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HP Studio I

Formal Analysis

October 18, 2010

Luke Mausoleum



History: The Luke Mausoleum was constructed in 1922¹ in Woodlawn Cemetery for John Guthrie Luke, the president of the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company (WVPP), who died on October 15, 1921. John G. Luke was born on April 29, 1857² to William and Rose Luke, immigrants from Scotland. His father, William Luke, established WVPP with his two sons in Piedmont, Virginia in 1889³. Over time the company expanded, leading to the establishment of a business headquarters in New York City. In 1904, at the age of forty-six, John G. Luke took over as president of the company, remaining in the position until his death in 1921, after which his brother, David Luke, took over operations. Today, the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company is called MeadWestvaco and is one of the leading paper manufacturing companies in the US. The company has been run by generations of Lukes since John G. Luke's death.

The mausoleum was designed by Presbrey - Leland Memorials one year after John G. Luke's death. Inside the mausoleum resides John G. Luke, his wife Grace and two other occupants; Charles Wilson Luke and his son Charles Wilson Luke Jr. It remains unclear exactly how Charles Wilson Luke and John G. Luke are related, but it is safe to say that they are close relations because Charles Wilson Luke's other son, Richard Luke⁴, was in charge of the mausoleum's maintenance during the 1960's.

Description: The mausoleum is a cubed shaped structure with four battered, corner buttresses that protrude out at a forty-five degree angle. The structure is designed with Gothic Revival elements. The door header, with the name Luke written in Gothic stylized writing, frames the entryway, which consists of bronze double doors. Each door has three spiral rods running most of the length of the door, with translucent glazing behind them, which allows for a fragmented view of the inside of the mausoleum. On and between each rod there are small bronze shields with crosses etched on the surface of each one. The Gothic Revival theme continues as you enter the building. Inside the mausoleum, the Gothic elements include a groin-vaulted interior with Guastavino tiling and three stained-glass windows with Scottish heraldry and religious symbols.

Materiality: The exterior of the mausoleum is made entirely out of coarse blocks of light gray granite. On each side and on all four buttresses, three pieces of granite compose each surface. The use of coarse granite in combination with very minimal ornamentation, aside from the door header and bronze doors, helps to give the structure a very austere feeling. There is almost a cold seriousness that is emitted from the building because of the simplicity of the design and

material choice. It seems very solid and dense for its size, giving off the impression that it is rooted into the earth like a small fortress protecting something important inside. The interior provides the viewer with a very different experience of materiality. The interior floor of the mausoleum is made of smooth granite and the walls are made up of polished Pink Tennessee marble⁵. The difference in material type and color immediately draws attention to the fact that there is a strong delineation between inside and outside space as well as soft and hard textures in this mausoleum.

Building Site: Luke is placed squarely in the middle of the property. When facing the structure, the property lines are roughly marked by a young tree sapling on the front right corner of the mausoleum and the stump of a beech tree on the left, rear corner. This arrangement places the building in the center of the plot, making it the focal point. There is also no other mausoleum situated directly across from Luke, leaving the structure with no form of opposition, further increasing the focus on the mausoleum. This arrangement was purposefully done, evidenced by sketches found in the Woodlawn archives of how the building site looked sixty years prior. In those sketches, the mausoleum was flanked on both sides by carefully placed ivy and rhododendron plants.⁶ There were also two beech trees in the back corners of the plot and a variety of other plants and shrubs. The stark difference in how the Luke site looked in the thirties and how it looks now has a big impact on the interpretation of the site. Those plants would have created a gentler framing for the austere mausoleum.

Plan, Section and Facade Design: The façade and the plan of the Luke mausoleum are vertically symmetrical. The vertical symmetry of the mausoleum implies balance and with balance comes strength, which further supports the idea of the mausoleum as a fort. Compared to several surrounding mausoleums in the area, the Luke mausoleum is not very welcoming. There is no pathway leading up to the structure nor is there a full threshold to help visitors prepare for the transition from outside to inside space. Although the doors allow visitors a peek inside, the entry way is short and abrupt with steps close to the building. This arrangement of the façade indicates the mausoleum is a very private space, a space where only the invited or the purposeful enter.

The outward appearance of the building gives no hint to the fact that a beautiful groin-vaulted ceiling with Guastavino tiling and stained-glass window's with interesting designs are located

inside the structure. When first stepping into the mausoleum, the space automatically draws attention to the stained-glass window that directly faces the door. The stained glass windows height above the tombs draws visitor's eyes up to the beautiful groin-vaulting and Guastavino tiling at the top. The smaller side windows are embellished with the Scottish heraldry of the Lindsey family. There is no evidence that John G. Luke is connected directly with the clan but the crest is unique and must have had some meaning for him or for members of his family. Under the crest is an inscription "endure fort" meaning endure bravely. I think this quote is very fitting for the type of space the owners had in mind. The owners of the mausoleum wanted to create a sanctuary, a place that is strong and sturdy on the outside but also delicate, impressive and warm on the inside.

Conclusion: The Luke mausoleum is a Gothic Revival, cubed-shaped building designed with a very simply adorned exterior. It is a structure that is full of opposites and contradictions. The outside facade is very stark and uninviting with an abrupt entryway, while the interior is encompassing with its groin-vaulted ceiling. The inside of the mausoleum is warmed by the Pink Tennessee marble walls and stained-glass windows that let in copious amounts of light. I believe this duality may have been something that the owners of the mausoleum had in mind when they selected it from the Presbrey - Leland Memorials trade book for John G. Luke. If the building is any indication of what John G. Luke's character might have been, I believe that he must have been a hardworking and strong minded individual with a caring heart.

¹ John G. Luke file. Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, 1863-1999. Avery Library. Columbia University in the City of New York.

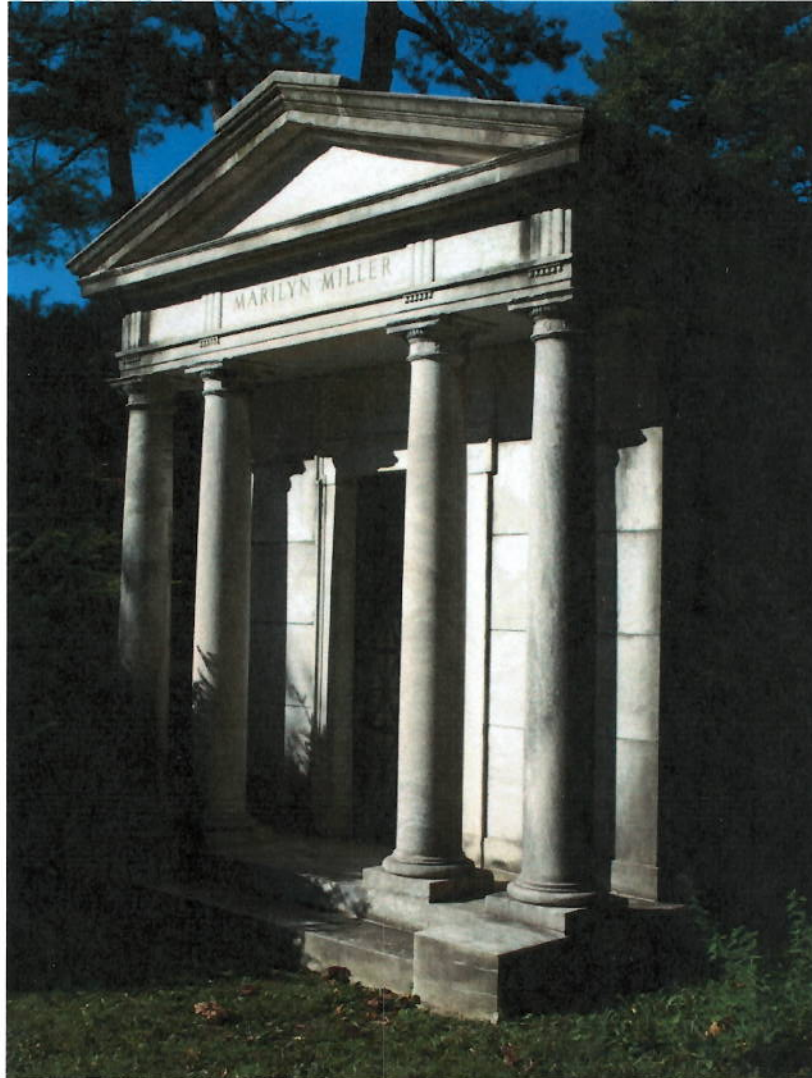
² John G. Luke file. Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, 1863-1999. Avery Library. Columbia University in the City of New York

³ "Westvaco Corporation Company History." Westvaco Corporation. n.d. Web. October 1, 2010. www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/Westvaco-Corporation-Company-History.html

⁴ US Department of the Interior, Census Office, 15th Census, 1930, New York City, Manhattan Borough, New York s.v. "Charles Wilson Luke", Ancestry, Library Edition, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁵ John G. Luke file. Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, 1863-1999. Avery Library. Columbia University in the City of New York

⁶ John G. Luke file. Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, 1863-1999. Avery Library. Columbia University in the City of New York



**The Marilyn Miller Carter Mausoleum,
Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY**

Columbia University Historic Preservation Studio I (Fall 2010):

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Peter Watson, October 18, 2010

In May 1920, a young actress by the name of Marilyn Miller commissioned the Davis Granite Company of 425 Fifth Avenue, New York to build a marble mausoleum for her recently deceased husband, Frank Carter, who had died in an automobile accident¹. Sixteen years later, at the age of thirty-seven, after a hugely successful Broadway career, a couple of unsuccessful Hollywood pictures, and two further marriages, Marilyn Miller herself was buried in the same mausoleum. The mausoleum that she commissioned, and Davis Granite built for her, is revealing both of the personal and social context in which Marilyn Miller made her design choices, and the impact of the industrialization of the monument maker's trade in the early twentieth century. Unlike many of the grander mausoleums at Woodlawn, Marilyn Miller's mausoleum was not individually designed by a prominent architect, but rather reflected a customized version of a standard pattern that had been engineered to deliver a representation of the traditional classical temple front mausoleum at a relatively affordable cost. And it should be stated that relative cost is the key idea here, since the ability to afford a marble mausoleum at Woodlawn was limited to the very wealthy. Davis Granite, and other firms such as Presbrey-Leland, had developed technical solutions that extended the potential market for mausoleums down to a broader audience: an "entry-level" luxury offering.

Marilyn Miller achieved her greatest professional success on Broadway during the mid to late 1920s, dancing and performing skits in such Florenz Zeigfield-backed productions as *Sunny* (1925). Along the way she became wealthy, worldly, and matured as a business woman, negotiating her own contracts and managing her own investments. But in 1920, she was still at the cusp of this success and her choices of plot and mausoleum design and finishes simultaneously reflect a desire to "fit in" socially, a desire to impress, and a strong inclination toward "value."

To consider this, let's begin with the building site. Ms. Miller purchased a burial plot on Whitewood Avenue at the prestigious Woodlawn Cemetery that appears at first glance to be a large and valuable private landscaped corner lot. An examination of the record of interment, however, reveals that the landscaping (several specimen

trees and a circular walkway) are in fact, property of the Cemetery Association and part of the overall cemetery landscape architecture, and her plot is a less expensive middle of the block lot (see figure 1).² An early photo suggests that, originally, the only landscaping of the plot was a pair of evergreen bushes flanking the entry: a very common Colonial Revival treatment³. Today, the approach to the mausoleum from Heather Avenue is obscured by the specimen trees planted by the Woodlawn Cemetery Association. The structure is sited at the back of the plot, centered six feet from the rear lot line. The mausoleum is oriented southwest and is aligned longitudinally with the rear plot line, causing it's facade to turn slightly away from the viewer as you face it head on from Whitewood Avenue. The overall impact of the siting is to give the mausoleum a somewhat secluded, introverted air unlike other nearby mausoleums that actively "greet" the passerby on the street head-on.

As you round the corner of Heather Avenue, the first impression of the mausoleum is monumental but as one approaches closer, it is clear the scale is quite petite: more a garden folly than a full scale temple. The plan of the mausoleum is a traditional classical prostyle temple with an enclosed volume or cella fronted by a columned porch or portico with four columns (i.e. - tetrastyle) resting upon a platform with a single step. The plan is symmetrical and axial with a pair of Roman Doric style columns flanking a classical bronze latticework door with foliate patera covering the crossings of the bars. A window centered on the doorway lights the interior. The facade is a tripartite plan composed of a low platform base, a middle columned section in front of the cella, and terminates in triangular pediment top. While all of these elements place the mausoleum firmly in the context of the classical tradition, the scaling of the portico and cella are radically abbreviated giving the mausoleum a strongly two-dimensional "cardboard cut-out" appearance. Instead of a long flight of steps leading to the temple platform, the mausoleum is entered via a single shallow step and the platform is only one foot above grade. The portico is so shallow that when you open the bronze door outward, its outer edge is flush with the exterior face of the columns. As one steps inside, the visitor is confronted with a tightly fitted interior like that of a ship's cabin. There is a built-in crypt on either

side of a narrow walkway lit by the wire-reinforced glass window in the rear wall. The interior trim is all of Vermont marble but the use of rail and stile construction for the crypts, flat panel wall sheathing and molded edge trim pieces all suggest a wood idiom: marble "board on "board" construction, facing a marble ashlar core. The designer raised the interior ceiling height by ten inches to give the sanctuary a greater feeling of spaciousness, borrowing the space from the cavity behind the frieze. One has the impression that the space is being doled out very parsimoniously with every bit used and none wasted. It is as if the designer or engineer was thinking: What is the minimum size cella that fits two caskets of typical dimension, allows sufficient walk way for visitors and pallbearers, and still reads as classical temple (see figure 2)?

The Davis Granite Company and others in the monument business were actively trying to solve this problem of minimum but still acceptable scale, and thus affordability, in the early the twentieth century. The 1911 catalog included a small temple front design for John T. Gibbons that although it is finished with Greek rather than Roman Doric columns and entablature could well have served as a prototype for the Marilyn Miller Carter mausoleum⁴. As the maker states "these buildings allow a certain freedom in treatment, and it is possible to follow any desired order of architecture."⁵ Clearly, affordability of this design is a key selling point since the catalog goes on to deem this design as "a good example of what can be done at a reasonable expense."⁶ This same note of "bang for the buck" is struck in the 1932 Presbrey-Leland catalog which includes a photo of the Marilyn Miller Carter mausoleum and a caption that recommends the changes of scale and detail embodied in the design as "offering legitimate economies in design, without impairing the architecture or construction."⁷ The Presbrey-Leland catalog also shows a picture of a large peristyle temple being constructed with mechanized equipment⁸ (see figure 3). Moving past the era of artisanal production and construction, the monument industry had entered the period of twentieth century industrialization and modern marketing.

NOTES:

¹ Warren G. Harris, *The Other Marilyn: A Biography of Marilyn Miller* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 69.

² Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Marilyn Miller Carter Correspondence File, Record of Internment (unpublished), 1.

³ Presbrey-Leland Studios, *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials* (New York, Presbrey-Leland Studios, 1932), 33.

⁴ Davis Granite Company, *The Davis Granite Co. Catalog* (New York, Davis Granite Co.), p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷ Presbrey-Leland, 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

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