

Remembering Moses Noyes

Text and photos by Olwen Logan (Published 8/22/07)

Replica of church's first minister's gravestone is dedicated



Born in 1643, the Reverend Moses Noyes became the first minister of the then Church of Christ, now the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme, in 1665.

He died on Nov. 10, 1729, after serving the Church for over 64 years and was buried in the Duck River Cemetery.

This past Sunday, almost 278 years later, Moses Noyes was remembered again when a ceremony was held to dedicate a replica of his original gravestone.

The Noyes family and the Deacons of the present church combined forces to preserve the original grave marker, which was deteriorating rapidly in the vagaries of the New England weather.

The beautifully inscribed brownstone gravestone was removed from its site in the cemetery to a custom-made case in the church and a replica carved in identical fashion out of granite, which is significantly more weatherproof, replaced it.

After the morning service on Sunday, the congregation gathered on the steps of the church (see photo above) to create an informal procession led by two riders on horseback to make the short walk down to the cemetery.



Prior to the start of the procession, 12 members of the Noyes family gathered on the lawn in front of the church for a photo together. Several are direct descendants of Moses Noyes, including Jim Noyes (second from left), a ninth generation Noyes, his son Bruce (extreme right); Lee Noyes (at rear, third from left), Vieve Noyes Kay (third from left), and Carol Noyes Winters (fifth from left), all ninth generation, and 10th generation Michelle Davis (fourth from left.)



The procession then gently wound its way up McCurdy Rd. in the bright sunlight.



Led by Leah Sweet and Meredith Chamberlain on horses loaned for the event from McCulloch Farm in Old Lyme, Senior Minister Reverend David Good and Associate Minister Rebecca Crosby followed immediately behind and ahead of some 70 members of the congregation.



Congregation members who included First Selectman Timothy Griswold, Florence Griswold Museum Director Jeffrey Anderson, Church Historian Robert Webster and his wife Betsy, and a number of Deacons, listened first to a short introductory speech by the Chairman of the Deacons, Carol Levy (below.)



Levy noted that the relatives of Moses Noyes "must be very proud" of him as he was one of the people who had "founded this area" and was responsible for "what it is today - our heritage."



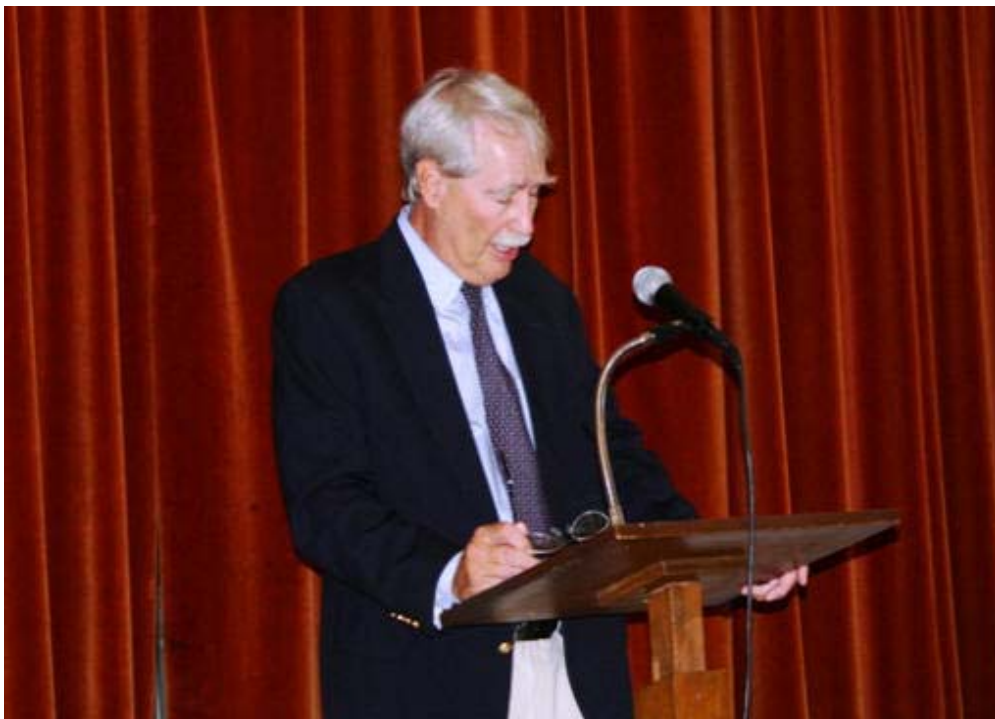
Reverend Good then spoke (above) commenting that Noyes had lived in a house situated where the Cherrystones restaurant on Shore Rd. is now located. He observed to laughter that he would very comfortable if the congregation chose to pay him as Noyes had been paid in "firewood and land." Good reminded the assembled crowd that "100 acres [had been] given to the ministry" back then and that "The 100 Acres" was the original name of Cherrystones.

Good led the group in prayer speaking of the "extraordinary heritage" that Noyes and his early brethren had left. He said "those who first fell in love with the hills and valleys here ... worked, and worked hard to lay the foundation for all that we have today." Noting "their faith was as solid as rock," he described Noyes and that first congregation as "part of the quarry from which this church is established" and said that those presently gathered should be "the guardians and keepers of the dreams of previous generations."

Good closed with the words, "Let us remember the man who worked and prayed that we may be the congregation we are today."



After the dedication was complete, Bruce Noyes, a 10th generation direct descendant of Moses still resident in Old Lyme, took the opportunity to touch the gravestones of his ancestors Moses (left) and Moses' son, also Moses (right.)



The group then returned to the church for a reception during which Lee Noyes of Morrisonville, NY (above), gave a detailed account of his ancestor's life and beliefs. He recalled that Noyes was an active participant in the formation in 1701 of the Collegiate School of Old Saybrook, which later moved to New Haven and changed its name to Yale College. Noting ministers at that time were chosen and elected by the congregation, Noyes concluded that the fact his ancestor held the job for 63 years was "a pretty good indicator that he was doing a good job." ([Click here to read the full text of his speech.](#))



The Noyes clan gathered again for another photo in the church's Sheffield Auditorium (above) before heading off to view their ancestor's original gravestone in its new resting place in the church.



Michelle Davis, a 10th generation Noyes living in Old Lyme, pointed out a word on the text of the gravestone, while a ninth generation family member, Vieve Noyes Kay (below right) of Meriden, encapsulated the universal mood of the day with her smile.



Text of Speech given by Charles Lee Noyes on the occasion of the Dedication of the New Headstone for the Rev. Moses Noyes, Aug.19, 2007

On behalf of the Noyes family, thank you for the privilege to speak at today's dedication of the new headstone for our great grandfather, Rev. Moses Noyes (1643-1729).

This memorable occasion provides the opportunity to reflect once again on our roots, on our proud cultural heritage.

It provides the opportunity to remember—

- > the origins of our community and of the long ministry of Rev. Moses Noyes
- > the expansion of the Saybrook township to the east side of the Connecticut River by the 1660s
- > the formal separation between Saybrook and the East Side known as the **"Loving Parting"** (1665)
- > the settlement of the area that became recognized by 1667 as the town of Lyme *and* the practical difficulties of attending religious services in Saybrook and the need to establish a new church community

In its broader cultural and historical context, today's dedication should also remind us of the different focus of our ancestors—

- > that religion played a far greater role in their daily lives and in the day-to-day affairs of the community and government
- > that our ancestors sought to establish a Biblical Commonwealth more than they sought to improve their material lives

As such, colonial law and institutions supported the established Congregational Church and its ministries. The formation of a new town or parish required the approval of the legislature; and the General Assembly in Hartford would not have done so unless it had been convinced that the new township could build a church (meeting house) or afford a minister.

The General Assembly's recognition of Lyme as a corporate entity in May 1667 testified to the belief that the new community contained the required minimum of 30 families and possessed the resources to support a ministry.

This formal decision of the colonial legislature thus set the legal stage for the ministry of Moses Noyes, who had already begun to preach in Lyme by 1665, a mission that continued until his death in 1729.

Born in Newbury, Mass. in 1643, Rev. Noyes was well prepared for his calling. He was the son of a distinguished family of English clergymen that included his father, the Rev. James Noyes, who (with his brother, Nicholas) had sailed for Boston from London in 1634.

On a similar note, Moses would marry Ruth Picket of New London, the great granddaughter of Elder William Brewster, spiritual leader of the *Mayflower* pilgrims.

Moses entered Harvard College at the age of twelve, graduating with his older brother, James, in 1659. As was common, the subsequent preparation of the two brothers for the ministry was obtained through private study, probably through their uncle, Rev. Thomas Parker of Newbury (because their father had died in 1656).

At the age of nineteen, Moses was invited to preach at the Old North Meeting House in Boston in 1662. Regardless of his experience in Boston, there is no evidence that Rev. Noyes had held a regular pastorate until his arrival in Lyme in 1665. (His brother, James, who had become the minister in Stonington the previous year, had influenced the decision of Moses to journey to Connecticut.)

Notwithstanding the continued difficulties of the town in paying its first minister (land grants supplemented what would become an annual income of 60 pounds), Moses Noyes remained in Lyme as its pastor for 63 years. This extended tenure by itself is fitting tribute to the impact and success of his calling to Connecticut.

Pastoral duties would require Rev. Noyes to serve his far-flung parish (some 80 square miles) on horseback, a community

that extended from Long Island Sound to Colchester and from the Connecticut River to New London, distances that grew as the population expanded to the north and east from its original center on Meeting House Hill, Black Hall and Duck River.

In addition to daily pastoral duties, his role and responsibilities would transcend the parish. His significant accomplishments in the colony would include:

- > the delivery of the election sermon to the General Assembly in Hartford (1694)
- > his appointment as a Trustee (1703) and a Fellow (1706) of what would become **Yale College**, an institution intended to train young men for the ministry and public service¹
- > his contribution to the **Saybrook Platform**, a document enacted by the legislature that strengthened the authority of ministers and further institutionalized the Congregational Church (1708)²

To our knowledge, none of the sermons of Rev. Noyes as Lyme's pastor have survived; nor have his pastoral records.

However, we can assume that his sermons reflected the Calvinistic faith in the Bible as the sole source of authority and guidance and that he shared the Calvinistic premise that ministers received their authority and functions directly from God.

He certainly would have adhered to the discipline imposed by church authorities as to consistent attendance and proper attention and decorum at religious services.

Although his father had died when Moses was young, we can also assume that the elder Noyes had influenced the religious convictions of his son and his attitude towards the world.

The brother-in-law of Rev. James Noyes remembered his colleague as "a man of singular qualifications, in piety excelling," as an "implacable enemy to all heresies."

The elder Noyes had been "a most able warrior," a man who was "sure in word and speech" and "resolute [in the defense of] truth." However, Thomas Parker also recalled that Rev. Noyes had exercised "a most profound judgment" and "was a most excellent counsellor [*sic*]" to all those in doubt.

This gentle, mild man "was of so loving and compassionate and humble" nature that all who knew him desired his acquaintance.

Such had been the character of the Rev. James Noyes, the father of Moses. Such was the character that he may have instilled in his son, the first minister of this congregation.

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¹Originally the Collegiate School, this institution was founded in Saybrook in 1701. Although brother James is listed as a Founder, Moses was not. Moses did, however, encourage its founding.

²This law established permanent ministerial associations that were alone authorized to license candidates for the ministry. Although a man became a minister only at the calling from a specific church, only one who was licensed could practically find a pulpit in the established church. The Saybrook Platform did not prevent dissenters from worship.