

**Velma & Norman B. Woolworth Mausoleum**

Historical Overview and Design Analysis

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## Overview

The Velma & Norman B. Woolworth Mausoleum is an Egyptian Revival-style mausoleum located in the Bronx's Woodlawn Cemetery. The mausoleum sits within Lot 136/146 of Woodlawn's Park View plot (fig. 1). The building is interred with the bodies of London-based businessman Fred Moore Woolworth, his wife Velma Bailey Woolworth, their only son Norman Bailey Woolworth, and daughter-in-law Pauline Elizabeth Woolworth. Fred Woolworth has both familial and business relations to the famed entrepreneur Frank W. Woolworth, whose mausoleum is located less than 500 feet away near Woodlawn's Jerome Avenue entrance. Velma Woolworth is the donor of Woodlawn's Woolworth Chapel (fig. 2), located a mere 150 feet away. The chapel was completed in 1935 and still holds service to this day.



Figure 1. The Velma & Norman B. Woolworth mausoleum, looking northeast. Photo by Neil Funkhouser, September 19, 2021, Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/135059320/fred-moore-woolworth>.



Figure 2. The Woolworth Chapel, looking northeast. Photo from Woodlawn Cemetery, <https://www.woodlawn.org/woolworth-chapel-exterior>.

### **Woolworth Family Background**

In analyzing the life, death, and history of the Woolworth family, their immense wealth and longevity cannot be overstated. Even as an ancillary branch of the F. W. Woolworth family line, and as the Woolworths' company declined by the end of the 20th century, Fred Woolworth and his progeny would enjoy financial security for several generations, stretching into the current day.

Velma Bailey Woolworth, the mausoleum's commissioner and original co-owner, was born on January 30, 1875 in Portland, Maine as Velma Erminie Bailey.<sup>1</sup> On January 5, 1897, she would marry Fred Woolworth, a man from her hometown. Velma was never listed as having any formal occupation on census records, though she had the means to acquire and develop a property in Winthrop, Maine known as Clearview Farm. Her grandchildren, some of whom still frequent the property, fondly remember "Granny Woolworth" practicing the naval tradition of morning colors during early summer mornings.<sup>2</sup> Near the end of her life, Velma ensured that \$225,000 of her estate

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Moore Woolworth and Velma Erminie Bailey, Record of Intentions and Return of Marriages, Maine Vital Records, 1670-1921, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Georgina Schaeffer. "Be Our Guest," *Town & Country*, September 9, 2013. <https://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/tradition/a1171/woolworth-family-interview/>.

would be left to various charitable institutions, including the New York Association for the Blind, the Home for Old Men and Aged Couples, and the New York Society for the Relief of Ruptured and Crippled.<sup>3</sup> (For perspective, Velma's lakeside summer home in Clearview Farm cost \$250,000 to construct,<sup>4</sup> and trust funds amounting to \$3 million were left to her grandchildren.<sup>5</sup>) The majority of this money, however, was benefacted to the Woodlawn Cemetery for the construction of the Woolworth Chapel. Velma allotted \$150,000 for the creation of a chapel that would be open to all religious faiths and would honor her and her husband's legacy.<sup>6,7</sup> On February 8, 1934, Velma Woolworth died in her Park Avenue apartment at the age of 59.<sup>8</sup>

Velma's husband, Frederick Moore Woolworth, was born on January 1, 1871 in Portland, Maine. Fred shares ancestry with the famed Frank W. Woolworth through Phineas Woolworth, who was Frank's grandfather and Fred's great-grandfather, making the two Woolworths second cousins, once removed. Fred's early career included a managerial position at 5 and 10 Cent stores in both Portland, ME and Boston.<sup>9</sup> He would later be delegated by Frank Woolworth to oversee the opening of the F. W. Woolworth & Co. "Threepence and Sixpence" store in Liverpool, the Woolworth company's first overseas venture (fig. 3). Fred left for England in 1909, where he would lead as director of the Woolworth stores for twelve years.<sup>10</sup> After suffering two strokes within four months, Fred Woolworth died on January 27th, 1923 at his residence in the London Ritz Hotel.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Woolworth Will Names Charities," *New York Times*, February 22, 1934, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>4</sup> "One of Maine's Show Summer Places: House Built by Mrs. Velma Woodworth on Lake Cobbossecontee Shore a Triumph of Artistic Effort," *Daily Boston Globe*, August 5, 1928, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>5</sup> "Mrs. Woolworth Left \$3,000,000 In Trust Funds," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 22, 1934, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Woolworth Chapel Dedicated," *New York Times*, April 17, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>8</sup> "Mrs. Fred M. Woolworth," *New York Times*, February 9, 1934, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>9</sup> "F. M. Woolworth Wed Portland, ME Girl," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 28, 1923, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>10</sup> "Fred M. Woolworth Dead: Director of Chain Stores Ill in London Since Last October," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1923. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>11</sup> "Fred M. Woolworth Dies in London at 53," *New York Times*, January 28, 1923, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

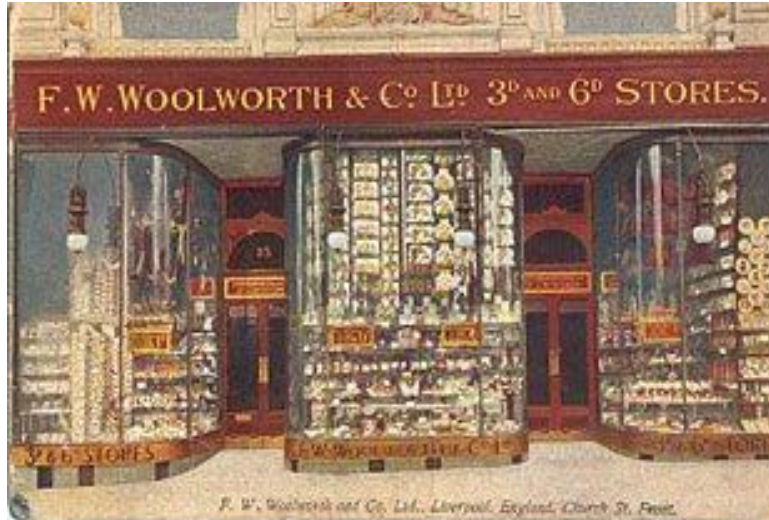


Figure 3. The first British Woolworth, Church Street, Liverpool, 1909. Image from Woolworths Museum <https://www.woolworthsmuseum.co.uk>.

Norman Bailey Woolworth, fellow co-owner of the Woolworth mausoleum (alongside his mother) and the only child of Fred and Velma Woolworth, was born on November 28, 1901 in New York City. He began his career as a cellar boy (a position comparable to modern-day dishwashers and errand-runners) at the former 14th Street Woolworth store. He would eventually work his way up to becoming an assistant manager at the Woolworth's branch in New London, Connecticut and a branch in Flushing, Queens.<sup>12</sup> He would marry Pauline Elizabeth Stanbury on July 7, 1925, with whom he would raise two sons and a daughter.<sup>13</sup> Their wedding ceremony was referred to in the *New York Herald Tribune* as “the most glittering wedding [since] the end of the first World War.”<sup>14</sup> Outside of the Woolworth business, Norman would seek other investments including sugar holdings in the West Indies and real estate in San Juan.<sup>15</sup> Norman co-owned the Woolworth mausoleum

<sup>12</sup> “Norman Bailey Woolworth Dies; Member of Chain Store Family,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> “Norman B. Woolworth, 60, Of Five 7 Ten Store Family,” *New York Herald Tribune*, June 21, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

alongside his mother. He died on June 19, 1962 in New York City of uremia and complications caused by diabetes.<sup>16</sup>

Pauline Elizabeth Woolworth was born in Woodstock, Canada on February 6, 1906, raised in England, and immigrated to the United States in 1925. There is little available material on Pauline's life outside her husband and children, and census reports simply list her as a housewife.<sup>17</sup> After the passing of her husband, Pauline would spend her later life in Miami Beach, outliving her late husband by 32 years. She died on February 22, 1994 at the age of 88. Norman and Pauline were survived by their three children, Robert Frederick Woolworth, Pamela Woolworth Combemale, and Norman S. Woolworth, all of whom have since recently passed between 2003 and 2011. Although the original plot had plans for 16 graves on the north and west sides of the mausoleum (fig. 4), only the first two spots are used, and Pamela's headstone is in front of the building's south porch.

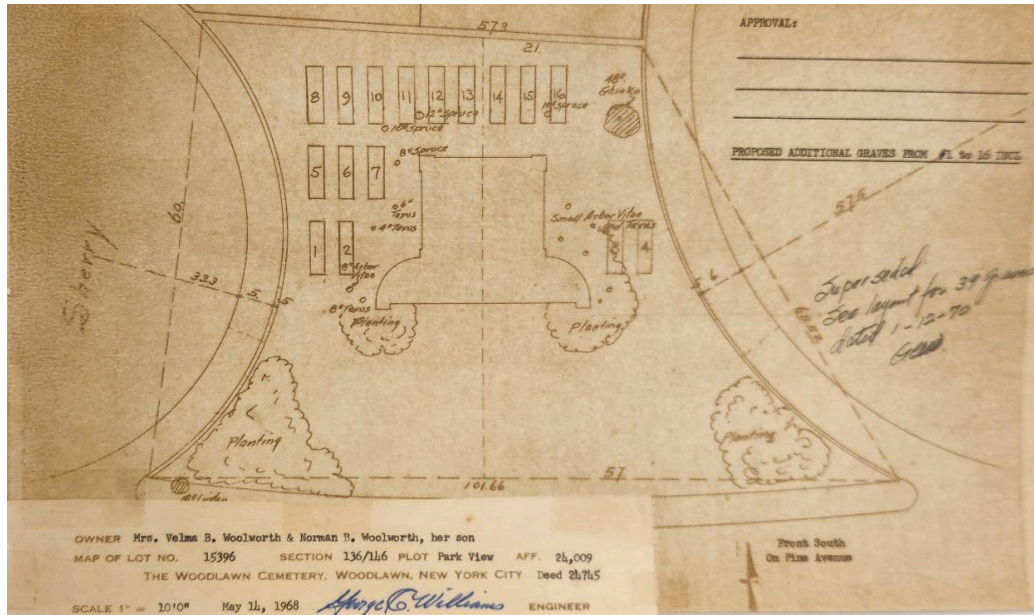


Figure 4. Woolworth plot layout, 1968. Drawing from Velma B. Woolworth, major monuments folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 4.3, Folder 40.

<sup>16</sup> “Norman Bailey Woolworth Dies.”

<sup>17</sup> Pauline Woolworth, US Federal Census, 1940, Manhattan Row, New York, p. 6A.

## Mausoleum Design and Construction

The Woolworth Mausoleum was erected in 1923 and designed by Harrison Granite Company. The building is of megalithic construction, comprising large, Barre granite masonry units set with thin mortar joints. The building plan is square and entirely symmetrical between its east and west sides. The principal, south-facing facade displays two Egyptian columns in-antis (fig. 5). The columns feature bell-shaped capitals and papyrus leaf and blossom ornament. The building entry includes a low granite porch. Bookending the porch are quarter-circle curved benches, flanking the building on its east and west ends. The benches each terminate at a pedestal topped with a papyrus leaf-decorated vase. Together, the building and front porch creates the footprint of a rectangle with side arms. Two additional planters sit on the porch directly south of the antae. These two green granite planters, which are specified in the original design, represent the only deviation from the building's monochromatic Barre granite scheme. "Fred M. Woolworth" is incised at the granite entablature with a round flush profile. Above the entablature is a level of granite cavetto cornices and megalithic, beveled granite stones forming a double-pitched roof.



Figure 5. Woolworth mausoleum, facing north, 2023. Photo by author.

The granite units at the entablature level and higher are supported by four corner antae (or “piers”). The piers are battered at the two faces corresponding to their location—the southeast pier, for example, is battered only on its south and east faces. Between each corner pier is a monolithic battered granite wall enclosing the building’s north, east, and west sides. The northern wall has a five-foot-wide window opening, and the southern wall is split into three segments with a doorway in the center. A bronze double door, with lotus flower and chevron motifs, opens into the mausoleum.

The mausoleum interior is entirely clad with Tennessee Pink Marble slabs with the exception of a one-foot-deep polished granite floor and exposed Barre granite door enframingent. A two-person vertical companion-style crypt abuts both the east and west walls. The remains of Fred and Velma Woolworth are held within the east crypt, with the younger Woolworths held in the west.

The rear, north wall is furnished with a built-in pink marble bench, pink marble window enframingent, and a stained-glass window. The art glass depicts a landscape of two lakes within a mountain valley. The sky is depicted with plump, deep-blue clouds that become thinner and warmer as they recede into the sunset (fig. 6). The art glass also includes trees, foliage, flowers, and a border of orange-green glass within a bronze frame.

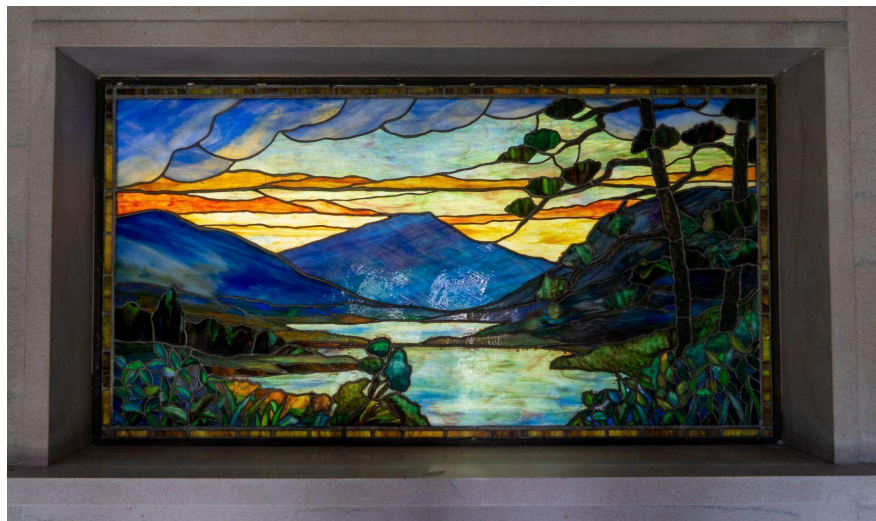




Figure 6. Art glass window, facing north, 2023. Photo by author.

The ceiling is composed as a grid of nine pink marble slabs with four bronze rosettes at the inner intersections. Lotus flower motifs, identical in shape to those of the door, repeat themselves as engravings on the bench and crypts. Each crypt is carved with the names and dates of the four bodies interred, though the crispness, shape, and quality of the lettering profiles has changed considerably over time (fig. 17).

The Harrison Granite Company (“Harrison Granite”), established in 1845 in New York City, specialized in the design and construction of Barre granite memorials. Touting design principles of “simplicity of treatment” over “ornateness,” Harrison Granite built tombstones, obelisks, and mausoleums in a variety of styles for clients in over 40 states.<sup>18</sup> Blueprints of the Woolworth Mausoleum show that the building was constructed accurately to the drawings.<sup>19</sup> However, the lids to the four granite planters are likely later additions, as they are reflected neither in planting design-related correspondence nor the original drawings (fig. 7).<sup>20</sup>



<sup>18</sup> Harrison Granite Company, *Company Clientele Catalog & Monuments* (New York: 1918)

<sup>19</sup> Velma B. Woolworth, major monuments folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 4.3, Folder 40.

<sup>20</sup> Velma B. Woolworth, mausoleum owners correspondence folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library, Columbia University, Box MOC 16, Folder 39.



### Similar Mausoleums & Comparative Analysis

A 1918 Harrison Granite catalog shows the image of a mausoleum engraved with “John W. Butler” (fig. 9), which is strikingly similar to the Woolworth mausoleum. The Butler mausoleum was built circa 1916-1918, at least five years earlier than the Woolworth.<sup>22</sup> Although the designs are near-identical on the exterior, a few notable differences become apparent with closer inspection.

The first difference is the topmost pitched granite block. While the Woolworth’s is completely pitched, the Butler’s has short horizontal “wings” on either side (fig. 9). The second difference is seen in the papyrus leaf ornaments on the column capital and planters, which are carved shorter and thicker in the Butler mausoleum (fig. 10). The third difference is the absence of bronze joint caps in the Butler mausoleum. The inclusion of bronze caps at the Woolworth mausoleum was a request by Woodlawn Cemetery, with Harrison Granite acknowledging their omission as an oversight<sup>23</sup>—bronze joint caps help to prevent deterioration caused by moisture and building movement.

The general state of deterioration between the Butler and Woolworth mausoleums constitutes the fourth and most noticeable difference. The Butler mausoleum contains blistered granite surfaces; surfaces heavily soiled, corroded, and infested with biological growth; and vacant planters—without lids—infested with tall grass (fig. 10). While many of these conditions reflect a difference in appropriations for maintenance or natural variations in quarried granite, some conditions (e.g., the bronze joint caps and papyrus leaf ornaments) imply a maturity of Harrison Granite’s designs within just a few years.

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<sup>22</sup> James Churchill, “John W. Butler Mausoleum: Woodlawn Cemetery,” (Columbia University, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Velma B. Woolworth, mausoleum owners correspondence folder.



Figure 9. Differences in pitched roofs between Woolworth (top) and Butler (bottom) mausoleums, 2023. Photos by author.

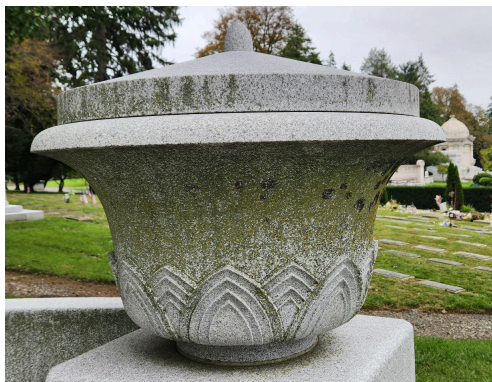


Figure 10. Differences in planters between Woolworth (left) and Butler (right) mausoleums, 2023. Photos by author.

It is worth briefly comparing the Velma & Norman Woolworth mausoleum with that of Frank Woolworth, both being built in Egyptian Revival styles. The Frank Woolworth mausoleum demonstrates a higher level of cost and craft in construction. Like the Velma & Norman Woolworth, the Frank Woolworth structure features battered walls, two Egyptian columns in-antis with bell-shaped capitals and papyrus leaf ornaments, megalithic entablature and cavetto cornice levels, and a pitched roof slab, all constructed in Barre granite. Unlike the prior mausoleum, the Frank Woolworth is a taller structure, is raised seven steps above grade, and features two female sphinx sculptures flanking the entry stairs (fig. 11). Designed by Farrington Gould and Hoagland in 1921, the structure is completely antithetical to Harrison Granite’s “simplicity of treatment.”



Figure 11. F. W. Woolworth mausoleum, 2023. Photo by author.

All three Egyptian Revival mausoleums discussed feature a particular locality of Egyptian architecture. Referred to as “campaniform,” the combination of a bell-shaped capital, eight overlapping papyrus leaves, and papyrus blossoms and stems is a form taken directly from the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak (fig. 12). However, it is more likely that designers such as Harrison

Granite or Farrington Gould and Hoagland would reference the “campaniform” as represented within architectural books, such as Alfred Dwight Foster Hamlin’s 1906-1916 series, *A History of Ornament* (fig. 14), Banister Fletcher’s 1896 text, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, or even the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* (fig. 13). It is also probable that memorial architects copied from one another.



Figure 12. Column capitals, main axis of the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak, 1962. Photo by Eliot Elisofon from the Smithsonian Institute, National Museum of African Art. <https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view/308172>.

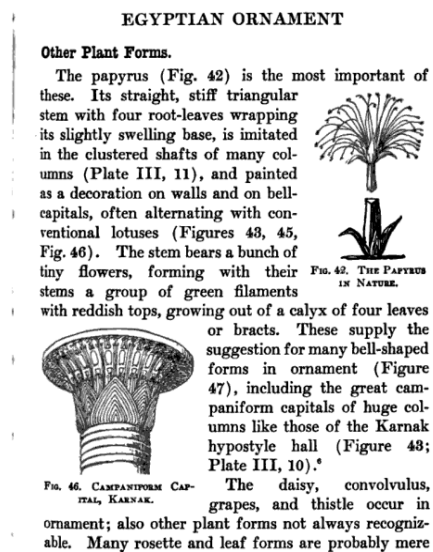
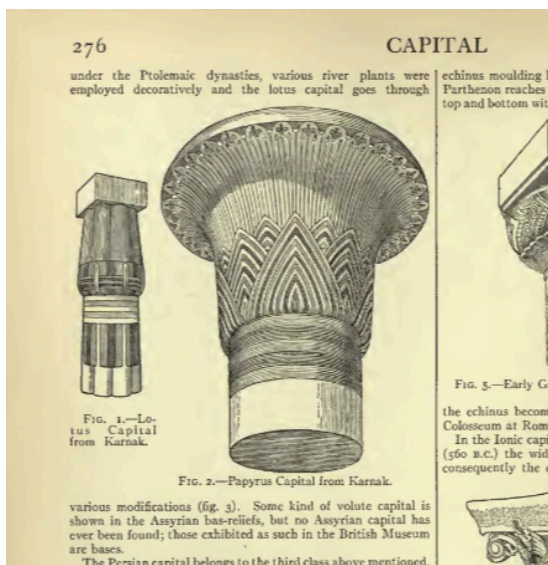


Figure 13. “Papyrus Capital from Karnak.” From “Capitals” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11 ed. (1911).

Figure 14. “Papyrus Capital from Karnak.” From Alfred Dwight Foster Hamlin, *A History of Ornament* (1906).

### Current State of the Velma & Norman Woolworth Mausoleum

The Velma & Norman Woolworth and Butler mausoleums’ quarter-circle benches have no clear precedent in Egyptian or Egyptian Revival architecture. This feature may be interpreted as a unique trait of Harrison Granite’s “Egyptian” designs. At the Woolworth mausoleum, this feature also presents major issues with deterioration. Nearly all mortar joints connecting the benches to their adjoining pedestals and building faces are friable, cracking, or completely missing. The bench is fully exposed to moisture, freeze-thaw cycles, and frequent movement from human activity. Any of these reasons may be the cause of the deteriorating mortar.



Figure 15. Deteriorating mortar and open joints at the east (left) and west (right) benches, Woolworth Mausoleum, 2023. Photos by author.

Beyond biological growth and minor soiling on the Barre granite planters, benches, and roof slabs, the building is otherwise in remarkable condition. All granite carvings on the building exterior remain crisp and well-defined. There is no sign of blistering or delamination. In the interior, the west crypt has undergone what appears to be a series of Dutchman patches on its north molding (fig. 16).

Besides this awkward repair, the Tennessee Pink Marble remains well-maintained with the exception of some minor scratches and scuffing.

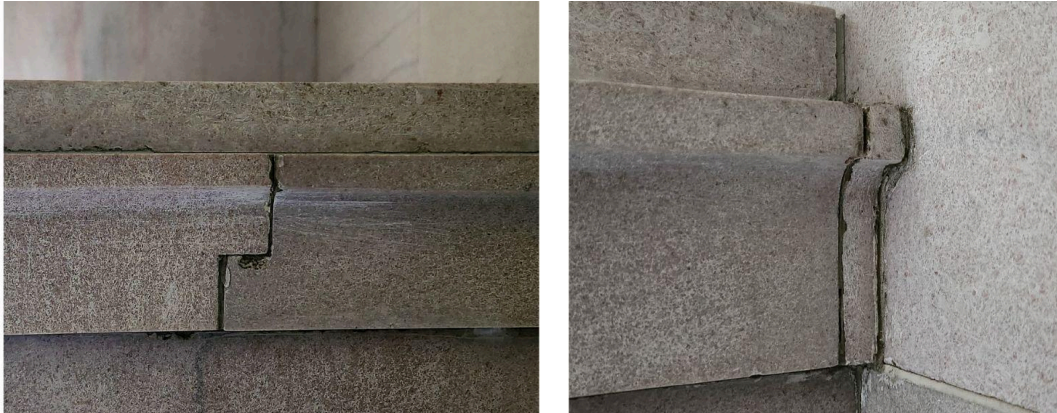


Figure 16. Dutchman patches on mausoleum interior. Photos by author.

As a historical monument, the Velma & Norman Woolworth mausoleum presents an interesting study in the interaction between multiple dimensions of time. Natural processes of growth and decay operate wildly and unpredictably, demonstrated by the blistering granite present only on the Butler mausoleum, or the asymmetrical biological growth between the Woolworth's east and west planters (fig. 5). Means of continued maintenance, tied to individual family wealth and posterity, also greatly affect the final product even with near-identical starting conditions (fig. 9-10). Changing practices of craft can often negatively affect historical constructions, such as in the difference in letter carving workmanship between two generations of Woolworths (fig. 17). Finally, attempts to revive the past—even with identical reference points, and even between clients of the same family—can be vastly different from another based on the design principles of the individual.





Figure 17. Letter carvings among three periods of the Woolworths. Left: typical profile, Fred and Velma, c. 1923-34. Middle: typical profile, Norman, c. 1962. Right: typical profile, Pauline, c. 1994. Photos by author.

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