



*LUCY LEAVENWORTH WILDER MORRIS, photographed by her sister, Emma Derwent*

## AN UNEMBARRASSED PATRIOT

*Lucy Wilder Morris*

Marjorie Kreidberg

TO THE LEGISLATORS in the United States Congress, Lucy Leavenworth Wilder Morris was a persuader, a cajoler, a prodder. To many Minnesotans she was a woman who earned the local, state-wide, and national prominence she achieved. Central to the celebrated aspects of her life was a record of initiatives to preserve historic sites and to honor the people who contributed to the development of Minneapolis, the state of Minnesota, and the nation. Significantly, it was she who grasped the last opportunity to record the memories of Minnesota's pioneers, reminiscences that she organized and arranged to have published in the book she named *Old Rail Fence Corners*.

The compass of Lucy Morris' life described circles of many sizes. Fort Snelling, St. Anthony, and Yorktown, Virginia, received the focus of her interest at various times, and so did over 1,000 elm trees planted in Minneapolis on Arbor Day, 1916. She was as much at home behind the wheel of her electric car as she was playing bridge to raise funds for a favorite project. She enjoyed drinking tea and dining in the Coolidge White House in Washington, D.C., or sitting in a deck chair aboard a ship bound for Europe. She was a practitioner of oral

history before anyone had given the method a name and a tireless researcher when she wanted long-forgotten information. From time to time she was a writer who worked one or another of her particular interests and experiences into articles, children's books, and a volume directed exclusively to women.

She was an unembarrassed patriot, proud of a family history that included a great-grandfather, Jotham Wilder, who fought in the American Revolution, and a cousin, Colonel Henry Leavenworth, first commandant of Fort Snelling. Lucy Wilder was born in Evanston, Illinois, on November 9, 1864, one of four children of Lucy Leavenworth Sherwood and Alden Galusha Wilder. Among the special people of her childhood was her maternal grandmother, Lucy Leavenworth Sherwood, who first inspired young Lucy's lifelong interest in history when she showed her namesake a map that had belonged to Colonel Leavenworth. Sketched on the back of a cotillion invitation, the map had turned "yellow with age," Mrs. Morris recalled, "but showed Fort Snelling, Lake Harriette [*sic*], named for his wife, other lakes and two rivers." She also remembered reading her grandmother's

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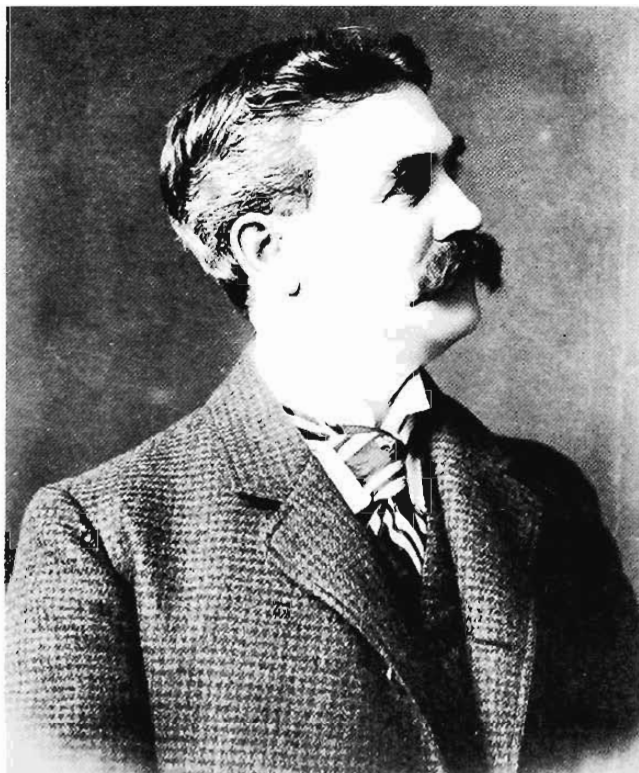
*THIS ARTICLE is the fourth in a series of Minnesota Profiles, biographical sketches of interesting Minnesota men and women. Each profile presents the salient facts of the subject's life, attempting to characterize the person and to assess the significance of his or her work.*

letters from the colonel in which he described his experiences and much of what he observed during his tour of duty at the fort. Regrettably, the map and letters were consumed in a fire that destroyed the grandparents' house. The loss of the historically important documents was an event Mrs. Morris never forgot.<sup>1</sup>

While the record of Lucy Morris' childhood is fragmentary, it is known that the four Wilder children were orphaned about 1872. Sometime before 1878 the family resources dropped to a low point, and the 16-year-old Lucy had to leave school to go to work. Somehow she found an opportunity to teach for three years in the graded and ungraded schools of Houston County, Minnesota, where she proved to be "thoroughly competent." The superintendent of the county schools, D. C. Cameron, noted that Miss Lucy Wilder "taught with success," and he expressed the hope she would be retained. For whatever reason, she did not remain. By 1884 she was teaching in the Fourth Ward elementary school (now Hamilton School) of La Crosse, Wisconsin, a position she held until 1889. In that city she joined forces with her older sister, Emma, who had taught school there since 1880. The two women made a home at 227 South Eighth Street for their young brother, Samuel. In many ways Lucy never gave up the particular ambiance of teaching, a quality that became evident after her marriage in 1890 to James T. Morris of Minneapolis.<sup>2</sup>

Following their wedding in Rockford, the Morris

#### JAMES T. MORRIS



settled in Minneapolis, where James had been associated in business since 1884 with the Donaldson Company. Not long after their marriage, he became vice-president and secretary of Thomas Brothers, a collection agency with offices in the Guaranty Building. By the turn of the century, his experiences in that field enabled him to establish his own firm in the business of handling adjustments, collections, and credit investigations. He took office space in the Lumber Exchange, and in 1914 he formed a partnership with George V. McLaughlin.<sup>3</sup>

When Lucy and James Morris first arrived in Minneapolis, they rented an apartment at 1607 Clinton Avenue. They were to move several times during the next quarter century, but their places of residence were all in south Minneapolis near the Lowry Hill neighborhood. They were members of the Cathedral Church of St. Mark. James Morris was recognized as a friendly, affable man who was widely and affectionately known as "Uncle Jim." He enjoyed playing golf at the Lafayette and Minikahda country clubs, where he and his wife also participated in the social activities.

While James Morris encouraged most of his wife's interests, he did not share her enthusiasm for foreign travel, although they once visited friends in Scotland. After that Mrs. Morris traveled alone or with companions when she crossed the Atlantic several more times to

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<sup>1</sup> Application for membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), approved May 4, 1894, in Registrar General files, National Society (N.S.) of the D.A.R., Washington, D.C., copy in Lucy Wilder Morris Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul; Elizabeth B. Johnston, *Lineage Book, N.S.D.A.R.*, 6:4 (Washington, D.C., 1898); United States of America Passport No. 4241, issued October 4, 1932. On her early interest in history, see Lucy L. W. Morris, ed., *Old Rail Fence Corners: The A.B.C.'s of Minnesota History* (hereafter cited as *ORFC*), "The Reason," n.p. (Reprint ed., St. Paul, 1976). The author is greatly indebted to Jane Wilder Prest (Mrs. George G.), niece of Mrs. Morris, for her valuable memories and other information that have enhanced this research.

<sup>2</sup> Interview of Mrs. Prest, July 7, 1977, April 13, 1981, notes in the possession of the author; D. C. Cameron, letter of recommendation, March 14, 1881, in Morris Papers. Lucy Wilder was listed as a "First Year Student" majoring in modern languages at Rockford Female Seminary, 1876-77; Joan B. Surrey, Rockford College librarian, to the editor, March 19, 1981. Information on her years in Wisconsin is from Elizabeth Mielke, La Crosse department of education, Carol Jensen, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and James T. Prest to the editor, April 10, 1981. On James T. Morris, see *Minneapolis Journal*, November 1, 1917, p. 2; Mary Dillon Foster, comp., *Who's Who Among Minnesota Women*, 223 (n.p., 1924).

<sup>3</sup> For their various addresses and for James Morris' business career here and below, see *Minneapolis City Directories*, 1886, p. 503; 1891-92, p. 976; 1894-95, p. 677; 1900, p. 985; 1913, p. 1321; 1914, p. 1445; *Saint Mark's Outlook* (church bulletin), November 10, 1917, p. 6, copy in Morris Papers; Prest interview, July 7, 1977.

go to England, Europe, and once to Egypt, where she viewed the pyramids from camel back. To finance her trips, Lucy Morris was given to saying that she saved all the dimes that came her way. Her niece, Jane Wilder Prest, recalled that the source of funds was helped along because "Aunt Lucy always asked for her change in dimes." However she met the costs, Lucy Morris knew how to make the most of her resources. After all, she wrote, "if you have only \$500.00 you will have enough to pay your steamer passage and fees and have plenty for six very enjoyable months traveling wherever you wish in Europe."<sup>4</sup>

How to get there, when to book passage, what clothes to take, how to pack, how much and when to tip, how to avoid seasickness, how to get about in cities, where to find the best buys — all this and more were the subjects of Lucy Morris' 64-page guidebook, *European Primer for the Penniless: A Book for Women*. The teacher was teaching again, drawing on her personal experiences, smoothing the way, making the unknown known, and advising. It is doubtful the book reached a wide audience. Mrs. Morris obtained the copyright, and the printing was done in Minneapolis; it is probably safe to assume the author handled the distribution. It is not known how many copies were printed, but anyone who read the book could absorb and perhaps benefit from a wide range of advice: "Do not be afraid to talk to people whom you meet if you are not too young and attractive." Married women were warned to have "express checks, drafts or bills of exchange made out to Mary Jane Smith instead of Mrs. Mary Jane Smith or Mrs. John Smith. You are not recognized as Mrs. in a business deal," she wrote. While much of the book centers on the prudent use of funds, Mrs. Morris cautioned against saving at the expense of "eating too little." She recommended that travelers should "Eat regularly and well." She explained how to save money and still provide a "well stocked lunch basket" and how to satisfy hunger pangs with some chocolate — "nothing more nourishing."<sup>5</sup>

The travel advisory of 1905 was Mrs. Morris' major published work up to that time. Her interest in writing was evident almost a decade earlier when she wrote a children's book that described the transformation of a caterpillar into a moth. She registered a copyright on *Story of a Caterpillar* and had the book printed in Min-

neapolis in 1897. That year the *National Magazine* of Boston accepted and published a short story she wrote about a widow of a seafaring man, and in 1898 the *Northwest Magazine*, a St. Paul publication, paid Mrs. Morris \$5.00 for an illustrated article that identified and encouraged the use of two varieties of wild mushrooms. Personal experience doubtless inspired "Nassau — The Bahamas," a travel feature that appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Minneapolis Tribune* on February 10, 1907. Lucy Morris described the serenity of the "tropical island," its government, population, resources, the absence of crime, the price of a quart of milk, cost of meals at a boardinghouse, and the quality of chickens grown on the island, "dispirited-looking in life and tough eating." A steamer, she wrote, "sails from Miami three times a week over a course which is invariably rough. Two hundred more wobbly miles of sea would be hard to find." The article was signed simply "L.W.M."<sup>6</sup>

LUCY MORRIS liked to write articles and stories, her niece recalled, but she also liked action. She was always "doing something or going somewhere or planning a project or activity. It was important to her to do everything correctly whether she was arranging a ceremony or a bowl of flowers to use on the dining room table." She was "particular about her appearance," personally selecting the fabric for the dressmakers she employed to cut and sew the neatly tailored suits she wore during the day and the dresses she chose for the evening. She favored a diamond bar pin to "dress up" her suits, but the predictable accessory she wore day or night and in all seasons was a hat. She often kept her hat on when she returned home from one event ready to go to another. Indeed, Lucy Morris preferred to be out and about and tried to keep her domestic activities to a minimum. Even so, she managed to develop a few cooking specialties — lamb stew and barley with homemade caraway cookies for dessert was a standard for her family dinners. The attentive hostess kept the platters moving about the table, never failing to urge her husband and guests to "take the plums while they are passing."<sup>7</sup>

Some very special plums were waiting for Lucy Morris when she founded and became the organizing regent for the Old Trails Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.) in 1913. Before that time she apparently played a rather inconspicuous role in the organization, but she identified closely with its objectives: to foster freedom and liberty; to preserve and protect historic sites; to encourage historical research; and to save and safeguard documents, relics, and records. Her 41-year association began with the official notification of her election to the D.A.R. on May 15, 1894, as its 5,008th member. She resigned on November 21 of that year — an unexplained interruption — and was reinstated on April 25, 1905, as a member at large. On June

<sup>4</sup>Prest interview, July 6, 1977; Lucy Wilder Morris, *European Primer for the Penniless: A Book for Women*, 64 (Minneapolis, n.d.), in Morris Papers.

<sup>5</sup>Morris, *European Primer*, 4, 5, 7, 15, 20, 22, 23, 29, 31, 36, 41, 50, 58.

<sup>6</sup>Morris, "Grass Pinks," in *National Magazine*, April, 1897, p. 88, and "The Neglected Crop," in *Northwest Magazine*, November, 1898, p. 10; Stephen Conday to Morris, January 14, 1899 — all in Morris Papers.

<sup>7</sup>Prest interviews, June 3, July 7, 1977, August 30, 1978.

1. Mrs. Morris affiliated with the Colonial Chapter in Minneapolis, then transferred to member-at-large status again in February, 1913. She must have spent time that year developing a particular plan, for on Columbus Day the Old Trails Chapter, whose declared purpose was to identify and commemorate historic places and trails in the Minneapolis vicinity, was founded under her aegis. For Lucy Morris it marked the beginning of her private influence and public accomplishment.<sup>8</sup>

The early 20th century saw a burgeoning of fellowships, fraternal and patriotic societies, and other groups intent on effecting various changes and reforms; as they proliferated, they attracted women such as Lucy Morris who had the time, the means, and the freedom to participate. Her renewed and expanded activity in the D.A.R. challenged her leadership abilities, her energy, and her talent for organization. She infused the newly formed chapter with her vigor and sometimes her sense of humor: "walking on water is taboo," she laughed, even for "a buoyant D.A.R." One Old Trails member wrote that Mrs. Morris was a woman of "boundless enthusiasm, who lead [sic], drove, or coerced each one of us into getting our papers prepared, or did it for us, or had her husband and his assistant Mr. McLaughlin doing it." When the weather was pleasant, she was busy arranging picnics in Mendota for two or three cars full of members, or planning inspections of the Faribault House, or a trip to the Brown farm to listen to "old Mr. John Brown point out the Indian and the traders' trails from the Fort to Shakopee." Mrs. Morris' fellow member also described other meetings at which "old General Le Duc of Hastings talked, or Mrs. Smith, who had been an Indian captive, appeared, or another where Mrs. Hern, a delightful old lady, sang for us, and Mrs. Mahlon Black[,] at that time the oldest living pioneer" spoke about life in Stillwater where she had settled with her family in 1848.<sup>9</sup>

The speakers were among the Minnesota pioneers whose personal experiences during the state's early period of settlement inspired Lucy Morris to record their reminiscences. She took the initial step toward preserving their oral histories, collecting and publishing them in *Old Rail Fence Corners*. While Mrs. Morris is identified as the book's editor, she was, in fact, responsible for its publication, half of the interviews, and the organization of the women who collected the other accounts. "It was impossible for me to get all these precious reminiscences before it was too late," she wrote. "It must be done at once by a large number of interested women." She found them: 22 dedicated members from 16 D.A.R. chapters located throughout the state.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the absence of orderly methods or tested procedures, Mrs. Morris and the book committee interviewed 62 men and 92 women. The result was a faithful record of the settlers' recollections, a significant social

history, a microcosm of the everyday frontier experience, its concerns, fears, and pleasures.

While Lucy Morris' approach and methods were unprofessional, they were surely productive. Of course she knew some of the pioneers whose memories were recorded in the book — those who appeared at D.A.R. meetings she had arranged, for example — but many she simply "found." Sometimes, her niece recalled, she discovered them when she was driving around town in her electric car. "When Aunt Lucy saw someone with white hair, someone obviously elderly, she pulled over to the curb, stopped the car, got out and asked the stranger when he came to Minnesota. If the answer was that the person came in the 1840s, '50s, or '60s, Aunt Lucy took a pencil and pad of paper from her purse and right away started asking what they remembered about those early days. Whatever they remembered, that's what she wanted to know. She had a way about her, a friendliness and smile that took the edge off the fact they were strangers to each other."<sup>11</sup>

As transcripts of the interviews were completed, Mrs. Morris piled them on the floor in two rooms of her apartment on Hennepin. She cautioned anyone who came into either room not to mix them up because they were arranged according to the D.A.R. chapter of the book committee member's affiliation — the same system Mrs. Morris applied to the organization of the book itself. Jane Prest remembered "hopping, skipping, and jumping" through the living room to avoid stepping on the piles of papers, a state of affairs that might have taxed the forbearance of James Morris who was the soul of "patience and kindness." But her niece recalled her aunt saying, "I better get that book done or Uncle James will have a nervous breakdown."

When the first edition was published in December, 1914, Mrs. Morris and her committee won an immediate and enthusiastic tribute from the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune's* book reviewer, who named them the "steward-

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<sup>8</sup>D.A.R., Application for membership, copy in Morris Papers. Transfer from a D.A.R. chapter to member-at-large status "was customary at that time"; Mrs. Wakelee R. Smith, President General, N.S.D.A.R., to the author, July 16, 1976, in the possession of the author. See also Flora Adams Darling, *Founding and Organization of the Daughters of the American Revolution*, 40 (Philadelphia, 1891).

<sup>9</sup>Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, 787 (New York, 1965); Lois N. Jordan, "Tribute to Mrs. James T. Morris," [1, 2], undated, typed manuscript, in Minnesota Society of the D.A.R. Papers, Sibley House, Mendota (hereafter cited as Minnesota D.A.R. Papers); Morris to Mrs. George D. Chenoweth, undated letter, Morris Papers. On the pioneer Minnesotans mentioned here, see Morris, ed., *ORFC*, 29–31, 40–47, 143–152, 260.

<sup>10</sup>Morris, ed., *ORFC*, "The Reason."

<sup>11</sup>Information here and below is from Prest interview, July 7, 1977; Jordan, "Tribute," [2].



MRS. MORRIS at the wheel of her electric car

esses of the history-makers trust." They had done a "glorious deed for Minnesota," he wrote, to give the "generation of today full appreciation of these state-builders of yesterday." A cosmopolitan weekly magazine published in Minneapolis, *The Bellman*, praised the "uncanny wisdom which made the compilers permit their native Homers to sing in 'their own unvarnished way'" to produce "one of the most remarkable 'first-hand' histories ever published in America." Another evaluation of the book appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*. The Boston review identified the work as a source of "intimate knowledge of the life of those who

conquered the forests and the prairies of Minnesota and laid the foundations for a great state."<sup>12</sup>

Less than a year after the first edition was published, Mrs. Morris ordered a second printing. Interest in *Old Rail Fence Corners* never disappeared, but copies gradually became almost unobtainable until the Minnesota Historical Society published a third facsimile edition in 1976 and a fourth in 1978. Testimony to the book's enduring value to general readers, historians, and fiction writers is the number of times it has been quoted. One of the earliest references appeared in Sinclair Lewis' first successful novel, *Main Street*, published in 1920. He quoted Mrs. Mahlon Black's recollection of Stillwater in 1848 and described the book as the "admirable Minnesota chronicles."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, December 6, 1914, sec. 13, pp. 3, 5; *The Bellman*, 17:694 (November 28, 1914); *Christian Science Monitor*; March 31, 1915, clippings in the Morris Papers.

<sup>13</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*, 151 (New York, 1920). Other references appear in Merrill E. Jarchow, *The Earth Brought Forth: A History of Minnesota Agriculture to 1885*, 51, 81 (St. Paul, 1949); Evan Jones, *The Minnesota: Forgotten River*, 290 (New York, 1962); Rhoda R. Gilman and June Drenning Holmquist, eds., *Selections from "Minnesota History": A Fiftieth Anniversary Anthology*, 84n, 89n (St. Paul, 1965).

PUBLICATION of *Old Rail Fence Corners* confirmed Mrs. Morris' ability to lead, a reputation that was to be increased many times in the years that followed. Her new projects were given extensive coverage in the city's newspapers, a further acknowledgement of her role as a community leader. When the Old Trails Chapter held a formal unveiling of a bronze tablet placed on the Round Tower at Fort Snelling in memory of Colonel Henry Leavenworth and his command, the *Minneapolis Sun-*

*day Tribune* reported the story in detail on September 12, 1915, including a full account of Mrs. Morris' "thrilling historic review" of the fort and Leavenworth's part in its establishment. The D.A.R. members had been disappointed when the date of the event was changed from August 23 to September 11 to accommodate Governor Winfield S. Hammond who had been invited to speak. To Lucy Morris, the governor's choice had "seemed . . . the worst day possible." It was the last day of the state fair, "when everybody is either tired from company or has to take the children to the Fair." These concerns faded when the participants gathered at the fort. The "picturesque historical pageant," as the newspaper described the ceremony, went well. Mrs. Morris, with her usual ebullience, said "everything turned out for the best, as it always does for us."<sup>14</sup>

The superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, Solon J. Buck, agreed. He wrote Mrs. Morris an appreciative letter, affirming that "all who have the historical interests of the state at heart are deeply indebted to the Old Trails Chapter and to you personally for the enterprise which has been shown in this matter." But to Lucy Morris there was a void still to be filled. According to her records, 60 of the 230 soldiers who served at the fort during the winter of 1819–20 had died of scurvy. They "laid down their lives far from kindred in a desolate land. Their names were even forgotten and seemed to have disappeared from the earth," she wrote. Nevertheless, Mrs. Morris continued her efforts to discover those names. Help came from Colonel W. C. Brown, a retired army officer and a native Minnesotan, who located a list

of 26 — "no longer unknown soldiers," she rejoiced, "but comrades in arms whose deeds live." With a series of bridge parties the Old Trails Chapter raised money for a bronze marker to memorialize the soldiers' names permanently, and on June 3, 1930, the marker was placed on the Round Tower at the fort and appropriately dedicated.<sup>15</sup>

Mrs. Morris next turned her attention to a plan for honoring Charles M. Loring, long acclaimed the father of the Minneapolis park system, with a living memorial of young elm trees to be planted in parks and schoolyards, on the University of Minnesota campus, and in residential neighborhoods. The Old Trails members agreed to the plan, and Mrs. Morris persuaded city officials to name Arbor Day, April 28, 1916, as Loring Day. Given the perspective of the present time, the words of Charles Loring that appeared in the program

<sup>14</sup>Old Trails Chapter, Regent's Report, 1, undated typescript, copy in Morris Papers. The memorial tablet was cast at the Flour City Iron Works, Minneapolis, at a cost of \$79.50; Invoice, August 31, 1915, in Minnesota D.A.R. Papers; the tablet was removed in 1966 during reconstruction of the fort and is in the possession of the state department of natural resources.

<sup>15</sup>Buck to Morris, October 1, 1915, and S. A. Howard, adjutant general, U.S. Army, to W. C. Brown, January 12, 1927, both in Morris Papers; Joseph P. Peavy, adjutant general, U.S. Army, to Morris, June 12, 1915, and "Report on Fort Snelling Marker," 6 typewritten pages, undated, unsigned but with notes in Mrs. Morris' handwriting, both in Minnesota D.A.R. Papers; *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 4, 1930, p. 1.

LUCY MORRIS (right) and  
Mary E. Chute at the  
dedication of the Leavenworth  
marker at Fort Snelling



are noteworthy: "If all our wonderful trees that have been planted with so much care should disappear in a night, would Minneapolis then be noted for her beauty?"<sup>16</sup>

The Old Trails Chapter was responsible for the success of the project and for the printed program that carried instructions on planting and caring for trees written by Theodore Wirth, then superintendent of parks. The program included a brief biography of Charles Loring, the words to the songs "America" and "Woodman, Spare That Tree" that were sung at the official ceremonies, and Lucy Morris' copyrighted essay, "Our Tree." The chapter committed itself to buy 180 trees at \$1.75 each, but actually bought 230 trees; other Minneapolis D.A.R. chapters also participated in the city-wide event.

THE YEAR 1917 was especially significant for Lucy Morris because of two vastly differing events. She sustained a great personal loss with the death of her husband who had been ill for over a year. As responsibilities at home lessened, those in the D.A.R. multiplied when she was elected state regent. That year D.A.R. concerns turned from memorials and commemorations to active service in behalf of the nation's involvement in World War I. Characteristically Mrs. Morris "met the many and strenuous demands arising from the changing conditions with unflinching and tireless response." Along with her personal involvement in Red Cross work, she directed the state's D.A.R. members in a number of war activities. Fellow workers remembered that "When the first requests for knitted garments came, she urged and secured the making of large quantities" of these items to outfit the sailors on boats. Under her supervision, the seven Minneapolis chapters were organized into "a strong Red Cross Unit, which for quantity and quality of production was unsurpassed." In September, Minneapolis members gathered wild herbs in the nearby woods to "help conserve drug supplies" by substituting home remedies made from the plants. Mrs. Morris sug-

gested that the D.A.R. circulate leaflets describing how the herbs could be converted to medicine. She aimed to persuade the State Federation of Women's Clubs to make a similar effort, noting the interest among women who attended a demonstration she had arranged.<sup>17</sup>

As state regent, Mrs. Morris "planned and supervised the entertainment of the soldiers at Fort Snelling and of the sailors, marines and aviators in training in Minneapolis, also keeping a constant stream of benefits flowing toward those in hospital wards." Those benefits included a supply of homemade grape juice and jellies, gifts from the kitchens of D.A.R. members. One Old Trails associate recalled special "parties when we rushed down to the Fort to serve ice-cream or cakes, to try to entertain the men, or on Sundays when we tried to entertain them at Mrs. Morris's and mixed the men and officers in a fashion most unmilitary, but since all seemed to enjoy themselves no harm was done." The Minnesota chapters under Mrs. Morris' leadership established a "record in . . . war work," and were among the more successful groups in the nation to secure subscriptions for Liberty Bonds. Together, the entire state D.A.R. raised "nearly three times its quota for rehabilitation of the village of Tillaloy, France, where the money has been used to furnish a water supply, dispensary and community house."<sup>18</sup>

The war effort occupied the first two years of her three-year term as state regent, but in 1919 Mrs. Morris redirected her attention to the commemoration of historic sites. During her tenure the Minnesota D.A.R. cooperated with the residents of Little Falls to establish a memorial to Zebulon M. Pike, the army lieutenant dispatched by the War Department in 1805 to explore the Upper Mississippi. A bronze tablet, appropriately inscribed, was affixed to a monument constructed of stones taken from the chimney of the first blockhouse built in Little Falls. At the dedication ceremony on September 27, Mrs. Morris spoke about Pike's journey. The value of marking historic sites, she later pointed out, awakened "an interest in State history that nothing else has done." The Pike monument was thus a valuable addition to a program that Mrs. Morris encouraged and considered an important obligation of the D.A.R. Always a teacher, she stressed the special collateral benefit that enhanced children's interest in the "history of places in their immediate vicinity, the home history."<sup>19</sup>

Lucy Morris' contemporaries thought of her as "tireless in her efforts, and a power in all that she undertook." Before her election to national office, Mrs. Morris had served as the director of the historical records committee for the west central states, responsibilities that were increased with her appointment as national chairman of the committee on the preservation of historic spots. The generous use of her time and energy to strengthen the

<sup>16</sup> Here and below, see Jordan, "Tribute," [6]; Old Trails Chapter history, 3, unsigned, undated, handwritten manuscript in Minnesota D.A.R. Papers; Loring Day Program, April 28, 1916, in Morris Papers. The *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 29, 1916, p. 18, said that nearly 100 ceremonies were held throughout the city.

<sup>17</sup> Mrs. A. W. Abbott *et al.* of Old Trails Chapter to "Madam Regent," N.S.D.A.R., December 26, 1919, in Minnesota D.A.R. Papers; Jordan, "Tribute," [6]; *Minneapolis Journal*, September 23, 1917, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Abbott *et al.* to "Madam Regent," December 26, 1919, in Minnesota D.A.R. Papers; Jordan, "Tribute," [6]; *Minneapolis Journal*, April 23, 1920, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Zebulon Pike Dedication Program, Little Falls, September 17, 1919; Lucy Wilder Morris, "Historic Spots Committee," in *Washington Post*, April 17, 1922, p. 11; Jordan, "Tribute," [7] — all in Morris Papers.





DRAWING by Helen E. Hokinson; © 1940, 1968 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc

"D.A.R.'s?"  
 "No, cherry blossoms."

"constructive service" of the D.A.R. was recognized by Minnesota members, who joined to support her election as vice-president general of the national organization. Delegates to the 29th national gathering of the D.A.R. agreed with the Minnesotans when they voted at the annual spring meeting in Washington in 1920. Mrs. Morris won 874 votes out of a possible 1,049.<sup>20</sup>

THE NEW CHAIRMAN for "historic spots" promptly launched a rescue mission to preserve the battleground in Yorktown, Virginia, where General George Washington in 1781 received the surrender of British commander Lord Charles Cornwallis. Part of the earthworks constructed by the British army still remained, covered over and protected by a thick growth of Scotch broom; the house where Cornwallis had established his headquarters, although it was still standing, was in a "broken down" condition; and the battlefield location and the remaining fortifications were in serious jeopardy by 1920, bracketed by a fuel oil station on one side and a World War I navy mine depot on the other. A "block and a half of earthworks that had preserved themselves

for 140 years were shoveled away" to allow the construction of one small house. A plan to erect a hotel on the site and another to build bungalows increased the urgency for action. Mrs. Morris' goal was to persuade Congress to establish a national military park in Yorktown. She considered the preservation of the battleground important to all patriotic Americans and the "chief interest" of the D.A.R. historic sites committee. "Is there a more sacred spot in all our land than this," she asked, "where the last battle of the Revolution, was fought?"<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Morris brought her crusade to the attention of the public and to the nation's leaders in interviews with the press, in speeches, and in testimony at a congressional hearing. She often quoted Lafayette's impression of the American forces who attacked Cornwallis' men: "I could not imagine," he declared, "that an army so ragged could face the enemy with such courage and shoot so straight.'" She also enjoyed pointing out General Washington's prophetic message to the troops that the battle of Yorktown would "decide American independence."

A lengthy illustrated story in the *Minneapolis Journal* described the proposed national military park and featured Lucy Morris' leadership in its establishment. The report announced her departure for Washington, "where she will actively urge support of the bill by members of both houses of congress." Travel to the national capital for extended stays became a customary part of her life during the 1920s and early 1930s. She gave up her apartment on Blaisdell in 1925 for the convenience of an accommodation at the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis; in Washington, she stayed either at the Willard Hotel or the Mayflower.<sup>22</sup>

If Mrs. Morris carried a carefully drawn plan of action in her purse when she arrived in Washington in the summer of 1921, she lost no time in putting it into effect. She won the support of two of Minnesota's congressional leaders, Senator Frank B. Kellogg and Representative Walter H. Newton. Their sponsorship of legislation to create a national military park, coupled with the influence of Secretary of War John W Weeks, who ordered a survey made and a map drawn to define the

<sup>20</sup>Mrs. E. J. Edwards, "An Appreciation of the Work of Mrs. J. T. Morris," 1, May 28, 1920, in Morris Papers; *Minneapolis Evening Tribune*, February 26, 1920, p. 1; Mrs. George M. Minor, President General, N.S.D.A.R., to Morris, June 8, 1920, in Minnesota D.A.R. Papers.

<sup>21</sup>Here and below, see *Minneapolis Journal*, June 5, 1921, p. 11; 67 Congress, 1 session, Committee on Military Affairs, *Yorktown Battle Ground Park, Hearings*, December 12, 1922, p. 4; *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, June 5, 1921, p. 2; *Washington Post*, April 17, 1922, p. 11. The name of the site, now administered by the National Park Service, has been changed to Colonial National Historical Park.

<sup>22</sup>*Minneapolis Journal*, June 5, 1921, p. 11.

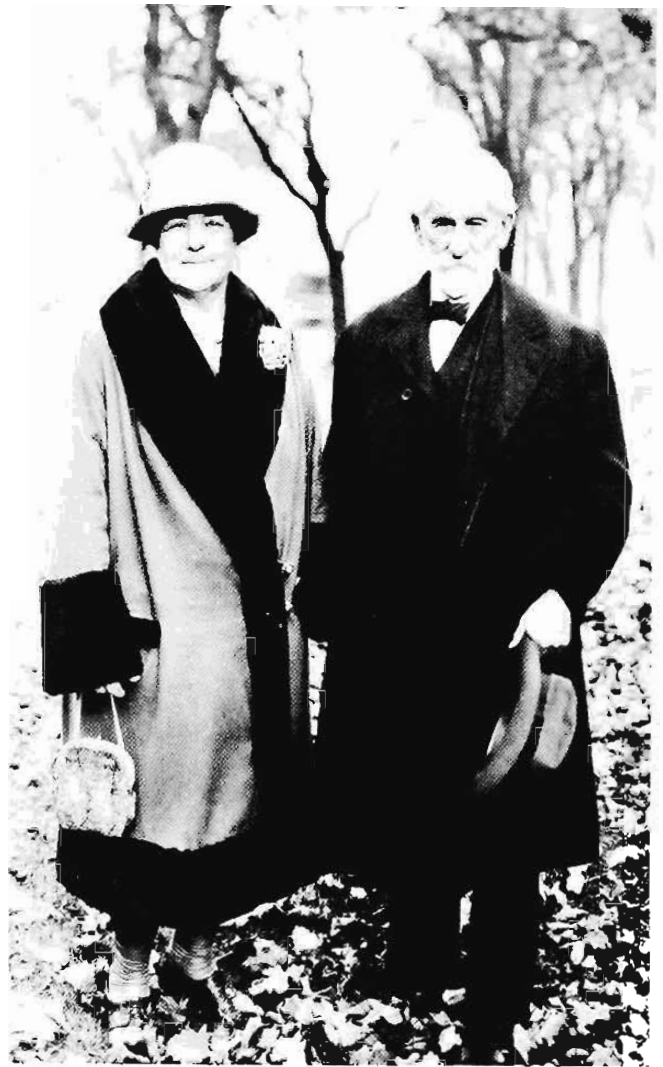
boundaries, were central to the success of Lucy Morris' campaign. She asked D.A.R. members throughout the country to encourage their congressmen to endorse the bill. Most of all Lucy Morris "with a willing heart but often most unwilling legs walked miles on the cement floors of the Government offices," trying to persuade congressmen to vote in favor of the legislation. Her lobbying, she reported, had "won the interest of one most uninterested Congressman by telling him that when she started out walking these cement floors she had been tall and not the pigmy he now saw before him; that if she had kept grinding herself off on those floors, she was sure to disappear entirely." The success of her crusade was measured in votes. The bill establishing Yorktown Battleground Park passed both houses of Congress and was signed by President Warren G. Harding on March 2, 1923.<sup>23</sup>

Less than a month later, delegates assembled for the D.A.R.'s annual spring convention in Washington heard Mrs. Morris reveal a "most wonderful secret." The War Department, she announced, had named her to serve on the Commission for National Military Parks, "the first time that a woman has been appointed a member of a Military Parks Commission." For her the honor was another personal achievement during a decade that had begun with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution that granted suffrage to women. Lucy Morris experienced an earlier indication of the changing times in 1921 when she became one of the first two women elected to the Minnesota Historical Society's executive council, an election Superintendent Buck called a special "distinction."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> National Society of the D.A.R., *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Continental Congress*, 112 (Washington, D.C., April, 1923); *Congressional Record*, 67 Congress, 4 session, 5712.

<sup>24</sup> N.S.D.A.R., *Proceedings*, 112. Buck to Morris, December 30, 1920; Minnesota Historical Society, Annual Meeting Ballot, January 17, 1921, both in Morris Papers. Marion Ramsey Furness, daughter of Governor and Mrs. Alexander Ramsey, was the other woman elected to the executive council in 1921, *Minnesota History*, 6:31 (February-March, 1921). Mrs. Morris also participated in honoring Josias R. King, Minnesota's "first volunteer" in the Civil War; *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 7, 1923, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> On the establishment of Lucy Wilder Morris Park by the D.A.C., here and two paragraphs below, see typed text of an address by Mrs. Morris to the State Assembly of the Minnesota Society, D.A.C., September 26, 1929, and Presentation of Tablet, printed program for October 4, 1924, in the Minnesota D.A.R. Papers, copy in MHS; National Society, D.A.C., *Yearbook*, 1929, p. 32, and 1930, p. 34; *Minneapolis Journal*, October 4, 1924, sec. 6, p. 1, September 23, 1927, p. 25. The park is now part of the Father Hennepin Bluffs public area. Membership in the D.A.C. requires descent from pre-Revolutionary settlers in the North American colonies; *Minneapolis Journal*, October 1, 1922, Woman's sec., p. 6.



THE "LADY of the Revolution" with William W. Folwell

Another member of the executive council at the time was the eminent historian and educator, William Watts Folwell. Mrs. Morris asked Dr. Folwell which historic site in the state especially deserved to be commemorated. He suggested the Falls of St. Anthony, named in 1680 by Father Louis Hennepin, the Belgian explorer. Folwell's recommendation became the initial project of another patriotic organization, Minnesota's first chapter of the Daughters of the American Colonists, founded in 1922 with Lucy Morris as organizing regent. The site was located on the Mississippi River at the foot of Sixth Avenue Southeast. To Lucy Morris the location was the "dirtiest and most desolate spot in the whole city of Minneapolis. Erosion had taken away what had probably been verdant banks in 1680," she said, "and dumping carts had filled in with old boilers, wringers, tin cans and whisky bottles. . . engine ashes," she noted, were piled under the bank and "beneath that, shale, not one single thing was growing there, and it looked as though nothing ever would."<sup>25</sup>

When the Daughters of the American Colonists learned the property was owned by Northern States Power Company and the Great Northern Railway, the

members launched a series of moves distinguished partly by persuasion and partly by modification of their rules to win easements to the property and their right as a society to hold it. They also won the blessing and enthusiastic support of Theodore Wirth. The park board helped to clean up the “mass of *horridity*, whiskey bottles led, but everything else in the dump line followed. Over three hundred cans were removed, — dead trees cut down, sand-burrs dug out, and still we had only begun,” Mrs. Morris wrote. She gave credit to Wirth for defining the need to do “all this work thoroughly, and making the surroundings beautiful.”

The new patriotic organization ordered a “very large” tablet cast in “two kinds of bronze” appropriately inscribed to commemorate the site. Superintendent Wirth located a large boulder on which the tablet could be fastened, but the boulder could not be moved to the location until the “winter snows came to make it possible.” Even then the cost was \$50. To meet the expenses, the society invited 800 guests to a fund-raising party. The \$700 made from the project became a supporting fund to finance construction of a stairway to the river because, as Lucy Morris observed, “No one but a rocky mountain goat could get down that almost perpendicular slope.” In addition, a fence was constructed with a locked gate to protect unwary children from the railroad tracks. A water system was installed, a gift to the memory of James T. Morris, and appropriate bushes and trees were planted. More trees were planted in 1927 to honor Dr. Folwell and Maria L. Sanford, university educator and a member of the D.A.R. The Daughters of the American Colonists voted to name the property the Lucy Wilder Morris Park at the time of the dedication in 1924.

IT WAS CHARACTERISTIC of Lucy Morris to save a copy of the printed program of the dedication ceremony, because she saved all programs pertaining to events in which she participated. It was her way. She did not mount them in scrapbooks but simply put them at random into boxes along with invitations, canceled checks, newspaper clippings, membership cards, reviews of *Old Rail Fence Corners*, some letters she received and speeches she gave, a copy of *Minnesota History*, September, 1925, and a handful of her personal calling cards. The memorabilia reveals invitations to the White House during the 1920s, and others to embassies of the Chinese, Italian, Mexican, Nicaraguan, and French delegations in the capital. Newspaper clippings describe luncheons, dinners, and teas, held primarily at the Mayflower and Willard hotels, where Lucy Morris mingled with some of the political, military, and foreign luminaries of the day. She attended parties to honor officials’ wives and hosted many herself. The guest lists included Mrs. Calvin Coolidge and Mrs. William How-



THE HENNEPIN marker in Lucy Wilder Morris Park

ard Taft. Among the invitations to official Washington functions addressed to Mrs. Morris was one to the dedication of the Ulysses S. Grant memorial, another to the Abraham Lincoln memorial ceremonies. She was asked to attend the conference on the limitation of armament as well as a reception given by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes in honor of the delegates. She was assigned a seat along with an invitation to attend the memorial service for President Warren G. Harding that was held in the House of Representatives.<sup>26</sup>

When Lucy Morris was spending part of each year in the nation’s capital, she became a nonresident life member of Washington’s National Women’s Country Club, but she retained her social memberships in the Lafayette and Minikahda clubs and also joined the Woman’s Club of Minneapolis. Indications of her additional interests are implicit in her membership in many organizations: the League of American Pen Women, the Republican Women’s Club, the Archaeological Society of Washington, the English-Speaking Union, and both the National and the Minnesota historical societies. Further clues to Lucy Morris’ sympathies and concerns are evident in the canceled checks she secured with rubber bands and put into the boxes of papers she wanted to save. She contributed to the China Famine Relief Fund in 1921, the Red Cross for Hennepin County tornado relief in 1925, and the “Flood Sufferers” in 1927. She supported the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation to help buy and preserve the former president’s home at Monticello. Canceled checks written to individual doctors, the Nicollet Clinic in Minneapolis, and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester

<sup>26</sup> Here and below, see numerous invitations, admission cards, newspaper clippings, canceled checks, and membership cards, all in Morris Papers; Prest interview, April 9, 1981.

underscore the health care Mrs. Morris required because of a malignancy that developed 16 years before her death in 1935. Nevertheless, the active life she led in both Minneapolis and the nation's capital throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s suggests that, in spite of her illness, she was not diverted from the things she wanted to do.

One of the pleasures for Lucy Morris in Washington was the renewal of her friendship with Calvin Coolidge, then vice-president of the United States, and his wife, Grace. The Wilder and Coolidge families had roots in Plymouth, Vermont, where earlier generations of family members became friends — a relationship perpetuated by those who followed. On August 3, 1923, the day after Coolidge succeeded to the presidency upon the death of Harding, the *Minneapolis Evening Star* published an interview with Mrs. Morris in which she praised the new president and spoke of Mrs. Coolidge as the personification of the "highest type of American womanhood," well qualified to represent the nation as First Lady. Grace Coolidge's letters to Mrs. Morris make it clear that the two women shared a bond stronger than a tea-party friendship.<sup>27</sup>

The notes, written between 1922 and 1933, began with the salutation "Dear Sister Morris," and one started "Dear Lady of the Revolution." One personal visit, hard to imagine in the 1980s, took place, wrote Mrs. Morris, "just outside the White House gate. 'Lady of the Revolution,' Mrs. Coolidge laughed, 'Mr. Coolidge thinks you talk more than anyone he ever knew' — I replied 'We had 3 common ancestors. He has all their silences and I have all their "conversation."' When we met again I asked her if she told him and she said 'Yes[,] and that held him some time.'" Significant political comment was absent from the letters. Grace Coolidge wrote about family activities, her husband's preparation of speeches to be given "here, there and elsewhere." She mentioned mutual friends from time to time and always expressed good wishes for Lucy Morris' well being. When Coolidge left office, his wife confided "Washington was a chapter of my life which [is now] closed." She wrote that even in their retirement "every move that we make has to be interpreted and needs must have some hidden meaning. It then becomes a game to see who can think up the wildest sort of story in connection with it. We can no longer do anything just for the sake of doing it," she lamented. "This would all be very well if the stories affected only ourselves but they seem to involve others. Further and further we are crawling into our shells for

<sup>27</sup> Here and below, see Grace Coolidge to Morris, May 18, July 9, 1922, April 10, July 31, August 14, 1923, December 23, 1929, January 25, 1931, November 16, 1931, February 26, 1933, and undated, miscellaneous correspondence and papers — all in Morris Papers.



GRACE COOLIDGE autographed this picture for Mrs. Morris "with happy memories of hours shared."

our own peace of mind and the comfort of others." Mrs. Coolidge was silent insofar as the Washington scene was concerned until the incoming administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt inspired her to comment: "All accounts from Washington seem to indicate change everywhere. I wish Mrs. R. success in her venture to be her own housekeeper!"

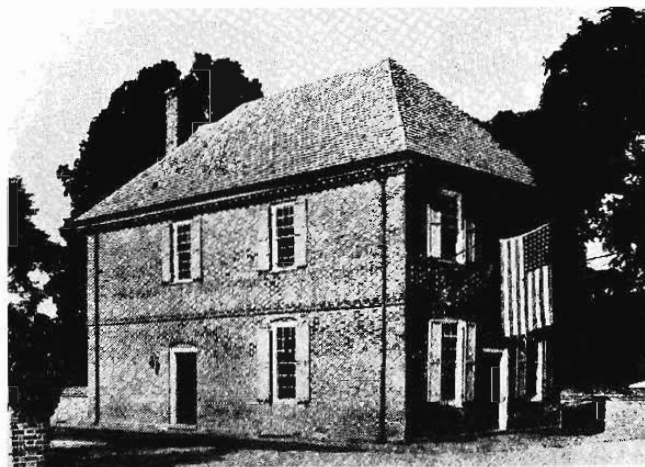
Among other letters that Lucy Morris kept and obviously valued was one from the Minnesota author, Maud Hart Lovelace. "My publishers are sending you a copy of my new novel, *Early Candlelight*, and I do hope that you will enjoy it," she wrote. "I hope so especially because your work and the work of the D.A.R. has helped me very much as it must help every worker in the field of early state history. I want so much for *Early Candlelight* to fall into the hands of those who have a real love for the old days that I would deeply appreciate

anything you could do to call it to the attention of the D.A.R. . . . but only if you like it and think it gives a true picture of the period."<sup>28</sup>

Along with such private recognition of Lucy Morris' reputation were public tributes for her continued leadership. In 1930 she organized a D.A.R. committee to sift through official and private records and documents to identify the American and French soldiers who died in the Battle of Yorktown. The research produced the names of 103 Americans and 133 Frenchmen — names that the D.A.R. had inscribed on two bronze tablets placed at the gateway to the national monument on the battleground site. The markers were dedicated at the four-day Yorktown Sesquicentennial in October, 1931. Mrs. Morris, asked to speak at the unveiling, occupied a grandstand seat reserved for "Especially Invited Guests" during each event of the memorial activities. There she listened to speeches given by President Herbert Hoover, General John J. Pershing, Marshall Henri Pétain of France, and other dignitaries. In August, 1932, the French government named Mrs. Morris a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor in appreciation of her work in identifying the 133 French patriots. The award, a "distinction but rarely achieved by any woman," was bestowed by Paul Claudel, French ambassador to the United States, in ceremonies held in Washington.<sup>29</sup>

On October 4 Lucy Morris sailed for Paris as "one of the most colorful personalities" and the leader of a D.A.R. junket whose publicized theme was "America Never Forgets." President Hoover called the pilgrimage a "splendid gesture of appreciation certain to promote an historic international friendship." Inside Pershing Hall the D.A.R. placed a replica of the Yorktown tablet dedicated to the French soldiers. The ceremony was attended by selected members of the French government and the grand chancellor of the Legion of Honor.

*THE CUSTOMHOUSE at Yorktown, Virginia, where Lucy Morris' portrait now hangs*



who decorated Mrs. Morris with the medal first presented in Washington.<sup>30</sup>

Possibly the most enduring public recognition accorded Mrs. Morris for her contributions to the military park at Yorktown came in 1933 when her portrait was hung in the restored customhouse located on the park grounds. The painting by Mrs. Stanford White was the gift of the Minnesota D.A.R. to the Comte de Grasse Chapter in Yorktown, one that Mrs. Morris was instrumental in establishing. At the unveiling, the appreciative Yorktown regent considered the portrait a reminder to "perpetuate to future generations the love, sacrifice and devotion to patriotism, as well as the accomplishments of Mrs. James T. Morris." She observed that "strange as it may seem a Minnesota Daughter receives these honors in recognition of her patriotic devotion to this revered locality." The series of honors granted to Mrs. Morris reached full circle with her election as honorary vice-president general for life, the national D.A.R.'s special acknowledgment of her achievements and the "distinction" she brought to the organization.<sup>31</sup>

When Mrs. Morris died in Minneapolis on November 1, 1935, an editorial in the *Minneapolis Journal* described her as an "able and forceful woman" whose death created a "notable loss," but what was most notable, and remains so, was the special brand of citizenship and sense of history she demonstrated so many times. "I have," she once wrote, "a great veneration for things true to the past, but none for pretense."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Lovelace to Morris, August 20, 1929, in Morris Papers.

<sup>29</sup> *Washington Post*, February 11, 1931; admission tickets for Yorktown Sesquicentennial, October 16 to 19, [1931], *Official Program of the Yorktown Sesquicentennial Celebration*, (Richmond, Va., 1931), all in Morris Papers; *Minneapolis Journal*, August 23, 1932, p. 1; *Sunday Star* (Washington, D.C.), August 28, 1932, sec. 3, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 25, 1932, p. 7; *New York Herald*, Paris edition, October 20, 1932, clipping in Morris Papers. Mrs. Robert M. Brown, regent, Comte de Grasse Chapter, D.A.R., to author, August 4, 1979, substantiated the fact that the Morris portrait still hangs in the Customhouse. Efforts to learn more about the artist have been unsuccessful.

<sup>31</sup> Program, Yorktown Celebration, October 19, 1933; Mrs. George D. Chenoweth, regent, Comte de Grasse Chapter, Yorktown, to Minnie M. Dilley, Minnesota state regent, D.A.R., August 28, 1933; address (copy) of Mrs. George D. Chenoweth, October 19, 1933, pp. 1, 3; clipping from *D.A.R. National Publicity Committee Bulletin*, April, 1933, p. 16 — all in Morris Papers.

<sup>32</sup> *Minneapolis Journal*, November 3, 1935, p. 4; undated, unaddressed letter in Morris' handwriting, Morris Papers.

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