen,	1.00
" W. G. Le Duc,	1.00
Miss Ellen Center,	1.00
Charles Ennis,	1.00
L. S. Follitt,	1.00
Mrs. I. D. North,	1.00
" H. A. Monser,	1.00
Miss F. Ainsworth,	1.00
W. G. Le Duc,	1.00
H. B. Plant,	1.00
S. R. Carri,	1.00
Total,	\$12.00
From Mrs. C. H. Berry, (Winona) \$5 00	
Sum Total,	\$250.00

Mount Vernon Record.

Devoted to the Purchase and Restoration of Washington's Home.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA, AUGUST, 1859.

NO. 2.



A NATIONAL ODE.

INSPIRED BY PERMISSION TO HON. EDWARD EVERETT.

Written by H. A. Purdie.

Shall crown him chief among the People's lords,
Though crowns he did disdain!
Shall crown him chief among the People's lords,
Though crowns he did disdain!

aid of these noble women who have purchased the priceless domain. I would briefly answer two questions, with reference only to a single point:—

First—What is Mount Vernon to become?

Second—How can it be made to express properly the ideas which should henceforth be associated with it?

First—What is Mount Vernon to become? It is to become emphatically historical: I hope exclusively historical; commemorating only the persons and events connected with the American Revolution. We cannot separate the Revolution and Washington, nor Washington and Mount Vernon. That spot will come to be regarded as the first volume of American republican history, seen and read of all men. They who move the world have induced our country to set it apart as a monument of gratitude, in which every male and female within our borders is to feel a new, peculiar, and personal interest; and it will certainly thus become to future generations an historical record more precious and renowned than we at this time have power to conceive. I hope, therefore, that the Presidents of the Historical Societies of the several States in the Union may make a part of that Executive Committee who are to restore the beautiful spot to the form it had in 1799, and do all else that impartial history can sanction. One of our own body, I trust, will be Chairman of that Committee.

Mount Vernon, in its integrity, will be permanent. It cannot change its owners, or lose its new distinctive character. The present national capital may pass away, but Mount Vernon cannot pass away,—it is the only place of which such historic perpetuity can be predicated, & *placitas vixit*.

Second. It is to be the first history and monument.

reported in March that John Washington was hiring out his slaves. “We should think,” wrote editor Andrew J. Van Vorhes, the husband of Lady Manager Elizabeth Van Vorhes, that “Mr. Washington has been paid enough by the ladies of the United States . . . to be able to do without hiring out his negroes.” The *Falls Evening News* replied snidely to one appeal: “The people of St. Anthony are patriotic—very—and they will prove it by a generous subscription, if she will take their contributions in *lumber*; the association might want to build Mr. John Washington a

coffin, or something.” Columbus Stebbins of the *Hastings Independent* editorialized, “Far and wide the Mount Vernon Association is extending its operations . . . for the purpose of giving notoriety and character to every species of humbuggy and humbuggeries.” (Stebbins later reported that John Washington had contracted to produce canes from Mount Vernon’s wood.) No doubt soon the country would be subjected to Mount Vernon hats, combs, and toothpicks. “The tomb of Washington needs no ornament,” he continued. As to the work of the women, “Let us

stop it,” Stebbins urged. In St. Peter, the *Minnesota Statesman* noted with distaste that Washington hired a “daguerrean artist” to photograph tourists in front of the tomb.¹¹

The *Winona Republican*, however, embraced Sarah’s appeal as a “praiseworthy object” and urged support of the fundraising campaign. Faribault’s *Central Republican* did not comment directly but printed a Mount Vernon appeal. A number of Democratic organs like the *Hastings Weekly Ledger* and *Henderson Democrat* were silent, which did not help the project.¹²

The most successful event for the MVLA in Minnesota was held in Stillwater on May 5 under the aegis of Henrietta King Holcombe, whose husband, William, was Henry Sibley's lieutenant governor. A refined and cultured woman who found frontier life a trying experience, she organized an evening of entertainment at the newly opened Sawyer and Buck's Hotel. The spacious hall was fitted for dancing; another room was set aside for chess and draughts (checkers); a third was reserved for conversation. The *Stillwater Messenger* reported, "The tables, the decorations, and everything connected with the entertainment, were arranged and conducted with exquisite taste." This event gathered \$83 above expenses, and the lady managers collected another \$17 before forwarding the contribution to Everett.¹³

Funds trickled in throughout the summer. An October 1859 report showed that Minnesota's contributions totaled \$250. One citizen, at least, tried to benefit personally from his donation. St. Paul postal clerk George L. Lumsden, in jail under suspicion of stealing land warrants from the mails (he was later convicted), published a letter in the *St. Paul Daily Times* to publicize his donation of one dollar.¹⁴

In tiny Mendota, Mariah McCullum, the 35-year-old wife of a prosperous Irish merchant, set the example for former fur-trade employees by giving \$2. The McCullums were typical of the area's changing population, as Irish farmers moved into Mendota Township to take advantage of an established Catholic church and farmland well suited to familiar root crops. Henry Sibley's donation of \$9.25, however, provided the lion's share of Mendota's \$17.25 contribution. Smaller amounts came



Governor Henry H. Sibley, painted by Thomas Cantwell Healy, 1860

in from Winona, St. Anthony, Hastings, and Cannon Falls.¹⁵

Ever since her marriage 16 years earlier, Sarah had dreamed of relocating to the growing urban center of St. Paul. In early 1859 she thought a move was imminent, writing to her friend Mary Le Duc, "I think now that Mr. S. is beginning to find it a little inconvenient—getting up and down to St. Paul. He is quite in the notion of building this summer, that we may be down next winter." The move would give Sarah better access to potential donors and a better base for supervising the MVLA in Minnesota. But the continuing national financial crisis kept the Sibleys in Mendota, and so Sarah regretfully wrote to Cunningham in late July to resign her post: "My residence is six miles distant from St. Paul on the opposite bank of the Mississippi River, and my health not permitting me to visit that City as frequently as was desirable, in order to aid the Lady Managers . . . little has been accomplished there." No one had

responded to her Independence Day appeal, she added. She offered to stay on until a replacement could be appointed.¹⁶

Nothing happened for many months after Sarah tendered her resignation. No response came from the national leadership, no funds were collected in the state, and no reports were filed by Sarah's lady managers. Perhaps John Brown's shocking raid on Harper's Ferry in October 1859 and subsequent trial and execution for treason in December distracted everyone's attention. Then, just after the new year, Sarah was surprised to receive a letter from Cunningham declining the resignation. Bewildered, Sarah restated more forcefully her adversity in Minnesota and added another reason: "The objects of charity among us are so numerous . . . and thus prevent those manifestations of good will to the Mt. Vernon Association." Sarah believed she had done everything in her power to help the association, but it was "a sense of real mortification" to her that Minnesota had only collected \$362 when neighboring Iowa and Wisconsin had each remitted four times that amount. She rationalized, "There never has been much wealth in this new and thinly settled State." And then, alluding to her own family, she admitted, "The recent financial disasters have operated ruinously even on those who had good reason to believe, that they were beyond the reach of such calamities." The association would have to accept her resignation.¹⁷

Although the MVLA paid for Mount Vernon in 1860, it still needed funds to restore and maintain the property. Meanwhile, the national crisis that Ann Pamela Cunningham



The Sibleys' St. Paul home at 417 Woodward Avenue. Both house and street are gone today; the area is near Lafayette Road, between East Seventh Street and University Avenue.

hoped to salve with her patriotic effort was worsening. Extremists on both sides frightened moderates on the slavery question. Tensions ran high as political parties convened in the summer of 1860 to write platforms and select presidential candidates. Sibley, who had not run for reelection, was selected as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Charleston, South Carolina. He and Sarah traveled east together, she to visit family in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, while he continued on to Washington and then the convention. Cunningham's secretary sent a note to him in the capital, requesting a visit with Sarah. No doubt the national leadership wanted to assess affairs in Minnesota and, if they could not persuade Sarah to stay, obtain a recommendation for a replacement. Since the note arrived the evening

before Sibley was to leave for South Carolina, he suggested they all meet after the convention.¹⁸

The convention closed without agreeing on a candidate. The southern wing of the party reconvened later to select John C. Breckenridge, and the northern wing, including Sibley, met in Baltimore to choose Stephen A. Douglas. Since the political process took longer than expected, Sarah returned to Minnesota. Whether she met with Cunningham is unknown.

Sarah's lingering illness from 1859 had worsened, developing into pleurisy, an infection easily treated with antibiotics today but incurable in her era. When Henry returned home from Baltimore, he found that his wife had suffered an attack "of what was supposed to be neuralgia in the shoulder, neck & head, but this culminated into a very dangerous

form of pleuro-pneumonia." For the next two weeks Sarah was severely ill, and hopes for her recovery were dim. Another cause for concern was her seventh-month pregnancy. Sibley told his friend William Le Duc that he was in "constant anxiety." The "nightly watchings & loss of sleep, have pulled me down considerably." On July 21 Sarah's fever broke, and she began to improve.¹⁹

Their healthy son Charles Frederick was born on September 11, 1860. Meanwhile, the national MVLA earnestly continued its work, still raising funds and desperately hoping to avert a civil war that now seemed imminent. Henry responded to a note from Cunningham in October, "I have delayed a reply . . . because I have had a faint hope that the state of Mrs. Sibley's health would enable her to address you herself." Though Sarah

had been confined to her bed for four months, she was still interested in the association's success. Henry repeated her need to resign as vice-regent since "health forbids any reasonable expectation that she will be able to leave her room for months to come." He then restated the reasons for Minnesota's dismal contributions. He doubted that the 1860 harvest would much more than cover existing expenses.²⁰

By 1861 worlds seemed to be crumbling. Though Sarah recovered from another attack that January, Henry admitted to Le Duc, "I much fear she will not last long, as she has them more frequently than heretofore."²¹ Then, in April, hopes for national unity perished with the attack on Fort Sumter, and the work of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association lapsed. The association was hopelessly divided by the war, with the estate on one side and wealthy supporters on the other. Union military officials temporarily seized MVLA's steamboat that had brought in both supplies and paying tourists.

Edward Everett and the New York vice-regent vainly attempted to remove Washington's home from the ladies' control in 1864 by floating a proposal for the organization to cede the property to the United States.²²

With the war over, the MVLA convened a meeting of vice-regents in Washington in 1866. As Sarah's resignation had never been accepted, she received an invitation at her new St. Paul address two days before the meeting date. (In 1863 the family had finally moved to a large house on Woodward Avenue in the Lower-town neighborhood.) When she did not attend, the MVLA inquired indirectly about her, causing Henry to sternly reply, at Sarah's bidding, that all letters had been answered except the invitation, that little or no communication had been received since 1860, and that any direct correspondence would be promptly answered.²³ Sarah was at last in a good location to raise funds, but her health prevented it. Wracked by recurring pleurisy and pregnancies, she spent extended periods confined

to bed. She died from a pleurisy attack on May 21, 1869, at age 46.²⁴

With Sarah's death, the efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association officially ceased in Minnesota. While the Minnesota group had diligently followed national patterns in preservation philosophy and fundraising, politics and the infant state's economy conspired to limit its success. Nevertheless, Sarah Sibley's campaign had launched historic preservation in Minnesota, a movement that continued to grow. In 1889 Rebecca Flandrau, one of Sarah's original lady managers, accepted appointment as the state's second MVLA vice-regent, pledging to raise money for the restoration of Mount Vernon's summer kitchen. Twenty years later, the Daughters of the American Revolution organized a rescue of Sarah and Henry Sibley's stone house in Mendota, the "Mount Vernon of Minnesota," using the same patriotic, private, woman-led methods pioneered a half-century earlier.²⁵ □

A Midwestern Mount Vernon



In 1910 the Daughters of the American Revolution secured title to Henry and Sarah Sibley's home in Mendota, launching the historic house movement in Minnesota. Today, the Sibley House is preserved in its historic setting to provide visitors an opportunity to be where history happened. The historic buildings help tell part of the Sibleys' story—and the stories of many others who made historic Mendota their home—that can never be fully captured in books.

The Sibley House Historic Site dates from the era of the American Fur Company's trade with the Dakota Indians.

Sibley, the company's regional manager, began his limestone dwelling in 1838, adding to it over the 20-plus years he lived there, first as a bachelor and then with his wife and their children.

Managed by the Sibley House Association from 1910 through 2003, this site will reopen to the public under Minnesota Historical Society management in Spring 2004 with group and education tours also available. For hours, directions, admission fees, and other information:

Sibley House Historic Site

1357 Sibley Memorial Highway

Mendota, MN 55150

(telephone): 651-452-1596

(email): sibleyhouse@mnhs.org

(website): <http://www.mnhs.org/places/sites/shs/>

Notes

1. Here and below, W. Barksdale Maynard, "Best, Lowliest Style! The Early-Nineteenth-Century Rediscovery of American Colonial Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59 (Sept. 2000): 338–57; Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 5–12; William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Pittstown, NJ: Main Street Press, 1988), 25–30.

2. Here and below, West, *Domesticating History*, 5–12, 15; *Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), Feb. 19, 1859.

3. Christie Johnson (Cunningham's secretary) to Mary Morris Hamilton (New York vice-regent), Oct. 20, 1858, Early Association Records, Mount Vernon Ladies Association, Mount Vernon, VA (hereinafter MVLA). For Sarah's background, see David M. Grabitske, "Sarah Jane: A Lady's Frontier in Minnesota," *Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine* 20 (Dec. 1999): 20–32. William Gates Le Duc was a Hastings businessman; Henry Rice, Sibley's Democratic rival, was Minnesota's United States senator; and Alexander Ramsey, a friend and political rival, was the former territorial governor and head of the state's new Republican Party. On Sarah's siblings: Abby Potts's husband, Thomas, was St. Paul's first elected executive and president of Minnesota's medical association; Rachel Johnson's husband, Richard, was an army officer; Mary Steele was at the center of St. Paul society; John Steele, a prominent physician; and Franklin Steele, the proprietor of the waterpower at the Falls of St. Anthony, was arguably the richest man in the state.

4. Sarah Sibley to Ann Pamela Cunningham, Nov. 28, 1858, MVLA.



5. See Ellworth Carlstedt, "Minnesota and the Panic of 1857," typescript, 1933, p. 6–41, copy in the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul.

6. Sarah Sibley to Cunningham, Apr. 1, 1859, MVLA; Sarah Sibley to Mary Le Duc, Mar. 13, 1859, William Gates Le Duc and Family Papers, MHS; William Le Duc to Henry Sibley, May 12, 1859, Henry H. Sibley Papers, MHS; Ann Loomis North to Anne Lewis, Mar. 30, 1859, John W. North Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, microfilm copy, MHS; John North to Henry Sibley, Dec. 2, 1858, Sibley papers, MHS.

7. *Pioneer and Democrat*, Feb. 19, 22, 1859.

8. *Pioneer and Democrat*, Feb. 16, 20, 1859.

9. Here and two paragraphs below, *Pioneer and Democrat*, Feb. 16, 19, 22, and 24, 1859; *St. Paul Daily Times*, Feb. 24, 1859; *Weekly Minnesotian*, Feb. 26, 1859; West, *Domesticating History*, 16; Sarah Sibley to Edward Everett, May 11, 1859, Everett-Norcross Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Everett to Sarah Sibley, May 19, 1859, Sibley papers.

10. *Pioneer and Democrat*, June 22, 1859.

11. *Stillwater Messenger*, Mar. 8, 1859; *Falls Evening News*, Mar. 19, 1859; *Hastings Independent*, Feb. 24, Apr. 12, 1859; *Minnesota Statesman*, Mar. 16, 1859.

12. *Winona Republican*, Mar. 2, 1859; *Central Republican*, Mar. 9, 1859.

13. Mrs. Andrew E. Kilpatrick, "William Holcombe," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, vol. 10, pt. 2 (St. Paul, 1905), 859–60; *Stillwater Messenger*, May 3, 10, 1859; *Mount Vernon Record* 2 (Oct. 1859): 71.

14. *St. Paul Daily Times*, Feb. 22, 1859; *Pioneer and Democrat*, June 7, 1859; *Mount Vernon Record* 2 (Oct. 1859): 71.

15. *Mount Vernon Record* 2 (Oct. 1859): 71; United States, *Census*, 1860, *Population*, Dakota County, Mendota Township, microfilm copy, Roll 2, p. 31, MHS.

16. Sarah was most likely suffering from pleuro-pneumonia or an infection that would lead to it. Sarah Sibley to Mary Le Duc, Mar. 13, 1859, Le Duc papers; Sarah Sibley to Cunningham, July 29, 1859, MVLA.

17. Sarah Sibley to Cunningham, Jan. 23, 1860, MVLA; Mount Vernon Ladies



Association, Report to the Council, 1889, p. 6–7, bound with reports from 1858–95, copy in MHS.

18. Henry Sibley to Cunningham, Apr. 19, 1860, MVLA.

19. Henry Sibley to William Le Duc, July 23, 1860, Le Duc papers.

20. Henry Sibley to Cunningham, Oct. 20, 1860, MVLA.

21. Henry Sibley to William Le Duc, Jan. 3, 1861, Le Duc papers.

22. West, *Domesticating History*, 30–35.

23. Henry Sibley to William Markoe, Dec. 18, 1866, MVLA.

24. Henry Sibley to Richard W. Johnson, telegram, May 21, 1869, Sibley House Association collection, Sibley House Historic Site, Mendota; Henry Sibley to William Le Duc, July 23, 1860, and Anna Ramsey to Mary Le Duc, Sept. 2, 1864, both in Le Duc papers, MHS.

25. MVLA, Report to the Council, 1889, p. 2; Ann Marcaccini and George Woytanowitz, "House Work: The DAR at the Sibley House," *Minnesota History* 55 (Spring 1997): 186–201. The MVLA continues its work in the present, and Minnesota's current vice-regent is the sixth in the chapter's 150-year history. On the preservation movement in Minnesota, see Russell W. Fridley's introduction to June D. Holmquist and Jean A. Brookings, *Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide*, rev. ed. (St. Paul: MHS, 1972), vii–xii.

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