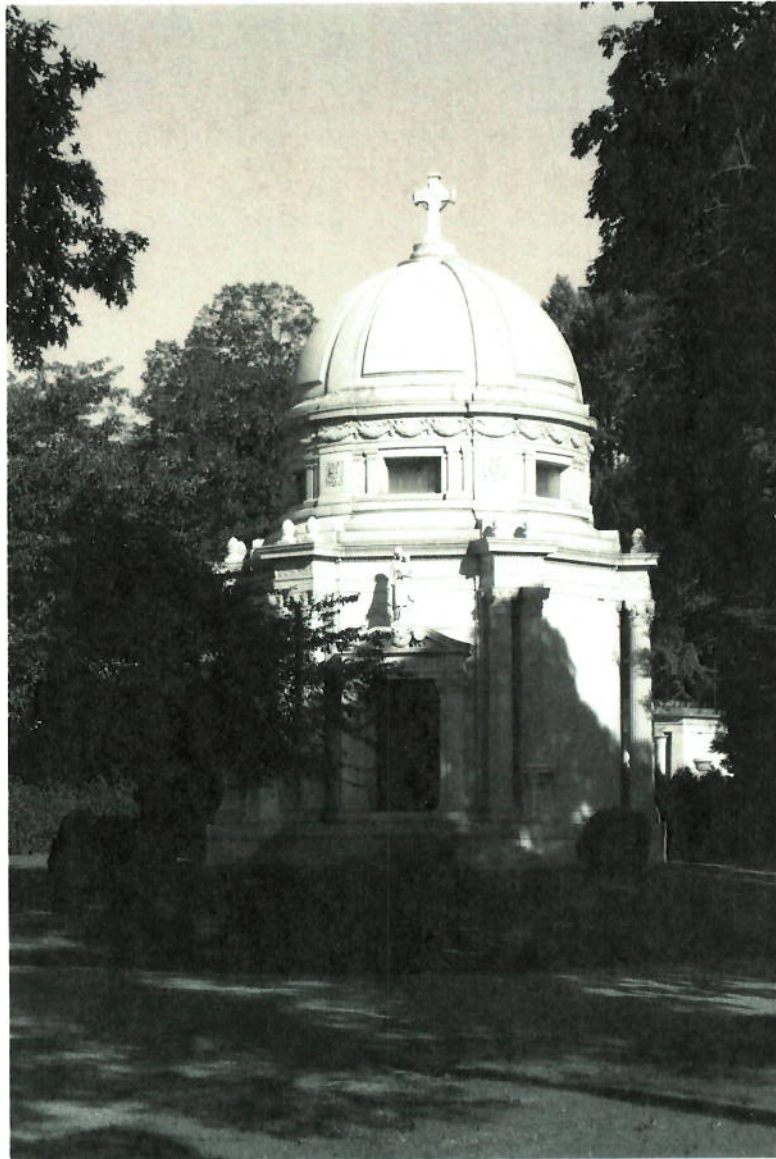


Maria de la Torre
HP Studio – Reading buildings, Fall 2014
Professors Erica Avrami – Françoise Bollack – Andrew Dolkart
Problem 3: Field Documentation
Nov. 6, 2014

MANGER MAUSOLEUM
WOODLAWN CEMETERY



The Manger Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery was originally commissioned by Domenico Dumbra in 1927. It was designed by architect Franklyn Naylor, who specialized in mortuary architecture and was well learned in the classical styles.

Mr. Dumbra (1883 – 1967) was an Italian immigrant who arrived in New York in 1904 and made a great fortune with a bootlegging business in Queens. By the early 1930's, however, he was having financial difficulties, due most probably to the end of Prohibition and the rise of the Depression. Evidence of this is the correspondence between himself and the Cemetery. In one of his letters dated March 27, 1933 he states "I have not been able to settle the above account because of the difficulties I have had and which you will understand"¹, referring to "special care" bills of his mausoleum. These letters continued until 1934, when Woodlawn canceled the care of his lot and mausoleum "as there [were] several outstanding accounts for work done during the year 1932, 1933, as well as for work done this [1934] year"². Mr. Dumbra returned to Italy where he died in 1967. His family remained in the United States, but decided not to keep the property in Woodlawn.

The mausoleum was bought by Julius Manger in 1935, probably through the cemetery. Mr. Manger was an attorney from Missouri who had made an immense fortune in the real estate business. He owned a great number of prominent hotels in New York, Boston, Chicago and Washington, DC and had his place in the highest spheres of New York social life. He died in 1937 and is buried in this mausoleum with his wife, three of his children, and his son in law.

This mausoleum stands as a symbol of power and a statement of status, first for a Catholic Italian immigrant showing his accomplishments in America, and then for an affluent Protestant family renowned in New York high society. Its location within Woodlawn, the way it is approached, its size and materials, its highly adorned facades, and its imposing interior are all features that embody wealth and elegance.

The mausoleum is located near the Jerome Avenue entrance to Woodlawn, one of the main entrances by the time the mausoleum was constructed. It is meant to be seen from afar. Its impressive height (55 feet) and its bright white granite exterior make it stand out, contrasting with the deep green vegetation around it. Moreover, its radial symmetry implies you are never looking at its back when seen from a distance. The overall image is of a bright, massive, manmade structure reaching to the heavens from within the earthly foliage of the trees.

The original landscape plan emphasized in its design this contrast between the order of a manmade classical structure and the chaos of nature. The front of the plot was scarcely planted with two symmetrical shrubs leading to the entrance through the lawn, and two boxwoods, which

¹ Letter from Mr Dumbra to Woodlawn Cemetery, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Library, Columbia University, March 27, 1933

² Letter from Woodlawn Cemetery to Mr Dumbra, Woodlawn Archive, Columbia University, June 29, 1934

are still in place, flanked the mausoleum near its entrance. The back of the plot, in contrast, was densely planted with no apparent order, in part separating it from the plot behind, but also creating a dramatic background for this monumental building.

The building is modeled in a Baroque Revival style, and can be compared to various domed structures in Europe. The dome topping St. Peter's in the Vatican, Les Invalides chapel in France, and the Basilica di Superga in Italy are examples that stand out. This mausoleum was inspired by the most prominent feature of these structures: the dome. It stands alone as if one of the domes of these structures was separated from the main body of the church, and set to rest on the ground independently.



It is noticeable that these are all Catholic buildings, as is the overall appearance of the Manger Mausoleum, further revealing the origin of its first owner. A pamphlet, written by Franklyn Naylor and published by Woodlawn Cemetery, deals with the change of ownership of this mausoleum. It strongly focuses on stripping its catholic symbols of their meaning, symbolically handing it over to the Protestant Manger family. He writes:

...taking into account the statue, angel faces and the cross, one would judge the design as one of Catholic origin, but such is not the case; for while the figure holding the babe might be taken for a Madonna, or, in other words, the Virgin Mary, it was modeled principally to portray a mother and her precious offspring, the deepest illustration of love, its actual purport.³

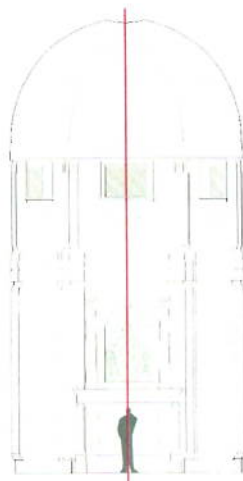
In a way, this pamphlet is a means of sanitizing the structure. It erases all traces of an immigrant family with doubtful reputation and delivers it to the *very elegant* Manger family.

³ Naylor, Franklyn, Manger Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery.

The building has a hexagonal plan whose radial symmetry is broken by its monumental entrance. A majestic staircase of 7 steps rises to a projecting platform where two “ornamental antipodes” (as called by the architect) flank the entrance portico. The portico itself has a swan’s-neck pediment, in the middle of which the statue of a “mother and her precious offspring” stand. The verticality of the building is emphasized by the alignment of this statue and the cross on top of the dome, an axis that projects the mausoleum up to the sky, symbolic of the connection of the mundane with the divine, the Axis Mundi.

The building is entered through a cast bronze door depicting two women in the woods. This image again contrasts with the order of the classical elements on the building. It is the only element in the exterior which is not white or symmetrical, and stands out as an integration of organic forms and geometric figures, of chaos and order, of the earthly and the divine.

Inside, the room also has a hexagonal plan beneath a 40 foot high dome. The catacombs are embedded in the walls of the building, almost imperceptible, leaving the center space free for the visitor to occupy while leading him towards the vertical axis centered in the building. It is the space that is the protagonist: The line of windows crowning the dome lead the visitor’s gaze towards the heavens; for the dome, as described by the architect, “is the nearest that man can devise and fashion a roof resembling the firmament: men ever-mindful thought of heaven and of which it is the symbol.”⁴⁴ The symmetry inside is broken by a Tiffany stained-glass window opposite the entrance, and under which Julius Manger and his wife are buried. The visitor is meant to be standing in the center of the imposing vertical space, this Axis Mundi, his gaze directed towards the owners’ tombs, as if praying to them.



⁴⁴Alfred Franklin, *Mary and Max Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery*.

Overall the mausoleum is an imposing structure stating the earthly power of the two families who have owned it. Although both of very different origins, both wanted to be noticed. The structure chosen for this is that of a monumental appearance based on symbols which connect the realm of the living with that of the dead, the spiritual and the mundane.