

Fei Teng
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Faculty: Françoise Bollack, Andrew Dolkart, Ward Dennis

Lancashire Mausoleum

Introduction

The Lancashire mausoleum this paper presents is located on Park Avenue in the Wintergreen Plot of Woodlawn Cemetery. The most distinctive feature of it is a strong contrast between a simple and compact design of mausoleum itself and a spacious and well-designed landscape. This paper examines five aspects of it, including biography of its owner, site analysis, façade design and materials, plan and section designs, and style.

Biography

James Henry Lancashire was born on August 22nd 1858, in Lanark, Ontario, Canada and raised in New York. He was educated at the public schools at Saratoga Springs, N.Y. and Stanton Institute, Schenectady, N.Y., and graduated in 1883 from the college of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. He practiced medicine for a year at Saratoga Springs, and became associated with A. W. Wright of Saginaw, Michigan in timber, railroads, banking, manufacturing, real estate and other interests. After Mr. Wright's death, Dr. Lancashire succeeded him as president of several of their companies. Dr. Lancashire had been a trustee of the United States Trust Company in New York City¹.

He married Sarah Henry Lancashire in 1883. They had five children, four daughters and one son. The only son, Ammi Wright Lancashire died in 1918 at a young age of 31 years old. He was

¹ "Dr. J.H. Lancashire Dies; Ex-Physician, Financier Head of Realty and Industrial Firms Passes in Florida." New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962), Mar 7, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

an ensign for US Army during World War I and died of flu in Philadelphia². The Lancashire mausoleum was built in 1920, shortly after the death of Mr. Lancashire's son, by the William D. Howe Company which was located at 527 Fifth Avenue in New York³.

Site Analysis

The mausoleum is located on Park Avenue, occupying a big lot in the Wintergreen Plot, with an east-facing front. It is set far back from the road edge, bearing a strong contrast to surrounding ones, the fronts of which follow the line of the road. The lot that Lancashires owned is nearly a seventy-six by ninety feet rectangular in plan, comprising a total area of more than five thousand square feet. The mausoleum occupies less than 10% of the land of the lot. Such siting of the mausoleum leaves quite a vast space between the façade and the avenue that the building sits along, which was originally covered by dense vegetation. This well-planned landscape can be better understood with knowledge of the background of its designer, Mary Rutherford Jay. She was one of America's earliest landscape architects. Jay liked to call herself a "garden architect." This preference clearly shows her love for horticulture.

According to the original design plan of the landscape, Jay filled the vast space of the lot with nine kinds of vegetation and placed them in a symmetrical way. To either side of the entry to the lot, irregularly shaped planting beds filled with azaleas and spirea were set. Then three layers of beds, consisting of rhododendron, ferns, and narcissus separately extended to either side of the mausoleum. Mugho pines were put circling four sides of the mausoleum, with two each at the front and rear façade and three each at the side facades. Behind the mausoleum Jay placed dogwoods and Douglas firs that would rise above the lower shrubs, which provides a background

² *U.S. Naval Deaths; World War I* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: <http://ancestrylibrary.com>.

³ Woodlawn Cemetery Archives. Columbia University.

to the mausoleum. In the periphery area of the lot, Jay used cornus serving as a foil to the major circle formed by the mausoleum and the planting beds mentioned above.

This landscape design has three functions. Firstly, it defines how the mausoleum should be viewed and approached. With rear and side façade almost invisible covered by planting, the dense planting provides a strongly frontal focus. With a relatively long way to go from road edge to the front door, the landscape design sets a mood for respect. Secondly, with vegetation surrounding three sides of the mausoleum, the landscape forms a natural protective screen that separates it from surrounding buildings. Lastly, this placing makes two adjacent bigger and more complex mausoleums look like its guardians.

Façade Design & Materials

The exterior of the mausoleum is symmetrical in composition and simple through the incorporation of only a few main elements such as door and steps. Decorations on the exterior are confined to the bronze door. The star-shaped patterns on the door reinforce the central focus of the mausoleum. The mortar lines evenly distributing at both sides of the door, further create a harmonious and balanced feeling. Other façade designs also show a strong sense of symmetry. From the façade design, it is natural for people to predict a similar symmetrical internal space. The roof is made of two large slabs of stone with slopes on either side. Together with vents, this design effectively kept out rain and gave good protection to this mausoleum since it has had no leaks over a long period of time.

The material used for the mausoleum is of good quality, an exterior of grey North Jay granite, a more decorative interior with ceiling and walls made of a delicate light-veined Italian marble and floor of coarse grained granite. This mausoleum, together with the lot, cost a large sum of

money. The total value of it is 52,119 USD in the early 20th century, which approximates around 621,039 USD today considering inflation⁴.

Plan & Section Designs

The form of the mausoleum is a relatively simple one, with a door centered in front flanked by catacombs and a stained-glass window centered at the back. The plan has a strong symmetry, with an axis starting at the main entrance and running straight through the building. The absolute presentation of symmetry can be often found in the geometry of the mausoleum. The walls of the mausoleum and the edges of plinth and the base create three layers of squares.

In the interior space, the catacombs are nearly identical in size and appearance and are placed on either side of the room. Among six of them, are deceased James H. Lancashire, his wife Sarah and their son Ammi respectively. As a compact space with a small number of elements in it, the burial chamber creates an intimate atmosphere. The back wall contains a stained glass window, composed of pointed-arch columns pattern. This Gothic style window has a different style from the whole mausoleum which is in a simplified Classicism. The reason for this is that it might be produced by other people or another company. Although without enough light, the major colors of pink and orange present a warm feeling. When light comes through the window, a sense of arms from the heaven hugging the space is created. Under it there is a small table, mainly for leaving flowers.

There is no social space in the mausoleum. It is hard for even two people to stand side by side in that small area. Presumably this design is only for occasional family members visits. Due to the thick layer of dust and many cobwebs inside, it turned out that the mausoleum has not been visited

⁴ Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Columbia University.

for a very long time. James's other daughters lived in Massachusetts, Washington and Italy separately. No family members lived in New York after the Lancashires' death is perhaps the major reason for the lack of visit.

Style

For the Lancashire Mausoleum, the Wm. D. Howe Company chose a simple design with pared-down allusions to Classicism. Compared with traditional Classical architecture, many classical components such as pediments, porticos and columns are missing here. Some other components are simplified. For instance, the pilasters are so shallow that whether they should be called formal pilasters deserve further discussion. However, the mausoleum does include some other classical elements such as a full entablature, star-shaped pattern and rosette decorations. In addition, some classical design rules can be clearly seen here. For example, symmetry is a very strong visual impression the mausoleum presents to visitors.

The Wm. D. Howe Company has two other mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery. One for Jane I. Ordway, built in 1924 and another for William H. Schmohl, built in 1946⁵. The former one is almost a bigger copy version of Lancashire mausoleum. A few alterations of the exterior design include Ionic shallow pilasters, a projecting cornice over the entrance and the dominant star-shaped pattern on the door. Built only four years later than the Lancashire mausoleum, it is highly possible that the Ordway mausoleum took cues from it. The latter one is basically a big tombstone with a group of gravestones in front of it. Judging from three works in Woodlawn Cemetery by Howe, simplicity is perhaps a preferred design style for this company.

Conclusion

⁵ Woodlawn Cemetery Archives. Columbia University.

The simplicity and clarity of form of the Lancashire mausoleum reflects a modern adaption of traditional classical form. In the era just before the architectural style of Classical modernism that prevailed in the United States, using a reduced classical form in a more modern way is a symptom of that trend. In this sense, it finds its place at a larger scale in a wider architectural background. In addition, it exhibits the materials and design that fulfilled the function of "mausoleum". At a smaller scale, the unique landscape design changed the traditional relationship of mausoleum and its lot which was mainly a building sitting on a monotonous lawn. For the Lancashire mausoleum, its landscape with well-placed vegetation practically decided how the building would be approached and viewed⁶.

Using classical elements in a simplified way but emphasizing symmetry and balance is a good demonstration of the characteristics of the mausoleum designers. Though the owner of the mausoleum is his wife, Mr. Lancashire must have been involved in the design since the mausoleum was built long before his death. As a physician and entrepreneur, it was highly possible that Dr. Lancashire preferred order and practicality. A concise but solemn design of the mausoleum as well as good quality of material satisfied his needs. The square-shaped appearance makes the mausoleum look like a cinerary urn. This compact design, though humble in some people's opinions, contribute a sense of security. At the same time, sufficient wealth allowed him to buy a large lot to incorporate more natural vegetation and create a wide private area for his family members. This harmonious combination of mausoleum and landscape design built an overall image of manmade structure reaching to the heavens from within the earthly vegetation.

⁶ Dolkart, Andrew. "Designing Woodlawn: Buildings and Landscapes," in the *Sylvan Cemetery Architecture, Art & Landscape*, 78. Edited by Charles D. Warren, Carole Ann Fabian and Janet Parks. New York: The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York The Woodlawn Conservancy, 2014.

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Façade of the Lancashire Mausoleum



Landscape



Landscape Designed by Mary Rutherford Jay

