

The Famous Bailey Twins

By Ray Geselbracht

On December 18, 1905, twin girls—Caroline and Margaret—were born to Leon O. Bailey, a prominent New York lawyer, and Gertrude Stein Bailey, a well-known classical singer. The twins were probably born at the family home, “Crossways,” on Elm Rock Road, which the Baileys had purchased the year before.



The twins from a very early age passed their lives in public view. When they turned two years old, the local paper, *The Bronxville Review*, covered their birthday party, at which “they were the proud possessors of a birthday cake apiece, with two candles each.” Another story from about this same time tells how the twins pony threw their nurse out of the cart one day and took the twins on a wild ride, all the way back home. When Mr. Bailey ran out he found his two little girls staring up at him from their cart, without their nurse. “Fell,” one of the twins said to explain the nurse’s disappearance.



When they began school—Brantwood Hall for ten years, then finishing up at Bronxville High School—the newspaper covered, it seems in retrospect, almost everything they did. They acted in plays and holiday pageants; they played on the basketball and volleyball teams; they were founding members of a Girl Scout club, and Margaret won a scout knot-tying contest; Margaret also received honors awards at school and passed achievement tests; and both twins helped with Belgian relief work and subscribed to a Liberty Loan drive during World War I. All these things, and quite a few more, were recorded in the newspaper.

Two autobiographical papers the twins wrote during their first year at Bronxville High School preserve some childhood memories. Margaret's paper tells how the twins would wear different colored dresses when they were attending Brantwood Hall—Caroline always in pink, Margaret in blue—so the teachers and students could tell them apart. But some days they would switch colors and spend the day in disguise as the wrong twin. Caroline's autobiography tells a story revealing of the anti-German hysteria that affected many Americans during World War I. The twins had a German governess who had taught them to speak German. Sometime after the United States entered the war in 1917, Caroline decided she wouldn't speak German any longer. "I shan't speak German," she told her parents, "because everybody hates the Germans since the war started and so do I." The German lessons stopped and the governess was dismissed.



After high school, Margaret went to college, Caroline got married, and, after finishing college, Margaret did too, and then both twins had children (Caroline three, Margaret one). All of this was reported in the newspaper. There were about 200 articles and notices about the Bailey twins in the newspaper between 1907 and 1975, telling of their many appearances in local plays, often at the Bronxville Women's Club; the many tennis tournaments they played in at the Field Club; the parties they hosted and attended; and their travels, illnesses, and charitable activities. There was a second marriage to report for each twin, their movements away from and back to Bronxville were reported from time to time, and in 1972, an article noted that the twins were both living in the Brooklands apartments in Yonkers. On March 6, 1975, an article reported that Margaret had died, and Caroline is lost to public view after this. Maybe she moved away to live with one of her children.

One of the *Bronxville Review's* stories about Caroline and Margaret Bailey—published in 1934 when they were 28 years old—called them “the Village’s most famous twins.” This was right—they were famous. They weren’t extraordinarily gifted, or brilliant, or beautiful, but they were famous.

This was so because the Bailey Twins had a stage—Bronxville itself—and a public interested in the details of their lives—the people of Bronxville, the members of the Women's Club and the Field Club, the people who went to school and to parties with them, the people who acted with them or saw them in plays and community pageants, the people who read about them in the newspaper. It was the particular character of Bronxville, its people and its institutions that made the Bailey twins famous.

Bronxville's historic newspapers are now online and accessible to everyone, and the hundreds of articles written about the Bailey twins over the years are easily discovered through a search. The twins' high school autobiographies, as well as several photographs of the twins, are preserved in the Bronxville History Center and are easily accessed.

If the Bailey twins had lived somewhere else, not in Bronxville, maybe they would never have become famous, and wouldn't still have some measure of fame, however slight and puzzling, even today. But they did grow up and flourish in Bronxville, their parents were prominent in the village, and they were launched into their famous lives; and since the people of Bronxville have been and still are active in recalling their past, when one looks into the history of Bronxville, one still discovers these forever famous Bailey twins.



Forever Famous