



DANCING ON A SUNNY PLAIN

The Life of Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis

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ANNIE BURR AUCHINCLOSS LEWIS'S LIFE spanned the first half of the twentieth century, and the legacy of her contributions to the world in which she lived continues today. Various known as “Annie Burr,” “Annie B.,” “Abie,” or “A.B.L.,” she was characterized as possessing “gentleness, gallantry, and grace” and “perception, enthusiasm, and charm.”

Born at her parents’ summer home in Newport in 1902, the youngest child of Emma Brewster Jennings and Hugh Dudley Auchincloss, Annie Burr grew up in a world filled with family and friends, privilege and opportunity, philanthropy and service. Her interests were varied and her contacts far-reaching.

She moved in circles between New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island as a member of a socially prominent family, as a debutante, and, later, as the wife of a scholar, after having followed in the footsteps of her mother, aunt, and sister by attending Miss Porter’s School in Farmington. Her interests encompassed family, friends, animals (ranging from a childhood pet pig to poodles), home, roses and her garden, photography, historic preservation, and travel.



Annie Burr traveled widely; destinations included England, the Continent, Egypt, Australia, the American and Canadian West, the exclusive Jekyll Island Club in Georgia, and, always, Newport, all of which she documented photographically.

IT WAS IN FARMINGTON that she met Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis. Their marriage in 1928 formed a partnership that lasted for the remainder of her life. Aside from a brief period during the Second World War when they lived in Washington, D.C., they made their home in Farmington, summered in Newport, and traveled abroad. Annie Burr shared Lewis's informed enthusiasm for collecting anything written by, to, or about Horace Walpole, and she fully supported Lewis's Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence project. She assumed the role of cataloger – and later served as curator – of the print collection following a seminal gift of eighteenth-century caricatures and satires from her brother, Hugh Auchincloss. Her celebrated catalog, particularly of subject terms, still provides key access points that have been incorporated into today's online records.

Glimpses into the life that the Lewises shared can be seen in the many photographs Annie Burr shot and pasted into albums and inserted into the guest books for Farmington, Newport, and

Washington homes. The Lewises traveled to England annually during the 1930s, and Annie Burr's letters to her mother describe a whirlwind schedule of visits and meals with owners of Walpoliana as well as scholars, friends, and family members also traveling abroad. Their Anglophilia was not confined to things eighteenth-century, however, and their support of England before, during, and after World War II manifested itself in numerous ways, among them bringing the wives and children of Oxford professors to Farmington, underwriting the cost of a food canteen truck in Manchester, and sending food parcels to English friends to ease the strain of rationing.

ANNIE BURR WAS AN ACTIVE CONTRIBUTOR to local and national organizations throughout her adult life. She held such positions as local treasurer and national secretary for the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform; vice regent for Connecticut for the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association; trustee of the National Trust; trustee of Miss Porter's School and chair of various committees, including the alumni committee, the alumni library committee, and the committee on furnishing and decorating; member of the Newport





Preservation Society; director of voluntary services for the American National Red Cross during World War II; chair of the Farmington committee of the Connecticut tercentenary celebration; and co-chair of the nominating committee and chair of the accessions committee for the Farmington Historical Society, to name a few.

HER GENEROSITY COULD TAKE MANY FORMS, among them financial. Many of these efforts were carried out quietly; for example, she sent money to help pay housing costs for a financially distressed classmate, and she gave a sizable sum to be used for the restoration of the east wall of the First Congregational Church in Farmington on the condition that the gift remain anonymous. Her donations during her lifetime, her bequests following her death in 1959, and the outpouring of contributions made in her memory amounted to a legacy that endures, both in Farmington and at Yale. The Annie Burr Lewis Fund at the Yale University Press continues to provide support for the publication of scholarly books, and a gift established for the benefit of the Yale School of Nursing and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in the last decade of her life is still used for fellowships



in the Graduate School today. The Lewis Walpole Library, which was ultimately bequeathed to Yale University following Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis's death in 1979, is for us the most remarkable instance of their philanthropy. The bequest included not just the buildings, property, and collections, but also an endowment that fully funds all operations of the library.

AT AN ADDRESS SHE GAVE for the celebration of their twentieth anniversary in 1948, Annie Burr selected words from Horace Walpole to describe her feelings on being married to W.S.L.: "Life seems to me as if we were dancing on a sunny plain." Sadly, the rest of the quotation, while unspoken in the anniversary address, proved prophetic: "on the edge of a gloomy forest, where we pass in a moment from glare to gloom and darkness." Annie Burr Lewis died of cancer on May 9, 1959.

Without fanfare, Annie Burr Lewis put her gifts to work to enable those she loved to realize their dreams, and the people involved in the causes she cared about to reach their goals. She was, as publisher and friend S.C. Roberts wrote in a letter following her death, "the happy collaborator...and doer of good by stealth."

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Items printed in color are reproduced in this booklet.

Albert Edward Sterner (1863–1946)
Portrait of Annie Burr Auchincloss as a Young Girl, 1908
Oil on canvas

Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis (1902–1959)
Travel diary, 1913

Class photograph at Miss Porter's School, Farmington, and Annie Burr Auchincloss and others in a theatrical performance, ca. 1920
Black-and-white photographs

Scrapbook with memorabilia from Miss Porter's School, ca. 1920

Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis (1902–1959)
Album with photographs of travels through Europe, ca. 1921

Group portrait of the bridal party, ca. January 1928
Black-and-white photograph

Passport, ca. 1927

Annie Burr Lewis and Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis in Venice, 1928
Black-and-white photograph

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (1929–1994)
Birthday card for Annie Burr Lewis: "Happy birthday Aunt Abie," 22 July 1946
Colored pencil

Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis (1902–1959)
Parisian scene, depicting the banks of the Seine River with figures in the right foreground fishing, 1916
Watercolor

Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis, 1929
Black-and-white photograph

Ruth Prentice Nash (1921–2007)
Dear Aunt A.B. and Uncle Left...your most faithful and obliged servants Ted and Ru, ca. 1950
Pen and ink and watercolor

Ruth Prentice Nash (1921–2007)
When William Brenton Went to Heaven... And niece and nephew do declare it is a Castle in the air, ca. 1950
Pen and ink and watercolor

Alice Stanley Acheson (1895–1996)
Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis and Annie Burr Lewis with poodle, ca. 1942
Oil on masonite

Alexander Crane (1904–1953)
The Red House, Farmington, 1940
Watercolor

D. McDonald (20th century)
"WONPR" (Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform), "Bring back the old, ring in the new, turn out false laws, bring in the true," 1932
Wool embroidery on linen

Unknown maker
Connecticut Tercentenary Celebration Plate, 1935
Black transfer-printed stoneware

Miss Porter's School
Miss Porter's School letter of appreciation with Daisy pin, 1958

American National Red Cross
Red Cross certificate with pin, ca. 1946

Annie Burr Lewis in Red Cross uniform and *Annie Burr Lewis with unidentified ladies*, ca. 1942
Black-and-white photographs

Mount Vernon Ladies' Association certificate, ca. 1959

British War Relief Society of the United States of America
Mobile kitchen, 1942
Black-and-white photograph

Cards and Letters from evacuated English children in Farmington
Pencil, crayon, and colored pencil

Children with Annie Burr Lewis, ca. 1942
Black-and-white photograph

Walter Griffin (1861–1935)
The Old Church, Farmington, 1901
Photomechanical print

Burr genealogy, early 20th century
Pen and ink with polychrome shields

Auchincloss family gathering, with key, 1937
Black-and-white photograph

Ruth Brandt (20th century)
The Castle, mid-20th century
Watercolor

Richard A. Kimball (1899–1997)
The Lewis House at Farmington, 1941
Watercolor

James Gillray (1756–1815)
Windy Weather, 1808
Hand-colored etching

Artist unknown
Strawberry Hill, south view, 1756
Watercolor

Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis (1902–1959)
(needlework)
Nathan Margolis Shop, Hartford (table)
Needlework view of Strawberry Hill, inset into
mahogany side table, 1938
Mahogany and ebony, with wool needlepoint
on canvas

Thomas Robins (1748–1806)
*Common French marigold, velvet or black rose,
ivy-leaved cranesbill, poet's narcissus, hyacinth
blue garden*, ca. 1783–88
Watercolor

Amy Cogswell (d. 1954)
Plan for garden, 1929
Blueprint

Tiffany and Company, New York
Flatware
Sterling silver, engraved with monogram EBA
[Emma Brewster Auchincloss]
and
Hand towel
Linen, with embroidered monogram ABL

The Lewises' Farmington guest book, 1926–1979

Annie Burr Lewis working needlepoint, ca. 1937
Black-and-white photograph

Various manufacturers
Figurines of poodles and a pig, ca. 1830–20th
century
Ceramic and metal

*Poodles' dog license certificates from Washington,
D.C.*, and *Certificates of Commission for
donations to the War Dog Fund*, ca. 1942

Annie Burr Lewis and Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis,
n.d.
Black-and-white photograph

In Memoriam: Annie Burr Auchincloss Lewis
Memorial service program, Farmington,
Conn., 11 May 1959

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