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HP Studio Fall 2011

Problem 3

October 10, 2011

### Kress Mausoleum

Samuel H. Kress was the founder of a department store chain and a philanthropist. He started the Kress Foundation in 1929 “to promote the moral, physical and mental welfare and progress of the human race.”<sup>1</sup> His brothers, Rush and Claude, joined the business and the whole family became extremely wealthy. This wealth is reflected in the size and design of their mausoleum and Woodlawn plot.



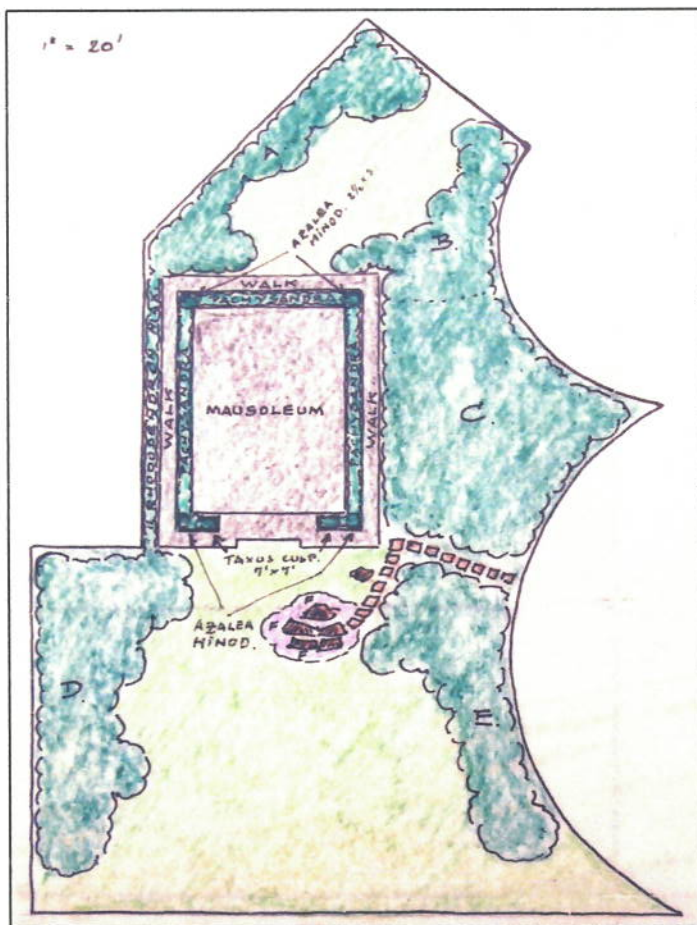
The mausoleum houses Samuel, Rush, and part of Rush’s family. At one time Claude was there too, though he was moved in the 1960s. Sylvia, Rush’s daughter, is absent although Rush planned for her and her family to be buried there. She died before her father in 1958 but was buried in Colorado with her husband’s family.<sup>2</sup> A folder of correspondence between the Kress family and Woodlawn showed that Rush, rather than Samuel, was in charge of the mausoleum decisions. Archive records show he would come to Woodlawn one to two times per week and if he were traveling someone would be sent in his stead to make sure everything was up to par.

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<sup>1</sup> “Samuel H. Kress, Merchant, Dead.” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* 23 Sep, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007) w/ Index (1851-1993), ProQuest. Web. 21 Sep 2011.

<sup>2</sup> “Mrs. Charles Abry Jr.” *New York Times (1923-Current file)* 16 Aug. 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2007) w/ Index (1851-1993), ProQuest. Web. 10 Oct. 2011.

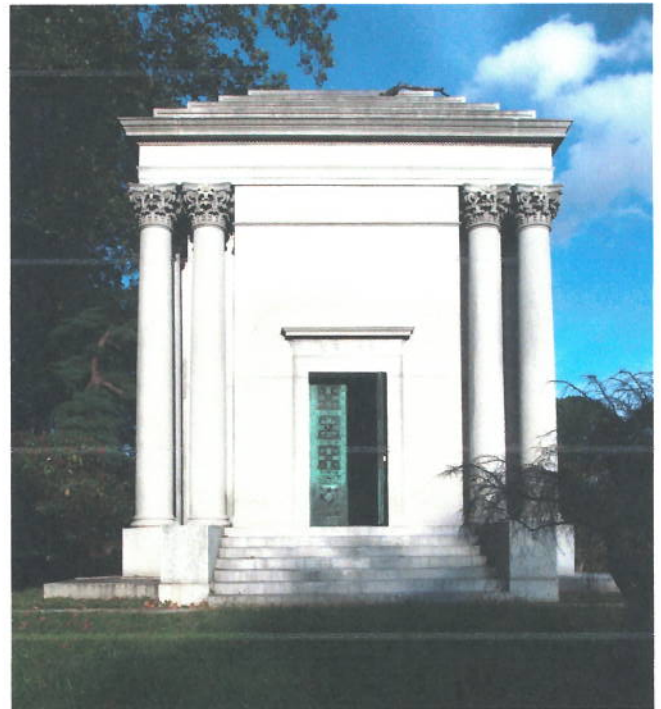
The Kress plot is 10,029 square feet, extremely large because it is actually composed of two separate plots; Walnut 15130 and 15920. Thomas Blake was hired to be the landscape architect and had his work cut out for him. At one point there were over 600 plantings on the property, constantly being changed via requests from Rush. The mausoleum is located at the top of a hill and original plantings would have been placed to either side of the property, creating a “grass walkway” up to the front of the building. An area behind the mausoleum was originally surrounded by plantings and approved as a burial site for up to 6 graves, though they were never used. A walkway, which surrounds the mausoleum, was the only way one could get to this private space behind the



mausoleum. Plantings were originally placed between the mausoleum and walkway to ensure individuals kept to the intended path. A birdbath and small rock garden were part of the original design along the right side of the building and still exist; the bird bath has long-since been covered with sheet metal, indicating neglect and disuse. The majority of plantings are bunched along the property lines, barring others from seeing in. They are primarily Rhododendron Maximum, a white bush growing between 8 and 30 feet

tall.<sup>3</sup> With groupings of 40 – 80, a virtual rhododendron wall would have been created around the plot. The nearly white rhododendrons coupled with the white dogwood trees must have created an almost ethereal atmosphere. What you experience when visiting the mausoleum today is definitely not what was originally intended.

The mausoleum was ordered from the Presbrey-Leland Company in 1924 and finished in 1925. The company handled all elements of the building except for the custom bronze door and three stained-glass windows which did not end up being installed until after 1947. The exterior is comprised of large slabs of light Barre, Vermont granite with a cement foundation. It looks similar to a Greek temple; it is symmetrical blocky with three columns on each corner holding up a classic



Greek entablature. This has an architrave with dentil molding, a plain frieze, and finally a slightly projected, plain cornice resting on Corinthian columns which are each made from a single piece of stone. Instead of a typical Greek pediment there are a series of stepped stone slabs on top of the building creating a pyramidal shape, a common design among Presbrey-Leland mausoleums. Although the lines of the mausoleum appear straight the walkway, raised foundation, and window sills are sloped to ensure water is shed from the surface of the building

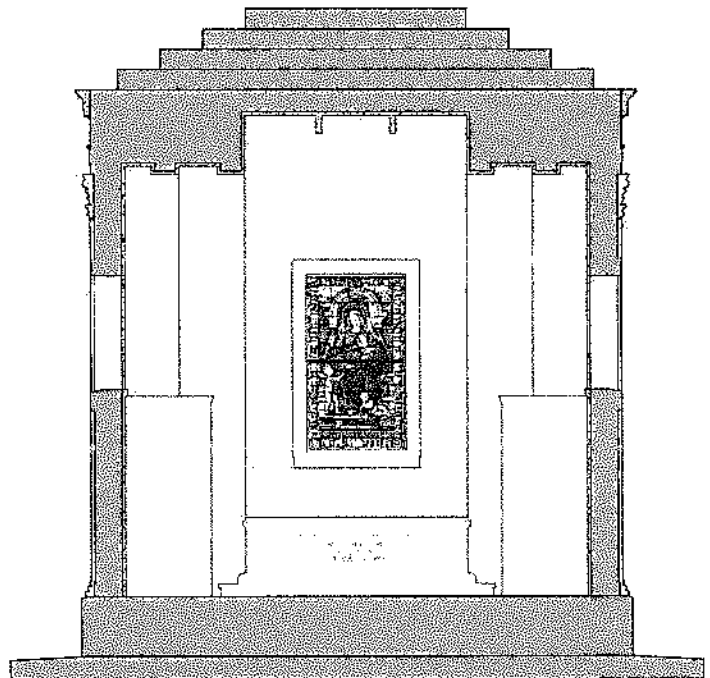
There is very little decoration on the façade so most of the attention is drawn to the joints holding together monumental blocks, suggesting the building was to be visible

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<sup>3</sup> Brand, Mark. "Rhododendron Maximum". *UConn Plant Database*, 2001. Web. 10 Oct. 2011.

from afar. This unornamented surface may have been intended to create a sense of calm.<sup>4</sup> The side and rear walls each have a single stained-glass window located at the same height on each wall. The side windows are shorter, suggesting the symmetrical interior layout. The foundation raises the building, creating a space beneath the floor for more catacombs that necessitates a grand front stairway leading to a custom bronze door. The door is ornate, decorated with rosettes, diamonds, flowers, and Ks.

The interior of the building is clad in white Alabama marble with Samuel's catacomb as the primary focal point located in the center of the rear wall. Although he did not die first, perhaps this was done since he was the founder of the family business. The stained-glass window above him references charity, something Samuel was known for. On each wall are catacombs with 3 compartments topped by smaller stained-glass windows, one depicting hope and one faith. The polished-granite floor has a removable panel hiding the empty compartments underneath. The coffered ceiling has a square section in the center of the building that rises even higher. Initially, one might think that is why there is a pyramidal roof on the structure; however, the section drawing shows that the coffers do not penetrate into that area, so there doesn't seem to



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<sup>4</sup> Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture: Lectures on Architecture and Painting*. London: George Allen, 1900. Print.

be a functional purpose for the design.

The monumental size of this building reflects the prestige of the Kress family and the stone conveys a message of eternity. The classical style results in a structure that will appear refined and fashionable throughout the years, making the Kress lot appear “first class,” something that Rush Kress would have wanted. The original plantings sheltered the building, creating a private sanctuary for the family only, and made a more ethereal environment with an abundance of white. With an emphasis on the importance of landscaping and the mausoleum’s monumental presence, the Kress plot truly is “... a picture exquisitely blending the works of God and man.”<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> Commemoration: The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials. New York: Presbrey-Leland, Inc, 1929. Print.