

Historically, elaborate above-ground burial chambers known as mausolea were reserved for burying only the most important and venerated people, and were usually very rare. However, around the turn of the 20th century, the popularity of the mausoleum suddenly exploded among New York's wealthy elite. This is evidenced by the enormous collection of mausolea found within historic Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.

Mausolea for the wealthy were constructed through two different means; either through commissions with individual architects, or through Mausoleum Companies that sprang into existence at this time to meet the growing demand for the popular funerary structure. Promotional material for the Presbrey-Leland Mausoleum Company makes the case for owning a mausoleum, even at the exorbitant \$5000 price, "A Mausoleum is an investment in piece of mind. Properly constructed it offers a permanent and private place of sepulcher for the family- clean, dry, and sanitary. It is at once a Memorial and a utility, rich in possibilities for architectural expression, however modest it may be in size".¹

There are 1300 mausolea located within Woodlawn cemetery² and indeed all are rich examples of architectural expression. Individually, any one of these mausolea can be evaluated in terms of its style, materials, form, who built it, and who it was built for. Together these pieces of information tell a story which is unique to the structure.

The story of this paper centers around the mausoleum built for the Estate of Harry F. Morse. The Morse Mausoleum is located on a lot on Oak Hill within Woodlawn Cemetery, not far from the Jerome Avenue cemetery entrance. Mausolea may often be designed to contain entire families, but the Morse Mausoleum houses only two people. It is the final resting place of Harry Morse and his wife Jane Schuyler Morse. Harry Morse lived from 1852 to 1919. He was born in Maine to a wealthy family and later moved to New York after marrying. He was a business man

¹ *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials*. New York 1932. p.1.

² Warren, Charles D., Carole Ann Fabian, and Janet Parks. *Sylvan Cemetery : Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn*. New York, 2014. p. 7.

involved in a number of different incarnations of his family business throughout his career, including serving as Vice President of the Groton Iron Works, a shipbuilding company. Morse's wife was Jane Schuyler Morse (1869-1924), a wealthy socialite from the famous Schuyler family (one of the oldest and wealthiest families in America). She was 17 years younger than her husband. The Morses appear in several Society summer registries, registering them at a home in Paris, and at their summer home in Sands Point, Long Island.³ The Sands Point estate was where each spouse subsequently died- just 5 years apart. The estate, described as "a large residence with private bathing beach" was sold shortly after Jane's passing.⁴

The Morse Mausoleum was constructed in 1920 after Harry's passing in 1919. (Presumably, Harry was entombed within one of the cemetery's receiving chambers until the time of its completion.⁵ The Morse Mausoleum represented a collaborative project between the architects Parker Morse Hooper and William Edgar Moran working in conjunction with contractors E.H. Stone Mausoleum Company who provided the foundation for the structure. One of the project architects, Parker Morse Hooper was the nephew of Harry Morse. Morse Hooper was the editor of *Architectural Forum*. His most notable works included the Camden Public Library in Camden, Maine⁶ and the Truesdale Hospital in Massachusetts.⁷ The mausoleum which he designed for his uncle represents his sole project in Woodlawn cemetery.

The Morse Mausoleum faces the street at Oak Hill. It sits centered in its lot, and back as far as possible, with its base partially submerged into the sloping ground. The Morse Mausoleum is surrounded on all sides by family monuments. (Oak Hill in particular tends to intersperse family monuments between mausolea). To its left is the Collier headstone, to its right the Hall obelisk, and behind are family plots for the Bloodhill and Morrill families. The arrangement of the different types of lots is not random. In fact, Woodlawn carefully controlled the appearance of the cemetery by only opening up certain lots at certain times for purchase in order to maintain the desired balance between mausolea and monuments for each individual street.⁸

³ Social Register Association, 1919.

⁴ "Brooklyn Life: Port Washington." *Brooklyn Life and Activities of Long Island Society*, July 25, 1925.

⁵ Andrew Dolkart desk critique 10/9/15

⁶ "Camden Public Library" *Wikipedia*.

⁷ "Truesdale Hospital" *Wikipedia*.

⁸ Susan Olsen email correspondence 10/12/15.

The Morse Mausoleum is approached by 3 steps which narrow in ascending order and emerge out of a classical style base that trims the entire monument. The mausoleum was constructed from Maine Pink Conway granite.⁹ The stone was cut into perfect 44 x 18 pieces and stacked in 7 rows to create a cubic shape measuring 152 inches in plan per side. The façade contains two large Bronze doors with a glass window pane. The doors are framed by classical pilasters carved into the stone which are topped by an entablature. The mausoleum is topped with a 3-slab ziggurat-style roof. The side façades should each contain 4 ventilation grilles, though only the upper grilles are extant. All lower grilles on both sides have either been lost, removed, or possibly stolen. The rear façade of the mausoleum faces east and contains a yellow glass window, possibly with gold in it, as building specifications for the mausoleum called for "gold opalescent glass."¹⁰ The window was carefully placed so that it would capture morning sunlight and illuminate the interior within. However, after noon the mausoleum is left completely in shadow.

While there are over 1300 distinct mausolea at Woodlawn Cemetery, stylistically many of them look very similar to one another (a few are even identical). This can be attributed to the fact that the mausolea in Woodlawn Cemetery must necessarily adhere to quite a few programmatic requirements. All mausolea have a size restriction which limits them to the confines of their individual lot. They must all have a proper foundation and be made of high-quality materials (usually stone) that will hold up over time so that they do not become "a menace to the cemetery"¹¹. They also tend to be limited aesthetically to a very small number of architectural styles deemed 'appropriate' for funerary architecture (i.e. Classical, Egyptian, Gothic etc.) In fact, Mausoleum Companies often grouped them together by style in promotional catalogues.

With only a limited number of styles, it is interesting to note the subtle ways in which each mausoleum interprets and expresses its style. In the case of the Morse Mausoleum, the building is classical. Yet it is also very much a product of its 1920 year of construction in the way it attempts to address a common problem encountered by architects working at the beginning of the 20th century- How to interpret classical forms from antiquity and make them relevant to a modern 20th century aesthetic?

⁹ Morse, Harry F. Series II: Mausolea and Monument Files: Woodlawn Cemetery Records 1863-1999, Avery Drawings and Archives. Building Specifications p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹¹ *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials.* New York, 1932. p. 2.

In his book, 'The Classical Language of Architecture', John Summerson defines a classical building as one whose, "elements derive, directly or indirectly from the architectural vocabulary of the ancient world" and aims to "achieve a demonstrable harmony of parts".¹² The Morse mausoleum is clearly classical due to its symmetry and proportionality. Additionally, it features classical elements such as a classical base, pilasters and entablature, and carved decoration above the door featuring a Grecian urn. Yet simultaneously, the cubic structure is boxy, flat, and even unfinished in appearance. Initially, it would appear that a page from the Presbrey-Leland catalogue advising money-conscious customers to leave off certain elements of their classical mausoleum such as columns or to replace the traditional classical pediment with a less expensive stepped roof might account for these stylistic reductions in the Morse Mausoleum. "In [the] modern adaptation of the classic temple... the salient qualities of the classic temple form are retained with modification of detail and cost".¹³ However, financial concerns are not an adequate explanation for the minimal appearance of the Morse Mausoleum. The Morses were extremely wealthy and money would have been no object. More likely the appearance of the mausoleum represents an intentional stylistic choice on the part of the architects. Examination of the interior of the mausoleum provides further clarity.

With their central location, recessed entrance and dark color, the bronze doors are clearly the visual focal point of the front facade of the Morse mausoleum. Yet the doors are somewhat deceptive from the outside¹⁴ because upon trying to enter, a person finds their way of entry blocked, and the interior inaccessible. Section and plan drawings for the Morse mausoleum show the interior space dominated by two elongated slate sarcophagi with classical decoration which sit on the floor and take up most of the space. Someone attempting to enter this cramped space would have to do so uncomfortably, with their back against the wall and with very little room to move around. Most mausolea serve a dual function. Their primary purpose is to house the dead, but often they are also designed to accommodate living visitors who come to spend time with deceased relatives and friends. For this reason, mausolea are often designed with clear paths of entry, well-lit interiors, and marble benches for sitting and reflecting. But the Morse Mausoleum differs in that it contains none of these things. Clearly, the structure was never intended to be

¹² Summerson, John. *The Classical Language of Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966. p. 8.

¹³ *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials*. New York, 1932. p. 44.

¹⁴ Françoise Bollaek desk critique 10/12/15.

entered. One explanation might be that the Morses had no children¹⁵, and so were not anticipating any visitors. It does seem very odd though that the architect (who in this case was also family) in designing this Mausoleum for his uncle left no space for himself to participate in it as a visitor. Whatever the reason, Morse Hooper instead designed a mausoleum that is sealed, and is about protection and containment of the sarcophagi¹⁶ rather than visitation. In keeping with modern architecture, the structure of the outside reflects the use of the inside, and this classical mausoleum which is essentially nothing more than a containment vessel, therefore expresses itself as a box.

Additionally, a modernizing of classical forms can be seen upon examination of the Morse mausoleum's exterior decorative features. The classical decorative work is achieved by the use of concentric lines, carved very shallowly into the surface of the rock to visually create a door frame, pilasters, and an entablature. The work is all delicate, elongated, and very flat. Perhaps this mausoleum is drawing its inspiration from the work of John Soane who working during the 1800's was very ahead of his time, and used a flattened version of classicism on the façade of the Soane Museum.¹⁷ The thin decoration on the Morse Mausoleum also serves to break down the classical forms into lines and simple geometric shapes- perhaps a foreshadowing of the Art Deco movement that was soon to come.

¹⁵ Ancestry.com

¹⁶ Françoise Bollack desk critique 10/12/15

¹⁷ Françoise Bollack desk critique 10/12/15 and Summerson, John. *The Classical Language of Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966. p. 40.

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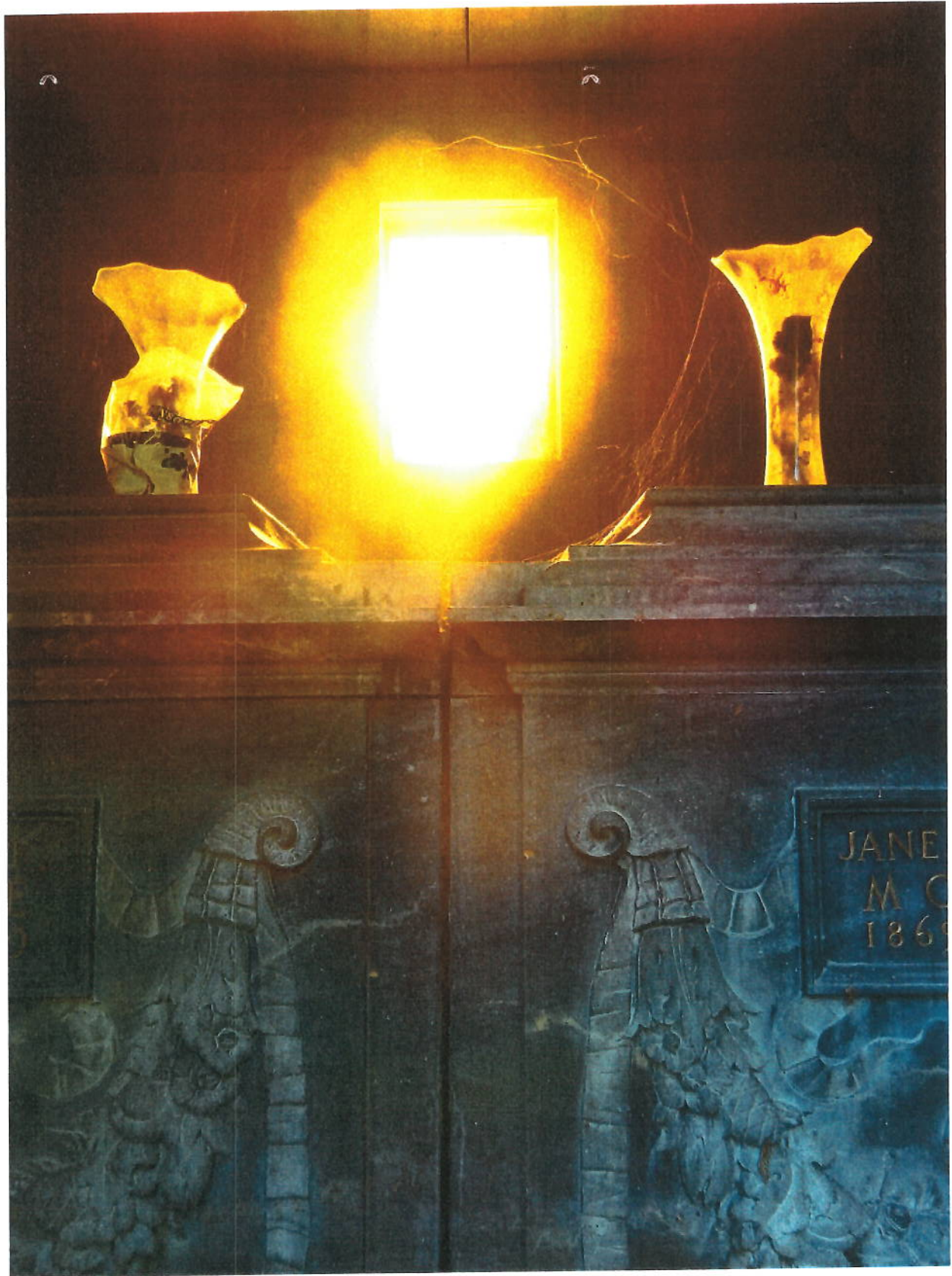
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Morse Mausoleum (front view).



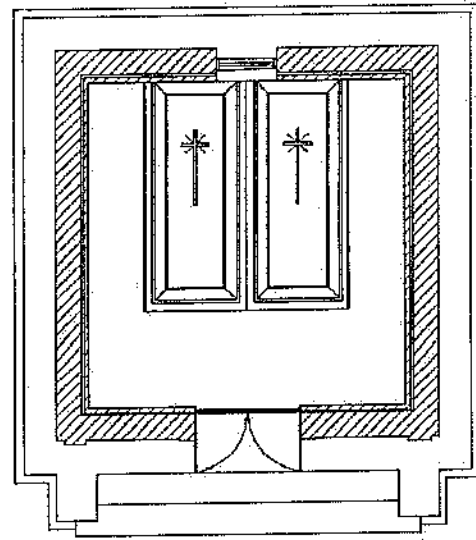
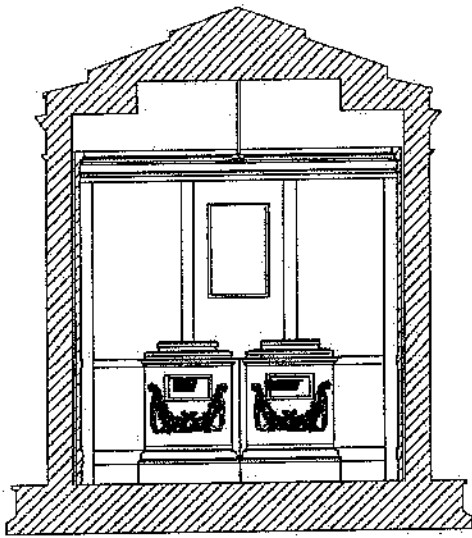
Morse Mausoleum (side view)



"Eternal Sunshine". Interior shot of the Morse Mausoleum Sarcophagi and the East window at sunrise.



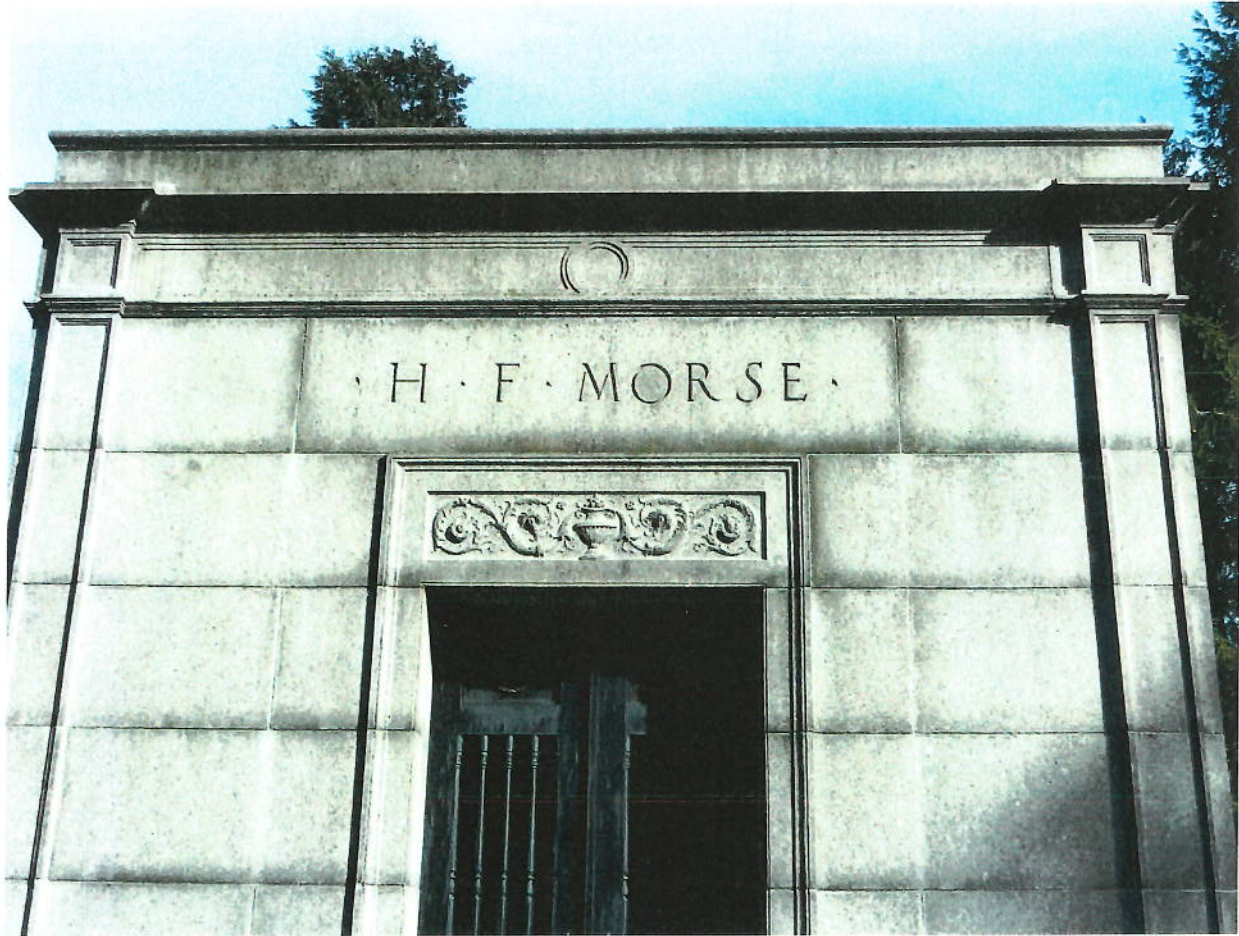
With their elaborate garlands, the sarcophagi in the Morse Mausoleum take their cues from classical antiquity. Above: Marble sarcophagus with garlands and the myth of Theseus and Ariadne, ca. 130-150 A.D. Image: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/90.12a,b>



Section and plan drawings of Morse Mausoleum reveal how much space the sarcophagi take up in the interior of the mausoleum.



Second story of the façade of Sir John Soane's House (the Soane Museum) depicts a compressed form of classicism. Decorative detail is thinly carved into the stone, producing an effect of flatness. Image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_John_Soane%27s_Museum#/media/File:Soane_Museum_1.jpg



Flattened details on the Morse Mausoleum façade.