

Hilary Grossman – October 17, 2011

Problem 3: Field documentation and Formal Analysis

Arata Mausoleum (Formerly W. B. Thompson)

Fall 2011 Studio: Reading Historic Buildings // Faculty: Francoise Bollack, Ward Dennis,
Andrew Dolkart



On July 23, 1908, William Boyce Thompson placed a formal order with the Woodlawn Cemetery for a 2,971 square foot plot called the Fairview plot in order to erect the Thompson Family Mausoleum. With this act he was joining his colleagues, the elite of American society, who were establishing large mausoleums at this prestigious cemetery. William Boyce Thompson was a self-made millionaire, mining entrepreneur, Wall Street financier, and philanthropist. Born in Virginia City, Montana on May 13, 1867, educated at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire and later Columbia University's School of Mines, he created the Thompson Investment Company that dealt with real estate, mining properties, and insurance.¹

In 1899, Thompson founded the Coronado Mining Company around the Shannon Mine in Arizona and the Nevada Consolidated Mine. This increased his wealth fourfold. By 1906, Thompson had joined the elite of Wall Street as a skilled financier who specialized in mining and mining property investments. Partnering with businessman George Gunn, the pair formed the Gunn-Thompson Company. It developed mining properties, mining technology, and assembled teams of prospectors. By 1914, Thompson and Gunn had acquired copper mines in Nevada and Arizona, zinc mines in Missouri and Oklahoma, a coal mine in Wyoming, a lead mine in Washington, a tungsten mine in Peru, an iron mine in Brazil, and silver and gold mines in China. During World War I, Thompson worked with J. P. Morgan to establish high grade British War Bonds and consolidate major mining properties.²

Thompson was highly involved in politics. He was a supporter of the Republican Party, and served as a Presidential elector in 1912. In 1914, Thompson sat on the Board of the New York Federal Reserve Bank. When the Russian tsarist regime collapsed in 1917, Thompson led the American delegation that President Woodrow Wilson sent to Russia in order "to undertake any work that might prevent the disintegration of the Russian forces."³ In December of 1917, Thompson returned to the United States. He argued for the acceptance of the Bolshevik regime, claiming the "revolution was as necessary to the development of Russia as the abolition of slavery to us."⁴ After his death in 1933, the first Soviet Russian ambassador, Maxim Litvinoff,

¹ Fred Carstensen. "Thompson, William Boyce"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/10/10-01640.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Access Date: Sat Oct 15 2011 11:58:02 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time) Copyright © 2000 American Council of Learned Societies. Published by Oxford University Press.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

acknowledged Thompson's input as the first American supporter of the new regime. By the 1920s, Thompson became less involved with politics. He focused his attention on the academic research he funded for metallurgy, mining, and botany, as well as his Wall Street investments, land purchases, and family.

He married Gertrude Hickman in 1895. They had one daughter, Margaret Thompson. Thompson moved the family to Yonkers, New York in the early 1900s to improve his connections with the elite of Wall Street. He commissioned the architecture firm of Carrere and Hastings to design his new estate, Alder Manor. The estate consisted of greenhouses, residence, garage, stable, and superintendent's house. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. At the same time, he commissioned Carrere and Hastings to draw up Mausoleum plans in a similar style to the Alder Manor, Italian Renaissance Revival Style.⁵

The Mausoleum is one of six other Carrere and Hastings designs at the Woodlawn Cemetery. Based off the Goodyear and Henry Sloan Mausoleum⁶, the Thompson Mausoleum is a catacomb style mausoleum constructed by the firm Batterson and Sisele. The Mausoleum is composed of Milford Granite at the base, steps, pavement, and vase pedestal. Old blue hole limestone, from the Arlando Marine Building Stone Company, is used for the exterior walls, columns, pediment, and roof. This is the same limestone used on the Hamilton Monument. White Dorset marble is used for the interior walls, catacombs, ceiling, and floors. Bronze work is utilized for the door, interior detail, and window casement.⁷

The Thompson Mausoleum is set back thirty feet on the plot, and placed on the central cross axis. It is set on a clear grass landscape with no vegetation. This puts the focal point strictly on the Mausoleum, creating a monumental image similar to that of the mausoleums on larger plots. The Thompson Mausoleum has a tripartite massing with a dominant central pediment defining its exterior, marking an axis of symmetry. The pediment is above the top cornicing. It is supported by two circular columns, and is semi-circular in shape with cornicing and floral detail. The exterior walls are detailed by limestone pilasters that mimic the frontal columns. The interior

⁵Rebic, Michael P. *Yonkers Historical Society Home Page*. Rep. Web. 16 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.yonkershistory.org>>.

⁶Hewitt, Mark A. *Carrère & Hastings Architects*. Vol. 2. New York: Acanthus, 2006. Print.

⁷Columbia University, Drawing and Archives Department, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Mausolea and Monument Files, Arata Mausoleum.

is defined by a narrow nave with a tripartite recessed ceiling. It has a bronze door centered on the entrance façade, under the pediment. The centered stained glass window at the other end of the Mausoleum lights up the space. On both sides, there are four crypts stacked one on top of the other. These crypts line the walls. In addition, flanking the Mausoleum on both sides are two large urns/vases decorated with floral patterns and phoenixes.⁸

The encompassing design creates the allusion of a grand monument sitting in a vast landscape. This is similar to Italian/Roman monuments. The set back in the landscape allows the viewer to approach the Mausoleum from the east/front/street side. By setting it up this way, this relatively small, 225 square feet Mausoleum at first looks smaller than it actually is; and the landscape appears at first glance to be larger than it actually is. The smallness of the Mausoleum is not as apparent because of the effective use of architectural detailing to make it look larger. The columns, coupled with the pilasters, emphasize a verticality of design. The large pediment raised above the structure with a central crown, raises the eye up to the highest point. This makes the structure seem to have greater grandeur than it actually has. When you add the base into the picture with the columns, pilasters, and pediment, it squares off the façade. This creates a centralized emphasis, based on the door in the front façade and the window on the rear façade. The two emphases create two focal points in the design. They are the center of the bottom block and the top of the pediment block. This creates a split in the massing of the structure. In a sense, it is the bottom verses the top. The horizontal split is overshadowed by the tripartite vertical split in the front and the rear façade marked by the central pediment. This cancels out any shortening of the design. In the end, it all equals out to create a monumental looking structure. One that is fit for Mr. Thompson.

It is ironic that later in life Mr. Thompson decided to be buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. He transferred his family members that were already buried at Woodlawn Cemetery to his new mausoleum in 1929.⁹ On January 4, 1937, the family estate sold the Mausoleum to the Arata family. Two brothers, Ernest and Lawrence Arata, bought the Mausoleum for their father, John Arata. Today the Mausoleum holds John Arata and his wife, Marie, their two sons, Ernest and Lawrence, with their wives, Mae and Florence, and children, Marie-Louise and Muriel. In

⁸ Hewitt, Mark A. *Carrère & Hastings Architects*. Vol. 2. New York: Acanthus, 2006. Print.

⁹ Columbia University, Drawing and Archives Department, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Mausolea and Monument Files, Arata Mausoleum.

addition, Marie-Louise's husband, William Pickett, is interned there. John and Marie Arata were first generation Americans from Italy. They lived in Brooklyn's Ward 6 during the early 1900s. The Aratas owned a luncheonette.¹⁰ While not self-made millionaires like William B. Thompson, they also worked their way up from having next to nothing to being able to provide sufficiently for their family and live a more than comfortable life.¹¹ It is fitting for this hard working family to be the present day owners of the elaborate, monumental Mausoleum that was first built for a far more affluent family. It shows that even in death that America is a far more democratic and less class conscious society than most, and that people from far different economic and social backgrounds can obtain a high status if they wish in one of our nation's most well regarded cemeteries.

¹⁰ United States. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. *Search Historical Records - Ancestry.com*. Web. 16 Oct. 2011. <<http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View>>.

¹¹ "Estates Appraised." *New York Times* [New York] 25 Feb. 1938. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 15 Oct. 2011. <<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/102638092?accountid=10226>>.

Bibliography:

1. Columbia University, Drawing and Archives Department, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Mausolea and Monument Files, Arata Mausoleum.
2. "Estates Appraised." *New York Times* [New York] 25 Feb. 1938. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Web. 15 Oct. 2011.
<<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/102638092?accountid=10226>>.
3. Fred Carstensen. "Thompson, William Boyce"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/10/10-01640.html>; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Access Date: Sat Oct 15 2011 11:58:02 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time) Copyright © 2000 American Council of Learned Societies. Published by Oxford University Press.
4. Hewitt, Mark A. *Carrère & Hastings Architects*. Vol. 2. New York: Acanthus, 2006. Print.
5. Rebic, Michael P. *Yonkers Historical Society Home Page*. Rep. Web. 16 Oct. 2011.
<<http://www.yonkershistory.org>>.
6. United States. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. *Search Historical Records - Ancestry.com*. Web. 16 Oct. 2011.
<<http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View>>.