

Furman-Gilroy Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery

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The Furman-Gilroy mausoleum faces north and is situated relatively close to the entrance accessed from Jerome Avenue through the main gates of Woodlawn Cemetery. It is located just off Whitewood Avenue, positioned between Tulip Avenue and Linden Avenue. The mausoleum occupies lot number 14866 within the Whitewood plot. Although it is a sizable lot, it is smaller than the grander plots found along the perimeter of the cemetery (Figure 1). The mausoleum is set back from the road, positioned behind the upright headstone of the Taylor plot. This location provides a degree of privacy, as it is removed from the main road and surrounded by dense tree coverage.

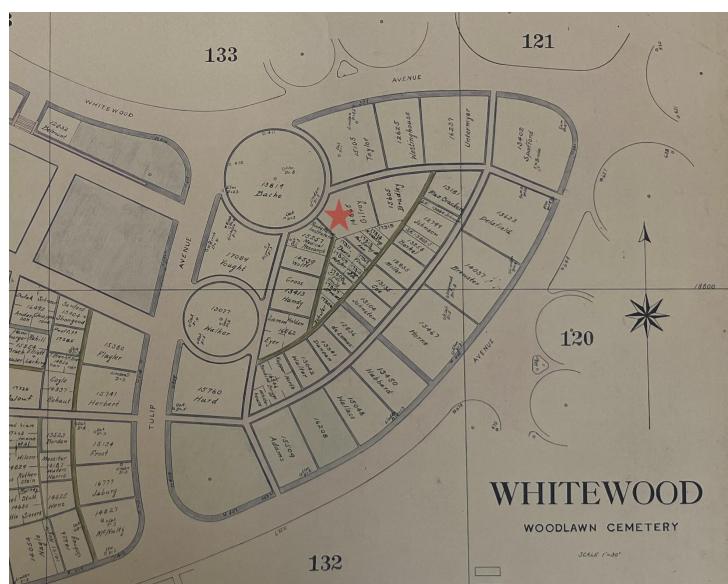


Figure 1: Whitewood Site Plan¹

The mausoleum was commissioned by Claudia Helen Furman Gilroy (as she was known at the time). The name “Furman” originates from Claudia’s maiden name and was most likely

¹ Gilroy, Claudia Helen (Whitewood: Lot 14865, Section 133), 1925, Major Monuments folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Avery Architecture Library Columbia

chosen to also honor her mother, Mary Mull Furman, who passed away in 1919² and was the first person to be interred in the tomb.

Claudia's family came from relatively humble beginnings. She grew up in Trenton, New Jersey, where her father, Charles Furman, worked as a second generation grocer.³ Claudia pursued a musical education, which shaped much of her childhood and she continued her musical education when she moved to New York. During the time that Claudia was married to her first husband, John Gilroy, her mother passed away. This loss is what prompted her to commission the mausoleum in her mother's memory.

The "Gilroy" portion of the name came from Claudia's first husband, John Joseph Gilroy, who was a stockbroker on Wall Street. John Gilroy was the head of the household. The family, according to the 1910 census, lived in a well-appointed apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, at 254 West 70th Street, just two blocks from Central Park.⁴ John Gilroy lived with his wife Claudia, his mother-in-law before she passed, and a servant. The Gilroy family was both wealthy and influential, and John himself came from a prominent background. He was the

² "Mary Mull Furman (1845-1919) - Find a Grave..." Accessed October 1, 2025.
https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/243315696/mary_mull-furman.

³ "1880 United States Federal Census, Mercer County, New Jersey, enumeration district (ED) 98, page number 25, dwelling 12, family 12 - AncestryLibrary.Com." Accessed October 1, 2025.
https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/6742/records/28144096?tid=&pid=&queryId=c9e85b7a-684c-497a-956b-d69e6c3d1d6a&phsrc=Bdp4&phstart=successSource&gl=1*1a8wf0f*up*MQ..*ga*ODc0MTk3MTY2LjE3NTkyNjM5NDk.*ga_4QT8FMEX30*c2E0YjcxY2NiLTQxNWQtNDM4NS04YWVhYTYwYzkyYjA3YSRvMSRnMCR0MTc1OTI2Mzk0OCRqNjAkBDakaDA.*ga_LMK6K2LSJH*c2E0YjcxY2NiLTQxNWQtNDM4NS04YWVhYTYwYzkyYjA3YSRvMSRnMCR0MTc1OTI2Mzk0OCRqNjAkBDakaDA.

⁴ "1910 United States Federal Census, New York County, New York, enumeration district (ED) 1381, sheet 7B, dwelling 37, family 187 - AncestryLibrary.Com." Accessed October 1, 2025.
<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/7884/records/19393839?tid=&pid=&queryId=f76c9ff5-5c32-4a33-aafd-3e456d0a0fb0&phsrc=Bdp13&phstart=successSource>.

son of Thomas Francis Gilroy⁵, who served as the 89th mayor of New York City. This connection to political and financial prominence likely explains the large scale and impressive design of the mausoleum. After Mary Mull Furman was interred, John Gilroy was the next person to be laid to rest in the tomb. His death at age 58 was sudden and caused by a brain hemorrhage, which was unexpected since he had no other illnesses.

In 1928,⁶ after the death of her first husband, Claudia remarried to Alfred Barnes McKay, who was also a stockbroker. The couple lived together for most of their married life in Westchester, New York. According to the 1940 census, they resided on a property valued at \$15,000, and they lived there with their butler.⁷ At the time, this indicated a very comfortable and upscale lifestyle. Claudia Helen Furman McKay passed away in 1951, eleven years later.⁸ After Claudia's death, Alfred Barnes McKay was also buried in the mausoleum⁹, joining the others who had preceded him.

⁵ "John J. Gilroy." *New York Times* (New York, N.Y., United States). Restaurant and Hotels Amusements. November 11, 1924.

⁶ "New York State, Marriage Index, 1881-1967 - AncestryLibrary.Com." Accessed October 2, 2025. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/61632/records/614710?tid=&pid=&queryId=e85fd023-4ac3-4a65-8cfc-10bb6f2c0a52&phsrc=nKx5&phstart=successSource&gl=1*4aro0r*up*MQ..*ga*OTQ4MjAyNjM3LjE3NTkzNzc4NTA.*ga_4QT8FMEX30*c2ExZDY5YWJiLTQxZTQtNGE5ZC04NDhhLTZjNWY0OTYxMTZhZCRvMSRnMCR0MTc1OTM3Nzg1MCRqNjAkBDaKaDA.*ga_LMK6K2LSJH*c2ExZDY5YWJiLTQxZTQtNGE5ZC04NDhhLTZjNWY0OTYxMTZhZCRvMSRnMCR0MTc1OTM3Nzg1MCRqNjAkBDaKaDA.

⁷ "1940 United States Federal Census, Westchester County, New York, enumeration district (ED) 60-252, sheet 7A - AncestryLibrary.Com." n.d. Accessed October 2, 2025. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/2442/records/10705780?tid=&pid=&queryId=e5669112-01c0-4d08-8c39-ce71acd38ebe&phsrc=nKx28&phstart=successSource&gl=1*hkqfch*up*MQ..*ga*MTU1NDk4MDQ2Mi4xNzU5MzgwMzM4.*ga_4QT8FMEX30*c2ExZDY5YWJiLTQxZTQtNGE5ZC04NDhhLTZjNWY0OTYxMTZhZCRvMSRnMCR0MTc1OTM4MDMzOCRqNjAkBDaKaDA.*ga_LMK6K2LSJH*c2ExZDY5YWJiLTQxZTQtNGE5ZC04NDhhLTZjNWY0OTYxMTZhZCRvMSRnMCR0MTc1OTM4MDMzOCRqNjAkBDaKaDA.

⁸ Special to THE NEW YORK. "MRS. ALFRED B. MACKAY." Archives. *The New York Times*, December 21, 1951. <https://www.nytimes.com/1951/12/21/archives/mrs-alfred-b-mackay.html>.

⁹ "Alfred Barnes MacKay (1888-1969) - Find a Grave..." Accessed October 2, 2025. https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/243047403/alfred_barnes-mackay.

The Furman Gilroy Mausoleum was designed to hold six individuals, but only four of those spaces are currently occupied. Interestingly, only the names of Claudia's mother and her first husband, John Gilroy, are engraved on the crypts. While both Claudia and Alfred McKay are also interred in the mausoleum, there is no visible recognition or inscription acknowledging their presence within the tomb. This absence of commemoration is notable and is clearly visible upon looking into the interior of the mausoleum, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Gilroy Mausoleum, photo by Cindy Chen, 2025¹⁰

The Furman Gilroy memorial was designed in 1925 by the architectural firm of Farrington, Gould & Hoagland, a well-known and respected firm based in New York City, particularly recognized for designing mausoleums at Woodlawn Cemetery and other prestigious

¹⁰ *Gilroy Mausoleum*, Cindy Chen, Personal Photograph, September 16, 2025

burial grounds. The memorial was built in the Neoclassical style, which is evident through the design characteristics of the structure. One of the key principles of Neoclassical architecture¹¹ is its emphasis on balance, symmetry, and a clear sense of order, all of which are present in the mausoleum's design. The social standing of the family is clearly reflected in various architectural elements throughout the building. This is especially visible in the stylistic elements such as the roof, the decorative urns, and the grand entrance door of the mausoleum (Figure 3). The architectural firm demonstrated a thorough understanding of both Neoclassical and classical forms, and they applied these styles deliberately to express the family's social and economic status, as well as their lasting legacy. The appeal of Neoclassical architecture lay in its timeless quality and refined simplicity. It was understated and rejected overly elaborate designs.¹² I believe this architectural style also reflected the family's sense of privacy. John Gilroy appears to have been a fairly private person, as there are few newspaper articles about him despite his father's social standing. It seems he deliberately avoided the public eye, much like Neoclassical architecture itself. This was a style often commissioned by wealthy patrons, yet it did not flaunt their wealth, just as the Furman-Gilroy family did not.

The design aspects of the mausoleum are particularly notable (Figure 4). The roof of the structure resembles that of a temple from Ancient Greek and Roman architecture. There are also Ionic columns present, which can be identified by examining the context of the overall design. Although the columns share some similarities with the Doric order, they can be classified as Ionic due to the decorative scrolls at the top of each column, as well as their slender and more ornate appearance compared to Doric columns. The urns featured in the

¹¹ "Neoclassical Architecture: History, Features, and Iconic Examples." Silvia. *Linvisible*, September 3, 2024. <https://linvisible.com/news/neoclassical-architecture-history-features/>.

¹² "Neoclassical Architecture: History, Features, and Iconic Examples." Silvia. *Linvisible*, September 3, 2024. <https://linvisible.com/news/neoclassical-architecture-history-features/>.

design reference ancient practices of cremation, symbolizing the cycles of life and death¹³ and the family's mourning, while also alluding to traditional Greek and Roman funerary symbols that reinforce the classical influence throughout the structure.



Figure 3: Gilroy Mausoleum, photo by Cindy Chen, 2025¹⁴

The structure is fairly simple, as it is intended to represent a sense of timeless beauty, which is a core principle of Neoclassical ideology. However, it is important to highlight the doors, as they are the most decorative element of the mausoleum (Figure 4). This emphasis is also true to Neoclassical tradition, where the entrance was often designed to be the focal point of the building. The doors are made of bronze and are adorned with garlands. Garlands were

¹³ "The Meaning behind Funerary Symbols and Grave Art - Hollywood Forever," Hollywood Forever Cemetery, February 21, 2025, <https://hollywoodforever.com/resources/the-meaning-behind-funerary-symbols-and-grave-art/#:~:text=Angels,veil%20between%20life%20and%20death.>

¹⁴ *Gilroy Mausoleum*, Cindy Chen, Personal Photograph, September 16, 2025

commonly used in funerary motifs during the early 1900s, when the mausoleum was built, and this symbolism originates from ancient Roman traditions. As a visual motif, the garland serves as a representation of remembrance to someone's accomplishment in life. Particularly, the circular design symbolizes the life cycle and subtly alludes to the rebirth of the soul.¹⁵ It conveys the notion that life does not simply end here but that the soul endures, thereby imparting both historical significance and emotional resonance to the design.¹⁶



Figure 4: Gilroy Mausoleum, photo by Cindy Chen, 2025¹⁷

¹⁵ "Seasonal Grave Symbolism," Find a Grave News, November 25, 2024, <https://news.findagrave.com/2024/11/07/seasonal-grave-symbolism/>.

¹⁶ "Seasonal Grave Symbolism - Find a Grave News." Find a Grave News, November 25, 2024. <https://news.findagrave.com/2024/11/07/seasonal-grave-symbolism/#:~:text=Wreaths%20share%20many%20meanings%20with,the%20immortality%20of%20the%20soul.>

¹⁷ *Gilroy Mausoleum*, Cindy Chen, Personal Photograph, September 16, 2025

The mausoleum today shows slight deterioration. This can be seen in the significant biological growth, which covers most of the front elevation of the building as well as both side elevations (Figures 5 and 6). In contrast, the rear elevation appears to be relatively clean and free from noticeable biological growth (Figure 7). My hypothesis is that this difference is due to the presence of trees on either side of the front elevation. These trees may keep the area shaded and damp, creating favorable conditions for biological growth to thrive. This contrasts with the rear side of the building, where there are no nearby trees, allowing for more sunlight and air circulation that help reduce moisture and prevent the spread of such growth.

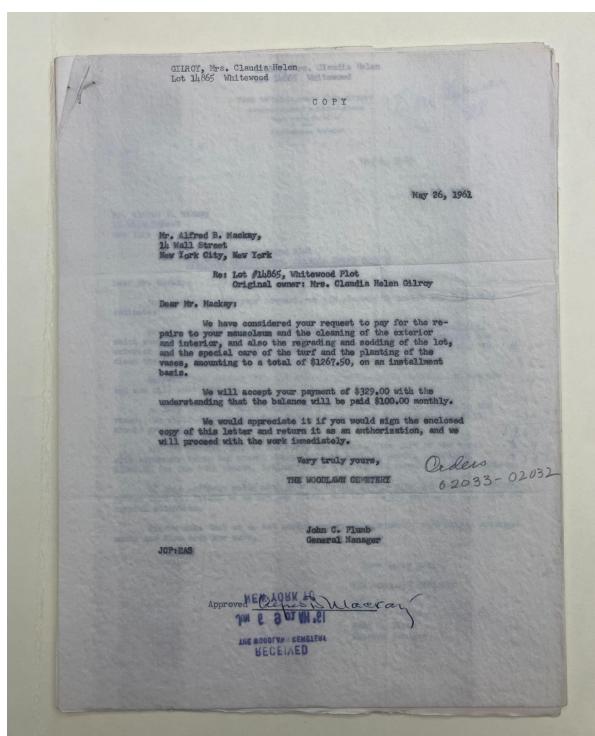
Another possible explanation for why this building may have more biological growth than others in the cemetery is related to its long-term maintenance. Claudia never had any children throughout her life. After she passed away, her husband Alfred continued to make the necessary payments to maintain the mausoleum (Figure 8). However, once Alfred also passed, there was no one left to continue covering the costs of upkeep for the building. As a result, the lack of regular maintenance may have contributed to the extensive biological growth visible today.



Figure 5 & 6: Gilroy Mausoleum, photos by Cindy Chen, 2025¹⁸



Figure 7: Gilroy Mausoleum, photos by Cindy Chen, 2025¹⁹



¹⁸ Gilroy Mausoleum, Cindy Chen, Personal Photographs, September 16, 2025

¹⁹ Gilroy Mausoleum, Cindy Chen, Personal Photograph, September 16, 2025

Figure 8: Gilroy Mausoleum, photos by Cindy Chen, 2025²⁰

Another sign of deterioration can be seen in the missing elements of the mausoleum. The design of the entire building is extremely symmetrical, so it is difficult to imagine that the doors would have been designed any differently. There are sections of garlands and foliage missing from the wreaths, which could be the result of natural wear and tear over time (Figure 9).

Another missing element appears to be stained glass. When looking inside the mausoleum and toward the rear (Figures 2 and 7), there is a fixed window with clear glass, which is extremely uncommon in mausoleum design. This strongly suggests that there may have originally been a stained glass piece installed there. This explanation is highly plausible, especially considering that Woodlawn Cemetery is known for housing one of the largest collections of stained glass in the country, including many works by Tiffany Studios, which are extremely valuable. Given the family's high social standing and wealth, it would be reasonable to assume they could have owned a stained glass artwork inside their mausoleum.

I also believe this missing stained glass piece may have been removed during a period when stained glass theft from cemeteries was more common. In 1999, Alastair Duncan²¹ a stained glass expert and author who was a former Christie's employee. was convicted for the thefts of stained glass, particularly those found in mausoleums designed to resemble Greek temples, making this explanation even more likely.

²⁰ Gilroy, Claudia Helen (Whitewood: Lot 14865, Section 133), 1925, Major Monuments folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Avery Architecture Library Columbia

²¹ Brown, Patricia Leigh. "A Passion for Graveyard Art That Took a Criminal Turn; Tiffany Glass and Other Tales From the Crypt." New York. *The New York Times*, September 5, 1999. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/05/nyregion/passion-for-graveyard-art-that-took-criminal-turn-tiffany-glass-other-tales.html>.

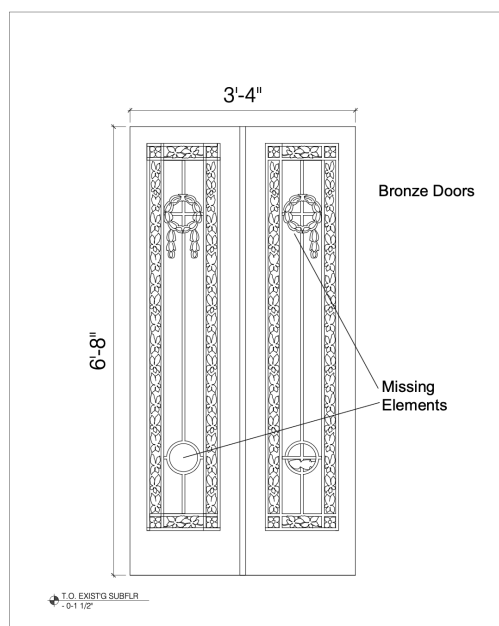


Figure 8: Gilroy Mausoleum, drawing by Cindy Chen, 2025²²

Since it is highly likely that stained glass was once part of the Furman Gilroy mausoleum, I have developed some theories about what it may have looked like. Given the mausoleum's strong Neoclassical style, I believe the stained glass would have followed a similar aesthetic. Based on the overall design of the structure, there are no strong indications that the family was overtly religious, so I do not think the artwork would have included traditional religious imagery.

Instead, it is more likely that the stained glass featured geometric shapes and decorative patterns, consistent with the Neoclassical emphasis on harmony and balance. It is also possible that the design incorporated elements that echoed the foliage seen in the wreaths or other floral motifs, creating a cohesive and elegant visual language throughout the mausoleum.

²² Cindy Chen, *Gilroy Mausoleum*, Personal Photograph, September 16, 2025

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