

*Yale and Minnesota intertwine in ways that many people do not recognize. This history of Yale alumni in Minnesota will surprise many about the substantial impact that alumni have had in the development of the State.*

# **No Small Coincidence: How Yale Alumni Made History in Minnesota**

by Ronald S. Goldser

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# No Small Coincidence

HOW YALE ALUMNI MADE  
HISTORY IN MINNESOTA

Ronald S. Goldser

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## Foreword

“Why Yale?” I asked George S. Pillsbury (Yale ‘43) one day as we were working on our book, “The Pillsburys of Minnesota.” (Nodin Press, 2011.) Why did you, your brothers, your cousins, and so many of your Minnesota contemporaries choose an undergraduate education at Yale University? Why did three of your four children opt for Yale? Why not Dartmouth, where George’s grandfather and Minnesota’s “Big Miller” Charles A. Pillsbury graduated in 1863? Why not the University of Chicago, which George’s great-grandfather helped establish in 1890? What about Harvard, Princeton, Penn, Michigan – or the University of Minnesota, where a statue of John S. Pillsbury honors “the father of the university”?

George knew a great deal about his kinsmen’s thinking. But he confessed that he did not know precisely who and what inspired the devotion to Yale that was first exhibited in Minneapolis and St. Paul early in the Twin Cities’ history. He had a hunch, though: Samuel Gale, Yale class of 1854, was among the first attorneys to settle in Minneapolis and quickly became a successful real estate investor. He was among the young city’s most vigorous and philanthropic citizens, serving nine years on the city’s school board and helping to found what became the Minneapolis Public Library. He saw to it that his own sons returned to Yale for college. He may have influenced a good many more.

In other words, Gale was a typical Yale man – successful in business, generous in service to his community, respected by all who knew him and loyal to his school. George was confident that Gale’s attachment to Yale was evident to his friends and extended family – which, after his son Edward’s marriage to Gov. John S. Pillsbury’s daughter Sarah Belle, included the Pillsbury clan. In George Pillsbury’s experience, when a man (and, later, a woman) had studied at Yale, he had been blessed with the finest possible formative experience, one he could not help but share with others.

Ron Goldser is a Yale man in that same tradition. He also possesses a Yale-trained analytical mind and a Yale-honed gift for storytelling. Goldser puts those skills to fine use in this book as he tells of the unusually strong ties that have bound this state to a higher ed institution 1,300 miles away. Those ties are both ancient and

contemporary. Many of Minnesota's pioneer leaders – or, more often, those leaders' sons – were Yale educated. But so were today's U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Gov. Mark Dayton, former state Rep. Phyllis Kahn, Hmong American leader Pakou Hang and 2018 DFL legislative candidate and physician Kelly Morrison.

Both subtly and not-so-subtly, Goldser attempts to answer a question that has been on my mind since I first became aware of the uncommon Minnesota-Yale bond: What difference has Yale made in Minnesota? It's a question that is not susceptible to quantitative analysis. Rather, it must be answered in qualitative terms of trends and tendencies, patterns that seem too pronounced to be the product of coincidence alone.

"No Small Coincidence" has me suspecting a Yale influence in a number of distinctive Minnesota characteristics. This is a state with an uncommon degree of civic engagement, ranked number one among the 50 states in 2009 by the National Conference on Citizenship's America's Civic Health Index. It has long led the nation in voter turnout in presidential elections. An unusually large share of its citizens volunteer their time, talent and treasure for charitable purposes. Those are behaviors encouraged at Yale.

Philanthropy is no afterthought among Minnesota's business and professional leaders. The Yale-connected pioneering families gave of their own resources to establish distinguished colleges, libraries, museums, performing arts institutions, parks and more. Those gifts did much to draw national notice to the region. It's noteworthy that Minneapolis was deemed sophisticated enough to host the Republican National Convention in 1892, just 25 years after the city's first mayor took office.

Yale alums again featured prominently in the 1970s when 26 Minneapolis corporations committed to setting aside 5 percent of their pre-tax profits for charity. Their Five Percent Club is today's Keystone Program overseen by the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, with more than 100 member corporations committing to annual charitable contributions of at least 2 percent of pre-tax profits.

Minnesota's leadership in civil rights might also be said to bear a Yale stamp. In the 1950s and 1960s – when George Pillsbury's brother John Jr. (Class of 1935) was a prominent civic and Republican political leader – the Minnesota Legislature was among the first to enact statutes barring racial and discrimination in

employment and housing. Yale-connected Minnesotans were among the political sponsors of perhaps the most important civil rights political leader of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Minnesota Sen. and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. A prominent figure in sustaining a progressive bent in Minnesota's Republican Party as the national party shifted to the right in 1964 was Attorney General Doug Head (Class of 1952).

Yale instilled in its students an appreciation for liberal arts education that's also evident in Minnesota. The state is home to some of the nation's most distinguished liberal arts colleges; the Minnesota Private College Council includes 17 member institutions. While most of them were founded by religious denominations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they have expanded and flourished into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I'd say that's in large measure because Minnesotans share the Yale notion that both individuals and communities are strengthened by the free exchange of ideas in the pursuit of truth.

Other plausible Yale influences on the North Star State are bound to occur to you as you enjoy Goldser's story. You're also sure to marvel at how many Minnesotans spent time in the "hallowed halls of ivy" in New Haven, Connecticut. Whether or not Samuel Gale was the founder of the Minnesota-Yale connection, I'm sure it would be a source of pride if he could see it today. More than that: It would be a source of confidence in this state's future.

*-Lori Sturdevant*

## Preface

In isolation, the fact that any prominent Minnesotan attended Yale may be purely random. But time after time, a relationship with Yale exists in the histories of so many Minnesotans, that its recurring presence soon appears to be no small coincidence. Stories abound—all around the Twin Cities, throughout the state, and beyond—that provide anecdotal evidence to substantiate this claim.

This is a collection of those stories—tales of individuals who helped make Minnesota what it is today, and what it will become tomorrow. Stories of passion, opportunity, and leadership. Of economic development, and of civic and philanthropic dedication to community. The common denominator for all these stories is a connection to Yale. These narratives set in historical context are intended as accounts of remarkable Yale alumni making their marks on Minnesota history, rather than offered as contributions to an exhaustive history of Minnesota.

Many well-known Minnesota buildings, companies, and other institutions tell much of the state's rich history. And so many are linked to Yale alumni. For generations, schoolchildren visiting the State Capitol in St. Paul have been greeted by the sight of a grand statue of Alexander Wilkin in its Rotunda. Wilkin (Class of 1841), a colonel with the Ninth Minnesota during the Civil War, co-founded The St. Paul Companies, today known as Traveler's Insurance. Other familiar logos, businesses, and family names in Minnesota have significant Yale connections, such as those associated with the Cargill Company, General Mills, Pillsbury, Peavey Plaza at Orchestra Hall, and the railroads of James J. Hill. A railroad magnate, Hill (Class of 1910L, Hon.) sent two of his sons to Yale. His splendid, Gilded Age mansion on Summit Avenue in St. Paul stands in recognition of the Hill family's accomplishments, preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society as a center for arts and architecture. Wheelock Whitney (Class of 1950), a well-known Minnesotan beloved for helping to bring the Minnesota Twins franchise to the state, is memorialized with a building dedicated in his honor at the Minneapolis Technical College, his name prominently visible from the street. Other renowned Minnesota locations with significant Yale connections include Northrop Auditorium on the campus of the University of



Minnesota; Hazeltine National Golf Club, founded by Totton Peavey Heffelfinger (Class of 1922) and home to golf's Ryder Cup; as well as a statue of young Nathan Hale standing resolute on the corner of Summit and Western Avenues in St. Paul, its journey to that location a study in Minnesota Yale alumni patriotism.

The motto, "For God, For Country and For Yale," is evidence of the University's fundamental commitment to public service. This can be distinguished from other prominent academic institutions whose functions focus more on education, knowledge and research.<sup>1</sup> As a result, many of the most well-known Minnesota civic organizations have Yale families behind them, and many of Minnesota's great community institutions have a relation to Yale families. This includes, among others, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, Minnesota Orchestra, Landmark Center in St. Paul, and The Minneapolis Institute of Art. So prevalent are Yale alumni in these organizations that the motto should really read, "For God, For Country, *For Minnesota*, and For Yale."

Paul Moore, Jr. (Class of 1941), Bishop of New York within the Episcopal Church, and a senior fellow on the Yale Corporation from the mid-1960s through the presidential administration of George H.W. Bush, wrote in support of this notion of public service as part of a Yale education. Moore said, "Central to [Yale's] identity was ... a powerful emphasis on community leadership and an abiding commitment to public service ... " Moore recalled that when he was an undergraduate, one was expected to "pull your weight" as a Yale citizen, going out for athletics, or singing, or debating or Dwight Hall,<sup>2</sup> the organization sponsoring good work in the community. So strong was the "do something for Yale" ethos, that failing to participate in such activities meant that "you would not be tapped for a senior society, a dreadful thought meant to strike fear in our heart." The University's fundamental mission, Moore believed, was "to forge a serious, public-spirited young man who would take his place in industry, law, academic life, or public service."<sup>3</sup>

This spirit of community service appears in the stories of Minnesota Yale alumni, dating back to before statehood. In early days, Yale men—and at the time, only men—came to Minnesota to put down roots and make their fortunes. Other families without University ties made their fortunes, and then sent their sons, and later daughters, to Yale. Those children often returned to the family

business, and then to the family foundation or other public service. Over generations, these families created businesses, served on boards of for-profit and non-profit entities, and contributed to a broad range of philanthropic and cultural organizations in the state. The University of Minnesota benefited greatly from its second president Cyrus Northrop (Class of 1857). Northrop expanded the University's undergraduate offerings and also started professional schools in law, medicine, and education, among others. The Minneapolis Institute of Art is far better for the gifts of land, money, and art from the Morrison, Pillsbury, and Dayton families, all of whom regularly sent their children to Yale. The Ordway Center for the Performing Arts exists because of the Ordway family—and Carl Drake Jr.

Certainly graduates from other premier universities have had their impact on Minnesota. Jim Ullyot (Harvard 1962, 1966MBA), a lifelong Minnesotan, described the relative contribution of Yale alumni this way:

“In early Minnesota, enterprising families developed a philosophy of sharing their wealth. One explanation for their obligation of giving back may be attributed to values learned through an education steeped in humanities and liberal arts. Many Minnesota families of early accomplishment and privilege sent their sons to Yale and Harvard College, and other institutions that were heralded for teaching critical thinking and the importance of values through a general education—leaving ‘vocational’ education for specializations at the graduate level. The link between such a college education and a long tradition of community service both in Minnesota and around the world may be disputed. But this book, *No Small Coincidence: How Yale Alumni Made History in Minnesota*, and its accounts of Minnesotans who attended Yale, suggests that their college education had an enduring effect on them, and in turn, on society. That is because Yale families have certainly had a significant and noteworthy influence on the growth and development of Minnesota.”<sup>4</sup>

Ullyot goes on: “In today’s frequent call for higher education to lead more directly to jobs, the stories of these influential, Yale-educated families in Minnesota remind us how a liberal arts education can have a positive, lifelong effect on lives and careers. The common denominator throughout this book is the Yale experience. It undoubtedly played an important role in shaping values, and

developing leadership qualities that helped these memorable Minnesotans make such a big difference in their lives back home.”<sup>5</sup>

Yale alumni influence in Minnesota is palpable today. But it began in the early 1800s, before Minnesota was even a recognized territory. The stories that follow bring these current alumni to life—and then trace how our current alumni stand on the shoulders of many early Yale men who made Minnesota in great part what it is today.



Pic 001 Yale Banner<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Regents, University of Minnesota, Mission Statement (Amended February 8, 2008) [https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Mission\\_Statement.pdf](https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Mission_Statement.pdf) (accessed May 22, 2018); Harvard University, Mission Statement (accessed May 22, 2018) <https://www.harvard.edu/about-harvard/harvard-glance>.

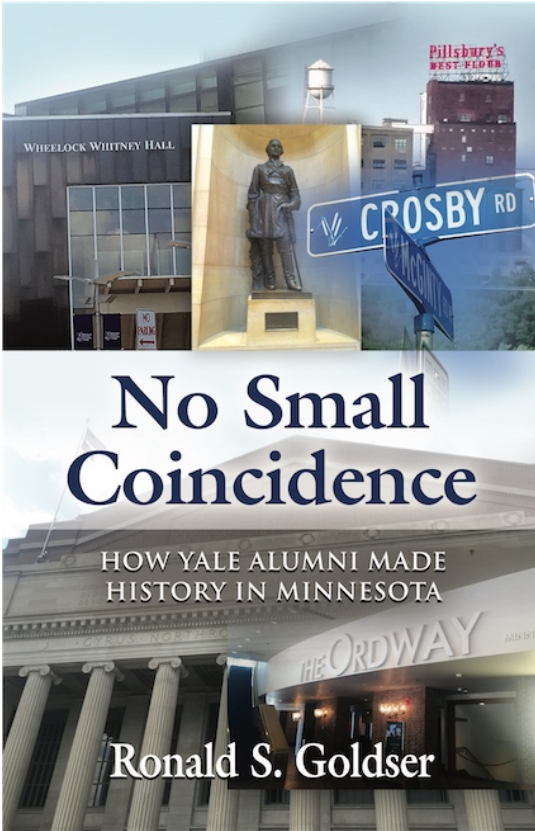
<sup>2</sup> Dwight Hall at Yale, Center for Public Service and Social Justice. <http://dwiththall.org/> (accessed May 22, 2018) To this day, Dwight Hall is about service: “Dwight Hall volunteers devote themselves to causes and contribute time and energy to filling real needs in the community...”

<sup>3</sup> Paul Moore, Jr., “A Touch of Laughter” in *My Harvard, My Yale*, cited in Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Morgan, *The First Hundred Years, 1880-1980*. (Minneapolis: Harvard Club Foundation, 1982) “An article in the October 2, 1891, issue of *The Harvard Advocate* noted that over Christmas break, the Glee Club would “sing in St. Paul and Minneapolis ... where, though Yale graduates prevail in numbers, there are still enough from Harvard to give the fellows a hearty welcome and ensure that the event will be beneficial to the good name of the University.” That was 90 years ago. The same could be said about us today.”

<sup>5</sup> Jim Ulylot (Harvard Club representative), in discussion with author, July 20, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Picture credit: Reggie Darling, The View From Darling House, “Yale Banner.”



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