

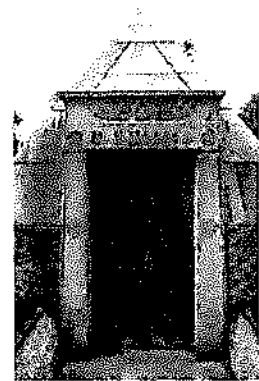
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Historic Preservation Studio 1

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D.Summa Mausoleum

The Domenico Summa Mausoleum located in the center of the lotus area of Woodlawn Cemetery is an Egyptian style masonry pyramid designed by Presbrey-Leland Co., under the commission of the lot owner, Domenico Summa in 1922, whose wife and himself were both Italian immigrants that came to the U.S. in late 19th century. The Summa Mausoleum was a representative of the contemporary mausoleums during the early 20th century, for its owner family was an average one that ran a small business, and it was purchased in the period of emerging working class. With a strong geometric form, the Summa Mausoleum is special among the prevalent classical style mausoleums and tombstones in Lotus, which illustrates the emergence and development of Egyptian Revival mausoleum.



Location

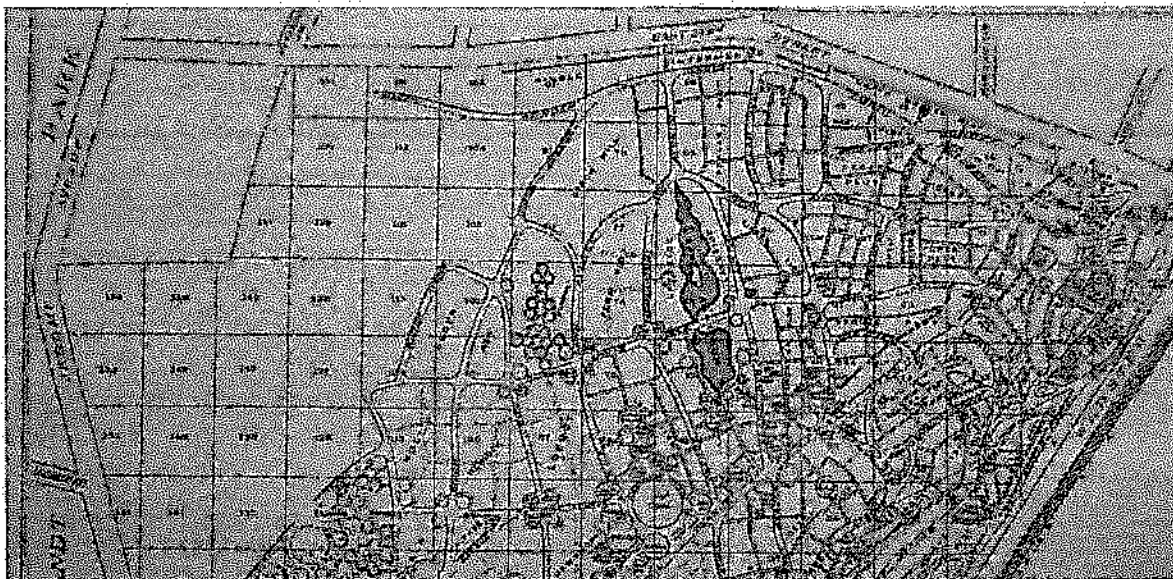


Fig 1. 1902 Woodlawn Plan

The blank upper left corner (Jerome Avenue and East 233rd Street) is the place where later developed as Lotus plot.

In the late 19th to the early 20th century, Woodlawn cemetery extended its scheme by developing more lots and changed its planning to welcome more middle-class families. (Fig. 1) Under this circumstance, the northwestern corner of Woodlawn was designed as a dense area for tombstones and medium to small mausoleums, which is now called the Lotus area.ⁱ The average price for Lotus plots were comparatively affordable. It cost Summa 500 dollars for the lot purchase, which was below the average lot sales price in 1922 to 1923 and equals to the design fee charged by Presbrey-Leland.ⁱⁱ The lot sales contract sheetⁱⁱⁱ also shows that specialized mausoleum design and construction companies gained acknowledgement from the middle class, forming a whole business system of burial with the cemetery. (Figure 2) A fairly large proportion of people who bought a lot in Lotus commissioned companies and mausoleum architects (also see Fig 2 for other companies and architects) to do the design and construction, and this may illustrate that the concept of having a mausoleum had spread widely beyond its original "elite" customers. Aerial view of the Lotus shows that in the shape of a spindle, with most of the tombs and individual mausoleums following the pattern along its direction. The Summa Mausoleum is located on a slope, in the center of the lotus area. This location makes it very visible among tombstones and trees, while hard to reach from the main road.

Fig.2. 1922 Lot Sales Record

Biographical Information

The Summa Mausoleum was designed and built in 1922-1923, in response to the death of Rosa Maria Summa, the lot owner's first wife. She was born in Italy in 1881, and came to New York as an immigrant with her parents and three siblings in 1893. (Figure 3) On August 24, 1899, she married Domenico Summa, an Italian immigrant who came to the United States in 1888 and worked as a pastry maker in a restaurant.^{iv} Few records could be found about Rosa. The census shows that she was a housewife or did housework.^v Sometime around 1910, the Summas started their own business, operating a confectionary shop and moved to the Bronx. In July of 1920, Rosa signed a will that left all her fortune and shared business to her husband and requested him to take care of her father. This might suggest that she had some kind of illness and was concerned about the future. On April 27, 1922, Rosa passed away in New York, and then Domenico bought a lot in Woodlawn and commissioned Presbrey-Leland to do the design work in October. The decision to commission a mausoleum in Egyptian Revival style might have been made by both Rosa and Domenico. Italian culture, especially the southern part of Italy where they came from, focused great effort on funerals.^{vi} People would pay a large amount to purchase a mausoleum, as a reflection of their wealth and social status, and Italian Americans largely continued their tradition in daily life.^{vii} Since he didn't have any children, Domenico Summa wrote a will in July 1924 saying he would like to be buried with Rosa's

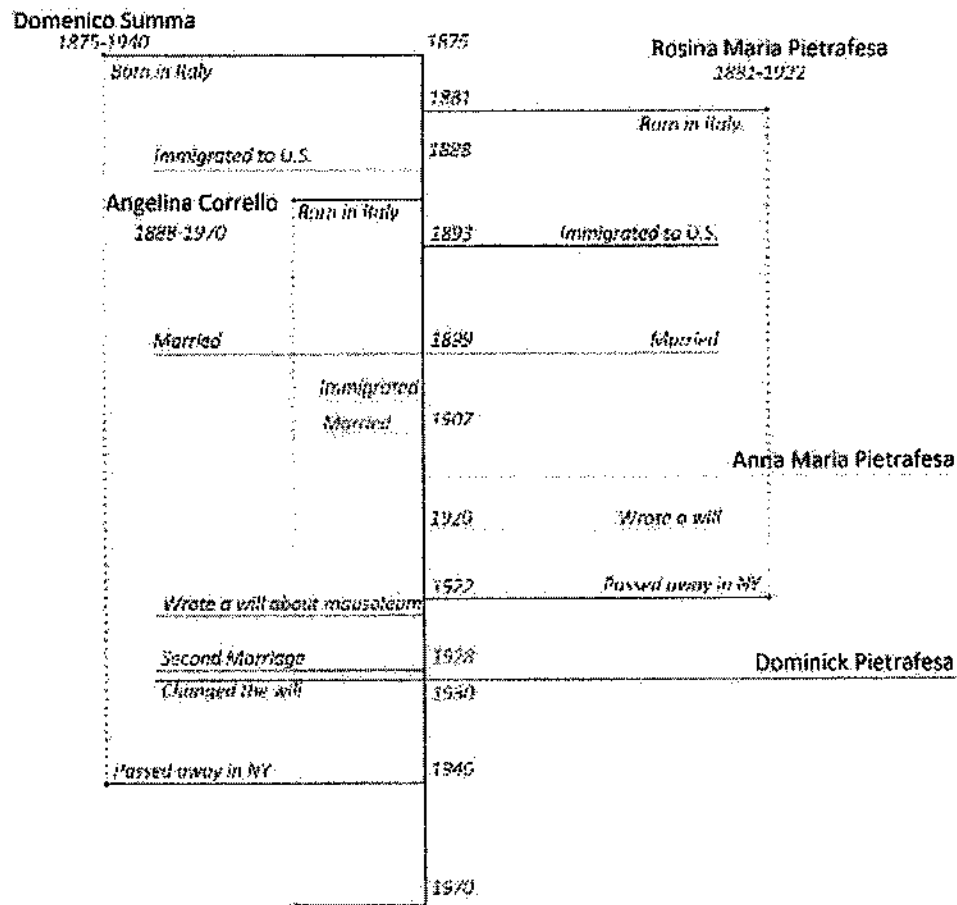


Fig 3. Family Members

This figure shows the important events and time related to the Summa mausoleum.

parents and a brother. (Figure 4). In 1928, Domenico married Angelina Summa, an Italian immigrant who had her first marriage in 1907 and brought three children with her. They started a new family, and in 1930 Domenico changed his will not to include any other relative while this year his only 8-months old daughter, Cosetta Summa, passed away. (Figure 5) In 1940, Domenico died in New York without any children left. He gave his fortune to some of his siblings, and was buried with his daughter in the middle part of the mausoleum underground. Angelina Summa lived the longest to 1970, and her son Joseph took care of the daily maintenance of the mausoleum since.

That at the time of the death of the said **Domenico Summa**
 he left surviving, as his sole heirs, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ no children, and no children
 of deceased children; no mother or father; but did leave as his nearest
 blood relatives the following:

- Luciano Summa, a half brother
- Theodora Summa, a brother
- Mrs. Rose LeGuardia, a sister
- Andrea Summa, a half brother, residing in Italy.

Fig 4. Domenico Summa's will

Style and Design

Egyptian architecture had its influence on American architecture, especially after the discovery of pharaoh Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 in the modern times. It is difficult to conclude that the archaeological discovery had direct logic link with the commission of this Summa Mausoleum to be built in the form of a pyramid, since the process had already begun in 1922.



Fig 6. Egyptian cavetto

However, the Summa pyramid did follow much of the Egyptian architecture design principles. The entrance of the mausoleum is guarded by two sphinxes, with a cavetto cornice and lotus pattern carving (Figure 6) on its door case. (Figure 7) The slope of the pyramid is 60 degrees, different from the 52 degree and less that are used in most of the Egyptian pyramids such as the Pyramid of Giza. The steeper slope made more interior space and gave people a better impression on its geometric form for its small scale compared with the gigantic limestone pyramid.

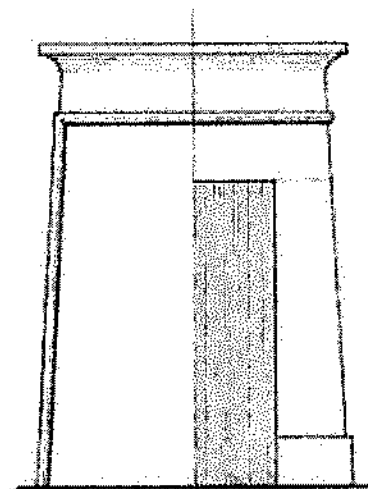


Fig 7. Egyptian Doorcase

The exterior parts of the mausoleum is made of Dummerston granite while the interior used mainly light pink Tennessee marble. Most of the metal parts are made of bronze, which contrasted the pink color by its green patina. The construction of the mausoleum is simple and clear, though there are some differences between drawings and the real site. Above the height of the door case, interior finishing was designed to be dark or blue marble, while the actual choice was a light, white marble. The second thing is about the ventilation on three elevations which were supposed to be a crucial part for the maintenance and moist circulation of the mausoleum. In the condition with lack of ventilation and a broken window, the Summa Mausoleum gets severe biological growth problem.

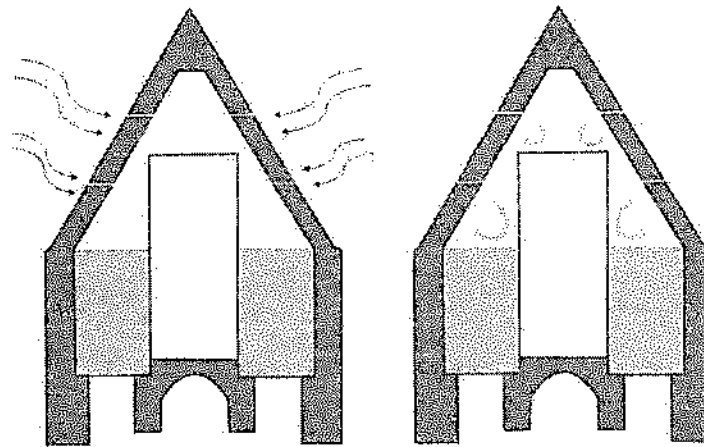


Fig 6. Moist Circulation Analysis

Evaluation

The Summa Mausoleum is a good example showing how Egyptian revival style became a choice of working class, and deserves preservation for its historic and aesthetic value. The preservation work can be done from the first step to add ventilation to the mausoleum and repair its stain glass window.

Notes

ⁱ Andrew Dolkart , , Designing Woodlawn: Architecture and Landscapes, in *"Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn"* (2014)

ⁱⁱ Lot Sales Price, 1923, Avery Archive

ⁱⁱⁱ Major Mausoleum Correspondence, Domenico Summa, Avery Archive

^{iv} 1900 Census, Ancestry

^v 1910 Census, Ancestry

^{vi} Richard F. Veit , Mark Nonestied , , and Richard Veit, *New Jersey Cemeteries and Tombstones : History in the Landscape* (2008)

^{vii} Sara Ickow, . "Egyptian Revival." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (2000)