

Miss. Bridget M. Grimes  
Employee – Dept. #6 – C. S. Laboratory, Brown’s Island  
Richmond, Virginia

Bridget M. Grimes was born in 1849 in Roundstone, County Galway, on the west coast of Ireland. She was the youngest daughter of Mortimer Grimes and Barbara Grimes (King). In 1860 her mother, Barbara Grimes and sister Elizabeth were servants living with the Royster family of the Royster & Brothers Tobacco Company. Barbara and three daughter immigrated sometime during the 1850s. The family lived in a residence on 7<sup>th</sup> and Cary Street in downtown Richmond.

At age 14 Bridget, along with many other young girls and young boys, was employed in Department # 6 of the Confederate States Laboratory on Brown’s Island. The laboratory was responsible for the manufacture of both breech-loading and pistol ammunition. The facility was located on the island, in the James River, for safety reasons.

On March 13, 1863 a huge explosion tore half of the 100’ long building down. *“Operatives were killed, wounded, thrown into the air or upon the floor.”* A huge fire engulfed the scene. The initial death toll was 31 women and 2 men with an additional 25 women and 5 men wounded. Many of the wounded were badly burned. The *Richmond Enquirer* noted that *“some of the unfortunate girls were burnt from head to foot, others were burned in the face and eyes; some had an arm or leg divested of flesh and skin, others were bleeding with wounds received from the falling timbers and violent concussions . . .”* The dreadfully burned, including Bridget, were taken to General Hospital #2 on the corner of Cary and 7<sup>th</sup> streets.

Bridget died on March 23<sup>rd</sup> after eleven days of suffering. Her obituary in the *Richmond Dispatch* recorded that, *“Bridget M. Grimes died on Monday the 23<sup>rd</sup>, at Hospital #2 of burns received at the explosion of the Laboratory, Bridget M. daughter of Mrs. Barbara Grimes in her 14<sup>th</sup> year.*

*In the death of this young girl, her circles of friends have lost a bright ornament. She was gifted with beauty of body and mind and possessed of a loving disposition, which won her the devotion of an immense number of friends. During the eleven long days of her excruciating suffering her priest and doctor were untiring in attention. She died in implicit faith in the Holy Catholic Church. Her friends and the family are invited to attend her funeral this (Tuesday) afternoon, at 3 o’clock from her mother’s residence on Cary near 7<sup>th</sup> street.”*

Bridget is buried in the same unmarked grave with her mother, Barbara, who passed in 1877, at Mount Calvary cemetery in Richmond. Bridget’s tragic death has yet to be recognized by those that have memorialized the other young victims of this tragic event. After 150 years, Bridget and her sacrifice to the cause will no longer be forgotten.

**(Family history provided by Richard Gordon Schwartz regarding his great-great aunt. *Richmond Enquirer* of March 14, 1863, *Richmond Daily Dispatch* of March 16, 1863, *Richmond Sentinel* of March 16, 1863 and *Richmond Dispatch* of March 24, 1863.)**