Abstract: In this consideration of some of the few Italian sculptures in Williamsport, a wealthy small city in north central Pennsylvania, personal meaning, civic patronage, and collecting practices of the late 19th century converge. The few pieces of neoclassical statuary in the city take on added importance as representative of the taste of Americans traveling abroad, and their aspirations to promote culture at home.

In 1896, Laura VanNess Stuart (1834–1926), who had trained as an artist and taught art for a brief time at Dickinson Seminary in Williamsport, Pennsylvania (now Lycoming College), published a list of the notable works of art in local collections. After mentioning seven copies after Raphael, Murillo and others, and about 24 original American and European paintings, she continued:

Now a word about sculpture. At Mr. J. V. Brown’s is an exquisite marble statue of RUTH, beautiful in pose and expression, by the noted sculptor, Ciniselli of Rome, also one of BEATRICE by Portenari of Florence; also at ... Mr. Stephen Brown’s, fine marbles by the former sculptor, one of COLUMBUS and one of REBEKAH... ¹

Her description demands clarification. The *Ruth* is indeed inscribed as by Giovanni Ciniselli (Fig. 7), but the *Beatrice* is inscribed “Beatrice Portinari” on the front of the base and “F. Vichi” on the right side of it (Fig. 8). Stuart’s attribution to a sculptor “Portenari” is a misreading of the full inscription; Portinari is Beatrice’s last name, not the name of the sculptor. This mistake is understandable since the sculpture was placed in a niche at the James V. Brown mansion and the artist’s name would have been difficult to read (Fig. 5). The *Columbus* is inscribed clearly as by F. Vichi (Fig. 10). The “former sculptor” refers to the sculptor of the *Beatrice*, and is the same as that of the *Columbus* and *Rebekah*. Thus, we may deduce that three of these four pieces are by Vichi. The *Ruth*, *Beatrice*, and *Columbus* belong to the permanent collection of Williamsport’s public library, founded by James V. Brown and bearing his name. Through some speculation and deductive reasoning, we may tentatively identify the fourth sculpture, *Rebekah*, with a marble that has remained in a private collection in central Pennsylvania (Fig 11). We may also suggest why the two subjects of Ruth and Beatrice held significance for James V. Brown. Finally, we may place art patronage in Williamsport and the city’s few collectors in the broader context of American patterns of taste and acquisition around 1900.

Since its opening in 1907, the James V. Brown Library has held a prominent place in the city of Williamsport. It is mentioned in all guidebooks, but, oddly, the sculptures are not. Soon after its completion, a photograph of the library appeared on a postcard; it continued to appear on postcards for decades, and after an addition was built (Figs. 1a and b). The sculptures, which would surely lend themselves to such popularization, have never received the attention they warrant, whether as fixtures of a major monument or as examples of American appreciation for European art with meaningful allusions.

Adorning the entry and main reading room of the library, the three marble statues of *Ruth*, *Beatrice*, and *Columbus* are significant art objects in Williamsport. Two sculptures, Ciniselli’s *Ruth* and Vichi’s *Beatrice*, were bequests of James V. Brown (1826-1904). The third, the *Columbus*, is the gift of the four children of his younger brother, Stephen S. Brown (1837-1900), who bequeathed the *Columbus* upon the death of their mother in 1920. The brothers purchased these sculptures to enhance and decorate their living spaces in their grand homes. According to the Williamsport historian, Samuel Dornsife (1916-1999), the James V. Browns traveled often to Europe, for a local doctor prescribed “travel to the Continent for whatever ailments one had.” We may assume that the Stephen S. Browns also traveled, although we know less of their interests. Presumably, the brothers purchased these pieces directly from a gallery in Italy, and regarded them as elegant souvenirs.

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4 *Williamsport Sun* September 16, 1920; *Gazette and Bulletin* September 17, 1920.

5 Conversation of the author with Samuel Dornsife, April 14, 1998.

6 The obituaries are in the *Williamsport Sun*, December 8, 1904, page 1; *Gazette and Bulletin*, December 9, 1904. The fullest account of his life is given in the account of the dedication of the library. “Born in Hartford, Washington County, New York, he was reared in Allegheny County...” His education at grammar school and training as a printer took place there. At the age of 17, he became a journeyman printer in upstate New York, but as soon as he “reached his majority” at 21, he switched to milling flour and other enterprises. In 1859, he came to Williamsport and purchased a flour mill which he sold in 1866 to turn to the lumber business, at first locally and then in Wisconsin.

He was among the founders of the First National Bank, but probably his most significant contribution to the prosperity...
of Williamsport was his reorganization of the Williamsport Water Company, of which he became president in 1866. Although he became quite well-off through his Williamsport business interests, he owed his fortune to his lumber business in Wisconsin. He married Carile C. Higgins (1831-1902) in 1861, who predeceased him, and there were no surviving children. Active in civic affairs and charities, particularly the Young Men’s Christian Association, he was a member of Christ Episcopal Church for 35 years, and served as warden and vestryman. He also was a generous benefactor to the church, and funded his memorial Tiffany window, *The Ascension of Christ*, installed in 1906 (Fig. 2). Brown died during the night of December 7-8, 1904, of a sudden heart attack. Three of his brothers also settled in Williamsport and were active in the businesses of the city. Henry (1824-1902) and Stephen S. (1837-1900) joined James V. in lumber and banking, and Orange S. (1839-1908) was the manager of the newspaper *Gazette and Bulletin* and postmaster of the city.

James V. Brown purchased a large lot at Third and Basin Streets in 1859. On that site he built a mansion (Fig. 3). After his death, this house at 239 East Third Street became a private hospital, and unfortunately was destroyed by fire in 1928 (Fig. 4). Brown furnished the house comfortably, but not ostentatiously. Although many of the wealthy residents of Williamsport owned elaborate and expensive Victorian furniture, Brown seems not to be among them; he seemed more interested in putting his money into charities, his church, and the library bequest.

In the James V. Brown house, the two marbles were among various paintings and paper art that were also given to the library: portraits, a few religious images, and some small landscape prints that included Italian views. The *Beatrice* graced the hall, along with some paintings (Fig. 5). The *Ruth* adorned the large parlor, adjacent to the hall, intended for casual conversation, music, and reading (Fig. 6).

Fig. 3  The James V. Brown house. Illustration from History of Lycoming County, Illustrated, Philadelphia, 1876. Photo: Author.

Fig. 2  Tiffany Studios, *The Ascension of Christ*, opalescent leaded glass, 1906, Christ Episcopal Church, Williamsport. Photo: Author, 2005.

Fig. 4  The James V. Brown house, 1928. Photo: Courtesy of the James V. Brown Library.

The two sculptures complement one another in subject and form, and reflect Brown’s diverse interests and aspirations.

In planning the bequest for the library, Brown made “his investments in such form as would assure the building’s construction and permanent endowment. It had been his hope that the work would be completed in his lifetime, and to that end he purchased this site, caused full plans to be made for the building, and made careful and complete provision for the dream of his life.” The account of his estate, including his will, presented to the Orphans’ Court of Lycoming County, bears this out. The will “bequeaths unto Library Trustees $150,000.00 for the erection of library building, and $10,000.00 for first purchases of books.” The cornerstone of the library was laid on March 10, 1906, and it opened to the public on June 17, 1907.

Brown personally developed his own ideas for the building, which he submitted to the architect, Edgar Viguers Seeler (1867-1929). The result was “a set of plans for a beautiful building in the French Renaissance style having every convenience known to the best library institutions the country over.” These conveniences included fireproofing and electric lights throughout, an art gallery on the upper floor, an elevator, and large clear or pastel leaded glass windows for natural light. A central space was lined with reading alcoves and surmounted by a dome of pale leaded glass. The exterior was of white marble and grayish brick. Two panels on the facade and one on each side wall were inscribed “with the world’s greatest names.” The panel to the left of the portal contains the names of historians, philosophers, and dramatists; the panel to the right of the portal, the names of poets; the panel on the west side, scientists; and the panel on the east side, artists from antiquity to the modern era. The 21 names of each panel, while hardly surprising, must have been chosen by James V. Brown.
V. Brown. The art gallery served as an exhibition space, with an assortment of prints and paintings bequeathed by Brown from his home. The construction of the library was well documented in photographs. An addition at the back, planned in 1929 and completed soon thereafter, provided significantly more space.

The architect, Seeler, had a thriving firm in Philadelphia, and would have represented current technically advanced practices. After studying at the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he spent the years 1890-93 in Europe, continuing his study of architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, under Victor Laloux, and traveling extensively. His versatility is evident in his production, which featured office buildings in Philadelphia and grand houses in the surrounding area. Seeler designed one other library, the Winona (Minnesota) Public Library, completed in 1899. With its copper dome and innovations, that building may have come to Brown’s attention, and guided him to select Seeler. Brown might also have noticed Seeler’s church in the Romanesque Revival style (First Baptist Church, 123 S. 17th Street, Philadelphia, cornerstone 1899), since it is close in date to many of the Williamsport churches.

The James V. Brown Library reflects both the grandeur and simplicity of illustrious precedents with central domed spaces and niches or alcoves along the wall, specifically the ancient Pantheon (Rome) and the original British Library (London; now the British Museum). On the facade, James V. Brown’s portrait bust sits in a roundel above the door. A crowning element above the architrave is the escutcheon displaying the elements of the official seal and flag of Pennsylvania. Those elements include a sailing ship, a plow, and three sheaves of wheat. For Pennsylvania, these represented commerce, diligence and prosperity. But these motifs could also easily refer to Brown’s family and his profession as a miller. In an allusion to his mother’s Dutch family, Vanduzee, or “of the sea,” in Dutch, the ship would be appropriate; the plow and three sheaves of wheat allude to Brown’s milling business.

The art bequest consisted of about 20 items, a few of which are still in the library; a small two-page publication listed the art works (James V. Brown Library files). Evidently, this bequest made national news, and was mentioned in “Notes from the art museums,” Brush and Pencil 15.1 (1905): 60-65 (unfortunately, this has been inaccessible to me).


“The Gazette and Bulletin, March 12, 1906 refers to the escutcheon as bearing the “Williamsport coat of Arms,” apparently disregarding the connection with the state of Pennsylvania.
The Marbles: I. Ruth (Fig. 7)

The statue of Ruth is inscribed on the front of the base: RUTH, and on the right side of the base, G. Ciniselli/Roma. Giovanni Ciniselli (Novara [Milan] 1832-1883 Rome) had some success creating single figures, mostly of biblical, allegorical, and historical women for an international clientele. Seated upon a tree stump with a vine growing upon it, Ruth holds a sheaf of wheat across her lap, and holds a few stalks of wheat in her left hand. Her loose gown, simply adorned with a patterned border and secured with a braided belt, suggestively bares her shoulder. Her bare feet imply poverty, and her turban, the exotic antiquity of the Old Testament. Ruth, whose story is told in the Biblical book that bears her name, represented strength in adversity that was necessitated by her early widowhood and resulting poverty. Out of sympathy and solidarity, Ruth remained with her mother-in-law, Naomi, also a widow, against the older woman’s advice. Ruth and Naomi gathered the leftover wheat in the field of Boaz, the nearest male relative of Naomi’s deceased husband. Boaz eventually offered Ruth protection and married her, and also took Naomi into his household. Thus Boaz fulfilled the role legally assigned to him: he took care of and protected the widows of his male kin. Ruth is exemplary as a wife and daughter-in-law; a Moabite, she was not Jewish, but a convert to Judaism when she married her first husband.

For James V. Brown, who had owned a flour mill in upstate New York and in Williamsport, the character of Ruth may have indicated more than a virtuous Biblical heroine. Ruth the gleaner represented the activity of growing and milling wheat. With its three sheaves of wheat, the Pennsylvania emblem on the library facade proclaimed this professional association.

The Marbles: II. Beatrice (Fig. 8)

In contrast to Ruth, who signifies agricultural activity, Beatrice signifies reading and the tradition of literature. Ferdinando Vichi (Florence 1875-1944/45) belonged to an established Tuscan family with long-standing interests in the arts. His grandfather founded the Gallerie Vichi in Florence, and Ferdinando served as its director. Presumably he took up the directorship after learning marble carving. His copy of Giulio Monteverde’s Columbus may have been made as part of his training, and perhaps a replica made to order. Vichi’s oeuvre is little known. As his works are now beginning to appear in auction records, they depict subjects of women: bacchante, Laura (Petrarch’s beloved), heads of women, and

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15 G. Degli Azzi, in Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler, ed. U. Thieme and F. Becker (Leipzig, 1912) 6: 609, reported that Ciniselli studied at the Brera Academy, Milan, and in 1856, he settled in Rome. From 1869 on, he had his own atelier, and numerous commissions for portraits and memorials. He made Old Testament and historical female figures, as for example a Rebecca and a Cleopatra; symbolic figures, such as Primavera; and genre pieces, such as First Sorrow. His greatest work is the monument to General Bandeira, Lisbon, which was finished only after the sculptor’s death. Benezit, in Dictionary of Artists (Paris, 2006) 3: 1029, amplified this account by noting that “His fantastic creations were greeted by warm supporters at all the exhibitions at which they appeared...This artist earned a medal at the Exhibition at Melbourne in 1881.” See also A. Panzetta, Nuovo dizionario degli scultori italiani del ‘800 e del primo ‘900, 2 vols. (Turin, 2003) I: 220.


dancers. They also depict pairs of lovers: Romeo and Juliet, and busts of Dante and Beatrice. Vichi’s later work includes a number of grave monuments with a bronze portrait of the deceased; these portraits are lifelike and tactile, not only in keeping with their function as realistic portrayals of contemporaries, but also because they were first modeled in wax or clay, rather than carved from stone. In his historical sculptures, Vichi often carved delicate lacy patterns and tactile folds of drapery.

As a youthful work with a literary theme, Vichi’s Beatrice has a more nuanced meaning than many of his other pieces. The Florentine poet Dante, as a historical character, and his Beatrice, as the object of his idealized passion, were wildly popular in the art and literature of the nineteenth century, both in Europe and the United States. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) set eyes on Beatrice (1265-1290) when they were both nine years old; they first spoke to one another when they were eighteen. By that time, their respective families had already arranged their marriages to other people. Beatrice died after several years of marriage, and her early death enhances the tragic nature of the unfulfilled love between her and Dante.

Vichi’s depiction of Beatrice Portinari reading a letter is an unusual portrayal of Dante’s beloved. Most often, Beatrice was shown in paintings as the object of Dante’s gaze from afar, or alone as a beautiful woman, for whom the viewer took the role of the watching Dante. Vichi’s Beatrice has received the letter from the infatuated poet, but she is reading it in a space inaccessible to its author; the textured brocaded rug on which she stands indicates a private room in her family’s palazzo. Upon the marble page in her hands is inscribed a selection from the Vita Nuova xii:13-14, a declaration of love from Dante to Beatrice. A demure and modest maiden, she contemplates the text, aware of its import and conflicted in her thoughts, as she is already promised to another.

The act of a woman reading a book or letter is not necessarily always so innocently depicted. One significant example of a distinctly different approach is The Reading Girl of 1862, a statue by the Italian sculptor Pietro Magni (1817-1877) (Fig. 9). Magni’s maiden sits on the side of a chair to rest her

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19 I am grateful to Erik Schoonhoven for indicating this passage.
Among the best known replicas is the marble in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The viewer, presumably a voyeuristic male, is to be seduced by this reader. In portraying the act of a girl reading, artists had many choices. These two sculptures demonstrate the polarities between the absent lover whose presence is in the piece of paper held by Beatrice, and the unseen viewer, who peeps at the maiden’s décolletage in a moment that ought to be private, but is not.

James V. Brown led the public life of a prosperous businessman, but he privately collected books. He would have read Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1867 English translation. Having traveled in Italy, he was surely familiar with Florence, whose central narrow streets featured the characters of Dante and Beatrice at many turns. There, he would have seen the 1865 statue of Dante in the Piazza Santa Croce; the cenotaph of the poet inside the church of Santa Croce; the house of the poet; and the small church of Santa Margherita, known as Dante’s Church, in which Beatrice is thought to be buried.

Curiously, the two statues *Ruth* and *Beatrice* were given widely distinct values in the settling of James V. Brown’s estate. In the inventory compiled in March 1905, the *Ruth* was listed at $150 while the “hall statuary” (the *Beatrice*) was priced at $50. It is unclear whether the difference in values reflected the appraisers’ greater familiarity with Ruth, a Biblical character, as compared to Dante’s Beatrice, or whether it reflected the original prices that Brown paid for the sculptures. It is striking that the *Ruth* statue is the only item among the artworks named by title, perhaps because its inscription was in English and therefore identifiable to the appraisers. Another possibility for the price difference is that the appraisers thought the sensual pose of the *Ruth* statue would appeal more to a central Pennsylvania public than the demure pose of the *Beatrice* and therefore get a higher price.

Together, the statues of the Biblical and historical characters of Ruth and Beatrice represent two prominent aspects of Brown’s own activities and personality: the grain mill and literary pursuits. His early training and career as a printer, which he seems to have left as soon as he was able to do so, must have contributed to his interest in book collecting. Presumably Brown chose these statues with his interests in mind, first to decorate his house, later to commemorate his business and interests in the library.

**The Marbles: III. Columbus** *(Fig. 10)*

Of the Brown brothers’ marbles, the *Columbus* is by far the most famous invention. The original by Giulio Monteverde (Bistagno 1837-1917 Rome) was made in 1870 (Genoa, Galleria dell’Arte Moderna), and is known in a number of replicas which vary slightly. Such replicas were often made of popular pieces, and could be ordered by size and medium. The Brown Library version is by Vichi, and inscribed COLOMBO on the front, and, on the right side of the base, F. Vichi, in cursive. This may be a case in which the Stephen S. Browns visited a commercial gallery before 1900. The James V. Brown Library, Williamsport. Photo: Stafford Smith, 2006.
appealed to the American art market in a timely fashion; a glorification of Columbus was well underway, highlighted by the construction of Columbus Circle, New York City, with its column with allegorical reliefs and statue of Columbus, by Gaetano Russo, completed in 1892 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Americas. Monteverde was quite well known as a sculptor, in contrast to Ciniselli and Vichi. The figure of the young Columbus was especially appealing, as it showed the dreamy aspiration of the future sailor. As such, it belongs to the popular genre of the childhood of a famous, great man, and the imagined moment of youthful potential for future achievement, glory, and fame.

According to the 1920 articles mentioned in footnote 4 concerning the bequest of the Columbus to the library, "...the statue ‘fittingly offsets the beautiful statue of Beatrice... The statue depicts a young lad seated on a spill at the end of a quay, where lapping waves almost reach his feet. He holds a book in his hand, but instead of reading he is looking out to sea, as if wondering what lies beyond the waters...’". Fitting, indeed, is the comparison of the boy Columbus to the young womanly Beatrice. The boy turns away from the activity of reading to imagine future conquests, while the young woman turns toward a letter to realize that its declaration of love will be unrequited. The boy looks up, the woman down, and in every way, they complement one another even as they fulfill typical gender-based roles.

The Marbles: IV. Rebekah (Fig. 11)

The Rebekah belonging to Stephen S. Brown became separated from the Columbus sometime between Laura VanNess Stuart’s account of 1896 and the bequest of the Columbus by the children of Stephen S. Brown in 1920. It is possible that Brown’s Rebekah is the statue mentioned previously that has remained in central Pennsylvania in a private collection. This possible fourth Brown marble is a pair of figures: a bearded man and a young woman, with a large jug lying behind them. The sculpture is inscribed in rough block capitals on the base: ISACCO E REBECCA. There is no artist’s name.

If we can trust Laura VanNess Stuart’s 1896 description that the Rebekah is by Vichi, we may plausibly, yet very tentatively, attribute this statue to him and date it fairly early in his career, as with the Beatrice. The general concept of two figures as lovers interacting fits with Vichi’s other pairs of lovers, Romeo and Juliet and Dante and Beatrice. Typical of Vichi’s workmanship is the attention to textures and clothing details, as in the tassels and borders of the robes, Rebekah’s long braid, and the rustic sandals. However, so far as we know, Vichi consistently signed his works, although the form of his inscription varied. The base of the sculpture is damaged, and it is possible that a signature was originally present and later removed.

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21 For Monteverde, see V. Terraroli, *Grove Dictionary of Art* (London, 1977) 22: 22, with further references. Probably his most sensational sculpture was of Edward Jenner injecting his own son with the smallpox vaccine (1873; Rome, Galleria Nazionale).

22 The text appeared in the *Williamsport Sun* on September 16, 1920 and was repeated in the *Gazette and Bulletin*, September 17, 1920.
The tender and hesitant affection between the two figures would indicate the first meeting of Isaac and Rebekah, as described in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Abraham sent a servant to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac. The servant met Rebekah at a well, where he was struck by her kindess, and arranged for her to return with him to become Isaac’s wife. He gave her jewelry to secure the agreement, and they returned to Abraham’s land. Isaac met Rebekah for the first time in a field near a well (Genesis 24:62-67). The jug lying on the ground behind the stautary figures is an attribute of Rebekah, who had offered water to Abraham’s servant, and might also indicate the site of the first meeting of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac was considerably older than Rebekah, as his beard indicates in the statue. Rebekah fingeres her necklace, which is appropriate, since the servant had given her jewelry. Isaac caresses the end of the turban at the back of her neck. This, indeed, might be construed as a protective, paternalistic gesture, but it could also be considered inappropriate, since physical contact between a man and woman who were not married would have been unthinkable, either in Biblical times or in the nineteenth century. Should this piece actually have been in Stephen S. Brown’s collection, it might have been considered a bit odd for a public library.

Laura VanNess Stuart termed this piece as Rebekah, and did not mention a second figure. On the other hand, her care in listing these Williamsport art works is not necessarily reliable, since she identified the sculptor of the Beatrice as “Portenari.” The piece was owned by a prominent Bellefonte couple, George Murray Andrews (1869-1958) and his wife Ellen Hale Andrews (d. 1931). In the February 1932 inventory at Ellen Hale’s death, the piece is listed as “Statue, 2 figures,” and valued at five dollars. Prior to the subsequent house auction, the sculpture was acquired by the auctioneer, L. Frank Mays; his son Kenneth inherited it, and, at his death in 1979, the present owners acquired it. As the statue’s whereabouts prior to its location in the Andrews house are unknown, it cannot be with any certainty traced to Williamsport, which is about fifty miles from Bellefonte. Consequently, however appealing it is to consider this Isacco e Rebecca as the missing Brown marble, such a conclusion remains tentative.

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Collectively, the Rath, Beatrice Portinari, and Columbus marbles typify the Italian nineteenth-century art in the Williamsport area. From the inception of the United States, authors, collectors and artists recognized the didactic values of European culture, and in the case of Italy, the literary and artistic foundation for western civilization. This was especially valid for American sculptors, who often regarded the Italian trip as essential to their training, and often found working conditions more compatible in Rome and Florence than in New York or Boston. Among the first generation of American sculptors who spent decades in Italy are Horatio Greenough (1805-1852), Hiram Powers (1805-1873), and Thomas Crawford (1814-1857); among the second generation are Randolph Rogers (1825-1892) and William Wetmore Story (1819-1895), and a number of women, of whom the best known are Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908) and Edmonia Lewis (1845-1911). Their sculptures were regularly exhibited in the United States, to great fanfare and popular appreciation, and brought the prevailing neoclassical style to the attention of America. Their studios were often visited by American travelers, who also purchased works directly from the artists. The pieces bought by the Brown brothers in Italy relate to the appreciation of the neoclassical that was established by these American sculptors and to the practice of purchasing art abroad that had become an American habit.

Sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822) played a prime role in forging the neoclassical sculptural style and taste, which emulated the proportions and forms of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. After the mid-19th century, Italian sculptors elaborated on Canova’s ideal, and often allegorized figures to include genre subjects. Among these is Magni’s Reading Girl, described in the section on Beatrice, which appealed to both sensuous and literary values.

The Brown brothers purchased marbles by Italian artists in the neoclassical style, a circumstance that reflected a conservative taste in their time for by the 1880s and 1890s, those American artists working abroad tended to be interested not in the idealized forms of the two earlier generations of American sculptors abroad, but in the naturalistic and more expressive forms of Rodin (1840-1917). Among these, for example, is George Gray Barnard (1863-1938).

The Browns’ collecting choices also indicated an awareness of the established tourist routes of the later decades of the nineteenth century. At that time, the commercial galleries of Rome and Florence were listed in the guidebooks, so that even the most inexperienced traveler who was inclined to shop for art, whether original or copy, would easily find it. We know painted copies made their way to houses in Williamsport because they were noted by Laura VanNess Stuart in her 1896 article, cited above. Sculpted copies, too, were collected, such as Vichi’s Columbus after Monteverde.

By definition, and as recognized by Americans in general, neoclassical sculpture presents idealized figures with some reference to the balanced proportions and smooth surfaces found in ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. This formal language was familiar through the famed collections of the Vatican and the

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Uffizi. As these collections were obligatory for the tourist to view, they also conditioned aesthetic taste for those interested in purchasing art objects. Certainly that would have been the case with the Brown brothers. They chose unadventurously, in both the style and subject. The subjects of Ruth, Rebekah, Beatrice, and Columbus were popular in the nineteenth century and also considered to convey moral lessons, especially useful in educating the youth toward good behavior. These subjects also reveal an inclination in literary taste that is wholly mainstream: the Bible, early Renaissance literature, and history. None of these characters has a role in which nudity features, lest youth be distracted and morals offended. The women—Ruth, Rebekah, and Beatrice—as depicted in these scenes, are models of decorum, duty to family, and obedience to their superiors. Columbus is a heroic figure, here presented as a dreamer and inspiration to youth. The three figures of Ruth, Columbus and Beatrice are at rest, whether seated or standing; if the Rebekah may be identified as proposed, its pair of figures is shown standing and at rest. All have features that are fairly generalized, with the exception of the Beatrice, whose face reflects an individual. The prevalence of Ruth and Rebekah as subjects for sculpture was noted by William Cullen Bryant in 1858, when he wrote that a typical American traveling in Italy “who at home was contented with mirrors and rosewood, is here initiated into a new set of ideas..., and orders a bust, ...a Ruth, or a Rebecca ... for his luxurious rooms in the United States.”

James V. Brown belongs to a group of wealthy men with philanthropic interests in literature, the arts, and civic projects, who concerned themselves with the general well-being of America around 1900. That his chief philanthropy was the establishment and endowment of a free public library invites comparison with Andrew Carnegie, whose fortune was largely made in Pittsburgh steel. Carnegie made grants to communities to help them establish 1,679 libraries between 1886 and the First World War; these grants, however, came with conditions that the communities bear the expenses of books and maintenance. James V. Brown’s bequest and endowment were outright gifts to the community. Envisioning his library as a memorial to himself, James V. Brown had precedence in New England families who founded local libraries to commemorate a family or individual, as in the Massachusetts communities of Quincy and North Easton, whose libraries were designed by Henry Hobson Richardson. By allocating space within the library for an art gallery, Brown followed the precedent of a number of American institutions, most famously the Boston Athenaeum (founded 1807), which sponsored annual exhibitions and collected art.

In contrast to James V. Brown, Stephen S. Brown did not leave traces of his appreciation of art and literature, apart from his ownership of the Columbus and Rebekah statues. Although he was closely associated with his brother James, for the two worked together in the milling, lumber, and banking businesses, Stephen belonged to a different church, the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, in which he was active. The two brothers differentiate themselves through their philanthropy to their respective churches. Although Stephen served on the board of his church, he did not evidently help in furnishing it when it was built in 1898, although at that time he surely would have had the opportunity to commission a stained glass window. James commissioned a window for his church from Tiffany Studios, which surely represented a significant expense. The Browns’ four sculptures represent the brothers’ proclivities to acquire elegant and permanent remembrances of their Italian travels, not only for their homes, but also, and ultimately, for the benefit of a major civic building; only in the case of James are we able to recover a personal meaning in the two marbles for their owner.

During the 1870s, Williamsport had a concentration of 37 millionaires, perhaps the most per capita of any city at the time. Their wealth was earned largely in the natural resources of lumber and land. Self-made men, they were generally lacking in formal education, and, although they built mansions and furnished them well, they did not collect art except as decoration for the interior spaces of their houses. They did, however, travel to Europe, making the grand tour as well-to-do Americans had done since the 1840s, and acquiring paintings and some sculpture from their travels. The Gilded Age collectors of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore—the cities most proximate to Williamsport—operated on a grand scale with highly developed aesthetic discernment. In contrast, Williamsporters generally considered paintings and other art objects as adornments to their homes. James V. Brown may have intended his bequest of art objects to the library as an example to his townsmen for art collecting. In this, he was largely unsuccessful.

One notable exception is William “Bud” Stuart (1866-1951), who formed the largest art collection in Williamsport. Stuart filled his own house with over 100 paintings and several sculptures, acquiring works both locally and from galleries in Philadelphia and elsewhere. Some of Stuart’s paintings are now

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25 William Cullen Bryant, letter, from Rome, 21 May 1858, quoted in Craven, American Art 248.
27 The church to which Stephen S. Brown belonged was originally the Second Presbyterian Church, located at the corner of Fourth and Market Streets, Williamsport, which was destroyed by fire in February 1897; it was rebuilt in 1898 at a new location, on West Fourth and Centre and renamed the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant (later merged with Central Presbyterian to become Covenant-Central). Stephen S. Brown was active in the decision to rebuild the church at its new location (Church records, now at the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia). He would have had ample opportunity to contribute to furnishing the new building, but evidently did not do so.
28 Among the paintings Stuart collected is George Loring Brown’s 1869 canvas, Near Sunset: Bay of Naples, a typical view by an artist who spent decades in Rome, which would have been an appropriate souvenir from an Italian trip. See Amy Golahny, “George Loring Brown and the Bay of Naples,” Nineteenth Century 25.1 (Spring 2005): 13-17, for additional information on Stuart and his collection.
B. Rife, Director, and Scott Sager, Curator, the Lycoming County Historical Society and Thomas T. Taber Museum, invited me to their facility for various helpful references. I would like to thank Sandra B. Rife, Director, and Scott Sager, Curator, the Lycoming County Historical Society and Thomas T. Taber Museum, and staff at the James V. Brown Library, and my research assistants at Lycoming College, Katie Kitchell, Amanda Ester, and Joyce Algute. Centre County Library staff answered my queries concerning the Andrews family, and provided much material on their estate.

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About

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Born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Mark Richner received a B.S. degree from Mansfield State College, an M.Ed. degree from Bloomsburg State College, and an M.S. degree from Iowa State University. A certified professional geologist, he teaches geography and sociology at Butler County Community College. In 2006, while researching the fate of his ancestor John Richner, Mr. Richner met Brian R. Mathias on a Civil War message board. Coincidentally, Mr. Mathias was researching the 54th Pennsylvania Volunteers, having found the burial locations of more than 1,000 of its nearly 1,740 soldiers. As a Sergeant in the United States Army Reserve and a Civil War re-enactor, Mr. Mathias is writing a biographical history of the regiment.

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