

The Misses Emery, West Newbury's Resident Philanthropists

Over the first half of the 20th century, four sisters (described in newspapers and town records of the time as the Misses Emery) used a windfall inheritance to make West Newbury a better place. Of the children of [Samuel Moody Emery](#) and [Mary Hale Emery](#) (both descendants of the Town's founding Emerys), Mary Elizabeth (1846-1927), Louisa (1849-1939), Frances (1857-1933), and Georgianna (1859-1952) enjoyed lifespans that enabled them to give away much of their wealth. The sisters were born in Portland, Connecticut, where their father was an Episcopalian rector, scholar, and teacher. Upon Samuel's retirement, and [her father's bequest](#) of the [Emery homestead](#) to Mary Hale, the family returned to West Newbury in 1870.

In 1905, the Misses Emery received a distribution worth about a million dollars (some \$30M in today's money) from the estate of their first cousin once removed, [Nathaniel Emery Noyes](#). He was a wealthy self-made Baltimore financier who retired early and spent much time abroad. He was thought to have left most of his assets to a niece in Haverhill. To everyone's surprise, a hitherto overlooked collection of papers given to the Emerys turned out to be deeds to vast and highly valuable landholdings in Maryland.

According to a [Boston Globe profile](#), "The million dollars came like a gift from God to [the] Emerys, so they regarded their fortune as a trust, rather than a possession." With the exception of such things as a [new brick winter home closer to Main Street](#), their simple lifestyle remained largely unchanged. Working with advisors and with Georgianna at the financial helm, they developed a "family council" system to identify worthy causes—and they tried to give away all that the bequest made. Many of their gifts were not recorded: among other things, they quietly lent college education funds to many students.

The Emery sisters gave generously to many local institutions ranging from the [West Newbury Historical Society](#) to [Anna Jaques Hospital](#), which, in addition to funding for endowed hospital beds for West Newbury, [received a new ambulance](#) in 1907. Also in 1907 their [St. John's Hall](#), for use by Laurel Grange and others, was opened. [All Saints Episcopal Church](#), another gift, was consecrated in 1913.

Since their land and water rights were at stake, the Misses Emery were among those best situated to

contest Newburyport's taking of the Town's Artichoke River for that city's water supply. Through their lawyer they questioned the Artichoke's [suitability for drinking water](#) and suggested that [Newburyport first try metering its water use](#). They also [sued](#) and won a settlement for the value of their water taken.

Intelligent, well-educated, and well-advised, the Misses Emery focused on the Town's long term needs. They purchased the [oft-raided](#), much-despised [Hotel Albion](#) at the corner of Bailey's Lane and Main Street and, according to a January 14, 1916 article in the [Fall River Daily Evening News](#), proposed to give the Town a fully-endowed brick library for the site. The article continued, "Provided that no petty quarrel over its acceptance arises, the sisters further propose to have water mains laid from the Artichoke river ... through all the principal streets of the town. The result of this latter benefaction will mean a free water system for West Newbury."

The [Boston Globe](#) reported that a quarrel over the library forfeited the \$300K gift—including the water system. The Town was still in the throes of finding a potential use (including as a library) for what is now called the [Carr Post](#). Unwilling to engage in a dispute over their gift, the Emerys withdrew the offer [days after it was made](#). Over 20 years later, the Town consented in 1937 to accept the sisters' renewed [offer of a library](#). In the [spring of 1939](#), the G.A.R. Library we know now was ready for use.

Throughout, the Misses Emery remained highly engaged with their neighbors. As [Garden Club members](#), they grew prize roses. At St. John's Hall, they gave [Christmas dinners for the children](#) at the No. 1 School and other children in the area, and [entertained All Saints Sunday School children](#).

When Georgianna, the last of the sisters, died in 1952, she left her estate to many charitable groups, not least Anna Jaques Hospital, All Saints Church, and the G.A.R. Library. The bulk of her assets, including the Emery homestead, went to the [Society of St. John the Evangelist](#). This final gift was as much to the lasting benefit of the Town as it was for the named legatee. Townspeople gained not only a fine new neighbor, but also enjoyment of the pristine open fields, forest, stone walls, and vistas still seen upon entering West Newbury on Rt. 113 from Newburyport.

The Misses Emery, West Newbury's Resident Philanthropists



Emery Homestead photo & map

Source: West Newbury Historic Sites Survey



L-R Louisa, Frances, Mary Elizabeth, Georgianna Emery Source: Ancestry.com

Fall River Daily Evening News 1/14/1916 p 2

Newburyport Daily News 1/17/1916 p 1

LIBRARY OFFER IS WITHDRAWN

Acceptance of Previous Gift by West Newbury for Similar Purpose Cause for Possible Controversy.

The Misses Emery have withdrawn their offer of a library building for the town of West Newbury, owing to conditions which arise regarding the acceptance of the gift by the town.

The town has already accepted from Major Boyd Post, G. A. R., the sum of \$2400, with the express stipulation that the fund should be used for the erection of a memorial building containing the public library, with a further stipulation that the building should be located within 200 yards of Postoffice square.

This action was taken in March 1902 and there are many who feel that the

town is morally obligated by this action

Prominent members of the Grand Army, however, are ready to waive all their moral and legal rights in the matter, for the sake of the good of the town that might follow the erection of such a building as the Misses Emery propose, though they feel that the location suggested for the new building is away from the business section of the community, even though the site, which is opposite the Town hall, is the geographical centre of the town.

The Misses Emery, noting the discussion which has been caused by the suggestion of the gift, have no desire to arouse any controversy by their ac-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE FIVE)

WEST NEWBURY HAS WINDFALL IN SIGHT.

Quartet of Sisters To Give Library and Free Water System.

West Newbury, Jan. 14.—The old Hotel Albion on the Newburyport turnpike, a famous landmark, a historic tavern, and for many years a bitter eyesore to the people of this town, has been purchased by Mary, Louise, Georgiana and Frances Emery, four elderly unmarried sisters, daughters of the late Rev. Samuel Emery, an Episcopalian clergyman. It is their intention to raze the building, to erect on its site a brick structure to be known as Memorial Library, to endow it forever, and to offer it to the town at the next town meeting in March.

Provided that no petty quarrel over its acceptance arises, the sisters further purpose to have water mains laid from the Artichoke river, which runs between West Newbury and Newburyport, through all the principal streets of the town. The result of this latter benefaction will mean a free water system for West Newbury.

Twenty years ago the Rev. Samuel Emery, who had four daughters and one son, succeeded to the fortune, estimated at more than \$1,000,000, of Samuel Emery Noyes, a cousin of the family. Mr. Noyes, who was a graduate of Dartmouth College, became a merchant in Baltimore and later invested very successfully in Baltimore and St. Louis real estate. Two years after his death the Rev. Samuel Emery passed away, and the fortune reverted to his children. Soon the son died, and the sisters came into unrestricted possession of a sum which, thanks to their modest manner of living and to conservative investment, probably has doubled itself.

These prospective gifts will come as an astounding surprise to the residents of the town. The facts remain that the tavern property actually has been bought, the library plans made and specifications for the water main prepared. It remains for the town meeting to hold to good behavior.