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## 1. Introduction

Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, New York, is one of the most important and oldest cemeteries in the United States. It was founded in 1863 during the rural cemetery movement and spans over 400 acres.<sup>1</sup> With more than 300,000 people buried there, Woodlawn Cemetery reflects not just the lives of those buried, but also the changes in American culture and society during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Wyckoff Mausoleum at the intersection of Central Avenue and Fairview Avenue in the historic Woodlawn Cemetery, the mausoleums are arranged in a circular plot. Symmetrical boxwood shrubs line both sides of the mausoleum, and a tall tree at the south side.

Archival records show that the garden around the mausoleum was carefully designed in a circular shape. The mausoleum, which is about 31 feet by 19 feet, is surrounded by plants and shrubs that were thoughtfully chosen. The outer circle includes four main plants: tall hydrangeas, Sweetbay Magnolia, American holly, and common boxwood.<sup>2</sup> The designer deliberately chose plants that have color in all seasons. This also proves that the designer also paid great attention to details.

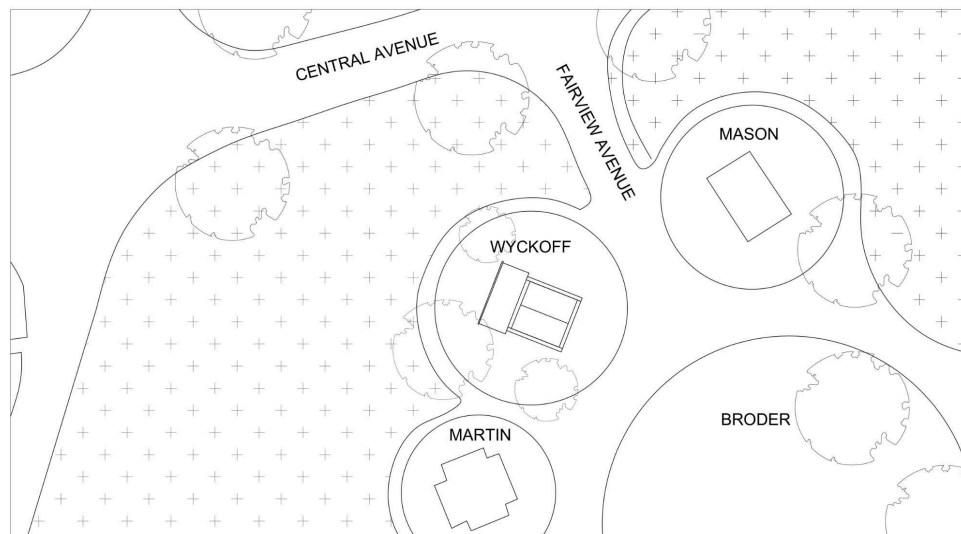


Figure 1 Woodlawn cemetery site plan drawing

<sup>1</sup> *The Woodlawn Cemetery*. Archived from the original on November 16, 2013. Retrieved November 17, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Wyckoff Mausoleum Garden Design, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive

The individuals buried in the mausoleum, Albert Wyckoff and Sarah Josephine Miller Wyckoff Bent, are central to understanding its significance. Albert Wyckoff came from a wealthy family, with financial success dating back to his grandfather.

This paper aims to explore the architectural, cultural, and historical importance of the Wyckoff Mausoleum by combining field observations and archival research. Mausoleums like the Wyckoff's are not just seen as still buildings but as monuments that change over time. The research uses materials from the Avery Library at Columbia University and the Woodlawn Cemetery Archives to understand both the design and ongoing preservation of the mausoleum.

## 2. Historical Background

The Wyckoff Mausoleum is not just a resting place but also a symbol of the wealth and status of the Wyckoff family. To fully understand its significance, we need to look at the history of the Wyckoff family and how their financial success, beginning with Albert Wyckoff's grandfather, led to the creation of this impressive structure. It is important to trace the family's financial and social history, starting with Albert Wyckoff Sr., followed by his son, Alexander R. Wyckoff, and culminating with *Albert Wyckoff Jr.*

The origin of the Wyckoff family name is Dutch. Pieter Claesen Wyckoff, an early family member, settled in New Netherland (currently New York) in the 1600s<sup>3</sup>. As time passed, the Wyckoff family gained recognition in New York for their societal, cultural, and economic impacts. The name has been passed down through the family for generations, showcasing their Dutch roots and enduring impact.

The Wyckoff family's wealth spanned several generations. Albert Wyckoff Jr<sup>4</sup>, who was born in 1840, was one of the key figures laid to rest in the mausoleum. Much of his wealth did not come from his own work but was tied to his grandmother's family, the Robertsons.<sup>5</sup> This connection to the

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<sup>3</sup> "Genealogy @ The Wyckoff House", n.d

<sup>4</sup> Albert Wyckoff Jr is the person who is buried in the Wyckoff Mausoleum.

<sup>5</sup> Lawson, Andrew. 2014. *Downwardly Mobile: The Changing Fortunes of American Realism*. N.p.: Oxford University Press.

Robertson family played a major role in keeping the Wyckoff family financially successful.

The Robertson family's wealth originally came from Alexander Robertson, a New York merchant and landowner. His fortune was supposed to go to a relative named Mary Walsh James, but it ended up going to Mary Robertson<sup>6</sup> instead. When Mary married Albert Wyckoff Sr., the Robertson fortune became part of the Wyckoff family.<sup>7</sup> This marriage helped strengthen the family's financial position, and their wealth was passed down through the generations, continuing to grow over time.

Even though there isn't much documentation about his career, it is clear that Albert's wealth and social status came from his family's fortune. He married *Sarah Josephine Miller*.

After Albert's death, *Sarah Josephine Miller Wyckoff* inherited a fortune from both the Wyckoff and Robertson families. At a time Sarah proved to be very skilled in managing her wealth. After Albert's passing, she remarried *Thomas C. Bent*, a well-known bandmaster and musician.<sup>8</sup> However, Sarah's true legacy lies in the smart financial decisions she made after Albert's death.

After Albert's death, Sarah made real estate investments that demonstrated her keen business skills. Her ability to double the value of her inheritance highlighted her understanding of New York's booming real estate market in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>9</sup> As the city grew, land and property values continued to rise, and Sarah took full advantage of these opportunities. Before her death, she also set up a trust fund to leave the majority of her fortune to the Wyckoff family, ensuring their financial future.

### 3. Architectural and Artistic Analysis

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Robertson is Albert Wyckoff Jr's grandmother

<sup>7</sup> Lawson, Andrew. 2014. *Downwardly Mobile: The Changing Fortunes of American Realism*. N.p.: Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> "BANDMASTER BENT TO MARRY AGAIN: WILL WED MRS. SARAH J. WYCKOFF AT THE WALDORF TO-NIGHT BRIDE-TO-BE IS REPUTED WORTH \$2,000,000, AND BENT WILL NO LONGER PLAY FOR THE OLD GUARD." *New York Times* (1857-1922), Dec 11, 1900.

<sup>9</sup> T.C. BENT WILL NOT FIGHT WIFE'S WILL: DOCUMENT DRAWN IN 1873 BEQUEATHED \$3,000,000 ESTATE TO HUSBAND NOW DEAD. SECOND HUSBAND TO SHARE REST OF PROPERTY WILL GO TO SEVENHALF-SISTERS AND ONE HALFBROTHER. (1921, Nov 09). *New York Times* (1857-1922)

While there are no available drawings or details about the architect, stained glass inspection report<sup>10</sup> indicates that the mausoleum was built by Norcross Brothers.<sup>11</sup>This company was well-known at the time, known for building landmarks such as Boston's Trinity Church and the Rhode Island State House. The Norcross brothers were known for their superior quality and craftsmanship, which made them the preferred builders for wealthy clients. By choosing such a well-known company, the Wyckoff family demonstrated their high social status. Hiring Norcross Brothers also guaranteed that the mausoleum would be built using the best materials and techniques of the time.

The exterior of the Wyckoff Mausoleum is an example of neoclassical architecture, a style that became popular in the United States in the late 19th century.<sup>12</sup>Inspired by the classical forms of ancient Greece and Rome, neoclassical architecture was often chosen for memorials and mausoleums because it symbolized permanence, dignity, and order—values that families wanted to convey through these lasting monuments.



Figure 2 Yuhan Wang,Front Elevation, 2024

<sup>10</sup> "Woodlawn Cemetery Stained Glass Condition Assessment," Liberty Stained Glass Conservation. This report provides a detailed analysis of the condition of stained glass windows at Woodlawn Cemetery, including issues related to deterioration, repair recommendations, and preservation methods.

<sup>11</sup> Worcester Society of Antiquity (Mass.) *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity*. Pub. by The Society, 1907, Vol. 21 (1905), p. 36 - 39.

<sup>12</sup> Middleton, Robin. (1993). *Neoclassical and 19th century architecture*. Electa.

The front of the mausoleum is dominated by a temple-front design, a hallmark of neoclassical architecture. The front of the building has a prominent pediment supported by Ionic columns. The Ionic order is known for its scroll-like volutes. Two rusticated columns, adding visual texture and complexity to the design.

Above the entrance, on the gable, is a relief of cherubs holding a laurel wreath, a classic symbol of victory and immortality. The use of cherubs in funeral art is also a nod to Christian symbolism, representing the ascent of the soul into heaven. The laurel wreath is a common motif in ancient Roman art, expressing the idea of immortality and victory over death, consistent with the cultural and religious values of the time.

The mausoleum is constructed from granite, a material chosen for its durability and resistance to weathering. Granite was commonly used in mausoleums for its association with strength and permanence, and Norcross expertly executed this choice of material, ensuring that the mausoleum would stand the test of time. The exterior walls are smooth and rusticated, creating a contrast between the finely worked stone around the columns and the rougher textures of the side and rear walls. In addition to the facade, smooth stone is used around the upper and base sections, with rusticated stone used primarily in the middle sections.

The entrance to the mausoleum is marked by a pair of bronze doors that were specially designed with the letters A and W in the middle. The doors are decorated with intricate wrought iron patterns that mix floral and geometric designs. The ironwork is not only decorative but also functional, protecting the mausoleum from the elements while letting light in.

The iron grille on the door reflects the Art Nouveau style that was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Known for its flowing lines, organic shapes, and intricate details, Art Nouveau often features floral motifs, which in this case can symbolize life and rebirth—a common theme in funeral art. The combination of classical elements and Art Nouveau details in Wyckoff's mausoleum showcases artistic influences from that era, blending traditional and modern styles in a unique way.

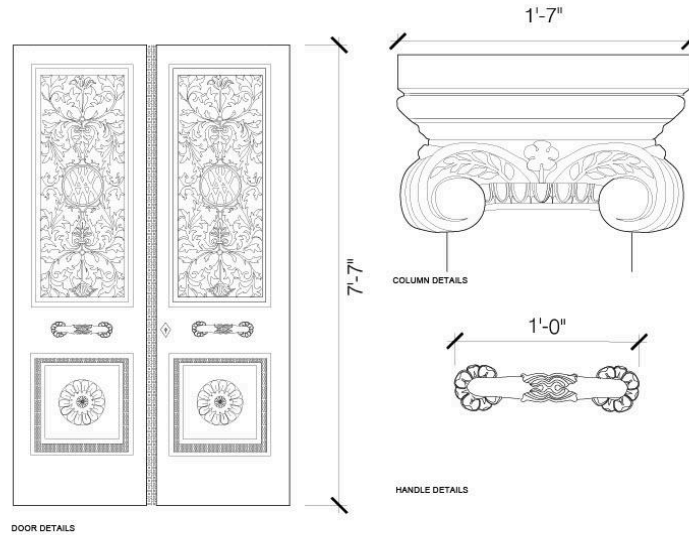


Figure 3 Door and Column Capital Detail drawings

The layout of the interior is symmetrical and simple. There are two symmetrical stained-glass windows on the left and right sides of the door. The door and the niches are facing each other. But in the middle, there are two marble coffins against the wall for Albert Wyckoff Jr and his wife, which is unusual from other mausoleums. The niches left for future generations are empty.

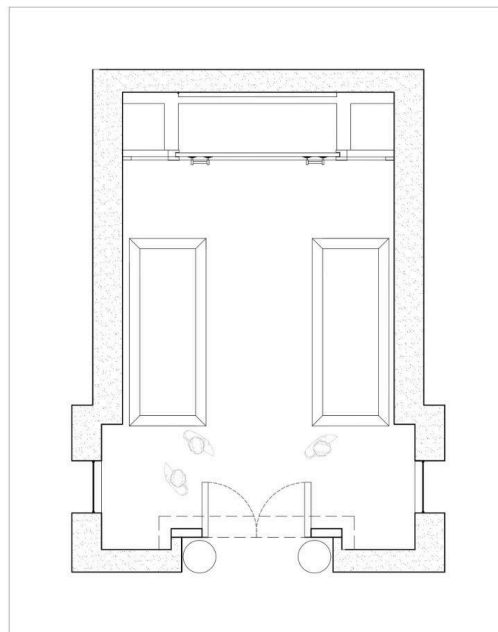


Figure 4 Mausoleum floor plan drawing

One of the most striking features of the interior of the mausoleum is the two large stained glass windows, which were made by the famous Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company. Tiffany stained glass is known for its vibrant colors and intricate designs. By the 1880s, Tiffany Glass had become the largest producer of stained glass windows.<sup>13</sup> The windows on the north side are painted with angel faces, continuing the theme of angelic protection and eternal life. The use of Tiffany's signature opalescent glass makes the windows sparkle and change color depending on how the light hits them. The stained glass paintings on the south side have faded.<sup>14</sup>



Figure5 Yuhan Wang, Stained Glass, 2024. Left is the north window, right is the south window.

#### 4. Archival Research Insights

Archival research has provided valuable insights into both the construction and continued maintenance of the Wyckoff Mausoleum. Documents from the Avery Library at Columbia University and the Woodlawn Cemetery Archives reveal key financial and legal arrangements made by the Wyckoff family to ensure the mausoleum's long-term care. Notably, Thomas C. Bent, who married Sarah Josephine Miller Wyckoff after Albert Wyckoff Jr. 's death, played a crucial role in overseeing these arrangements.

Correspondence between Bent and cemetery officials indicates that the family established a special care fund to cover the cost of maintaining the

<sup>13</sup> Lee, Lawrence; Seddon, George; Stephens, Francis (1976). *Stained Glass*. Spring Books. ISBN 0-600-56281-6.

<sup>14</sup> There is no clear reason why the stained glass is not painted on. It is speculated that it may be due to long term exposure to UV light.



mausoleum. The fund was initially proposed for \$10,000 and was eventually adjusted to \$5,000, still a significant sum at the time.<sup>15</sup> Correspondence from the early 1920s details the negotiations surrounding the establishment of the fund to ensure that the mausoleum would be cleaned, repaired, and maintained for future generations. These documents highlight the family's foresight and commitment to preserving its legacy. Additionally, financial records indicate regular repairs, such as restoring granite and maintaining bronze doors and stained glass windows, indicating the family's ongoing involvement in the mausoleum's conservation.

## 5. Preservation and Current Condition

On the Exterior, you can see a lot of efflorescence and discoloration, especially at the joints of the structure. We see more of it in the Interior. There are water stains coming in. The Interior air feels damp. Green moss biological growth can be seen on the marble coffin. You can also see it in the corners of the room. It is interesting that the painting on the window facing the south has faded. This window is directly exposed to the sun. If the colors on stained glass are not baked at very high temperatures, they may fade with long-term exposure to sunlight. You can also see water stains on the ceiling. Over time, materials like stone or concrete can develop small cracks or wear, allowing water to seep in, especially during heavy rains. Older mausoleums may lack modern drainage systems. Without proper drainage, rainwater can pool or seep into areas it shouldn't, eventually causing interior damage like ceiling stains.

Recent inspections, including a detailed 2021 condition assessment, confirm that the mausoleum remains structurally sound, though some areas require attention. The stained glass windows are in relatively good condition, though minor damage was noted on the left window, requiring stabilization and weatherproofing. The bronze doors and ironwork remain intact but exhibit signs of patina, which is typical for outdoor bronze over time.

Overall, the mausoleum requires ongoing maintenance, continued maintenance is essential to preserve its architectural and artistic features.

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<sup>15</sup> Cemetery officials, Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University

Regular cleaning, minor repairs, and environmental monitoring will help ensure that the Wyckoff Mausoleum remains a prominent and well-preserved fixture within Woodlawn Cemetery.

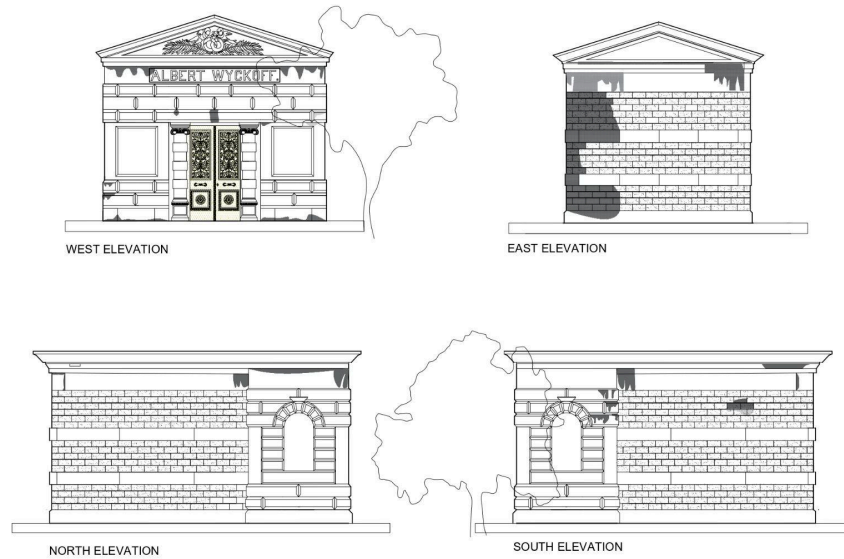


Figure 6 Mausoleum Exterior Condition Drawings



Figure 7 Mausoleum Interior Condition Drawings

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