



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Virginia Powis Brown (Green) (1908-1957)

Virginia Powis Brown was born in 1908 in Salt Lake City, Utah to Louise Powis and Elwood Stanley Brown. Her ancestors included John Goodman, the Dunhams, and the Hathaways who journeyed to America on the Mayflower. She was also a direct descendant of Prince Bledyn of Powysland (present day Wales). Her maternal great-great-grandfather was Solomon Dunham, an early settler of Illinois and one of the first to build a brick house there. Her maternal grandparents were Julia and Walter Van Rensselaer Powis of New York.¹

Virginia's father Elwood was employed by the Y.M.C.A in Salt Lake City before accepting a position as the Director of Physical Education at the Y.M.C.A in Manila, Philippines in 1910. He later founded the Far East Championship games which brought together athletes from the Philippines, China, and Japan. During World War I, Brown served as an Athletic Director for the United States Army in France. For his service, Brown was awarded the Legion of Honor from France, the Order of the Redeemer from Greece, the Order of the Crown of Italy, and a Citation for Distinguished Service Medal from the United States. A prominent figure, Brown was known internationally for the promotion of amateur athletics. At the time of his death in 1924, Brown was the Vice President and Executive Secretary of the National Amateur Athletic Federation.²

Virginia's mother Louise was a talented artist, musician, and entrepreneur. After admiring the hand embroidered fabrics made by local women in the Philippines she began having her original designs embroidered on linens and lingerie. She soon established Powis-Brown Manufacturers which sold the embroidered goods in cities including Paris, New York, and Chicago.³ She married her second husband Horace Clark, an industrial engineer, in 1927. Clark died just two years later. Following the death of her husband, Louise split her time between her New York City apartment on 57th Street and her mother's home in St. Augustine, Florida.⁴

In 1937, Louise married Owen D. Young, a wealthy businessman, attorney, and chairman of the board of General Electric.⁵ The couple resided in Van Hornesville, New York where Louise established Van Horne Kitchens. From her home kitchen Louise worked with local school girls

¹ "Owen Young Weds Mrs. Louise Clark," *The New York Times*, Feb 21, 1937, 71.

² "News, Notes and Comments," *Mind and Body*, Vol. 31, April 1924, No. 327, (Mind and Body Publishing Co.: New Ulm, MN, 1924) p.44

³ Sandra Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2005) 235.

⁴ "Society," *Daily News* (New York, New York), Sun, Feb 21, 1937, 72.

⁵ "Owen D. Young Weds in South," *Asbury Park Press* (Asbury Park, New Jersey), Sun, Feb 21, 1937, 3.



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to produce canned goods and preserves.⁶ In 1938, the couple built a house in Florida on the Washington Oaks estate. The estate was named for George Washington, a grand nephew of the President.⁷ In 1939, Louise began renovating houses to be used as artisan studios.⁸

While few details exist about the life of Virginia Powis Brown, the artist attended Columbia University during the years 1929-1930⁹ and 1942-1943.¹⁰ In 1953, Virginia married George Green. Her mother and step father built a residence and studio for Virginia on their Washington Oaks property where she often asked the caretaker's daughter, Francis Faye Lopez, to sit for portraits. Virginia lived and worked at Washington Oaks until the end of her life. She died in 1957 at just 49 years of age.¹¹

Following the death of Virginia and her husband Owen, Louise donated the Washington Oaks Property to the State of Florida. In 1964, Washington Oaks became what is known today as Washington Oaks Gardens State Park. Louise died one year later.¹² Virginia's studio underwent several alterations by the park service in the 1960's but today serves as a private residence for park staff.¹³

⁶ Sandra Alfoldy, 235.

⁷ "When Chicago Was Young," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Sun, Apr 5, 1942, 72.

⁸ Sandra Alfoldy, 235.

⁹ *Columbia University Directory of Officers and Students 1929-1930*, (Columbia University: New York, 1930) 82.

¹⁰ *Columbia University Directory Number 1942-1943*, (Columbia University: New York, 1943) 87.

¹¹ "Washington Oaks Gardens State Park: History" Florida State Parks accessed June 24, 2021 <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/washington-oaks-gardens-state-park/history>

¹² Ibid

¹³ "The Studio: Washington Oaks Historic District," The Historical Marker Database accessed June 24, 2021 <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=145357>.