

Still Here: Gorham Sites in Providence

Today, Gorham Manufacturing Company's Elmwood factory has vanished from the Providence landscape, as its Steeple Street location (now a parking lot)¹ did before it. The Elmwood site is most noteworthy today for the toxic environmental legacy it has left the neighborhoods near Mashapaug Pond. Yet Gorham's presence in Providence remains strong, from its objects and monuments in silver, bronze, and stained glass to its records and papers in Providence museums and libraries. (The places where these Gorham sites may be found are indicated in bold in this paper. Maps at the end also depict these locations.)

Outdoor Spaces

The most visible Gorham objects in Providence today are the commissions the company's Bronze Division cast during its late nineteenth and early twentieth century heyday. They mark some of the city's leading public spaces. For instance, in 1906 the company's foundry cast the monument that stands at **Roger Williams Square** (or **Slate Rock Park**), where tradition claims



The State House,
topped by
Independent Man

Roger Williams came ashore.² The **Bajnotti Fountain** in Burnside Park near Kennedy Plaza, the statues of Oliver Hazard Perry and Nathanael Greene at the **Rhode Island State House**, the monument to Christopher Columbus at **Columbus Park** in Elmwood, and several statues in **Roger Williams Park**, including *The Falconer* and *The Fighting Gladiator*, are all made of Gorham bronze.³ Probably the most impressive Gorham

¹ Brown University Library, "Related Resources Gorham Archive Brown University," December 7, 2007, available at <http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/University_Library/test/bbuzzell/gorham/related.html>, accessed October 6, 2011.

² Daniel Barbarisi, "What Cheer? Monument is Being Revived," *The Providence Journal*, August 27, 2007, available at <http://www.projo.com/ri/providence/content/ROGER_LANDS_08-27-07_UC6SLUT.238d4f3.html>, accessed October 6, 2011.

³ Charles Hope Carpenter Jr., *Gorham Silver, 1831-1981* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1982), 312.

monument is *The Independent Man* atop the State House. Gorham received \$2,000 for the bronze casting of the statue in the summer of 1899.⁴

Another noteworthy part of the company's work in public spaces was its use of stained glass and bronze in the decoration of structures such as churches and banks. For example, **Calvary Baptist Church** in South Providence includes Gorham-designed windows depicting David, Christ, the prophet Isaiah, and Saints Peter, Paul, and John.⁵ Other sites where Gorham carried out bronze commissions, ranging from grille work to memorial tablets, include the **Union Trust Company** building, **The Old Stone Bank**, **The First Baptist Church**, and the **Mathewson Street United Methodist Church**.⁶

All of these Gorham commissions indicate the company's prominence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, many of the Gorham bronzes commemorate important figures in Rhode Island or American history and are located near major centers of power and public spaces. Clearly, Gorham was a "go-to" company for more than just silver and was known for its work with several kinds of materials.

Museum and Archival Spaces

Gorham's papers and other materials housed in several Providence museums, libraries, and archives point to the huge variety of work the company produced. One example is the **Providence Jewelry Museum** (open by appointment), whose collection, which includes Gorham's bronze rolls, dies, and foundry, reflects the industrial process behind the company's creations. The **Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum** displays some of Gorham's most famous objects, from silverware to vases to teapots, in its American Decorative Arts section. Among the nearly 2,000 pieces in its collection



Gorham silver and bronze objects, RISD Museum

⁴ Carpenter, 150.

⁵ Calvary Baptist Church, "Calvary's Stained Glass Windows," available at <http://www.calbaptist.org/windows.html>, accessed October 9, 2011.

⁶ Gorham Manufacturing Company Records, John Hay Library, Brown University, Manuscript Collections 74. Records of Gorham's bronze works can be found in the collection's ledger book of bronze work cast at the foundry between approximately 1901 and 1920.

are silver from an 1870s dinner service for a Chicago businessman (Gorham's largest commission), a replica of the "Cellini Vase" that Gorham produced for the Centennial Exposition of 1876, and a 1904 prize-winning writing table.⁷

Gorham papers and publications may be found at the **John Hay Library**, the **RISD Library**, the **Providence Athenaeum**, and the **Rhode Island Historical Society Library**. The Hay Library contains the Gorham Company's archive, which includes a huge array of objects and documents, from work records to annual reports to blueprints and photographs.⁸ Both the Hay and the Rockefeller Library hold a number of books and pamphlets published by Gorham's Bronze Division and Ecclesiastical Department. These publications, from works of scholarly research to promotional texts touting the work of Gorham craftsmen in areas from Communion ware to grave markers, represent some of the company's substantial literary output. The Providence Athenaeum includes a valuable example of these kinds of texts, *Loving Cups* (1898), a short Gorham book that gives a history of certain kind of drinking vessel.⁹

The RISD Library's special collections include part of Gorham's design library and a number of other Gorham publications, including catalogues. The Rhode Island Historical Society's Library also holds many documents related to Gorham, from company founder Jabez Gorham's papers to further Gorham books and copies of the company's bylaws. Other objects in the Historical Society's possession include Gorham candlesticks, platters, bowls and dishes.¹⁰

Exploring these places that display or own Gorham objects and papers is just scratching the surface: this paper does not include private homes that contain Gorham silver or many of the bronze plaques and glass pieces throughout the city that doubtless came from Gorham's factories. In some sense, Gorham is everywhere in Providence. Two more examples of the company's reach at Brown illustrate this point. One is the bronze "Bruno" statue in the heart of

⁷ Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, "Collection: Decorative Arts," 2008, available at <<http://www.risdmuseum.org/collection.aspx?Type=Decorative-Arts&id=15200>>, accessed October 10, 2011.

⁸ The Brown University Library, "Gorham Company Records," 2010, available at <http://library.brown.edu/collatoz/info.php?id=59>, accessed October 8, 2011.

⁹ For more on Gorham's publications, see Carpenter, 135.

¹⁰ The Rhode Island Historical Society, "NETOP: RIHS NetWorked Online Public Catalog," 2007, available at <http://rihs.minisisinc.com/>, accessed October 7, 2011. (Note: the online catalog does not contain all RIHS Gorham material. It is best to visit the Library in person).

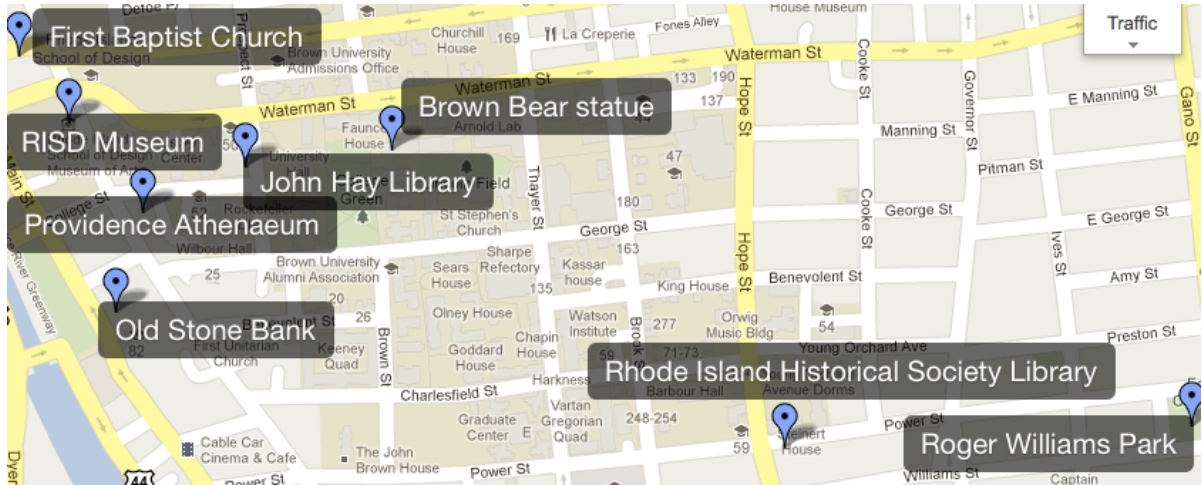
campus, cast at the Gorham foundry in 1923.¹¹ The other is the chain and pendant that the Brown President wears at events such as convocation and commencement.¹² It, too, is Gorham-made.

¹¹ Carpenter, 312; see also “Bear” in Martha Mitchell, *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* (Providence: Brown University Library, 1993), available at http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=B0130, accessed October 10, 2011.

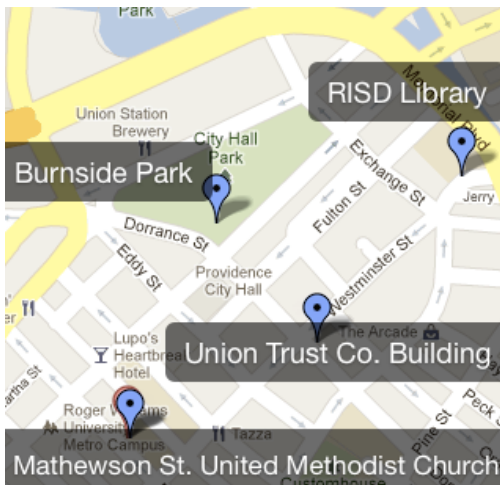
¹² Carpenter, 271.

Maps of Gorham Sites

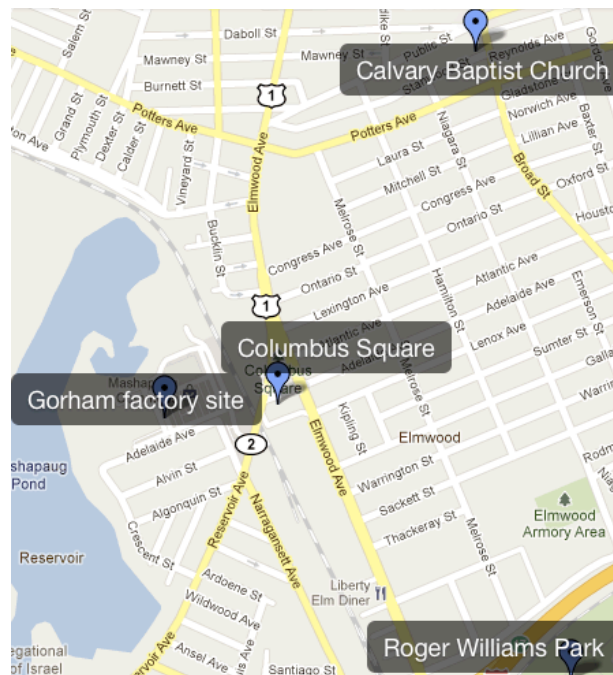
The East Side



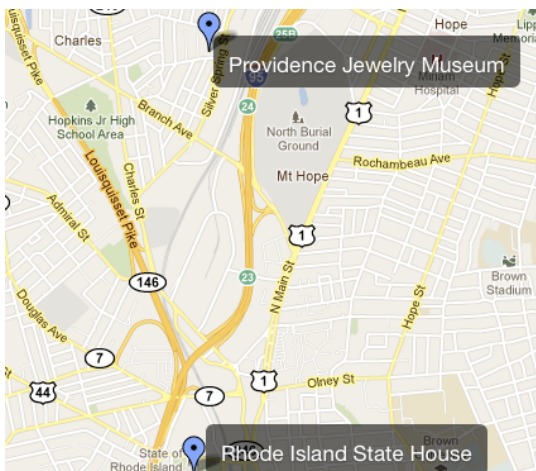
Downtown



Elmwood/Mashapaug Pond Area



North Providence/State House



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