

Nook Farm

Nook Farm was a neighborhood in Hartford where the residents were a circle of close friends and literary types that loomed large in the literary, political and social worlds of the nation. It got its name from a “nook” in the Park River, which defined the property’s southeast corner. Harriet Beecher Stowe made it her home in 1864 and remained there until she died in 1896.

Isabella Beecher Hooker, Stowe's younger half-sister, was interested in the status of women; she became a prominent advocate of women's suffrage in the United States. She organized the first convention in Connecticut to discuss women in government, and formed the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association. In 1871, she organized the suffragist convention in Washington D.C. For seven years until its passage, she submitted to the Connecticut legislature a bill to guarantee women the same property rights as their husbands.

In 1853, Nook Farm began as a collaborative purchase between John Hooker (a lawyer, husband of **Isabella Beecher**, and descendant of Hartford founder Thomas Hooker) and his brother-in-law, Francis Gillette (a Senator, abolitionist, and temperance reformer). Following the purchase, the land was subdivided and sold in pieces.

The community attracted friends, relatives, business associates, and literary types, including Stowe, Hartford Courant editors Joseph Hawley and Charles Dudley Warner, and Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). This idealistic, liberal circle was a tight one, and there were frequent impromptu social activities and intellectual discussions.

The everyday life of Nook Farm was lived less in the single-family sphere than in the social area where families met on common ground. The informality of the old farm was perpetuated and enlarged in this community of friends and relatives. The houses appeared to be irregularly spaced on one enormous estate. Winding among the trees were paths and shortcuts that the neighbors used without going to the street. Doors were unlocked, and residents of the farm walked in and out of each other's houses without knocking. William Dean Howells wrote that the Clemens' and Warners "live very near each other, in a sort of suburban grove, and their neighbors are the Stowes and the Hookers, and a great many delightful people. They go in and out of each other's houses without ringing, and nobody gets more than the first syllable of his first name -- they call their minister Joe Twitchell."