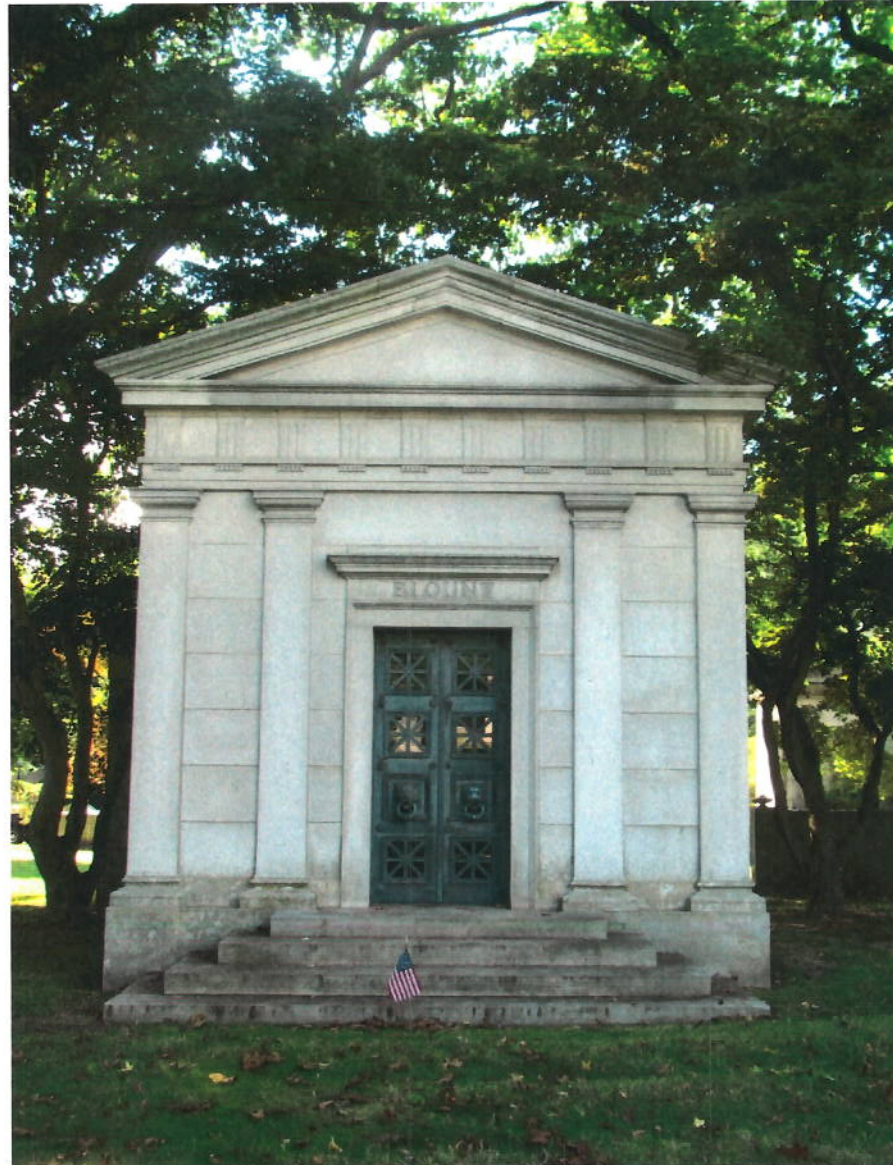


# Blount Family Mausoleum

Woodlawn Cemetery, Heather Plot, Lot #14526



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### Woodlawn Cemetery: Blount Mausoleum

The Blount family mausoleum which rests at lot number 14526 in the Heather plot of Bronx's Woodlawn Cemetery was commissioned by Manhattan resident Charles Blount in 1919. Sitting midway down Lawn Avenue, the Blount lot is a midsized, square piece of land measuring about 1,763 square feet.<sup>1</sup> The ground is fairly even with just a slight dip in elevation towards the rear of the structure. The lot has sparse landscaping in the form of three trees on the property. Previously, the Blount plot contained more significant landscaping. At some point between March 1950 and the current date, an ivy ground cover was removed from the property as well as a Japanese barberry, an eastern white pine, a Japanese Holly, a Japanese Azalea, and a Japanese Maple.<sup>2</sup> Still remaining are two larger Japanese Maples which sit at each rear side of the mausoleum, as well as a small dogwood tree placed between the front left of the Mausoleum and the road. Also overhanging the mausoleum from a nearby lot is a sweet gum tree.

Designed by Adler's Monument and Granite Works, a company based in Manhattan's Midtown neighborhood, the Blount mausoleum's exterior is composed primarily of granite resting on a concrete foundation. The interior is finished in marble on all visible surfaces. Although the archival information on the Blount mausoleum does not specify a marble or granite type, other mausoleums built by Adler's Monument and Granite works used Greenslanding Granite.<sup>3</sup> As the company was quarrying out of Deer Island, Maine at this time, it is likely that the Blount mausoleum is made from the same granite type. Beginning in the late 1860's the granite

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<sup>1</sup> "Map of Lot No. 14526," Box 2 BEL-BRO, Folder 38, 2006.009; Woodlawn Cemetery Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Drawings & Archives, New York, NY, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> "Blount Lot Conditions Report," Box 2 Baylis, William-Brown, Augustus, Folder 59, Woodlawn Cemetery Mausoleum Owners Correspondence, Columbia University Avery Drawings & Archives, New York, NY, 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Samler mausoleum, Box 15, Folder 85; Woodlawn Cemetery Mausoleum Owners Correspondence, Columbia University Avery Drawings & Archives, New York, NY, 1925.

from Deer Isle was exported all over the East Coast and especially used in many buildings in New York City.<sup>4</sup>

Pulling from classical references, the Blount mausoleum contains a strong air of grandeur and strength in its design. Many of the surrounding mausoleums in the plot are of much smaller size, both in square footage and in height, leaving the Blount mausoleum with a sense of authority within its general area. The facade is a simple rectangle with a strongly neoclassical form, paying reverence to typical classical temple designs. A wide staircase which spans the full length of the mausoleum's front facade draws the eye to its large, highly ornamented double bronze doors (Figure 1). The stairs lead to a raised base, where four Doric pilasters span the width of the facade, supporting a heavy entablature and a stately roof pediment. The Doric pilasters continue to wrap around the remaining exterior walls, creating the sense of a colonnade which was a staple of the ancient Greek and Roman temple forms. Across the entablature on each side of the facade are triglyphs and metopes, traditional elements of a Doric temple entablature. The further ornament on the exterior reinforces the sense of the neoclassical temple as a final resting place for the Blount family. The door frame has its own simple but elegant entablature which displays the Blount family name. Each of the bronze doors is studded with rosettes and contains four vertical panels, three of which contain a sunburst style ornament which is backed by operable glass panels used for ventilation (Figure 1). The door handle, which is built into the remaining panel of each door, is ornamented with a grand lion's head (Figure 2).

On the interior, the mausoleum uses a T-shaped floor plan. On the east and west walls are the family crypts, of which there are six in use and ten total. In the space beyond the crypts

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<sup>4</sup> Boston Granite Exchange, "The Story behind the Stone: Deer Isle Granite," Boston Granite Exchange (Boston Granite Exchange, September 22, 2020), <https://www.bostongraniteexchange.com/the-story-behind-the-stone-deer-isle-granite/>, <https://www.bostongraniteexchange.com/the-story-behind-the-stone-deer-isle-granite/>.

where the wings of the T branch off are two columbarium areas which contain both cremation urns and personal effects. The design of the back wall strongly emphasizes the neoclassical theme seen on the exterior. Three Doric pilasters span from ground to ceiling with the remainder of the wall containing thin-cut slabs of marble. Between the pilasters are two stained-glass windows which contain religious imagery. With its heavy panes, deep, rich colors and the use of gaunt and wispy angelic figures, the stained-glass contains a strongly medieval character (Figure 3,4). Given the window design and the various pieces of religious paraphernalia and memorabilia spread throughout the interior, the family clearly had very strong ties to the Christian faith (Figures 5, 6). As well as giving clear hints to the Blounts' religious affiliations, the mausoleum makes the family's French heritage evident through the use of eulogic quotations carved in French on multiple crypts (Figure 7).

As stated above, the Blount mausoleum was commissioned by Charles Blount in 1919, about a year prior to his own passing on July 22, 1920.<sup>5</sup> Born August 25, 1862 in San Antonio, Texas, to two French immigrants, Charles grew up in New York City.<sup>6</sup> At the time of his death, however, he was not the first member of the family to pass. Isabel Claire Blount, the daughter of Charles and his wife Mildred (born Mildred Bernheimer, also buried in the mausoleum in 1950), passed away in January 1914 at only fourteen years old. Isabel's original place of rest was Salem Fields Cemetery in Brooklyn which is, interestingly, a Jewish cemetery.<sup>7</sup> This is not the only detail of the family which is in conflict with the overtly Christian iconography as referenced above. In fact, Charles Blount and his parents originally had the surname "Blum." It is unclear exactly why or in what year the change took place but at some point between the 1910 and 1920

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<sup>5</sup> "Correspondence between Adler's Monument and Granite Works and Woodlawn Cemetery," Ibid 1

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Passport Application for Charles Blount, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; Roll #: 2202; Volume #: Roll 2202, 1923

<sup>7</sup> "Correspondence between Blount family and Woodlawn Cemetery," Ibid 2, 1920

census, the Blum family became the Blounts.<sup>8</sup> Given that “Blum” as a surname has strongly Judaic roots, it is possible that the Blount family removed any Jewish associations in order for a better chance at financial success in America between the time that Isabel was buried at Salem Fields and Charles had the family mausoleum commissioned at Woodlawn.

If the intention behind the name change was as theorized, the effect certainly proved to be successful by the time the next generation of Blounts reached adulthood. Charles Blount Jr., son of Charles and Mildred, was born in New York City on January 25, 1897.<sup>9</sup> Although it is unclear at exactly what point his father, Charles Sr., began working for United Piece Dye Works, it is clear that the family was seeing some financial benefits by the time of the 1910 census. In 1910, the Blounts resided at 11 ½ East 76th Street in Manhattan, a lavish residence which hosted a full staff of employees aiding the family (Figure 8).<sup>10</sup> Charles Jr., however, was directly responsible for the success of United Piece Dye Works after his father’s passing in 1919. At this point, Charles Jr. joined the company following his graduation from Harvard University.<sup>11</sup> His education was extensive and his success well earned.

Before rising in the company’s ranks, Charles took a trip abroad to France and Italy to study textiles, returning to New York in early November, 1925.<sup>12</sup> The company endured financial hardship over the following decades and its ultimate comeback to success was ultimately attributed to Charles Jr. As he rose from general manager to president between 1936 and 1944, he completely overhauled United Piece.<sup>13</sup> Not only did he expand the company’s plants from Lodi, New Jersey to new locations in California, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina, he replaced

<sup>8</sup> United States Census, 1910 ED 3, P 14A

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 6

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 8

<sup>11</sup> “Charles Blount; Built Failing Dye Works into National Firm,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1989, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>12</sup> List of United States Citizens (for the Immigration Authorities) Sailing from Le Havre, France, US Department of Labor, New York, New York, Page 59, 1925, Ancestry.com

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 11

the established method of silk dyeing with the introduction of synthetic and double-knit fabrics.<sup>14</sup> Most notably, he invented his own process for the dyeing of double-knit fabrics which he had patented in 1968 (Figures 9, 10).<sup>15</sup> By the time of his death on September 22, 1989, Charles Blount Jr. had moved to Evanston, Illinois and had become a prominently successful business figure in both the New York and Chicago areas.<sup>16</sup>

Other Blount family members of note were Charles Jr.'s wife, Mercedes and daughter, Lorna. Mercedes Blount, born Mercedes Marshall, was born in Vedado, Cuba in 1907.<sup>17</sup> Her cremated remains are located in the columbarium section of the mausoleum. Although it is unknown where Charles Jr. and Mercedes met, their union led to a wonderful blend of Hispanic and French culture inside of the mausoleum. Despite Mercedes being cremated, her mother Dolores Gonzales De Pares (3/3/1862-9/14/1936) has a crypt on the opposite wall of the Mausoleum to the Blount's. Lovingly adorned "Abuela" (Figure 11), it provides an interesting balance to the French inscriptions on the Blount crypts across the wall.

Finally, Lorna Blount, daughter of Charles Jr. and Mercedes, was born in New York City on January 29, 1921.<sup>18</sup> Lorna grew up in the same place of residence on East 76th street as her father had. She attended the Brearley School, a single-sex private school in Manhattan's Upper East Side, not far from her own home. On September 26, 1949, the *New York Times* published an announcement for her upcoming wedding to Erling Christian Christophersen.<sup>19</sup> Erling was a diplomat from Oslo, Norway, at the Norwegian Embassy in Washington. In addition to his prestigious status, he attended both Yale and Stanford before planning to go to medical school in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid 11

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 11

<sup>16</sup> "Charles Blount Jr., 92, Dye Works Ex-Chief" *The New York Times*, September 22, 1989, ProQuest Historical Newspapers

<sup>17</sup> 1950 Census, New York, New York, Page 42

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 17

<sup>19</sup> "Lorna Blount is Married to Son of Norse Diplomat" *The New York Herald Tribune*, September 26, 1949, ProQuest Historical Newspapers

Iceland.<sup>20</sup> After their marriage on April 9, 1950, Lorna and Erling moved to Reykjavik while continuing to maintain their Upper East Side residence as well.<sup>21</sup> Lorna passed away on July 28, 2007.

Today, the Blount mausoleum maintains its air of grandeur fairly well. A multitude of correspondence between the family and Woodlawn has shown great care taken in its upkeep over the years. Dates of note include March 1950, when much cost was put into an update of the landscaping on the lot and April of the same year, when the Woodlawn staff called for the necessary repointing of the exterior.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the repointing may have been necessary due to buildup of moisture and biological growth over time because of the large trees overhanging the mausoleum almost entirely, as well as the slightly uneven ground which dips down towards the rear of the mausoleum. In 1968, a sum of money was again put aside for future cleaning and repointing of the exterior masonry.<sup>23</sup> Today, biological growth remains the biggest sign of wear on the mausoleum (Figures 12, 13). The east and rear elevations have exhibited the most signs of this, noted by clear staining and discoloration of parts of their facades. Unsurprisingly, this is where the larger trees are placed on the lot. On its interior, the mausoleum is in fine condition. The ventilation seems to be working properly, with no overwhelming signs of water damage or condensation on the marble inside. Despite natural buildup of dust, the interior feels fairly clean and well-cared for with definitive signs of its visitation over the years. With the personal effects of the family carefully placed towards the back of the room, and two large, wooden chairs facing outwards to welcome whoever may choose to visit, the Blount

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid 19

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 17

<sup>22</sup> "Correspondence between the Blount family and Woodlawn Cemetery," Ibid 2, 1950

<sup>23</sup> "Correspondence between the Blount family and Woodlawn Cemetery," Ibid 2, 1968.

family mausoleum remains a fond living memory of the family where one feels encouraged to sit down with the Blounts and reminisce on their colorful history.

Photos

**Blount Mausoleum: General Overview**





Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

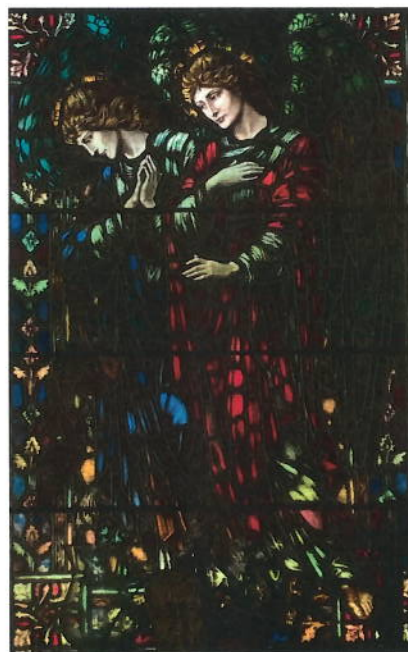


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>24</sup> 11 E 76th St New York, photograph, *Apartments* (New York: CoStar Group), accessed 2022, <https://www.apartments.com/11-e-76th-st-new-york-ny/8b0br61/>.

Figure 9<sup>25</sup>

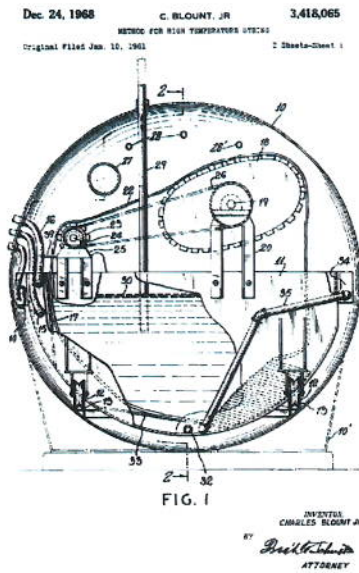


Figure 10<sup>26</sup>

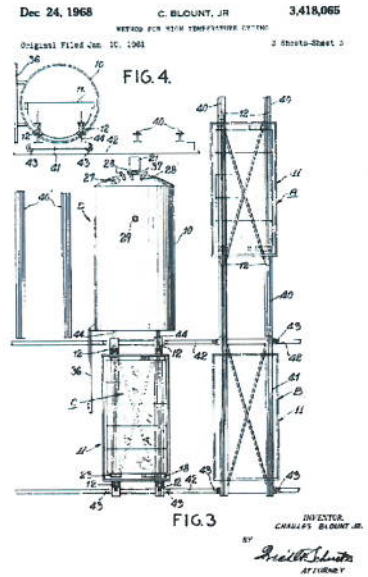


Figure 11



Figure 12



<sup>25</sup> Blount, 1968., <https://patents.google.com/patent/US3418065>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 25

**Figure 13**



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