

ROCHAMBEAU HOUSE

BROWN UNIVERSITY
Inaugurated May 28, 1988

*Celebrating 30 years of Rochambeau House,
home to the Departments of
French Studies and Hispanic Studies.*



The background of the right half of the page is a marbled pattern in shades of red and white, with swirling, organic shapes. The text is centered vertically and horizontally within this marbled area.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

250th Commencement

Welcome

Bienvenidos

Bienvenue

Rochambeau House Gardens

Sunday, May 27, 2018

Mary Elizabeth Sharpe, 1884-1985

In 1900, at the age of 15, Mary Elizabeth Evans began, with the help of her mother and sisters, what would soon become “probably the most famous retail candy business in the United States” (*Grocery World*, 1903). Pressed by necessity—her father had left the family to search for gold in the Klondike and never returned—she began selling homemade “Mary Elizabeth candy” for \$4 a month to subscribing customers in Syracuse, New York. This retail business grew rapidly, allowing her to open larger stores: first in Syracuse, then in Newport, where she included a tearoom. Soon, what had been an old candy kitchen in Syracuse grew into a high-production facility with stores and tearooms opening in other cities across the Northeast and her now famous “Mary Elizabeth” candies and chocolates were sold in all the fashionable summer resorts. In 1913, the all-women Mary Elizabeth company, which included her mother and sisters, Martha and Fanny, was prosperous enough to sign a 21-year lease totaling nearly \$1 million at 392 Fifth Avenue.

At the onset of World War I, Mary Elizabeth Evans joined up with the U.S. Food Administration and later traveled to Paris with the Red Cross to oversee the U.S. Central Diet kitchen. During the war she published two books: *War Time Recipes* (1918) and *My Candy Secrets* (1919) both under the name Mary Elizabeth. *War Times Recipes* offered “simple but excellent recipes” and “delectable ‘economy’ dishes”. The book enjoyed great success and was reprinted during World War II.

Upon her return to the US, she married Henry Dexter Sharpe and moved to Providence in 1920. She planned and designed the gardens for their new home at 84 Prospect Street. At the request of President Henry Wriston, she served in a volunteer capacity as the university landscaper during the 1940s, beautifying the campus with elms, evergreens, and flowering trees.

Mary Elizabeth Sharpe worked with the city of Providence on a street tree planting program, beginning in the 1950s when almost half of the city's elms were devastated by disease. Highly active in the Garden Club of America, Mary Elizabeth Sharpe was influential in many park projects around the city of Providence. She was instrumental in the India Point Park renovation project which turned the dilapidated waterfront in the Fox Point neighborhood into a public park and recreation area.



Photo courtesy of Peggy Sharpe

In 1950, in recognition of her significant contribution in enhancing the campus, Mary Elizabeth Sharpe received an honorary degree from Brown. The Sharpe Refectory in Wriston Quad was also named in her honor and that of Chancellor Henry D. Sharpe.

Mary Elizabeth Sharpe died April 4, 1985 at the age of 100.

Rochambeau House

Built in 1929, Rochambeau House was the home of Henry Dexter Sharpe (1872-1954), class of 1894, President of Brown and Sharpe Manufacturing Company and twelfth Chancellor of Brown University (1932-1952), and his wife Mary Elizabeth (Evans) Sharpe (1884-1985), a business woman and entrepreneur. Completed in 1929, the house was designed and built by the Boston firm Parker, Thomas and Rice, who also designed the Tudor style home across the street at 87 Prospect, for Ellen Dexter Sharpe, a sister to Chancellor Sharpe, now Antonio Machado House.

The house was named after Jean-Baptiste-Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau (1725-1807) the General who commanded the French Forces during the American Revolution and fought alongside George Washington at the decisive battle of Yorktown in 1781. Prior to the historic march from Rhode Island to Virginia, Rochambeau's troops had been encamped at Brown University—then Rhode Island College, founded in 1764—with University Hall serving as a military hospital.

French in style, the house reflects the architecture of an 18th Century chateau and Mary Elizabeth Sharpe's interest in French art, design and furniture. The entry hall includes Languedoc marble detailing and a sweeping curved stairway to the second floor. The 'antique room', currently the office of the Chairperson of French Studies, features antique 18th Century *boiserie* acquired from a French house.

It was Mary Elizabeth Sharpe's longtime dream that the house would one day be a center for students of foreign cultures. In keeping with her wishes, her son Henry Dexter Sharpe Jr. donated the house to Brown University in 1988. Since then it has been home to the Department of French Studies and Department of Hispanic Studies.

Designed by Julia Bennani-Smires, Ourida Mostefai, and Mary Oliver