

PEARSON MAUSOLEUM

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Pearson Mausoleum

Introduction

The Pearson Mausoleum is on a plot near the lake, and the center of Woodlawn. The mausoleum lies south of the lake and its faces southwest. The mausoleum was built by Robert Caterson in 1891, and its exterior features heavy, rusticated, red granite stones. The interior of the current mausoleum is heavily detailed, featuring Tiffany windows, ornate marble sarcophagi, and an altarpiece.

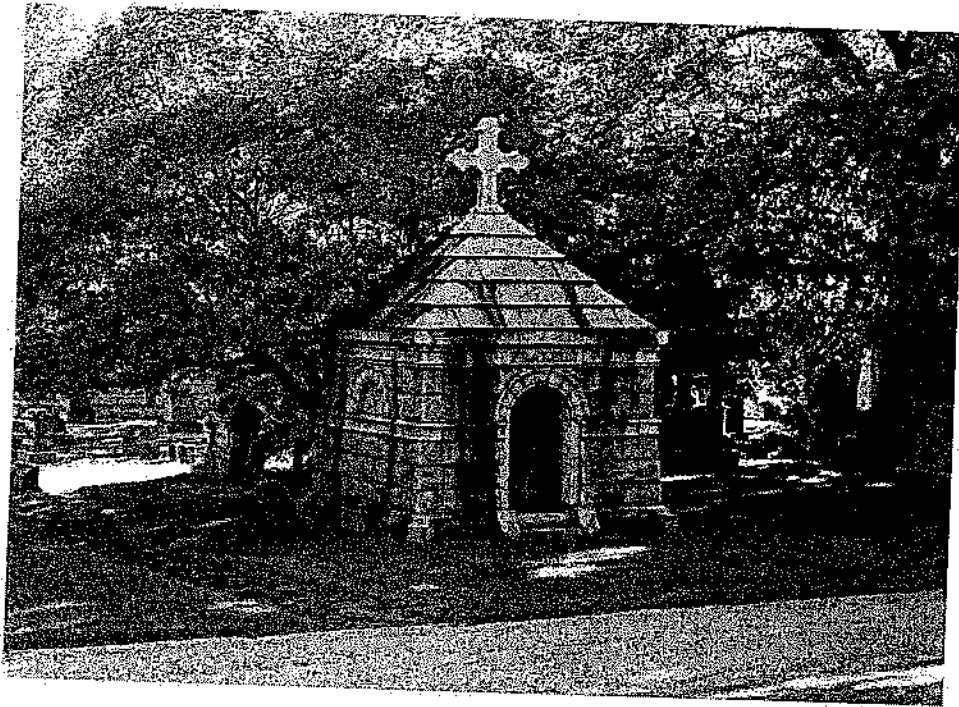


Figure 1. Pearson Mausoleum, 2015. Photo by author.

Pearson Family

The Pearson mausoleum is the resting place of three people; Frederick Pearson (1842 - 1890), his wife Lesley J. Pearson (nee Ayer) (1855 - 1928), and their son, Edward Pennington Pearson (1886 - 1944). Both Frederick and Lesley Pearson were born into successful, industrious families outside of New York. In 1842, Frederick Pearson was born in Reading, Pennsylvania to

Edward Pennington and Frederica (Smith) Pearson, a family of successful lawyers. Frederick's father was a successful lawyer, and his maternal grandfather served as the attorney-general of Pennsylvania and a Supreme Court judge in Pennsylvania through the mid-nineteenth century.¹

However, instead of following his family's path into law, Frederick was enrolled at the naval academy by the age of 17, and was soon after sent to join the Atlantic blockade. After the Civil War, Pearson went on to travel the world with the US navy. He travelled to the Indian Ocean, Japan, Alaska, France and Hawaii. Pearson had a successful naval career, receiving public thanks and an award for assisting British seamen. By the age of 29, Pearson transferred to the ordinance department of the US Navy,² and he retired with the rank of commander at the age of 43, in 1885.³ A year earlier, in February of 1884, Pearson married Lesley Josephine Ayer, at a lavish ceremony at Lesley's mother's house in New York.⁴ The couple had four children, Frederick Fanning Ayer Pearson, Josephine Southwick Pearson Bogert, Edward Pennington Pearson, and Lesley Frederica Pearson Ripley.⁵ Edward Pennington Pearson was also buried in the family mausoleum at Woodlawn.

¹ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. Vol 26:348. James T. White & Company (New York: 1937).

² "Death of Frederick Pearson," *New York Tribune*. Dec. 24, 1890. Accessed via ProQuest.

³ *List of Officers of the United States and of the Marine Corps*. Haskell House Publishers. (New York: 1969).

⁴ "Events in the Metropolis, Wedded in an Arbor of Roses. The Marriage." *New York Times*. Feb 6, 1884. Accessed via ProQuest.

⁵ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*. Vol 26:348. James T. White & Company (New York: 1937).

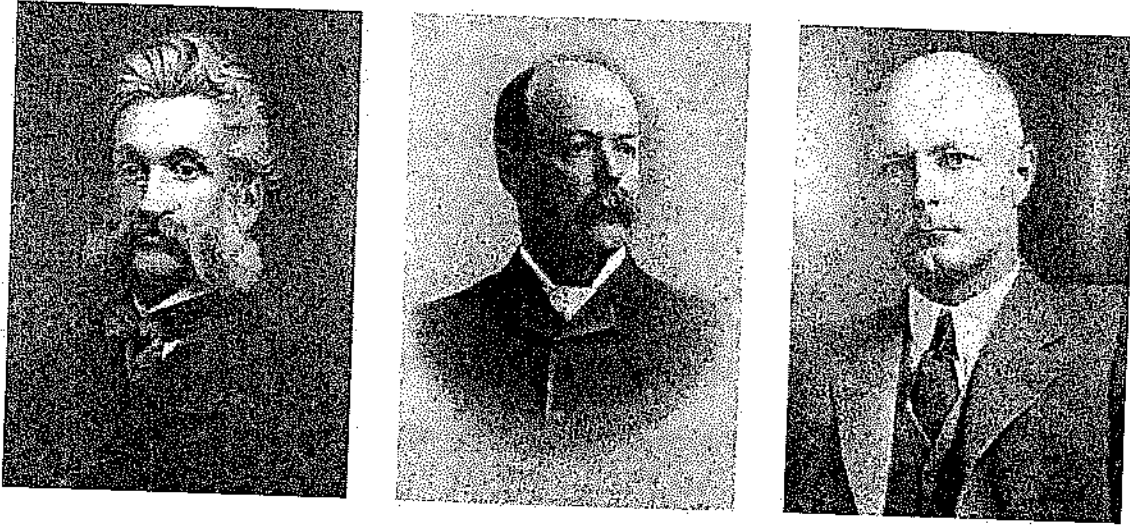


Figure 2. J.C. Ayer (left), Frederick Pearson (center), and Edward Pennington Pearson (right).

Lesley Josephine Pearson was born to James Cook Ayer and Josephine Mellen Southwick in 1855. She inherited enormous wealth from her father, a manufacturer, industrialist, and philanthropist in Massachusetts. James Cook Ayer (1818 - 1878) developed medical patents for popular treatments including sugar-coated pills, sarsaparilla extract, and "Hair Vigor" pills.⁶ Ayer also invested in industrial infrastructure, including the management of textile mills and involvement in canal and iron works.⁷ He was also a philanthropist, funding a town hall and school building in Groton Junction, MA; renamed Ayer, MA in his honor (Figure 3). Lesley was one of his three children.

⁶ "James Cook Ayer." *Who Was Who in America. Marquis-Who's Who* (Chicago: 1963).

⁷ *Ibid.*

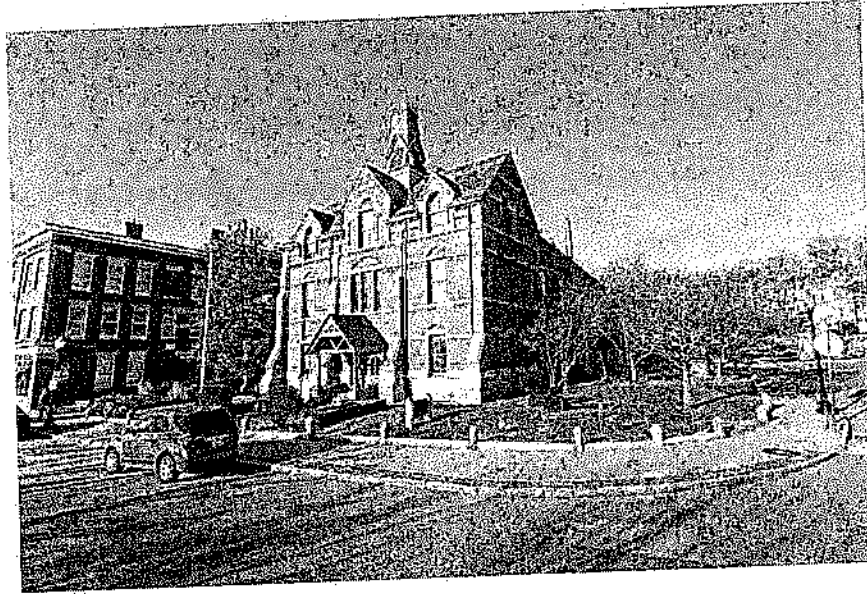


Figure 3. Ayer, MA Town Hall

After their marriage in 1884, the couple lived in New York on West 57th Street, where the elder Ayer also owned property. Only six years after their marriage, Frederick died suddenly of heart-related issues at the age of 48.⁸ A few months after his death, Mrs. Pearson purchased the plot at Woodlawn and arranged for a mausoleum to be built (discussed later). Lesley maintained ownership of the family's house in New York, and also spent time in Newport, Rhode Island, where the family owned an estate known as Angelsea.⁹ The property was owned by the family through the 1990s, and lies within the Ochre-Point Cliffs Historic District.¹⁰ In addition to time spent in Rhode Island, Mrs. Pearson was known to have travelled by steamship to Europe, such as a voyage to France in 1927.¹¹ In 1924, Mrs. Pearson's brother Frederick, manager of the Ayer estate, died without leaving a will, at which point Lesley and her brother each inherited half of her father's remaining estate, valued at over ten million dollars. In 1928, Mrs. Pearson passed away, leaving her

⁸ "Death of Frederick Pearson." *New York Tribune*. Dec. 24, 1890. Accessed via ProQuest.

⁹ "Newport Cottages Closed: IN THE SHOPS." *Special to the New York Times*. Nov. 11, 1903. Accessed via ProQuest.

¹⁰ "Angelsea Estate." *The Gilded Age Era*. Blog. Jan. 16, 2013. Accessed via <http://thegildedageera.blogspot.com/2013/01/angelsea-estate-newport-ri.html>

¹¹ Steamship Travel Records, to Cherbourg, 1927. Accessed via Ancestry.

estate to her four children. In 1932, her property was valued at over 16 million dollars,¹² and her estate was to be managed by her son Edward Pennington Pearson.

The two sons of Frederick and Lesley, Frederick Fanning Ayer and Edward Pennington, went on to become successful financiers and philanthropists. Frederick served with the U.S. Army, became a well-traveled diplomat and eventually settled in England, where he devoted his time and finances to cancer treatment and research and writing.¹³ His brother, Edward Pennington Pearson lived and worked as a financier in New York City. After attending school at Harvard and serving in the U.S. Navy, Edward worked as a salesman and within the banking trade. Edward continued the family tradition of philanthropy, serving as a trustee for the Ayer Home for Children in Massachusetts and the New York School for the deaf. Additionally, he managed the Pearson-Ayer estate until his death in 1944.¹⁴ Edward Pennington Pearson never married, leaving a 14 million dollar estate to his sisters, extended family, hired help, and (notably) the care of his horses.¹⁵ Edward is interred with his parents at the family mausoleum in Woodlawn cemetery.

*Building Chronology*¹⁶

Frederick Pearson died at the age of 48 in December of 1890. In January of 1891, Lesley Pearson purchased a plot near the lake at Woodlawn cemetery for \$2100. The foundation was applied for in June of 1891, and construction was to be completed by Robert Caterson. Cemetery ledger books list the cost of the mausoleum at \$10,000.¹⁷ Little is known about the early years of the mausoleum. However, a photo of the building was published in a Robert Caterson catalog in 1905.

¹² "Mrs. Pearson Left \$16,484,528 Estate." *New York Times*. Mar. 29, 1932. Accessed via ProQuest.

¹³ "Frederick F. A. Pearson. *Who Was Who in America*. Marquis-Who's Who (Chicago: 1963).

¹⁴ "\$1,244,573 Willed by Arthur C. Train: \$5,000 . . ." *New York Times*. Oct 30, 1947. Accessed via ProQuest.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ Information for this section was collected from the Woodlawn Archive at Avery Architectural Library Drawings Collection, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁷ Woodlawn Cemetery Ledgers.

(Figure 4).¹⁸ Additionally, the mausoleum can be seen in aerial photographs from 1921. The exterior of the mausoleum is largely the same as the current configuration, save for the lack of trees and shrubs around the building.



Figure 4. Robert Caterson catalog, ca. 1905

¹⁸ *Robert Caterson Monumental Work*. Robert Caterson. (New York: 1905).

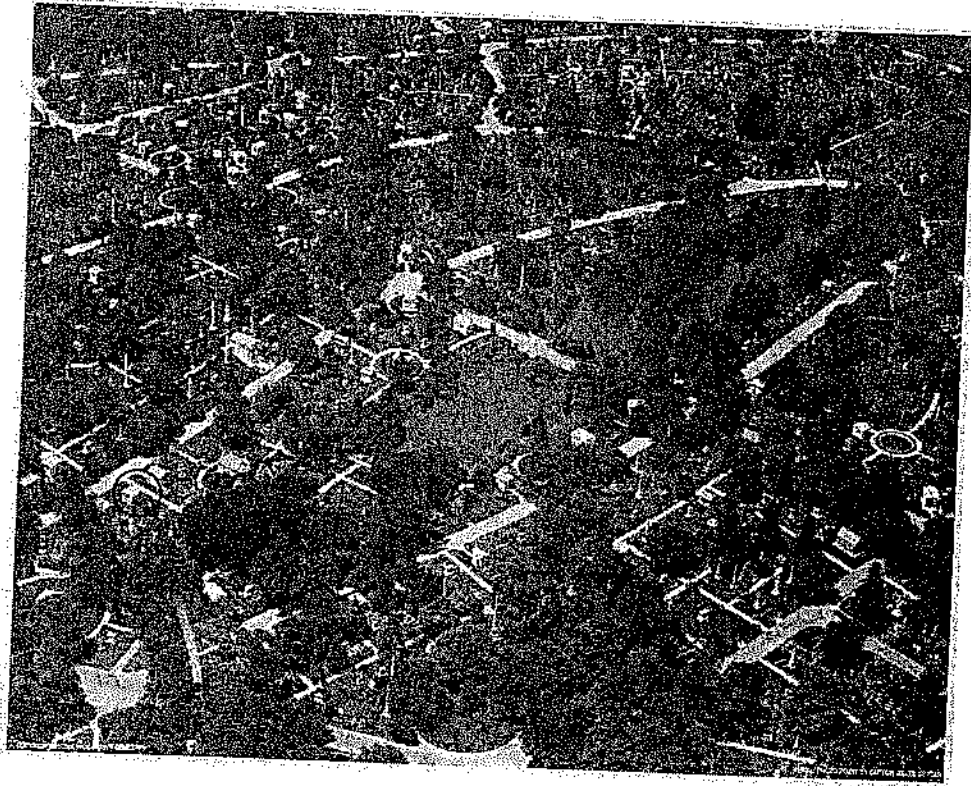


Figure 5. 1921 Aerial Photograph. Pearson Mausoleum in Red Circle.

A number of documents dated between 1932 and 1957 highlight potential alterations to the interior of the mausoleum. After Mrs. Pearson's death in 1928, there exists correspondence regarding a new foundation to be put in place by Farrington, Gould & Hoagland. At this date, the cemetery also recorded a blueprint and budget for this potential project, detailing hollow tile and new concrete. It is unclear whether this alteration took place. In 1944, three months after the death of Edward Pennington Pearson, Robert Caterson Inc. was in correspondence with Woodlawn Cemetery regarding the addition of catacombs underneath the existing mausoleum. Included with this proposal are structural plans, detailing a new underfloor catacomb. This project sheds some light on the building's construction -- it mentions new reinforced concrete walls as well as the existing brick piers and end walls with plastered cement grout. There is confirmation that this

alteration was completed for Edward Pennington Pearson's burial, underneath the floor at the center of the mausoleum.

The Woodlawn Archive also contains two undated drawings from Presbrey Leland, including proposals for new interior spaces. These drawings were completed after Lesley Pearson's death, as the perspective drawings include a date of death on the interior inscriptions. It is possible that these drawings date from the 1930s, as an alteration proposed shortly after Mrs. Pearson's death, in an attempt to modernize the 1890s mausoleum. The drawings mention that the interior of the mausoleum already had a marble interior by 1928. Notably, the Presbrey-Leland drawings do not match the present configuration of the mausoleum. The undated drawings propose rectangular windows, sarcophagi with rosettes, and interior walls, while the present mausoleum features semi-circular windows and free-standing sarcophagi with different decoration. The distinct contrast between the interior and exterior of the mausoleum suggest that Robert Caterson is not responsible for the present interior. Additionally, portions of the proposed Presbrey-Leland drawings detail "existing" interior renderings that are also unlike the current interior. With this information in mind, it seems likely that the interior of the mausoleum was modified from its 1890 condition after the death of Lesley Pearson in 1928. The attention to detail at the interior also suggest that the new sarcophagi, altar piece, and marble facing were designed specifically for the Pearsons and this mausoleum.

In 1957, plans were created to add frosted glass and casing to the exterior of the mausoleum, in an effort to protect the glass windows. Plans from 1957 indicate the use of Rutland Vermont marble, either as the original material or as replacement. At this time, plans were also created to restore interior features and the door.

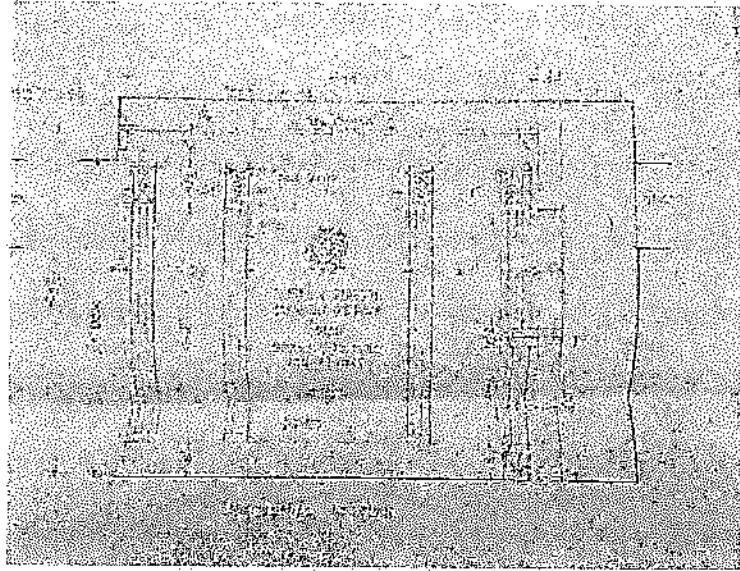


Figure 6. n.d. Presbrey Leland Proposed Drawing for mausoleum drawing

In 1973, Tiffany Studios published a partial list of windows they had completed. The text includes an entry for an unnamed memorial window at the “Pierson” mausoleum. While this is a misspelling of the family name, no other Pierson family is listed at Woodlawn cemetery, so it is likely that the mausoleum does feature Tiffany windows at the interior. Further research may also indicate that Tiffany Studios was responsible for the interior of the mausoleum as well as the windows.

Although there is no published evidence supporting this claim, the complexity of detail and prominence of the Pearson family at the time of Lesley's death would align with an interior design by Tiffany Studios. Finally, in a 1957 alteration, frosted glass was installed to protect the valuable Tiffany windows as well as deflect external attention away from them.¹⁹

¹⁹ Tiffany Studios. *Partial List of Windows*. 1937

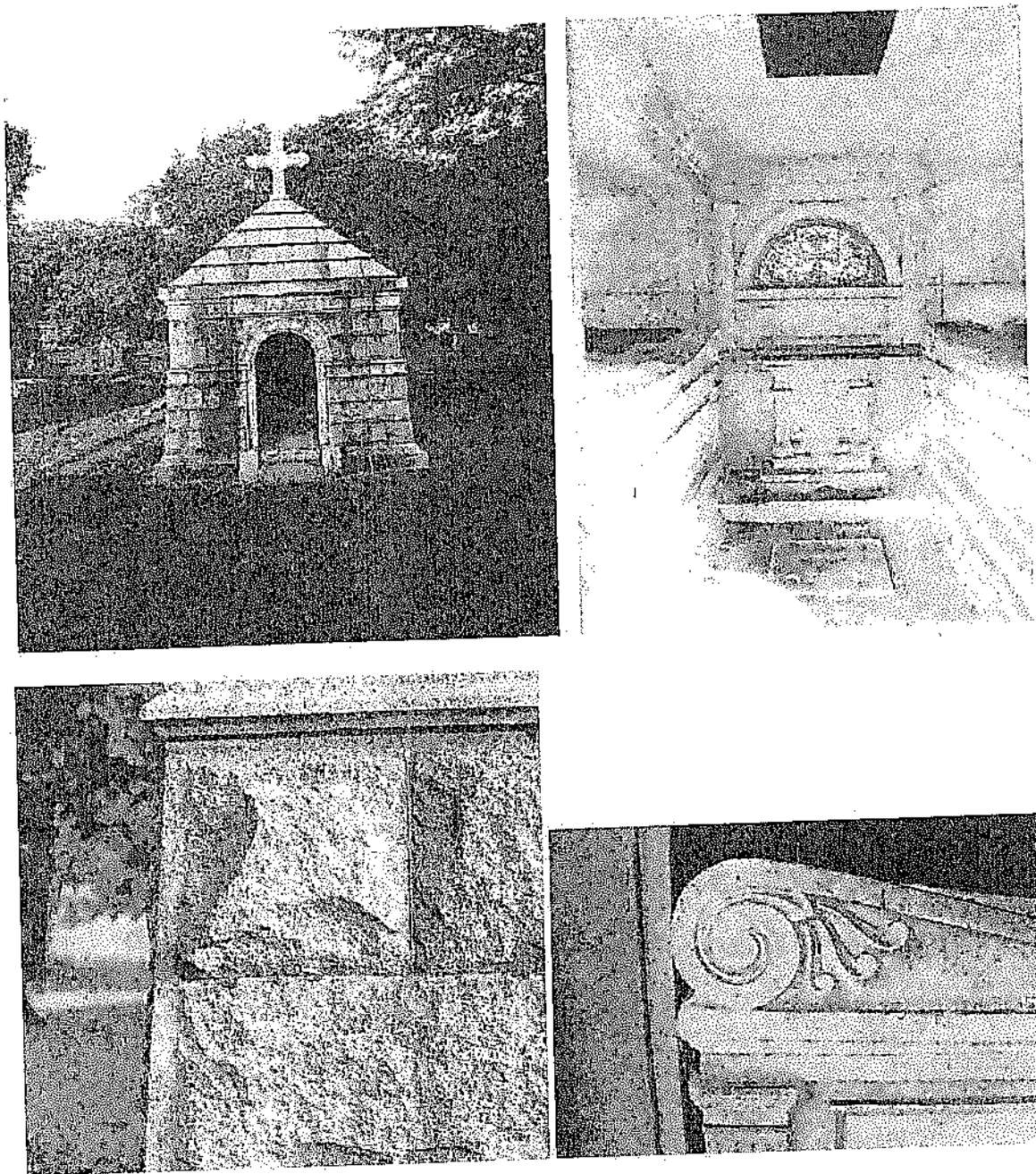


Figure 7. Interior, Exterior, and Detail Views

Visual Analysis

The Pearson mausoleum is a compact building with a wealth of features. I found its most striking feature to be the contrast of external and internal elements. Outside, the building is heavy, with chunky forms, while inside, the space is intimate and intricate. It sits facing straight with the street, within a line of three mausoleums. Its stocky form is emphasized by its square plan, blocky

ornament, and large, rusticated stones. The stonework and granite trim are complex, yet the forms remain large up through the large Latin cross at the top of the building. In contrast, the inside is faced entirely in marble and the ornament is curving, rounded, delicate, and incredibly intricate. The sarcophagi feature rounded tops and the stonework features raised relief. In striking contrast to the marble, three Tiffany windows luster the interior space with pink and gold-hued light. The interior is small, and intimate, largely filled by an altar piece and the sarcophagi of Mr. and Mrs. Pearson.

I believe this mausoleum drew upon the trends of the late nineteenth century. This is most evident with the mausoleum's pyramid shape. Although the exterior of the mausoleum was not designed by Tiffany, their published catalogs from the early twentieth century show the popularity of ancient pyramid forms, dating back to prehistoric times, Egyptian tombs, and monuments of early Biblical times (Figure 8).²⁰ Additionally, the Robert Caterson catalog discusses the use of red granite in its likeness to ancient forms.²¹ On the interior, the mausoleum feature ornate classical details, including fluted pilasters, printing in relief, bullnose edges, recessed trim, and curving sarcophagi. This contrast between the exterior and the interior makes the interior of the mausoleum surprising and unexpected.

²⁰ Tiffany Catalog Advertisements Collection, *Tiffany Studios*, Early C20.

²¹ *Robert Caterson Monumental Work*. Robert Caterson. (New York: 1905).

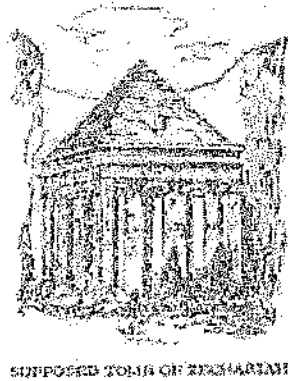


Figure 8. Tiffany advertisement catalog illustration. Early twentieth century.

Conclusion

The design of the mausoleum in combination with biographical information about the Pearson family shows a familiarity with current trends in art, culture, and building. In light of the design of their mausoleum and their family history, I will argue that the Pearson family was prominent, yet also private. There is more information published about the generations before and after Frederick and Lesley than this generation itself. While they were incredibly wealthy, there is little mention of their day-to-day lives. Their news presence only comes through when the Ayer estate passes between generations. Frederick retired at a young age, after devoting himself to naval service. His sons were prominent philanthropists, as Lesley's father, J.C. Ayer had been. I believe the difference between the exterior and interior of the Pearson mausoleum reflects these values. The entire building is well detailed and of fine construction, yet the strong and heavy exterior yields little information about the beauty inside.

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