

# Siegman Mausoleum

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The Siegman Mausoleum is located in the Chestnut Hill section of Woodlawn Cemetery. It was commissioned by Mathilde Siegman after her husband Edward Siegman passed away on April 27, 1919; the contract stipulated that construction was to be completed before the winter of 1919. The architect was little-known Alfred Freeman and the contractor was Presbrey-Coykendall Company. Freeman was inspired by a Classical Revival style, thus he incorporated forms from various ancient civilizations, namely Greece and Rome, but with a modern twist, to create something that is everlasting.

Mr. and Mrs. Siegman, along with their daughter Virginia, lived in New York City at 524 Fifth Avenue<sup>1</sup> and then at 18 East 27<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>2</sup> Based on the 1880 census, Edward Siegman had previously immigrated to the United States from Germany with his uncle, Henry Siegman, and several cousins.<sup>3</sup> Edward Siegman was a merchant and made his fortune selling garment trimmings, including buttons, and possibly made costumes for theater. He was also a large importer of tinsel products and even manufactured them.<sup>4</sup> At one point, New-York-born Mathilde Siegman was both an author and a manager for an entertainment program for the Stony Wold Sanatorium.<sup>5</sup>

The Siegman mausoleum is in the center of a teardrop-shaped plot. In relationship to other buildings, this mausoleum is small to intermediate size, and the distance between this and another plot is about average. A graveled road passes close to the plot, and it is not too far-removed from its neighbors. There may be some difficulty in locating it correctly because there is a Pacific yew shrub that is wide enough to cover the front of the structure and is approximately half of the height. As

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<sup>1</sup> "Society Here and There." *New York Times*, Oct 16, 1910, (accessed October 12, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Consular Registration Certificates, 1907 - 1918*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., (accessed October 12, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Year: 1880; Census Place: *New York City, New York, New York*; Roll: 883; Family History Film: 1254883; Page: 1D; Enumeration District: 341; Image:013, (accessed October 12, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> United States Office of the Special, *United States Congressional Serial Set Volume 2774* (Washington, 1891), Google Books (accessed October 13, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> "Benefit for Stony Wold." *New York Times*, Jan 09, 1910, (accessed October 12, 2013).

one approaches the main facade, which faces west, one must walk to either side of the shrub in order to see the mausoleum clearly. The building is raised slightly, resting atop the third step; the single-door entrance permits one person at a time. The exterior is well-preserved, however, the inside, as in all mausoleums, is filled with spiders, cobwebs, and other insects.

Alfred Freeman's Classical Revival design is symmetrical and gives balance to the whole composition. Mr. and Mrs. Siegman traveled to Europe,<sup>6</sup> usually to Paris, and must have seen the work of architects at the École des Beaux-Arts or at least were influenced by the urban architecture around them. The Doric capitals, corner pilasters, cornice, entablatures, and urns are Greek and Roman-inspired, whereas the stepped roof and the rosettes on the frieze of the pilaster have origins in ancient Egypt. Symmetry and order evoke a sense of calm and peace, which are appropriate for funerary architecture. Furthermore, this symmetry allows the focus to be on the bronze door, sculpted by James Novelli.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, the Pacific yew in front that was supposed to be cleared away was not and still stands today. Correspondence in the Avery Drawings and Archives shows that Virginia Esmerian (née Siegman) asked to remove the shrub and to replace it with a new plant, but Woodlawn advised that it would still obstruct the view of the mausoleum. Rather than pay for something that would result in the same issue, Mrs. Esmerian decided to leave it as is.

Although one must walk around a bush in order to see the ornate portal, the building does not lose its unique quality; the maple tree in the rear, or southeast, corner frames the mausoleum nicely and provides shade for the plot. There is a box-like nature to the mausoleum that conveys strength and solidity. The exterior appears to be monolithic, therefore it does not detract from the entrance; there are joints upon closer inspection. Polished and unpolished parts of the granite help to

<sup>6</sup> "Society Here and There." *New York Times* (1857-1922), Oct 16, 1910, (accessed October 12, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> "Memorial Door, Edward Siegman, (sculpture)," Smithsonian Institution, [http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record\\_ID:siris\\_ari\\_359838](http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID:siris_ari_359838) (accessed October 12, 2013).

distinguish the main entrance; the layering effect of the way the granite surrounding the door was carved, gives attention to it. The darker, polished granite recedes, further emphasizing the bronze door. The urns on plinths on either side of the entrance similarly draw one's eye in toward the center. Novelli's door consists of a female figure in classical attire; she holds a wreath in her hand to signify the circle of life and bows her head in sorrow and out of respect for the dead.

The Siegman design is different from others in that the exterior is made of Stony Creek granite and the interior is made of Tennessee pink marble, which are not materials often used for funerary monuments. Granite is a type of stone that is more durable, relative to other stones, because it does not deteriorate or soil as easily. Tennessee pink marble lines the interior and four mini pilasters are attached to the back wall. Five catacombs are stacked horizontally one on top of the other in the back, or east, wall. Two additional catacombs are underground. Mr. Siegman was a wealthy businessman, and could certainly afford an expensive, quality stone. Edward and Mathilde Siegman were greatly involved in society, thus they must have been influenced by those of higher social standing. The materials of the mausoleum are ambitious, but not in a pretentious way.

Alfred Freeman's classical touches of timelessness permeate the design; the purpose of a mausoleum is to be an eternal resting place. He was influenced by Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome: he combines Greek order and pilasters with Roman funerary urns, but uses them in a new and modern way. Additionally, even though it does not become narrow enough at the top to constitute a true pyramid, the stepped roof alludes to ancient Egyptian pyramid-style sloped roofs. The materials used on the exterior and interior are uncommon of Woodlawn, but follow the theme of perpetuity. Other mausoleums are not typically made with Stony Creek granite or Tennessee pink marble; both are resilient stones, which are essential because future generations of this family may be buried here and one would want a material that lasts long and does not require too much maintenance.





