

Schmickl Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery

Bronx, New York

Nicole Mezydlo

Problem 2: Woodlawn Documentation

FALL 2015 HP STUDIO I: Reading Historic Buildings

Faculty: Françoise Bollack, Ward Dennis, Andrew Dolkart

The Schmickl mausoleum in the Woodlawn Cemetery occupies a prominent corner lot of the Elder plot. This area of the cemetery consists predominately of small monuments and gravestones, and the majority of mausoleums occupying it are small in scale or modest in detail. Figures 1 through 3 establish this siting and show the oddity of style that this modest mausoleum makes; it presents a collage of styles that show a distinct level of architectural knowledge and creativity in both the designer and its commissioner. The Schmickl monument was designed in 1903 by Ferdinand Prochazka, for the widow of Mathias Schmickl.

As shown in Figure 2, the form of the Schmickl mausoleum has a square plan with buttresses at the four corners, topped with a steep gable roof. The exterior is blocks of solid Vermont Barre granite, mostly with a rusticated finish, in unusually large pieces that run the length of the mausoleum.¹ These large monoliths of stone mean that there are few grout lines to detract from perceiving this mausoleum as an intentionally articulated massing that combines both the gabled Gothic revival chapel form with a prostyle temple form. The Schmickl mausoleum is almost like the battle of Richard Upjohn meets the Erechtheum and the places where these two styles of architecture to not match up is where this mausoleum has some truly awkward moments. The chapel architecture of the Gothic Revival desires a gabled porch to stick out from the facade, but a prostyle temple wants to create a screened off porch behind columns. These two things are fundamentally opposite, and lead to the decision to extend the gable roof out over the porch and support it awkwardly on a pointed arch leading to columns. Its a combination of post and lintel and arched design, topped off with the gable form that leaves you staring at it in Figure 5, and it really takes understanding this building in section (Figure 7) to deem it structurally sound. Despite the strong monolithic

1 Schmickl Mausoleum Inventory, Schmickl folder, Woodlawn Collection, Avery Drawings and Archives

construction, its detailing makes you worry about the audacity of all these elements coming together. The monolithic massing, and Prochazka's ideas on such, are most clearly understood by looking at the detailing of the roof. The gabled pieces are two huge monoliths of barre granite, keyed into the walls through notching, and the seam is entirely capped by a keystone with significant overlap. Prochazka wrote "The Problems of Mausoleum Construction" on this very issue of roof detailing, and the protection of vertical joints, and I think this is an excellent case study of the fineness of his ability to detail the stone carving.² Other details of stonework designed by him, such as the simplified corinthian columns drawn in Figure 8, demonstrate some of the weaknesses that come from being so experimental. The squat proportion of these columns, especially the elongation of their bases, make them seem almost like a distraction from his experiment on layering arches above the doorway. Beyond their odd appearance, the capitals are well carved and well preserved - they still show prominent tool marks in the canthus leaves that give them a veiny, plantlike appearance.

Despite the sort of clashing of classical forms occurring on the outside, the interior presents a modest and austere state. 2" slabs of Carrara marble act as cladding material for the interior, with the exception of the floor which is left as bare concrete.³ Despite the high gabled roof and well detailed keystone, the finish stone on the interior is a flat monolithic piece of marble, set far below the peak of the gable and leaving the rest as void - this, to me, is a worse design choice than letting the visitors experience the height created by that magnificent roof which would be the true Gothic experience. However the whole interior screams modest in its finishing, one of the few architectural details are

2 Prochazka, Ferdinand. "Problems of Mausoleum Construction," *The Architectural Review* Vol. 5, no. 5 (1917): 97.

3 Schmickl Mausoleum Inventory

generic cast bronze lionshead drawer pulls and there are generic statuettes in alcoves flanking the window. The element of note (shown in Figure 4) inside is the pointed arch leaded window. While trying to identify meaning behind the stained glass, I investigated the fact that the figure was holding roses and whether that was related to a specific known saint. This resulted in several possible saints, none canonically depicted as the person in the stained glass. One particular Saint -- Elizabeth of Hungary -- drew further investigation due to the fact of the Schmickl family being Austria-Hungarian immigrants but the lack of other canonical indications such as a crown lead me to believe that it is a generic figure carrying roses as symbolism for love.⁴

The Schmickl family buried in this monument is quite small. The patriarch, Mathuas Schmickl, immigrated from Austria with his wife and daughter in 1870 to Newark, New Jersey where they obtained citizenship. Partnering with his brother, Frank Schmickl, they began or continued a business of crafting luxury handbags and travel bags with a storefront in lower Manhattan. This storefront was notable enough to be mentioned in *Illustrated New York*, which speaks of him as an acclaimed and popular businessman in his trade with a specialty in alligator leather.⁵ His storefront and manufacturing facilities occupied three stories on Warren St in TriBeCa, and his staff was over twenty people by the first decade of his practice. His business was successful and he patented the hinges in his suitcases.⁶ Three years after his death in 1903, Anna Schmickl had him entombed in the mausoleum she commissioned for the family and the first person to follow him to the mausoleum was Anna herself.

4 Koehler, Theodore. "The Christian Symbolism of the Rose"
<http://campus.udayton.edu/miary/rosarymarkings36.html>

5 International Publishing Co., *Illustrated New York: The Metropolis of To-Day* (1888). 153.

6 Schmickl, Mathuas. Traveling Bag. US Patent 306530 A and US Patent 299272 A. Illustrations Figure 9-10.

photograph shows the urns in front are lavishly planted, particularly with tall grassy plants, which would be an immediate improvement over the dead weeds currently present in my 2015 photograph. Making these landscape changes will help the monument regain its prominence as a corner lot mausoleum by reengaging it to the corner.

Figures

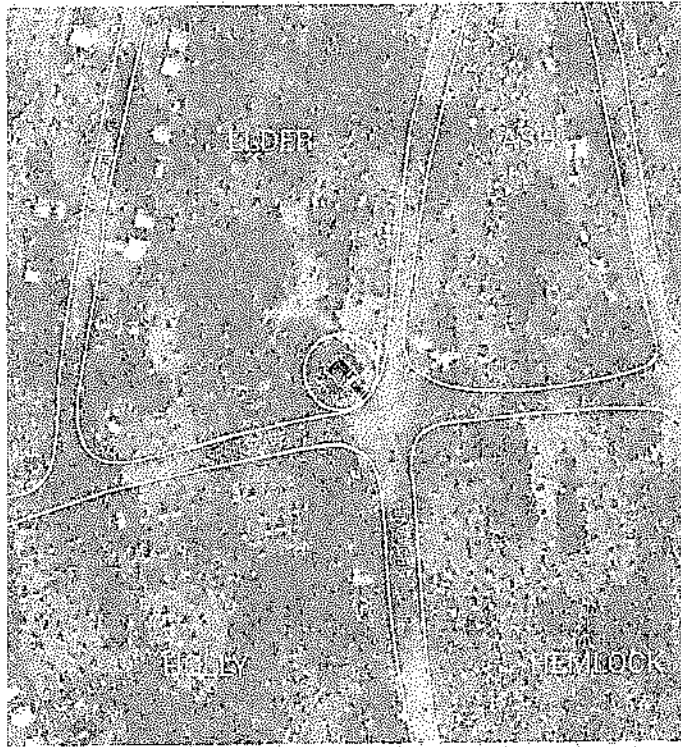


Figure 1: Woodlawn site plan depicting the Schmickl mausoleum plot

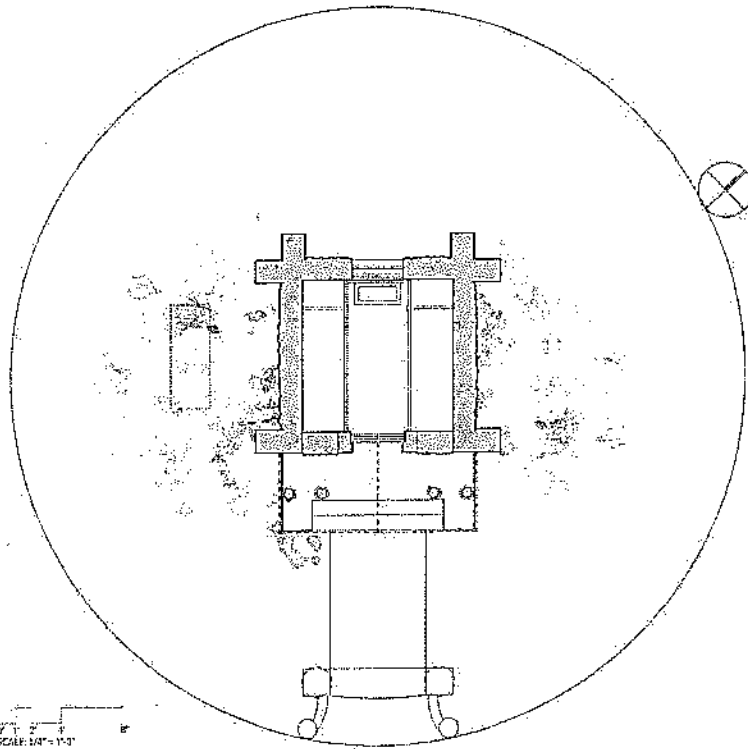


Figure 2: Drawing of the Schmickl mausoleum in plan

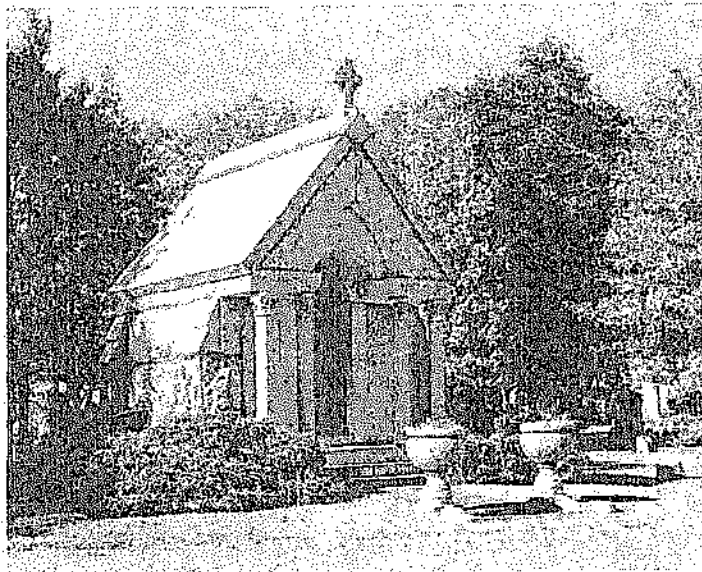


Figure 3: 2015 Photograph of Schmickl mausoleum exterior

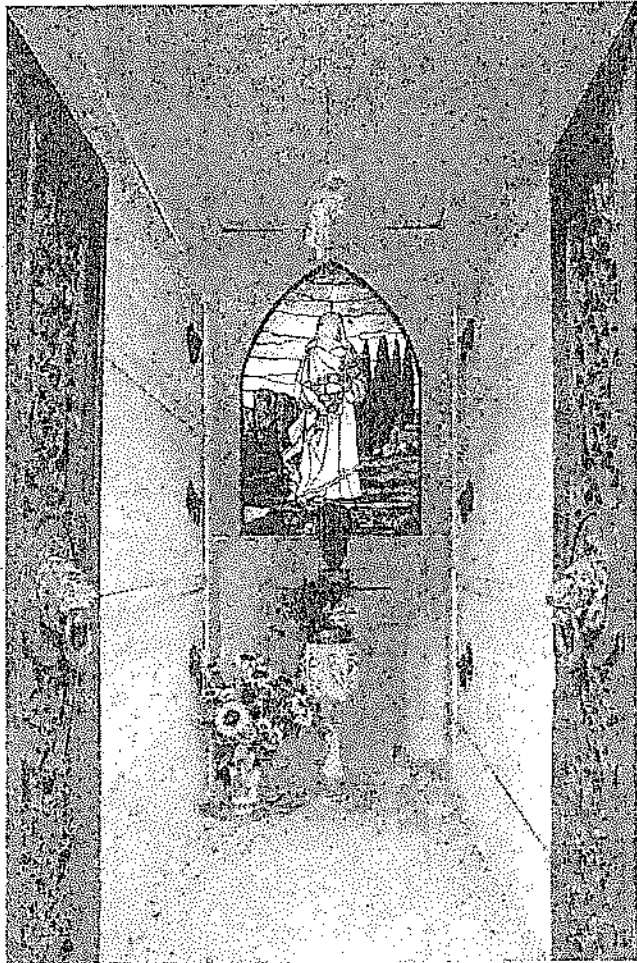


Figure 4: 2015 Photograph of Schmickl mausoleum interior

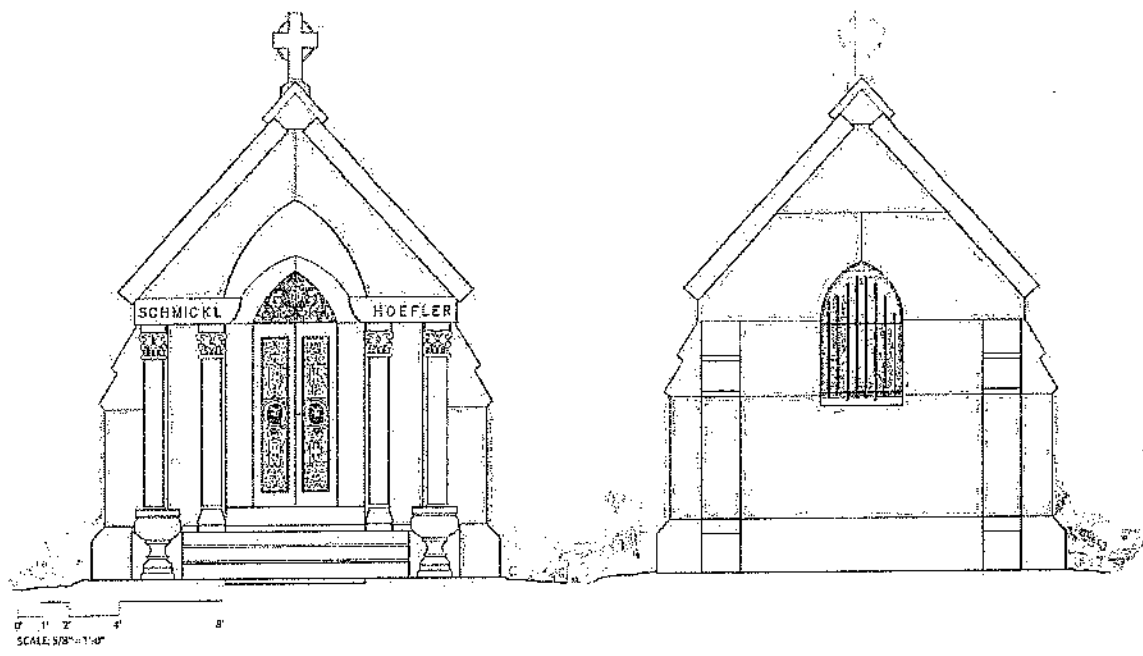


Figure 5-6: Drawing of the Schmickl mausoleum in front and back elevation

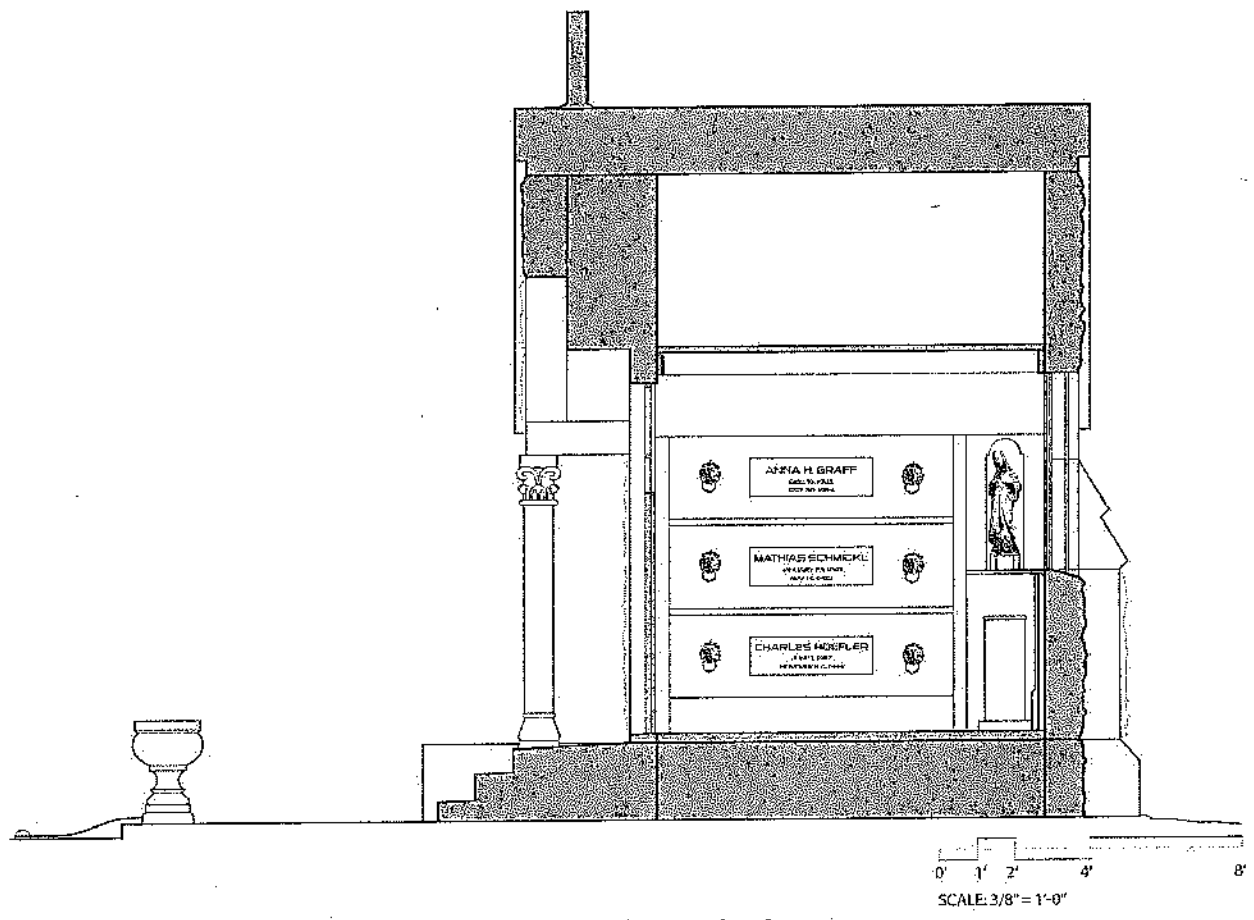


Figure 7: Drawing of the Schmickl mausoleum in longitudinal section

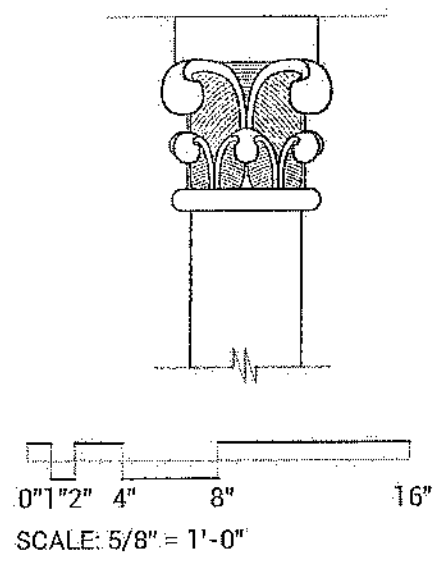


Figure 8: Drawing of a simplified Corinthian capital from the Schmickl mausoleum

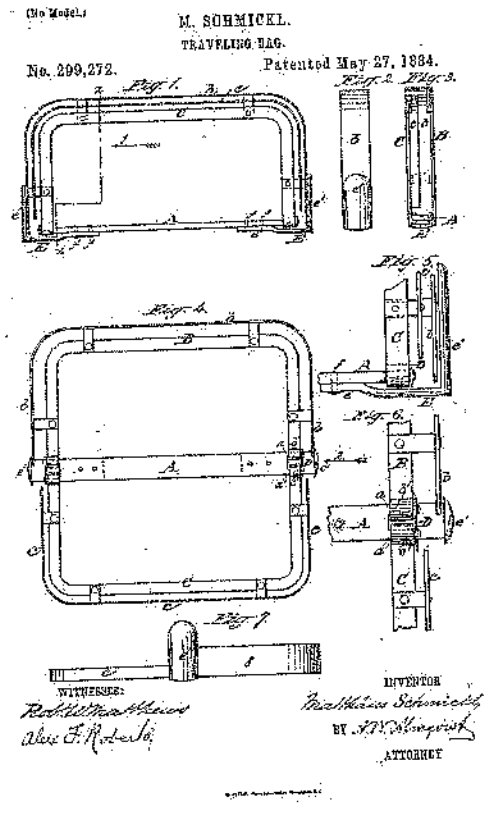
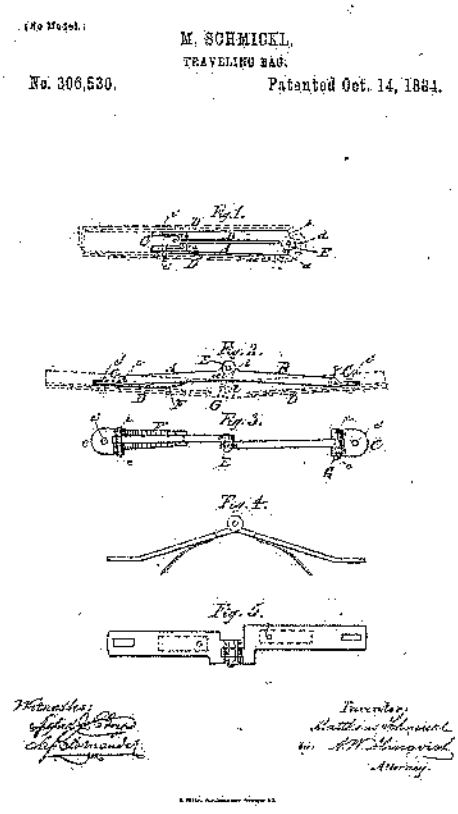


Figure 9-10: US Patent 306530 A (right) and US Patent 299272 A (left) illustrations

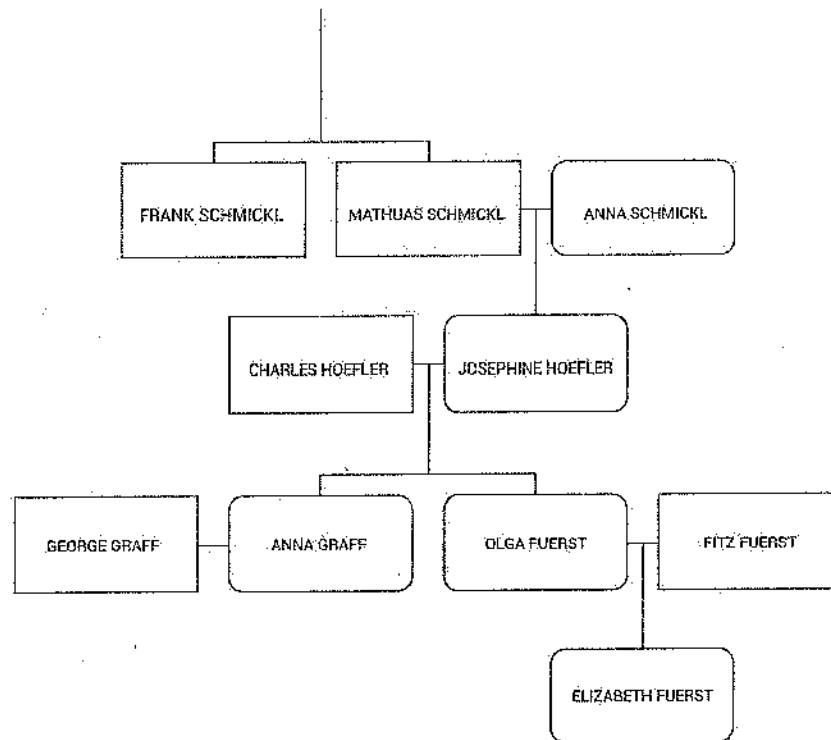


Figure 11: Schmickl family tree. Names in red indicate not buried at Woodlawn.

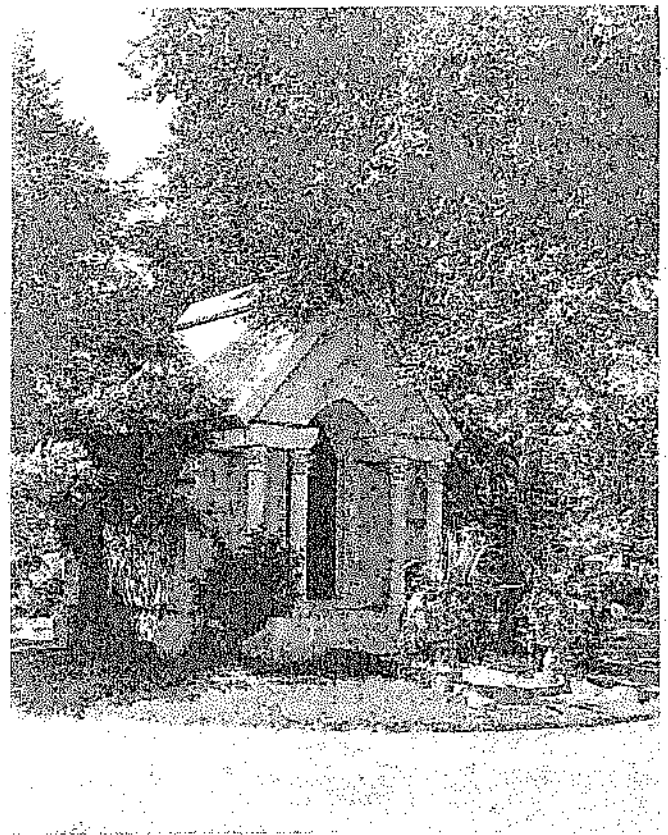
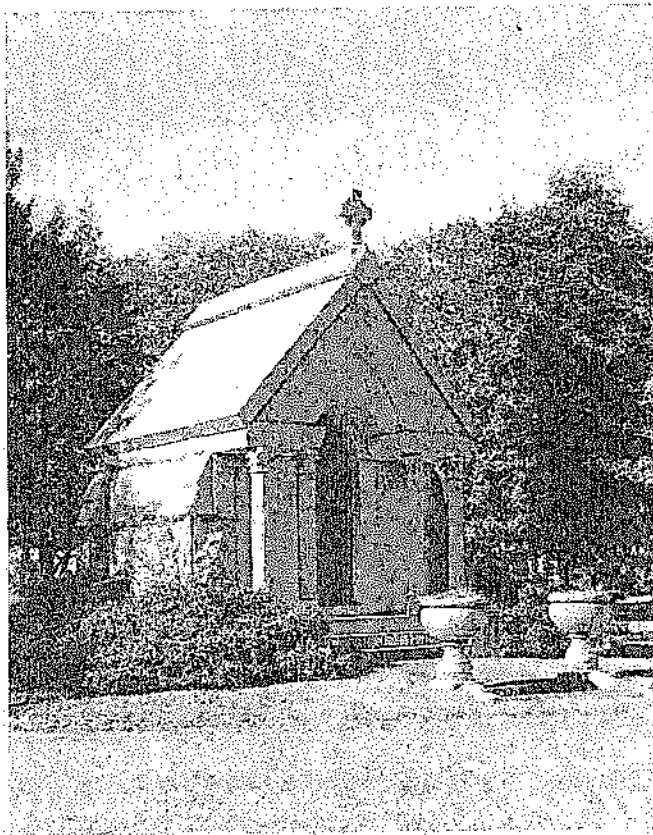


Figure 12-13: 2015 Photograph (left) and a 1930's photograph by A. Tennyson Beals (right)

Bibliography

International Publishing Co., *Illustrated New York: The Metropolis of To-Day* (1888). 153.

Koehler, Rev. Theodore A. "The Christian Symbolism of the Rose" The Marian Library, University of Dayton. Access 11/5/2015 <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/rosarymarkings36.html>

Prochazka, Ferdinand. "Problems of Mausoleum Construction." *The Architectural Review* Vol 5, no. 5 (1917): 97.

Schmickl, Mathuas. Traveling Bag. US Patent 306530 A. Filed August 11, 1884, and Issued October 14, 1884.

Schmickl, Mathuas. Traveling Bag. US Patent 299272 A. Filed June 5, 1883, and Issued May 27, 1884.

Schmickl Mausoleum Inventory, Schmickl folder, Woodlawn Collection, Avery Drawings and Archives, Columbia University.

"Schmickl" *Burial Search*. The Green-Wood Historic Fund. http://www.green-wood.com/burial_search/