

Problem 3: Woodlawn Cemetery, B. Head Mausoleum

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HP Studio: Reading Buildings

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Standing alone in the center of lot 11231 in Woodlawn Cemetery is a small but stout mausoleum. Built with granite walls roughly a foot thick, the tomb of Betsy Head is a fortress of memory in both purpose and meaning. But which memory resides inside this bastion of recollection; the story of Mrs. Head's life, an account of the obscure designer or, the tale of the mausoleum itself? The answer is all of these and more. In order to truly understand the nature of this mausoleum, all aspects that make up the memorial's history have to be examined.

Betsy Head was born in the United Kingdom in approximately 1853. On September 28, 1884 she, with her twelve year old daughter Lena, arrived in New York in the company of George C Taylor, a wealthy New York businessman.ⁱ Not much is known about Mrs. Head prior to her arrival in the United States however, one source mentions that she was the widow of an English gentleman.ⁱⁱ She died on June 14, 1907 on Long Island of, "a complication of diseases."^{iv} Mrs. Head was officially employed by Mr. Taylor as his housekeeper for his extensive Long Island estate. Yet, the relationship between Mrs. Head and Mr. Taylor exceeded that of normal employee / employer dynamics. While specific details on the nature of their relationship remain interred with Mrs. Head, there are some interesting reports left behind. Namely that, Mr. Taylor had in his will that Mrs. Head would inherit his entire estate on Long Island, which was valued between \$15,000,000 to \$30,000,000 and was to be given bonds and securities that amounted to around \$1,000,000. However, because she died before Mr. Taylor the inheritance was defaulted back to the estate.^v Her mausoleum at the Woodlawn Cemetery in New York also lies on a lot near that of Mr. Taylor's.

Mrs. Head also left behind a charitable but slightly surprising legacy. In her will, Mrs. Head left half of her estate to the City of New York, "[to] be used to purchase and improve playgrounds for children, such as recreation places, public baths, etc."^{vi} This money was used to construct the Betsy Head Play Center in Brooklyn, which is a landmark designated site. However, the reason she left the bulk of her estate to the city was because she gave nothing to her daughter save for 5 dollars. Several years prior to her death, Mrs. Head had disowned her daughter because she had married, in secret, one of Mr. Taylor's workers on his estate. Both Mrs. Head and Mr. Taylor felt that this marriage was "beneath her,"^{vii} and largely left her out of their wills.

Her mausoleum was designed and built by the Leland and Hall Company of New York. Little is known about the company other than the fact they advertised stone home and garden furnishings as well as mausoleums and memorials in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Also, they had studios in Italy and Long Island as well as granite works in Barre, Vt.^{viii} The mausoleum is built primarily out of granite with interior finishes of

white and sienna marble and cement foundations. The door and widow grilles are made of cast bronze. The lower section of the doors has a panel depicting an inverted torch, which is a common symbol for death or mourning.^{ix} The widows are of stained glass designs by an unknown artist and, according to the specifications contract, are, "of selected design to cost no more than 10 per cent more than those shown in plan."^x One window depicts an angel holding a bouquet of flowers and the other depicts an angel holding a palm leaf. The overall cost was \$359.70^{xi} and seems to be paid for by Betsy Head herself. The date that mausoleum was ordered was June 6, 1904 almost three years to the day before Mrs. Head died.

The mausoleum has an interesting though sometimes awkward design. There are two basic volumes that make up the design; a shorter, wider volume that is characterized by a rusticated stone finish on the exterior and a taller, narrower volume that penetrates through the rough exterior and is characterized by a smooth ashlar finish. This play between volumes is carried into the interior of the mausoleum where it can be seen in section. The middle portion of the ceiling is raised above the two sides creating a distinction between implicit boundaries. On the exterior, the rusticated stonework gives the impression of solidity and almost appears to be acting as protection and support for the smoother penetrating volume. This idea is furthered by fact that on the front and rear facades, the lowest band of stone is also rusticated and literally provides the base for the more finished stone work above.

The overall design places the focus on the front elevation. In fact, the path that leads up to the mausoleum takes one from the street, to the door and, directly inside. The structure was purposefully designed to be approached from the front and no other direction. The basic form of the mausoleum is very loosely reminiscent of that of a Greek or Roman temple. There is a series of columns arranged in pairs carved into the middle stone course on the front, flanking either side of the door. Because of their squat nature and stockier proportions, the columns appear to be of the Tuscan order which, according to architectural historian James Ackerman, is the most rustic and solid of the classical orders.^{xii} Each layer of columns supports an arch which recedes as they approach the door. The arches are each semi circular however, because of their arrangement in the rectangular entablature they appear to be ovular in nature. The lines of the arches are also continued on the entablature in an impression carved in the stone that connects the meeting point of each set of column pairs. There is also details carved in the shape between the edge of the entablature and the circular impression that seem to be in a toned down art nouveau style. The inscription, "B. HEAD" is carved in block lettering in the center below the slightly protruding pediment.

The interior of the mausoleum is finished in two bands of white marble paneling separated by a sienna marble molding. The top band has a geometrical design carved on each panel and the bottom has more pronounced blue veins. There is also an interesting floral tile pattern around the edge of the floor. The most noticeable feature of the interior is the marble tomb which holds the remains of Mrs. Head. The interior of the mausoleum is not very large being only 11'5 1/2" by 9'2" however, almost half of the space is taken up by the tomb itself. This makes for an awkward and cramped space and leaves no doubt as to what the main focal point of the mausoleum is. The tomb actually extends into the window panels on either side, visually heightening the feeling of confined space.

There are some unique construction details in the interior of the mausoleum. The marble paneling on the ceiling rests on molding that is held up by ties that connect straight into the stone wall above. The panels themselves appear to be held in place by gravity alone. Also, the interior portion of the ceiling that is higher than sides is not actually a direct continuation of the differing heights of the volumes as expressed on the exterior. The ceiling inside is brought down 1'2" than the actual height of the roof.

The overall condition and construction of the mausoleum are fine, however; there are some areas of deformation and deterioration. The marble ceiling panels in the raised section have started to bend under their own weight and appear to be bowed. The tile on the floor of the interior has almost completely faded or worn away in sections. There is also a large amount of dust and spider webs that cover everything inside the mausoleum from the floor to the ceiling and even the marble tomb itself. This would indicate that the mausoleum is probably seldom visited. Other than average weathering and slight vegetation growth, the exterior appears to be in good condition. The step at the front of the path by the street, however, seems to have become slightly detached. The mausoleum also appears to have been built precisely as in the construction drawings without many noticeable discrepancies.

In conclusion, the Betsy Head mausoleum contains the memory of not only a woman who led an unconventional life but also of a garden furnishing and memorial company who is largely lost to time and of a structure whose design, though at times awkward, possesses elements that deserve further examination and, at least, an occasional visitor.

ⁱ see attached naturalization record

ⁱⁱ "DEATH OF BETSY HEAD: Daughter Disowned for Marrying May Get Large Estate" *New York Tribune (1900-1910)*; Jun 15, 1907; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Tribune (1841-1922)

ⁱⁱⁱ "YOUNG HEIRESS WEDS FOREMAN.: Miss Lena Head, Ward of Millionaire Taylor, Secretly" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*; Sep 1, 1901; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1987)

^{iv} "DEATH OF BETSY HEAD: Daughter Disowned for Marrying May Get Large Estate" *New York Tribune*

^v "GEORGE C. TAYLOR'S WILL: Annuity for Housekeeper's Daughter Cut Out in Codicil" *New York Tribune (1900-1910)*; Oct 31, 1907; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Tribune (1841-1922)

^{vi} "New Brownsville Playground Planned as Most Elaborate in City"; "Daughter Gets \$5 of \$365,000 Estate," *New York Times*, July 14, 1907, C8; Betsy Head Play Center Landmarks Preservation Commission designation

^{vii} "YOUNG HEIRESS WEDS FOREMAN.: Miss Lena Head, Ward of Millionaire Taylor, Secretly" *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*; Sep 1, 1901

^{viii} see attached flyer document

^{ix} "Victorian Cemetery Symbolism - Inverted Torch." *VintageViews*. Web. 17 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.vintageviews.org/vv-tl/Photos/MtHope/Sym0016.html>>.

^x see attached specifications contract document

^{xi} Ibid

^{xii} Ackerman, James. "The Tuscan/Rustic Order: A Study in the Metaphorical Language of Architecture", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42.1 (March 1983:15-34).



Figure 1: B Head mausoleum

FAMILY NAME		FIRST NAME OF DECEASED	
HEAD		BETSY	
TOWN AND LOCATION OF CHURCH			
COMMON PLACAS COUNTY NEW YORK COUNTY			
DATE OF NATURALIZATION	NUMBER SECTION	PAGE NO.	NO. OF PAGES IN
SEPT 18 1890	677		132
RECORD OF NATURALIZED PERSONS			
ISLIP L.I. N.Y.			
CITIZENSHIP	DATE DATE OF AGE	OTHER NATIONALITY	
		ENGLISH	
PLACE OF ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES		DATE OF ARRIVAL	
		SEPT 28 1890	
NAME, ADDRESS AND OCCUPATION OF APPLICANT TO NATURALIZATION			
1 STEPHEN S. PALMER 121 W 73 ST NY			
2			

Figure 2: Naturalization Record

GARDEN SETTING, Charles M. Linn, Jr., Landscape Architect

HOW WONDROUSLY BEAUTIFUL IS THIS GARDEN SETTING—stately—dignified; its quiet restfulness makes a compelling appeal. Our love for a garden is a rightful inheritance and it is not surprising that the ever-increasing attention which is being paid to the architectural features and arrangements of our own town and country houses should be accompanied by a revival of that interest in the laying out and adornment of the surrounding gardens in which our forefathers delighted.

COLUMNS, STATUARY, SUN DIALS, BENCHES, FOUNTAINS, WELL HEADS, PERGOLAS, VASES, TABLES, etc., IN MARBLE, STONE AND BRONZE.

Portfolios Catalogue request.

LELAND & HALL CO.

557 Fifth Avenue, - New York

Granite Works: BARRE, VERMONT  *Studios:* PIETRASANTA, ITALY LONG ISLAND CITY

Figure 3: Leland & Hall advertisement

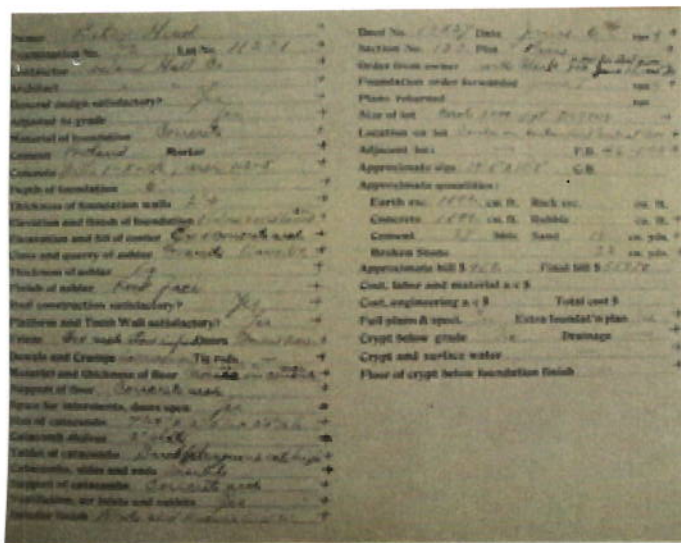


Figure 4: Copy of Specification Contract

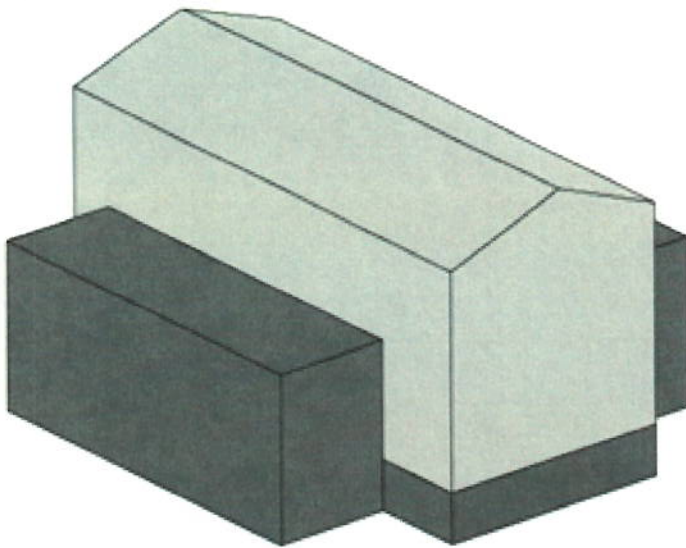


Figure 5: Volumetric study

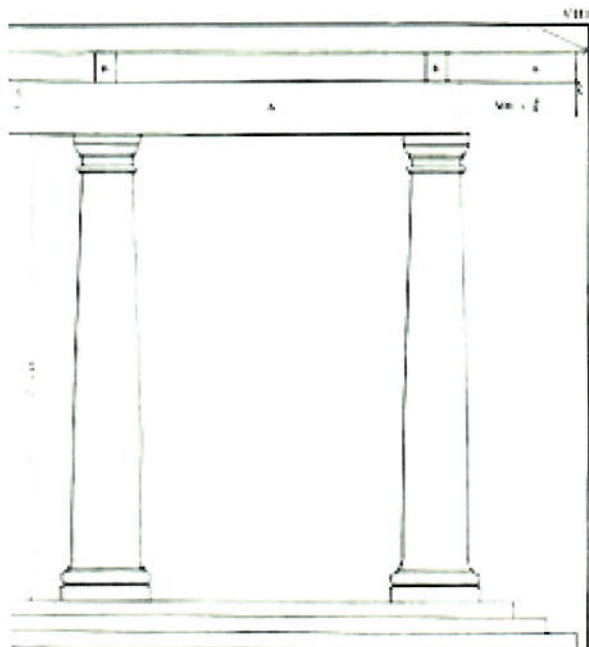


Figure 6: Comparison of Tuscan order from Palladio and columns in mausoleum

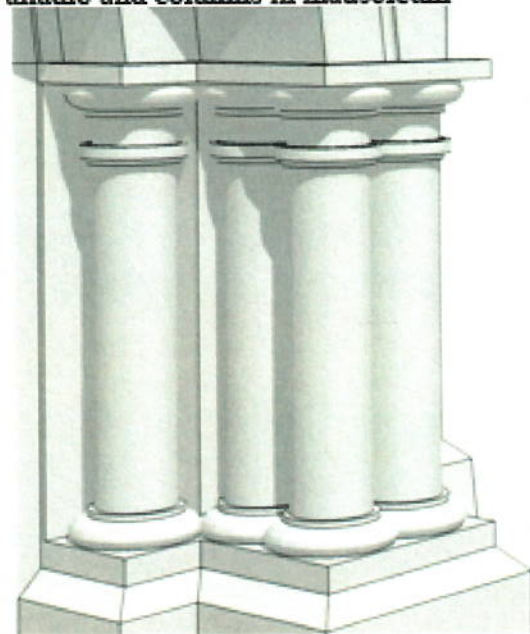


Figure 7: Continuation of volumetric system
(occupation exists in the overlapping area)

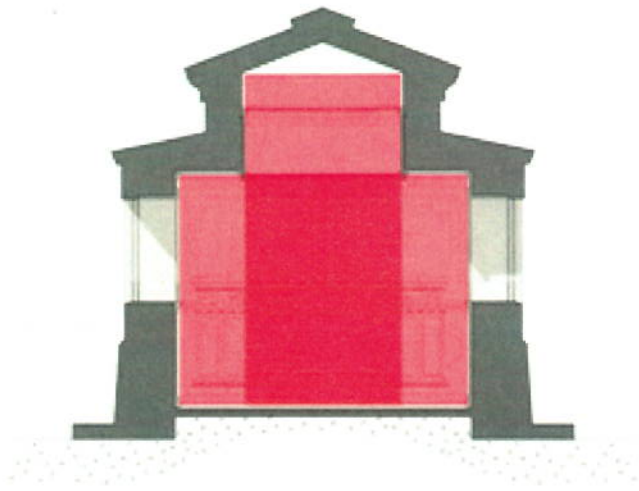


Figure 8: Interior view showing marble
paneling and intrusion of tomb into space



Figure 9: Bowing of top ceiling panel

