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Historic Preservation - Studio I

Exercise 4B- Biographical Research

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Muschenheim- Radley Mausoleum

For this project I looked into the history of the Muschenheim-Radley mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery. Located in the Dogwood plot, this mausoleum was commissioned by hotelier William C. Muschenheim for himself and his immediate family, and was designed and executed by C.E Tayntor Granite Company in the spring of 1909.¹

The mausoleum is stepped back about fifteen feet from the cemetery's Park Avenue and nestled in the shade of a large tree. It is a rectangular and stately looking structure possessing a subdued elegance that is owed to its harmonious symmetry and classic Greek motifs (Fig.1).

The exterior walls, base, columns and door frame of the mausoleum are all made from the same Hardwick granite, quarried and imported by the Tayntor Granite Company. The doors, the window frame, and the rosettes at the center of each catacomb tablet are made of United States standard bronze. The shelves of the catacombs are made of 2-½" thick slate. The catacomb tablets and the floor of the interior of the mausoleum are made of light veined Italian marble. The original specifications for the mausoleum request that it be pointed with La Farge cement,² although it is impossible to confirm based on observation if this was actually the cement that was used.

The mausoleum can be defined by its strong Greek motifs, its design fitting comfortably into the Greek Doric order.³ It has a triangular pediment with raking cornices beneath which sit a series of nine

¹ C.E Tayntor Granite Co. to Woodlawn Cemetery, April 1, 1909, Avery Library Archives, Columbia University.

² C.E Tayntor Granite Co. to Woodlawn Cemetery

³ Cyril M. Harris, Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture (New York: Dover), 1977, 172-3

triglyphs evenly spaced by metopes. Beneath each triglyph are corresponding guttae. The classic Doric frieze of triglyphs separated by metopes is repeated on the top of each exterior facade of the structure. Both the two columns and two pilasters at the front facade of the mausoleum are a variation of the Doric order. The pilasters flank either side of the front facade. Between the pilasters, on either side of the door are two fluted, articulated columns.

The door frame utilizes a geolinear pattern which vaguely evokes the greek meander-- or key-- pattern in its corners. The door itself, cast in bronze, shows the key pattern in friezes around the inside of its edges. Below the meander pattern on the doors are bronze cast lion's head knockers. The image of the lion has long been a symbol of power and leadership and although it does not necessarily adhere to the strictly Grecian-Doric design of the mausoleum, it attains relevancy as a symbol for the man for whom it was built.

The interior of the mausoleum drops the Grecian motifs entirely in favor of a design style more akin to the interior of a simplistic Christian church. In the middle of the far wall is a stained glass window secured in a bronze frame. The window depicts a scene of an angel resting upon a rock, his right arm outstretched upwards towards an unseen *manus dei* (Fig 2). Narcissus flowers bloom around the perched angel. Below it, a long horizontal scroll reads "*He is risen; He is not here*" making reference at once to the resurrection of Christ and the journey that the Christian soul makes when it leaves the body. On the walls to either side of the window are the catacombs. Three are visible to each side, tableted each with its own piece of light veined Italian marble and separated by a thin shelf of slate. The floor of the interior is granite.

The stained-glass window can be seen from the rear facade of the mausoleum on the exterior, protected by a bronze grille (Fig 3.). The cover is made up of thin scallop outlines that spring from the row before in a fish scale pattern. The bronze of the window is evenly corroded creating a natural patina of uniform green.

The exterior of the mausoleum is in good condition for a structure built over a hundred years ago. There is biological growth around the base and steps, primarily lichen that has grown from the moisture

of the ground onto the granite. The bronze patina of the doors is very slightly corroded, though not as severely as the window. The difference between the corrosion on the window cover at the rear facade and that of the patina on the entryway doors suggest the possibility that the doors may have been restored at some point and strategically “aged” to produce desired results. There seems little other explanation for why the doors are so drastically different in appearance than the window cover.

At the inside of the mausoleum, the granite beneath the window appears to be disintegrating, a process formally known as blistering and flaking, due to moisture damage (Fig. 4). The marble on the catacomb tablets as well is disintegrating but unlike the granite it does not bubble away from the surface before falling but rather simply splinters away. This too is the result of moisture damage although marble being different from granite in its constitution, the effects are manifested differently. The lowest level of slate shelving on either wall is also splintering, crumbling into miniscule, wood-like shards all over the floor of the interior.

As previously stated, the mausoleum was commissioned by William Carl Muschenheim in the spring of 1909, just nine years before his own passing. Muschenheim was born in Munich, Germany in 1855 and immigrated to the United States in 1890 with his wife, Emma Delb Muschenheim and their daughter, Emma. It is unclear from the immigration records if his brother, Frederick, and sister-in-law Elsa Unger immigrated at the same time, regardless of this fact they are both interred in the mausoleum.

When Muschenheim first arrived in America he worked tirelessly as a waiter and porter before eventually landing a job as head chef at West Point Academy, a position he held for several years before moving on to open his own restaurant. Sometime in the 1870’s, Mushenheim opened his restaurant “The Arena” on East 31st Street (Fig. 5). The exact cross streets of the restaurant are not specified, though multiple documents describe its location as “east of Broadway” which would suggest it was located somewhere between Fifth and Madison Avenues. There is little in the way of photographs or descriptions of Mushenheim’s Arena and the most that I was able to find are several photographs of the exterior and the understanding that the restaurant was divided into a “Ladies” and a “Gentleman’s” sections, a practice that was not uncommon in lounge and dining settings of the time particularly for the upper class.

In 1904, with the financial and social backing of Mr. Waldorf Astor himself, Muschenheim opened the Hotel Astor in Times Square (Fig 6.). In a pamphlet published by the hotel and featuring extensive colored illustrations of the buildings lavish interiors and modern amenities, it is asserted that “the building was erected for Mr. Muschenheim by Mr. William Waldorf Astor”⁴ suggesting that the two were business partners.

The hotel itself was a triumph of architectural beauty and modern engineering and Muschenheim’s status as its proprietor gave him every opportunity to rub shoulders with New York’s elite. In this way, the German born immigrant achieved what still today would doubtless be classified as the American dream. Little is known about his wife, Emma Delb, other than that she stayed by his side throughout the entirety of both their lives.

Muschenheim’s daughter, Emma, was married twice. Her first marriage in 1898 was to a man from Brooklyn named Ignatius Radley, who tragically died in 1908 from pneumonia at the age of 38. It is important to note here that I do not believe the construction of the mausoleum beginning the same year that Mushenheim’s only child’s spouse died is a coincidence but rather a direct result of the tragedy, especially because the name on the mausoleum is a hyphen of the two men’s surnames⁵ and the spacing suggests that they were carved at the same time. Emma the younger’s second marriage was to a Colonel John Hermann Koehler in August of 1919. Koehler is not buried in the mausoleum with the rest but rather at West Point.

After the death of her parents and uncle, Emma Radley-Koehler lived out the remainder of her life at the Hotel Astor, though what her role at the hotel was is unclear. In her correspondences to Woodlawn cemetery from the 1930s and 40s, all her letters are sent on customized Hotel Astor stationery, suggesting she maintained some semblance of power or authority at the hotel.⁶ In her letters, she frequently makes reference to her travels, suggesting that she and her husband had rich social lives, or at

⁴ “Hotel Astor: The Culmination of Years of Artistic Study, Times Square, New York City”, 1900s, Hotel Astor.

⁵ The mausoleum bears the hyphenated name of Muschenheim- Radley

⁶ Mrs. Emma Radley- Koehley to Woodlawn Cemetery, February 4, 1946, Avery Library Archives, Columbia University.

the very least very busy ones. Emma was the last to be buried at the mausoleum having never had children of her own.



Figure 1 - Photograph of the front elevation of the Muschenheim- Radley Mausoleum



Figure 2- Stained glass window from interior of mausoleum with angel and narcissus flowers



Figure 3- Scalloped bronze window cover at rear elevation of mausoleum.



Figure 4- Blistering and flaking on the granite below the window of the mausoleum due to moisture damage.



Figure 5- Photograph of W.C Muschenheim's "Arena" on East 31st St, Manhattan, N.Y. Photograph courtesy of the New York City Historical Society

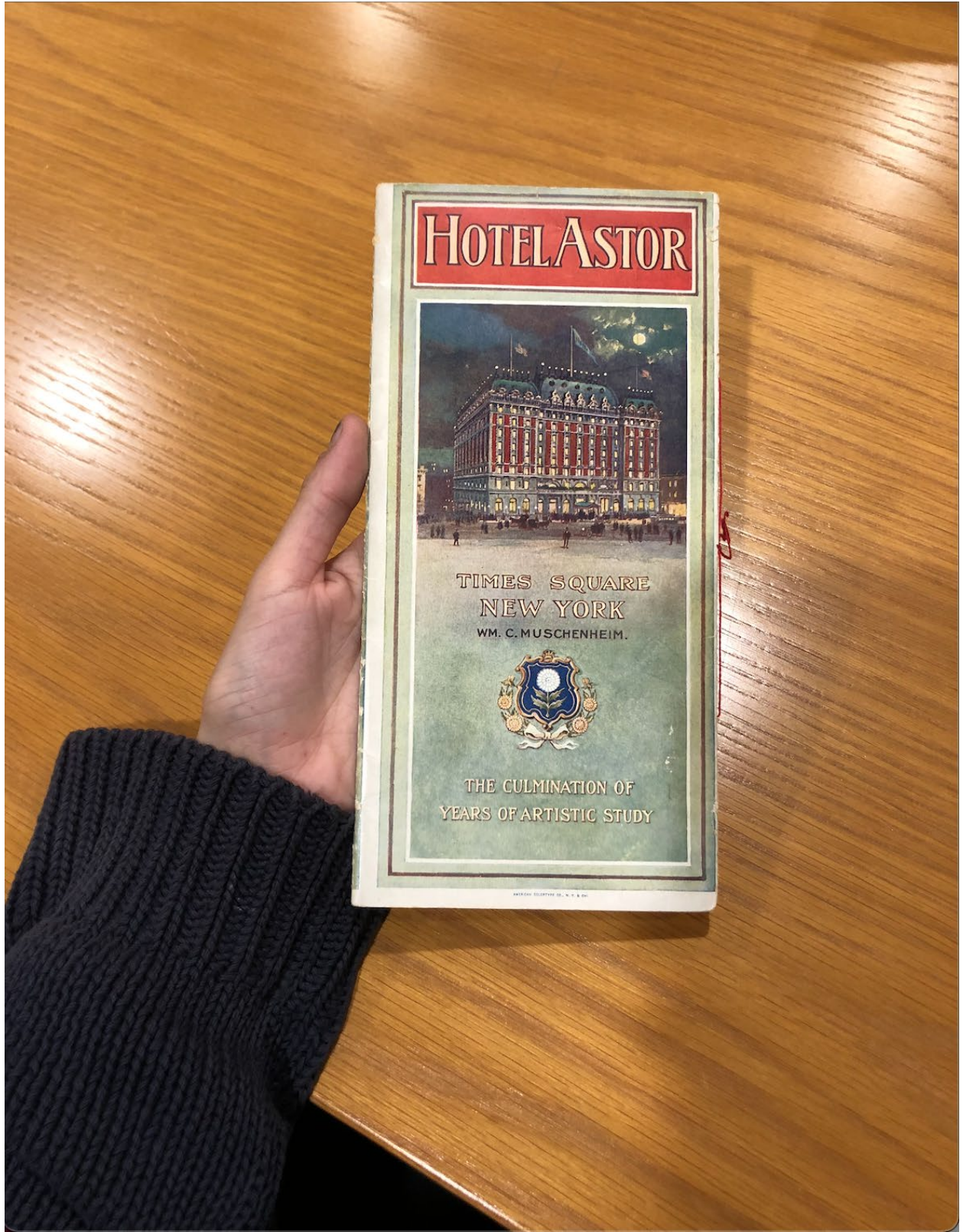


Figure 6- Brochure with pigmented illustration of the Hotel Astor under William C. Muschenheim's leadership. Hand in photo necessitated by low lighting conditions in the Avery Library reading room causing shadows.

Bibliography:

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