

Woodlawn Cemetery: Essig-Foeller Mausoleum



View of Essig-Foeller Mausoleum and Neighbors, Woodlawn Cemetery

Introduction

The Essig-Foeller mausoleum is located within the Columbine plot in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, New York.¹ It was designed by Presbrey-Leland Studios in 1944 for Mr. Charles Essig.² The mausoleum is the final resting place for twelve members of the Essig and Foeller families. This paper will first describe the designer followed by the architecture of the building. Next, the materials and condition will be discussed. Finally, the Essig and Foeller families will be explored.

Designer

Woodlawn was established in 1863.³ By the turn of the century it was the “fashionable” final resting place for the wealthy of the era employing architects, sculptors, and other artisans highly skilled at carrying out their clients’ elaborate plans.⁴ Some projects were designed for families by the same architects who built their homes but others relied on the memorialists.⁵ The memorialists focused specifically on designing “mausoleums and other cemetery monuments.”⁶

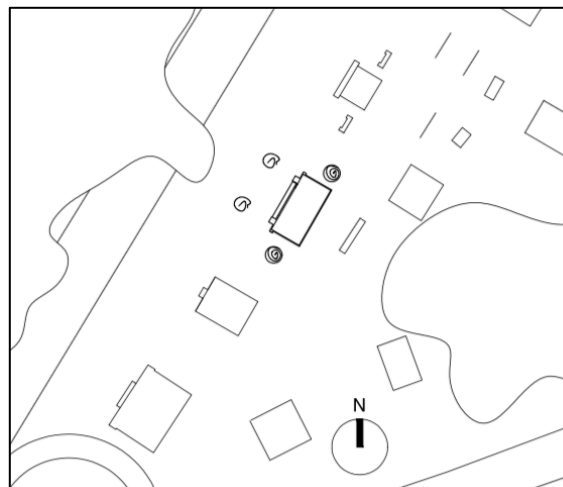
Presbrey-Leland Studios, the designer of the Essig-Foeller mausoleum, fell into this latter category.

Presbrey-Leland was a successful memorialist studio and was established in 1920 after a merger of a quarry company, Presbrey-Coykendall, and W. E. Leland Studios - a design firm.⁷ Both companies had “developed a following in many states among discriminating people.”⁸ Presbrey-Leland counted the most discriminating among their patrons and the likes of Walter P. Chrysler, A. Sterling Calder and various Rockefellers appear on their client lists.⁹ By 1952, they had erected over 30,000 memorials, of which 1,300 were mausoleums.¹⁰ Prices ranged from under \$5,000 to \$1,250,000.¹¹ Presbrey-Leland’s success, both by the numbers and by the clientele, show why they may have been a top choice as the designer and manufacturer of the Essig - Foeller mausoleum.

By 1944, the landscape of the mausoleum and monument business had changed because after the two world wars and the Great Depression the popularity of mausoleums had decreased.¹² Nevertheless, Mr. Charles Essig contracted with Presbrey-Leland Studios to design a building on a solitary lot, #33.¹³ The lot is 39.5 x 40.5 feet and is outlined by four 10 x 10 inch pavers on each corner of the property line. The mausoleum sits three feet west from the east property line which allows it to remain separated from the development of other memorials behind it.



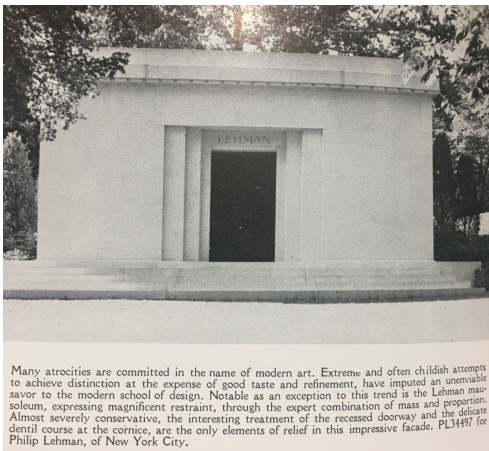
West Elevation, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery



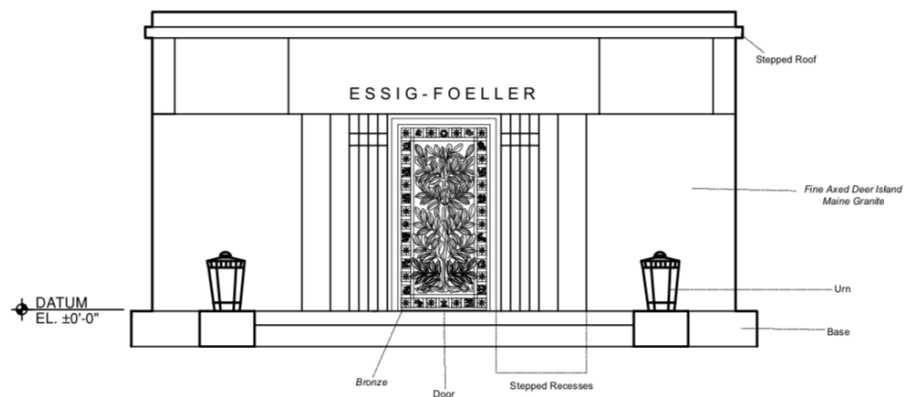
Site Plan, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery

Design of the Mausoleum

The design of the mausoleum is definitively modern yet still nods to classical architecture in the details. It is modern because it refrains from excessive embellishment on all exterior walls.¹⁴ There are only simple lines where the exterior cladding comes together and an incised Essig-Foeller above the door. Further, the rectangular outline of the structure emphasizes clean lines. Even the shape of the roof, and the base of the mausoleum have simple, stepped detailing. Additionally, the mausoleum is strikingly similar in design to the Lehman mausoleum¹⁵ which Presbrey-Leland describes as an example of modern design.¹⁶



Lehman Mausoleum, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives



West Elevation, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

The stepped recesses framing the door, however, hint at a more classical aesthetic.¹⁷ Four, four-inch wide sections are cut into the final recess flanking both sides of the door. The sections span the full height of the recess and when viewed from the west elevation suggest fluting such as along the shaft of a column. Further, two horizontal lines cutting perpendicular across the top of the four sections allude to a capital. This, combined with the fluting create a pilaster like effect on viewers as they walk closer to the entrance. Further, there are two granite

urns flanking the stairway to the mausoleum's entrance whose motif harkens back to elements of ancient Roman tombs.¹⁸

The door and the stained-glass window, however, add some personality to the otherwise clean modernity of the Essig-Foeller mausoleum. The border of the door features stars, birds, fire, the sun, a globe and the twelve signs of the zodiac. In the center is a sprawling organic tree which gives the door a one-of-a-kind effect but in actuality the design was available to other Presbrey-Leland Studios clients as a stock option.¹⁹ This door may be a sign of a more secular approach to death by the Essig-Foeller family for there are no overwhelmingly religious symbols on the door or, for that matter, the entire mausoleum exterior. However, the signs of the zodiac have been interpreted as Christian symbols since the religion's beginning.²⁰ Further implicating the door's potential Christian meaning is a Christian symbol located on the stained-glass window in the center of the east facing elevation. The letters IHS are drawn in yellow and placed in the center of a circle. There is dark blue detailing along the border of the circle and along the border of the rectangular window. The letters are likely a Christogram for the name of Jesus²¹ and further imply the Essig-Foeller family's Christian beliefs.



Detail: Door, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum



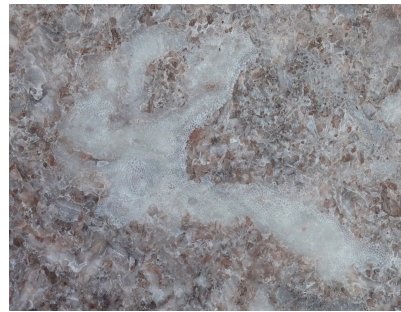
Detail: Stained glass window, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

Materials and Conditions

The Essig-Foeller mausoleum is constructed of several materials. The exterior of the mausoleum is clad in “fine axed” Deer Isle Maine granite.²² Deer Isle Maine granite is also used for the roof and floors of the mausoleum but inside it is “highly polished.”²³ The interior of the mausoleum is clad in pink Knoxville, Tennessee marble.²⁴ However, the molding along the bottom of the mausoleum is likely made of cedar Tennessee marble which was not indicated in the building plan.²⁵ This marble (note: Tennessee marble is actually limestone²⁶) is of a reddish “cedar” color and does not match the pink color of the Tennessee marble used in that era.²⁷ Further, the marble contains traces of fossils (indicating that it is not granite or actual marble) and matches the sample of the National Park Service’s National Building Stone Database’s “Tennessee Cedar.”²⁸ However, additional confirmation such as comparing samples would give a more definitive answer.



Pink Tennessee Marble of the Essig-Foeller Mausoleum



Cedar Tennessee Marble of the Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

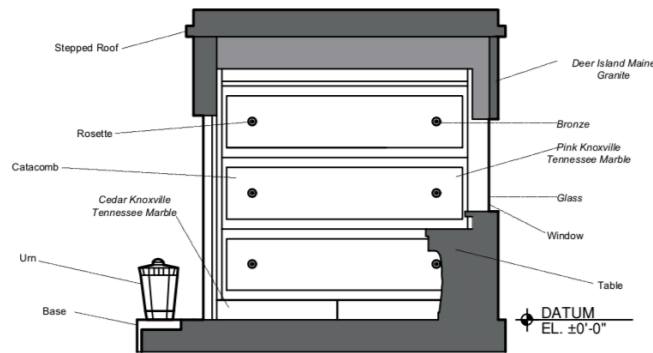


Fine Axed Deer Island Maine Granite of the Essig-Foeller mausoleum



Polished Deer Island Maine Granite of the Essig-Foeller mausoleum

Further detailing on the mausoleum is done in bronze. The earlier discussed door, vents located on the north and south elevations and rosettes, positioned two per catacombs on the interior, are all made of bronze.²⁹ A magnet did not stick to the door, vents or rosettes indicating that there is likely no ferrous metal in the door.³⁰ Finally, there are two small trees located on the east end of the north and south elevations as well as two small bushes in front of the west facing elevation. These natural elements were added later because they are not accounted for in the original site plans.³¹



Section of the Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

Overall, the condition of the mausoleum is stable but there are two areas of concern. First, there is evidence of biological growth along the granite urns, their bases and the base of the north elevation. The biological growths on the urn, their base and the north elevation appear to be lichens given their pale green color and wrinkled appearance.³² Harm to the granite may arise upon removal which can result in structural damage.³³ However, as the lichens do not appear to be on any structurally significant parts of the mausoleum at this time there is no urgency to their removal but they should be monitored.³⁴



Detail: Biological Growth on Essig-Foeller Mausoleum Urn



Urn, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

Next, there is a discoloration of the marble on the bottommost eastern catacomb of the south facing catacombs. To the touch, there is a difference in texture between the discolored spot and the marble surrounding because it is much smoother. This may indicate an issue regarding the condition of the coffin behind the marble cladding. The coffin is made of seamless copper.³⁵ Copper is sensitive to heat and cold and as such collects condensation more easily and the discoloration of the marble may be the result of a collection of moisture from it.³⁶ There are no additional signs on the floor, ceiling, or other panels of marble discoloration. However, further inspection is recommended, to determine the discoloration's source and to prevent any further issues.



Interior South Elevation of Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

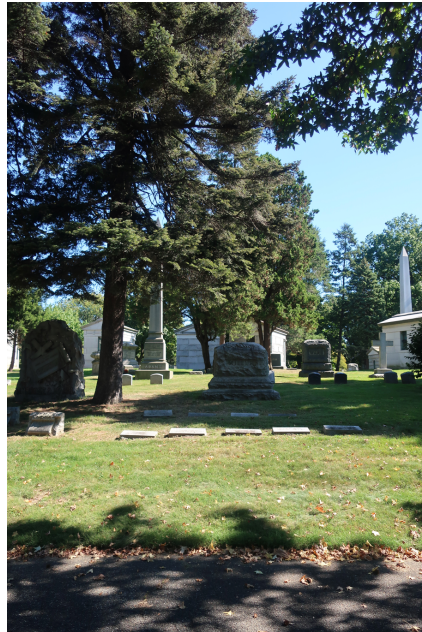


Detail: Discoloration, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

The Essig-Foeller Family and the Mausoleum

The Essig-Foeller family together purchased lot #33 in 1944.³⁷ The co-owners of the lot were Mr. Charles Essig, Mrs. Margaret Essig (his sister) and Mr. Harold Charles Essig Foeller (his nephew).³⁸ This was not the family's first foray into Woodlawn. The Essig's actually owned a smaller lot in the Juniper neighborhood.³⁹ This lot was purchased in 1904 by Charles, Margaret,

Louise Essig Foeller (mother of Harold) and Louise Essig Sr. (the mother of Charles, Margaret and Louise).⁴⁰



Former Essig-Foeller lot, Juniper Plot, Woodlawn Cemetery

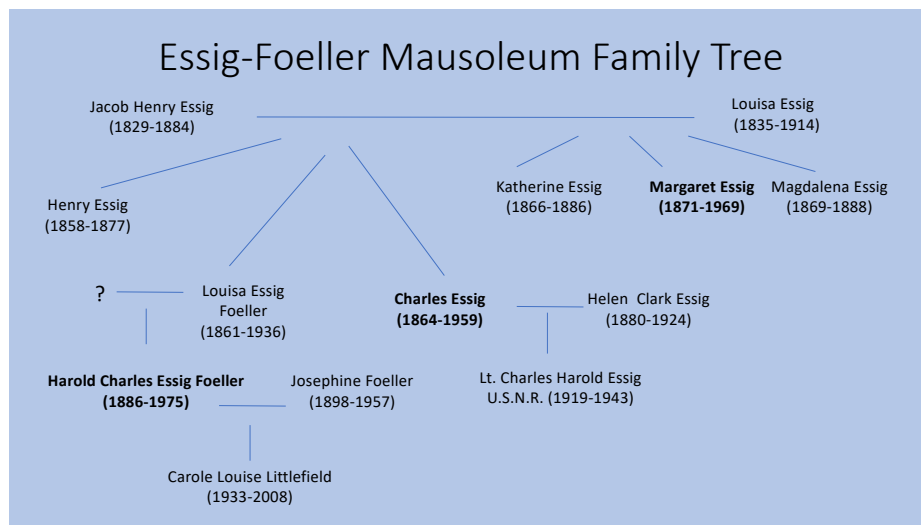
Sadly, the decision to buy the mausoleum was not brought on to show off new wealth or success but because of the death of Charles' son, Lt. Charles Harold Essig, in 1943.⁴¹ Lt. Essig was flying a plane off the coast of Washington State, encountered inclement weather, lost contact, and hit a tree while trying to follow the coastline. The plane burned immediately.⁴²



Lt. Charles Harold Essig, *Senior Portraits, Wesleyan University, 1941*, Ancestry.com.

Lt. Essig was only 24 years old when he died. He graduated from Wesleyan University in 1941 with hopes of pursuing law at Columbia University.⁴³ Lt. Essig was also involved in the Civil Aeronautics Association which explains why he may have been interested in becoming a pilot in the first place.

The family, perhaps in an act of grief, cashed in their insurance on Lt. Essig and received \$15,000 worth of war bonds.⁴⁴ This money allowed them to afford to purchase the Columbine plot (\$9,500),⁴⁵ build the mausoleum foundation (\$940),⁴⁶ and then move the family already buried in graves in the Juniper plot to the mausoleum on the Columbine plot⁴⁷(for \$540).⁴⁸ The long dead siblings were among those moved; and all four had been previously moved from the Lutheran Cemetery in 1902 when the Juniper plot was originally purchased.⁴⁹



Family tree of Essig-Foeller Family Members in the Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

Unfortunately, Lt. Essig's death was not the first tragedy for the family. Helen Essig, the wife of Charles died only five years after Lt. Essig's birth.⁵⁰ Louise Essig Foeller was a widow, husband unknown⁵¹ and three of the Essig siblings died before the age of twenty (Henry Essig, Magdalena Essig, and Katherine Essig).⁵²

Jacob Essig, the father of Charles, Margaret, Louise, Magdalena, Henry and Katherine was born in Germany in 1829, came to America, and worked in the meat industry.⁵³ He experienced some degree of success as he is listed as owning real estate valued at \$20,000 in 1870 and had a personal wealth of \$900.⁵⁴ His wife, Louise Essig (Sr.) was also born in Germany in 1835, and came to America in 1849.⁵⁵ Charles Essig was their son and worked in the banking industry.⁵⁶ Margaret was their daughter and never married and their daughter Louise Essig Foeller was married and then widowed.⁵⁷

Louise Essig Foeller's son, Harold Charles Essig Foeller, was a member of the Columbia Electrical Engineering Class of 1911.⁵⁸ While in school he was debarred but the reasoning for such disciplinary action is unknown.⁵⁹ After school, Harold married Josephine Menne on April 7, 1926.⁶⁰ They had one daughter, Carole in 1933.⁶¹ Harold was an accountant⁶² and must have accumulated some wealth in his lifetime as he was living on Park Avenue in 1963.⁶³



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Carole graduated from Brown University in 1954.⁶⁴ She was married in 1956 to Fred Inman Smith.⁶⁵ She had two sons and three grandchildren⁶⁶ and was passionate about the arts. Carole was a member of the Museum of Modern Arts Council for 30 years.⁶⁷ She also hired

Richard Meier to design a weekend home for her family which is now the famous Smith House.⁶⁸ The Smith house is considered the work that launched Richard Meier's career.⁶⁹ Her two sons and three grandchildren are likely the only currently living heirs with claim to the Essig-Foeller mausoleum.

After Charles Essig passed in 1959, Margaret and Harold (the two remaining purchasers of the mausoleum) set up an endowment with Woodlawn Cemetery for \$18,800 to take care of the mausoleum in perpetuity.⁷⁰ As Carole was the last remaining family member to be buried there (2008) it will be interesting to see if the next generation will make use of lot #33 of the Columbine plot in Woodlawn Cemetery.



Interior, Essig-Foeller Mausoleum

¹ Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Examination Sheet, 2 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.

² Ibid.

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- ³ “History,” *The Woodlawn Cemetery*, Accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.thewoodlawncemetery.org/history/>.
- ⁴ Charles D. Warren, Carole Ann Fabian, and Janet Parks, eds. *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn*, (New York: Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library and the Woodlawn Conservancy, 2014) 9.
- ⁵ *Sylvan Cemetery*, 57.
- ⁶ *Ibid* 53.
- ⁷ Presbrey-Leland Company, *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening*, August 1, 1920.
- ⁸ Presbrey-Leland Company, *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening*, August 1, 1920.
- ⁹ *Commemoration: The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials* (New York: 1952) 13-14.
- ¹⁰ *Commemoration*, 11.
- ¹¹ *Commemoration*, 11.
- ¹² Douglas Keister, *Going Out in Style: The Architecture of Eternity* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1997) 139.
- ¹³ Walter Murray to George Williams, 25 February 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ¹⁴ Douglas Keister, *Going Out in Style: The Architecture of Eternity* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1997) 130.
- ¹⁵ *Sylvan Cemetery*, 66.
- ¹⁶ *Commemoration: The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials* (New York: 1952) 40.
- ¹⁷ John Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1963) 7.
- ¹⁸ D. Borbonus, *Columbarium Tombs and Collective Identity in Augustan Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2014. <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=696250&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- ¹⁹ *Commemoration: The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials* (New York: 1952) 40.
- ²⁰ Fr. Murphy, "Symbolism, Early Christian," In *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Vol. 13 (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003) 666.
- ²¹ Fr. William P. Saunders, "Straight Answers," *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, January 15, 2014, https://www.catholicherald.com/Opinions/What_does_IHS_mean/.
- ²² Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Examination Sheet, 2 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ²³ General Conditions, Specifications and Agreement for a Mausoleum - Addenda to the Specifications, 28 January 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ²⁴ Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Examination Sheet, 2 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ²⁵ Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Examination Sheet, 2 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ²⁶ Matt Pailes, "Tennessee Pink Marble National Building Stone Database," *National Park Service*, August 24, 2015, <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/buildingstone/stone/tennessee-pink-marble>.
- ²⁷ Appalachian Marble Company, *Appalachian Tennessee Marble*, (Knoxville: 1925) 12.
- ²⁸ Ed FitzGerald, "Tennessee Cedar National Building Stone Database," *National Parks Service*, November 24, 2014, <https://www.ncptt.nps.gov/buildingstone/stone/tennessee-cedar>.
- ²⁹ Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Examination Sheet, 2 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ³⁰ "Metals and Magnetism," *American Chemical Society*, accessed September 29, 2019, [metals-and-magnetism-science-for-kids.pdf](https://www.acs.org/education/whatis/chemistry-for-kids/magnets-and-magnetism/).
- ³¹ Map of Lot No. 33, 21 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ³² "Common Greenshield Lichen," *National Museum of Natural History*, accessed on September 27, 2019, <https://eol.org/pages/133798/articles>.
- ³³ "Common Greenshield Lichen," *National Museum of Natural History*, accessed on September 27, 2019, <https://eol.org/pages/133798/articles>.
- ³⁴ Stefanie Scheerer, Otto Ortega-Morales and Christine Gaylarde, "Microbial Deterioration of Stone Monuments – An Updated Overview," *Advances in Applied Microbiology* 66, 2009: 98, 110, 118.
- ³⁵ Lot Card #58885, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ³⁶ "The Copper Advantage: A guide to working with Copper and Copper Alloys," Accessed on September 29, 2019, *Antimicrobial Copper*, 5. https://www.copper.org/publications/pub_list/pdf/a1360.pdf.
- ³⁷ Lot Card #58885, Woodlawn Cemetery.

- ³⁸ Lot Card #58885, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ³⁹ Deed Ledger, Deed #10911, 5 Nov 1902, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁴⁰ Deed Ledger, Deed #10911, 5 Nov 1902, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁴¹ Order for Interment, C94, 4 October 1943, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁴² Douglas E. Campbell, *VPNavy! USN, USMC, USCG and NATS Patrol Aircraft Lost or Damaged During World War II – Listed by Bureau Number* (Syneca Research Group, Inc.) 270.
- ⁴³ Ancestry.com. *U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/43900_b292727-00044?pid=459939834&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid%3D1265%26h%3D459939834%26indiv%3Dtry%26o_vc%3DRecord:OtherRecord%26rhSource%3D6716&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true#?imageId=43900_b292727-00044.
- ⁴⁴ United States of America War Production Board, 16 February 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ⁴⁵ Memorandum of Lot Sale, Deed #32989, 11 December 1943, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁴⁶ Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Examination Sheet, 2 March 1944, Box 5, Essig, Major Monuments, Columbia University Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library Drawings and Archives.
- ⁴⁷ Deed Ledger, Deed #10911, 12 October 1944, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁴⁸ Order for Internment, Internment Number 17134, 1944, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁴⁹ Deed Ledger, Deed #10911, 5 Nov 1902, Charles Essig, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁵⁰ Lot Card #58885, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁵¹ Ancestry.com, *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA Accessed September 20, 2019. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/7884/31776_4449720-00105?pid=108368491&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3D1910USCenIndex%26indiv%3Dtry%26h%3D108368491&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true
- ⁵² Lot Card #58885, Woodlawn Cemetery.
- ⁵³ Ancestry.com, *1870 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA, Accessed September 20, 2019. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/7163/4274853_00628?pid=30277521&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc%3DDOQ6%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource%26usePUBJs%3Dtrue%26qh%3DiKwRdZt%252Biw/CxC6yunDRw%253D%253D%26gss%3Dangsc%26new%3D1%26rank%3D1%26gsfn%3DHenry%26gsfn_x%3D0%26gsln%3DEssig%26gsln_x%3D0%26msbdy%3D1829%26msypn_ftp%3DNew%2520York%2520New%2520York%26MSAV%3D1%26uidh%3Dfph%26pcat%3D35%26h%3D30277521%26dbid%3D7163%26indiv%3D1%26ml_rpos%3D1&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=DOQ6&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true.
- ⁵⁴ Ancestry.com, *1870 United States Federal Census*.
- ⁵⁵ Ancestry.com, *1900 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA Accessed September 25, https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=WkK27&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&qh=07wwMD92gh5f8Y/Nzmlc7Q%3D%3D&gss=angs-g&new=1&rank=1&gsfn=Louisa%20Falk&gsfn_x=0&gsln=Essig&gsln_x=0&msypn_ftp=Germany&msypn=3253&msbdy=1835&msddy=1914&msdpn_ftp=New%20York,%20New%20York,%20USA&msdpn=1652382&mscng=Charles&mscns=Essig&catbucket=rsp&MSAV=1&uidh=fph&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=38197615&dbid=7602&indiv=1&ml_rpos=5.
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- ⁵⁸ *The Columbian 1912* (New York: Columbia University in the City of New York, 1912), 165; Photograph on page 10, "Series VII: Class Portraits 1901-1906, 1909-1913," Historic Photograph Collection Circa 1858-UA#003, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Archives.
- ⁵⁹ "Debarred Students," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Volume LII, No. 85, January 1909, 6.
- ⁶⁰ Ancestry.com. *New York, New York, Extracted Marriage Index, 1866-1937* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.
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- ⁶² Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/6061/4313920-01024?pid=41795343&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db%3D1920usfedcen%26indiv%3Dtry%26h%3D41795343&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true>
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- ⁶³ Catacomb Opening Authorization, Margaret Essig, April 8, 1963.
- ⁶⁴ "Obituaries," Brown Alumni Magazine, last modified November 6th, 2008, <https://www.brownalumnimagazine.com/articles/2008-11-06/obituaries>.
- ⁶⁵ "Marriage Announcement." *New York Herald Tribune (1926-1962)*, Jun 19, 1956. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1325261523?accountid=10226>.
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- ⁶⁸ Keshia Badalge, "AD Classics: Smith House / Richard Meier & Partners," Arch Daily, last modified February 28, 2018 <https://www.archdaily.com/889769/ad-classics-smith-house-richard-meier-and-partners>.
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