

The Coburn Carter Mausoleum

When looking at the Coburn Carter Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery, it is easy to forget you are still in New York City. There, resting beneath two towering maple trees, far from the sirens and crowded sidewalks, eight members of the Coburn and Carter families take their eternal rest in seeming harmony with nature. Located mid-block on Prospect Avenue at the northern edge of the Heather plot of Woodlawn Cemetery, this funerary monument is a single-chambered, tetrastyle neoclassical mausoleum (Fig. 1). Punctuated by carved garlands on its frieze are the surnames of those interred: Coburn and Carter. In 1911, the Harrison Granite Company designed this monument for the family of Lena May Coburn (née Carter) and her husband Hewitt Coburn Jr.

This mausoleum was erected across two plots, the former owned by Lena's Mother, Hannah M. Carter (née Youngs), and the latter by the Coburns; additionally, this structure may have been designed in concert with the directly adjacent Bowne mausoleum, which belonged to Lena's aunt, Henrietta 'Nettie' Bowne (née Youngs).¹ Interred in this structure are: Robert K. Carter (1839-1904), Hannah M. Carter (1848-1908), Clarence M. Carter (1873-1917), Lena M. Coburn (1869-1913), Hewitt Coburn Jr. (1859-1926), Hewitt Coburn (1904-1904), Robert Bowne Coburn (1906-1983), and Elizabeth Mohun Coburn (1906-1988). Unlike the monuments of other multigenerational families, the addition of a married surname is not a later addition etched below the name of the parents here, but rather the names adorning the frieze are in line with one another and original to the design, reflecting the importance of the Coburn and Carter families' matrilinear connection.

Biographical Information

Hannah Maria Carter was born in 1848 to Daniel S. and Maria Youngs (née Mastin) and was raised, alongside her younger sister, Nettie, on West Thirty-Second Street in Manhattan.² Census records and business directories show their father was a self-described “master builder,” who came to own four buildings on the corner of Eighth Avenue and Thirty-Second Street, which were appraised at roughly \$100,000 in 1873.³ After the Civil War ended, Hannah met Robert K. Carter (Fig. 2), a hardware dealer and former Confederate surgeon from Culpepper County, Virginia. Carter was the son of William A. Carter and his second wife, Mary Catherine Pittman.⁴ As a descendant of the prominent Virginia Carter family, Robert K. Carter was likely named for his most infamous ancestor, Robert “King” Carter I (1663-1732), a colonial merchant, tobacco planter, politician, and enslaver.⁵ R.K. Carter graduated from the University of Virginia and received his medical education from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. **In 1869, Robert and Hannah Carter welcomed a daughter, Lena; four years later, they had a son, Clarence.**

Not long after Hannah gave birth to her second child, her sixty-one-year-old father, a recent widower, remarried a twenty-four-year-old woman named Jennie.⁶ Days before the wedding, Daniel reportedly fell ill and transferred the deeds to his properties, which comprised his entire estate, to his daughters. His new wife, a young woman admittedly marrying for financial security, found this to be a breach of her right to her dower and took the case against her stepdaughters to court.⁷ The legal battle over Youngs’ property and its status as inheritance or dower, was tried several times before being brought to the New York Superior Court. There,

the judge ruled in favor of Jennie Youngs, ordering Hannah Carter and Nettie Bowne to relinquish their father's property, and with it, their inheritance.⁸

Fortunately for Hannah and Nettie, this loss did not financially compromise the small family, however, for several years afterward, the couple shared a home on East Sixty-Fourth Street with the newlywedded Nettie and her husband Samuel Bowne.⁹ Both Bowne and Robert Carter were industrious men and would soon make fortunes that would compensate for the loss of their wives' inheritance. Bowne was a chemical manufacturer, most famous for selling Cod Liver Oil Emulsion.¹⁰ Robert Carter worked in several hardware firms before opening his own company, R.K. Carter & Co., which dealt in the wholesale trade of hardware, iron, steel, mill, mining, and railway supplies.¹¹ The company became quite successful, and the Carters were able to commission a house at 40 East Seventy-Fifth Street by the prominent architects Thom and Wilson for the grand total of \$40,000.¹² At the age of 66, Carter died of a months-long affliction of Bright's Disease.¹³ In the 1904 issue of *The Iron Age* trade catalog, Carter is given a lengthy tribute, heralding him as "one of the pioneers" in hardware wholesaling who possessed a "marked ability" for this trade.¹⁴ When he died, his business partners assumed control of his company.¹⁵

The Carters' youngest child and only son, Clarence, graduated from Columbia University School of Arts in 1893; however, little else is known of his life. According to the New York State and Federal Censuses, Clarence lived much of his adult life at his parent's home on Seventy-Fifth Street, but his employment was never recorded.¹⁶ Clarence's name was mentioned in the papers on one interesting occasion. On January 25, 1905, the *New York Tribune* reported that the lawyers of Harry Kendall Thaw challenged the selection of Clarence as a Juror for the

infamous Stanford White case, claiming Carter had formed an opinion immediately after the architect's shooting.¹⁷

After Hannah's death in 1908, Lena was named the sole heir of their mother's estate; the will, however, stipulated that Lena must furnish Clarence an adequate apartment and provide a \$1,000 monthly allowance from the income of Hannah's estate. Lena kept to her word and rented her brother a unit on the Upper West Side, where he lived out the short remainder of his life. In 1912, Clarence died of a sudden illness, leaving Lena as the sole survivor of the Carter family.¹⁸

Like her brother, Lena seldom made the papers. On December 12, 1895, Lena M. Carter married Hewitt Coburn Jr. in St. James Episcopal Church in Manhattan and moved from the city to Hartford, Connecticut.¹⁹ Hewitt Coburn Jr. (Fig. 2), the son of Scottish immigrants, was born in New York in 1859. By 1900, Coburn was president of the Glastonbury Woolen Knitting Company. Lena gave birth to their first child, Hewitt Coburn, on February 24, 1904. The infant Coburn's date of death is listed on his crypt as February 25, 1904, just one day later.

In 1906, Lena gave birth to another son, Robert Bowne Coburn (Fig. 3), named for his maternal grandfather and maternal aunt and uncle Bowne. Soon after her mother and brother's death, Lena's health began to decline. In 1913, Lena died of complications with asthma, which she reportedly struggled with for four years.²⁰ By this time, the completed the mausoleum was ready to receive Lena alongside her reinterred family members, who had originally been buried in the plot.

Hewitt Coburn Jr. inherited Lena's estate and remarried to a woman named Sadie White.²¹ Coburn remained close with Nettie Bowne (Fig. 4) throughout the next thirteen years of his life. Business continued to improve in the early twentieth century as Glastonbury Knitting Company became well-known for its products, most notably for its merino wool long

undergarments (Fig. 5). By World War I, Coburn was appointed as the chairperson of the US War Service Underwear Committee, which no doubt was a boon for Glastonbury.²² In 1920, Sadie White Coburn died and was buried in the White family plot at Union Cemetery in North Smithfield, Rhode Island.²³ Coburn died in 1926 and was interred alongside his first wife, Lena.

Now orphaned, twenty-year-old Yale sophomore Robert Bowne Coburn undoubtedly turned to the support of his great-aunt Nettie. The pair seem to have remained close; in 1929, Robert Coburn married Elizabeth Mohun, a Barnard graduate from New York (Fig. 6) in 1929 and Nettie was the only surviving family member in attendance.²⁴ Nettie died soon after in 1930, bequeathing to her only blood relative, R.B. Coburn, over \$1,000,000 in cash, stock, and trust funds.²⁵ As stipulated in Bowne's will, Coburn served as a director on the board of the Samuel and Nettie Bowne Hospital in Poughkeepsie until its closure in the late 1950s. In 1959, Bowne Hospital became Bowne Hall, after the board of directors transferred the property to the State University of New York (SUNY) for the construction of Dutchess Community College.²⁶ Coburn established a career for himself as a stockbroker in Connecticut and founded the investment firm Coburn & Meredith.²⁷ Robert and Elizabeth Coburn had three children:

In 1983, Robert Bowne Coburn sustained severe burns from a fire in his garage and shortly thereafter died of complications.²⁸ Elizabeth passed away five years after her husband; both were interred in the last crypts in the family mausoleum.

The Mausoleum

From Prospect Ave, the viewer is presented with a welcoming yet seemingly austere facade; nestled beneath two large maples, the monument offers perhaps respite from the harsh summer sun and extends an architectural invitation with its granite platform, a later mid-twentieth century addition leading from the street to the structure's portico. The monument is

raised approximately two feet above ground level on a thick granite base. Across a plain pair of stairs, two overgrown yews sprawl, leaving only a small path for the infrequent visitor to pass. With a closer inspection, the building reveals a subtle complexity; the unornamented and utilitarian pavement and stairs give way to the portico's unfluted Ionic columns and entablature made of smooth Barre granite.²⁹ Behind this projection, the building is further stylistically complicated with a rusticated treatment on the central chamber's exterior, garnished on top by an extension of the smooth frieze in a belt-course around the entire mausoleum.

On each façade, bronze protective features, aged with blue patinas, add a pop of color to the otherwise monotonous stone: bronze grilles ward off squirrels from ventilation shafts; a bronze window grille protects a pane of art-glass from impact and theft, and a locking bronze door with filigree window grilles stifle the unwelcomed guest.

Behind the heavy bronze doors and rough-hewn granite, the mausoleum is clad with a polished and expressive blue-veined white marble, described by the Harrison Granite Co. as "Italian Marble" (Fig. 7).³⁰ Two bronze rosettes are affixed to each catacomb's slab. Lining the narrow corridor of the mausoleum are two rows of four vertically stacked catacombs. On the eastern side, Lena is interred along with the three members of the Coburn family in the following arrangement: (from bottom to top) husband Hewitt, herself, son Robert Bowne, and infant son Hewitt. Opposite the Coburns are Lena's Carter family: (from bottom to top) brother Clarence M., father Robert K., and mother Hannah M. Above Lena's mother is the most recent internment of her daughter-in-law Elizabeth Mohun Coburn.

Save for the carved and cast ornament, the architect mainly relied on the materials to effectively communicate an atmosphere of warmth, welcome, and proximity to heaven. While the architectural play of texture and tone are certainly deft, perhaps the most intriguing facet of

this mausoleum sits at the back of the chamber, above a small marble mantle. There, the afternoon sun filters through the maple's leaves and into the south-facing frame of colorful art glass (Fig. 8). The pane is thematically simple, depicting a young woman in heavenly exaltation against a backdrop of clouds, clasping her hands and expressing a calm yet pure happiness. The window consists of opalescent drapery glass and reverse-painted glass in hues of blue, purple, and pale yellow, creating a three-dimensional and tactile piece. The window shares a striking similarity in color, material, and composition, to that in the Bowne Mausoleum (Fig. 9), which is signed by Lederle Studios.

Louis J. Lederle was a German immigrant and glass artisan who worked for well-known decorative glass makers, such as the Belcher Glass Company and, most famously, Tiffany Studios. Lederle was a skilled glass painter and often worked under Louis Comfort Tiffany's direct supervision.³¹ Excellent examples of his work can be found in the Tiffany windows at **Saint Michael's Church in Manhattan** (Fig. 10).

Interestingly, the woman depicted in the Coburn Carter mausoleum is not painted in the idealistic humanist manner often used in religious glasswork, as seen in the Bowne window's depiction of Jesus; the woman here is drawn in a more contemporary style, with features that bear a familial resemblance to later photos of Nettie Bowne (Fig. 11), suggesting the window may be based on an image of Hannah or Lena. Nettie Bowne's close relationship with her sister and niece along with her documented concern for both mausoleums' maintenance throughout the last two decades of her life suggests she had influence in the commission of the Coburn Carter mausoleum and in the commission of the glass window. This assumption coupled with the material and stylistic resemblance between both monuments leads to the reasonable attribution of the glass window to Lederle Studios.

Conclusion

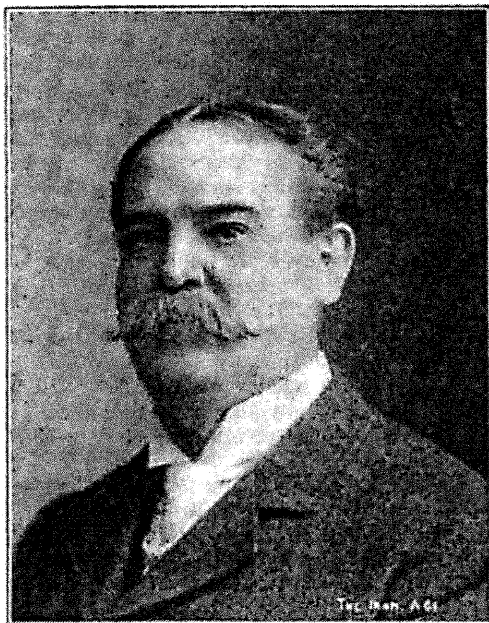
Despite R. K. Carter's dynastic last name and great fortune, the monument still was not erected in his memory. In fact, Robert K. Carter was initially interred in the ground at Hannah's plot with Lena's stillborn child and remained there for nearly a decade before a mausoleum was even considered. It was only after Hannah's death and Lena's health began to decline that the mausoleum application process began. From the stained-glass tribute to the inclusion of Coburn's in-laws, this monument was likely commissioned by Hewitt Coburn for his wife Lena.

Women are all too often lost in the pages of history; while Lena's name is largely absent from social records and newspapers, one need not look too long or too carefully at this monument and its beautiful glass tribute to find a refreshing and heartwarming window of her life and the people she loved. Here, immortalized in the Coburn Carter mausoleum—despite its precarious condition—is the legacy of a beloved mother, daughter, niece, and wife.

Appendix



Figure 1—Coburn Carter Mausoleum (center) and the Bowne Mausoleum (right). Danforth, 2022.



ROBERT K. CARTER.

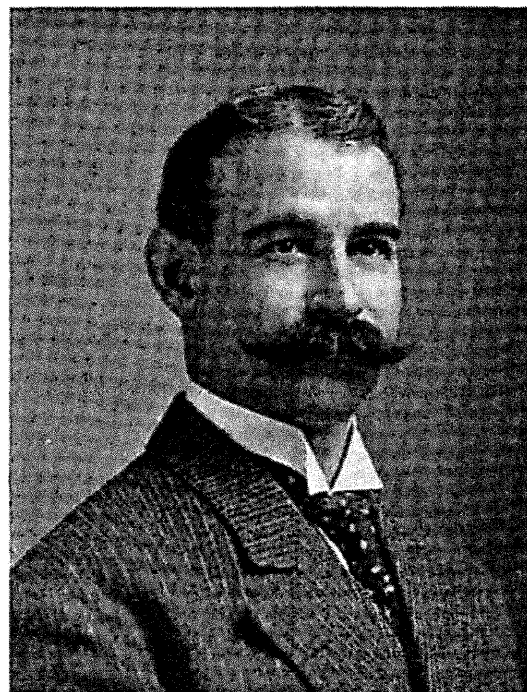


Figure 2—Left: Portrait Photo of Robert K. Carter, The Iron Age, 1904. Right: Photo of Hewitt Coburn Jr., William Harrison Taylor, 1908.

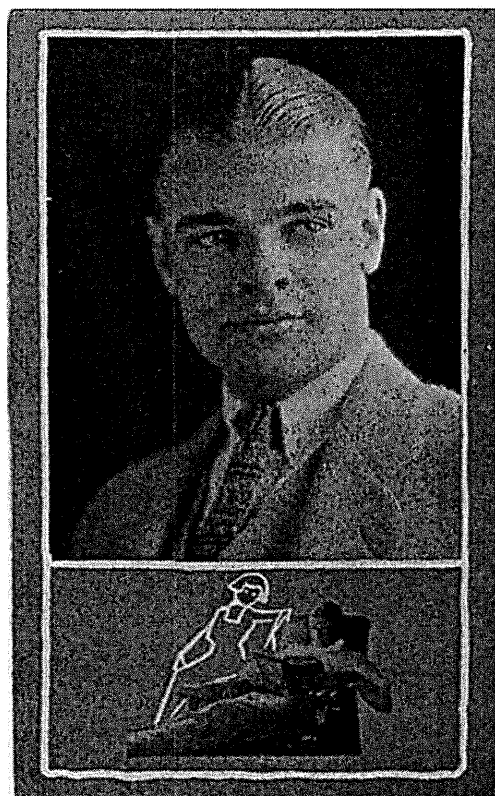


Figure 3—Senior Photo of Robert Bowne Coburn. *Hotchkiss Mischianza Yearbook*, 1924.

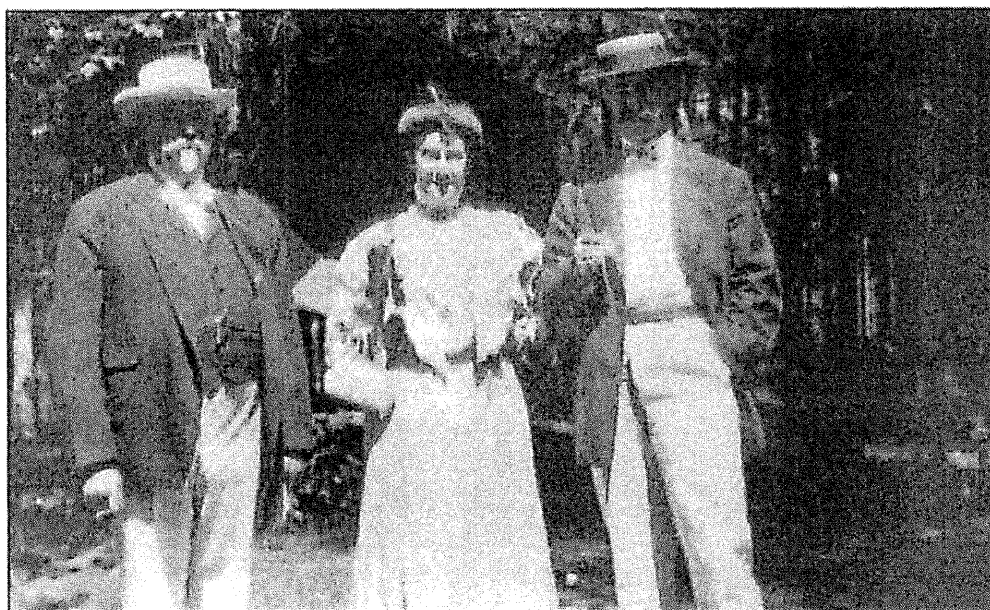


Figure 4—From left to Right: Samuel Bowne, Nettie Bowne, and Hewitt Coburn Jr., undated. From Cunningham, *Drew University*.

GLASTENBURY

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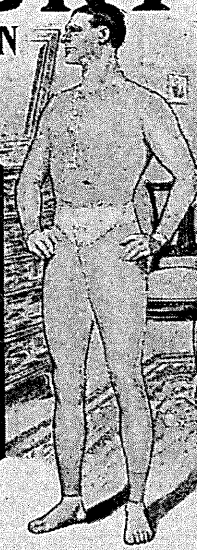


Figure 5—Advertisement for Glastenbury Health Underwear circa 1900. Image by Connecticut Digital Archive.



MRS. ROBERT BOWNE COBURN

Mrs. Coburn was Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Mohun of Washington, D. C., before her marriage to Mr. Coburn this year. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Mohun of Washington. This portrait was painted by Nicola Michailow, the well-known Russian painter. When Mr. and Mrs. Coburn return after their wedding trip, they will live on Highland Street, West Hartford. Mr. Coburn is the son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt Coburn, Jr., of Hartford.

Figure 6—Elizabeth Mohun Coburn. Hartford Courant, 1914.

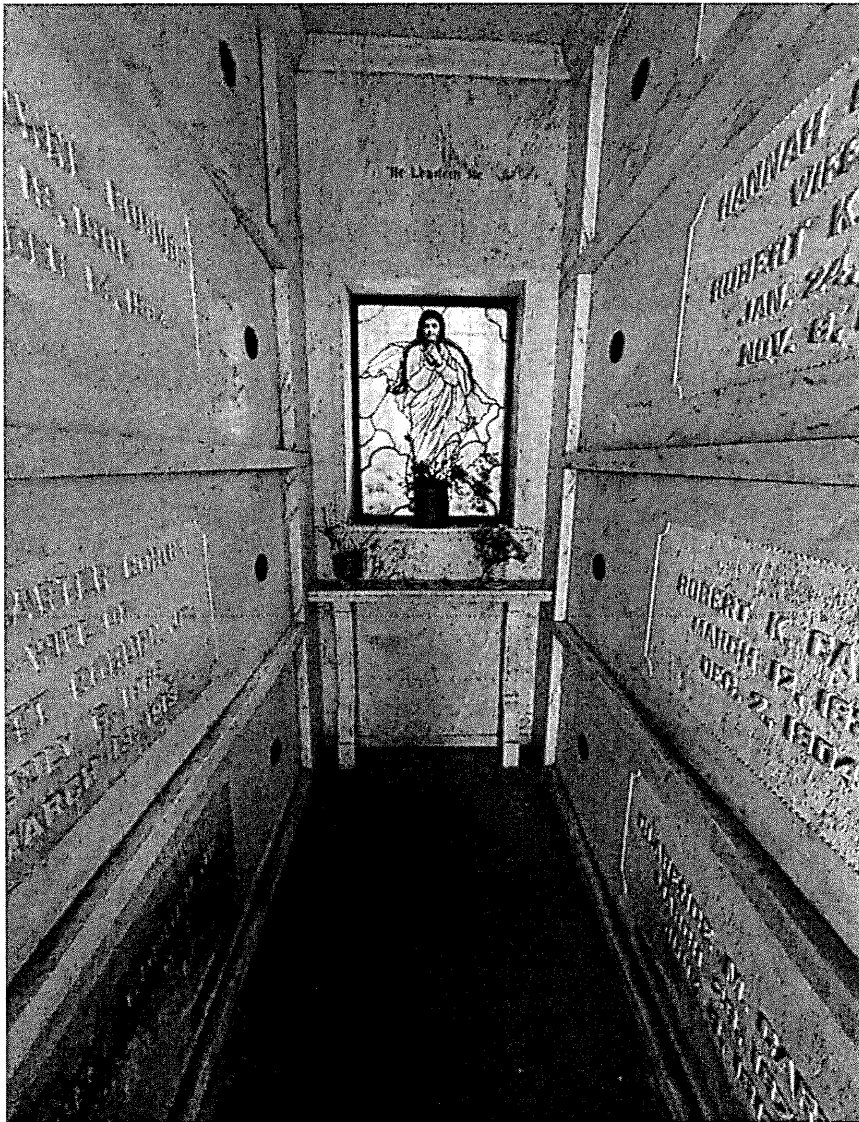


Figure 5—Interior of Coburn Carter Mausoleum. Danforth, 2022.

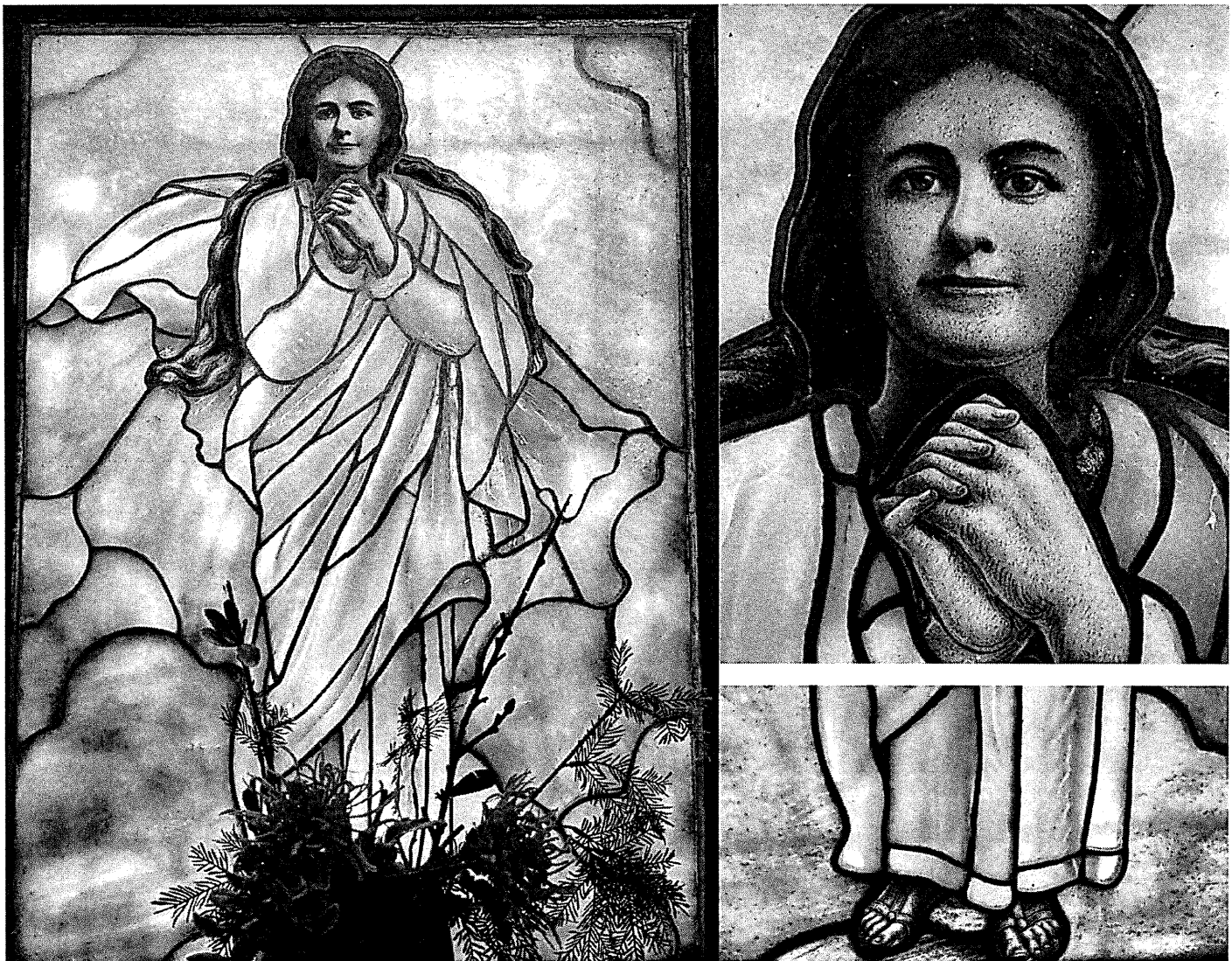


Figure 6—Window in Coburn Carter Mausoleum. Danforth, 2022.

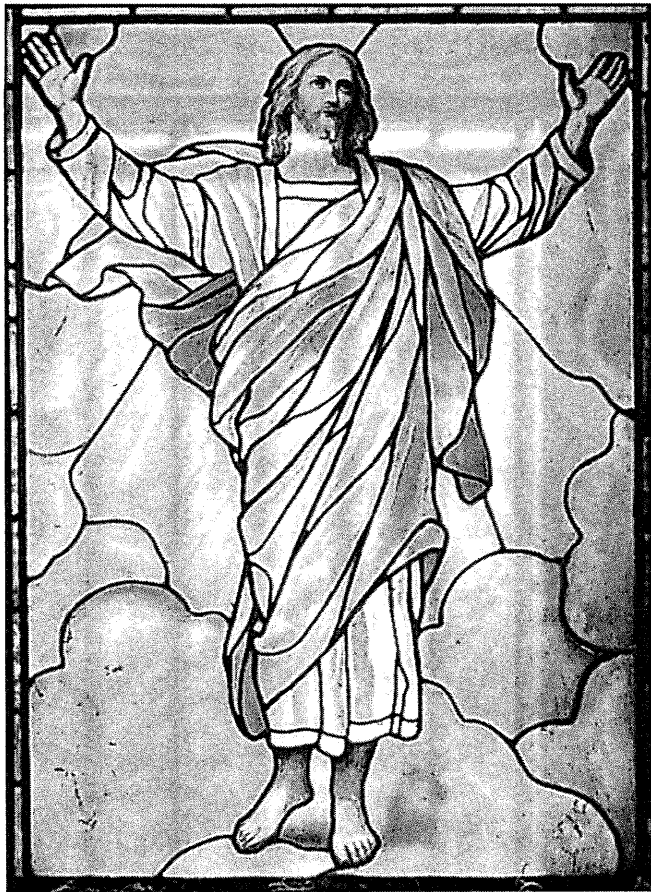


Figure 7—Stained-glass window in Bowne Mausoleum. Detail: Louis J Lederle's signature. Danforth, 2022.

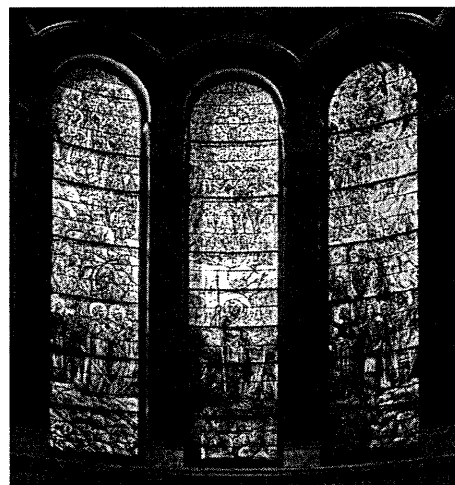


Figure 8—Tiffany Window at St. Michaels in Manhattan. Faces hands and feet painted by Louis J. Lederle. Image by William Tyre, 2009.



Figure 9—Photo of Henrietta “Nettie” Bowne (née Youngs) from Passport Application, National Archives and Records Administration.

¹ “Map of Lot No. 11199 + 11402.” Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. Major Monuments. Box 3: Fol 87. Coburn-Carter 2006.009.

² U.S. Census, 1860, New York County, New York, population schedule, New York Ward 20 District 2, p. 195 (stamped), dwelling 536, family 1624, Daniel S. Youngs; Roll: M653_816; Page: 379; Image: 380; Family History Library Film: 803816

³ Ibid; “New York City directory,” Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 13, 2022; Carter v. Youngs, 42 N.Y. Super. Ct. 169, 10 Jones & S. 169 (1877).

⁴ U.S. Census, 1850, Stephensburg, Frederick, Virginia, population schedule, Roll: M432_945; Page: 346B; Image: 299.

⁵ Brown, Katharine L., *Robert “King” Carter: Builder of Christ Church*. United States: Lot’s Wife Publishing, 2001.

⁶ “Death of R. K. Carter.” *The Iron Age*. v.74: no. 14-15. Pp. 57

⁷ Carter v. Youngs, 42 N.Y. Super. Ct. 169, 10 Jones & S. 169 (1877).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ U.S. Census, 1880 New York County, New York, population schedule, New York City, District 1, p. 22 (stamped), dwelling 121, family 161, Robert K. Carter; Roll: 895; Family History Film: 1254895; Page: 494B; Enumeration District: 586; Image: 0390.

¹⁰ “S.W. Bowne Left \$1,976,976.: Widow Receives Nearly \$1,000,000.” *New York Times*. May 18, 1912.

¹¹ “Death of R. K. Carter.” *The Iron Age*. v.74: no.14-15. Pp. 57

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ New York State Census, 1905, State Population Census Schedules, A.D. 29, E.D. 16; Manhattan, New York, p. 45.

¹⁷ “Another Juror in the Box.” *New-York Tribune*, New York, NY. January 25, 1907.

¹⁸ New York State Census, 1905.

¹⁹ “Coburn-Carter” *The New York Times*, New York, NY. Dec. 16, 1895.

²⁰ “Obituary.” *The Hartford Courant* (1887-1922), Mar 17, 1913.

²¹ “Hewitt Coburn Jr. Dies in Hartford.” *The Boston Globe*. Boston, Massachusetts. Jan 15, 1926.

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- ²² Clarkson. Grosvenor B. *Industrial America in the World War: The Strategy Behind the Line, 1917-1918* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1923). Pp. 537
- ²³ "Coburn, Sadie White. NS007" *Rhode Island Historical Cemetery Commission*. Accessed Oct 11, 2022.
- ²⁴ "Society." *Hartford Courant*. Hartford, Connecticut, Jul. 14, 1929.
- ²⁵ "W. Hartford Man Is Left \$1, 140,765." *Hartford Courant*. Hartford, Connecticut. Feb. 21, 1931.
- ²⁶ "Bowne Director to Propose Gift of Property to County for College." *Poughkeepsie Journal*, Poughkeepsie, New York. Oct. 21, 1956.
- ²⁷ "Death Notices: Coburn, Robert B." *Hartford Current*, Hartford, Connecticut. Sept. 16, 1983.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ "Applications for Mausoleums to be Erected in Woodlawn Cemetery, New York City, on the Lot of Mr. Hewitt Coburn Jr." Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. Major Monuments. Box 3: Fol 87. Coburn-Carter 2006.009.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ "Black Memorial Window." *The Pittsburgh Press*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Feb 24, 1898.

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