

The Robinson-Oldenbusch Mausoleum

Woodlawn Cemetery



Thomas B. Rice

Historic Preservation Studio I

10/1/19

The Robinson-Oldenbusch Mausoleum is located in the Aster lot, in the northwest corner of Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, New York. It is set back 20' south of the North Border Ave, with a four-foot-wide granite walkway leading from the mausoleum to the road. This location is at the periphery of the cemetery, as East 233rd Street runs along the exterior of the perimeter, and is visible from the plot. In 1911, a vehicular entrance to the cemetery was constructed approximately 300' to the west on North Border Ave, but this space has now been converted into the Lotus Mausoleum. This entrance would have provided easy access to the mausoleum, and it is now harder to reach within the cemetery than it was for most of its history. The Mausoleum is surrounded on all sides by single graves, although there are other mausoleums in the general vicinity. The ground around the mausoleum is relatively level. There is a large chestnut tree next to the North Border Ave, which provides significant shade to the lot. The siting and size of the tree create a distinct darkened area and gives the mausoleum a cooler, mysterious appearance.

The mausoleum itself is approximately 12'6" tall, with base dimensions of 17' by 12'11". It is constructed of large rough-hewn granite blocks, and the walls are battered. There are four primary horizontal courses of the granite, all more than 30" high. The roof is one slab of granite consisting of a smaller sixth course, followed by two setbacks (Fig. 13). It is carved with ridges at each corner terminating at a point in the center. The granite blocks have tooled margins, which simulate a 1-3/4" gap between the slabs of granite, while the actual mortar joints are much thinner. There is a Gothic pointed-arch door that is 7' tall and 4' wide at its base. There are Gothic pointed-arch stained-glass windows on the east and west sides of the mausoleum, 30" tall and 20" wide. The door, window frames, and window grilles are all bronze.ⁱ Above the door, the fourth course of granite is engraved with the Oldenbusch name, and an elaborate Egyptian motif: the winged globe.ⁱⁱ There are snakes on either side of the globe known as uroei.ⁱⁱⁱ This symbol is widespread in Egyptian art, symbolizing power and the afterlife and can be found on many other

mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery. Use of the Egyptian style is well documented in the mid 19th century, with increased enthusiasm after Cleopatra's Needle arrived in Central Park in 1881.^{iv}

The style of the Robinson-Oldenbusch Mausoleum is eclectic because it is Egyptian, but contains a door and the two windows with distinctly Gothic arches. One of the mausoleum's most distinguishing features its use of four granite feet at its base (Fig. 5a). The feet protrude 27" from the sides of the east and west façades, from 32" to the ground. When viewed from North Border Avenue, they are a part of the north façade and South facades. The feet descend in a 's' shaped curve to the ground, and their thickness is tapered, matching the taper of all other courses of granite (Figs. 2-5). They are rough on the sides, matching the other courses of granite, but smooth on the top, which matches the smooth surface of the roof slab. The feet could be interpreted like the feet of a sphinx, in keeping with the Egyptian theme. The interior space measures 5'2" from the door to the catacombs, which abut the south wall, and 8'10" across. It is entirely clad in polished white veined marble, which is the only available specification.^v The floor is a granite slab. The two stained-glass windows depict the same simple scene of water lilies and fish. The fish are red and yellow, and there is an abundance of green surrounding them. Their appearance is calming, and they symbolize peace. They were to be selected by the Robinsons from a selection of drawings furnished by the contractor.^{vi} Due to the placement of the catacombs, the windows are not centered within the interior space as they are on the exterior (Fig. 8-10). The smooth finish and plumb walls the interior stand in contrast to the battered, rusticated exterior, creating a structure with two very different aesthetics inside and out.

This structure was originally known as the Robinson Mausoleum, as it was commissioned by Carmela P. Robinson, probably for her husband, John K. Robinson, who died in 1917. It was designed by Joseph E. Mosel, and the plans were approved by the cemetery on May 17, 1916, before Mr. Robinson's death.^{vii} The current location of the plans is unknown. The

foundation order from the Adler's Monument Company dates to June 5, 1918, while the walkway was built on January 24, 1919, both after Mr. Robinson's death.^{viii}

The designer, Joseph E. Mosel's work address was 527 East 233rd Street, which is across the street from the entrance to the cemetery.^{ix} Because of these details, it is likely that Mosel worked for Adler's Monument Company. Adler's Monument and Granite Works had an office on East 57th Street in Manhattan, and was the firm that the famous Piccirilli brothers began working for when they first arrived in New York.^{xxi} The company is listed as the designer of many monuments in Woodlawn Cemetery, while Joseph E. Mosel is listed as having designed three.^{xii} Mr. Mosel was born in the U.S. in 1888. He lived in Yonkers, NY, and had a high school education.^{xiii} In the 1910 Census, he worked as a draughtsman or draftsman in the statuary industry, while in 1920, he was employed by the "Dealer" Monument Company.^{xivxv} There are no other references to this entity in the Woodlawn Cemetery Records, so it is possible that this is a transcription error, and it is supposed to read "Adler." In 1921, he was associated with the Woodlawn Memorial Company.^{xvi} Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services of Woodlawn Cemetery, notes that monument companies would often merge or reorganize in different situations, as Mr. Mosel's work history shows. By the 1940 Census, Mosel worked as a controller tester of an elevator works.^{xvii} This change of career may have been a result of the Depression decreasing the market for mausoleum construction.

The Robinson family used the mausoleum for approximately 17 years. Two family members were interred in the mausoleum: John K. Robinson, who died on September 7, 1917 at age 51, and Carmela B. Robinson, his daughter, who died May 29, 1906 at one day old.^{xviii} J. K. Robinson, LTD. was an Import/Export Business with offices on Pearl Street in Lower Manhattan and in Iquique, Chile.^{xix} Mr. Robinson was likely a Freemason, because the mausoleum instructions indicate that it was to have a Masonic emblem over the doorway.^{xx} There is no evidence of the carving on the mausoleum today. John K. Robinson's wife, Carmela P. Robinson

remarried in 1918 to William Henry Vosholl. W.H. Vosholl worked at the J.K. Robinson firm, and corresponded with the cemetery from Chile throughout the 1920s, and from Maine in the early 1930s.^{xxi} Much of the correspondence was related to bills for cleaning of the mausoleum.^{xxii} In 1932, Vosholl wrote a letter to Woodlawn Cemetery inquiring about the sale of the mausoleum. He asked about the price of “a nice but inexpensive lot to which the two bodies in the mausoleum could be transferred.”^{xxiii} Mr. Vosholl would have had no connection to his wife’s former husband and infant daughter, and he may have viewed the half empty mausoleum as financially imprudent. The bodies were moved to simple graves in the Alpine Hill plot on January 21, 1935.^{xxiv}

The Oldenbusch family probably purchased the mausoleum in 1936, after the removal of the Robinson bodies, although there are no records of their correspondence with the cemetery. There are three Oldenbusch family members interred in the mausoleum: Emily Oldenbusch, and her parents Ernest Oldenbusch and Katie Oldenbusch. Emily Oldenbusch was born November 15, 1885, and died January 5, 1936, at age 52. Her brother Ernest Oldenbusch Jr. of Rockville, Long Island, and sister Caroline Oldenbusch of Brooklyn, served as executors of her estate.^{xxv} Because she predeceased her parents, it is reasonable to assume that her death was hard for the family. The bench in the northeast corner of the lot was installed on April 1, 1936, and probably provided the family a place to mourn.^{xxvi} Emily Oldenbusch’s death may have been the impetus for her parents purchasing the mausoleum.

Ernest Oldenbusch was born November 29, 1856 in Germany, and died February 28, 1942.^{xxvii} He was president of the Kronheimer and Oldenbusch Company of Brooklyn, also known as the K. and O. Company, Inc. The business was a novelty manufacturer, which produced a wide variety of metal trinkets and household wares (Kronheimer and Oldenbusch Company wares are currently available on internet auction platforms, including items ranging from little brass stage coach ash trays to silver-plated cups and bronze bookends). In 1902,

Ernest Oldenbusch became a director of the newly incorporated Oldenbusch Metal Spinning Machine Company, which had \$100,000 in capital.^{xxviii} He retired in 1932, after 40 years as the president of his company.^{xxix} Oldenbusch sold his five story factory building at 366 Butler Street, Brooklyn, NY in 1942, when it was valued at \$71,000.^{xxx} The property has since been demolished and new rowhouses have been built in its place. Katie Oldenbusch, also known as Mrs. Ernest Zierau Oldenbusch was born July 29, 1862, and died February 17, 1949, while still living at the family home of 72 Marlborough Road in Brooklyn. She was survived by her son Ernest Jr. and daughter Caroline.^{xxxi} In summary, Ernest Oldenbusch appears to have been very industrious, and the money to buy this Mausoleum likely came from his company.

The visible exterior materials in the Robinson-Oldenbusch Mausoleum include the structural granite, the mortar, and the bronze fixtures and glass window and glass door panes. The architect, Joseph Mosel specified machine cut Mt. Airy Granite from North Carolina (Fig. 14), which was to be “sound and free from seams all exterior surface.”^{xxxii} He appears to have added this requirement in pen over the original typewritten orders, illustrating the importance the appearance of the granite blocks. The instructions have been followed, as the granite does not have any visible seams. Mosel also specified that the joints between the courses of granite be white Portland Cement from the Atlas Portland Cement Company, between 1/8 and 1/4” thick.^{xxxiii}

The current condition of the mausoleum is worthy of further examination. In the joints, there is some evidence of minor damage. In multiple locations on the exterior, the pointing mortar is loose or missing (Figure 16). There is also some moss growing on the south façade (Fig. 17), likely because the location is well shaded, leading to a retention of moisture. In correspondence between the cemetery and the Robinsons, the Superintendent of the Cemetery mentions some joints needing repointing in 1935, but there is no follow up in the available documents.^{xxxiv} A close inspection of two small pieces of loose mortar shows significantly different colors of the mortar aggregate, indicating that there likely have been repairs with a

different mortar mix after the initial construction (Fig 20-21). The top bronze vent grille on the East façade is loose, and could potentially fall into or out of the mausoleum. It was originally secured with mortar, but the mortar is no longer holding the vent in place. The bronze doors have evidence of uneven corrosion. There is no documentation of artificial patina being applied to the doors, but their current condition affects their aesthetic appearance (Fig. 1). The stained-glass windows were constructed with a protective plate of glass outside of the leaded glass windows. The protective glass on the west window has been broken with a 2" hole at the top and cracking extending down the pane (Fig. 15). At present time, this damage does not extend to the interior stained-glass window. In changing from one family to another, the Mausoleum the mausoleum was adapted. The Robinson name on the north façade was originally raised out of a rectangle cut to a depth of 3/8", but the whole section was cut deeper to allow the raised Oldenbusch name to be carved in (Fig. 18).^{xxxv}

As found, the interior marble is 2-7/8" thick, mounted to the interior surface of the granite. There are no visible cracks in the marble segments, but there are some signs of moisture penetration into the interior (Fig. 10). The marble segments surrounding the west window are no longer plumb with the rest of the marble cladding, having settled up to 3/4". This movement has widened some of the joints on top of the window (Fig. 11-12). The reason for this is likely through water damage as a result of humidity rather than through leaks, because the roof and exterior masonry is all largely intact. Still, it is of concern, and damage may be more pervasive than is what is visible on the outside. The marble segments of the ceiling are also slightly out of plumb, which may or may not be related. A full analysis of the water damage would require removal of these marble segments. The granite floor has some deterioration in its center, where the surface is pitted and rough. This is possibly the result of some salt or chemical accidentally applied to the surface (Fig. 13). The interiors of the catacombs are specified to be of

Pennsylvania slate, but this condition is unverifiable.^{xxxvi} There are no signs of damage or movement on the marble facing of the catacombs (Fig. 9).

Overall, the Oldenbusch Mausoleum is an interesting example of an early 20th-century memorial at Woodlawn Cemetery. It was designed by Memorialists, like the majority of the monuments in the cemetery, but both its architectural emphases and ownership history are unusual. The Egyptian style paired with Gothic elements and the rare addition of feet, combined with the internments of two different families make this monument an interesting find.

ⁱ Specification Document, 2, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

ⁱⁱ Elizabeth Browman. 2001. "Egyptian Revival Funerary Art in Green-Wood Cemetery." *Markers* 18: 54.

ⁱⁱⁱ Broman, Elizabeth. 2001. "Egyptian Revival Funerary Art in Green-Wood Cemetery." *Markers* 18: 55.

^{iv} Broman, Elizabeth. 2001. "Egyptian Revival Funerary Art in Green-Wood Cemetery." *Markers* 18: 58.

^v Specification Document, 1, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

^{vi} Specification Document, 3, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

^{vii} May 17, 1916 cemetery approval letter, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

^{viii} Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services, Woodlawn Cemetery, email, 2019.

^{ix} May 17, 1916 cemetery approval letter, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

^x Directory of Directors Company, *Directory of Directors in the City of New York*, New York, 1913, page 5.

^{xi} "The Italian Influence at The Woodlawn Cemetery," Woodlawn Cemetery, October 12, 2016,

<https://www.thewoodlawncemetery.org/italian-influence-woodlawn-cemetery/>.

^{xii} Major Monuments Spreadsheet, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

^{xiii} 1920 United States Census, Yonkers Ward 8, Westchester County, New York, Roll: T625_1281; Page: 17A; Enumeration District: 256, Joseph E Mosel," *Ancestry.com*.

^{xiv} 1910 United States Census, Yonkers Ward 1, Westchester County, New York, Roll: T624_1092; Page: 10A; Enumeration District: 0141; FHL microfilm: 1375105, "Joseph Mosel," *Ancestry.com*.

^{xv} 1920 United States Census, Yonkers Ward 8, Westchester County, New York, Roll: T625_1281; Page: 17A; Enumeration District: 256, Joseph E Mosel," *Ancestry.com*.

^{xvi} "Business Troubles: Petitions in Bankruptcy." *New - York Tribune (1911-1922)*, Sep 03, 1921.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/576466146?accountid=10226>.

^{xvii} 1940 United States Census, Yonkers, Westchester County, New York, Roll: *m-t0627-02867*; Page: 44; Enumeration District: 68-131A, "Joseph E Mosel," *Ancestry.com*.

^{xviii} Identification card, Lot No. 14095, Aster Plot, Woodlawn Cemetery

^{xix} June 19, 1920 letter from W.H. Vosholl to Woodlawn Cemetery, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

-
- ^{xx} Specification Document, 1, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Drawings and Archives, Woodlawn Cemetery, Major Monuments, Box 15
- ^{xxi} W. H. Vosholl letters 1920-1931, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxii} W. H. Vosholl letters 1920-1931, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxiii} January 4, 1932 letter from W.H. Vosholl to Woodlawn Cemetery, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxiv} Removal Order card, No. 95078, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives.
- ^{xxv} "Wills for Probate." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 19, 1936.
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/101984202?accountid=10226>.
- ^{xxvi} Olsen, Susan, Director of Historical Services, Woodlawn Cemetery, email, 2019.
- ^{xxvii} "Ernest Oldenbusch." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Mar 02, 1942.
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1267774495?accountid=10226>.
- ^{xxviii} "Stock Quote 14 -- no Title." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Mar 03, 1906.
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/96587965?accountid=10226>.
- ^{xxix} "Ernest Oldenbusch." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Mar 02, 1942.
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1267774495?accountid=10226>.
- ^{xxx} "Five-Story Building in Brooklyn Trades: Metal Products Concern Buys Butler St. Property." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 04, 1942. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/106371762?accountid=10226>.
- ^{xxxi} "The Rev. Mother Ste. Firmin." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Feb 19, 1949.
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1327124699?accountid=10226>.
- ^{xxxii} Specification Document, 1, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxxiii} Specification Document, 2, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxxiv} April 29, 1935 letter from Woodlawn Cemetery to Mr. A. F. Swain, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxxv} Specification Document, Page 1, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.
- ^{xxxvi} Specification Document, 1, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Bibliography:

Letter from Woodlawn Cemetery to Mr. A. F. Swain, April 29, 1935, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Audit Company of New York, Directory of Directors in the City of New York, New York, 1913, page 5.

Broman, Elizabeth. 2001. "Egyptian Revival Funerary Art in Green-Wood Cemetery." *Markers*, 18: 30.

"Business Troubles: Petitions in Bankruptcy." *New - York Tribune (1911-1922)*, Sep 03, 1921.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/576466146?accountid=10226>.

Cemetery approval letter, May 17, 1916, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

"Ernest Oldenbusch." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Mar 02, 1942.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1267774495?accountid=10226>.

"Five-Story Building in Brooklyn Trades: Metal Products Concern Buys Butler St. Property." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 04, 1942.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/106371762?accountid=10226>.

Major Monuments Spreadsheet, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Identification card, Lot No. 14095, Aster Plot, Woodlawn Cemetery

Olsen, Susan, Director of Historical Services, Woodlawn Cemetery, email, 2019.

Removal Order card, No. 95078, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives.

Specification Document, Box 15, Folder 30, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

"Stock Quote 14 -- no Title." New York Times (1857-1922), Mar 03, 1906.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/96587965?accountid=10226>.

"The Italian Influence at The Woodlawn Cemetery," Woodlawn Cemetery, October 12, 2016,

<https://www.thewoodlawncemetery.org/italian-influence-woodlawn-cemetery/>.

"The Rev. Mother Ste. Firmin." New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962), Feb 19, 1949.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1327124699?accountid=10226>.

Vosholl, W.H. letter to Woodlawn Cemetery, January 4, 1932, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Vosholl, W.H. letter to Woodlawn Cemetery, June 19, 1920, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Vosholl, W.H. letters 1920-1931, Box 12, Folder 23, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

"Wills for Probate." New York Times (1923-Current File), Jan 19, 1936.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/101984202?accountid=10226>.

1910 United States Census, Yonkers Ward 1, Westchester County, New York, Roll: T624_1092; Page: 10A; Enumeration District: 0141; FHL microfilm: 1375105, "Joseph Mosel," Ancestry.com.

1920 United States Census, Yonkers Ward 8, Westchester County, New York, Roll: T625_1281; Page: 17A; Enumeration District: 256, Joseph E Mosel," Ancestry.com.

1940 United States Census, Yonkers, Westchester County, New York, Roll: m-t0627-02867; Page: 4A; Enumeration District: 68-131A, "Joseph E Mosel," Ancestry.com.

Mausoleum Photographs



Figure 1: North Elevation



Figure 2: South Elevation



Figure 3: West Elevation



Figure 4: East Elevation



Figure 5: North Elevation with bench and walkway



Figure 5a: northwest corner



Figure 6: From North Burial Road, looking southwest



Figure 7: View along North Burial Road, looking east



Figure 8: East window interior view



Figure 9: Catacombs



Figure 10: West window interior



Figure 11: East window interior marble

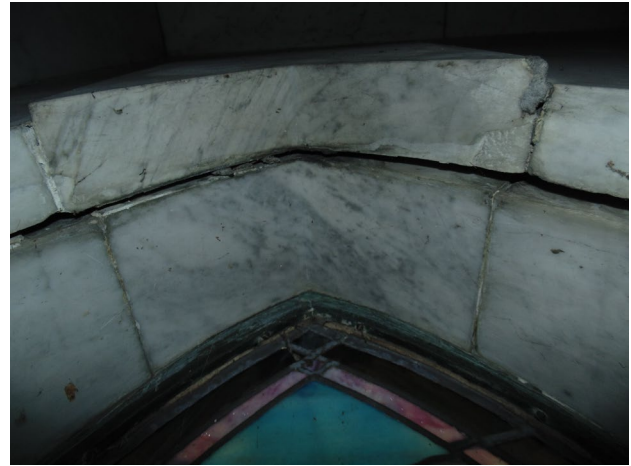


Figure 12: West window interior marble



Figure 13: North façade from above showing roof slope with doors open



Figure 14: Mt. Airy granite samples
Compared with mausoleum foot



Figure 15: Broken glass, west window



Figure 16: Disintegrating mortar pointing



Figure 17: Moss growing in mortar joints



Figure 18: Recessed lettering with stone cut layers visible



Figure 19: Satellite image of the Mausoleum from Google Earth, earth.google.com/web/.

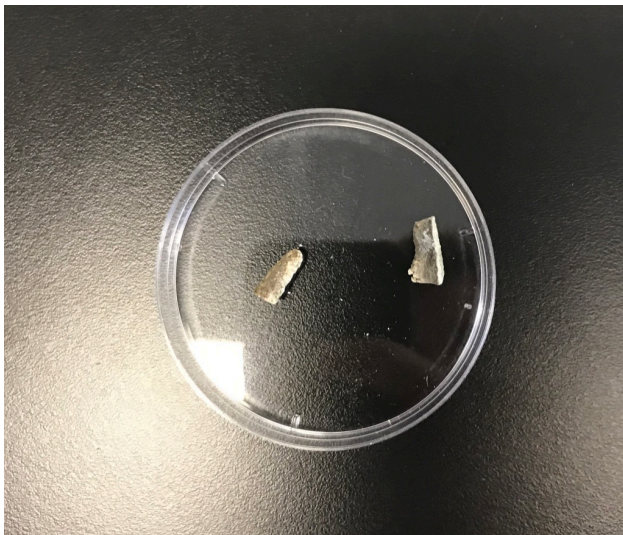


Figure 20: Two mortar samples from mausoleum



Figure 21: Microscope inspection of samples