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Studio I: Reading Buildings

Project 3: Field Documentation

& Formal Analysis

Gachot Mausoleum

The Gachot family mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery serves as the final resting place for Mr. Charles Gachot and his heirs. Mr. Gachot was the owner and founder of Charles Gachot Food Products, a market at 429 West Fourteenth Street in the meatpacking district in New York.¹ Known especially for dry-aged meats, Mr. Gachot was a distributor to many high-end restaurants and hotels. His obituary in the *New York Times*, written on December 28, 1928, explained that Mr. Gachot was a French immigrant born in Alsace and was survived by two sons, George and Charles, who continued the family business.² His wife, Louise Gachot, passed just before Charles on July 18, 1928. Curiously, the mausoleum was not constructed and ready for entombment until exactly one year and one day after Charles' death, on December 28, 1929. According to Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services at Woodlawn Cemetery, Mr. Gachot was held in the cemetery's receiving vault during this period, a fairly common practice for recently deceased persons who do not preemptively build their mausoleums. It is unclear, however, where Louise resided during the period between passing and her ultimate interment at the family mausoleum. The four aforementioned Gachots are all presently interred at the mausoleum. They are survived (at least) by Charles' son Chris, who most recently managed the Gachot & Gachot company.³ Gachot & Gachot owned and occupied 440 & 442 West Fourteenth Street in the meatpacking district, but sold the building in 2004 to Diane Von Furstenberg for \$10.5million.⁴ The company's current standing is unknown.

Returning to Woodlawn, the Gachot mausoleum is sited along the western border of the Columbine plot situated at the heart of the cemetery. The plot was developed in the 1920s as one of the early planned plots at Woodlawn.⁵ Susan Olsen explains that before this period, most people selected or designed their funerary monument prior to drafting up an appropriate site. Columbine, on the other hand, was ordered by a grid plan from the beginning, and its mausoleums and funerary monuments are organized in rows parallel to its borders. The Gachot Mausoleum is located along Myosotis Ave between Whitewood Ave and Walnut Ave and is set back one row from the street. It sits diminutively behind and between two mausoleums in the first row, both of which were built some time later: Squier, to the northwest, was built in 1937; Essig-Foeller, to the southwest, was built in 1944.⁶ Whether or not the Gachot family would have anticipated this is undetermined. However, it is likely that when selecting the plot, the family would have known that the strip of land along the street was already planned to be sold as lots.

The Gachot mausoleum anticipates these later additions by interfacing with its immediate context. Unlike the sharply rectilinear mausoleums which surround it today, the Gachot mausoleum is chamfered along its vertical corners, in a gesture of openness to its surrounding. This spatial transition also has the effect of somewhat softening the building's appearance in the landscape. Its western, primary facade is anchored by two pedestals that extrude forth from its chamfered corners at forty-five degrees to the primary facade, and flanking, but not attached, to the single step used to enter into the mausoleum. This extending gesture is at once assertive and welcoming, laying claim to the open space in front of the mausoleum by invisibly delineating its reach. Two large octagonal urns sit atop these frontal pedestals and elegantly terminate along the same horizontal datum line as the building's shallowly-projecting water table.

In addition to its unusual form, the primary facade is a concatenation of eclectic design influences. The front facade is split into three primary masses, with the center mass projecting forward several inches and extending upwards into a parapeted pediment. Gothic Revival elements abound in the pointed-arch front-door and bas-relief tracery which inscribes the attached shafts flanking the door. Yet for all its efforts at associating with the Gothic Revival, the structure does not have the overall verticality of a typically Gothic structure. The pedimented parapet and successive stepping-in of the facade from pedestal to rooftop suggests a vertical orientation, yet this lies in tension with the overall cubic massing of the mausoleum block. Additionally, its structure is not Gothic, as it is built using monolithic dressed masonry blocks, not the typical columnar-and-arched structure of Gothic buildings. In its exploitation of Gothic ornamentation at the surface level, the Gachot mausoleum is unabashedly facade-ist.

To enter into the mausoleum, one passes through a narrow set of bronze-and-glass double doors on the central axis. The interior massing reflects that of the exterior: the projecting central mass delineates the narrow corridor within which one can enter the mausoleum, and terminating in a Tiffany-style window with copper-foil came.⁷ The spaces behind the sides of the front facade house six catacombs, three stacked longitudinally along the center axis on each side. Its interior surface is entirely clad in pink marble in contrast to the grey Barre granite of the exterior.

The overall volume of the Gachot mausoleum is rather small compared to the adjacent mausoleums. Its size is possibly due to the rise of pattern book styles in the 1910s and 1920s, when smaller, mass-produced mausoleums proliferated.⁸ The mausoleum's design and construction is attributed to the Harrison Granite Company of Barre, Vermont, with offices in New York.⁹ Unfortunately, there is no extant archival record of Harrison Granite's catalog. However, upon inspection of other Harrison Granite mausolea at Woodlawn (of which there are about 70 total), the Gachot mausoleum is still quite unusual in its aesthetic. A small copyright

plaque attached to the rear of the mausoleum appears to be the manufacturer's attempt at establishing exclusive rights to the production of this particular model or design. Susan Olsen explained that this is not unheard-of, though it is very uncommon for building designs to be copyrighted. In this regard, one might be inclined to conceptualize the mausoleum not as a building, but rather as a prefabricated spatial product.

¹ Gachot, File of Charles, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Department of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Obituary 2, *New York Times*, (1923-Current file); Dec 28, 1928; ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2006) w/Index (1851-1993).

² Ibid.

³ Anderson, Lincoln "Furstenberg has designs on Meat Market building," *The Villager*, V73, No.52, April 28-May 4, 2004, http://www.thevillager.com/villager_52/furstenberghasdesigns.html.

⁴ Market faces expiration date, as exodus of meat -, *The Villager*, V74, No.11, July 14 - 20, 2004, http://www.thevillager.com/villager_63/marketfacesexpirationdate.html

⁵ Interview with Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services at Woodlawn Cemetery, 2010.

⁶ Inventory for Series II: Mausolea and Monument Files, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/avery/da/woodlawn.html>.

⁷ Gachot, File of Charles, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Department of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

⁸ Keister, Douglas, *Going Out in Style: The Architecture of Eternity*, Checkmark Books, 1997.

⁹ Gachot, File of Charles, Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Department of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

