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Studio I – Reading Buildings
Assignment 3 – Cowles Mausoleum

The Cowles Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery was commissioned by Alfred and Frances Cowles from architect Ferdinand Prochazka. The mausoleum's design is classical with clear references to Greek temple plans. The features of this mausoleum demonstrate Ferdinand Prochazka's interest in constructing mausoleums for longevity and low maintenance. The Cowles Mausoleum is simple in design with sparse decoration that focuses the viewer's eye to the center of the façade, drawing them in. The large pieces of granite used demonstrate the wealth of the Cowles family, while simultaneously showing elegant restraint in design. (Figure 1)

Alfred and Frances Bailey Cowles commissioned their family mausoleum in 1909, five years before Frances passed away. This mausoleum was built well in advance of its need, the Cowles preparing for the future. It holds ten standard catacombs, eight of which are filled, and one child's catacomb; one of these catacombs displays the names of living Cowles descendants. Alfred Cowles, 1845-1916, made his wealth through running and owning manufacturing companies. At the time of his death, he was Vice President of the American Brass Company, which he was also instrumental in founding. Additionally, he founded the Ansonia Clock Company in 1878 and was the president of Coronet Phosphate Company and Terrace Estates as well as the former head of Ansonia Brass and Copper Company.¹ In 1917, shortly after his death, Alfred's estate was valued at \$876,193.² He passed most of this on to his children, and his son Russel, also buried in the Cowles Mausoleum, succeeded Alfred as president of Ansonia Clock Company.³ Also interred at the Cowles Mausoleum are Russel's two wives, young daughter, son, and daughter-in-law. The wealth of the Cowles family is displayed in their mausoleum, not through grand ornament but in more subtle ways through the building's design. Their choice to hire Ferdinand

¹ "Alfred Abernethy Cowles," Obituary, *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 1916: 11.

² "Cowles Left \$876,193: Head of Ansonia Clock Company Divided Estate in Family." *New York Times*, 23 Sep. 1917:20. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, this amount is about 16 million in today's dollars.

³ "Ansonia Clock," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 Feb. 1917: 6.

Prochazka as an architect, coupled with their personal, early planning of the mausoleum, shows an interest in longevity and quality:

Ferdinand Prochazka worked mainly as a monument architect in New York City with an office at 1 Madison Avenue.⁴ In May of 1917, he wrote an article in *The Architectural Review* on mausoleums and how best to ensure their longevity and sustainability. A number of architectural features that he discusses in the article are utilized in the Cowles Mausoleum. Prochazka states that waterproofing and proper ventilation are of the utmost importance for mausoleums and that the Greek or Roman temple form is an ideal form to aid in this. According to Prochazka, one very important way to prevent water leakage is to avoid upright joints in projecting molding and instead to use stones with overlapping joints. This technique can be seen in the roof of the Cowles Mausoleum. Also, Prochazka states that proper ventilation through small, hooded vents will encourage the circulation of air and prevent condensation inside the mausoleum; these types of small hooded vents can be seen on the Cowles Mausoleum. Additionally, he suggests that double windows in bronze with small vents will prevent ice from freezing the window, which is visible with the Cowles' stained-glass window and outside pane. The Cowles Mausoleum is constructed of Barre granite, which in the article, Prochazka states as being the second best granite for durability and the best for beauty, uniformity, and longevity of color. Above all, Prochazka states that these features are much more easily controlled when a small mausoleum is built of large stones. The Cowles Mausoleum's smaller size may reflect both the Cowles and Prochazka's interest in preparing the mausoleum for a long life, and the simple Greek design allows Prochazka to use his signature mausoleum construction techniques.⁵

The original inspiration for the Cowles Mausoleum is the Greek temple, and in order to create this small, intimate, long-lasting mausoleum, the temple *in antis* plan was utilized. This is one of the simplest Greek temple designs, and according to Vitruvius, consists of pilasters on the wall ends (antae) with two columns in between the pilasters.⁶ When

⁴ Ferdinand Prochazka, Cowles Mausoleum Drawing, 1909. *Woodlawn Cemetery Archives*. Avery Library, Columbia University: New York.

⁵ Ferdinand Prochazka, "The Construction of Mausoleums," *The Architectural Review*. Volume 5, No. 5, May (1917): 97-100.

⁶ Vitruvius Pollio. *The Ten Books on Architecture*. Trans. Morris Hicky Morgan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914.

comparing the plans of a temple *in antis* and the Cowles Mausoleum, the parallel is clear. (Figure 2) Through viewing drawings of temples such as the Temple of Diana Propylaea at Eleusis (Figure 3) and Temple of Themis at Rhamnus, (Figure 4) it seems likely that Prochazka was looking to small temples such as these for design inspiration. The façade of the Cowles Mausoleum, as with these temples, is symmetrical. Additionally, the mausoleum and these temples are in the Doric order, but the mausoleum deviates from the traditional use of triglyphs and metopes. Instead, the mausoleum has a minimal decorative motif of laurel wreaths on the architrave and a laurel swag with "COWLES" written above the door. These decorations serve as visual guides to move the viewer's eye to certain parts of the building.

The laurel swag and the Cowles name are usually the first thing that one notices when looking at the mausoleum. The swag lifts the viewer's eye to the laurel wreaths then down the columns to frame the intricate door. In addition, the mausoleum can be broken up horizontally into its very flat pediment, shallowly recessed central portion, and flat bottom with plinths for the columns. The plinths also serve to closely frame the doorway. These features create a focus on the central part of the Cowles Mausoleum, drawing the viewer inward to contemplate on the Cowles family. While this variation on the Greek temple form does draw in the viewer, it is important to remember that Prochazka's choices for the design are focused on both an aesthetic purpose and his construction techniques.

These tools used to draw in the viewer's eye are necessary because the mausoleum is not often approached from the front. Situated on Rose Avenue, the mausoleum is easily visible from the road, yet it is usually approached from one of its side elevations. There is one road that approaches the façade of the Cowles Mausoleum, but it is rarely used. When approaching the mausoleum from one of its sides, it is very simple with no decoration, but the mausoleum is still intriguing because of the beautiful Barre granite color and large size of its stones. However, the visual techniques used by Prochazka are able to capture the viewer's eye and draw it in as one comes to face the façade. This small, elegant mausoleum has served the needs of the Cowles family by staying in good condition throughout the years, displaying their wealth through monumental stone, and drawing in an onlooker through its visual composition.

Appendix

Figure 1



Figure 2.

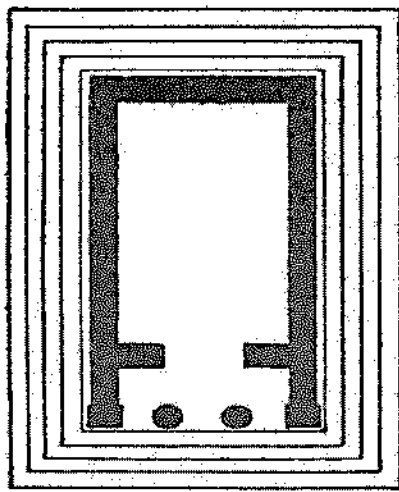
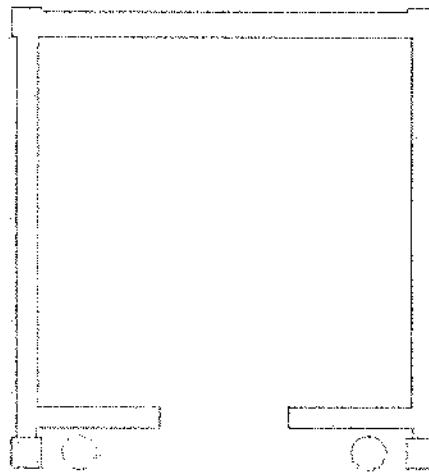


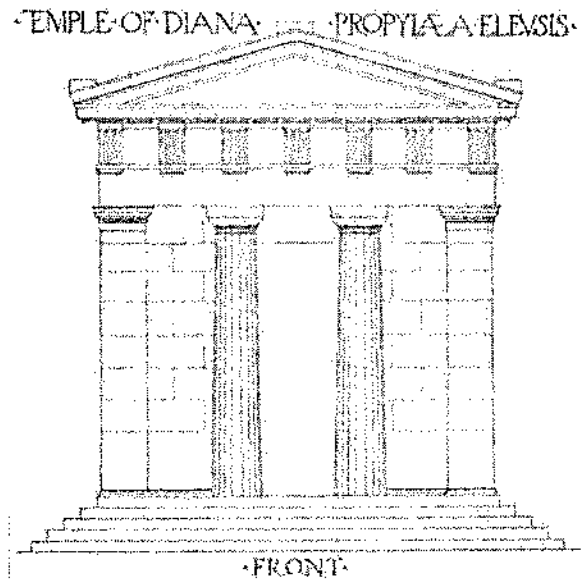
Fig. 32. Plan of Temple of Diana Propylea at Eleusis.



Cowles Mausoleum

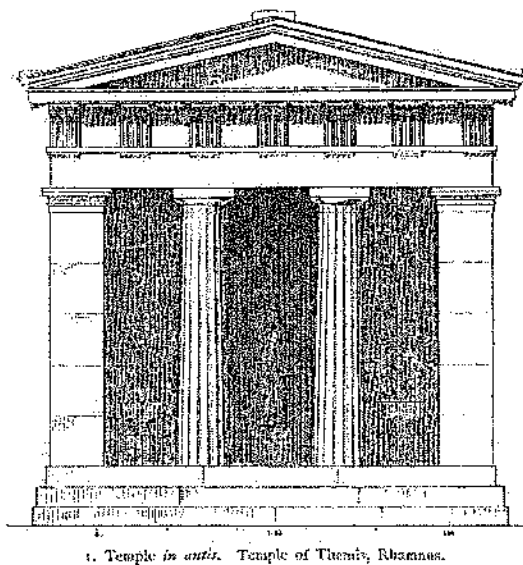
American School. *Cyclopedia of Architecture, Carpentry and Building*. Chicago: American School of Correspondence, 1908.

Figure 3



American School. *Cyclopedia of Architecture, Carpentry and Building*. Chicago: American School of Correspondence, 1908.

Figure 4



Architecture, Sculpture, and the Industrial Arts Among the Nations of Antiquity. Authorized American edition, published under the supervision of S. R. Koehler. Boston: L. Prang and Company, 1879. Series I.

Works Cited:

Architecture, Sculpture, and the Industrial Arts Among the Nations of Antiquity. Authorized American edition, published under the supervision of S. R. Koehler. Boston: L. Prang and Company, 1879, Series I.

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