

*Assignment #3—Field Documentation and Formal
Analysis: Mausoleum of Eva Stahl*

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The Stahl mausoleum is one of the most interesting in the cemetery. Despite its small size, the unusual front facade design gives it a unique charm and appeal. At first glance, it seems to be a crude structure, roughly put together; however, after further scrutiny, one notices the intricate details that give it its character, notably the granite-brick pattern and the ornate Gothic style doors. While the history of the Stahl family is not necessarily extraordinary, it tells the interesting story of a German immigrant family who worked hard to make a life for themselves in America. Overall, the family within, the surrounding environment and the physical features of the structure itself combine to create a charming and distinctive mausoleum that stands out amidst even the grandest mausoleums in the cemetery.

Eva Stahl was born in May of 1851 in Darmstadt, Germany. She and her husband, Adam, were the heads of a German middle-class family, living at 419 East 84th street. They had immigrated to New York in 1865. Together, Adam and Eva had 8 children, all born in New York: Augusta, Adam, Anna, Elizabeth, Fred, Philip, Dorothea, and Edelwise. Adam Stahl was a butcher with his own shop; his son Philip would work there as well. The shop was located at 454 East 84th street, just down the block from their home. The building where they lived was called The Augusta; it is unclear whether this had anything to do with the naming of their first child, or if it was merely a coincidence. It was a tenement house, with two apartments on each of the five floors. Today this building is a condominium complex; the butcher shop is currently a dry cleaner, although coincidentally there is a deli shop just a few doors down. While typically this may not be the wealthiest of professions, the Stahls were wealthy enough to not only have owned their house, but also to ultimately afford a mausoleum. Eva appears to not have worked but was listed as “keeping house” or “housewife” on multiple census records. After her husband’s death, Eva remained at 419 East 84th street, living with her son Philip, the new head of the household, and his family; Philip was the executor of her will and ultimately saw that her estate of over \$20,000 was distributed as she wished among her children and grandchildren. Of their children, two died before their mother but most of them did marry; in fact, Edelwise, also known as Merdie, married Albert Aberle, who was laid to rest with the Stahl family in the mausoleum. The exact reason why Albert is the only spouse to be laid there is unknown, although one may speculate that he either was the last surviving spouse or that he may have helped to pay for the mausoleum, thus earning a place of eternal rest with his wife and her family.

The mausoleum was commissioned in the middle of August 1925. One can conclude that this was due to the premature passing of their son Fred, who passed away on August 8, 1925, at the young age of 43. It was built and designed by Frank T. Lang whose title was “Designer and Manufacturer of Memorials in Stone.” Lang was also a German immigrant and owned his own business, building monuments and mausoleums for the nearby cemeteries. The address of his business was 69-01 Metropolitan Avenue in Middle Village, Queens. The building, erected in 1904, was located across the street from a Lutheran Cemetery and was ultimately named after Lang. In fact, similar to the Stahls’ neighborhood, Middle Village was predominantly comprised of German immigrants who were practicing Lutherans. While no direct connection was found between the Stahls and Frank T. Lang, one can infer that within the German

community, there were a few highly respected names in the business of monuments and mausoleums and that Lang was most likely recommended to the Stahl family by a member of this community.

The Stahl mausoleum is located relatively close to the Jerome Avenue entrance to Woodlawn cemetery and is visible from a busy street just outside the boundaries. It is on a corner lot and can be approached from three different paths. By sitting on an intersection, the structure is given great viewing possibilities from many angles. In addition, even though there are mausoleums of similar sizes in the vicinity, the Stahl one is directly surrounded by smaller monuments and gravestones; therefore it can be observed and approached easily from all directions. The surrounding trees hang directly over the mausoleum, providing a cozy, comforting atmosphere. While the lot may have been selected due to lesser cost or limited availability, the result of its location is a pleasant environment which is close enough to the street so as to still be connected to the outside world but made private and inviting enough by the trees so as to still have an intimate experience in visiting the mausoleum.

There is only one possible way into and out of the mausoleum—through ornately designed Gothic bronze doors. Standing on the main road in front of the mausoleum, the viewer is invited to approach the mausoleum by a narrow concrete path that connects to a set of wide stairs. The stairs, and consequently the space for the viewer, become smaller and smaller until the person reaches a small landing; then it is one small step up in order to enter the door. The center of the door is aligned with the center of the path, providing with the viewer a direct route to the entry; in addition, the narrowness of the walkway forces the viewer to enter the mausoleum this way. The wide steps allow the viewer's eye to converge upon the central focus of the front facade—the entrance. Even the arched border around the doors is angled inward toward the interior, compelling the eye to settle on the doors; this convergence, although forced, provides a welcoming atmosphere and draws the person inside.

Both the plan and the section of this structure are symmetric and balanced in terms of design and clearly define the spaces within; in both cases, the ratio of catacombs space to the walking space is 2:1. Therefore, one can see that this is a relatively small mausoleum, perhaps meant to honor the family's space over that of any visitors. Once inside, this can result in feelings of claustrophobia or of intimacy, depending on each individual visitor. There is a definite sense of being closed in, and during the day, it is darker inside than outside; however, the incoming light from the beautiful stained-glass window in the back wall provides an other-worldly light which could have been the original intention since it was a common element of mausoleums. Despite the lack of light inside, there is a much lighter feeling from the smooth, marble interior than from the rough, rusticated exterior. In terms of the construction, one can see that the steps were cut separately and that the roof was cut and assembled in three separate parts, the joints covered by another smaller granite piece to crown the mausoleum. Also, it is clear that each of the exterior stones were jointed as closely as possible so as to give each wall the impression of being one large mass as opposed to one constructed of many smaller pieces. The design of the building makes it look heavy, dense, and crude. In fact, the juxtaposition of this crude frame to the substantially more refined entryway is what creates both the appeal and charm of the mausoleum.

Although the interior is small, its elements interact in a pleasant way. The convergence technique used outside continues inside, ultimately ending on the stained-glass window depicting Christ as the shepherd. Perhaps this image reflects the Lutheran idea that we are the sheep meant to follow Christ, the shepherd, through life and after. The window sits on a projecting sill, which serves as a small altar holding some personal items including two vases of flowers and a small statue, possibly Mary, Jesus, or a saint. The narrow interior space, almost exactly the width of the walkway, provides the viewer with an intimate experience; there is nothing to distract the visitor from the focus of the mausoleum—the window. Other than the small bronze rosettes on the catacombs, there is no extraneous detail inside. The smooth, marble pieces that cover the catacombs give the inside a sense of refinement and a small marble bench provides a place to rest under the window. In addition, there is a small pot under the bench. Perhaps some of these items belonged to the family or were brought by visitors, but one cannot be sure. There is a balance to the interior layout as well. There is a central vertical line of focus from the window to the sill to the bench below which reinforces the symmetry found on the exterior. Albeit small in size, the interior of the Stahl mausoleum achieves its purpose of providing a cozy space for people to pay their respects to the family.

The design of the front facade is both symmetrical and balanced. In essence, it consists of two wide stairs, leading to a main platform upon which lie elevated columns holding up a lintel. Above this lintel, which is inscribed with the family name, is a triangular pediment topped by a sloping roof. This temple-like design is seemingly simple, almost as if large building blocks were stacked one upon another. The frame of the facade is rusticated and looks rough and unfinished. Coming in from both the left and right sides, the design becomes more and more refined ultimately ending on the intricate bronze doors. The intermediate space between the frame and the doors is compiled of alternating bands of brick-patterned granite and rusticated granite; these bands serve both to connect the outline of the structure to the entry and also to add interest to the facade. The orderly lines of the brick pattern reflect those of the arched border around the doors. In addition, the design of the Gothic style doors convey a sense of upward motion, again leading the viewer's eye to the stained-glass window meant to be the central focus. It is possible that this converging of refinement of the design found throughout the mausoleum symbolizes the family's situation in life—a rough start as immigrants in a new country but ending happily with a large family and enough money to afford a beautiful final resting place. From outside, one can deduce that the interior is small by observing the direct pathway to the front doors. Therefore, the small size is meant to indicate that the space was designed to be close and intimate. It can also be surmised that the small interior space was a necessity in order to house all eleven catacombs for the family members. There are similar mausoleums in size and with rusticated exteriors nearby, although the granite-brick pattern on the front of the Stahl's makes it unique.

The various building materials used for this mausoleum work together to form a cohesive structure. The building's exterior is made of Greenslanding Granite, including the walls, roof, stairs, door jamb and lintel, floor slab, and front ashlar. The exposed surfaces are all rock face and the floor slab is polished on top. The front ashlar was created by

fine axing and then being checked with sand-blast grooves to achieve a rock face effect. The entire interior, excluding the door jamb and lintels, is made of highly polished blue-veined Italian marble. The other materials used were the following: Bangor Slate—eight shelves, each two inches thick for the catacombs; Portland cement mortar (one part cement to two parts sharp Cow Bay sand) to set the granite and the roof pieces; U.S. Standard Bronze for the double door, window frame, sixteen rosettes and eight vents; glass for the window; and cement for the walkway. Together, these materials of different sizes, textures, and colors combine to form the mausoleum's charming aesthetic. The large, rusticated block-like shapes that make up the exterior stand in stark contrast to the smaller smooth, front brick shapes as well as the intricacy of the entry doors. Yet despite their textural differences, the overall effect of the front facade is attractive. In addition, the only color other than gray and white on the facade is the green of the bronze doors. This may have been meant to additionally serve to enhance the focus of the eye on this spot, directly behind which lies the most beautiful source of color—the stained glass window. While textural differences come together to form a unified whole, color serves to highlight the main feature of this whole.

The Stahl mausoleum is in a word unique. No other mausoleum has these alternating bands of brick-pattern and rustication to break up the front facade. While many of these structures focus the eye on the entrances, this one in particular does so in a way that the convergence is forced, yet welcoming. This rhythm that is created is one of the most appealing and aesthetically interesting features of the facade. While the overall design of the Stahl mausoleum results in a seemingly crude exterior, the focus of the viewer's eye on the entryway shows how the facade becomes more refined the closer it gets to the doors. The basic design and layout of the structure may be simple but they are enhanced by the rustication and the ornate details. Even though the structure is a relatively traditional temple form, the Stahl family sought to make their mausoleum distinctive and the result is an interesting and charming creation. While far from being grand, the Stahl mausoleum is an appealing and engaging structure which utilizes its surroundings and intricate details to create an enjoyable, although unusual, aesthetic for both the residents and the visitors to enjoy.

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