

Historic Preservation Studio I – Fall 2011  
Documentation of Historic Buildings  
Project 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis  
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The Maclay Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery was completed in 1903 for the Maclays, a prominent New York City business family. J.M.A Darrach designed the Mausoleum. It is a white marble structure with a traditional Greek cross plan and a dome. It sits on a circular plot facing Central Ave in the cemetery. The mausoleum's monumental proportions and prominent location speaks to the Maclay family's importance in New York City society at the turn of the century.

Robert Maclay was born June 11, 1834 on Manhattan Island. He spent his early childhood out of the city, on a family farm, but returned as a young man.<sup>1</sup> Maclay's family was already well established in New York City, decedents of the famous preacher Archibold Maclay.<sup>2</sup> Maclay made a name for himself in real estate and finance. In 1892 the Supreme Court appointed him rapid transportation commissioner.<sup>3</sup> Maclay was also the president of the Knickerbocker Trust Company, the Vice President of the Bowery Savings Bank, Director of the People's Bank, and President of the Knickerbocker Ice Company.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Maclay was a member of many social clubs, and a devout Baptist, probably stemming from his relation to Archibald Maclay. He was an officer at the Madison Avenue Baptist Church.<sup>5</sup> The National Encyclopedia of American Biography writes that Maclay was "cautious and conservative in his business methods, thorough in execution, enterprising, but taking no risks, original in ideas and has great power of concentration."<sup>6</sup>

Maclay became locally famous when he was elected president of the New York City Board of Education in 1895.<sup>7</sup> His election to the presidency was unanimous and greeted as an era

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, "Robert Maclay is Dead," July 29, 1898, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://proquest.com>

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, "A.B. Maclay Dead," May 28, 1944, 33. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://proquest.com>

<sup>3</sup> *The National Encyclopedia of American Biography Vol IV*, (New York: J.T. White Company, 1895), 467.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, "A.B. Maclay Dead," 33.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Tribune*, "Robert Maclay Chosen," July 2, 1895, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://proquest.com>

<sup>6</sup> *The National Encyclopedia of American Biography*, 467.

<sup>7</sup> *New York Tribune*, "Robert Maclay Chosen," 1.

of reform for the Board. The New York Tribune wrote on July 2, 1895 that “the business of reforming the school system will undoubtedly be begun in a practical, swift and thorough manner.”<sup>8</sup> Maclay acknowledged in his inaugural address to the School Board that the New York City schools were over-crowded, and that he planned to improve the conditions in school buildings.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, Maclay was wounded seriously when a carriage hit him in 1898.<sup>10</sup> He died from his injuries about a month later on July 28. Maclay was initially buried at Greenwood Cemetery. He left behind his wife, Georgiana Barmore Maclay. The Maclay’s had four children. Two daughters, Eliza Labatut and Effie Onderdonk Barmore, died during childhood. They are buried with their parents in the Maclay Mausoleum. The two surviving sons, Robert Jr. and Alfred Barmore, are also buried in the family mausoleum. Alfred fought in the Spanish-American War and later married Louise Fleischmann. Their descendants, a son, Alfred Barmore Maclay, a daughter, Georgiana, and son-in-law Noel Bowers, are buried in graves surrounding the mausoleum. John Maclay, a later decedent born in 1953, and Maria Wade are also buried in graves behind the mausoleum. It is possible that Maria was a servant living in the Maclay home. The 1880 census lists a Maria Griffin, age 62, living in the Maclay home.<sup>11</sup>

In 1902, four years his death, Maclay’s wife commissioned the design of the Maclay Mausoleum. She hired James Aertson M. Darrach, a New York City architect who graduated from Columbia University in 1896.<sup>12</sup> Darrach designed several buildings in New York City, New Jersey, and Connecticut.<sup>13</sup> His most newsworthy design was for a Columbia University women’s dormitory, Whittier Hall.<sup>14</sup> At the time Darrach designed the Maclay Mausoleum, he was only twenty- eight years old and still early in his architecture career. Many of his designs, borrow ideas from classical architecture. The Maclay Mausoleum follows this style.

Darrach designed the mausoleum with a Greek cross plan. The structure is perfectly symmetrical, revolving around a central point which is the exact center of the mausoleum as well

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<sup>8</sup> *New York Tribune*, “Robert Maclay Chosen,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *New York Observer and Chronicle*, “Robert Maclay,” August 4, 1898, 146. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://proquest.com>

<sup>11</sup> 1880 United State Census, New York City, New York, New York, 413.

<sup>12</sup> *American Institute of Architects Quarterly Bulletin*, “Obituaries,” July 1912, 13, 156.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Andrew S. Dolkart, *Morningside Heights: A History of Its Architecture and Development*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 238.

as the center of the circular plot. The catacombs surround this central point and form the cross. On the exterior, each of the cross ends are capped by an entablature. A circle, radiating off the central point, forms curved walls which connect the catacombs. A window is cut in each of these curved walls. A dome roof creates a sense of height and monumentality. The exterior is simple, with little intricate detail. However, the proportions of the elevations are strong. Each elevation is dominated by the end of the Greek cross, and the dome rising above. The mausoleum is taller than it is wide at each entablature, creating a vertical emphasis.

The mausoleum is constructed of No. 1 white Rutland marble.<sup>15</sup> Darrach took the surroundings of the mausoleum into consideration when he designed it. The surrounding greenery, although less full at the turn of the century, makes the white mausoleum stand out. The approach to the mausoleum, on Central Ave, slightly curves around the site giving a view of the west elevation, before becoming parallel with the main façade and entrance. This approaching view and the lack of a path leading from Central Ave to the entrance of the mausoleum, even in initial site plans, indicates that Darrach wanted to draw the visitor around all sides of the mausoleum. The circular, symmetrical design draws the visitor not only into the mausoleum entrance but around to all sides as well, bringing attention to the grave sites located behind the mausoleum. Early site plans indicate that graves were also planned for the east and west sides of the mausoleum.

The entrance to the mausoleum is indicated by the difference in the north entablature, which is supported by two fluted columns instead of a catacomb. The bronze doors are tall and narrow, contributing to the vertical nature of the mausoleum. A simple border surrounds the door. Four pedestals were included in the original floor plan by Darrach. Presently, glass vases sit on the two pedestals closest to the entrance. One is empty, and one holds a bust of Robert Maclay, sculpted by C. Calverley in 1898.

As one enters the mausoleum, the domed ceiling immediately draws the viewer's gaze upward. It is a gold glass mosaic with a Gustavino structural tile.<sup>16</sup> The celestial design of the dome and its reference toward the sky invokes a spiritual symbolism and echoes the vertical emphasis of the exterior.

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<sup>15</sup> J.M.A. Darrach, "Specifications for the Maclay Mausoleum at Woodlawn, New York." December 10, 1902, Woodlawn Cemetery Collection, G.B. Maclay, Avery Archives, Columbia University.

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The Maclay Mausoleum is meant to be a prestigious resting place for the Maclay family. The mausoleum's location is prominent, close to the entrance of Woodlawn. It is a classical, monumental design with strong, quiet proportions. The circular, symmetrical design draws the visitor into and around the mausoleum, bringing attention toward the catacombs and graves. The exterior vertical emphasis and the mosaic dome in the interior and directs one's gaze toward the heavens. Using these elements, Darrach designed a mausoleum which honored those resting there.

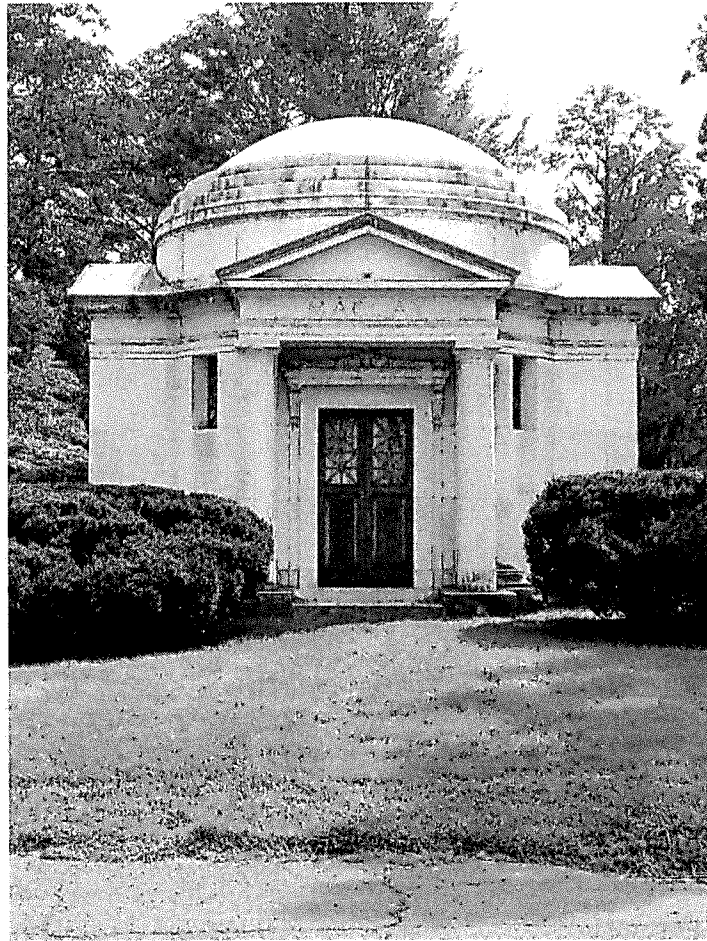


Image 1. North elevation of the Maclay Mausoleum, September 19, 2011. Modern planting is most likely not part of the original design. Lack of a path to the entrance encourages the visitor to explore the site. Tall, narrow doors, columns, and an imposing dome create a vertical emphasis.

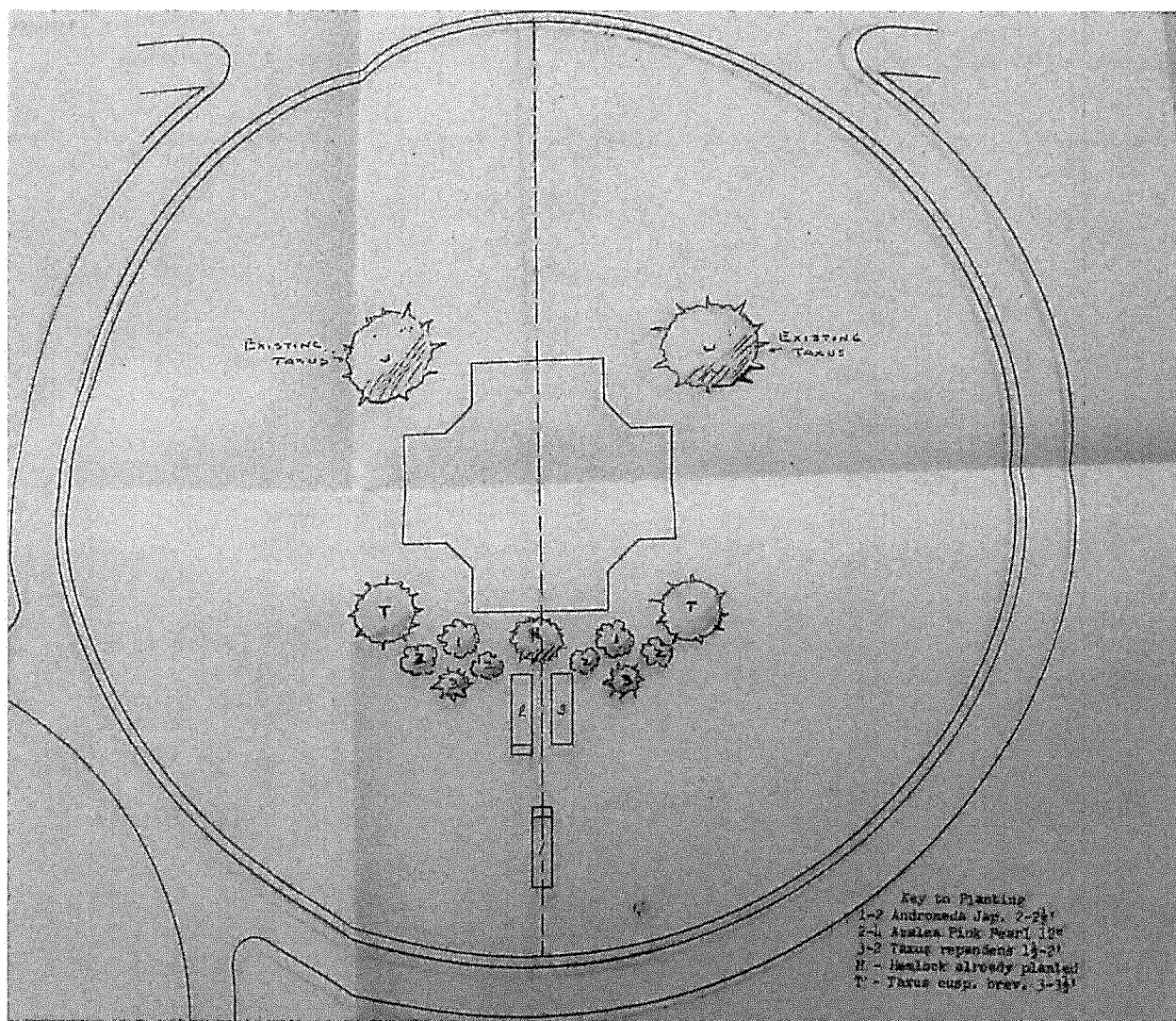


Image 2. Maclay plot plan showing modern planting and existing graves. In 1952, additional grave sites were listed on the east and west sides. Darrach's design takes into account the future locations of these graves by drawing the visitor to all sides of the mausoleum. *G.B Maclay folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Collection, Avery Archives, Columbia University*

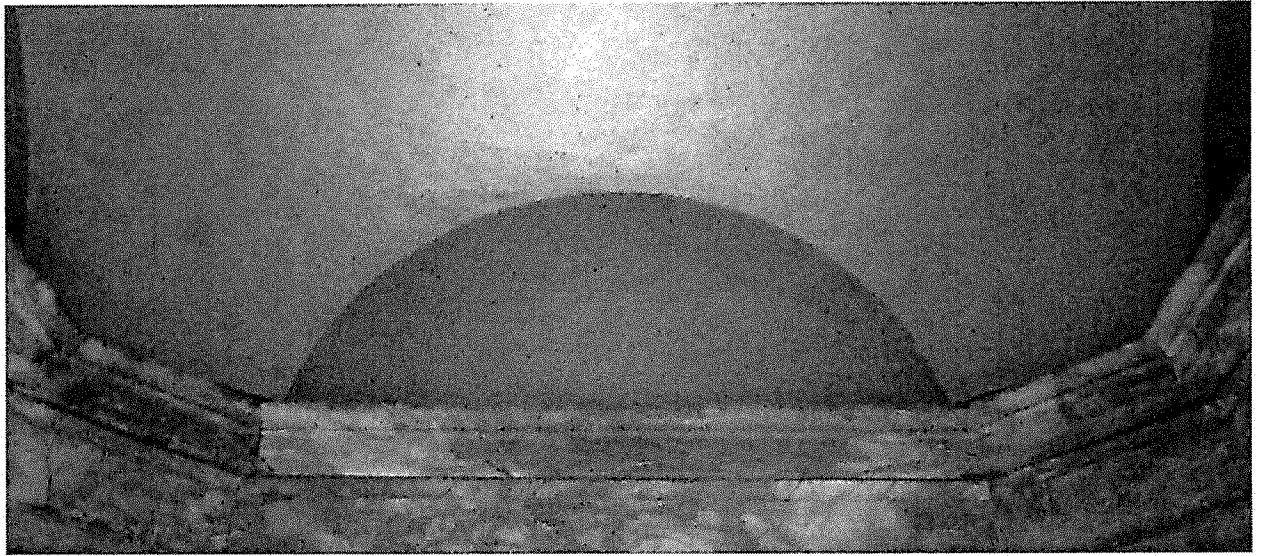


Image 3. Gold glass mosaic ceiling with Gustavino tile structure. The dome dominates the interior space and draws the visitor's attention upward.

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