

*by Jennifer Dustin Hinze*

## A Woman's Vision of Family:

### *Emily Malbone Morgan, Putnam Elms, and the Women Who Came to Brooklyn*

#### *Who Was She?*

Emily Malbone Morgan (or “Miss Morgan”, as she was called) has a story that is little known, and to date has been only briefly documented. She was a woman of vision, generosity and compassion. She was artist, writer, lecturer, philanthropist and deeply spiritual. Her most noteworthy accomplishments were the creation of the Society for the Companions of the Holy Cross (SCHC), a non-denominational women's spiritual group that continues today, the running of summer vacation houses for working women and the co-founding of the Colonel Daniel Putnam Association (CDPA).

Miss Morgan was quite clearly a multifaceted lady. She led an outward and visionary life, yet many of her aspects and accomplishments are quite personal and intimate. She never married and thus never had children, although she was always deeply involved with her family members.

Elizabeth Morgan Love of Pomfret wrote of her great aunt “ As I grew older I began to appreciate what a wonderful woman Great Aunt Emily was. She accepted the three of us (her brother John L. Firth, her sister Mary Nelson Firth and herself ) without criticism and with obvious pleasure and she never asked silly questions like, “What did you learn in school today?” frequently asked by my mothers friends and seemingly in the same category of “have you stopped beating your wife?”.”

To date no one has researched her life very thoroughly, and Miss Morgan herself seemed to have little interest in taking note of her own personal history. As a result her story has been collected out of the bits and pieces of writings and journals, together with first hand family accounts and letters. Much of what we know about Miss Morgan comes from the book *Letters to Her Companions*, by Vida D. Scudder. Mrs. Scudder was a close friend of Miss Morgan, and one of the earliest founding members of the SCHC.

Miss Morgan's primary link to Brooklyn rests in her ownership of Putnam Elms, the home of Colonel Daniel Putnam, the son of General Israel Putnam. Miss Morgan was the great granddaughter of Colonel Daniel Putnam.

Always a forward thinker, and always concerned for family matters, Miss Morgan created a financial trust for her family homestead, ensuring that it need never be sold again. It is because of Miss Morgan's efforts that Putnam Elms remains within its family and open to visitors as a piece of living history today.



Emily Malbone Morgan  
"Miss Morgan"



General Israel Putnam



Colonel Daniel Putnam



Putnam Elms 1911

## *The Story of Putnam Elms*

Putnam Elms is a large farmhouse that sits nestled back from the road on Church Street. The elms for which the house was named are now few and far between, (although 10 new elms were planted in 2001.) A variety of other trees now dot the lawn, almost obscuring the house from view in summer. You could see Old Trinity church from the bedroom window on the south side of the house if the young forest had not sprung up over the past 60 or so years.

One of the most intriguing features of Putnam Elms is that it has remained exclusively in the possession of one family throughout its existence. Passed on continuously into the hands of family members, today the house is owned by the Colonel Daniel Putnam Association, an organization made up almost entirely of descendants of the Malbone and Putnam lines.

*The story of Putnam Elms shows us a brief glimpse of a woman who had the sense of both family and history to take action to secure the life of her family homestead.*

Godfrey Malbone Jr., builder of Old Trinity Church, built the central portion of Putnam Elms between 1784-1786. He constructed the house for his brother-in-law, Nathaniel Brinley. Colonel Daniel Putnam took residence in Putnam Elms in 1791. Col. Putnam had married Godfrey Malbone's niece Catharine Hutchinson.

The marriage of Daniel Putnam to Catharine Hutchinson united the Malbone and Putnam families. This established the tradition of family ownership that continues to this day. Interestingly, this union also united the Congregationalist Putnams with the Anglican/Episcopal Malbones.

Colonel Daniel Putnam resided at Putnam Elms until his death in 1831. He and his wife raised a son and five daughters in the house. After the Colonel's death the house was rented, but not sold for about a decade, after which time Colonel Putnam's daughter Emily came to live in the house with her husband James Brown.

In 1869 John Murdock Brown, son of Emily and James married Eliza Putnam Day and brought his new wife home to live at Putnam Elms. At this time James Brown built the south wing onto the house to accommodate the growing family. John Murdock Brown died in 1897, leaving Putnam Elms to his widow Eliza Putnam Day, who then sold the house to Emily Malbone Morgan in 1906.

Emily Malbone Morgan was daughter of Henry Kirk Morgan, an established merchant from Hartford and the gentleman for whom Morgan Street in Hartford was named. Miss Morgan's mother was Emily Malbone Brinley, daughter of Catharine Putnam and George Brinley, who were married in the west parlor of Putnam Elms. Catharine Putnam was the daughter of Colonel Daniel Putnam, making Miss Morgan the great granddaughter of the Colonel, and great great granddaughter to Israel Putnam.

Once in Miss Morgan's hands, a trust was established to insure that Putnam Elms could always remain in the family. Miss Morgan formed the "Colonel Daniel Putnam Association", a group made up primarily of family descendants that oversee the house today.



Old Trinity Church



Miss Morgan with friends in Hartford

The story of Putnam Elms shows us a brief glimpse of a woman who had the sense of both family and history to take action to secure the life of her family homestead. This is merely one of numerous chapters, however, of Miss Morgan's story.

## *Her Early Life*



The Putnam Elms Chapel 1916

Born on December 10, 1862 in Hartford, Emily Malbone Morgan was the youngest of five children, and the only daughter. Her mother, Emily Malbone Brinley, was quiet, introverted and religious. Her father was known for being brusque.

Her eldest brother, George Brinley Morgan became a minister in the Episcopal Church, and was made rector of Christ Church in New Haven in 1887. Her brother William Denison Morgan became a medical doctor and Henry Kirk Morgan Jr. was a Wall Street broker. Edward Brinley Morgan, the youngest of the brothers, died at 17.

As was fashionable for a family of means, the Morgans traveled extensively and this formed the basis of Miss Morgan's education. Although primarily tutored at home by her mother, she also attended Miss Haines's School in Hartford for a time. Traveling continued to be a passion for Miss Morgan, who in her lifetime visited such places as England, Continental Europe, Bermuda, Russia, Egypt, Spain, North Africa, the Near East, Japan.

*Even as a child Miss Morgan was known for her lively and generous spirit, and her willingness to help those in need.*



White Day 1914

Members of the Society for the Companions of the Holy Cross

Even as a child Miss Morgan was known for her lively and generous spirit, and her willingness to help those in need. Her brother Edward recalled that he met Emily "wandering down the street yesterday. She was trying to change a dollar she received Christmas into pennies to drop into beggars' hats."

And while Miss Morgan would not have thought herself a feminist per-se, from childhood she had an unusual idea about the roles of women and girls. Again it was Edward, who in 1869 wrote, " I took her to the Historical Rooms (Wadsworth Atheneum) and before going up, I told her to read the notice: "Boys under fourteen not admitted." She was disappointed at first 'til the happy thought struck her that she was not a boy and wished to admit Moscow (her Saint Bernard dog) on the same plea."

In 1882 at the age of 20 she helped to found the Thursday Afternoon Club, a literary organization that continued to run for several decades. A year later she allied herself with the United Workers, a group that helped find work for the unemployed, exhibiting her sympathies for those less fortunate than herself.

It was in 1883 that Miss Morgan became reacquainted with an old childhood playmate Adelyn Howard, of Winsted, CT. Adelyn had fallen victim to a terminal bone disease that left her bedridden. Upon news of Adelyn's illness, Miss Morgan went to see her old friend and their relationship was rekindled.



Guests arriving for summer respite

While Miss Morgan had received a proper religious education from her parents she was not especially devout in her youth. Her journals actually reflect her



Waiting for the coach

difficulty in understanding formal religion. She even speaks of becoming a hypocrite or an atheist. It was discovering that she could channel her energies into helping those in need that brought some sense of peace to her soul.

Her relationship with Adelyn Howard prompted Miss Morgan to found the Society for Companions of the Holy Cross. Adelyn herself held a strong belief in prayer, and while she told Emily that there was no need for her to spend hours in confinement along with her, she asked that Emily take time each day to pray and remember her. The tradition that grew between them extended itself as Miss Morgan encouraged other friends and companions to begin participating in intercession prayers on a daily basis for those in need of spiritual support. This was the foundation for the formation of the Society for the Companions of the Holy Cross, the organization created together by Miss Morgan and Adelyn Howard in 1885.

Still growing today, the SCHC was described by Miss Morgan as “a community of women, Christ’s disciples, called by God to a life of prayer, transformation and reconciliation within ourselves, within our Companionship, within our faith communities, and within the whole creation.”

### *Her Vision Unfolds*

“My greatest desire has always been to make tired people rested and happy.” Miss Morgan wrote these words and lived by them her entire life. This is the sentiment that exists beside all of her public and private efforts. Her desire in forming the SCHC was not to create a monastic order, but to bring together women of various religious backgrounds in prayer for the benefit of greater humanity, particularly the working class.

***“My greatest desire has always been to make tired people rested and happy.”***



Birthday Party 1914

The desire to serve those less fortunate is what drove Miss Morgan to purchase properties to open summer vacation houses for working class women, girls and children. The first of these properties was Heartsease, in Saybrook CT. Opened in 1889, Heartsease ran until 1914. In 1894 Miss Morgan purchased Beulahland in Blanford, MA. This home ran for 12 years until it was destroyed by fire in 1906, the same year Miss Morgan was able to purchase her ancestral home, Putnam Elms from her cousins, the Brown family.



Marybai

In July of 1906 Miss Morgan wrote to her cousin Mary Brown, “I have heard recently a rumor that the John Browns are thinking of selling their farm. Is it true? The dearest desire of my mother’s heart was to own a house on Church Street, and her most anxious thoughts the Autumn before she died were about the future of the Old Church when our generation had gone. I should therefore be frightfully saddened if that dear old place should be sold to anyone outside the family and should at least like the opportunity given me of being the purchaser. I do believe myself to be a good purchaser, and one who would preserve the traditions dear to them as well as being able to offer them as perhaps few others could the use of their old home many times in the future. It is because of its traditions I would purchase it.”

Miss Morgan did indeed purchase the house, and placed a dedication to her mother over the fireplace in the front parlor, where it still hangs today. It was she who named the house “Putnam Elms.”



Play time croquet



Sleep time on the porch 1916



"Kingswood" the dormitory



Happy Sextette 1913

She also created a chapel room in the south wing of the house. Though a consecrated Episcopal chapel, Miss Morgan took pride in this room as a place where all were welcome, no matter their faith, for prayer and quiet reflection. This room has remained essentially unaltered since Miss Morgan's time. Painted in blue and white and decorated with numerous plaques and sculptures, this room can still be enjoyed for all its quiet meditative beauty.

In 1930 she wrote "When I return to Putnam Elms I come into historic relationship to the Church, for I can place my hands on papers which tell of lands confiscated in England at the time of the Commonwealth which belonged to some of my mother's people who fled to this country because the Puritans made it too hot for them to stay there because they were true to King and Church; and I can place my hands on others which tell of their struggle to maintain the Church's order and worship here in New England, and they were only representative of other brave old fighters who fought a spiritual fight that we might have our present and multiplied privileges and everything that enhances and beautifies worship." (Letters to Her Companions, p. 283)

***"Emily had everything in life, but when circumstances denied her what she was accustomed to she never complained nor indicated that she recognized the situation."***

The summer homes purchased by Miss Morgan also served as meeting places for the SCHC, as the society evolved alongside Miss Morgan's efforts to provide rest for those in need. The society found a permanent home in 1914 when Adelynrood was built in Byfield, MA. Adelynrood, translating to "Adelyn's cross", still serves as home to the society today.

From 1889 until her death in 1937 Miss Morgan made herself personally responsible for the upkeep and running of these summer vacation houses "for the entertainment of those needing rest and refreshment." (Letters to Her Companions, p. 8) To accommodate more women guests she built Kingswood, a dormitory house, in 1922. Kingswood was named for the original land grant of Kingswood Manor, upon which Putnam Elms was built.

Miss Morgan's journals show that she was making plans for these vacation houses even in her later teenaged years. She found little support for these efforts amongst her family however. She funded these efforts largely on her own, and trained herself at a young age to live frugally and go without. Miss Nina E. Browne of Boston wrote "Emily had everything in life, but when circumstances denied her what she was accustomed to she never complained nor indicated that she recognized the situation. At Beulahland, I remember that on one occasion she gave up her bed for someone and slept in the pantry with her head under the shelf. When she moved to Adelynrood, she chose one of the smallest and least desirable rooms."

Miss Morgan was dedicated to providing enrichment for the lives of her guests. She herself was immersed in the world of art and literature, covering the walls of Putnam Elms with paintings done by local artists and friends. A library room was created in the south wing of the house, supplied with a wide range of reading materials. Her letters speak of women taking time to read quietly or gathering together to read aloud.

In the mid-1930's it is remembered that Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt came to read



General Israel Putnam  
statue in Brooklyn,  
Connecticut



Putting wood by



Haying

to the visitors of Putnam Elms. Mrs. Roosevelt had a summerhouse in the center of Brooklyn, not far from the statue of Israel Putnam. She read aloud the poem “*Death and General Putnam*”, by Arthur Guiterman, in the front parlor of the house.

“Extracts from her first report on her vacation home at Saybrook, delivered in the fall of 1889 to the United Workers, show her combination of vision and sage wisdom.

“During the summer, thirty-six girls were sent to the summer home in Saybrook, four or five at a time, some staying a week, ten days or a fortnight as their parents or employment allowed...

If the summer home has done little else, we may congratulate ourselves that it has brought both workers in our Society and workers it is our pleasure to work for into a pleasant fellowship.” (Letters to Her Companions, p.11)

Miss Morgan’s philosophy about her efforts to offer rest to those who came to Putnam Elms is best expressed in an open letter she gave to those who came to stay –

“Here, in a place filled with history, we want to maintain the past traditions of the three-fold development of mind, body and spirit...of an open house where all are welcome to take refuge and rest from the cares of the world, thus making yourself strong in the present for all the future may have for you. If we could place ourselves in a position of receptivity every summer; our bodies ready to receive and do all that may strengthen them, our minds ready to grasp through the eyes and ears the infinite miracles of summer beauty all about us...then, in everything they see and hear, loveliness should, like a breeze, pass into their souls and Teach the Truth of which Beauty is a manifestation...”

### ***Her Artistic Endeavors and Physical Hardships***

Having been taught to appreciate beauty and the finer aspects of culture as a child, Miss Morgan was a great supporter of the arts. She enjoyed painting most of all, and encouraged young artists through both word of mouth and by purchasing their works.

Miss Morgan was also a very capable writer. Having kept journals since her teens, she honed her writing skills over the years. She was able to raise funds to support her humanitarian efforts not only by giving talks on art and art history, and also by publishing novels. Her short novels include *A Little White Shadow* (1889), *Prior Rahere’s Rose* (1893), *Poppy Garden* (1894), *A Lady of Olden Time* (1896), *Madonna of the Smoke* (unknown), *Flight of the Swallow* (1902) and *Adelyn’s Story* (unknown). Her stories tend to be romantic in nature, and often have a historic element. *A Lady of Olden Time*, for example, is a romance loosely based around the life of Lady Alice Fenwick of 17th century CT.



Nuns visiting Putnam Elms



The Colonel Daniel Putnam Association 1916



Emily Malbone Morgan with Dotty

While Miss Morgan's spirit seemed to be always strong her physical condition was not. She suffered various illnesses in her early life, and battled cancer as an adult. She spent her summers at Putnam Elms from 1906 until her death in 1937, but spent a great deal of time in and out of hospitals as well. Many of the letters she sent to her fellow companions of the SCHC were written from hospitals or places she sought for her convalescence.

***Miss Morgan did not allow her ill health to drain her enthusiasm for life or the projects she undertook.***

Even with the hardship of illness her spirit and humor remained vital. "I had a perfectly gorgeous time at the hospital." She wrote, "I always do. I call each hospital the House of Life, for there little new lives begin under the happiest auspices medical science can devise, you get better and are prepared to meet life here, or if we regard death simply as an incident in a life that goes on forever, you are born into a life of more radiant possibilities and unhampered effort...When I went under an anesthetic last June, I found myself in a wonderful garden of undreamed-of beauty, and a voice seemed to come out of the air and say, 'The flowers never fade here, and nothing ever grows old.' When I came out of unconsciousness I was told I embarrassed the surgeon and others by my effusive thanks, for I wanted to shake hands with everybody and I kept saying, "Oh, I have had such a wonderful time! I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much!"

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### ***The Benefactors of Her Vision***

Miss Morgan seemed always attracted to the subject of history. Her travels encouraged the study of it, and her novels reflect a deep interest in it. Her appreciation of the past, coupled with her strong devotion to her own family and heritage may well have been the spark that encouraged the formation of the Colonel Daniel Putnam Association in 1910.

A historical society in honor of Daniel Putnam, the CDPA met regularly in Brooklyn and often at Putnam Elms. The CDPA is still active today. With a board of directors and a web site, the association continues to oversee Putnam Elms and preserve its long history to this day. Photographs of recent meetings at Putnam Elms can be seen on the web site.

Miss Morgan's vision also continues at Adelynrood. With over 800 members and chapters of the SCHC nationwide, with a chapter in India as well, the society that Miss Morgan and Adelyn Howard created has grown and thrived. Adelynrood now serves as a conference and retreat center for both groups and individuals. Workshops are run seasonally.

I believe Miss Morgan would be pleased and perhaps also proud to know that the work she began at the turn of the twentieth century, with the SCHC, Putnam Elms and the CDPA has continued and grown into the twenty-first century. Her vision has continued and flourished, and although hers is not a story often told, she left her own mark on the town of Brooklyn.