

Gifts of Troy:

The Wilson Family Mausoleum



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Washington Wilson's Mausoleum is located in the southwest corner of the Oak Hill plot in the center part of Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx (Figure 1). There are now five people that rest in it: the head, Washington Wilson (1838-1905), his wife Jane Rich Wilson (1844-1925), and their three daughters - Emily B. Wilson (1871-1936), Alice R. Wilson (1873-1940), and Mabel Wilson (1878-1923). There are eight catacombs inside in total, so three of them are still empty.

It is a middle-sized mausoleum in Woodlawn. The site area is about 2800 square feet and the building covers an area of 280 square feet. The mausoleum is facing the end of Pine Avenue, where it meets Park Avenue. Therefore, the building becomes the focal point of the T-junction, increasing its monumental image. However, it is not a solemn formal monument in classical style but a relatively romantic genre, telling the story of his wealthy and elegant life.

1. Wealth From Troy: Washington Wilson and His Collar Empire

In 1838, Washington, the fifth child of John Wilson and Gaynor Wilson, was born. John was an English immigrant and ran a saddlery business with his oldest son, William H. Wilson¹. The business probably began in about 1841 at 135 Bowery Street (Figure 2) and the family also live there from then on, which echoes with the "ward 10" location in the 1855 census².

John Wilson produced a range of leather products from saddles, trunks to firemen's caps.³ He was assisted by his oldest son William H. Wilson, who was also the heir of the saddlery business after his father's death. Growing up in this industry, it's not difficult for Washington to gain knowledge and experience of managing manufacture and selling. The earliest record of Washington's business was fancy goods seller in 1860 when he was 22.

¹ "John Wilson," United States Census, 1855, The City of New York Ward 10, NY, ED 2, Sheet 17.

² Shockley and Danza, "Hardenbrook - Somarindyck House Landmark Designation Report", Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2011, Page 7.

³ Annual Report, American Institute of the City of New York, 1849, Page 117.

At that time, he worked at 71 Warren Street and he lived in the old London Terrace⁴, which was a community of Greek revival row houses preceding the current apartment. In around 1864, his occupation was “clerk” in the directory, but became collar seller at 73 Franklin Street in 1865.

His involvement in the thriving collar industry in the upstate city of Troy did not come out of coincidence. Though there were large strikes in collar labors in 1886 and 1901, urging for higher salaries and protesting against the introduction of machine, Troy’s “Collar City” title was hardly challenged in the second half of the 19th century. According to *The Atlantic*, “Mr. Wilson was connected with a business [fancy goods trader, writer added] that brought him often to Troy, where through mutual friends he fell in with the Earls.”⁵ William S. Earl, another co-founder of Earl & Wilson, was experiencing the downturn of his own collar company in the early 1860s and that’s when young and smart Washington came and brought his business ideas. In 1867, the firm of Earl & Wilson was set up by these two “reckless and visionary” men. By 1869, the company grew to a size of over 300 staff and Washington opened up a store in 217 Church Street in New York City (where now AT&T long line Building stands). In the same year, he moved from the London Terrace to a row house in Brooklyn Ward 19, which is now around New Utrecht.

In 1874, the store moved to 676 Broadway (Figure 3), which was a brand-new building at the north side to the grand red brick "Brooks Brothers" store. One year later his resident also moved back to Manhattan in 348 West 21 Street. Then in 1882, he moved to 166 West 58 Street, which was his last residence in New York City. After being neighbor of the luxury men’s clothing store for 10 years, the E&W sales room moved again to 33 West 17 Street in 1884, into what is now known as “the Century Building” at Union Square⁶. Through these relocations of his store as well

⁴ New York City Directories, 1859-1860.

⁵ Edward Mott Woolley, “Troy and Collars”, *The Atlantic*, March 1920.

⁶ Arthur James Weise, *The City of Troy and Its Vicinity*, Troy: Edward Green, 1886, Page 98.

as his home, we can see the gradual expansion of the collar business empire. In Troy, where there are collar factories everywhere, Earl & Wilson's production building completed in 1876 was one of the most outstanding. Though demolished long ago, a precious picture in *The City of Troy and Its Vicinity* (1886) of it has survived (Figure 4), allowing us to see the factory's former glory. It was a four-story building with a basement floor standing at a block corner, with pretty cornice and a flagpole on the top. There is also a sketch that reflect the working condition in Earl & Wilson factory from an article in March 1920 issue of the magazine *The Atlantic*, and it wrote “up and down aisle after aisle where endless rows of women, and here and there groups of men, were working.”⁷ (Figure 5).

Through the collar company, Washington made a great fortune, which allowed him to purchase a summer home in Elberon, Long Branch, NJ in his later years in around 1885. The 1889 map showed that his property was on the turning point of Lincoln Avenue and right opposite to Elberon Railway station where the Sephardic Synagogue and 120 Lincoln Avenue stands nowadays (Figure 6). There is also a photo showing a driveway to the porch of his comfortable resort (Figure 7). We can see a typical Queen Anne style cottage which was in fashion around Long Branch, with hipped roof, high chimneys, and a large finely decorated timber porch surrounding the front elevation. The house was “admired”⁸ as the obituary described and also a lively one with several dormers and bay windows.

September 3, 1905, Washington Wilson passed away in this lovely house suddenly from heart disease. In his spare time, he was fond of horse riding and went on morning gallops in the country.⁹ Washington Wilson married with Jane Rich Wilson in 1870 when he was 32. Since her

⁷ Edward Mott Woolley, “Troy and Collars”, *The Atlantic*, March 1920.

⁸ “OBITUARY.” 1905., Sep 04 *New - York Tribune (1900-1910)*, 7.

⁹ Ibid.

husband's death, Jane lived with their three daughters and two Irish maids. Perhaps relying on the inheritance and the profits of the collar company, they lived a comfortable life without having to work, and their three daughters never married in their lifetime. They gathered with Mr. Wilson in the mausoleum at Woodlawn eventually.

After the death of Washington, the Earl & Wilson company was taken over by Washington's nephew, Franklin H. Wilson (son of his oldest brother William)¹⁰, and finally, the half-century collar brand was purchased by another collar tycoon Cluett, Peabody & Co. in 1925¹¹.

2. Ideas From Troy: Design of the Mausoleum

When focusing on Washington Wilson's mausoleum, it is hard to give a specific definition of which style this beautiful stone construction is. The basic prototype of the mausoleum plan could be traced back to the Greek cross and has similarities to Palladio's Villa Rotunda: a square chamber with tower in center as the core, with symmetrical affiliated spaces projecting in four directions (Figure 8). There is a portico in front of door and a chapel-like space at the back, both have similar length and depth. Eight catacombs are set on both side in the right and left wings.

The stone was carefully selected for this masonry building. The exterior is mainly made of Woodbury gray-white granite from Vermont, with smooth stones and ashlar alternating to create a rich sense of layering. Two red polished granite columns supporting the portico were from Westerly in Rhode Island. The interior finishing strikes a good balance between holiness and

¹⁰ "Franklin H. Wilson," United States Federal Census, 1920, Brooklyn Assembly District 1, NY, ED 27, Sheet 31.

¹¹ "Cluett, Peabody Buys the Earl & Wilson Co.: Two Largest Collar Concerns Combine -- 10,000 Employees are Affected." *New York Times* (1923-), Jan 27, 1925, 5.

warmness, by using Tennessee Pink marble on baseboard, door architraves, window sill, central bench and belts on a pure white marble background (Figure 9).¹²

The designer of this pretty mausoleum is James Inglis from Troy. Interestingly, though Washington Wilson didn't actually live in Troy himself, he found this architect through the relationship with the Earls. In 1897 Troy directory, James Inglis was recorded as the superintendent of Earl crematory, which is now registered as the National Historic Landmark "Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium" in Oakwood cemetery. The crematory was set up by Washington's collar business partner William S. Earl in memorial of his son Gardner Earl who left a will wanting cremation after death. It was assumed that James Inglis improved cremation measures to reduce the waiting time for families, and the reception room was redecorated "gorgeously" with stone and paintings.¹³

The design of Wilson's mausoleum was not a very original one, and its archetype can be dated back to a former work done by Inglis in Oakwood Cemetery for the Simmons family. It was finished before 1902, included in the magazine *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening* (Figure 10). The same photo appearing on that book was also printed on the letter paper of Inglis as advertisement. In the gardening book it showed an idea that his mausoleum was not a fixed-size design but a flexible one. According to designer's marketing, "it can be changed to accommodate from three to six or even nine catacombs" and just "with little additional expense."¹⁴ The Wilsons likely had at least viewed the photo of Simmons Mausoleum and decided to purchase an eight-

¹² Wilson, Washington (Oak Hill: Lot 110, Section 10392-10397), 1903, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 4.3, Folder 26.

¹³ "The Jewel of Oakwood and a National Historic Landmark," Oakwood Cemetery Conservancy, accessed October 3, 2025,

<https://www.oakwoodcemetery.org/the-history-of-oakwood-cemetery> of Oakwood Cemetery

¹⁴ "The Simmons Mausoleum, Troy, N. Y," *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening* (1900-1931) 12, no. 3 (1902): 285.

person version. Introducing a design from Oakwood to Woodlawn, Washington could memorialize the invaluable business chance seized in Troy and rest forever in his hometown, the City of New York.

However, that is still not the end of the story. A decade after the completion of Wilson family mausoleum, a lady named Elizabeth Bastian chose the same architect in Woodlawn for her rest place as well¹⁵. We have known that Inglis' design was not originally intended for a single person, but there is only Elizabeth's name carved on the portico (Figure 11).

Therefore, three built examples of this Inglis' design have been known so far, the 1902 Oakwood one for Simmons, the 1903 one and 1914 one in Woodlawn for Wilson and Bastian respectively and its fortunate that all of them survived to our days. Comparing the three cases, we can impose how Inglis controlled and adjusted his design using modules in stone masonry. Each layer of the stone on elevation is the same height of one foot. Then the shorter face of every quoin is designed as a standard one-foot square. In terms of height, the foundations have just slight difference according to terrain factors and there are no significant variations of roof parts, so it is the height of body part that matters. In Wilson's case, we have known that the catacombs are placed on shelf-like spaces in two symmetrical wings on both sides, so this becomes the key factor of containing capacity in this series. Simmons is the shortest, with only 5 blocks of granite at the wings; Wilsons is the middle with 7 blocks and Bastian's is the tallest with 8 blocks. So, the Simmons may have three floors of combs on both wings. Because Bastian's have the highest staircases and floor plain, hers might have only 6 catacombs, as many as Simmons, but gains a higher visual impression. When it comes to material, Wilsons mausoleum used exactly all the same kinds of stone types mentioned in introduction of Simmons, but Bastian's building was simplified.

¹⁵ Bastian, Elizabeth (Pine: Lot 11415, Section 135), 1915, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 1.1, Folder 39.

All the Westerly red granite was removed from the façade and the two portico columns were replaced by the same Woodbury granite used on the main body.

In terms of building condition, Wilson's mausoleum is generally good, with almost no missing components or structural instability. But there are three main types of decay observed: gypsum decay, biological growth, and mild indoor efflorescent decay. Gypsum decay occupies the largest area on the rooftop. Because the roof is composed of several curved sections, the curve turning points make water to gathering, causing the gypsum to darken around, especially on north-facing roofs that don't get much sunlight to vapor the moisture. In the base part, the maple tree planted by the entrance has grown too large due to lack of pruning (Figure 1). The part that is blocked by the shrub canopy has more biological growth such as moss and lichen, forming a clear dividing line with the part not blocked by the canopy. The efflorescent effect inside the ceiling is mainly distributed in the corners, with the southwest corner being the most severe, forming white crystals about 1 square foot in size (Figure 12).

This interesting case of Washington Wilson's mausoleum may not be some sophisticated or highly remarkable one in New York's monument and cemetery design, but it does show the commercial thinking and creation of the monument architect during the 1900s and how an idea can move from a place to another, bonding a person's life path together.

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Figures



Figure 1: Yicheng Lin, *Front Elevation*, 2025.



Figure 2: Christopher D. Brazee, *135 Bowery Street*, 2011. (demolished)



Figure 3: Yicheng Lin, 676 Broadway (Now “RISENATION”), 2025.

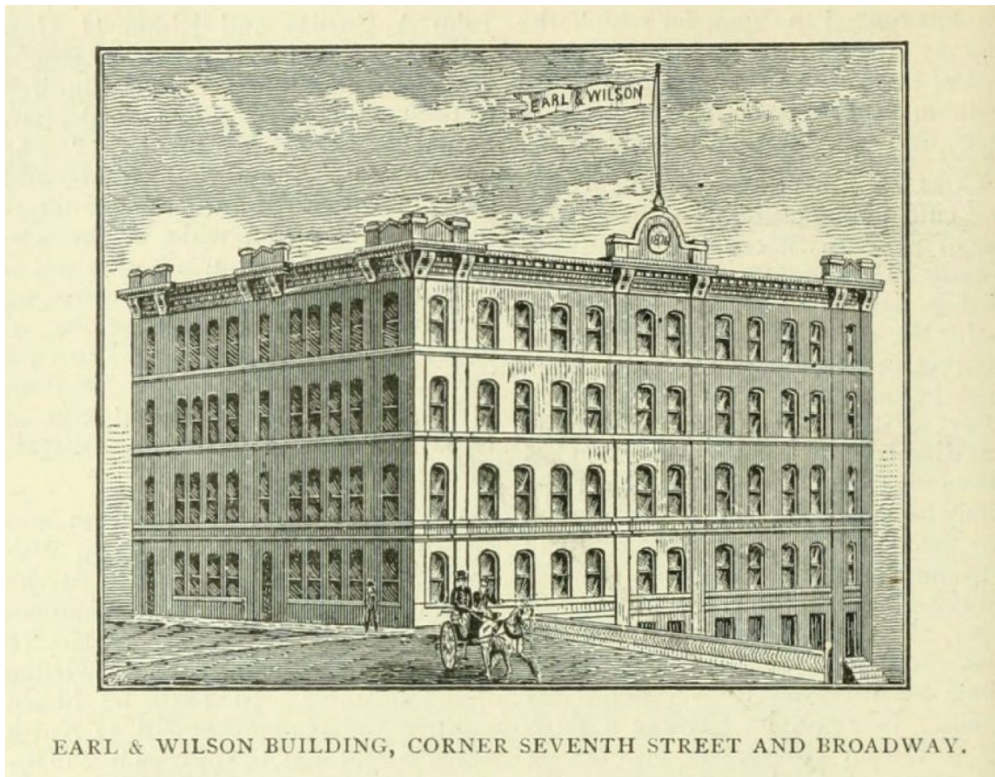


Figure 4: Weise, Arthur James. *Earl & Wilson Building*, Troy: Edward Green, 1886,78.



Figure 5: Woolley, Edward Mott, “Troy and Collars”, 1920., March issue *The Atlantic*.

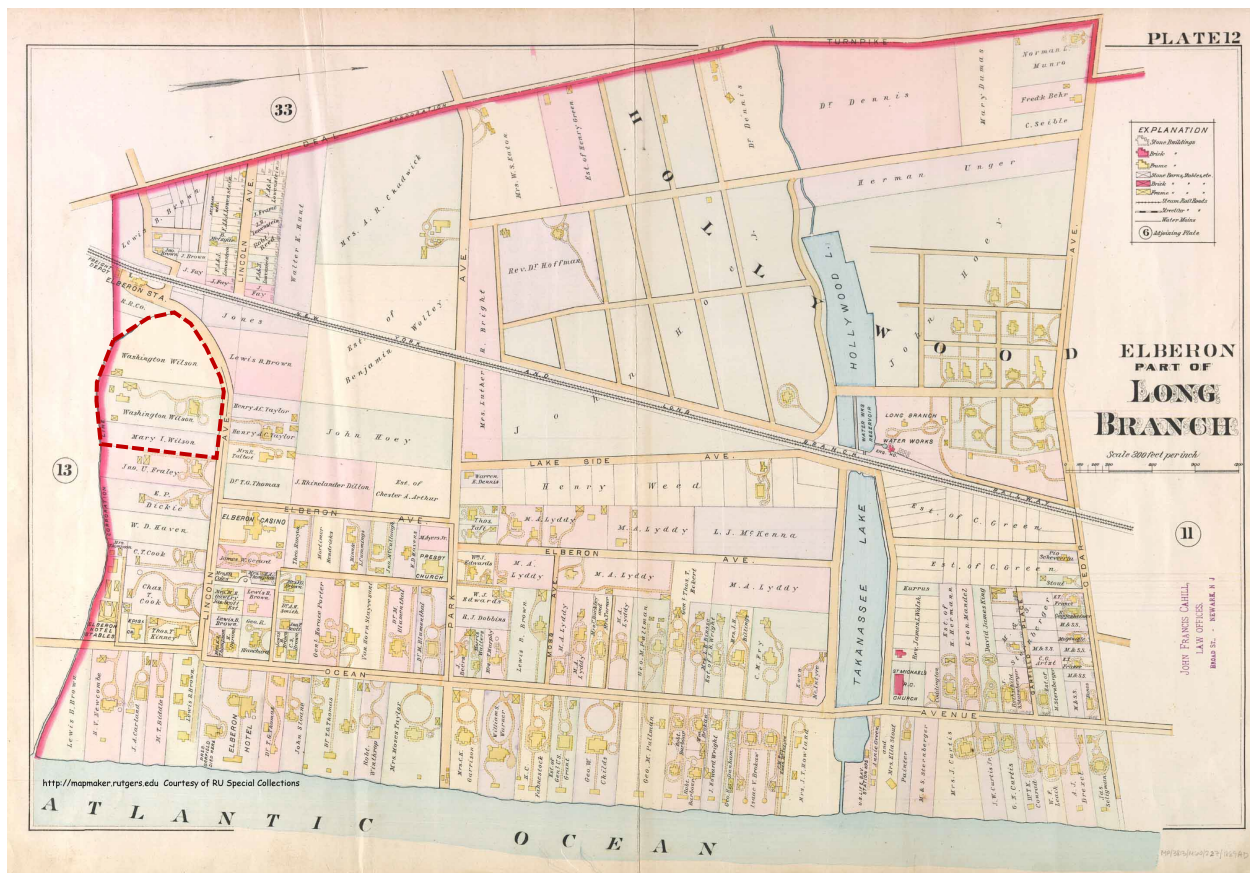


Figure 6: , John Francis Cahill, Law Offices, Broad St., *Long Branch map*, 1889, Part 12, Newark NJ. Digital Collection of Rutgers University Department of Geography.

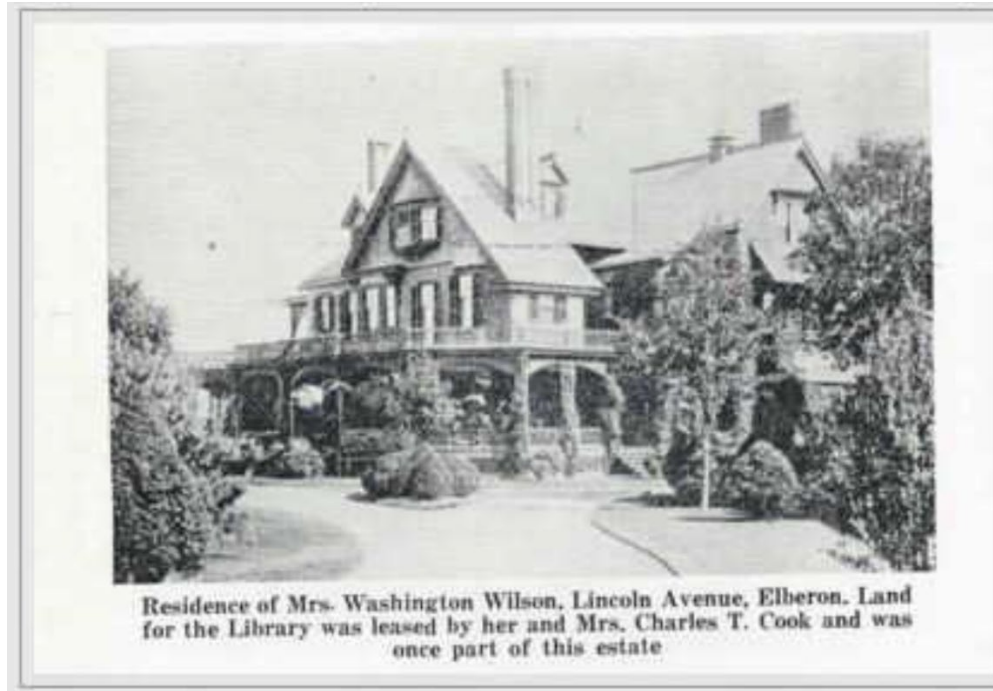


Figure 7: Ancestry Gallery, *Residence of Mrs. Washington Wilson, Lincoln Avenue.*

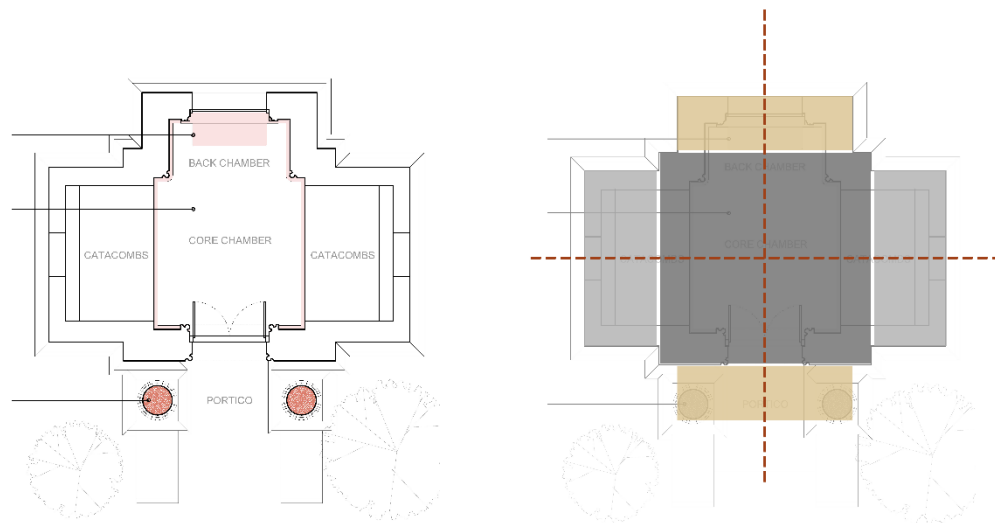


Figure 8: Yicheng Lin, *the Cross Structure of Wilsons mausoleum.*



Figure 9: Yicheng Lin, *Interior*, 2025.



Figure 10: “The Simmons Mausoleum, Troy, N. Y,” Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening (1900-1931) 12, no. 3 (1902): 285.



Figure 11: Yicheng Lin, *Elisabeth Bastian's mausoleum*, 2025.



Figure 12: Yicheng Lin, *Interior Efflorescent on the Corners*, 2025.