

Suki Gershenhorn

HP Studio 1: Reading Buildings Problem 3: Documentation and Formal Analysis

Faculty: Dolkart, Ward, Bollack

10.14.13

Albert Lowenstein Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY

The Lowenstein Mausoleum, located in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, NY, was funded by Albert Lowenstein upon the death of his older brother, Isaac Lowenstein (1866-1935) in 1936. The structure is a beautiful Deco-inspired structure with a simplicity and beauty manifested in the materials and minimal ornamentation.

Albert Lowenstein was a self-employed lawyer, living in both Manhattan, New York and Newark, New Jersey in his adult life. Albert and Isaac were the only children of Caroline and Abraham Lowenstein, German-borne parents, with whom they lived in New York City at 25 Central Park West. Albert got married to Sara Stein in 1913 and had one daughter together, Carol, and moved to Essex, New Jersey shortly after her birth. Isaac remained in New York, changing his career as a real estate agent to a tobacco salesman between 1910 and 1930.¹ Shortly after his parents died he became a lodger at an all-male apartment building at 256 West 73rd Street. He died suddenly at the Hotel Alamac on West 71st Street and Broadway on August 10, 1935. Isaac never married, nor had children, so his benevolent and financially stable brother, Albert proceeded to build the Lowenstein Mausoleum for him, and it was finished the following year.² Albert (1879-1966), Sara and Carol are buried in it as well.

¹ 1930 Federal Census." Ancestry.com, US Federal Census, n.d. Web. 29 Sept. 2013.

<<http://search.ancestrylibrary.com>

² Woodlawn Cemetery Archives. Albert Lowenstein Mausoleum. Avery Library Architectural Drawings. Columbia University. 7 October 2013.

Although the Lowensteins weren't notably famous in New York, nor was Albert a noteworthy lawyer, clearly he was financially well off. He consistently had a servant, and managed to build an elegant mausoleum in a high-end cemetery for his brother, the plot alone costing \$4000.³ The circular plot is secluded, off the intersection of Park Place and Filbert Street on the Filbert plot, shaded by large growth pines and bushes. The once existing path leading to the mausoleum (according to site plans) is now enveloped by overgrown foliage, leaving the present day mourner to make their own trail. This site's location within the cemetery allows the visitor to enjoy the natural environment and be away from the public and traffic, paralleling Albert's wealth, but relative anonymity.

The design of the mausoleum was contracted through Woodlawn Cemetery by Farrington, Gould and Hoagland, a popular mausoleum design firm during the 1920s and throughout the 1930s in New York.⁴ The design is simple and symmetrical. The dominant mass is a central granite block with two recessed smaller outer wings (also granite) embellished with vertical tiered carvings, subtle on the outer wings and more dramatic framing the door. The ziggurat roof divides the mass of the roof into three parts, initiating a pattern of the carved stone triple tiers. The ziggurat is an architectural feature borrowed from both Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica, was one of the predominant Art-Deco motifs.⁵

The most ornamental feature of the mausoleum is the door. All stone recesses lead to it, and its beautiful bronze cast design gives the Lowenstein mausoleum a dynamic softness contrasted with the cubic structure. James Novelli, a rising New York artist in the early 1920s, designed and sculpted the door—although it was not originally intended for the Lowenstein mausoleum. In 1930, Novelli was contracted to design a mausoleum door, which was later found to be a fraudulent order, leaving Novelli

³ Woodlawn Cemetery Archives. Albert Lowenstein Mausoleum. Avery Library Architectural Drawings. Columbia University. 7 October 2013.

⁴ Farrington, Gould and Hoagland Inc. *Memorial Designers and Builders: Mausoleums, Monuments and Statuary*. Farrington Gould and Hoagland Inc. New York, 1927.

⁵ Don Vlack, *Art Deco Architecture in New York 1920...1940*. Harper and Row Publishers: New York, New York. 1974. (21-32).

with a new design and unexecuted cast. However, a few years later, Novelli completed the cast with a small variation in design, entitled "Two Women". The whereabouts of this cast was unknown to the author of *Novelli: Forgotten Sculptor*, but this piece is in fact the door of the Lowenstein mausoleum.⁶ It is not documented how the Lowensteins acquired this Novelli original; however, it clearly exudes elegance in design and sophistication in materials.

Farrington, Gould and Hoagland's mirrors the trends of the 1930s. Shown in the Lowenstein mausoleum, there are elements influenced by Deco and Modern architecture. The facade lacks decorative ornamentation, except the cut stone that breaks the surface, creating new planes, allowing light and shadow to give the structure more depth.⁷ The most dramatic breaks appear on all sides of the door: the stairs at the bottom, the stone recessions to the right and left and the ziggurat—each recessing in numerical symmetry. Even in the interior of the mausoleum, clad in a rare limestone, "Pink Kasota Fleuri,"⁸ the incised lines recur—long slabs of stone in the walls by the stained-glass window and door and in smaller repetitions of three, presented on the catacombs. The recurrence creates a comfort for the viewer with a stylized geometry, offset by the natural beauty of the limestone, granite and marble and the natural landscape depicted on the art glass.

The structure's boxy and geometric shape is a nod to the Moderne, and the setbacks in both the body of the structure and the roof are a general motif featured throughout the 30s, especially in New York with the setback sky-scraper.⁹ The horizontal lines and the two external wings offset the mass of the main structure, creating depth and various shadows. The symmetric design allows the viewer to enjoy the subtle beauty of the stone, the minimal embellishments and the decorative fixtures.

⁶ Josephine Murphy, *Novelli: Forgotten Sculptor*. Brandon Books, Boston: 2003.

⁷ William J.R. Curtis *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. Prentice Hall Inc, New Jersey: 1982.

⁸ Farrington, Gould and Hoagland Inc. "Lowenstein Mausoleum Invoice." Letter to Woodlawn Cemetery. 1935. MS. Avery Library, Drawings and Archives, New York, New York.

⁹ Ely Jaques Kahn, *Contemporary American Architects*. McGraw Hill Book Company Inc, New York, New York: 1931.