



The Jacob Appell Mausoleum

Adam Kaleb Poole

Project 3: Documentation & Formal Analysis

18 October 2010

Françoise Bollack, Ward Dennis,
Andrew Dolkart, Cleary Larkin

The Jacob Appell Mausoleum and plot in Woodlawn Cemetery is home to nine persons of the Appell and Evans family. The eponymous resident died on 26 December 1915 at his Westchester County estate. He is joined there by his second wife, Mrs Rosa (alt. Rose) Appell (b. 1847, d. 1924), and their four children; Robert W. (b. 1874, d. 1941), Anna T. (b. 1875, d. 1941), Matilda (b. 1877, d. 1958), and Amanda (b. 1879, d. 1961). The Mausoleum also contains the bodies of Dr. William P. Evans, husband of Amanda Appell Evans (d. 1958), and Ida Agnes Appell (d.1970), wife of Robert W. The grounds contain the unmarked grave of Robert Theodore Appell (d. 1971), son of Ida and Robert W.

Mr Jacob Appell was born in Schwegern, Auxt-Baden (now Germany), in 1836. He immigrated to the United States aboard the Felix from Le Havre, arriving on 23 June 1852.¹ He was naturalized on 22 October 1860, and the US Census of 1870 found him living at 292 Eighth Ave. and working in a restaurant. He lived with two German women, both aged 20 years, Christina and Anna, one of which could have been his wife and the other his sister. His first three children, none of whom are interred in his mausoleum, are also recorded: Franklin (b. 1861), Emilia (b. 1863), and Albert (b. 1866).²

In 1873, Jacob was married to Rosa Kerpel and by 1880, the two are living at 271 west 23rd Street with Jacob's children from his previous marriage and the four other children mentioned above.³ He would reside at this address until his death, and by this point he had entered his primary profession. He practiced real estate brokerage and development in a nearby office, also on West 23rd Street. Over the next thirty-five years, Mr Appell would develop his portfolio to include thirty-seven parcels in the Chelsea neighborhood (some buildings of which are still standing) and 40 acres in Westchester County. Thirty-four of these parcels were sold at auction in 1927 by his heirs at a value of \$1,423,550, \$582,550 above the estimated value.⁴ While no obituary ran in the paper, the auction of his estate in 1927 brought attention both in the *Times* and the *Real Estate Record & Guide* to his fore-sighted development activity in

¹ Ancestry.com. *U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007. 6 June 1898.

² Year: 1870; Census Place: *New York Ward 16 District 11 (2nd Enum), New York, New York*; Roll M593_1035; Page: 319B; Image: 32; Family History Library Film: 552534.

³ Year: 1880; Census Place: *New York City, New York, New York*; Roll 883; Family History Film: 1254883; Page: 28D; Enumeration District: 342; Image: 0185.

⁴ "APPELL PROPERTIES SELL FOR \$1,423,550," (1927, February 16). *New York Times* (1923-Current file), p. 25.

Chelsea.⁵ He visited Europe at least twice, including once in 1872 for which his passport application described him as 5'7" with a low forehead, bluish eyes, acute nose, small mouth, medium chin, a ruddy complexion, and an oblong face.⁶

The will of Jacob Appell stipulated that his son Albert and his daughter Amanda be the executors of his estate. The two argued repeatedly beginning almost immediately and began a series of suits from 1917 well into the 1920s when the estate was sold. In 1917 Mrs. Amanda Appell Evans engaged W.W. Leland & Co. to construct a Mausoleum for the second family of her father at the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. As part of an appeal on a case concerning misuse of the estate income, Albert took issue with money from the estate being used for purchase and construction of this mausoleum, valued in the court records at \$11,621.28, considering that the plot contract included exclusive burial rights for members of Jacob Appell's second family. Amanda Evans acquiesced and funds were drawn from other accounts. Mentioned in the court records is another Woodlawn plot which Jacob Appell purchased himself, but which was not the one on which Amanda Evans built the mausoleum for him.⁷

W.W. Leland & Co. designed for Amanda Evans a simple structure with curious ornament. It is a cube set on a square platform and topped with a shallow pitched roof. The exterior is built of modestly-sized granite ashlar, and inset on the platform are random granite tiles. Although the form is set in the round with squat square planters at each corner and a fully circumscribing cornice, the facade is clearly preferred in terms of ornament. A bronze grill door is set in an arched portal with pronounced quoins. Around the door is carved a tree - undoubtedly the Tree of Life - which spreads across the top under the cornice. Set in the archway is a colorful mosaic depicting a winged hourglass whose time has run out. Two butterflies flit about as well. The arch formed by the portal is continued in the grill of the door creating a circle. In the blueprints, this element is enhanced by spherical bay trees in the corner planters where now grow weeds. As the trees were not included in the contract, it is uncertain whether they were ever there. This ornament is reminiscent of Joseph Olbrich's Viennese Secession Building, built 1897, which itself is capped by an enormous spherical tree whose leaves are carved to crawl up the facade. The

⁵ *Real Estate Record & Guide*, February 14-20, 1927.

⁶ *NY Times* reports Mr Appell leaving for Europe in 1895, and the *NY Tribune* records him visiting once again in 1898.

⁷ *Reports of Cases Heard and Determined in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York*, Vol. 199, pp 574-584. Lyon, Albany: 1922.

interior of the Appell Mausoleum is faced with Tennessee Pink 'marble' and a Barre granite floor. There are eight catacombs lining a central aisle. A small bench lies at the far end beneath a west-facing stained-glass window appropriately depicting a bucolic sunset. The structure is framed in the front by two low bushes and sits two-thirds of the way back in the plot, which itself is just shy of a crest on a relatively unpopulated road, the primary residence of which is the extensive gothic retreat of Mr Edward Harkness.

Leland & Co., later Presbrey-Leland Memorials, has a large portfolio within Woodlawn Cemetery. The company catalogue, published as a guide to selecting a monument, does not specifically showcase the Appell mausoleum, but its style fits within the 'square form' and the 'modern style' with several modifications. The 1929 edition is fairly critical of the modern style, claiming that only expert designers such as those at Leland & Co. are capable of executing with modern style without offense.⁸ In fact, the Appell Mausoleum breaks several rules recommended by the catalogue, including planters, a full name epitaph, and a non-monolithic roof.

The structure survives well at ninety-three years old. It was altered once by Robert T. Appell to accommodate two more catacombs (it originally held only six). Deterioration include cracks in the windows of the door and the stained glass, and a hairline fracture in a granite block of the roof. The most evident damage is surface failure of the interior floor. It is likely that moisture has leaked gypsum from the limestone walls and compromised the integrity of the granite.

⁸ The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials, Presbrey-Leland, inc., 1929.

Works Cited

"APPELL PROPERTIES SELL FOR \$1,423,550 :\$582,550 Above Assessed Value Paid for 33 City Parcels in a Joseph P. Day Auction. CLOSE, SPIRITED BIDDING Continued Upward Movement in New York Realty Shown in Year's Second Big Test." *New York Times*. 1927, February 16.

The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials. Presbrey-Leland, inc., 1929.

"Jacob Appell, 6 June 1898." *U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007.

"News," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, February 14-20, 1927.

Reports of Cases Heard and Determined in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, Vol. 199, pp 574-584. Lyon, Albany: 1922.

Year: 1870; Census Place: *New York Ward 16 District 11 (2nd Enum)*, *New York, New York*; Roll *M593_1035*; Page: *319B*; Image: 32; Family History Library Film: 552534.

Year: 1880; Census Place: *New York City, New York, New York*; Roll 883; Family History Film: *1254883*; Page: *28D*; Enumeration District: 342; Image: 0185.