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Celebrating 175: Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Biographical Sketches (WMAA file), 1917-1947

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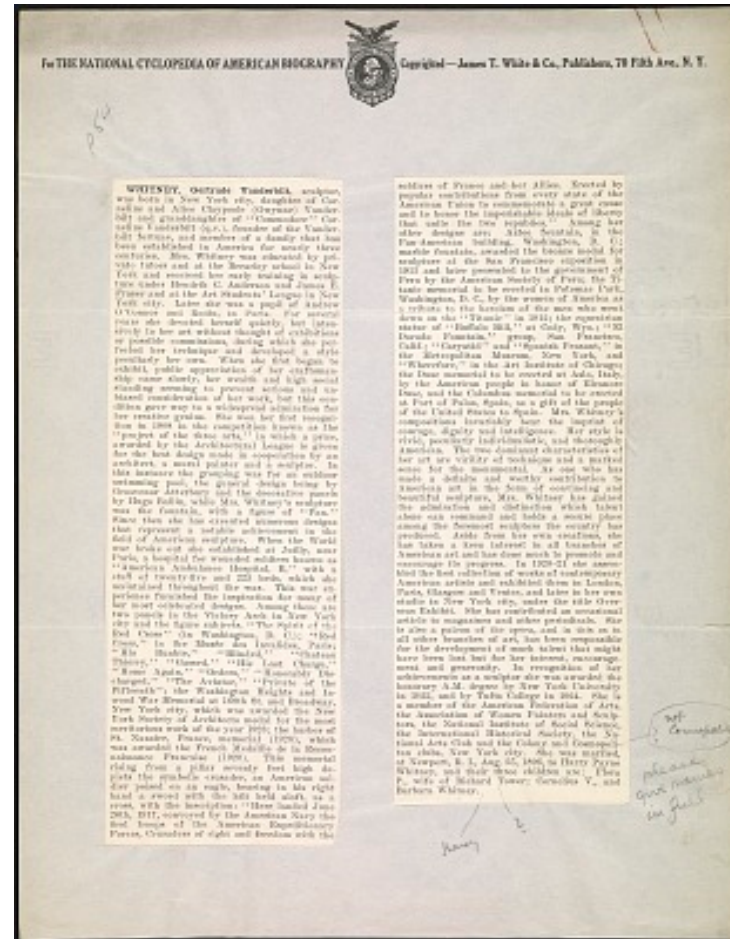
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WHITNEY, Gertrude Vanderbilt, sculptor, was born in New York city, daughter of Cornelius and Alice Claypoole (Gwynne) Vanderbilt and granddaughter of "Commodore" Cornelius Vanderbilt (q.v.), founder of the Vanderbilt fortune, and member of a family that has been established in America for nearly three centuries. Mrs. Whitney was educated by private tutors and at the Brearley school in New York and received her early training in sculpture under Henrik C. Anderson and James E. Fraser and at the Art Students' League in New York city. Later she was a pupil of Andrew O'Connor and Robin, in Paris. For several years she devoted herself quietly, but intensively to her art without thought of exhibitions or possible commissions, during which she perfected her technique and developed a style peculiarly her own. When she first began to exhibit, public appreciation of her craftsmanship came slowly, her wealth and high social standing seeming to prevent serious and unbiased consideration of her work, but this condition gave way to a widespread admiration for her creative genius. She won her first recognition in 1908 in the competition known as the "project of the three arts," in which a prize, awarded by the Architectural League is given for the best design made in cooperation by an architect, a mural painter and a sculptor. In this instance the grouping was for an outdoor swimming pool, the general design being by Grosvenor Atterbury and the decorative panels by Hugo Ballin, while Mrs. Whitney's sculpture was the foundation, with a figure of "Pan." Since then she has executed numerous designs that represent a notable achievement in the field of American sculpture. When the World war broke out she established at Jullily, near Paris, a hospital for wounded soldiers known as "American Ambulance Hospital, B," with a staff of twenty-five and 225 beds, which she maintained throughout the war. This war experience furnished the inspiration for many of her most celebrated designs. Among these are two panels in the Victory Arch in New York city and the figure subjects, "The Spirit of the Red Cross" (in Washington D. C.); "Red Cross," in the Musée des Invalides, Paris; "His Bunkie," "Blinded," "Chateau Thierry," "Gassed," "His Last Charge," "Home Again," "Orders," "Honorably Discharged," "The Aviator," "Private of the Fifteenth"; the Washinton Heights and Inwood War Memorial at 168th St. and Broadway, New York city, which was awarded the New York Society of Architects medal for the most meritorious work of the year 1923; the harbor of St. Nazaire, France, memorial (1926), which was awarded the French Medaille de la Reconnaissance Francaise (1920). This memorial rising from a pillar seventy feet high depicts the symbolic crusader, an American soldier poised on an eagle, bearing in his right hand a sword with the hilt held aloft, as a cross, with the inscription: "Here landed June 26th, 1917, convoyed by the American Navy the first troops of the American Expeditionary Forces, Crusaders of right and freedom with the soldiers of France and her Allies. Erected by popular contributions from every state of the American Union to commemorate a great cause and to honor the imperishable ideals of liberty that unite the two republics." Among her other designs are: Aztec fountain, in the Pan-American building, Washington, D.C.; marble fountain, awarded the bronze medal for sculpture at the San Francisco exposition in 1915 and later presented to the government of Peru by the American Society of Peru; the Titanic memorial to be erected in Potomac Park, Washington, D. C., by the women of America as a tribute to the heroism of the men who went down on the "Titanic" in 1912; the equestrian statue of "Buffalo



Bill," at Cody, Wyo.; "El Dorado Fountain," group, San Francisco, Calif.; "Caryatid" and "Spanish Peasant," in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and "Wherefore," in the Art Institute of Chicago; the Duse memorial to be erected at Asolo, Italy, by the American people in honor of Eleanore Duse, and the Columbus memorial to be erected at Port of Palos, Spain as a gift of the people of the United States to Spain. Mrs. Whitney's compositions invariably bear the imprint of courage, dignity, and intelligence. Her style is vivid, peculiarly individualistic, and thoroughly American. The two dominant characteristics of her art are virility of technique and a marked sense for the monumental. As one of who has made a definite and worthy contribution to American art in the form of convincing and beautiful sculpture, Mrs. Whitney has gained the admiration and distinction which talent alone can command and holds a secure place among the foremost sculptors the country has produced. Aside from her own creations, she has taken a keen interest in all branches of American art and has done much to promote and encourage its progress. In 1920-21 she assembled the first collection of works of contemporary American artists and exhibited them in London, Paris, Glasgow and Venice, and later in her own studio in New York city, under the title Overseas Exhibit. She has contributed an occasional article to magazines and other periodicals. She is also a patron of the opera, and in this as in all other branches of art, had been responsible for the development of much talent that might have been lost but for her interest, encouragement and generosity. In recognition of her achievements as a sculptor, she was awarded the honorary A.M. degree by Tufts College in 1924. She is a member of the American Federation of Arts, the Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, the National Institute of Social Science, the National Historical Society, the National Arts Club and the Colony and Cosmopolitan clubs, New York city. She was married, at Newport, R.I., Aug. 25, 1896, to Harry Payne Whitney, and their three children are: Flora P., wife of Richard Tower; Cornelius V., and Barbara Whitney.

[[right margin]] ? not Cosmopolitan please give names in full [[/right margin]]

Henry ?

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