

Columbia University

Historic Preservation Studio I - Fall 2010

Project 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis

Date: October 18, 2010

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The Woodlawn Cemetery Katherine Kelly Mausoleum

Introduction

■ About the Mausoleum

Katherine Kelly Mausoleum was built in 1962-67, ordered by Miss. Katherine Kelly who has been the sole occupant of this mausoleum since 1976.ⁱ The mausoleum is designed by H.K. Peacock Memorials Inc. (Valhalla, New York), which is a New York based monument and mausoleum company since 1927. The majority of the mausoleums they design use granite, and this mausoleum is one of them. Architect Reginald M. Morgan (H.K. Peacock Memorials) designed the mausoleum, George C. Williams (Woodlawn Cemetery) was the chief engineer, and John Gilbert (H.K. Peacock Memorials) was the builder.ⁱⁱ

This mausoleum is located at the Woodlawn Cemetery, Columbine Plot Section 81, southwest of the Woodlawn Cemetery main office.ⁱⁱⁱ

Background and History

■ About Miss. Katherine Kelly

Although there are a number of mausoleums for prominent individuals and families at the Woodlawn Cemetery, unfortunately, not much could be found about this lady, Miss. Katherine Kelly, even after researching documents at Woodlawn Archive, Rare Books archive at Avery, Historical Newspapers and censuses. Since her birth certificate is not available at the New York Public Library, at the moment there is no document nor proof that show who her parents were. At the time of her mausoleum purchase in 1962, she was not married, nor had any family alive.

■ Mausoleum Construction Timeline

04/14/1894	Katherine Kelly born, social security number obtained in New York ^{iv}
04/19/1962	Mausoleum ordered by Kelly
05/04/1962	Mausoleum Blueprint sent from H.K. Peacock to the Woodlawn Cemetery
04/15/1963	Gardening work started
09/21/1964	Balustrades added (Requested by Kelly)
06/30/1966	Seamless Bronze casket placed in Sarcophagus
04/06/1967	Kelly and Harold J. Schaller (H.K. Peacock) visited Woodlawn to see the progress of planting. Mock funeral done with H.K. Peacock staff
10/04/1976	Katherine Kelly, 82 years old, died at a nursing home in Queens.

- 11/19/1976 Reis Bega (4/11/1923-7/19/2008)^v, the person Kelly worked for as a personal secretary, and also the sole legatee under her will, requested the Woodlawn Cemetery to issue the deed under his name, and to obtain the key of the Mausoleum which was thrown away by the staff at the nursing home Kelly spent her last years.
- 12/02/1976 The key to the mausoleum sent to Reis Bega

Formal Analysis

■ Building Siting

This mausoleum is located at Columbine Plot Section 81, 5 from the intersection of Heather Avenue and Whitewood Avenue.^{vi} Its entrance is facing south, and the front façade, urns, pedestals, and balustrades are arranged in a parallel relationship with the front property line.

■ Plan Design

When you walk through Whitewood Avenue and arrive in front of this mausoleum, you will be warmly welcomed by the beautiful granite urns, pedestals, and balustrades that function as a gate, guiding visitors the way to the entrance. The balustrades, added by the owner Kelly's wish after the mausoleum design was completed^{vii}, create a path for visitors giving a welcoming atmosphere. You push the door inside, walk in, and you will be standing right in front of the sarcophagus.

■ Section Design

This is a mausoleum made only for Ms. Katherine Kelly, and the simple interior made of marble gives us a very quiet and plain atmosphere. The main elements of the building's interior are; a marble sarcophagus placed in the middle of the back wall, bronze flower ornament on both sides, and the stained glass windows on the side walls. The walls, trims and ceiling are all made of polished Alabama white marble, the floor is of silver gray Georgia marble, and the sarcophagus is made of polished Blue vein Georgia marble.^{viii} The composition of the interior is perfectly symmetry, except for the hand mirror shaped wall engraving with her initial "K.K", and her name engraved on the sarcophagus. This symmetric design and the material they chose for the interior create a quiet, calm and refined atmosphere, and at the same time, with the decorative engravings on the wall and the sarcophagus, visitors can feel the existence of an elegant lady.

■ Façade Design

The main principle of the façade is symmetry. Moreover, the main block of the façade is a 12 feet cube. This cube shape creates a solid, austere impression. However, at the same time, the hand carved ribbon garland above the door, the classical letter chosen for the engraving of her name, the acanthus pattern around the door^{ix}, wreath and the extended ribbon decoration on the door make the façade look extremely decorative, elegant and feminine.

The façade is made of light barre granite. Although there are a lot of mausoleums with rusticated façade in the surrounding area, its finish is all smooth. Also, as we can see in the front, side and back elevation, this mausoleum is constructed with huge granite blocks. The light color of the granite and the smooth texture of the façade create a noble and sophisticated taste, and the decorations using flowers, leaves and ribbon motif make us imagine a lady of classic and elegant atmosphere. From the door made of glass and cast iron, we can see the

magnificent marble floor and sarcophagus even before opening the door as we approach the entrance. The difference of material used for the exterior and interior suggests that this mausoleum is designed to differentiate the public and private zones.

■ Landscape Design

According to the document found at Woodlawn Archive, it seems that there were a well planned landscape design around the mausoleum. The gardening plan shows that relatively low trees were planted along the front and side property lines, and high trees were selected for the back property line, with azalea and myrtle on both corners. This design creates an arch covering the mausoleum, which separates the plot from the outside area, and makes a unique sense of place. Although the landscape cannot be seen clearly anymore, the arch shaped door and the façade decoration around the door, still shows the connection it had with its landscape.

Conclusion

As we have examined in the formal analysis of this mausoleum's siting, plan, section and façade designs, this building's significance comes from the distinct balance of solid, austere atmosphere, and an extremely elegant, feminine and classic decoration found both in the exterior and interior designs. At first, it seems quiet and plain, yet visitors can feel the welcoming atmosphere with the decorative urns, pedestals and balustrades showing the way to the mausoleum. As visitors get closer, the elegant and feminine decoration catches their eyes. At the time this mausoleum was built, there were three major categories of mausoleum design; Classic, Gothic and Modern, and this mausoleum is a fine example of the classic mausoleums. Katherine Kelly's mausoleum appears on the first page of the mausoleum catalog published by H.K. Peacock Memorials in 1966, which also proves the significance of its designⁱ. Although the life of Ms. Katherine Kelly is still unknown even in the Woodlawn Cemetery, its design seems to tell a story of an elegant single lady who deeply loved classic arts and designs, and who wanted to make herself remembered in the future.

ⁱ Mausoleum profile obtained from the Woodlawn Cemetery

ⁱⁱ Correspondence document at Woodlawn Archive, Avery Library

ⁱⁱⁱ Map of the Woodlawn Cemetery, The Woodlawn Cemetery

^{iv} Social Security Death Index, Number: 101-16-0912; Issue State: New York; Issue Date: Before 1951. AncestryLibrary.com, Accessed October 4, 2010

^v Social Security Death Index, Number: 085-26-1402; Issue State: New York; Issue Date: 1951. AncestryLibrary.com, Accessed October 11, 2010

^{vi} Mausoleum profile obtained from the Woodlawn Cemetery

^{vii} Correspondence document at Woodlawn Archive, Avery Library

^{viii} Drawings at Woodlawn Archive, Avery Library

^{ix} Drawings at Woodlawn Archive, Avery Library

^x H.K. Peacock Memorials, Inc., *Commemorative Art A Collection of Distinguished Memorials*. New York: American Institute of Commemorative Art, 1966, p.8.



Front Elevation: Photo by Author



Details: Photos by Author



Construction: Photos obtained at H.K. Peacock Memorials Office