

# **THE HOLLISTER MAUSOLEUM**

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Located on Prospect Avenue, the Hollister mausoleum is rather unremarkable at first glance. Likened overall structure, granite finishes, and front facade can unsurprisingly be found elsewhere in surrounding plots of the Woodlawn Cemetery. Although no formal records or commissions for the mausoleum are available, one can date the structure to be from around 1907.<sup>1</sup> It is only upon longer and more careful examination that one begins to witness the small elements of the mausoleum that keep its history alive: typical early 20<sup>th</sup> century stained glass patterns, a broken stool, a standalone marble plaque from Greenwood, delicate marble work by Bronx sculptor Peter Celi...<sup>2</sup> All of the small seemingly disjointed elements ultimately come together to create a coherent whole.

William H. Hollister, the third child of Frederick and Jane M. Hollister, commissioned the mausoleum to gather his family into a single burial space. Prior to Woodlawn, the members of the family rested in different spaces, although predominantly in Greenwood, Brooklyn. Today, the mausoleum hosts six people: William, his parents Frederick and Jane, as well as his three siblings Fannie, George, and Frederick A. The Hollister mausoleum is of much interest because it not only traces the story of its people, but it is also a broader tale of American industrialization and mobility. And so, much like one's initial encounter with the surface of the mausoleum, begins this layered discovery and narration of the history of the Hollister family in Woodlawn.

The earliest record featuring the six members together dates to the 1850 Census.<sup>3</sup> The family lived together at Utica Ward 1, Oneida, NY; near to where Frederick had established his multiple businesses. Frederick was a businessman and politician in Utica, Oneida County. An "adventurous merchant and manufacturer"<sup>4</sup> described as having had a "somewhat remarkable career,"<sup>5</sup> he was well known locally with a story that in part epitomizes the industrial spirit of 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Frederick greatly branched out with his undertakings. Most famously, he owned Clayville Mills as well as Washington Mills that he

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the earliest correspondence between William H. Hollister and the Woodlawn Cemetery. Those records indicate that the structure was already completed by then, but interior marble work was still in progress. In Box LOC 069, "Series IV: Lot Owners Correspondence", Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

<sup>2</sup> Comfort, Randall, Charles David Steurer, and Charles A. D Meyerhoff. History of Bronx borough, city of New York. New York, North-side news press, 1906. Image.

<sup>3</sup> "Frederick Hollister", 1850 United States Federal Census.

<sup>4</sup> Oneida Historical Society at Utica, and Utica Half Century Club. Semi-centennial of the city of Utica, March 1st, and first annual supper of the Half century club, March 2d. Utica, N.Y., Curtiss & Childs, printers; 1882.

<sup>5</sup> Wager, Daniel E. editor. Our county and its people; a descriptive work on Oneida County, New York. [Boston: The Boston History Co, 1896] p.371

purchased from Isaac Mason in 1840.<sup>6</sup> As an example of his prominence, it is said that the Checkered Drug Store he owned inspired the popular way people referred to his mills as "Checkersville".<sup>7</sup> One statistics report from 1845 further supported his local status by asserting that beyond the industrial area, his factories were "well known in the New-York city market."<sup>8</sup> Beyond manufacturing, Frederick also did a lot of investments such as the Bridgewater plank road, and is said to have "for a time held a controlling amount of stock."<sup>9</sup> Outside of business, Frederick was a committed member of the Whig party and served as mayor of Utica from 1843 to 1844.<sup>10</sup> Although he did not stay long, he was remembered fondly by his peers even after he passed.<sup>11</sup> His involvement in the Whig party went beyond the local scene, as he was sent as one of the New York State delegates to the Whig National Convention at Baltimore in 1844.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of such varied ventures, poor investments and several incidents in the factories (fire in 1844, flood in 1850) gravely impacted his businesses.<sup>13</sup> He filed for bankruptcy in 1851 with liabilities estimated to amount to \$1,800,000.<sup>14</sup> Although records state that he then moved to New York City, his address remained in Utica until his death. Despite their father's failed ventures, the Hollister children appear to have been fortunate with the rest of their endeavors. Although little information can be found on Frederick and Fannie, we know that George Stanton was a colonel in the Army, and that William was a successful banker at Kountze Brothers in New York and was oftentimes referenced in newspapers.

William was nonetheless the most prominent of the Hollister children as a result of his career and longer lifespan. As the only offspring still alive in 1888, William had previously inherited all assets from his mother Jane as per stated in her will,<sup>15</sup> and it seems quite apparent that he had reached a comfortable standard of living at the turn of the century.

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<sup>6</sup> Wager, Daniel E, editor. *Our county and its people; a descriptive work on Oneida County, New York.* [Boston The Boston History Co, 1896] p.488.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Statistics of the woollen manufactories in the United States.* New York, W. H. Graham, 1845. p74.

<sup>9</sup> Hough, Franklin B, and Joseph Meredith Toner Collection. *A history of Lewis County, in the state of New York: from the beginning of its settlement to the present time.* Albany: Munsell & Rowland, 1860.

<sup>10</sup> *New-York daily tribune.* (New York, NY), Mar. 2, 1844.

<sup>11</sup> Oneida Historical Society at Utica, and Utica Half Century Club. *Semi-centennial of the city of Utica, March 1st, and first annual supper of the Half century club, March 2d.* Utica, N.Y., Curtiss & Childs, printers, 1882.

<sup>12</sup> *The New York herald.* (New York, NY), May. 3 1844.

<sup>13</sup> *New-York daily tribune.* (New York, NY), Oct. 29, 1850.

*The New York herald.* (New York, NY), Nov. 21, 1844.

<sup>14</sup> Wager, Daniel E, editor. *Our county and its people; a descriptive work on Oneida County, New York.* [Boston The Boston History Co, 1896] p.371.

<sup>15</sup> "New York, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999". 216.

William lived with his family on 8 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street in midtown Manhattan.<sup>16</sup> 8 West 43<sup>rd</sup> Street was located nearby the eminent Hotel Renaissance on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where notable people such as William Rutherford Mead once resided. With this information alone, we can thus infer in part his socio-economic standing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is more, the content of his will was the topic of an article in the New York Herald whose self-explaining title "Fortune for Army Officer" further attests to William's standing.<sup>17</sup>

But despite his status, very little information about his private life can be discovered through research. A New York Tribune article from 1904 referencing an unfortunate carriage accident involving him and his wife (not mentioned by name) is one of the rare written records shedding some light on his family life. William and his wife had one daughter, named Florence Ange, who married Dr. Joseph William Carr in 1900 and assumedly moved out from the family home then.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, neither of them appears in his will updated in 1907. One can assume that his wife had died shortly before while the story of the daughter remains a mystery. One should also note that William updated his will around the same time as he purchased the lot at Woodlawn, which might indicate a form of sudden awareness of death, perhaps caused by a recent loss.

William's will is perhaps the most insightful document for both for the information it provides regarding his assets, as well as his endeavor at Woodlawn.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the document surprisingly contains direct references to the Cemetery in its very first paragraphs. The first part of the will reads as follows:

"First: I hereby give and bequeath unto the Trustees of Woodlawn Cemetery of the City of New York the sum of two thousand dollars, to be held by them and their successors in trust, **forever, to invest and reinvest the same in their discretion and to apply the income thereof to the preservation of the tomb and to the care and improvement of the lot** located in said Cemetery at Woodlawn, New York City, and now owned by me.

Second: I give devise and bequeath the aforesaid lot now owned by me, and the tomb erected thereon, to the said Woodlawn Cemetery, **on trust to be preserved forever by it as a place of burial and tomb** for the remains of those deposited therein during my life and after my death for **others of my family until all the vaults in the said tomb are so occupied or disposed of.**<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Horses Fell Woman: Banker's Wife Applies Restoratives to Her in Saloon." New - York Tribune (1900-1910), Jul 30, 1904.

<sup>17</sup> The New York Herald. (New York, NY), Jan. 7, 1912.

<sup>18</sup> "Marriage Announcement 1 -- no Title." New - York Tribune (1900-1910), Oct 05, 1900.

<sup>19</sup> "New York, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999". 47-49.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Several points should be noted here. First, William was always concerned with the preservation of the mausoleum, which echoes the content of his correspondences with the Cemetery around the same time.<sup>21</sup> One of his main concerns, for example, was the landscaping of the mausoleum's immediate surrounding which damaged its facades from the very beginning. In order to ensure the survival of both the structure and the Hollister name, he endowed Woodlawn with the mausoleum, hoping that it would guarantee its everlasting care. It is fascinating to read this document from 1907 alongside the correspondences more than a century later, as the main visible forms of deterioration in the present day are the same as the ones William feared in 1907. Second, the notion of continuity through preservation also mirrors his attachment to family and explains why he gathered his family members into a singular mausoleum shortly before his own death. It is rather interesting to see that his wish of bringing in more family members after his death never came true. William was the last person to be buried in the Woodlawn mausoleum, and despite there being two empty slots to this day, they have never been occupied. This raises the question of why no affiliated family members came to this mausoleum when it seems to have been the original design.

Although the Hollister legacy did not prosper through this Mausoleum as William had hoped, it nonetheless tells a fascinating tale of family love and individual achievements. There is much that is yet to be uncovered, and it is my hope that this research can spur further inquisition into the records of William's family members prior to being moved to Woodlawn. The Greenwood archives may be a fruitful starting point which may contain more contextual information surrounding the erection of the Woodlawn Hollister mausoleum.

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<sup>21</sup> Box LOC 069, "Series IV: Lot Owners' Correspondence", Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

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