Chronicles of Brunonia

Forgotten Memorials: The Carrie Tower and the Annmary Brown Memorial

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The following paper tells the stories of the lives of the women behind Carrie Tower and the Annmary Brown Memorial, two largely unnoticed fixtures on Brown University's campus. It details the lives of Carrie and Annmary Brown (daughters of Nicholas Brown) from birth to death, with a focus on their respective romances and their resulting pain from separation from each other.

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Next time you're in Providence, take a trip to the corner of Prospect and Waterman Streets at the top of College Hill. Zealous parents and prospective students trying to look indifferent will stroll by as they seek the admissions office a block over. Tired undergraduates will scuff past on their way to the library. But almost no one will notice Carrie Tower.

Walk through the gate. Not the big one just down Prospect, but the smaller one off the side of Waterman. It will be quiet because, well, it's the quiet green. Look at the clock tower. Now look closer. There, just above the warped black door at the base of the East side of the tower, stop and read: "Love is Strong as Death," etched into the granite.

Cut east through the Main Green, past University Hall and flying frisbees, and through the iron gates onto Brown Street. You will stumble upon the Annmary Brown Memorial. Students in sweatpants will probably be more concerned with stumbling to the dining hall just behind it, so chances are you'll be alone.

Go up the pyramidal granite steps and through the bronze doors, aged to black, and take a moment to explore the collections of swords, toy soldiers, art and furniture. But don't miss the crypt in the back. Use the sun filtering down through the skylight to read the inscriptions on the two marble slabs on the floor: "Like some rare flower entombed in its beauty, shedding everlasting"

A tower and a museum. Two memorials built for two sisters by the husbands that loved them, an elaborate version of initials carved into a tree. A few words nicked into granite that hint at the love behind the buildings and play with our imaginations. Who were these women, this Carrie and this Annmary?

Are the memorials simply decorum, or do they really have love stories to back them up?

I expected biographies and well-preserved letters and diaries to provide some answers. After all, Carrie and Annmary Brown were part of Providence's prominent Brown family, integral in the formation of Rhode Island and granddaughters to the Nicholas Brown who lent his name and the first $5000 to the University. But they were nonetheless Carrie and Annmary, and the lives of the nineteenth-century women fell into the shadows of their male brethren.

Besides the memorials, two tribute books written by General Rush C. Hawkins, Annmary's husband and Carrie's close friend, are all that preserve their lives. The story comes from Rush's point of view, and he describes a romance according to his perfect terms. The books hide deep within the shelves of Brown University's archives. Dirt has found its way into the grooves of the covers' cream fabric, and the spines hang by mere threads, barely connecting the story on the pages within.

Rome, 1845. The Brown family has just arrived with their four children in tow, including eight-year old Annmary and four-year old Carrie. Italian nationalism has fueled a revolution against the rule of Pope Pius IX, and President Polk has just appointed Nicholas Brown III as Consul General.

Over the next nine years, the girls transform into ladies. English, Italian and that day's French recitations mingle in the rooms of the Brown's home. Original works by DaVinci and Donatello teach them about art, and Annmary completes her algebra as Carrie practices multiplication tables. In the evening, the murmur of small talk and the tinkle of piano keys escapes from the smoky

light of the parlor and travels through the hallways, as the girls simultaneously practice their musical skills and social graces.

After Annmary's graduation from the respected Madame Arlaud's school in Geneva in 1854, the Browns return to Providence, where twenty-three year old Annmary and seventeen-year old Carrie swiftly join the social circles of Providence's upper class. Their closets brim with the fashions of the time: petticoats, chemisette, crinoline, front-lace boots, pearls, huge puff sleeves that look like jellyfish. A warm Sunday afternoon may find them coaching through India Point Park on their way to a picnic or bowling or tennis, always amongst friends. A cold Friday night may find them huddled under blankets as they sleigh past the stately clapboard homes of Benefit Street.

Though they live in a world of splendor, it is the sisters' genuine characters that hook their husbands. Annmary meets General Rush C. Hawkins early in the summer of 1858, next to the sparkling waters of Narragansett Bay at Choppequonsett, the Browns' summer home that they fondly call Choppe. They spend time coaching or walking, always under the supervision of a chaperone, probably Annmary's mother, and "sparking it," or kissing and cuddling, when they can escape her watchful eye. Hawkins discovers in Annmary a graceful, natural and refined woman whose conversation "sparkles with genial suggestion." She captivates him with her innocence, frankness, "a perfect absence of any consciousness of the value of self, and entire freedom from any taint of worldliness." Their courtship progresses quickly, and the two announce their engagement on September 17, 1858.

The following June 30, twenty-one year-old Annmary, twenty-seven year old Rush, their families and “a few most intimate friends” gather in the great library at Choppe. The fresh green lawn and blooming flowers peek through the window, and a gentle, warm wind joins the simple wedding. Annmary most likely wears a white wedding dress with a wreath of white flowers or a veil in her chestnut hair. The bride and groom’s hands shake as they follow the bishop’s instructions to place the rings on their fingers. There is no reception and no honeymoon. The practices of elaborate weddings, receptions and honeymoons are just becoming popular, and, even then, only for the upper class. And though Annmary and Rush belong to the elite, they are humble at the core.

The Civil War shatters their marital bliss on April 22, 1861, when it beckons the general into service. Annmary acknowledges that it is Rush’s duty, but she laments, “it will almost kill me.” During Rush’s five-year absence, Carrie steps in as Annmary’s closest companion and caretaker. In the autumn of 1864, Annmary continues a cycle of respiratory illnesses that has plagued her since the age of three, and Carrie sacrifices “the allurements of society” to care for her sister.

In the summer of 1875, at a belated thirty-four, Carrie finds her own prince when Italian noble Chevalier A. Paul Bajnotti sails into Swan Point. Her eyes, the first thing you notice about her and the hardest to forget, grab his attention. Clear and piercing, they express the “openness and sunshine” that make her a favorite within society. The two wed at Choppe on June 16, 1876, with a wedding similar to Annmary’s. Average, middle class couples would

honeymoon to a place like Niagara Falls or Cincinnati. The Bajnottis travel to Italy.

The Bajnottis live in New York City for only a year before Paul receives re-appointment as Vice Consul to Paris. The sisters' pain at separation is the "beginning of an indescribable sorrow," and Carrie cries as the steam billows up from the ship that will take her to Paris. And so while a middle-class, nineteenth century woman might feel trapped by the home—taking care of an average of five children, mending, cooking, and cleaning without maids or nannies—Carrie is, in a way, trapped by her fairy tale.

In the coming years, the Bajnottis follow Paul's post around the world—Paris, Rome, St. Petersburg, Chicago, Switzerland, Turin—while the Hawkins seek a cure for Annmary's perpetual respiratory illnesses. Norfolk, New York, Nice, Florida, Charleston, Geneva, Vevay, Paris, Alexandria, Cairo, Bingen, Providence, La Bourboule—the couple searches for health all over the world, hoping new techniques, or at least warmer climates, will deliver a cure. But they can't escape catarrh, bronchitis, pleurisy, Roman intermittent fever, lung congestion, and common colds that send Annmary to bed for weeks at a time. She can't walk more than a mile and generally stays indoors, though even there she is not safe, for emotional anxiety or stress can induce an outbreak.

Meanwhile, Carrie flits around Paris' social circles and sails frequently to and from Rome, St. Petersburg and Chicago. Occasionally, the Hawkins make it to Rome or Paris to visit Carrie, although either Annmary or Rush usually end up contracting some sort of illness and going home.

In 1890, Carrie and Annmary part for the last time as Carrie sets sail for Turin, Italy. It shares the same ocean with Providence but, with a steamer voyage that takes approximately one week, is a world apart from her sister. “The last moments of [our] separation with her on board the steamer were pathetic and sad beyond description,” writes Hawkins.

In the autumn of 1892, Carrie contracts the flu, and the Bajnotties leave Turin for Rome’s warmer climate. Carrie improves, and they travel further south to Palermo, Italy, a tiny shore town nestled at the foot of mountains and whose bay is a mirror image of Providence’s. While there, on March 27th, Carrie writes her last letter to the Hawkins. She again falls ill with the flu a day later and retires to her room at the *Hotel des Palmes*. The flu escalates into pneumonia, and for eleven days, Paul sits by his wife’s bedside as her body is wracked with fever, chills and vomiting. Carrie dies at 1:15 PM on April 6th, leaving Bajnotti “sorrowing and heart-broken.”

Around the same time, the Hawkins receive Carrie’s March 27th letter. She describes the people and vibrant pink flowers of the Sicilian Expo. They had no reason to expect that Carrie, the younger Brown sister, the healthier Brown sister, would succumb to the illness that had plagued Annmary for her entire life. But around 5:15 PM on the same day, they receive a telegram with news of Carrie’s death. Grief consumes Annmary.

Bajnotti holds an extensive competition to determine the architect who would memorialize Carrie in her hometown. Guy Lowell of Boston wins the honors and designs the clock tower that now stands as a landmark on Brown’s campus. Its ninety-five feet of granite and red brick tapers slightly as it reaches

for the sky, and four stone shields and urns with flames adorn the top of the now-silent belfry. A stone railing serves as both a protective barrier and a nice place to rest your arm while looking out over the bustle of Providence. The four clocks on top, flanked on each side by eight groups of stone fruit, look like clocks from Peter Pan. They no longer move.

In 1894, the Hawkins make a painful visit to Carrie's granite tombstone in the English cemetery in Rome. It sits against a backdrop of vines and trees, and looking out over the rest of the cemetery, it is an anchor for the surrounding multitude of cross gravestones surrounding it. The city's "feeling of quietude and every-present panorama of natural beauties" envelop the plot, just as Carrie had envisioned. As Annmary stands next to Carrie's grave, the pain at her separation from her sister rushes back. "When the separation came," Hawkins writes, "her courage failed, and she succumbed to the weight of grief she could no longer control. She never recovered from this nerve-exhausting crisis, and never mentioned without regret the marriage that caused the separation."

Annmary spends the next few years as she had spent the majority of her life, jumping from ship to ship and city to city in search of health. She is relatively well until Christmas Day of 1902, when the servant in charge of the furnaces neglects the temperature in her room. It drops to 63 degrees. She contracts a violent chill, a temperature of 104, a pulse of 90. Her cold morphs into pneumonia, and on January 4th, 1903, Annmary dies. A romance of forty-five years comes to a physical end. "No words at my command are equal to the expression of my desolation and loneliness," Hawkins writes. "Existence now is

tolerable only because linked with sweet memories of the past. The present is without joy, and the future a dreary anticipation."

Hawkins immediately hires Rhode Island architect Norman Isham to design a memorial, which now appropriately stands next to Brown's Health Services. The gray, windowless building resembles a tomb, and Annmary and Rush are, in fact, buried in the back. When Brown University acquired the memorial in 1948, they renovated the building, adding electricity and plumbing to make it more comfortable for the public. But it rarely receives visitors[1], and the hum of the lights fills the wide, spacious rooms that originally held Hawkins' personal rare book and art collection. In 1990, the University filled the large wooden cases that line the wall with Ann SK Brown's collection of elaborate, colored toy soldiers, as well as a collection of swords from England. They moved much of the original collection was to the John Hay Library or the memorial's basement.

Charlie, security guard and usher, asserts that it is not a museum and not a library but a memorial. Before Hawkin's own death in 1920, he placed flowers on Annmary's tomb every March 9th in honor of her birthday and left the withered greens on the slab until the next year, a tradition the University continues today. And in the basement, closer to the Hawkins' graves, amongst random pieces of artwork and University memorabilia, hides a locked box of love letters written between Annmary and Rush during the Civil War. In his will, Rush asserts that the box is never to be opened.

Just looking at the memorials, you think their loves were perfect. They had the money to be in love, to take the honeymoon, and not worry about chores

[1] Superstitious students believe that if you enter the memorial, you won't graduate.

and bills and transportation. To build memorials. You think, I want that. But most of the information comes from Hawkins, husband and close friend, and he doesn't discuss the fights, the secrets or the women's points of view. The memorials certainly don't. Annmary, at least, seemed to resent the marriage that took her sister away from her. Maybe Rush noticed and ensured that the memory of the two would be just down the street and around the corner from each other.

Either way, next time you're at Brown University, don't miss the clock tower on the quiet green or the tomb next to health services. Wander around them and through them. Take a moment to remember and take from them what you will.

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