

## Russell Mausoleum: A History Through Memorial Architecture

*THIS CHAPEL WAS BUILDED IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
HENRY EMANUEL RUSSELL  
A CHRISTIAN MAN—DEVOTED HUSBAND  
WISE FATHER AND TRUE FRIEND  
WHOSE EARTHLY LIFE ENDED JANUARY 26<sup>TH</sup>, 1894.*

These words, engraved on a bronze plaque behind the altar, briefly describe the history of the Russell Mausoleum. After Henry E. Russell died on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1894, this building was constructed to hold his remains and was planned to be a burial place for other family members. Located in Woodlawn Cemetery, the Russell Mausoleum is one of the six mausoleums designed by a prominent architectural firm in New York City in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: McKim, Mead & White. This fact leads to a number of questions: Who were the Russells? How did they manage to commission McKim, Mead, & White? In order to answer these questions, this paper will investigate the biographical history of the Russells, their relationship with McKim, Mead, and White, and the architects' design direction reflected in the physical quality of the mausoleum; and will end with some discussion of architectural deterioration as recorded from site surveying.

Russell Mausoleum

Architect: John W. Russell  
Date: 1890



## THE RUSSELLS

According to the names engraved on the crypts' marble panels, there are eight Russells in the mausoleum: Henry Emanuel Russell (1816-1893), Elizabeth Hibbard Peck (1825-1904), Grace Russell Hooker (1844-1881), Elizabeth Russell (1848-1849), William Henry Russell (1854-1928), Isabel Russell (1867-1948), Henry Emanuel Russell (1892-1962), Elizabeth Eagle Russell (1892-1933), and Sydney King Russell (1897-1976). The 1850 United States Federal Census records that, 34 at that time, Henry E. Russell lived in New Britain, Hartford, Connecticut, with his parents – Emanuel and Elizabeth Russell, his wife – Elizabeth H. Russell, and one daughter – Grace Russell.<sup>1</sup> The name of the another daughter: Elizabeth Russell, born in 1848, does not appear on the 1850 Census since she had already died the previous year. It was only in the last decade of Henry E. Russell's life that the family moved to New York City. The 1880 United States Federal Census records that the Russells' address that year on East 57<sup>th</sup> Street. It also revealed that Henry E. and Elizabeth H. Russell also had another child, the only son who would carry on the family name: William H. Russell.<sup>2</sup>

New Britain is where the Russells built their wealth through their manufacturing business. Henry E. Russell was the president of Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company which was famous for its locks, keys, and doorknobs. Though the business was officially founded on January 1st, 1850, by Henry E. Russell and Cornelius B. Erwin, its foundation can be traced back to 1830 when William B. Stanley, Henry B. Clark, and Lora Waters established a machine shop on Main Street, New Britain.<sup>3</sup> When Emanuel Russell – the father of Henry E. Russell – joined the business in 1835, the enterprise had already taken the name “Stanley, Woodruff & Co.” and purchased a large plot of land to construct a lock factory.<sup>4</sup> Henry E. Russell

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<sup>1</sup> “1850 United States Federal Census,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 28, 2022, [https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/15887560:8054?tid=&pid=&queryId=51e02b9bb3b3eee5549d2fbf3e0eb040&\\_phsr=&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/15887560:8054?tid=&pid=&queryId=51e02b9bb3b3eee5549d2fbf3e0eb040&_phsr=&_phstart=successSource)

<sup>2</sup> “1880 United States Federal Census,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 28, 2022, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/39080294:6742>

<sup>3</sup> “New Britain: Its History, Manufactures and Public Institutions,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, Jul 3, 1867, <https://www.proquest.com/hnphartfor-dcourant/docview/553548028/D5E2DE1919F94CEFPQ/1?accountid=10226>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

took his father's role in 1839, and, after many changes in the administration's team, the firm finally adopted the title "Russell, Erwin & Co.," which was changed to "Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company" in the following year.<sup>5</sup>

The Company was admired as one of the "leading manufacturers of hardware in the country,"<sup>6</sup> and its goods were exported all over the globe.<sup>7</sup> According to the Company's claim in its illustrated catalog, the Russell and Erwin Manufacturing Company's cast iron was "essentially different in many of its properties from any brands made in Europe."<sup>8</sup> This cast-iron technique allowed the worker to mold, rivet, or drill the hardware.<sup>9</sup> After existing over half a century, Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company merged with the P.&E. Corbin Company in 1902.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, the business is run under the title "Corbin Russwin Architectural Hardware" by Black & Decker Company.<sup>11</sup> Though the name "Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company" does not exist anymore, its locks and doorknobs with the logo "Russwin" on their surfaces can still be found all over New York City.

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<sup>5</sup> "New Britain: Its History, Manufactures and Public Institutions." *Hartford Daily Courant*, Jul 3, 1867. <https://www.proquest.com/hnphartfordcourant/docview/553548028/D5E2DE1919F94CEFPQ/1?accountid=10226>.

<sup>6</sup> "The Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company: Important Addition to their Business. *Hartford Daily*, Jul 26, 1875. <https://www.proquest.com/hnphartfordcourant/docview/553875063/1E1370B891824CB2PQ/1?accountid=10226>

<sup>7</sup> "New Britain: Its History, Manufactures and Public Institutions." *Hartford Daily Courant*, Jul 3, 1867. <https://www.proquest.com/hnphartfordcourant/docview/553548028/D5E2DE1919F94CEFPQ/1?accountid=10226>

<sup>8</sup> *Illustrated description of Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Co.'s new improvements in hardware which received at the Universal Exposition of Paris, 1878.* New Britain: Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company. <https://archive.org/details/illustrateddescriptionofRussellErwinManufacturingCo.sNewImprovements/page/n3/mode/2up>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> "About Corbin Russwin." Accessed October 3, 2022. <https://www.corbinrusswin.com/en/about-us/#:~:text=About%20Corbin%20Russwin&text=The%20company's%20story%20began%20when,form%20The%20American%20Hardware%20Corporation.>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

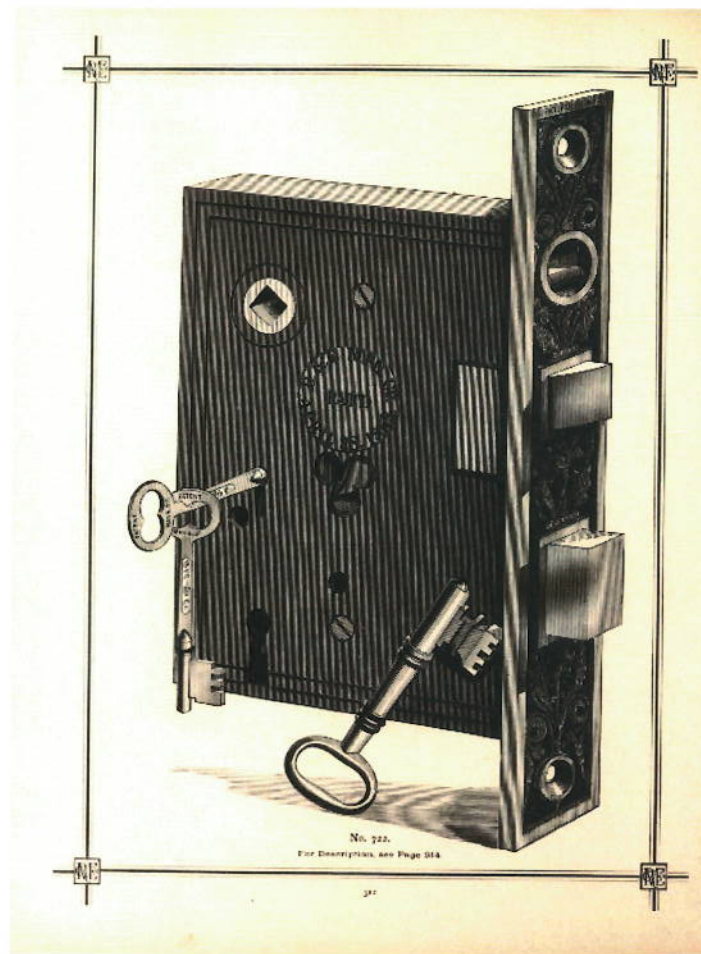


Plate 22. The safe shown in the illustration is the one used by the Russell family. It is a heavy, dark metal safe with a textured surface. The safe is shown from a three-quarter perspective, revealing its front door and a vertical side panel. The front door has a circular keyhole and a small diamond-shaped emblem. A large, ornate key is inserted into the keyhole. The side panel features two circular openings and a rectangular slot. The safe is set against a light background and is enclosed within a decorative border with small square markers at the corners. Below the safe, the text reads: 'No. 222. For Descriptions, see Page 214.'

## THE RUSSELLS AND MCKIM, MEAD & WHITE

After Henry E. Russell died on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1893, his wife, Elizabeth H. Russell, commissioned McKim, Mead and White to design the mausoleum in August of the same year. However, this was not the first time that the Russells had commissioned one of the most prestigious architects in New York City. As mentioned in Leland's list of McKim, Mead and White's works, in July 1883, McKim, Mead & White designed the "RussWin Hotel" in New Britain, Connecticut, for Henry E. Russell and Cornelius B. Erwin. The hotel

## Russell Mausoleum

Woodlawn Cemetery Biographical Research  
Pitchaya Koinarangkul

construction was completed in 1885,<sup>12</sup> and it became one of the works that strengthened the reputation of McKim, Mead and White in their early years.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in December 1885, Henry E. Russell also commissioned the architects to design a house in Adirondack, New York, and in May 1892 – just a year before he died – a stable located on East 76<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. Evidently, it is this loyalty in the relationship between the client and the architect that resulted in McKim, Mead & White becoming the designer for the Russell Mausoleum.



Figure 1: A view of the building at East 76th Street in New York City, designed by McKim, Mead & White, 1870-1871. (The drawing was reproduced in "The City of New York" by George C. Fox, 1924. Copyright © 2014 Avery Library.)

<sup>12</sup> Leland, Roth M. *The architecture of McKim, Mead & White, 1870-1920 : a building list*. New York: Garland Pub, 1978, P.134-135.

<sup>13</sup> Dolkart, Andrew S. "Desinging Woodlawn: Buildings and Landscapes." In *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art and Landscape at Woodlawn*, New York: Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library and The Woodlawn Conservancy, 2014, P.57.

## THE MAUSOLEUM

Located in the Highland plot, the Russell Mausoleum is one of the six mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery that were designed by McKim, Mead & White. The majority of these mausoleums are in a classical revival style and are balanced with a central plan.<sup>14</sup> Based on an octagonal plan, the Russell Mausoleum consists of four pediment arms one of which serves as a portico. The portico, functioning as the entrance to the mausoleum, contains two Doric columns that support its roof. Two pediment arms function as crypts, four on each side, and, considering the interior space, there are also three other crypts underneath the marble floor panels. The other pediment, opposite the portico, functions as an apse with an altar and a stained-glass window of Jesus Christ's image. The altar is decorated with a cross, wreath, and ribbons. And, as mentioned at the beginning of the paper, there is a bronze plaque behind the altar engraved with words suggesting that this mausoleum functions as a chapel for the Russell family.

While the primary material of the exterior is granite, the interior is mainly clad with marble. The magnificent element of the interior space is the dome ceiling covered with warm yellow and orange mosaics with eight green ribbons decorated with vine motifs extending from the center – which is also clad in green mosaics – to each corner of the octagonal chamber. Considering the northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest façades of the mausoleum, each of them consists of a stained-glass window with a flame torch, wreath, cornucopias, flower mobiles, and two locks that, presumably, represent the family's business. The symbol representing the family also appears at the front door of the mausoleum. The bronze door is decorated with the letter 'R' in the middle of the wreath and ribbon motif. The door handle is a lion shape, and there are two dolphin motifs on the left and right sides of the handle.

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<sup>14</sup> McDowell, Peggy. *The Revival Styles in American Memorial Art*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994, P.34-37.

## Russell Mausoleum

Woodlawn Cemetery Biographical Research  
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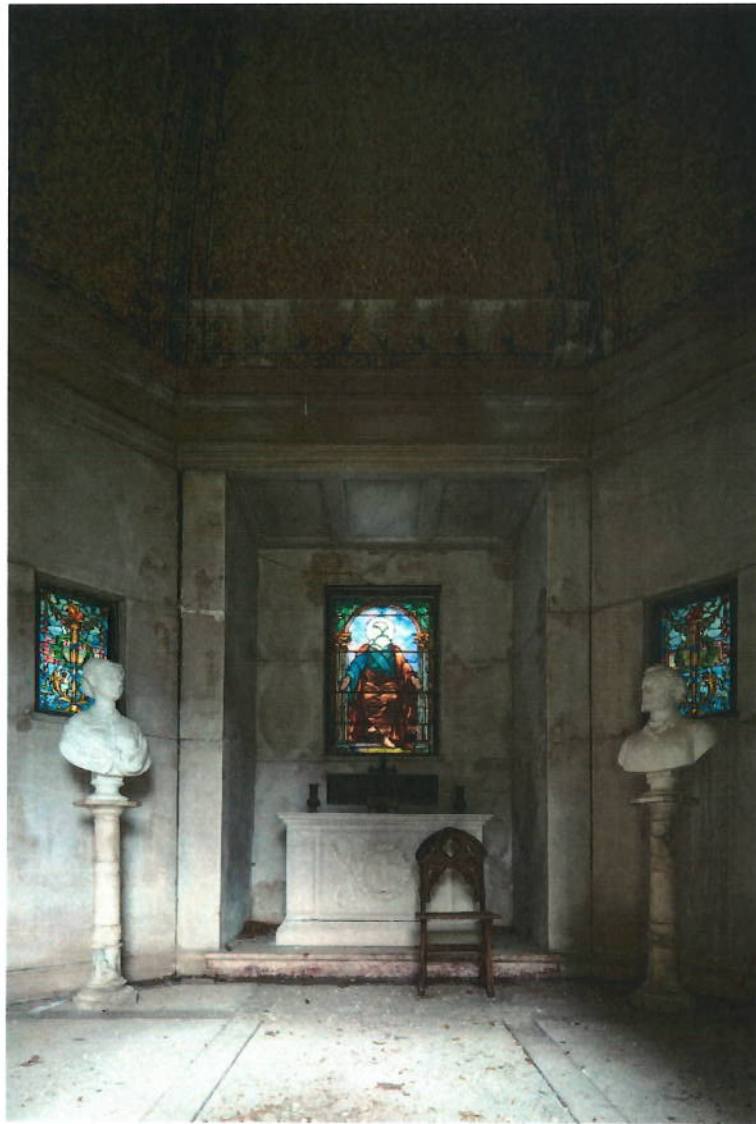


Figure 1. The Russell Mausoleum. Photographed by Pitchaya Kantarangkul

The architects' knowledge of classical architecture is reflected in the physical appearance of this mausoleum. Besides using a central plan and classical order at the portico, McKim, Mead & White – who had spent several months studying, sketching, and photographing classical architecture in Greece and Italy – also applied other Greek ornamentation to their design. The entablature of each gable roof consists of a Doric frieze decorated with triglyphs and metopes. The higher-level roof – which is clad with copper sheets



– is topped with acroteria and crowned with a finial form that they borrowed from the design of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates – a monument they encountered during their tour in Greece, as evident in McKim, Mead & White's photo album<sup>15</sup> – representing McKim, Mead & White's intention to apply eclectic-classical architecture elements to the design of Russell Mausoleum.

## THE DETERIORATION

Besides the fact that numerous mosaics had fallen from the dome ceiling and the stained-glass window behind the altar – the one with Jesus Christ's image – had been partially broken, most of the deterioration in the Russell Mausoleum is water damage and salt damage. The interior walls are covered with numerous stains of water infiltration. Despite recent maintenance efforts, water infiltration is still occurring, as evident in the area near the altar where the floor was observed to be wet. The most noticeable salt stains are located on the dome ceiling above the altar, indicating that the roofs, especially at the spot above the altar area, are leaking.

According to the roof form, I hypothesize that the water leaking problem is a primary cause of these water and salt damage stains since the mausoleum's complex form – an octagonal chamber with four pediment arms – led to a number of joints between the roof panels: eight joints for the roof above the octagonal chamber, two joints for each pediment arms, and the joints between each pediment and the chamber. Lead flashing at the roofs of each pediment arm is clearly evident that there have been some unsuccessful attempts in the past to solve this water leaking problem. In order to alleviate the water damage and salt damage stains, solving the water leaking problem on the roof might be the solution.

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<sup>15</sup> Avery Library, Classics, Photographic views of works by McKim, Mead & White : gift of Walker O. Cain, [https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/mm1w\\_photographs/10.7916/d8-05b4-5153](https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/mm1w_photographs/10.7916/d8-05b4-5153)



Figure 1: The interior of the Russell Mausoleum. The image is by Pitchaya Kointarangkul.

## CONCLUSION

To undertake research on buildings is a way to understand the architectural, biographical, and social history behind their physical appearance. In this case, researching the Russell Mausoleum reveals numerous captivating facts about the owner – a wealthy family who ran one of the most well-known manufacturing businesses from New Britain, the designer – a prestigious architectural firm in the United States, and a long client-designer relationship between them. However, for further research, it is interesting to do a comparison study between the Russell Mausoleum and the other Woodlawn mausoleums designed by McKim, Mead & White. The comparison study will establish an understanding of the typical way McKim, Mead & White designed the mausoleum and identify unique features they apply for the Russells and for each of their clients.

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