

On Blackstone Boulevard stands a bronze statue of a young woman striding with heroic confidence and feminine grace, her hair blown by the wind. She looks like she has stepped out of a myth. Inscribed in the statue's granite base:

THE WIND ROARS BY I FEEL IT BLOW
AND KNOW THAT I AM FREE TO GO.

CONSTANCE WITHERBY '30

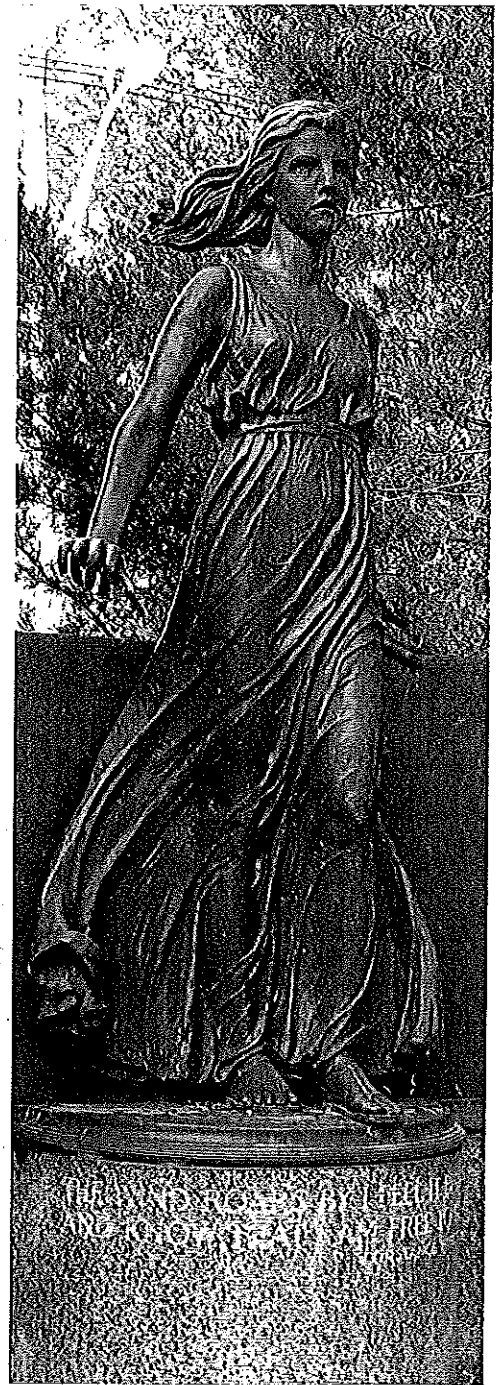
by Stephen Coon

Hundreds of people pass the statue every day. Very few know the deeply moving story of Constance Witherby, Lincoln School Class of 1930.

Constance Witherby was born in Solvay, New York, on September 5, 1913 to Dorothy Hazard Witherby and Edwin Chaplin Witherby. She was the first of three children born to the couple. Both parents were well educated — Dorothy was a Wellesley graduate and Edwin earned degrees from Amherst and MIT. Edwin Witherby was an executive with Solvay Process Company, which had been founded by Dorothy Hazard's family. In the midst of a life distinguished by professional success and community-minded activity, Edwin Witherby died tragically in February 1919 at the age of 44. Constance was five years old.

In September 1923, Dorothy Witherby married S. Foster Hunt, a Brown graduate and, like her, a descendant of an old Rhode Island family. Mr. Hunt was an executive at Nicholson File, one of the leading industrial companies in Providence, and the largest file company in the world at that time. In January 1924, Mr. and Mrs. Hunt and the three Witherby children took up residence in Providence, and Constance—known to her family and friends as "Con"—was enrolled in the sixth grade at the Lincoln School.

The family lived at 233 Medway Street in an enormous mansion that is no longer standing. Their home, a short walk to Lincoln School, looked across Waterman Street to open fields and the Seekonk River beyond. At Lincoln, Constance distinguished herself as an outstanding student with particular interests in writing and drama. She began contributing to the "Lincoln Green" in June 1924, with a short prose sketch titled "The Old Curiosity Shop." Constance published poetry and short fictional sketches in every issue of the twice-yearly "Lincoln Green" through June 1929. She acted in theatrical productions beginning in seventh grade, including the "Shakespeare Play," an annual upper school event, in 1928 (*The Taming of the Shrew*) and 1929 (*Twelfth Night*). As a sophomore, she played on the class baseball and basketball teams. She was described

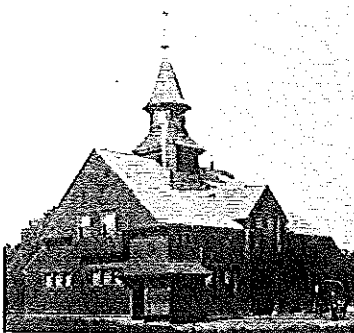


Statue inspired by Constance Witherby '30 on Blackstone Boulevard

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A portion of the Ballou Estate, called the Beane barn, is purchased for the Nursery School

1929



1930's



Uniquely Lincoln traditions Step Singing and Vespers begin

1938

Amy L. Philips becomes Lincoln's fourth Principal



as vivacious, thoughtful and outgoing.

Constance was a normal, regular girl as well as a child of privilege. She was the "big sister" to her brothers Thomas and Frederick and to the Hunts' baby daughter Deborah, born in 1925. She enjoyed reading "St. Nicholas," a popular children's magazine of the time. A student of serious literature, she also loved to read mysteries and detective stories. She dearly loved her pet dogs, Mac and Dio. She spent summers at family homes in Narragansett and Solvay. She spent the summers of 1927 and 1928 at the DC Bar Ranch in Kendall, Wyoming, riding horses, hiking in the mountains, and enjoying life outdoors. Letters to her parents demonstrate unusually strong writing talent, as well as her love for her family and especially for her mother.

In June 1929, following her junior year, Constance traveled to Europe with Hazard family cousins. The main purpose of the trip was to climb in the Alps—not an unusual activity for girls of her age and class. By August, Con and her family members were in Saas Fee, a small village reachable only on foot and horseback. Her letters from Switzerland are precocious in their descriptions of the landscape, reflecting her joy and exuberance in the stunning, majestic natural setting of the Alps. She was inspired to write poems from, and about, Saas Fee.

On August 27, after a hike no different than previous outings, Con felt tired in the evening. The next morning she awoke with a slight fever which was assessed as a cold; but over the next several days, her condition worsened. She was medically diagnosed with a failing heart, attributed to strain from hiking. Constance Witherby passed away on the afternoon of August 30, 1929. She was not yet sixteen. Following a service in a small "English church" in the village, Constance was buried in Saas Fee.

A page in the Christmas 1929 issue of the "Lincoln Green" commemorates her and says in part, "she leaves a place that no one else can fill. Though she is no longer with us, her memory is a daily inspiration to that more abundant life which she so richly lived." Constance's mother organized a collection of her poems, dating from her childhood through her last days in Saas Fee. This was privately published in 1930 as *Sunshine & Stardust*. A very sweet portrait of Constance graces the frontispiece.

To preserve and honor her memory, her parents acquired the plot of land between Waterman and Pitman Streets opposite their Medway Street home; it was landscaped and dedicated as Constance Witherby Park, and donated to the city of Providence. The park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Her parents also commissioned a bronze statue by Gail Sherman Corbett, a celebrated sculptor of the time. The statue, completed in 1933, was not intended to be a likeness of Constance, but rather to embody "The Spirit of Youth." Originally situated in Constance Witherby Park, the statue was moved in 1992 to its current location. It is listed in the Smithsonian's Inventory of American Sculpture.

Take a short walk from Lincoln School up Blackstone Boulevard. You will find the statue, sheltered in a little grove of evergreens, where Clarendon Street joins the Boulevard. Now that you know her story—remember Constance Witherby '30.

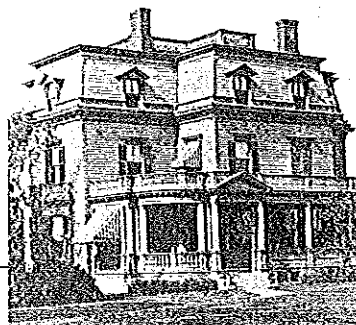
Stephen Coon is the father of Jessica Coon, Lincoln School '10 and Baker Coon, Wheeler School '06. As a resident of Providence's East Side, he has long been familiar with the statue on Blackstone Boulevard. In researching the history of his own home and its past residents, he became interested in other Providence families of the times as well as institutions like Lincoln School.

1940

Marion Shirley Cole
begins her two decade
position as Headmistress



1943



Remainder of the
Ballou Estate, the Dwight
House, is purchased

1961

The Glee Club, later called
the Lambrequins, has its
first performance

