

From Manufacturers to Artists

Analysis of Pyle Family's Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery

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Fig.1 Front Façade of the Pyle Family's Mausoleum

FRONTISPIECE

Does time the destroyer really exist?
When will it shatter the peaceful mountain's tower?
When will the demiurge overpower
this heart that always belongs to the gods?

Are we really as anxiously brittle
as fate wants to prove us?
Is childhood, so deep, so full of promise
in its roots - later - made still?

Ah, the apparition of impermanence;
it slides through the innocent
receiver as if it were steam.

As these which we are, the drivers,
among the lasting powers
we still matter as a divine means.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Sonnets to Orpheus: Second Series

INTRODUCTION

Visiting Woodlawn Cemetery, city of the deceased, was an exotic experience to me. Not only because I am a newcomer from overseas, but also in that “the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”¹

Recalling that day of Indian summer, when Susan drove me touring around the cemetery, I could feel the gently rolling topography of this urban oasis; the ground was said to be carefully regraded by engineers as they prepared each plot for division into lots and sales. Later that afternoon, it was sprinkling and breezy; I imagined that, the numerous round ripples dancing on the lake might just resemble the dynamic pattern of the Woodlawn Cemetery.

The Pyle family’s mausoleum is located at the south-east edge of the Woodlawn Lake. Walking down Central Avenue and then turning left on Lake Avenue, soon you will find it among other freestanding monuments. It occupies a small and open lot, without any designed landscape.

It is a modestly-scaled Grecian temple built with granite: symmetrical, with balanced proportions and it is highly restrained in decoration. Regarding its front façade (Fig.1), four fluted Doric columns support the simple entablature and gable. The family name ‘Pyle’ is inscribed on the lintel above the door.

The door is of bronze, with twelve glass panels and grille work. The introduction of glasses in the door of a mausoleum was an innovation at that time; through this glass, the interiors of the mausoleum will be in the full view of visitors. Peering from the outside, I could tell that four catacombs were positioned on each side; in the center of the rear wall, an iridescent glass window depicts a winged angel on a blue terraced landscape, releasing a bird, a dove maybe.

“Greek, Roman, sepulchers -- palatial mausoleums made to order, phantomesque, signs and symbols of hidden decay, ghosts of women and men who have sinned and who've died and are now living in tombs. The past doesn't pass away so quickly here. You could be dead for a long time.”² Entering a family mausoleum was like opening a time capsule; watching their photos, niches, names and dates carved on marble catacombs, it felt like I was building an intimate relationship with the people buried there. To my mind, mausoleums are deeply engaged in the metaphysical questions of time and duration, life and death.

Inside, the memorial window is the most interesting feature of the Pyle family’s mausoleum. On that overcast day, it appeared like a torch in the dim chamber; secular light came through the wings of the angel and then illuminated the sleeping dead. The signature on the bottom corner indicated that it is a favrile glass window produced by the Tiffany Studios.

On the table below the Tiffany window there display three black-and-white photos of family members: the man with sensitive eyes must be William Scott Pyle, Jr. the painter; the elder man

¹ Hartley, L. P. 2002. *The Go-Between*. New York: New York Review Books.

² Dylan, Bob. 2005. *Chronicles*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

looking spirited should be his father, and the very young boy could be James Vanderhoef Pyle, who died at the age of five.

Notably, there are two *pentagonal-dodecahedron* niches, belonging to Mieta Waller-Pyle and William Scott Pyle, Jr.; Mieta's niche was painted in a champagne color and Scott's was in dark brown. Initially the polyhedron structure strikes an impression of crystal, a metaphor of purity and renewal, as well as poetic quality. Then, by examining the biographies of Mieta and Scott Pyle, it is reasonable to assume that this unique design might commemorate their life in Goetheanum and their dedication to the Anthroposophy Society, which was founded by Rudolf Steiner. Mieta and Scott Pyle were close friends and followers of Rudolf Steiner; they were among those artists who helped Rudolf Steiner build the first and the second Goetheanum, which was to be the "revelation of the cosmic world."³ Hence, the crystal shape might represent Steiner's ideal that "this anthroposophical conception is not an attempt to achieve something one-sidedly theoretical - an expression of cosmic laws in a sum of ideas. It intends to be something born from man as a whole and to serve his whole being... the anthroposophical world view would be essentially more comprehensive; it strives to be able to speak from the whole compass of man's being."⁴

The lot was purchased on September 18, 1889, for \$1,050; Mary Vanderhoef Pyle, the wife of Albert Spalding was documented as the owner. According to the architectural blueprints of 1907 in Avery Library, the mausoleum was designed by the Ecclesiastical Department of the Tiffany Studios, constructed by C.E. Tayntor Granite Co. and the masonry was bought from Hallowell Quarry.

³ Zeylmans van Emmichoven, F. W., and John Davy. 2002. *The Foundation Stone*. East Sussex: Temple Lodge.

⁴ Steiner, Rudolf, and Michael Howard. 1998. *Art as Spiritual Activity: Rudolf Steiner's Contribution to the Visual Arts: Selected Lectures on the Visual Arts*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.

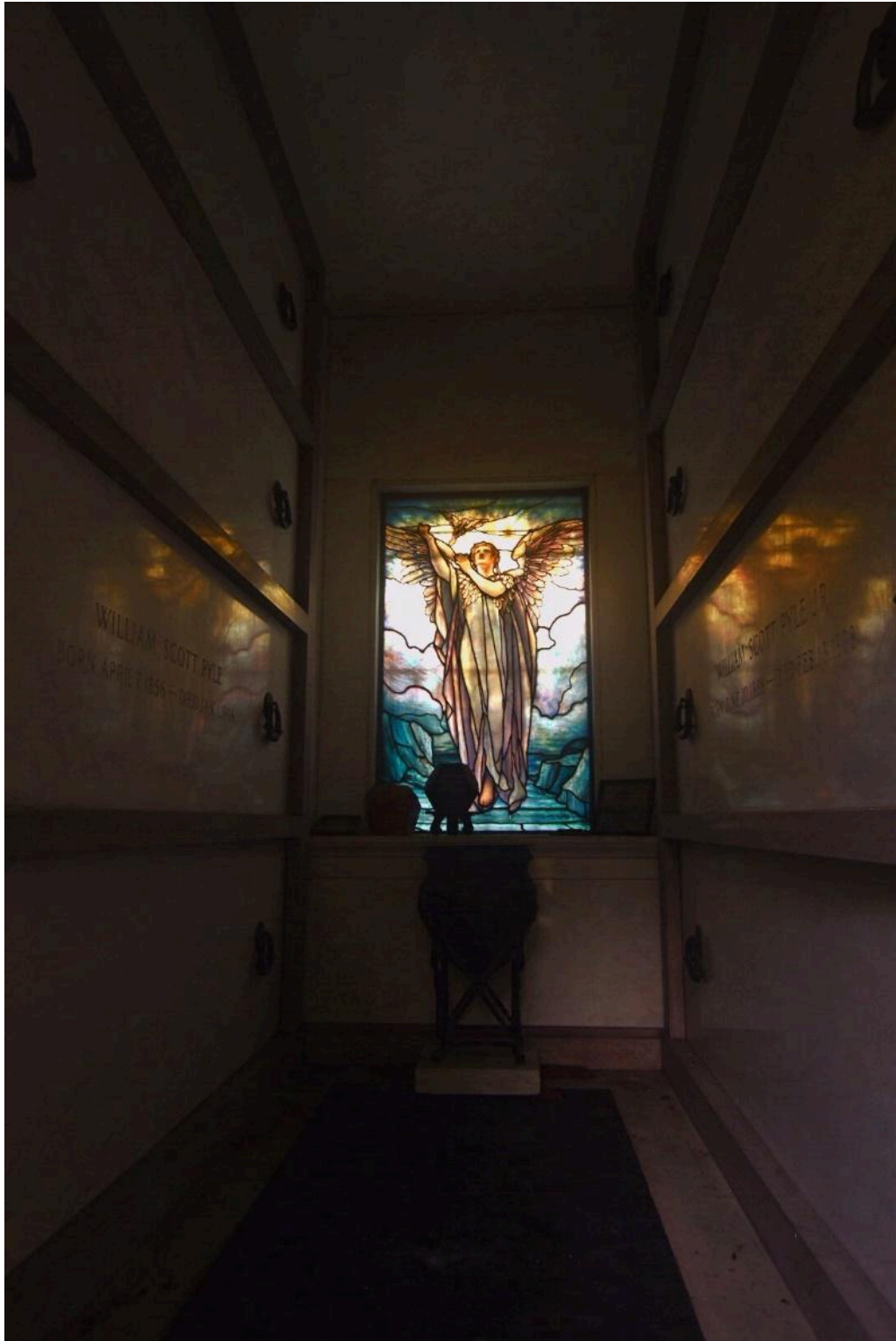


Fig.2 Memorial Glass of the Pyle Family. 1907. Designed by the Tiffany Studios

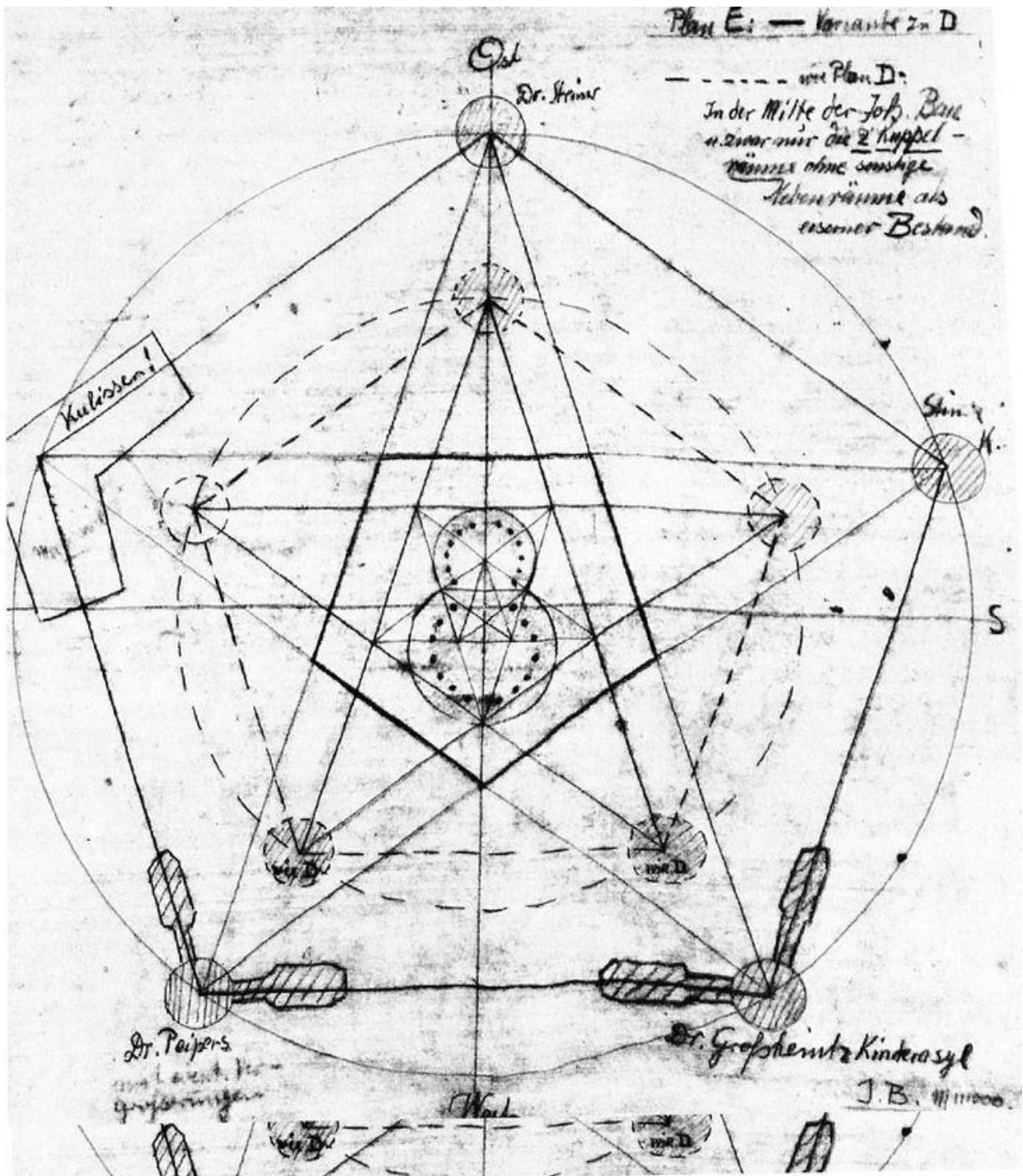


Fig.3 Site plan of the First Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland. 1913. Drawn by Rudolf Steiner



Fig.4 the Second Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland. Designed by Rudolf Steiner.



Fig.5 (Right) Portrait of William Scott Pyle, Jr.

Fig.6 (Left) Niches of Mieta Waller-Pyle and William Scott Pyle, Jr.

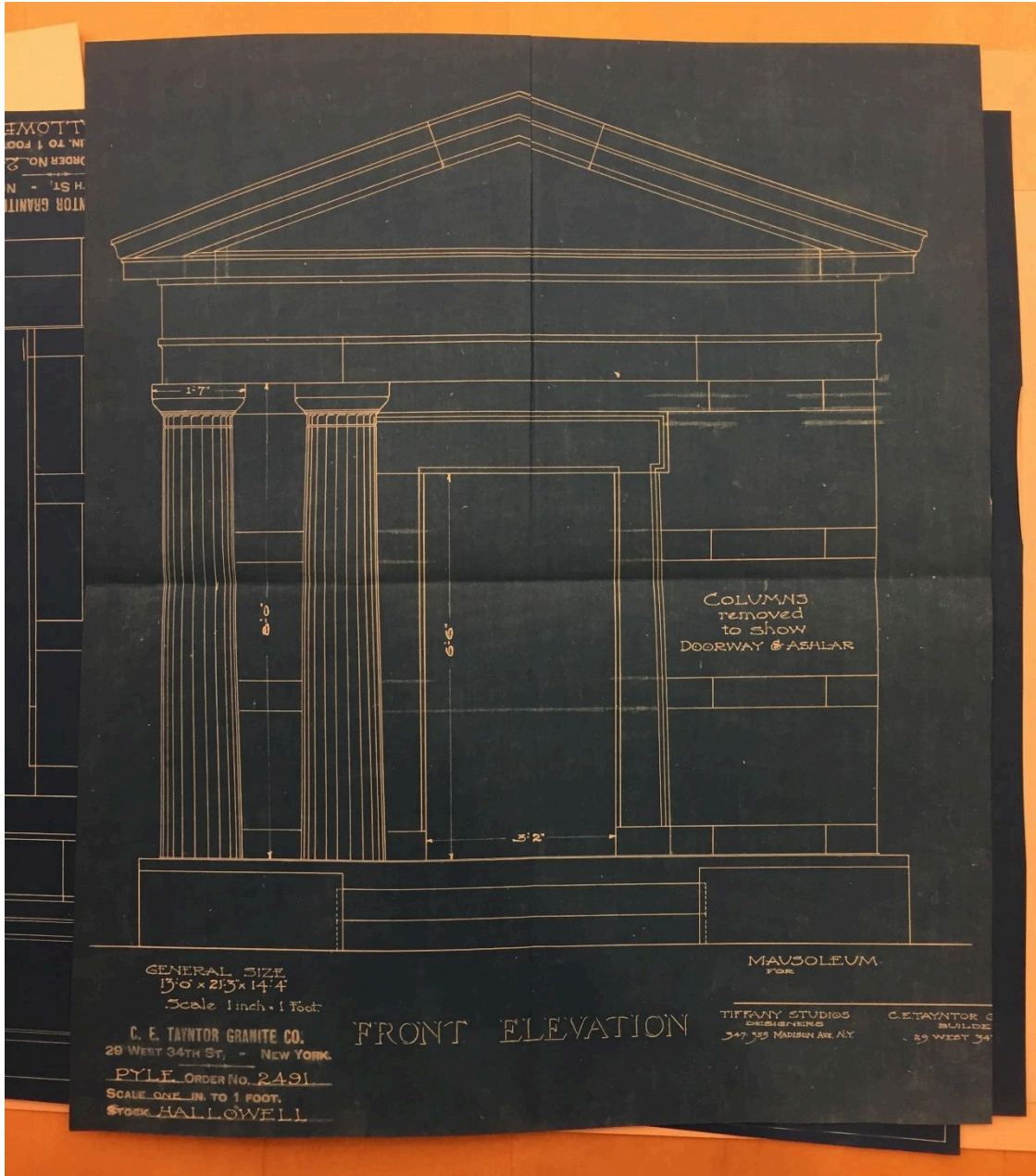


Fig.7 Front Elevation Drawing. 1907. Tiffany Studios. Source: Avery Library.

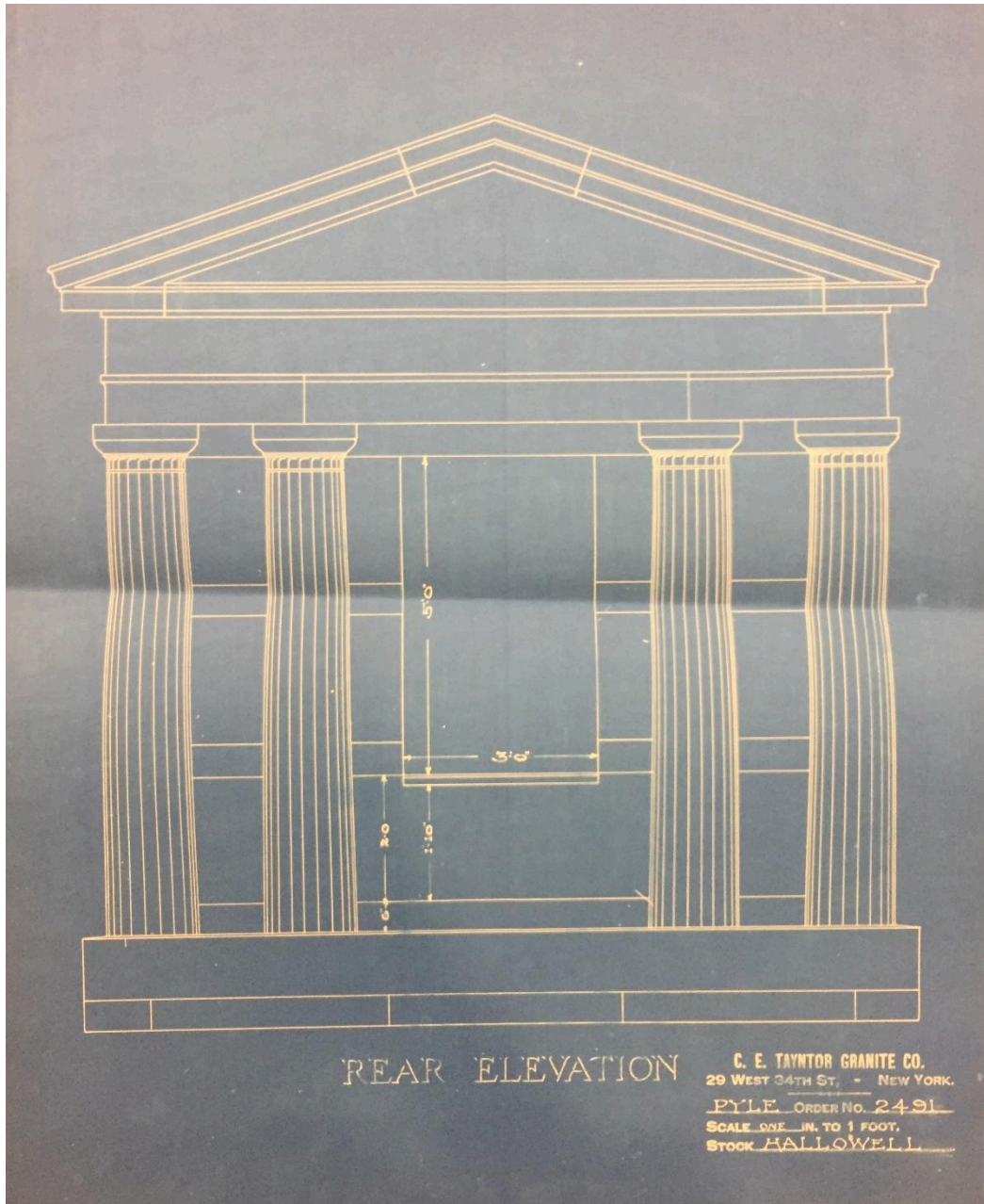


Fig.8 Rear Elevation Drawing. 1907. Tiffany Studios. Source: Avery Library.

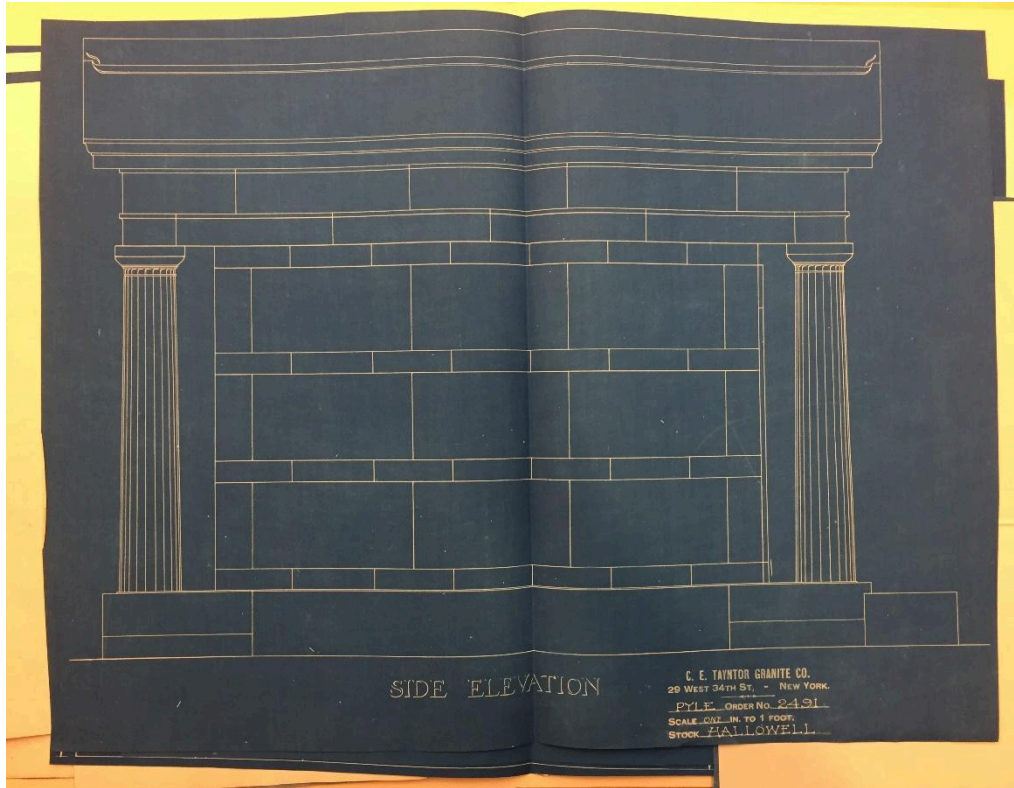


Fig.9 Side Elevation Drawing. 1907. Tiffany Studios. Source: Avery Library.

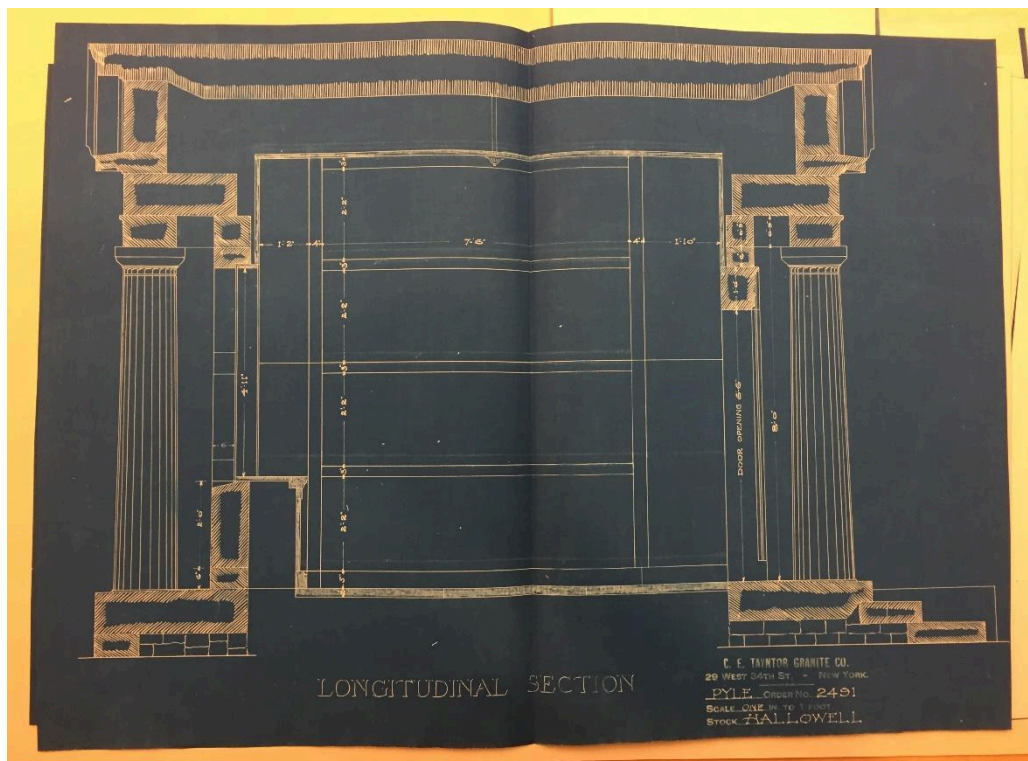


Fig.10 Longitudinal Section Drawing. 1907. Tiffany Studios. Source: Avery Library.

MEMORIAL DESIGNS OF THE TIFFANY STUDIOS

In the United States, the inception of producing cemetery memorials along artistic lines may be attributed to the moment when outdoor memorials became an available catalogue of the Tiffany Studios.⁵ The fact unknown to many people is that Louis Comfort Tiffany set up an Ecclesiastical Department which specialized in catering to people who lost their beloved. Products executed by this department included mausoleums, tablet monuments, Celtic crosses, and table monuments. Moreover, Louis Comfort Tiffany had investigated what's named as Tiffany Granite, and he bought an entire quarry at Cohasset, Massachusetts (Fig. 13).

In light of Tiffany Studios' advertising brochure, they claimed that "as in the various forms of monuments, so in the building of mausoleums, it is the aim of this institution to combine individuality of design and durability of material with the best engineering science. Tiffany mausoleums may be memorial tombs of the most magnificent architectural proportions and the most elaborate interior adornment consistent with the lasting materials which are invariably employed, or, they may possess equal solidity and charm in less pretentious size. In the smaller family mausoleums the character of the material and the method of construction need not differ from those employed in the great tombs erected as memorial sepulchers."⁶

As for the Tiffany favrile glass, the term "favrile" is a modification of the old English word "fabrile", meaning "hand-made". This exclusive Tiffany favrile glass is the basis of all Tiffany windows, which alone would make these windows distinctive. No part of the development of a Tiffany window can be done mechanically; the design is interpreted in the spirit of art. Louis Comfort Tiffany believed that his designs and luminous masterworks, specifically his work in glass and his vibrant gem-stone and enamel jewelry depicting myriad natural forms, restored the human spirit and sustained the soul.⁷

Louis C. Tiffany staffed his studios with a corps of talented chemists, designers, and artisans who worked together to realize his artistic vision and keep pace with the demand for his leaded-glass objects (Fig. 11, 12). Creating these objects was a collaborative effort. From making sheet glass to sketching designs to selecting, cutting and assembling windows and lampshades, various departments and numerous hands contributed to the finished product.⁸

⁵ Tiffany Studios (New York, N.Y.). 1913. *Memorials in Glass and Stone*. Tiffany Studios.

⁶ Tiffany Studios (New York, N.Y.). 1914. *Mausoleums*. Tiffany Studios.

⁷ Cooney Frelinghuysen, Alice, and Elizabeth Hutchinson. 2007. *Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁸ The Neustadt. <http://neustadtcollection.org/history/people-behind-the-glass>

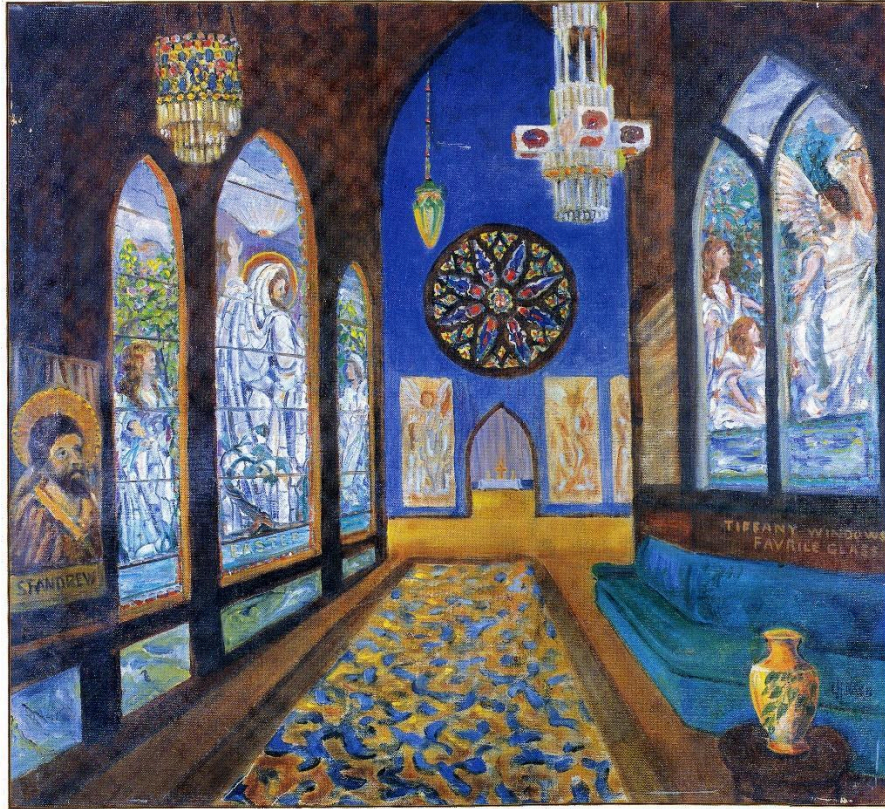


Fig.11 the Ecclesiastical Department's showroom. Oil Canvas. Sketch by Leslie H. Nash



Fig. 12 Designing Room of the Tiffany Studios. 1913.
(*The New York Public Library Digital Collections*)

GRANITE QUARRIES
of LOUIS C. TIFFANY at
COHASSET, MASS.

JOSEPH CASNA, Supt.
Tel. Cohasset 45, or Quincy 589-M

Aug 13/17

Superintendent
Woodlawn Cemetery
N.Y.

Dear Sir

we are sending under separate
Cover drawing of foundation for the Cohan-
Nibbs Mausoleum to be set in your
Cemetery. we give all sizes etc so you
should be able to build foundation.
we have shipped the granite and slate
which form part of the foundation so
they should be there soon.

Trusting all will be clear to you
Thanking you for courtesies received

Yours very truly

Joseph Casna

Fig. 13 Letter from Tiffany's Granite Quarries in Cohasset, Mass.
George M. Cohan Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery. (Avery Library)

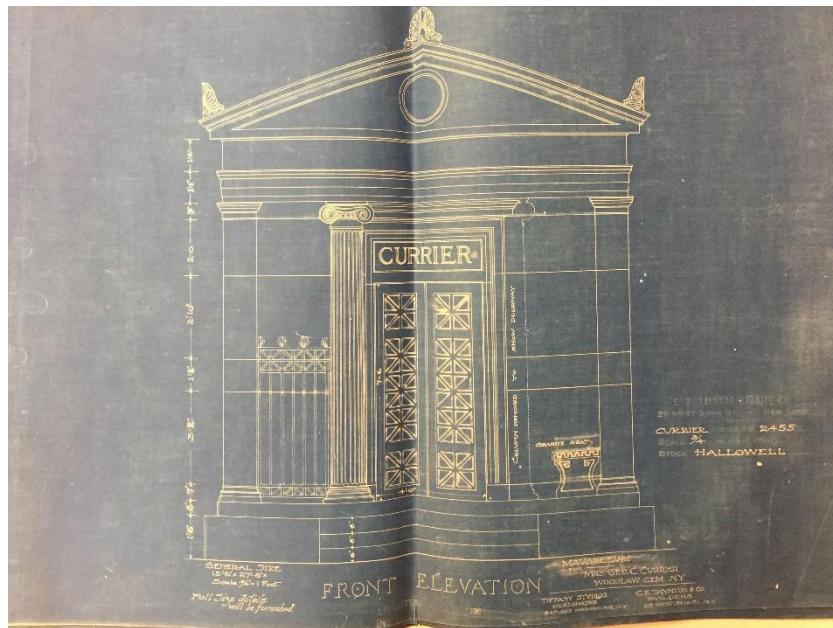


Fig. 14 Front Elevation Drawing. 1907. Designed by the Tiffany Studios. Jennie Currier Mausoleum. Woodlawn Cemetery. (Avery Library)

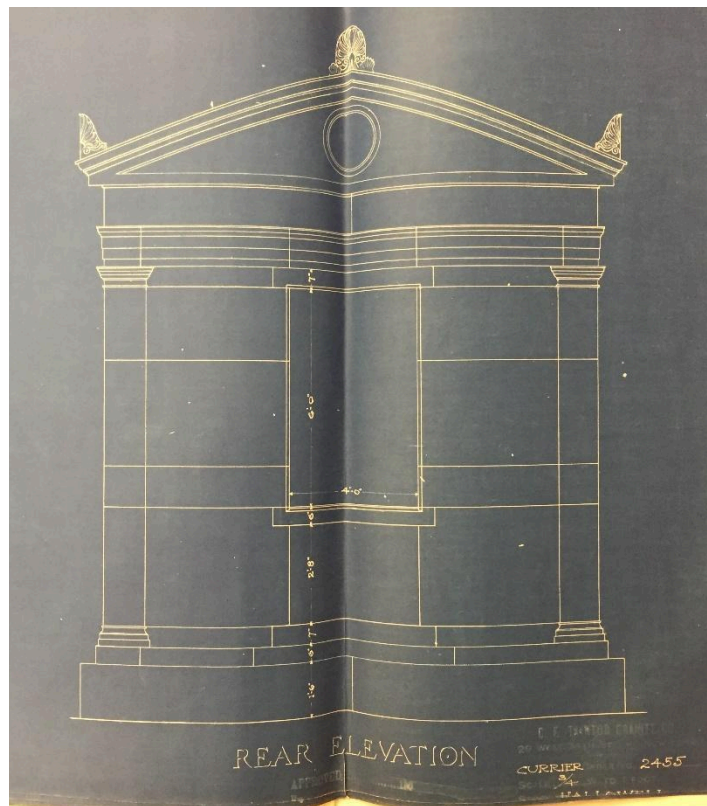


Fig. 15 Rear Elevation Drawing. 1907. Designed by the Tiffany Studios. Jennie Currier Mausoleum. Woodlawn Cemetery. (Avery Library)

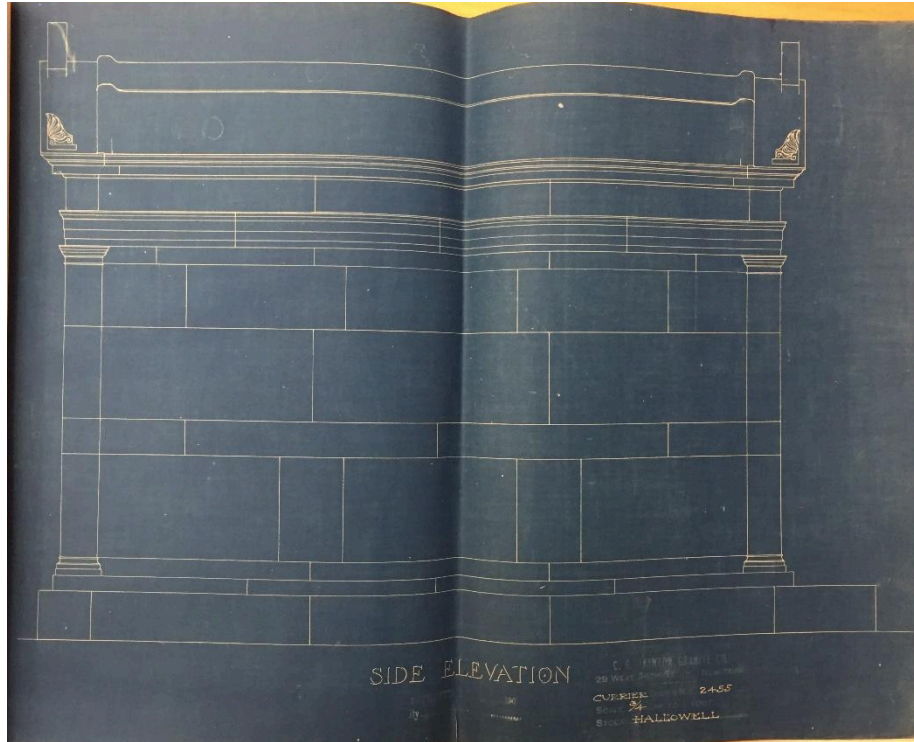


Fig.16 Side Elevation Drawing. 1907. Designed by the Tiffany Studios.
Jennie Currier Mausoleum. Woodlawn Cemetery. (Avery Library)

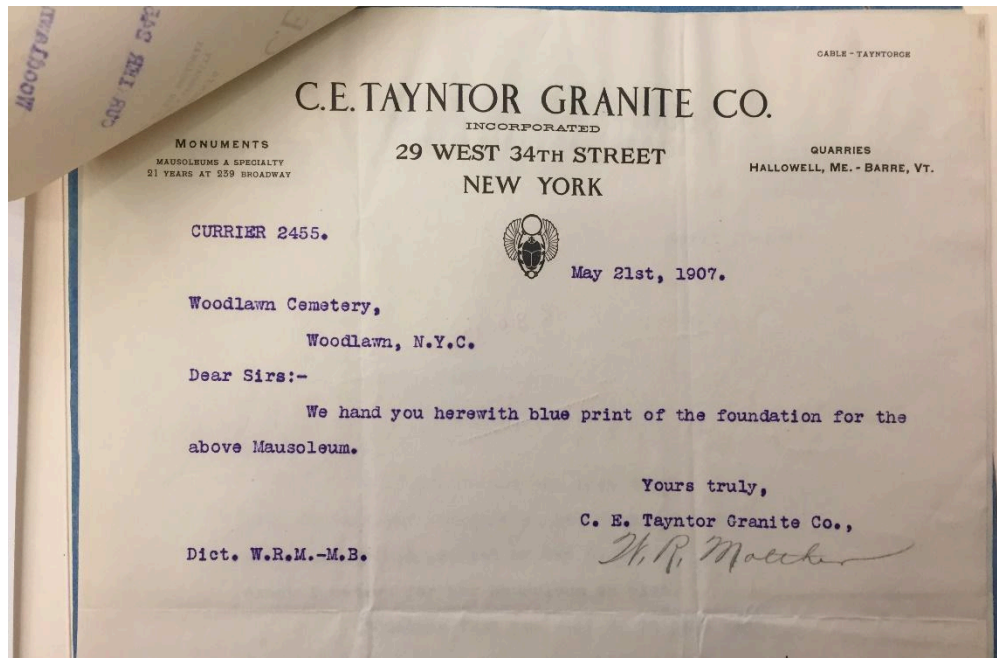


Fig.17 Letter from the C. E. Tayntor Granite Co. to Woodlawn Cemetery. 1907.

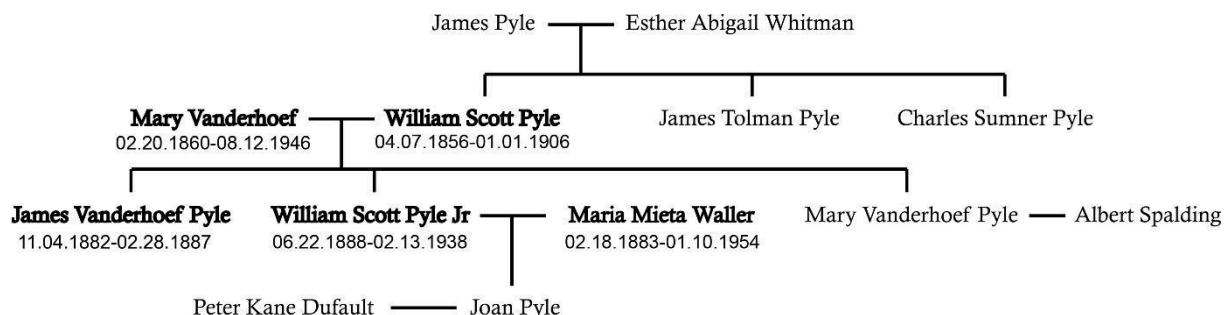
Jennie Currier Mausoleum. (Avery Library)



Fig.18

HISTORY OF THE PYLE FAMILY

The Pyle family originally came from the Isle of Wight, England, having obtained a grant of land from William Penn.⁹ The Pyles were very influential in the Isle of Wight, where there is to this day a village called Pyle.



James Pyle was born in Nova Scotia on August 16, 1823, to a father who fled from Pennsylvania after the battle of the Brandywine, as a Loyalist in the Revolutionary War. James Pyle came to New York when he was 22 years old, and started in the washing fluid business. In the 1859 *New York City directory*, James Pyle is listed under ‘saleratus’ (sodium bicarbonate) at 313 Washington Street.

When men left to fight in the American Civil War, women were forced to take over the farming; in addition to their already staggering housekeeping maintenance, thus leaving them with far less time for soap making. Consequently, this created a demand for manufactured soap. When the men returned from war they became accustomed to the manufactured soap and even began to prefer it.

James Pyle capitalized on this new market and invented his laundry soap “O.K. Soap”. From the 1870's until about 1907, Pyle's Pearline was widely advertised, conjuring a popular household commodity in homes across America.

William Scott Pyle was the second son of James Pyle. He and his brother James Tolman Pyle had been engaged as partners in business under the firm name of James Pyle Sons, with offices at 436 Greenwich Street. The business, which consisted among other things in manufacturing and selling Pearline Soap, was an extensive one, large amounts of capital being invested, and prior to the death of William had proved very profitable.

⁹ <https://frommainetokentucky.blogspot.com/2014/06/great-grand-uncle-william-scott-pyle.html>, June 7, 2014

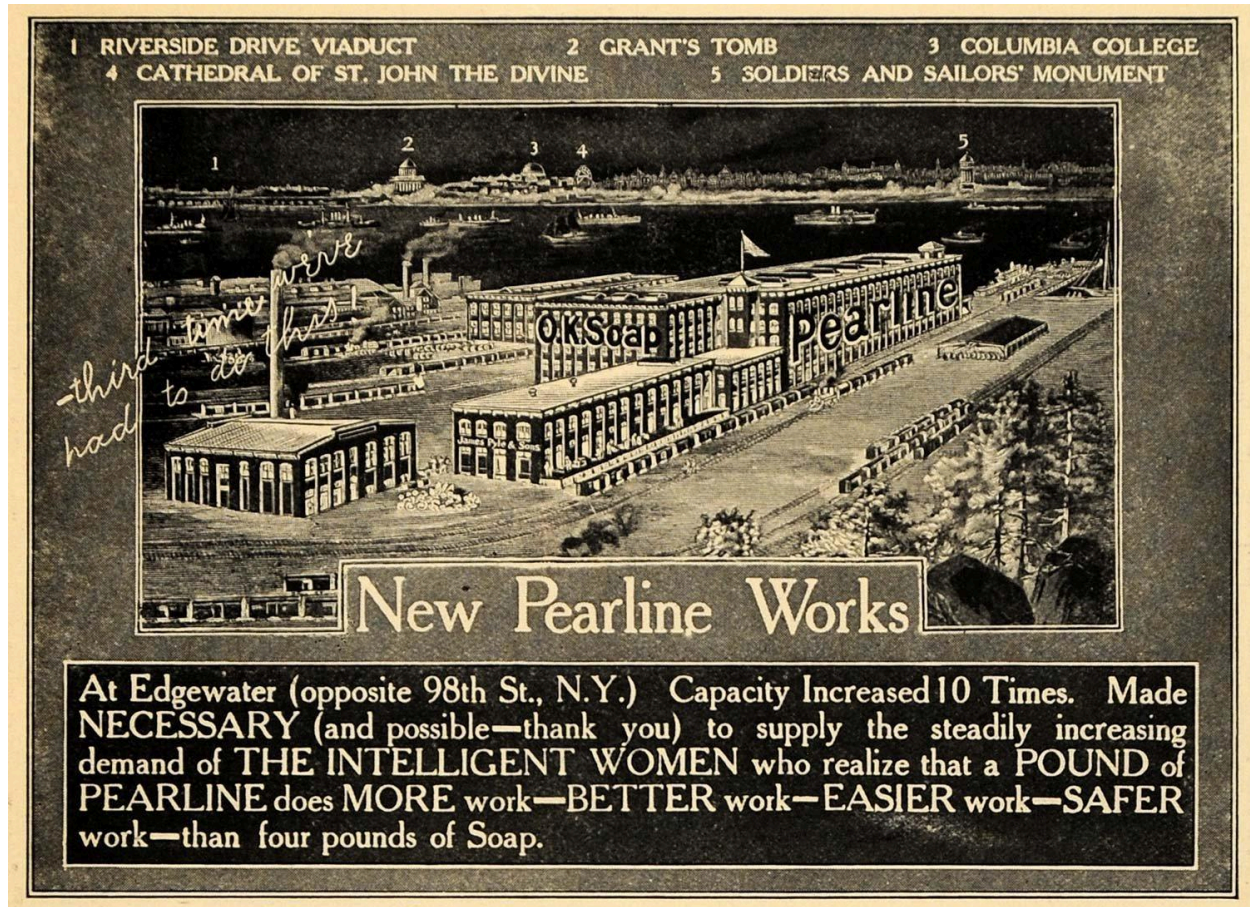


Fig.19 Print ad for the New Pearline Works at Edgewater, NJ. 1907

William Scott Pyle was active in the social life of New York City. He was member of the Union League, the New-York Athletic Club, the Law Association, the Biding and Driving Club, the Ardsley Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Municipal Art Society. In light of his obituary in *The New-York Tribune*, he died at his home, 3 East 53rd Street in 01.01.1906. His funeral was held at the Collegiate Church, 5th Avenue 48th Street.

William Scott Pyle Jr. was born on July 22, 1888 in the United States. He grew up in a wealthy and cultured circumstance, akin to the Spalding family.

Scott Pyle left Princeton in his sophomore year to study painting, first under William Merritt Chase (American painter, known as an exponent of Impressionism and as a teacher. He is also responsible for establishing the Chase School, which later would become Parsons The New School for Design), then at the Academy of Munich and with Frank Brangwyn.

In 1916 he set out for Europe, where he began studying European art and culture in Greece; during a four-year study stay in Florence, he dealt with the Renaissance. Quaintly he occupied himself with urban motifs - often silhouettes in an evening mood - and portraits.

From Florence, he traveled to Dornach in 1921 to participate in the first Goetheanum building (the Free High School for Anthroposophical Spiritual Science. Presumably he met Anthroposophy through his cousin Irene Brown, one of the first active anthroposophists in the United States. In Goetheanum, he dedicated himself with his entire artistic career, but also took over duties in the field of the Anthroposophical Society. With Albert Steffen, Ita Wegman and George Metaxa, he signed the invitations to the international delegation meeting in July 1923, which was decisive for the reconstruction of the Goetheanum and thus for the future of the Anthroposophy Society. At the end of January 1924, Scott Pyle became secretary of the branch at the Goetheanum and, with Emil Groscheintz, represented the branch as a delegate within the Swiss subsidiary.¹⁰

In 1924 he married Maria Mieta Waller, who had lived for many years in the narrowest circle of Rudolf and Marie Steiner; two years later their daughter Joan Pyle was born, and Marie Steiner was designated as the girl's godmother.

Mieta Waller and Scott Pyle combined an intense artistic collaboration, and their artistic talents had been incorporated into the humanities. Together they created stage sets for the production of the third and fourth mystery plays of Rudolf Steiner. By 1922, Scott Pyle had been commissioned by Rudolf Steiner to paint the large stage curtain for his mystery plays, according to his sketch from 1914. The fire, however, destroyed all that had been created. It was not until 1937 that Scott Pyle again took up this order.

In 1930, together with his wife Mieta and Marie Steiner, Scott founded the "Anthea-Institut für Rudolf Steiner Pflanzenfarbenherstellung"; he took a leading part in lengthy experiments with paints made from plant colors, which were finally manufactured by the Goetheanum. After just four years, the institute, for which a private building was built in the south-east of the Goetheanum, had to be closed for the global economic crisis; Scott Pyle had almost lost his entire fortune almost overnight.

¹⁰ Haid, Christiane. <http://biographien.kulturimpuls.org/detail.php?&id=540>



Fig.20 *Unter Baum*. 1932. Gouache on Paper. Drawn by William Scott Pyle Jr.



Fig.21 the Dead of Rudolf Steiner. 1925. Crayon Drawing. Sketch by William Scott Pyle Jr.

Maria Mieta Elizabeth Waller was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and attended the Dresden Conservatory of Music.

In July 1908 she took part in Rudolf's lectures in Kristiana. There she suggested to Marie Steiner-von Sivers the proposal "to build a temple for the words of Rudolf Steiner" (Lindenberg 1988, p. 271), later the Goetheanum. In August 1909, she appeared in Edouard Schuré's drama "The Children of Lucifer", and from 1910 to 1913 she played in Rudolf Steiner's mystery plays. She was the first to offer the money for building where the Mystery Plays could be performed.

After moving to the United States with her husband, Mieta helped design the Threefold Auditorium in Spring Valley. According to Virginia Hermann, staff from the Threefold Educational Center, the auditorium is currently used as a performance and lecture hall, a conference venue, offices for the Threefold Educational Foundation, and classrooms.

Mieta was described as "...a tall, highly gifted woman, a Dutch painter, who, like Marie von Sievers, was exceptionally endowed for the new art of speech, and was able intuitively to grasp at once and follow all that Marie von Sivers was doing, and could then do the same herself."

¹¹Marie Savitch portrays her great figure with broad shoulders, which gave a male impression. But her movements were soft and flowing. Under heavy eyelids, the view seemed to be "always directed into the distance. Music was in her gesture, and music was in her voice".

¹¹ Easton, Stewart C. 1980. *Rudolf Steiner; Herald of a New Epoch*. Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press.

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