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Fall 2011 HP Studio 1: Problem 3



Richard Kyle Fox Mausoleum
Woodlawn Cemetery, The Bronx
Lot 15345, Section 121, Sassafras Plot

Richard Kyle Fox was born in Belfast, Ireland on August 12, 1846. His father, James Fox, was a carpenter and mason, and his mother Mary was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Starting in the career of journalism at an early age, he became employed at a paper called the *Banner of Ulster* from the ages of 12-16, then spent several years at the *Belfast News Letter*. He married Annie Scott in 1869 (Riley 144). They eventually had four children together: Mary Kyle, Richard Kyle Jr., Charles, and Frederick (R. K. Fox). In 1874, he immigrated to America. Arriving on July 12, he was employed three days later by the *New York Commercial Bulletin* as an ad salesman. By the end of the year, he had become a business manager of the *National Police Gazette*, which was founded in 1845. In 1878 Fox acquired full control of the journal as compensation for salary and commissions owed to him (Riley 144).

The *Police Gazette* was known as a sensationalist tabloid reporting on crime, sex, and scandal. It was “altogether a picture of New York City from the underside, a chronicle of events that were too rough or too undignified to be chronicled elsewhere. It was not a periodical for the squeamish or the prudish” (Riley 144). After Fox gained control over the magazine, sports articles became much more common. Fox saw boxing as the most savage of sports and therefore the biggest circulation builder. He made his fortune by backing boxers and arranging fights so he could report on them in the *Gazette*. At the time, boxing in the United States was not a legal sport and the *Gazette* was the only one reporting on fights. Fox popularized the practice of giving championship belts in America. He also gave medals for a variety of strange sports and competitions, from a sleeping marathon to pie-eating to a one-legged clog dancer (Riley 145-6).

Fox’s first wife died in 1890. A report from one article indicated that he married again but divorced the second wife in 1906, claiming she had eloped with a handsome young Austrian officer (Richard). He married again on March 1, 1913 to Emma Louise Robinson, also a widower but 14 years younger. At his death on November 14, 1922, he was a millionaire, with his will stipulating that \$50,000 go towards constructing a mausoleum for himself and his wife (R. K. Fox).

The mausoleum is approached from the front and is on a circular lot off of Whitewood Ave. The plantings, not added until 1925, lined the outer ring of the site and ensured that the visitor not get the full impact of the mausoleum until almost directly in front (Figure 1). The landscaping was done by Brinley and Holbrook of 156 Fifth Ave. While the exact plantings do not survive today, the concept remains the same. Bushes surround the rear and sides of the lot, screening the view from all angles except the front. The one tree to the right of the mausoleum may be from the original design and is quite large.

The Fox mausoleum is in an Egyptian Revival style. This style was often associated with mausoleums because of the extensive funerary rights the ancient Egyptians performed. When Napoleon laid out Pere-Lachaise cemetery in Paris after the French Revolution, many Egyptian style monuments were included. This cemetery in turn became a model for laying out other cemeteries built in the 1800s, incorporating winding paths and foliage on a beautiful site. The use of the Egyptian style also transferred over and was considered suitable for its immense scale and grandeur (Curl 187). The tomb of King Tutankhamen was opened shortly before Richard Fox died, furthering the popularity of the style for mausoleum designs of that time period.

Many symbols reflect this intention. Lotus flowers are used throughout the design – on the columns, doors, interior walls, and sarcophagus. Lotuses represented sun, creation, and rebirth because the flower closes at night and goes underwater until its reemergence in the morning. Scarab beetles, carved on the columns, were associated with the sunrise and spontaneous creation (Deurer). Papyrus leaves, on the column capitals, were a symbol of life and were said to hold up the sky, which is why they were often used on columns. These leaves also appear below the pediment. The ankh, seen as the handles of the doors and in between the beetles on the columns, was another representation of life (Egyptian). Finally, the winged solar disk, used both above the door and the name inscription, is a depiction of the sun god Horus (Deurer).

The mausoleum of Richard Fox is essentially a rectangular box set on a larger base. It is made entirely out of granite, which lends a weightiness and eternal feel appropriate for a cemetery. Battered piers at each corner give the impression from the front façade that the whole building is angled when it is really just the corner pieces. Two sphinx sculptures protrude out from the front of the base, furthering the Egyptian theme. After climbing three steps, one reaches a small vestibule with four columns framing the doors. Through these doors is visible a glimpse of the stained glass window on the rear façade. Upon entering the mausoleum, it can be seen that the window depicts the three wise men following the star (Figure 2). Even with an Egyptian style of architecture, a Christian scene was chosen. Two joined sarcophagi are inscribed with the names of Richard Kyle Fox and Emma Louise Fox.

The mausoleum can be seen as a 'box-within-a-box.' The façade is made up of an outer and inner series of forms. The ratio of the length to height of the outer box (minus the top pediment) is 1.51. This same ratio appears in the rectangle formed by the cut-in vestibule, and again if the box of the door surround is rotated 90 degrees (Figure 3). The details of the angled surround and beading around the door, the sun disk, and the curved cornice are repeated in the overall form (Figure 4). This 'box-in-a-

box' idea is used in the plan also, with the base forming an outer box and the main mausoleum forming another box.

The front façade is organized into a series of horizontal visual elements that direct the viewer's eye (Figure 5). The sphinxes, the lotus flowers on the columns, and the bottom block of granite on the building form a strip analogous to a chair rail. Farther up are bands created by the beetle and ankh carvings on the columns and the rings around the top of each column. Then there are the column capitals and the sun-disk symbol over the door. Above this inside box are three more horizontal sections – the granite block bearing the name, the cornice, and the pediment.

This same idea works vertically in the center of the façade. Starting from the focal point of the door, the eye is drawn upward and outward by the elements of the building (Figure 6). The door leads up to the winged disk and cornice above, then to the name of Richard Kyle Fox, on up to the building's cornice and pediment with another larger winged disk symbol.

The Fox mausoleum was designed and executed by Farrington, Gould & Hoagland, a mausoleum company located on 258 Broadway. They did a large number of mausoleums and monuments in Woodlawn Cemetery and the surrounding area in a variety of styles. Many of the Egyptian details on the Fox mausoleum can be seen echoed on such mausoleums as Woolworth in 1919, Winslow in 1922, Ivie in 1924, Schuette in Sleepy Hollow cemetery, and the Samuel Pratt monument in Sleepy Hollow. What makes the Fox mausoleum unique is that it has four columns instead of just two, and is correspondingly wider than the company's standard cube form. This makes it in some ways more grand than the famous Woolworth precedent, even though it does not stand on as tall a base or have detailing quite as intricate.

The mausoleum is in fairly good condition due to an endowment fund set up by Emma Louise Fox. Still, there are several preservation issues that could be better addressed. Some biological growth exists, particularly on the bottom of the front façade and on the right façade. This is probably because these areas get less sun (the right side is blocked by plants and the front is recessed) and therefore stay damp longer. There has also clearly been some water damage in the interior of the mausoleum, leaving strange splotches on the granite which could perhaps be solved by a repointing job. Overall, the Fox mausoleum is a unique example of an Egyptian Revival cemetery building and deserves to have care given to it, now and in subsequent generations.

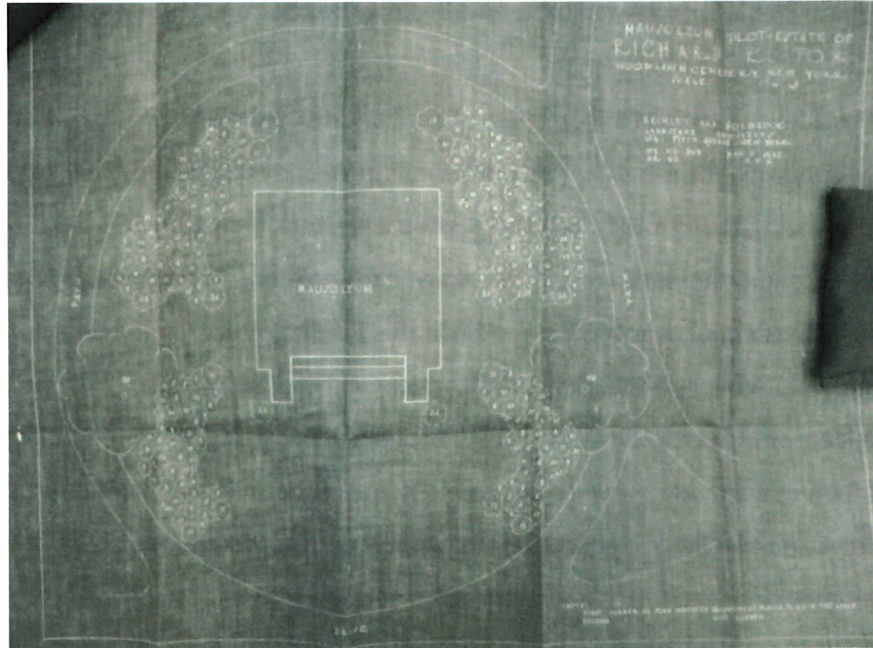


Figure 1



Figure 2

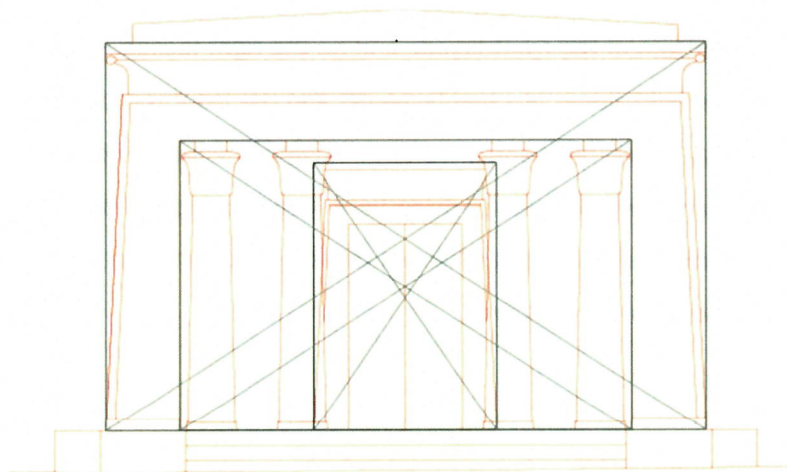


Figure 3

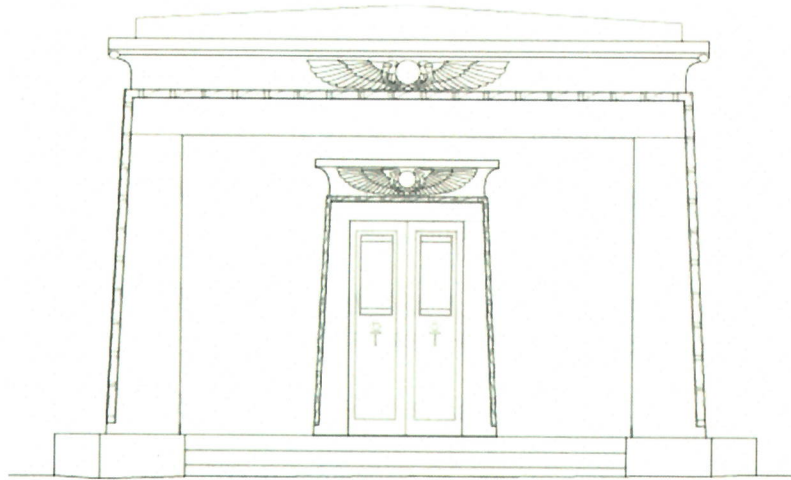


Figure 4



Figure 5

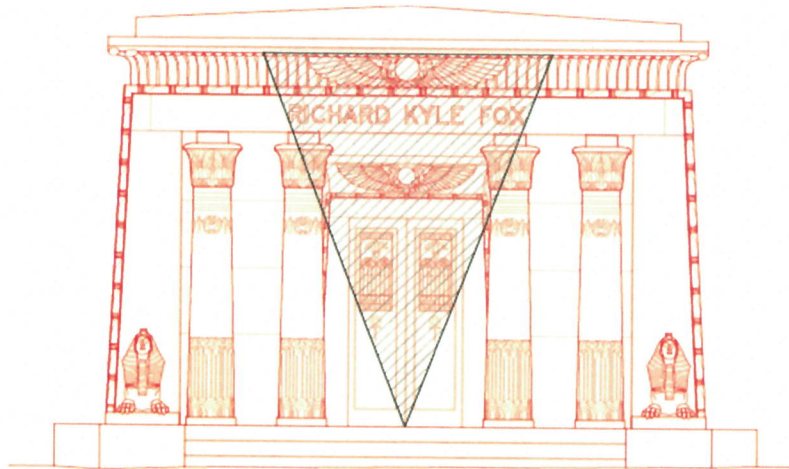


Figure 6

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