In Service of Art and Humanity: The Lives of Caroline Rogers Hill

David Burzillo

ABSTRACT

Caroline Rogers Hill (1878-1965) was a student at the *Academie André Lhote* in the 1920s. Her name is likely remembered today only by surviving family members, but the life she lead and the choices she made--focusing on career, public service, and art at different points in her life--demonstrate an independence and drive typical of that exhibited by other "New Women" of her day. At the age of forty, Caroline Hill turned her focus to art. Embracing the milieu of 1920s and 1930s Paris, she painted and sculpted, studied with well-known teachers to hone her practice, exhibited at numerous salon, and collected art as well. Her ability to change the trajectory of her life on multiple occasions based on her shifting interests and current events testify to her power to make meaning in a world where the power to choose was quite circumscribed for most women.

Among her many contributions to the field of women's studies, the scholar Carroll Smith-Rosenberg focused attention on the lives of a group of unique, late-19th and early 20th century American women who were "single, highly educated, and economically autonomous" (Smith-Rosenberg 1985: 245). What made these "New Women" so remarkable, according to Smith-Rosenberg, was that "[H]er quintessentially American identity, her economic resources, and her social standing permitted her to defy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world" (245). Caroline Rogers Hill (1878-1965), a student for two years at the *Academie André Lhote*, was just such a "New Woman." She was married briefly but remained single for the better part of her life. She embraced progressive social ideas and service as evidenced by her work with Denison House and the Women's Municipal League of Boston. And she was not averse

to tackling challenging service projects, spending almost four years in France during World War I where she engaged in relief work with child refugees. She also lived and worked in the exciting artistic milieu of post-World-War-I Paris for close to twenty years. This short resume of Hill's life and work should more than attest to her worthiness as a subject for historical inquiry. But this short resume does not account for the details of her life and work in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, when she studied sculpture with Antoine Bourdelle and painting with André Lhote, and exhibited both sculptures and paintings at various salons in and around Paris. This period of her life is also rich enough to justify her worthiness as a subject for historical study. Hill came to a passion for art later in her life, making her art career a relatively short one, though art still remained a passion even after it had become challenging for her to practice her craft. In her final years she shifted her focus from Europe to the southwestern United States, exploring Native American art, and it was on a trip to Mexico, to explore Toltec ruins, that she died in 1965.

Caroline Rogers was born in 1878, in Hyde Park, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. She was raised primarily in Barre, Massachusetts, a rural community about 60 miles west of Boston, where her father ran the local newspaper. The family was comfortably middle class, but they certainly would not be considered Boston "Brahmins," though she could claim direct descent from four Mayflower passengers. Caroline Rogers graduated from Barre High School in 1896, enrolled at Wellesley College, and graduated from there in 1900. Her college transcript is unremarkable, and there is no indication of a passion for art.

After earning her undergraduate degree, Caroline Rogers remained in Wellesley and embarked upon a business career that introduced her to the worlds of finance and management and provided her with experience and skills that would serve her well both in her service work and her management of her own affairs. She worked at the Wellesley Tea Room, the Wellesley Inn, and for the *College News*, each of which had been established by Wellesley College graduates for the

Boston's upper class shared a number of characteristics in common--chief among them an affinity for Beacon Hill, Unitarianism, and Harvard – which would continue to distinguish them through World War I. See Farrell Elite Families: Class and Power in Nineteenth-Century Boston. Albany 1993. See also Butler/Wacker/Balmer. Religion in American Life: A Short History. Oxford 2003. See also Story. The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard & the Upper Class, 1800-1870. Middletown 1980.

purpose of serving the Wellesley College community.² She was actively involved in all aspects of the incorporation process when the Wellesley Inn was incorporated and expanded,³ and Hill and her colleagues were recognized by the local and national press as entrepreneurs expanding the opportunities for educated women in the new century (Crawford 1903; Marks 1903). Hill was also actively involved in the *College News*, a publication for which she served as business manager its first year, business editor for two more, and as overseer of advertising for another.

In 1906 Caroline Rogers married the investment banker William Henry Hill (1838-1913), a recent widower and father of eleven grown children.⁴ From the time of her marriage, Caroline's life changed dramatically, as she turned away from a focus on business and towards education and philanthropic and volunteer work. She enrolled in classes at Radcliffe College from 1908-1912, taking courses in the philosophy of education, sociology, and economics, and earning an MA in 1912. Her philanthropic and volunteer work focused on organizations run by women that provided education, support, and direct services to the poor, particularly women who were supporting families. The first of these organizations was Denison House, a settlement house in Boston.⁵ Denison House made educational, vocational, and social services available to neighborhood residents and sought to break down class barriers between community residents. Hill served on the organization's Executive Board (1907-1913) and as the organization's treasurer for a one-year term during that period.

In 1910 while still serving Denison House, Caroline Hill became actively involved in the Women's Municipal League of Boston, which had been founded in 1908. Its work was carried out by various committees whose goal was to identify

² The Wellesley Tea Room was founded in 1897 by two Wellesley alumna, while Caroline was at the college. The Wellesley Inn was opened in 1902.

³ Caroline was secretary of the board of directors of the corporation, and she managed the Inn from at least 1903-1906.

⁴ Despite the difference in age, by all accounts, the marriage was a happy one, and Hill's descendants kept in touch with Caroline until her death and those I have been in touch with have fond memories of her to this day.

⁵ The College Settlements Association was founded in 1887 by two Wellesley College professors, who would found Denison House five years later. The records of Dennison House do not show Hill being involved there as an undergraduate. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr founded Hull House in Chicago, the most well known of the settlement houses, in 1889.

the significant problems facing the people of the city of Boston, particularly those that impacted the lives of women and families.⁶ Committees focused on a facet of a larger area of concern including the environment (cleaning, ventilation, abatement of noise, rats and flies), health (obstetrics, nursing support for expectant or new mothers), work (social hygiene of occupations), the home (housing, cleaning), food (milk delivery, ice cream and butter, markets), education (open-air schools), and many others. Committees researched problems, sought to identify the best available solutions for them, and worked to ameliorate or eliminate them. Like Denison House, women provided the energy, vision, and labor for this organization.

Caroline Hill served the League from at 1910 to 1915. Her most significant role was as founder and chair of the "Social Hygiene Committee." The issues studied by the Social Hygiene Committee involved significant and controversial cultural and moral issues of the day including sex education, family planning, prostitution, and sexually transmitted diseases, among others. Progressive reformers attributed the "decline of the family" to delayed marriage, smaller families, and rising divorce rates. Many of these reformers were also concerned about the impact of sexually transmitted diseases and prostitution as well. Hill's committee strove to disseminate accurate, up-to-date scientific information about them in an effort to

⁶ Though the League sought to grapple with the most pressing issues of the day, when it came to suffrage it was agnostic and welcomed both supporters and opponents of suffrage.

In introducing the new committee to the League's supporters, the creation of the committee was described as a case of "spontaneous generation" and as having sprung "fully formed from the head of its parent, the chairman of the committee" Mrs. Hill (Bulletin April 1913:9). In her first report for the League Hill contrasted the knowledge of social hygiene, possessed by doctors, social workers, and psychologists with the lack of knowledge possessed by the general public. The silence around the important issues of social hygiene demanded an end to the silence surrounding them: "...the Committee on Social Hygiene of the League has set itself the task of awakening the community to the dangers of a further continuance of this policy of silence and of arousing the public conscience to do its duty; providing sex education for parents and for those whose parents cannot or will not furnish it for them." (Bulletin April 1913: 11).

⁸ Allen Brandt has written extensively about the history of sexually-transmitted diseases in recent American history.

⁹ According to Brandt, one approach adopted by the social hygiene movement on sexually transmitted diseases "contended that the best way to prevent infection was by adherence to a sexual ethic that made it impossible to acquire an infection. Essentially this meant restricting sexual relationships to marriage. The principal means of achieving this goal was through education to encourage abstinence and the repression of prostitution, assumed to be the central locus of infection" (Brandt 1988: 380).

ensure that women had access to science-based information about sex and birth control 10

Under Mrs. Hill's leadership and that of her successor, the Committee organized a number of lecture series, as well as individual lectures, by doctors and health experts and held mass meetings at area factories where experts addressed groups of workers.¹¹ In some cases the committee partnered with organizations like Public Health Education Committee of the American Medical Association to put on a lecture series. The Committee also supported organizations throughout New England, particularly women's clubs and the American Home and School Association, that were seeking to provide education about these issues to its members. In the spring of 1914 the committee helped bring these issues directly to the public by sponsoring public performances of a play that focused on issues of social hygiene, Damaged Goods (Les Avaries) by the French playwright Eugene Brieux, which dealt with the horrible impact of prostitution and sexually transmitted disease on a young family. 12 The committee worked with the Suffolk District Medical Society and the Massachusetts Department of Health to bring the play to Boston, motivated by the belief that the play "...teaches a vital lesson, gives a clearer understanding of the fundamental facts of life, and the dangers of the double standard of morality" (Bulletin January 1914: 23-24).

¹⁰ The creation of the Committee on Social Hygiene by the Women's Municipal League came at a time of growing interest in the question of "social hygiene" across the country, as reflected in state-wide organizations like The Chicago Society for Social Hygiene (1907), the Connecticut Society for Social Hygiene (1908), and the Oregon Society for Social Hygiene (1910). By World War I, there were many national organizations as well: The American Purity Alliance, The National Vigilance Committee, and the American Federation for Sex Hygiene merged to create the American Social Hygiene Association, which would be a leader in the field for many years.

¹¹ One of the doctors who advised the committee and delivered lectures for it was Dr. Hugh Cabot, who was a professor of urology at Harvard Medical School, and later dean of the medical school at the University of Michigan. His perspective on social hygiene is clear from the title of one of his articles. "Education versus Punishment."

¹² The importance of education in addressing the many ills of social hygiene is well summed up by the words of the doctor in *Damaged Goods* who treats the main character and delivers the following message to his father in law: "All that is needed is for people to understand the nature of this disease rather better. It would soon become the custom for a man who proposed for a girl's hand to add to the other things for which he is asked a medical statement of bodily fitness, which would make it certain that he did not bring this plague into the family with him" (Brieux 1914: 231).

The League did not provide any public explanation for the dissolution of the Committee, which was eliminated after a little over two years of work.¹³ But if Caroline Hill was the driving force behind the committee, the death of her husband during the committee's first year of work would certainly help explain her stepping away from an active role in directing the committee's work. Her decision to travel to Europe with her nephew removed her from any possibility of overseeing the committee's work on a regular basis. She returned to Boston from Europe in the fall of 1914, just after the outbreak of hostilities, and within a few months left for France to do relief work with children displaced by the war.¹⁴ She would remain in France for the duration of the war, returning to America for short stints to raise money, to lecture about the conditions of refugee children in France in support of the organization's fundraising efforts, and collect materials for distribution to refugees.

Hill worked with the *Comité Franco-Americaine pour la protéction des enfants de la frontière (The Franco-American Committee for Protection of the Children of the Frontier)*, serving both as an executive committee member and as a volunteer working directly with children in the *Comité's* care. ¹⁵ The *Comité's* work focused primarily on providing relief to child refugees from Belgium, Alsace, and northern France, who had lost their parents or had been sent to the *Comité* in Paris by parents to get them away from war zones. Relief was provided to the children at a series of "colonies" the *Comité* established throughout France. ¹⁶ These colonies were created in a variety of settings: convents, empty hotels, former orphanages, artist studios, and estates made available by wealthy supporters of the *Comité's*

¹³ The Amy Lowell Putnam papers do not provide information on the dissolution of the Committee.

¹⁴ Yearly trips between the United States and Europe would be common for Hill for most of the rest of her life.

¹⁵ The *Comité* was organized in August 1914 to help children and families fleeing from areas invaded or under attack by the Germans. The *Comité* was originally established by Frederic Courdert of New York and M. Jean Cruppi, a former minister of foreign affairs and justice of France. Relief work was already under way by the time Hill arrived with the colony at Nazelles in Touraine that was established in November 1914. and the number of colonies established by the *Comité* grew rapidly from that point on (Children June 1916).

¹⁶ There is much more to the story of her work in France than I can briefly sketch here. The centennial of World War I has, among other things, helped raise awareness of the work of women in relief organizations like the *Comité*, which has been previously underappreciated and understudied. Scholars like Katherine Storr have tried to address this lacunae.

work. A colony typically supported between twenty and fifty children, with some serving just boys or girls while others served both. Eventually two sanatoria were also established for the care of tubercular children. While at the colonies, children received food, shelter, clothing, education, and medical treatment in the hope of achieving the *Comité's* goal of making the lives of children in its care as normal as possible.

Mrs. Hill's work for the *Comité* focused on what she described as "...collecting, placing and visiting, children from devastated districts and broken homes." The arrival of children in Paris was a particularly difficult time for many of them, as most traveled without parents, and some were quite young. Accounts of Mrs. Hill greeting the children emphasize her tenderness and her care in reassuring and calming them. (See Fig. 1)

Mrs. Hill was responsible for administrating three of the *Comité's* colonies. The colony at Berck (Pas-de-Calais) for tubercular children, the colony for boys and girls at Oulin, and the colony for boys at Rosay. She also performed a wide range of other administrative tasks for the *Comité*, including investigating conditions at the colonies, travelling to the front, and at other times investigating potential locations for new colonies. ¹⁹ Mrs. Hill also proved herself a great fundraiser.

¹⁷ This information comes from a one-page typed supplement on her war relief work that Mrs. Hill provided with her Alumnae Questionnaire for Wellesley College. The Comité's procedures were established early in the war: children were sent to Paris where they were collected by Mrs. Hill and others. The children were cleaned up, their clothes were washed, and they were evaluated for their state of health and the presence of disease. Temporary housing was provided in "depots" in and around Paris before the children were sent to "colonies" outside the city for more long-term placement. When necessary, unhealthy children were sent to hospitals for care.

¹⁸ Gertrude Atherton, who visited France for three months during 1916 to observe the efforts of French women to serve the war effort, was moved by the efforts of the American women she observed in France, and included a chapter on them in her book. She noted Mrs. Hill's work with children, particularly in consoling the small children recently arrived by train. "While I was in Paris Mr. Jaccaci and Mrs. Hill were meeting these trains; and, when the smaller children arrived frightened and tearful they took them in their arms and consoled them all the way to the Relief Depots" (Atherton1917: 173-74). Later in the same chapter she described another scene in which "Mrs. Hill was kissing and hugging several little girls who had clung to her skirts. It was, in spite of its origin, a happy scene" (181).

¹⁹ For example, "Have just come back from a week spent along 100 kilometers of the front and all I can say is do keep busy for us, the need is tremendous, the frontier very long and the children who are giving out under the strain of life there, and appealing to us to take them ever increasing in number" (Hill to Hall, August 25, 1916, Hall Papers).



Fig. 1: Caroline Hill and Emilienne Delsalle, 1916. © Franco-American Committee for the Protection of Children of the Frontier.

On trips back to the United States in 1916 and 1917 she raised money and publicized the plight of refugee children. Her talks about conditions in France were supported by her personal stories of refugee children and photographs she had taken.²⁰ Hill was also actively involved in efforts to provide clothing for the children, which was accomplished with the support of many individuals in America.²¹ Hill was in regular communication with Constance Hall about the clothing needs

²⁰ Lecturing about the situation in France was very important to her fundraising efforts, and to support this work she reported taking over 4000 photographs and five "reel" films (Rogers, Caroline).

²¹ Caroline Hill provided very specific information about the needs of the *Comité* Constance Hall of Cambridge, MA who served as chair of The New England Clothing Committee. She coordinated the acquisition of materials, the cutting of them, the sewing, and the packing of them. Towns, schools, businesses, and individuals contributed to the work. Finished goods were sent to New York City, to the War Relief Clearing House, for shipment to France (Hall Papers).

of the refugees in the *Comité's* care. For her efforts on behalf of refugee children, Caroline Hill was awarded the Medal of Elizabeth (by the Queen of the Belgians) and the *Médaille de la Reconnaissance française* by the government of France.

The end of the war did not bring much of a slowdown for Caroline, who travelled to England and Scotland in early November 1918 to complete a study of child welfare in some of England's major cities (Hall Papers). Her postwar work also included a tour of northeastern France with Corinna Haven Smith to assess the progress of recovery efforts in post-war France. "Rising Above the Ruins," a book she co-authored with Smith, was the product of this tour, which sought to publicize the efforts of the French people to rebuild their country.²²

Mrs. Hill was forty years old when her tour of northern France ended, and she was ready to embark on a new chapter in her life. This chapter would focus squarely on art. It is not clear why Caroline Hill chose to make this shift and focus her time and energy on sculpture and painting. Other than taking two art classes as an undergraduate, and visiting some European art museums in 1914-and more perhaps while she was in France during the war--Caroline Hill does not seem to have engaged with art in a significant way up to that point in her life.²³ It is clear, though, that she embraced art at this time with the same drive that motivated her work for the League and her work with refugees in World War I. She moved to Paris, lived the life of an artist, studied with some of the city's most famous teachers, attended art shows, visited museums, and she spent her time sculpting and painting. In addition, she became a collector of works of art from many periods of history, spanning the history of art from ancient Rome to modern France.

²² After the war Smith and Hill investigated the devastation to northern France and visited many regions that refugee children they had served came from. They were moved by the plight of the families they visited and their efforts to rebuild their war-torn country. "When, on returning to America, we heard on every hand expressions of doubt as to whether the French people were doing their share toward overcoming the difficulties resulting from the war, we felt that in loyalty to our brave friends of the north we would like to tell the story of their effort as we had seen it" (Smith/Hill 1920:vii).

²³ At Wellesley College Hill simply fulfilled the graduation requirement, taking two introductory level courses. The Fine Arts Department did offer courses in the history of sculpture, history of painting, Italian painting, and Greek sculpture—topics that Mrs. Hill would show a keen interest in later in life.

Unfortunately, given the dearth of personal material, there are more questions than answers about Caroline Hill's art career compared with her other activities which are easier to trace in the records of public organizations.²⁴ There is no diary or a collection of papers with which to trace the evolution of her interest in art and or trace her evolution as an artist.

An additional gap in understanding her art career regards the nature of the corpus that remains. One of her nephews, Robert C. Rogers, reported that "the contents of her studio were transported to the Paris memorial service and those attending allowed to take away whatever they wished." Evidently many works that were not taken were simply discarded, though some were brought back to the United States by family members. Members of both the Rogers and Hill families possess a small number of her works.²⁵ A majority of her paintings exist only in the form of slides of her work, and are in the collection at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, in Washington, DC. These slides were discovered by accident by Annette Merlis, who purchased the slides at an antique store on Long Island, a discovery that inspired her to begin investigating the story of Caroline Hill to find out more about the woman who created them. A number of these slides lack titles or dates, and this is also true of a number of the surviving paintings.

Caroline Hill's informal study of art began shortly after the war when she returned to Europe to explore the great museums of Europe. Her passport application from December 1922 shows that she was already in Berlin studying art at the time, having left the United States in December 1921. She noted in the application that the purpose of her trip was "study." She listed her destinations as: Germany, England, France, Italy, Poland, "and other necessary countries." She made this passport application in Berlin, but asked that the passport be forwarded to Florence. Hill was an avid museum visitor and art collector, and it is likely that a lot of her time in these years was devoted to these activities.

Mrs. Hill's first significant training in art would come at the *Académie de la Grande Chaumière* in Montparnasse where she was a student of Antoine Bour-

²⁴ Unfortunately, Caroline Hill did not leave behind any writing that would explain this. She did not keep a diary. A few letters have survived, some of which were kindly shared with me by Dominique Bermann Martin of the Association André Lhote. She also shared some personal information with the Wellesley and Radcliffe College Alumnae offices, but these are bullet points.

²⁵ Linn Trowbridge, recently deceased, had about 15 paintings.

delle (1861-1929) from 1927-1932. While the *Académie* was known for its training in both painting and sculpture, it is not clear if Mrs. Hill did any training in painting, and almost no specific records remain from her time there. Five of the first six pieces she exhibited at the *Salon des Tuileries* were sculptures, suggesting that this was her sole focus in her early years in Paris.²⁶

Her formal relationship with André Lhote (1885-1962) lasted from 1933-1936, though she would continue to visit Lhote and correspond with him in the 1940s and 1950s. These letters and postcards touch on many issues beyond painting, and they suggest a close bond of friendship between Hill and Lhote that went far beyond the teacher-student relationship and continued long after she left the *Académie*. Many of her surviving works that can be dated come from the year 1933, so she appears to have been painting very actively during this time. She exhibited a number of paintings at the salon during 1930s, including at the *Salon des Tuileries* in 1934, 1935, 1936, 1938, and 1939, and she exhibited multiple works at the majority of these salons. Her focus on painting continued after she left the *Académie*, and in 1940 she reported to the Radcliffe Alumni Association that "Painting is now my active & sole interest." (Radcliffe College Alumnae Information Form, 1940. Radcliffe College Alumnae Association (RCAA), Deceased alumnae files.)

Her surviving works show that she developed a distinctive style and painted landscapes, portraits, and still-lifes. Besides painting scenes that clearly capture the places and life of Paris, she also painted when she traveled, and there are paintings from Alamanarre in southern France and from Venice. Other than a few portraits that are identified as being of her mother, and a work that is titled "Spanish Refugees," it is not possible to identify the people in her images. (See Fig. 2-6)

At the start of World War II Caroline Hill was sixty-four years old, but this second world crisis would lead to more refugee work and another major shift in her life. In the spring of 1940 she began to work on behalf of the National War Fund, which provided relief and financial assistance in war-torn areas. She managed to flee from Paris on the eve of the German invasion, making it to Bordeaux. In September 1940 she was asked to help organize relief work for women and children in Marseilles by the organization *Secours Quaker*. She returned to New York and was there for much of the period from July 1941 to June 1945, working

²⁶ Unfortunately I have not been able to locate any images of her sculptural work.





Fig. 2: Untitled landscape by Caroline Hill. Courtesy of Randy Trowbridge. (top)

Fig. 3: Untitled portrait by Caroline Hill. Courtesy of the Rivers School. (bottom)





Fig. 4: Untitled portrait by Caroline Hill. Courtesy of the Rivers School. (top right)

Fig. 5: Untitled landscape by Caroline Hill. Courtesy of Tod Hill. (top left)

Fig. 6: Untitled portrait by Caroline Hill. Courtesy of Tod Hill. (bottom)

for American Aid to France. While her work focused on coordinating food and medicine shipments to France, she took Red Cross classes on nutrition, and at the New School she passed an exam certifying her for modern relief work. She also took a course focused on camouflage at Harvard, as well as courses at Simmons College (Boston) on "nutrition" and "emergency feeding."

While she was not able to provide direct relief to refugees for much of the war, she was able to after the war's completion. She worked from June 1945 to June 1950 as head of food distribution for American Relief to France.²⁷ In 1950 she supported the House of Students, which had been created by the University of Paris through her generosity.28 She also resumed painting at this time. For her work on behalf of refugees during World War II, Mrs. Hill was again awarded the *Médaille de la Reconnaissance française*, and her work after the war was recognized by multiple French ministries.

In the final years of her life she remained active, travelling, visiting museums, and studying the Papago Indians of the Southwestern United States, She was exploring Toltec ruins in Mexico when she died in 1965.

Like other New Women of the late-19th and early 20th century Caroline Rogers Hill challenged the status quo in a number of important ways. These challenges included her choice to remain single for most of her life; her pursuit of her ever-evolving interests--business, service, art, and service again; and her embrace of radical social and cultural ideas, like social hygiene and cubism. Her artistic skill and corpus by themselves may not support her inclusion in a list of the most important artists trained by Lhote, but the way she combined service to humanity and art surely makes her one of Lhote's most unique students.

^{27 50,000} children were served by this program in 1948-1949 alone. She emphasized "the giving of aid to physically deficient children and in establishing a program for three or six months, during which time an additional 300 calories daily would be supplied to these children in the forms of dried milk, cocoa and sugar, biscuits (fortified with calcium), jam and butter or oleo" (Kowza 1950).

²⁸ This helped fund medical exams, rest rooms, restaurants, nurseries for children of married students, a laundry, gyms, and assembly hall for students.

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