

The Du Bois-Blauvelt Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery

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Closely observing a mausoleum offers a unique window into a deeply personal history expressed through the medium of architecture. The structure illuminates not only the symbols, values, and tastes of an individual or family, but also larger architectural and artistic trends of the time of construction. In this paper I will examine a mausoleum situated in the Woodlawn Cemetery constructed in 1906 by business tycoon Frederick N. Du Bois. My paper will be divided into two parts; I will first explore the family and life of those buried using archival sources. Following this, I will analyze the monument's aesthetic properties through original construction documents and firsthand observations. The subsequent section will draw conclusions that build upon the biographical information shared.

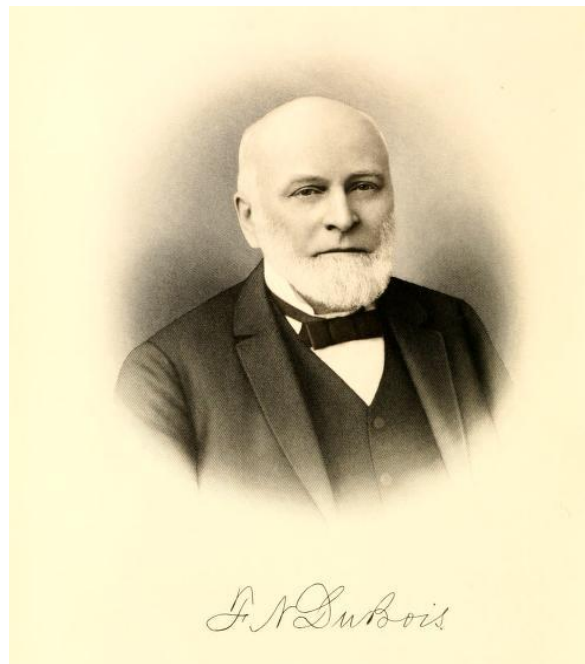


Figure 1. F. N. Du Bois Portrait. From *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Family History of New York*, vol. 1, by William S. Pelletreau (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 183.

The Du Bois Family

Frederick Du Bois died at the age of 86 in Catskill NY, at his summer home.¹ He had a single surviving daughter at the time, who is now lying beside him at Woodlawn. An obituary in the *Plumbers' Trade Journal* memorializes him as a “Prominent New York City Manufacturer and Jobber” in the plumbing trade of New York City.² He was born in Catskill, New York, on October 5th, 1829. The *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Family History of New York* by William Pelletreau traces the Du Bois name from medieval times until 1907.³ It should be mentioned that wealthy individuals or families would often pay publishers to include their family histories in such compilations. According to this publication, the genealogy starts with “Geoffroi Du Bois, who was a Knight Banneret under William the Conqueror, whom he accompanied to the conquest of England, 1066.”⁴ It is then described that the direct descendents of Frederick Du Bois, migrated to the New World in the late 17th century, moving to Ulster county, New York.⁵ Louis Du Bois, an ancestor of Frederick, acquired a large amount of property from the Native Americans of the area, presumably the Esopus people, a part of the larger Lenape nation.⁶ The sale took place in 1677 and saw a stretch of “ten miles along the Hudson river” be exchanged for prized possessions such as “forty kettles, forty axes and sixty knives.”⁴ Besides various accounts describing the family’s deep ties to the New World, Pelletreau

¹ *The Plumbers Trade Journal*. New York: Plumbers Trade Journal v. 58-59 (July-Dec. 1915).

² Ibid.

³ Pelletreau, William S, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Family History of New York*, vol. 1 (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 176, <https://archive.org/details/historichomesins01pell/page/186/mode/2up>.

⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁵ Ibid., 177.

⁶ Ibid., 178.

chooses to emphasize the family's devout Christianity. When describing the early Du Bois settlers he notes that, "The French Bible of the Huguenots was their companion."⁴ Although the origins of the Du Bois name are somewhat embellished, it is clear that the family was quite wealthy and had ties to the Hudson Valley area dating back many generations. Pelletreau provides various portraits and illustrations of lavish family estates from the 18th century to back this up.⁷

According to Frederick's obituary, "he was in the silver business in Buffalo and Chicago, and later started a gold smelter in Black Hawk, Colo."⁸ Many flocked west to Colorado during this time hoping to profit from gold. The only son of Frederick Du Bois and his wife Helen would die at 11 years old during this time. *The Daily Mining Journal* of Black Hawk includes an obituary that reads, "Died. At Black Hawk Point, Dec. 22nd, of Congestion of the lungs, James Frederick Du Bois, Aged 11 years and 29 days."⁹ James is now resting at Woodlawn beside his parents. Du Bois relocated to New York City in 1868 after an accidental fire destroyed his smelting refinery.¹⁰ He would enter the manufacturing trade, first working with his brother Lewis who had founded the J. G. Du Bois and Company in 1844. The company manufactured "sash, doors and blinds."¹¹ Du Bois would help introduce lead pipes to their catalogue. Pelletreau writes that, "It was while conducting the business of manufacturing lead pipe that Mr. Du Bois made the valuable invention of the Du Bois Seamless Drawn Lead Trap."¹² Traps are a curved section

⁷ Ibid., 181-182.

⁸ The Plumbers' Trade Journal. New York: Plumbers Trade Journal v. 58-59 (July-Dec. 1915).

⁹ *The Daily Mining Journal Newspaper*. Wednesday, Dec. 23 , 1863. Page 3. Vol. 1 , No. 21. Black Hawk, Gilpin County, Colorado.

¹⁰ Pelletreau, William S, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Family History of New York*, vol. 1 (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 183, <https://archive.org/details/historichomesins01pell/page/186/mode/2up>.

¹¹ Ibid., 184.

¹² Ibid., 184.

of pipe which holds water, acting as a stopper to ensure that gases or odors cannot reach inhabited spaces. Drawn lead traps came in, a now obsolete, S-shaped design.¹³ The fixture was made entirely from lead. Lead was even used to solder the connection points.¹⁴

The success of this plumbing trade endeavor can be, at least in part, attributed to the contributions of Du Bois' son-in-law. Frank W. Blauvelt would marry Frederick's only daughter, Alice. He entered the manufacturing business with his father-in-law and "organized his (Frederick's) business into a stock company under the name of The Du Bois Manufacturing Company of New York, for the purpose of handling the product of his patent, and established a branch for the manufacture of the traps in London, England, and another at Berlin, in Germany."¹⁵ An advertisement in the *Plumbers Trade Journal* shows a basin cock system which was added to their inventory in 1915, one week after Frederick Du Bois' passing (Fig. 1).¹⁶ Frank W. Blauvelt is now lying below Frederick at Woodlawn, beside his wife Alice. Their daughter Madeline Allaire is also present, who passed away in 1918, at the age of 26.

¹³ Reuben Saltzman, "Drum Traps," *Structure Tech Home Inspections*, July 30, 2019, <https://structuretech.com/drum-traps-2/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Pelletreau, William S, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Family History of New York*, vol. 1 (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 184, <https://archive.org/details/historichomesins01pell/page/186/mode/2up>.

¹⁶ *The Plumbers Trade Journal*. New York: Plumbers' Trade Journal v. 58-59 (July-Dec. 1915).

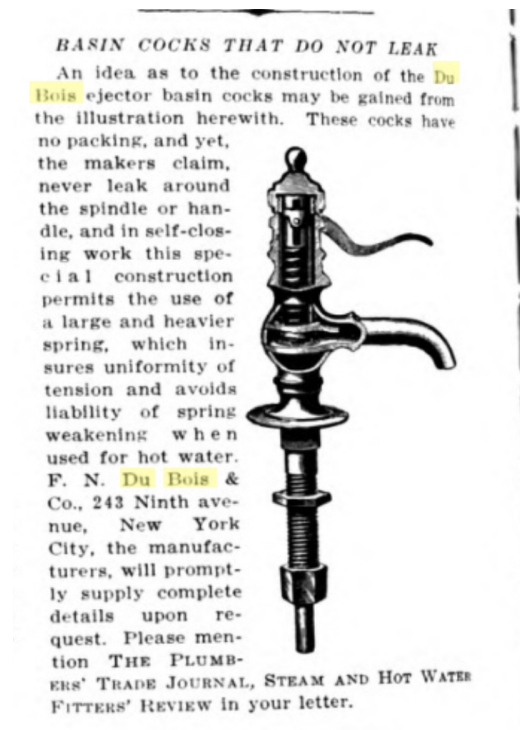


Figure 2. Advertisement in the *Plumbers Trade Journal*, July 15, 1915, 126.

When describing the life and character of Frederick Du Bois, Pelletreau adds that the business mogul's faith was a central aspect of his character.¹⁷ He also includes that Frederick, "always cherished the place of his early associations of life, has established his citizenship at Catskill, and has contributed his time and substance towards advancing the material as well as the social and moral interests of the town."¹⁸ *Dear Old Greene County*, a publication which documents important figures in the Hudson Valley area, similar to Pelletreau's Genealogical compilation, documents that Frederick Du Bois had donated \$30,000 to the Catskill Young Men's Christian Association in 1902.¹⁹ Frederick would pass away at his summer home in

¹⁷ Pelletreau, William S, *Historic Homes and Institutions and Genealogical and Family History of New York*, vol. 1 (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 186, <https://archive.org/details/historichomesins01pell/page/186/mode/2up>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gallagher. *Dear Old Greene County*. Library of Congress, 274 <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.dearoldgreenecou00gallt/?st=slideshow#slide-60>

Catskill, the place in which he was born and deeply connected to. I find it fascinating that he chose to be buried at Woodlawn in the Bronx and not the Hudson Valley given his clear passion and strong ties to the area. The photograph below shows Du Bois' prominent summer home in Catskill where he passed.

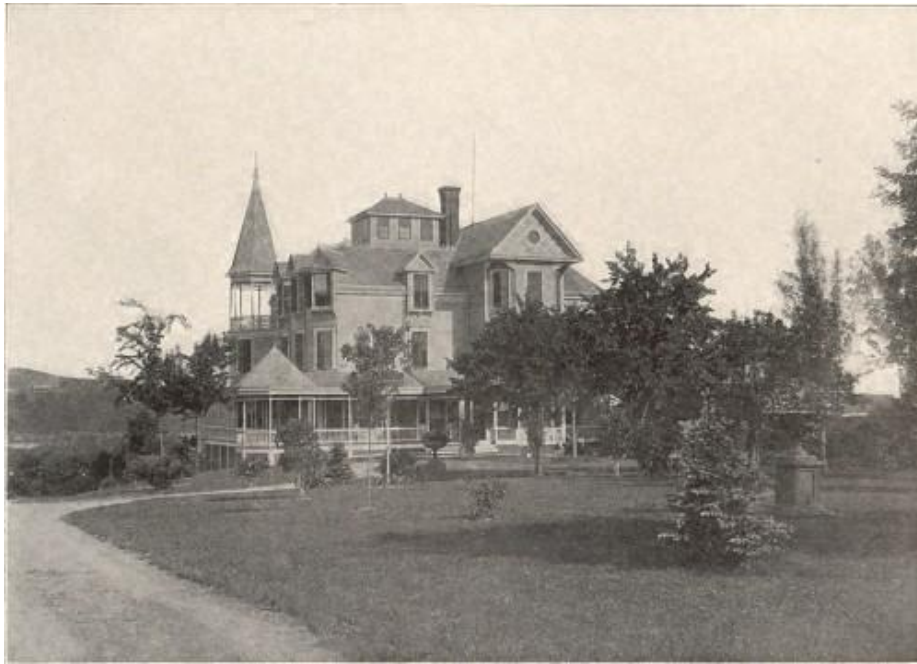


Figure 3. Catskill Archive, Mountaintop Historical Society, Residence Mr. F. N. Du Bois, <https://www.catskillarchive.com/home.ht>

The Mausoleum



Figure 4. Du Bois-Blauvelt Mausoleum. *Photo by Gerrit Bollin, September 2025.*

Today at Woodlawn, in the Park View Plot, a 13 by 18 foot mausoleum stands bearing the Du Bois-Blauvelt names. The stone built structure is rectangular in shape. A modestly sloped gable roof caps the structure in stone. Two beautifully decorated, one inch thick, bronze doors seal the tomb, framed by two columns and a round arch. The keystone of the arch is decorated with a carving of a crown: inside the crown is a diagonal Christian cross. The cast bronze of the door is dark green in color and scratched in some areas from natural weathering. A grill in the upper half of the door, housing a detailed floral wreath, allows for a minimal amount of light to

enter into the central chamber. The bottom sections of the doors are decorated with detailed urns and additional floral and scroll-like patterns. The back and side elevations are dominated by large four foot by fourteen inch granite blocks, each with a rock-faced finish. The large rough stones give the structure a sense of permanence. Each corner is marked by an engaged column; each capital is intricately carved with classical ornamentation. The columns are not rock-hewn, allowing them to stand out against the larger granite blocks which they frame.

Entering through the bronze doors, the visitor will enter a chamber lined with Vermont marble. Looking forward, the room has twelve crypts, framed by darker mottled marble. To the sides, two small stained glass windows allow a beam of light to enter. The stained glass depicts five white flowers, perhaps white magnolia or dogwood blossoms, in a field. The floor is mosaic with a laurel wreath design in the center, a Greek key pattern adorns the floor's edge. Given the columns, rounded arch, mosaic floor, laurel wreath, and Greek key pattern the mausoleum resembles some kind of Classical temple. The stained glass on the other hand, creates an array of light that reminds one of a church interior.



Figure 5. Du Bois-Blauvelt Mosaic Floor. *Photo by Gerrit Bollin, September 2025.*

The interior is only nine feet in height as four marble stones are supported by a central cast-iron rosette anchor. One of the marble ceiling panels is sagging slightly, which is noticeable from the joint lines. The structure shows minor signs of deterioration, a door hinge has fallen off, a piece of the granite roof has a small fracture, pieces of the mosaic floor have been dislodged near the doorway.

The Avery Woodlawn Archive houses the initial blueprints for the mausoleum as well as documentation of the materials used. There is surviving correspondence between the Woodlawn Cemetery and the Manhattan Monument Company discussing the details of the plan and the mausoleum's location. According to the descriptions, the exterior walls should be erected using Light Barre granite, a mix of Atlas Portland cement and sand was chosen for the mortar. The interior was to be lined with Vermont marble as well as mottled marble to frame the crypts. It is noted that the catacombs would be supported by common brick walls and that a two inch gap would be left in between the exterior walls and the catacomb walls. All stones besides the two rounded columns in the entranceway were to be left unpolished.²⁰

Considering Du Bois' alleged ties to the knighted Geoffroi Du Bois, the crown could signify this noble history. The cross, carved in stone, embodies Du Bois' devotion to Christ. This seal is representative of the two major thematic elements described by Pelletreau in his genealogical history, nobility and faith. The large rock-faced stones and Classical Romanesque elements portray a sense of antiquity. Given the family's presumed ties to the early settlers of the region, perhaps these elements are meant to signify the maturity or persistence of the Du Bois family name in the United States.

²⁰ J. A. Doolittle, Letter to Woodlawn Cemetery, 1906, Woodlawn Archives, Avery Library.

Another interesting point of inquiry is the large inscription adorning the mausoleum bearing the name Blauvelt alongside Du Bois. Earlier I referenced the crucial role Frank Blauvelt played in expanding the lead trap business and helping found the Du Bois Manufacturing Company. This relationship between father and son-in-law went beyond business endeavors as their names stand as equals. The documents which still exist from the Manhattan Monument Company do not mention Frank Blauvelt, they instead reference the pending approval of only Du Bois. They also refer to the project as the “Du Bois Mausoleum”.²¹ Perhaps the success Frank Blauvelt had achieved in the plumbing trade business earned him the respect and admiration of his father-in-law. Perhaps Du Bois, in the years leading up to his death, revered Blauvelt as his son and heir, which he lacked following the tragic death of James Du Bois in Colorado.

I have not yet touched on the women entombed in the mausoleum. Their stories are not included in the primary sources or embellished genealogical accounts; their presence is almost invisible in the archive. Both the crypts of Helen, the wife of Du Bois, and Alice, the daughter, are inscribed with their maiden names. Helen keeps the name Riley, while Alice is listed as Alice Du Bois, not Alice Blauvelt. Was this their final attempt to mark their presence as individuals, not appendages to these rich men?

²¹ J. A. Doolittle, Letter to Woodlawn Cemetery, 1906, Woodlawn Archives, Avery Library.



Figure 6. Du Bois-Blauvelt Crypts. *Photo by Gerrit Bollin, September 2025.*

The Du Bois-Blauvelt mausoleum, offers a glimpse into a plurality of stories. Some of which have been meticulously dramatized and published, some of which are still untold. From what we know, the Du Bois family were ardent Christians, successful businessmen, victims of tragedy, perpetrators of settler colonialism, and prideful of their family name and heritage. The monument at Woodlawn is testament to their intersecting and conflicting identities. The structure sends a clear message to the passing onlooker, the Du Bois and Blauvelt legacy is made from granite and will not be forgotten. When observed alongside the family's history, the mausoleum projects not only prominence, but religiosity and an obsession with nobility and permanence.

Bibliography

Figure 1. Advertisement in the *Plumbers Trade Journal*, July 15, 1915, 126.

Figure 2. Catskill Archive, Mountaintop Historical Society, Residence Mr. F. N. Du Bois,
<https://www.catskillarchive.com/home.htm>

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