

Penney Mausoleum



Problem 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis
Faculty: Francoise Bollack, Ward Dennis & Andrew Dolkart
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The Penney Mausoleum is located in the Pine plot along Chestnut Avenue, a secondary road that branches off from the main West Border Avenue. Known today as the Penney mausoleum, the plot was originally purchased in 1919 by Millicent Willson Hearst, wife of famous publisher William Randolph Hearst.ⁱ In the 1960s, the plot's ownership transferred to Caroline Penney, wife of James Cash Penney, the founder the retail chain J.C. Penney.ⁱⁱ The mausoleum is relatively restrained considering the two prominent families that have owned the memorial. However, careful attention to construction details and specific design elements created a compact, powerful mausoleum worthy of the illustrious families that have been entombed there.

In 1929, George Willson, Millicent Hearst's father, contracted Presbrey-Leland to create the mausoleum. The design for the mausoleum was clearly derived from an existing template that Presbrey-Leland used frequently to create a "modern variant of the classic temple type."ⁱⁱⁱ Promotional materials claim that "sheer simplicity of design distinguishes this modern mausoleum of square plan in which the sole enrichment has been centered in the sculptured portal."^{iv} See a mausoleum highlighted in the Presbrey-Leland promotional materials in Figure 1. This described template is directly translated into the Willson design. The Willson design also adds the "modern note" of a monolithic roofstone.^v The nexus between the advertised templates and the final design of the Willson mausoleum is striking; however, Presbrey-Leland does incorporate unique design choices that set the particular commission apart.

The mausoleum, which faces West, is sited directly in the middle of the plot and slightly recessed from the road. The mausoleum's design favors the front as the main plane of decoration in order to focus the viewer's attention. No plans for the original landscaping remain; however, the existing trees that flank the mausoleum pre-date the 1970s re-landscaping that was completed when the Penney's purchased the plot. The two tall evergreens create a density that allows the comparative void of the mausoleum to stand out as shown in Figure 2.

The entirety of the mausoleum's mass is included in one flat plane with a unique monolithic roof slab that appears to float above the main mass of the structure. The mausoleum is constructed of a few large pieces of Dummerston granite rather than an assembly of smaller units.^{vi} The use of larger stones signifies wealth and follows Ruskin's belief that "the smaller the building, the more necessary it is that its masonry should be bold" in order to impart a sense of nobility.^{vii} The density of the main structure anchors the mausoleum into the ground, while the unique cut of the roof slab gives an impression of levity that draws the eye upwards to the small cross incised in the center of the roof stone.

Service's designation report for Woodlawn Cemetery. James Cash Penney began his department store career when he opened a branch of the Golden Rule dry goods store in Kemmerer, Wyoming. Adhering to the Golden Rule- do unto others as you would have done unto you- infused all of Penney's business transactions.^{xv} As Vanessa Castagna, Executive Vice President of JC Penney notes, Penney believed "take good care of customers, profits take good care of themselves."^{xvi} Throughout his career Penney bragged that he wore an off the rack suit from his "Towncraft" label claiming that he didn't want to purchase anything that wasn't "a well-made value right of the rack."^{xvii} Yet as Penney aged the company's suit buyers began to secretly have suits tailored to his unique body shape and sewed in the "Towncraft" label, allowing Penney to maintain his bragging rights. Penney consistently demonstrated his commitment to customer service without the arrogance typical of other entrepreneurs; thus, it was logical that Penney chose an understated, well-constructed mausoleum.

The Penney's completed a large re-landscaping campaign in the early 1970s. As seen in the sketch done by the landscape company in Figure 6, the plantings re-enforce the front elevation as the mausoleum's main point of interaction with the passerby. As the drawing notes that two large evergreens flanking the mausoleum were existing, and the new landscaping re-enforced the use of vegetation to frame the memorial.

Today, the mausoleum is in good condition at testament to Presbrey-Leland's craftsmanship. As highlighted in the original promotional materials, the monolith roofstone was both a decorative and practical element ensuring water tight construction.^{xviii} The mausoleum was endowed by the Penney family and has been maintained as a space for quiet reflection and remembrance. Today, a small cross of pennies sits on the window sill right above the altar-a tribute to the late James Cash Penney left by his granddaughter. The richly-detailed mausoleum is a simple, well-crafted mausoleum that stands a tribute to the illustrious families that have owned the memorial.

ⁱ Deeds, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Provided by Susan Olsen.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*

ⁱⁱⁱ Commemoration: The Book of Presbrey- Leland Memorials, Presbrey-Leland Inc., Avery Classics Holdings for Woodlawn Cemetery Sepulchral Monument, Woodlawn Gift Box 1, 1929, Plate XV and Plate XVI.

^{iv} *Ibid*

^v *Ibid*

^{vi} Presbrey- Leland Contract for Willson Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, 1863-1999: Caroline Penney (formerly George Willson) Mausoleum Collection, Department of Drawings and Archives, Columbia University Avery Library.

^{vii} John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849.

^{viii} Urn, *Cemetery Symbols Found in Forest Lawn Cemetery*, <http://buffaloah.com/a/DCTNRY/u/urn.html>, Accessed October 13, 2011.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 5



Figure 6

