

*The Annmary Brown Memorial*



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ARCH1900 – Archaeology of College Hill

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Brown University

10/01/2013

You can find the Annmary Brown Memorial placed on a quiet strip of Brown Street between Benevolent and Charlesfield, yet to say it quietly meshes with its surroundings wouldn't be quite right; it stands an enormous granite anomaly amongst the somewhat homogenous traditional red-brick New England collegiate buildings that flood the Brown University campus. The building was built between 1905 and 1907 by General Rush Christopher Hawkins as both a library for his collection rare texts and as a mausoleum for himself and his wife, Annmary Brown Hawkins, both of whom lie in a crypt in the rear (Mitchell, Annmary). Now one of Brown University's "sacred libraries," the mausoleum is still in heavy use as a home to several academic departments and a gallery for the University's collection of swords (Library).

General Hawkins, a Vermont native, was a prominent member of the American army having risen to the rank of Brigadier General during the Mexican-American and Civil wars (NY Times 1920). He began collecting rare texts accidentally at the age of twenty-four: only after curiously asking a knowledgeable friend did he come to realize that a tattered Latin manuscript he had purchased on a whim in 1855 New York actually dated to the year 1484 (Stillwell 1940). This led to an unyielding interest in the collection of rare texts, specifically from different presses that were in operation before 1500; by his death in 1920, he had gathered over two hundred first and second editions from some 130 of the 238 presses in operation before the year 1500, not to mention an additional five hundred independently printed pamphlets from the same time (Mitchell, Annmary). This passion in turn led to a gusto for writing on 16<sup>th</sup> Century aesthetics, extending beyond the realm of texts and into that of the fine arts—he eventually held the



prominent position of Commissioner of American Art to the *Exposition de Paris* of 1889 (NY Times 1920).

Information on Annmary is unfortunately sparse. Most notably, she was daughter of Nicholas Brown, after whom the University is named, and sister of Carrie, to whom the tower on



the Quiet Green is dedicated (Phillips). Annmary and Hawkins were married in 1860 soon after having met at a high-society party in Newport, and they resided in New York City until her passing in January of 1903 of pneumonia. She was buried in Providence but posthumously moved into the Memorial, and he remained in New York until his death in 1920—his poor vision the cause of not noticing an oncoming car (NY Times 1903;

NY Times 1920). The cornerstone of the memorial library was laid in 1905, and the building was opened for public viewing of the paintings and texts on the morning of July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1907 (NY Times 1907).

In 1907, the University librarian, George Parker Winship, recruited Pembroke sophomore Margaret Bingham Stillwell to be trained as his successor. Aside from a quick stint in the rare books section of the New York Public Library during the First World War, Stillwell spent the entirety of her career, 1909 through 1953, as curator of the Annmary Brown Memorial Library (Mitchell, MBS; Library). She operated it independent of the University until 1948, when, anticipating her retirement, she joined the faculty as a full professor, and five years later brought the Memorial Library under Brown's control.

Presently, the Memorial is home to Brown's departments of Medieval and Renaissance/Early Modern Studies. In the early 1990's, all the texts were moved from Annmary

Brown to the John Hay Library both in response to a break-in and in an effort to consolidate and reorganize the University's possessions (Library), though the original paintings, most from Annmary Brown's own collection, remain in place. The Library has a seminar room in the rear and is used to house the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, which permanently exhibits the Mazansky British Sword Collection, a set of over one hundred British swords dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Library). On a personal note, for some reason this seems a strange and somewhat inappropriate fit for an exhibit in a mausoleum.

The aesthetic of the Annmary Brown Memorial is a bit abnormal. Architecture, especially at such a large scale, is supposed to help cope with death in some way, and its monumentality generally relates to the monumentality of the people within. Annmary Brown's design, if anything, is heavy. It feels more appropriate as a small chamber in a graveyard rather than a large monument on a university campus. Even though it falls within the Roman classical style it's quite unadorned, aside from its enormously raised pedestal (elevating the gaze from the ordinary up to the stately). The key to understanding the memorial's monumentality and true magnificence is oddly not in the architecture, as is the case with most historical mausoleums;

only a form of permanence is reflected in its architecture. The magnificence, the magnifiers of the people for whom the mausoleum was built, in fact lies within: the books (though unfortunately this only lasted until they were relocated in the 1990's). Instead of donning a



visually lavish and aesthetically hedonistic crescendo to the tombs, the Annmary Brown

Memorial presents an intellectual build-up of books upon books upon books—not simply those that you could find in the Rockefeller or Sciences Library, but rather texts that hold a sort of sacred and authoritative value. That they should choose to elevate themselves not through conspicuous consumption but rather through literature seems referential to the quintessential Socratic belief that *knowledge is virtue*.

Hawkins is far overrepresented in the texts on the Memorial, and so it's difficult to come to a conclusion on whether both he and his wife shared his passion for old texts. It seems odd, however, that he might have simply used the building to house his personal collection while giving the dedication little thought. Stillwell, heavily biased towards Hawkins and his greatness, seems to suggest (possibly inadvertently) that the bridge from collection of text to art was in fact heavily influenced by Annmary; the collection of some hundred paintings originally within the



memorial were predominantly hers (Stillwell 1940). She then goes on to explain that since some of these paintings that Annmary collected were inaccessibly shoved away in the back the building near the crypt, Hawkins valued his own collection of texts over anything she might have found precious, but

rather Hawkins must have seen value in these paintings above all else; why else would he have placed them closest of all to their tombs? Moreover, he chose to build in Providence, not his own native Vermont or New York but rather Annmary's. In spite of quite lopsided representations in historical texts that tend to ignore her influence on Hawkins and the Memorial's extensive library

of books, Hawkins did not act simply to preserve and glorify his own passion; in keeping the memory of his wife very close at heart he appears to have been far more of a romantic.

Shifting gears, it would seem worthwhile to consider the archaeological significance of conducting fieldwork near the Annmary Brown Memorial. According to a map of Providence dating from 1895, only ten years before construction, there used to exist other buildings on the Mausoleum's current plot (one of which was rumored to be the original Brown household). Because the building is so self-encapsulated (no windows for objects to fall through, no terraces, and few doors) and not near a major hub of activity (since it's a bit out of the way it's not surrounded by stereotypical "campus life"—the general collegiate shenanigans to which most grassy spaces, walkways, areas around residential or academic buildings, etc. would be subject), digging would prove resourceful in being able to jump straight back to pre-1900s Brown. Granted, the first several contexts would most likely be deep and empty because of this century-long lack of use. Also, the area underwent a sizeable amount of construction in the early 1900s, and such a large cultural formation process would imply the possibility of a largely disturbed site. It would be difficult to place exact dates on objects, though we could probably assume most would come from the same time frame.

It's unfortunate that the texts, such a key aspect of the Memorial, were displaced; the experience of entering the permanent resting place of these two intellectuals now seems a bit skewed. Nonetheless, it still revels in historical and academic splendor, and the stern building with its rich library within seems eerily like the inscription Hawkins writes about his wife inscribed in the marble above their crypt: *Like some rare flower entombed in night, its beauty shedding everlasting light.*

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## Images

### *Cover – Annmary Brown Memorial Exterior*

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### *Page 1 – Gen. Rush Christopher Hawkins Portrait*

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### *Page 2 – Annmary Brown Hawkins Portrait*

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### *Page 3 – Annmary Brown Memorial Interior*

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### *Page 4 – Crypt*

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