

Buhler Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery  
Project 3: Field Documentation & Formal Analysis  
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The Buhler Mausoleum was constructed to be the final resting place for Conrad C. Buhler, his wife, Martha C. Buhler, and family. In total, four family members were buried here: Mr. and Mrs. Buhler, as well as Leo and Edith Fennelly. Five relatives were placed here after cremation, including Frances L. Buhler, Curt Ferdinand Buhler, Lucy Jane Buhler, C. Walter Buhler, and most recently, Carol F. Hutchins. The mausoleum is a modest structure situated on a rather private lot, designed with reference to Egyptian tomb structures and ornamentation.

Conrad Buhler passed away suddenly in 1922, after a short bout with "sleeping sickness."<sup>1</sup> He had immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1887, and had formed an import business for dry goods and other merchandise. Mr. Buhler had struck a partnership in his business endeavors with Siegfried Peierls, located here in the States, and Ferdinand S. Warburg, who was located in Germany and contributed capital to the enterprise.<sup>2</sup> Being a merchant and importer, travel was naturally part of Mr. Buhler's life. In October of 1921, Mr. and Mrs. Buhler had sailed for Europe aboard a passenger ship.<sup>3</sup> Not four months later, Conrad Buhler had lost his struggle with the aforementioned sleeping sickness. Transmitted through insect bites, this infection causes a rare form of encephalitis. It stands to reason that he may have become infected during his travels abroad. Upon his death, he left an estate of almost \$1,500,000 to his wife, Martha Buhler.<sup>4</sup> Given the family's financial or perhaps social status, Woodlawn Cemetery made an appropriate selection for their final resting place.

The architects Necarsulmer and Lehlbach, who had designed a handful of other buildings at Woodlawn Cemetery, designed the Buhler Mausoleum. The actual construction was handled by Adler's Monument and Granite Works Company, which was selected numerous times in Woodlawn's history to oversee and execute the growing number of structures. The Buhler Mausoleum is rather humble in size with

four above ground crypts and, presumably from the original architectural drawings, four crypts below ground.<sup>5</sup> The exterior is comprised of a black-speckled granite, while the interior is clad in a fine polished marble. There are numerous adornments of bronze, and a picturesque stained-glass window, whose peaceful landscape appears more secular than religious in tone.

Upon approaching to the mausoleum, a visitor must veer off from the main thoroughfares of Chestnut, Spruce, or Pine Avenues, and venture into a secluded area shrouded by trees. This area is nestled and quiet, although it might not always have appeared this way. The aerial views taken of Woodlawn in 1921 (figure 1) show that the plantings of cedar trees now on the plot were not yet present, and were most likely chosen by the family and placed at the four corners of the mausoleum. In this same photograph, it can be seen that the massive weeping beech trees present on the adjacent Armour lot were diminutive in comparison to the gargantuan specimens they are today (figure 2). Currently, the massive overhanging curtains of tree limbs and leaves from this neighboring plot create an impasse to using the designated footpaths (figure 3). The cedar trees, which were planted at the corners of the Buhler mausoleum, have grown into towering obelisks and form a canopy directly overhead (figure 4).

Having arrived at the façade of the Buhler mausoleum, one is greeted with a small but solid structure (figure 5). It is rectilinear and stout, with lightly battered walls and perfect symmetry. It is centrally focused with one grand entrance accessed by a few shallow stairs. There is a clear influence of Egyptian architecture in much of the ornamentation. In the 1800's, there were a couple significant waves of interest in Egyptian architecture, as first influenced by Napoleon's military campaign of the area. The style found favor for many prisons, as well as the obvious mortuary associations.<sup>6</sup> This pattern continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A few characteristic details displayed on the Buhler mausoleum help to characterize it as a modest version of Egyptian revival as well as capture an appropriated symbolism. On the cornice, there is a prominent emblem of a winged disk flanked by two asps. This is quite reminiscent of a similar emblem found at the gate of Ptolemy X from the period between 323 – 31 B.C. (figure 6)<sup>7</sup>. The winged

disk has associations to the element of air, the god Osiris, and protection. Similarly, the asps maintain their own degree of protection while guarding over the tomb or mausoleum. The fluted cavetto cornice, and the stylized banding both have their precedents in the gate of Ptolemy X. The lotiform design on the bronze entrance doors is also an Egyptian archetype. As the lotus bloomed throughout the year, it was a natural solar symbol, expressing the cyclic passing of time and rebirth.

Altogether, the Buhler mausoleum makes for a peaceful resting place and a secluded place to be visited. With some attention to landscaping, it could be made more easily accessible, while maintaining its sense of privacy. The structure itself is a lovely and unassuming example of a style that was popularized in the mid 1800's to the early 1900's. Further, one can easily distinguish a strong craftsmanship in every small detail.

## Endnotes

1. "Importer Dies from Sleeping Sickness," San Francisco Chronicle, February 15, 1922, 17, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/576877291?accountid=10226>.
2. "Copartnership Notices," New York Times, January 10, 1906, 10, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/96598883?accountid=10226>.
3. "Three Passenger Ships Sail for Europe To-day," New York Times, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1921, 9, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/576480971?accountid=10226>.
4. "Estates Appraised," New York Times, January 20, 1923, 22, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/103225467?accountid=10226>.
5. Buhler Mausoleum Documents, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Drawings & Archives.
6. Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 169-185.
7. Dieter Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 211.



Figure 1  
Aerial Photograph, Woodlawn Cemetery, 1921  
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library  
Drawings and Archives

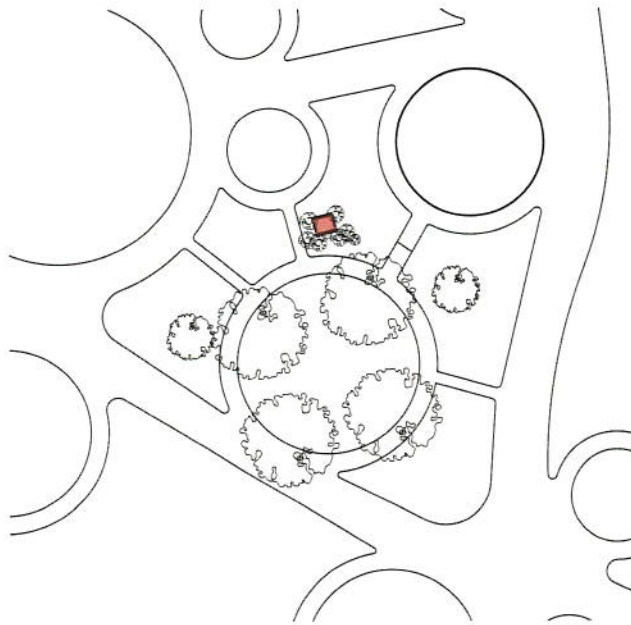


Figure 2  
Site Plan, Woodlawn Cemetery, Buhler Mausoleum



Figure 3  
Footpath Toward Buhler Mausoleum



Figure 4  
Blocked Footpath Toward Buhler Mausoleum



Figure 5  
Buhler Mausoleum with Cedar Trees

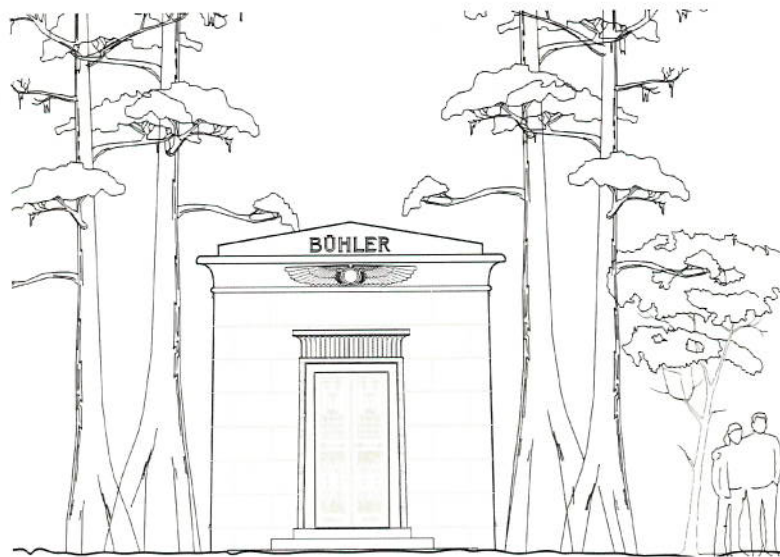


Figure 6  
Buhler Mausoleum, Front Elevation

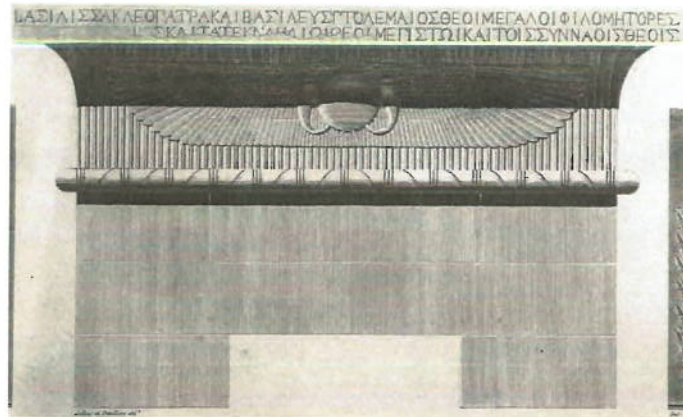


Figure 7  
The Gate of Ptolemy X Alexander I of the Temple of Haroeris and Heqat at  
Apollinopolis

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Arnold, Dieter. *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture*. I.B. Touris & Co. Ltd, 2003.

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"Copartnership Notices," *New York Times*, January 10, 1906, 10, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/96598883?accountid=10226>.

"Estates Appraised," *New York Times*, January 20, 1923, 22, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/103225467?accountid=10226>.

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"Three Passenger Ships Sail for Europe To-day," *New York Times*, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1921, 9, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/576480971?accountid=10226>.