

Patrick Caughey

Historic Preservation Studio: Reading Buildings

Problem 3

Fall 2010

The Goelet Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery

The Goelets first appeared in New Amsterdam when Jacobus Goelet arrived with his father, Francis Goelet, in 1676.¹ The Goelet lineage is of Huguenot decent; their arrival in the Americas was the result of an ancestral retreat from religious persecution in La Rochelle². After Francis and Jacobus first arrived in New Amsterdam at the end of the seventeenth century, Francis returned to Holland for his effects but never returned: his ship was presumably lost at sea.³ Jacobus was entrusted with Frederick Phillipse, a popular merchant in New York at the time and later married Jannetje Coessar, also a member of a Huguenot Family. Jacobus died in 1731, leaving a family of six children of whom his third son, John, married Jannetje Cannon and fathered four children before his death in 1753.⁴

John's fourth child, Peter Goelet, laid the foundation of wealth for the subsequent generations of the Goelet Family. He first partnered with Peter T. Curtenius in the hardware business, but later in 1765 bought his partners rights and continued to operate his hardware enterprise independently. Recognized by the public as the "Golden Key," Peter Goelet's business was well established⁵ for its variety of household hardware in the latest fashions "of London and Bristol."⁶ (Figure 1.1)

Peter Goelet Sr. left his son, Peter Goelet Jr. with a strong financial foundation from which to expand. He began investing heavily in real estate throughout the city, leaving his four children (Peter, Jean, Hannah and Robert) an even larger foundation of wealth from which to erect what we may now recognize as the Goelet real estate empire.

Robert and Peter Goelet, sons of Peter Goelet Jr., were very closely associated throughout their lives. Peter, sometimes referred to as "Uncle Peter"⁷ went through life unmarried. His philosophy towards business bordered on being parsimonious, however, his extreme frugality seemingly strengthened the Goelet's grasp on the real estate market. Robert Goelet married a woman by the name of Sarah Ogden⁸ and fathered two sons, Robert and Ogden Goelet. Peter and Robert preserved the business principles instilled in them by their father and invested in real estate "upon the lines of the city's growth and improvement,"⁹ and consequently became the owners of some of the most valuable lands in New York.

Like their father, Robert and Ogden Goelet were given a very strong foundation of wealth from which to expand. Robert Goelet graduated from Columbia College in 1860,¹⁰ became a lawyer then dedicated his career to the attention and care of the Goelet Estates left to him by his father and uncle.¹¹ Robert Goelet was regarded as a man of intellect with a strong sense of civic pride¹² who was a model figure to

other large real estate entrepreneurial types in New York City. In 1879, Robert married Harriette Louise Warren and fathered two children, Robert Walton and Beatrice Goelet. Robert Goelet was a member of several prominent men's clubs in New York including the Metropolitan and Knickerbocker, as well as several Yachting associations.¹³

Robert's brother Ogden also devoted himself to the care and progression of the family fortune. Ogden married Mary Wilson in 1877¹⁴ and also fathered two children, Robert and Mary Goelet. Ogden, like his brother, was a member of several prominent social clubs throughout the city including several yachting associations.¹⁵ Despite Ogden's regular absence from the city while he participated and orchestrated yachting events abroad, he maintained a close relationship with his brother Robert. If familial relationships played a role in the growth and strength of the Goelet fortune, Robert and Ogden are a prime example of such a bond that further strengthened the empire. Together, they continued to build upon the already prolific acquisition of Goelet Estates and managed to erect several notable buildings along the way, designed by the leading architects of the early twentieth century.

Two of these buildings include the Goelet Building, located on the corner of Broadway and 20th, and the Judge Building, located at 110 Fifth Avenue and 16th Street. What do these two buildings have in common? They were both designed by acclaimed architects, McKim, Mead and White.¹⁶ McKim, Mead and White was a prolific architectural firm that was very popular in the eastern United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Their projects included the plan for what is now Columbia University, Penn Station, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Harvard Club and the Collector's Club; just to name a few. Their talent for fashionable design was endless. Their relationship with the Goelet family is evident through their professional cooperation, but one of Robert and Ogden's final projects suggests a relationship deeper than previously seen. Towards the end of their lives, Robert and Ogden Commissioned McKim, Mead and White to design the Goelet Family Vault at Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY.

The Goelet Family Vault designed in 1897 and built in 1899, is considered one of "the finest at Woodlawn."¹⁷ It is a masonry structure built of white granite in the classical Ionic order. The interior walls and catacombs are clad in Tennessee Pink limestone. Two bronze handles are mounted onto the surface of each catacomb, which are then framed by thin horizontal and vertical bands of Tennessee pink limestone with delicate bronze foliate motifs projecting in even rhythm. The ceiling is vaulted with inlaid mosaic tiles of varying colors with a simple star motif, decreasing in scale as it climbs the arch towards the merging points above. Two identical stained-glass windows flank the interior space, casting soft hues of warm light across the pink interior stone and patina bronze details. (Figure 1.2)

An original section drawing by the architects (Figure 1.3) reveals another vaulted structure above the vaulted ceiling. Due to the origin of these drawings (the Guastavino Collection at Avery Library, Columbia University) and the drawing details themselves, it is easy to believe that this is in fact a Guastavino vault, providing support, ventilation and moisture control for the upper portions of the mausoleum. McKim, Mead and White would have been familiar with this type of design, as they had used it previously in several other projects across the city.

The building sits at the peak of a small hill in isolation from any proximate plot or mausoleum. The exterior is ornate only in the classical sense. The pediment is carved from a single piece of white granite. It is surrounded by a well-maintained lawn, gently sloping upwards revealing the mausoleum's finer details as one approaches from a distance. The building's main facade is south facing and its overall orientation is arguably in line with the New York City grid. The building lies in perfect symmetry along its y-axis; however, it is a-symmetrical in both its plan and site-position on the x. There is an eighty-foot path stretching from the road to the main gates, and a roughly forty-three foot separation between the road and sidewalks of the main vault.

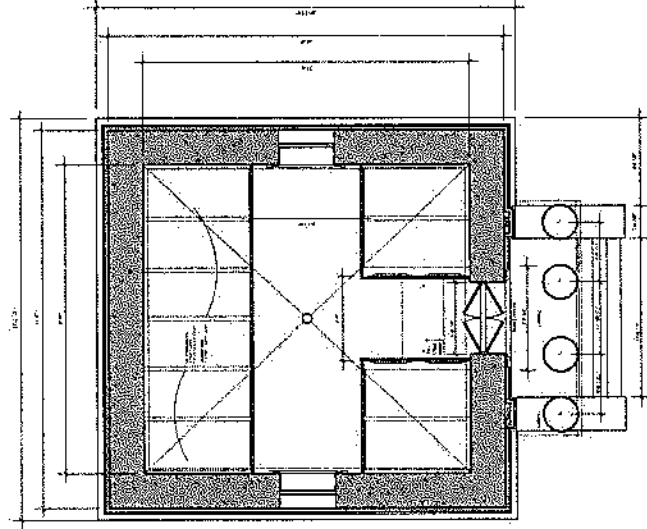
The building in form is a synthesis of three main components (excluding the sub-grade crypt). The first of which is the freestanding pediment and portico. Its details are in classic Greek design, with Ionic columns, egg and dart motifs and a delicate arcoterion that sits on top of the pediment. The portico appears to rest against its proximate counterpart, the main vault. The second is this, it is the core of the mausoleum; it is what we may call the private space of the structure (the site and portico being public). Above this is the third and final piece, the stepped capstone.

There is one identifiable piece of ornament on the exterior of the mausoleum, the arcoterion that can be traced to another place in New York City, on the campus of Columbia University. It was noted earlier that Robert Goelet graduated from Columbia College in 1860, and maintained a working relationship with the university until his death in 1899. After his death, his wife, Harriette Goelet commissioned Daniel Chester French (a friend of Charles McKim) to erect a sculpture in honor of her late husband. This sculpture, the Alma Mater, sits on the steps in front of Low Library and depicts on the back of the Klismos Chair a very similar motif that can be seen at the top of the pediment on the Goelet mausoleum. This form can also be seen on the top of the pediment of Earl Hall, adjacent to Low Library. What does this mean exactly? Well, perhaps nothing at all, but there is of course the chance that it represents a familial symbol or a greater relationship between the architects and the family. In either case, its purpose is one of intent and certainly proposes some interesting questions. (Figures 1.4, 1.5, 1.6)

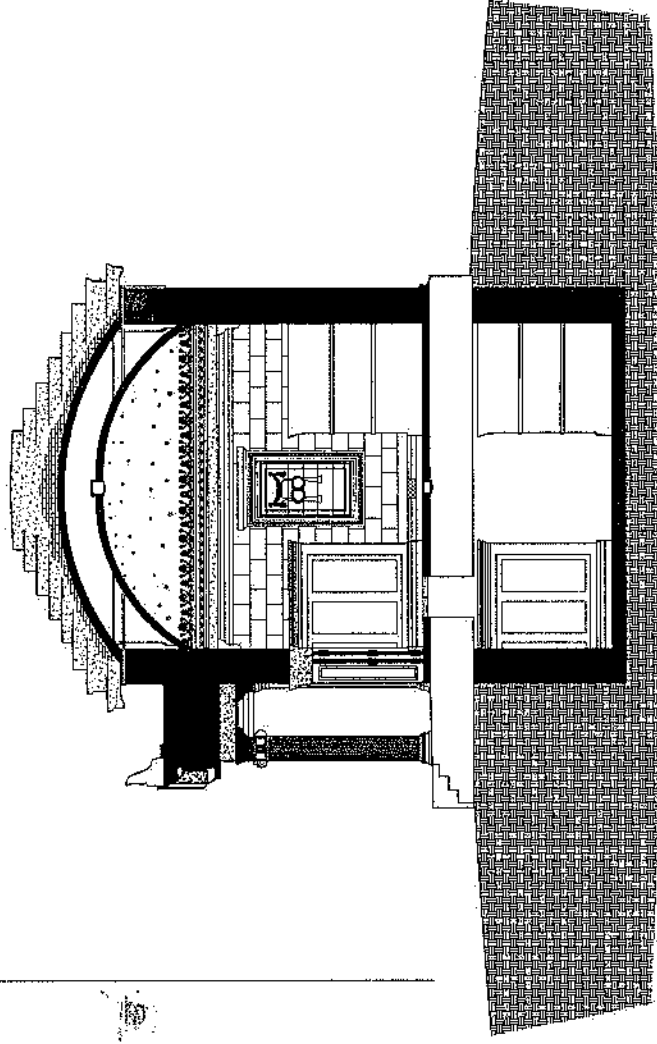
McKim, Mead and White were arguably the most talented architects of their time, and indeed, they could have designed such a perfect structure in their sleep. The proportions are undoubtedly correct, the design most respectful to its Greek precedent and perhaps a perfect example of the golden-ratio. But, it does not seem that these qualities in-of-themselves make this property unique.

What makes this building unique is the relationship that governs the plan and layout of this design: the relationship between two brothers, one that typifies the core strength that led to the success of one of New York's most famous families. Every part of this design points in the direction of Robert and Ogden. From the site plan divided east and west, Ogden and Robert respectively, to the long narrow approach pointing directly to their final resting place, to the plan oriented around the extended familial relationships between wives daughters and sons. Even from inside looking out, Robert and Ogden are given direct views of the very grid in which they lived and worked. McKim, Mead and White had to have understood, or at least been aware of this relationship, it is arguably the driving force behind the Mausoleum's design.

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- ¹ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ² *New York Times* (1857-1922): Nov 22, 1879: *An Eccentric Man Gone, Death of Peter Goelet*
 - ³ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ⁴ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ⁵ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ⁶ Hall, Henry, *America's successful men of affairs* [New York]" *New York Tribune*, 1895-1896. Electronic Reproduction. New York, N.Y.:Columbia University Libraries, 2008
 - ⁷ *New York Times* (1857-1922): Nov 22, 1879: *An Eccentric Man Gone, Death of Peter Goelet*
 - ⁸ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ⁹ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ¹⁰ *Proceedings of the New York State Annual Meeting, Volume 23*, New York State Bar Association, 1900
 - ¹¹ *New York Tribune* (1866 - 1899); Sep 23, 1879: *Obituary, Robert Goelet*
 - ¹² *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ¹³ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ¹⁴ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ¹⁵ *Prominent Families of New York*, Anonymous (C) BiblioLife, LLC. (C) 1897 The Historical Company
 - ¹⁶ <http://www.nyc-architecture.com>
 - ¹⁷ *New York Times* (1851 -1993) *Funeral of Robert Goelet*



— floor plan
scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"



— section cutting north to south
scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"

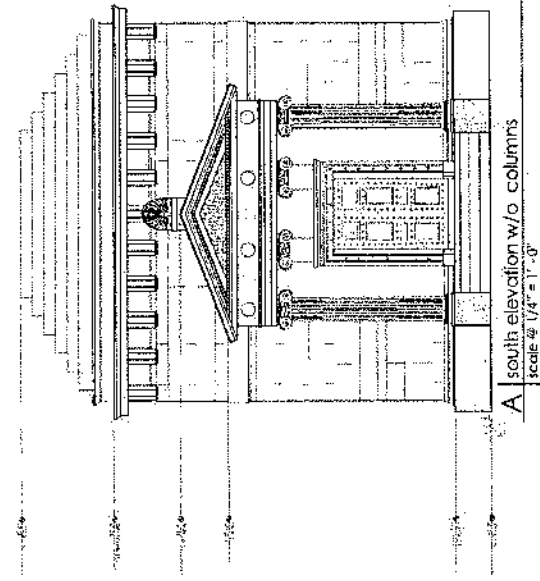


PROBLEM 2: Woodlawn Cemetery, The Goelet Mausoleum

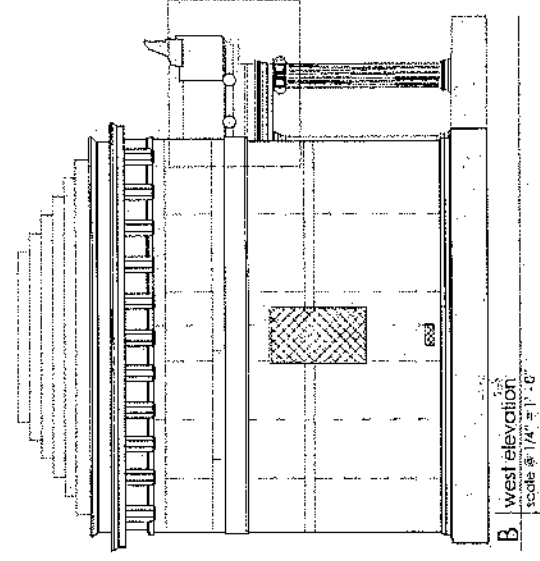
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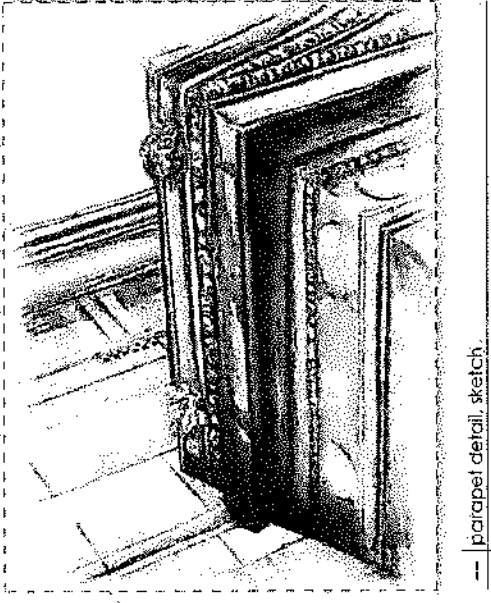
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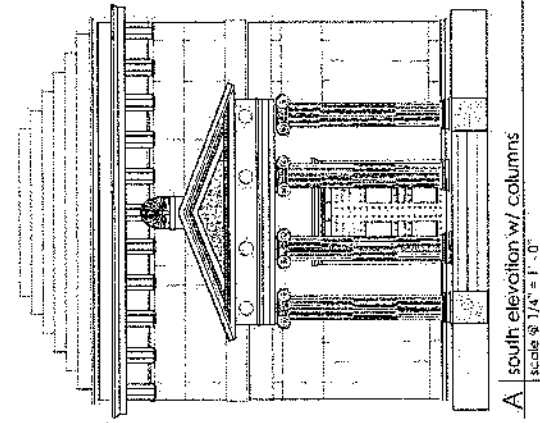
A south elevation w/o columns
scale @ 1/4" = 1'-0"



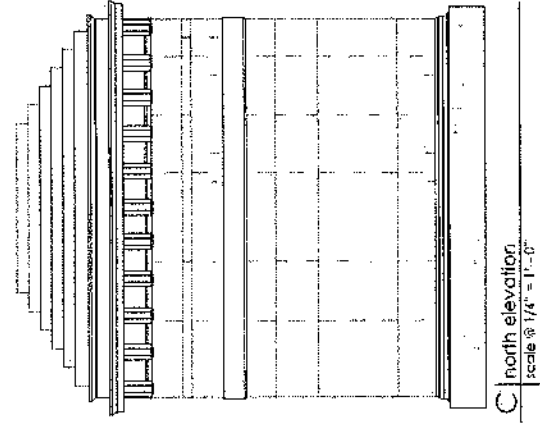
B west elevation
scale @ 1/4" = 1'-0"



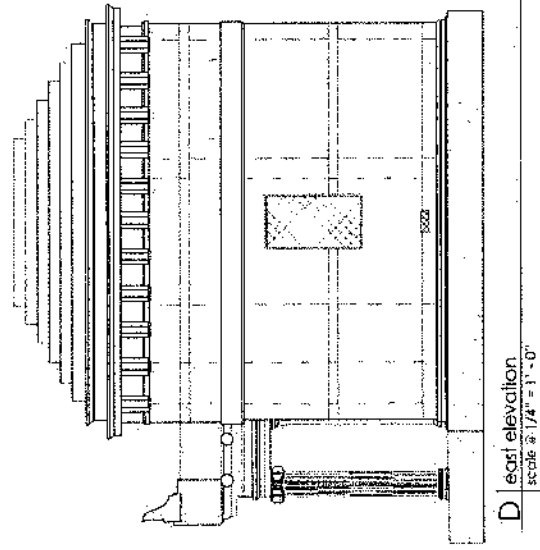
parapet detail, sketch
-1-15-



A south elevation w/ columns
scale @ 1/4" = 1'-0"



C north elevation
scale @ 1/4" = 1'-0"



D east elevation
scale @ 1/4" = 1'-0"

PROBLEM 2: Woodlawn Cemetery, The Goebel Mausoleum

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Problem 3 Research Paper Cited Images

The Goelet Mausoleum
 Figure 1.1 - Peter Goelet Ad



PETER P. GOELET,
*At No. 65 Water Street, between the Counties
 Slip and the Old Slip in New York, has re-
 ceived from the manufacturers the following
 consignments—which will be sold on low
 terms.*

400 boxes of Tin Plates.
 3 casks Biscuit Tin in ingots.
 1 ton Sheet Iron.
 140 boxes Bristol Window Glass.
 50 casks of English Nails from 8d to 30d.
 20 do. do. Spikes from 4 to 7 inches.
 1 ton of Iron Wire from No. 10 to No. 40.
 1 ton of Rod Wire for lightning rods.
 4 cases of assorted fancy fashionable chip,
 paper, willow, cane, and straw Hats,
 Bonnets, Tassels, Bands, Ruffles, &c.
 for Women and Children.

ALSO,
 Red, green, blue, yellow, and black Mo-
 rocco Skins—plain and printed, green, blue,
 white, yellow, and pink Kid and Lamb
 Skins for ladies shoes—a general assortment
 of Saddlery, Ironmongery, Cutlery, Pew-
 ter, Brass, Copper, Japanned and Hard-
 ware—smiths', carpenters', and joiners'
 Tools, &c. &c.

New York, Aug. 2.
 THE COURT OF BANKERS, BANKERS, &c.

Figure 1.2 - Interior Detail
 Figure 1.3 - Original Section Drawing,
 McKim, Mead and White

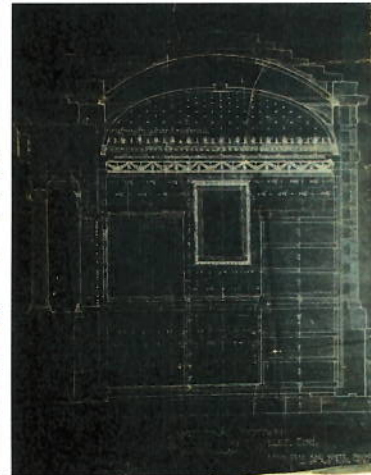


Figure 1.4 - Arcoterion,
 Goelet Mausoleum
 Figure 1.5 - Alma Mater
 detail
 Figure 1.5 - Earl Hall
 arcoterion

