

**The Rustification of
Henry Thomas
Brown
(Book 1 of 3)**

Andrew Thomas Hunter

his death in 1896 at the age of 43 years and 2 months. It is not known (at this time) what the cause of his death was but he was buried in the Bishop's section of the local Malvern Cemetery. His grave (which has been precisely located) is unmarked and there is no published obituary. It appears that Brown was of little means and not from the immediate area as only a fellow Bishop, employee and the undertaker attended his funeral. There are no known images of Brown, however, there are a number of photographs of the campus during Brown's tenure. Included in this publication is an image taken after the fire of 1891 and it is quite possible that Brown inhabits this scene.

Rustification:

(n.) The act of rusticating, or the state of being rusticated; specifically, the punishment of a student for some offense, by compelling him to leave the institution for a time.
(n.) To go or live in the country.

For the past two years I have been visiting Lennoxville and the surrounding area in an effort to both document recent fires and to try and locate traces of Brown. As mentioned, Brown lies buried in the Malvern Cemetery, in a rear middle section far removed from the area of the cemetery where many more prominent Bishop's employees (faculty, administrators, board members, clergy) are interred. His grave is unmaintained and I am convinced that this missing object of remembrance and respect is a signal that his passing was never properly settled, that the fumaceman was never truly put to rest, and so his spirit continues to wander the area, with unfortunate consequences. It is as if Brown's soul had been punished for some offense and was compelled to leave the university. He had like a misbehaving student, been suspended, a victim of rustification.

On each visit to the area, I have taken it upon myself to try different techniques in an attempt to soothe the soul of Brown and to curtail his destructive wanderings. This has included the leaving of flowers and ritual items on his grave and at sites of fires, the placing of discrete memorial markers around the university, the



Described in various documents (the student paper, church records and city directories) as "furnaceman," "engineer" and "labourer," Brown appears to have arrived in the Lenoxville area around 1890, just prior to the great fire of 1891 that nearly destroyed all of Bishop's buildings. Like other working staff at the university, he most likely lived on site and (as furnaceman) probably in the basement of the main building near the furnace room. Through research in the Eastern Townships Archive, it has been established that Brown's full name was Henry Thomas Brown (born 1853, location unknown). He worked at Bishop's University until

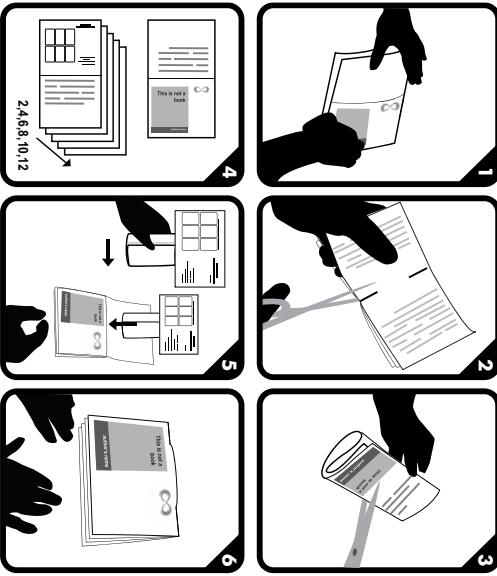
"Many of us were surprised and grieved to hear of the death of Brown, the furnaceman, who has held the position for several years and was generally liked and respected"

- The Miner, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec, Volume IV, No. 1, page 8, October 1896

This town smells of burnt wood, of melted vinyl siding and scorched metal. There is a consistent pattern— with each visit in search of the traces of Mr. Brown, I find the remains of another building that has been engulfed in flames and stands waiting to be demolished. I am convinced that there is a link between these many fires, fires that date back to the great Bishop's fire of 1891 that occurred just after the "furnaceman" settled in the city. Searching through old documents and school records in the university archives, I came upon this slim trace of Brown's presence in *The Miner*, a brief statement of a workingman's passing. Initially I was drawn to this because I have always been interested in the fate of marginalized and working people who aren't part of the greater "purpose" of organizations, institutions or communities. People like Brown are not normally remembered by places universities. They will not have buildings named after them, have their portrait hung in prominent places, or be memorialized with the ceremonial planting of trees and gardens. My initial intention was to give prominence to this obscure individual and to highlight a life lived briefly within a context that normally only values the accomplishments and contributions of administrators, faculty, donors and academics, but then I kept noticing burnt buildings and so I went back to that parent image from 1891. I started to wonder if Brown had, on his own, continued to be very present in the area.

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Published on the occasion of the exhibition, "The Rustification of Henry Thomas Brown" at the Foreman Art Gallery, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec, Canada, September 30 - December 12, 2009. Curated by Andrew T. Hunter with contributions by Crystal Mowry and Colette Laliberté.
Book 1 of 3.



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Reproduced on the following pages are images of various burnt buildings and sites of fires in the Lennoxville area that I attribute to the spirit of Henry Thomas Brown. I do not claim that he has intentionally caused these conflagrations, but that his mere unsettled presence has caused these fires. This publication is the first of three. The second publication will feature a letter I recently wrote to my late dog Roger and explains in a different fashion my feelings about this project. The third publication will include documentation of the exhibition installed at the Foreman Art Gallery, September 30-December 12, 2009. *A.Hunter*



Offering of a model for a headstone and, most recently, the playing of music at his gravesite I was quite convinced that this last approach would be effective and provide some solace for me in several difficult circumstances. I chose the old Scottish ballad *Burnt Myself* and played it on my mandolin at the gravesite earlier this summer. Sadly, as is evidenced by a number of tales to take comfort in this strategy, Roger did not find a knack for finding lost things. Sadly, soon after deciding on this new strategy, poor Roger suffered another setback. He was out in the field, split his pants, and got stuck in the mud. I turned him around when I turned him around, but when I turned him around again, he was out in the mud. I then began to wonder if Brown's spirit had remained after he had passed from this world. He was only here a few days country, and that I was merely playing into a pattern I had created so I decided to go back to the Lennoxville community for another visit to assist in calming the spirit of Brown, that perhaps the furtaceous spirit of Brown had found a new home.

Roger traveled with me on my final visit to install my exhibition *The Renification of Henry Thomas Brown* at the Foreman Art Gallery of Bishop's University; he accompanied me in calming the spirit of Brown, it is ultimately the responsibility of Bishop's University to undertake the dechristianization of Henry Thomas Brown.

-Aldrew Hunter
October 2009

