

On Lot #14767 of Wistaria Plot in Woodlawn Cemetery stands a monumental, well-groomed mausoleum; originally built for Frederick Gerken after his sudden death on November 23, 1919 in his residence in his 64th year (See Fig. 1).¹

Frederick Gerken, born in August 1857, died a wealthy man; “the beloved husband of Charlotté D. Gerken and beloved father of Frederick Gerken Jr., Mrs. Florence Gerken Tschirky and Mrs. Irene Gerken Egan.”² Frederick immigrated to New York from Germany in 1871 and married his wife, Charlotte, in 1876.³ Within a few years of their marriage, Frederick and his wife had two children who died at a young age, 2 years and 6 months, respectively. Almost 10 years later they successfully had three more children, who survived to live long lives. Early in life, he worked as a clerk, a restaurant keeper, and a wine merchant.⁴ By 1910, he was living on his own income from his success in real estate development.⁵ His first investment was the Gerken Building, located at 90 West Broadway and built in 1896 and was designed by the firm of Harding & Gooch. In this building, he “already leased the first floor of the building for a long

¹ “Gerken, Frederick, suddenly, (on) Nov. 23, in his 64th year, at his residence, 276 Riverside Drive.” (Deaths, 1911-1922).

² “Beloved husband of Charlotte D. Gerken and beloved father of Frederick Gerken Jr., Mrs. Florence Gerken Tschirky and Mrs. Irene Gerken Egan. Funeral services Wednesday, Nov. 26, at 2 p.m., at All Angels’ Church, West End Ave., and 81st St. Interment Woodlawn.” (Deaths, 1911-1922).

³ In the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, it states that Frederick Gerken was born about August 1857 in Germany, lived in Manhattan, immigrated in 1871, married Charlotte Gerken in 1876, was occupied as a restaurant keeper, mortgaged his home, and had five servants also living with the family. (1900).

⁴ “The property of the Trinity Corporation, and has been leased by it to Frederick Gerken, wine merchant, who will at once erect thereon a modern fire-proof office building.” (Real Estate Record).

⁵ In the 1910 U.S. Federal Census, it states that Frederick Gerken had four different live-in servants, own his home freely, and occupation was listed as own income. (1910).

term of years to the New York National Exchange Bank.”⁶ He also “bought the site across the street at 1 Hudson and built another building,” which housed the Irving Bank.⁷ Frederick Gerken was also “chiefly responsible for the development of the town of Deal, New Jersey and built a casino there.”⁸ As a rich man, Frederick’s personal life was a point of discussion in the public eye. Frederick was part of the syndicate that started the Empire State Trotting Association, and was a member of the Road Drivers’ Association.⁹ The Gerkens spent their winters in Bermuda, where their youngest daughter Irene was befriended by Samuel Clemens, and spent their summers between Deal, New Jersey and Manhattan.¹⁰

Frederick Gerken’s family also shared Frederick’s limelight. Mrs. Charlotte Gerken was involved with cotillion, where she acted as a patroness.¹¹ She made sure that her daughters were raised

⁶ “The plot there, 76 feet on Chambers street by 51 feet on Collage place, is the property of the Trinity Corporation, and has been leased by it to Frederick Gerken, wine merchant, who will at once erect thereon a modern fire-proof office building, eleven stories high, to cost about \$165,000. Harding & Gooch are the architects, and the plans will be finished and ready for estimates in about a week. Mr. Gerken has already leased the first floor of the building for a long term of years to the New York National Exchange Bank, which is now in temporary quarters pending the destruction of the old building and the erection of the new one.” (Real Estate Record).

⁷ “Gerken also bought the site across the street at 1 Hudson and built another building that mirrors the Gerken in various ways, although the architects were different. 1 Hudson housed the Irving Bank. The Irving Bank and New York Mercantile Bank eventually merged, kept the Irving name, and moved into the Woolworth Building to occupy the flagship retail space there on the 2nd floor.” (Hillworth).

⁸ “Frederick Gerken was a German-born immigrant who had come to New York in 1871. Gerken was notable for his remarkable business acumen, especially in real estate development. He was chiefly responsible for the development of the town of Deal, New Jersey and built a casino there.” (Schmidt).

⁹ Frederick Gerken was “one of the most noted horse breeders in the country... and Mrs. Gerken, has been noted for years as a ribbon winner at the various horse shows, always driving her own teams and riding her own mounts. ... Mrs. [Irene Gerken] Tschiky was a dashing horsewoman.” (Special to the New York Times, Wife Sues).

¹⁰ In 1907, at the age of seventy-two, lonely and widowed, Samuel Clemens began “collecting” surrogate granddaughters -- young girls between the ages of ten and sixteen. Clemens maintained correspondences with the girls -- most were from prominent and wealthy families who traveled in the same social circles with Clemens. They and their parents often visited him in his homes in New York. Samuel Clemens met angelfish Irene Gerken in Bermuda on his second trip to the island in January 1908. ... The family spent part of their winters in Bermuda and summers at their home in Deal, New Jersey. (Schmidt).

¹¹ Deal Beach, N.J., July 30. Hathaway Inn had its first cotillion of the season to-night. The patronesses were Mrs. Bedle, wife of the ex-Governor, Mrs. J.P. Bryne, Mrs. Gherardi, Mrs. Napier, Mrs. Zuckerman, Mrs.

correctly and married into good, wealthy families. Her daughter Irene married Joseph L. Egan, who worked his way to become CEO of Western Union, while her daughter Florence married Leopold Tschirky, son of "Oscar" of the Waldorf-Astoria.¹² Oscar loved Florence and the couple's son L. Robert Tschirky. After Florence separated from her husband, there was court order stating "that the child be brought to Oscar's house every Sunday," regardless of her unsuccessful appeal.

Frederick Gerken lived a fashionable, public, and successful life. When he died suddenly in 1919, his wife Charlotte was left to deal with the arrangements of his interment. She chose to work with Harrison Granite Company, a company whose offices were at 200 Fifth Avenue and had been in operation for almost seventy-five years. To aid those who were in need of a gravestone, monument, or mausoleum, or those who wanted to work ahead of schedule, the company had the "Harrison Granite Company Clientele Catalog (& Monuments)" published in 1918, which they used for years to come.¹³ This guide contained lists of the more famous clients who used

Newcombe; Mrs. Frederick Gerken, and Mrs. Doremus. There were forty couples present. (Special to the New York Times, Cotillion at Deal Beach).

¹² On November 24, 1915 Irene Gerken married attorney Joseph L. Egan. Joseph Egan advanced through the ranks of Western Union Telegraph Company to eventually become president of that enterprise. The couple had two children— Ronald and Irene Marie who later married Lawrence J. O'Brien, son of the former mayor of New York. Joseph Egan died in Monte Carlo on December 6, 1948. Irene Gerken Egan died May 19, 1969. (Schmidt).

Leopold Tschirky, son of "Oscar" of the Waldorf-Astoria, New York, was today sued in the Common Pleas Court by Florence Gerken Tschirky for an absolute divorce. The papers charge cruel and barbarous treatment... (Special to the New York Times, Wife Sues).

Leopold Tschirky, who is employed by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, and his wife, who was Miss Florence Gerken, separated more than a year ago, and Mrs. Tschirky took Leopold, Jr. away from their home. On the plea of the boy's father and his grandparents a writ of habeas corpus was issued by Judge Callahan in Brooklyn in May 1916, and later an order requiring that the child be brought to Oscar's house every Sunday was signed. The mother appealed, and the Appellate Division affirmed the writ some months ago. (Tschirky to See Grandson)

¹³ "The interpretation of classic forms is the true expression of lasting tribute to the departed. Simplicity of treatment rather than ornateness has characterized the efforts of this company for the past 73 years. Ranging from monumental pieces of public interest to the simplest of private tributes this organization has achieved wonderful success in executing the conceptions of prominent sculptors and architects as well as the work of its own carefully selected staff of designers. This varied experience, coupled with extensive quarrying and cutting facilities under personal supervision, permits the offering of unusual service in suggestion and advice to our patrons. The list of clients contained herein represents only a few of those who have availed themselves of our facilities. Reference to such can be made on request." (Harrison Granite Company).

the company, as well as numerous photographs of typical mausoleums. This catalogue contained twenty pictures, one of which was the picture of the mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery built for John W. Butler, labeled as "Mausoleum- Egyptian" (see Fig. 2). It seems likely that Charlotte Gerken saw this mausoleum on page 16 of the catalog, and picked out her husband's mausoleum right there in the moment of her grief, as the mausoleum in the catalog is almost an exact copy of the mausoleum later built for Frederick.

The mausoleum itself is very grand, letting visitors know that someone important resides within. The mausoleum is an Egyptian Revival design, with minimal carvings that are only present in the column capitals and the two vases that mark the front outside edges (see Fig. 3). As one enters the cemetery from the Jerome Avenue, one walks north, past the Woolworth Chapel, past many gravestones, and enter an area full of mausoleums and gravestones. You turn right onto Hilbert Ave and walk for a minute, as you approach the next intersection, you can see off to your right a row of larger mausoleums; each have columns two on the front (see Fig. 4). However, one of these stands out, with a set of curved seats on either side, ending in a pillar with a large vase. This is the Frederick Gerken mausoleum, set back about 20 feet off of Fern Avenue with its beautiful, symmetrical landscaping with mature Blue Spruce trees just behind the curved benches, hanging ivy in the pedestaled pots at the front, and small, groomed evergreen in the stone planters inset on the multiple layers of stepped entrances, all of which are laid in front of a large, shady tree in the plots behind (see Fig. 5). From far away, it beckons you closer, drawing you to the front and center with its curving benches and evergreen bushes right up against the road on the front corners of the plot. The large bushes, at the corners of the plot are welcoming. Set back from this is a symmetrical mausoleum design that is multi-layered, the first layer including a step up into large welcoming area with the curved benches. This is the widest and most public area, other than the grassy lawn. Set several feet back into that, there is another step up, onto a

smaller, more intimate area, with columns, as you enter the area reminiscent of a portico. This area is less deep than the last. From here, a recessed door area creates a last, even smaller area, leading to intricate brass doors covered with Egyptian symbols including the lotus, which is associated with rebirth (See Fig. 6. and 7).¹⁴ At last, you enter the threshold into a rectangular room, with three coffin bays are on each of the side walls, and two coffin bays are laid before you, which also creates a deep shelf. In the top most central coffin lies Frederick Gerken, almost on a pedestal, appearing most important. On the shelf above, several urns and plaques sit in memory of more recently deceased family members. The shelf also allows for a multi-layered stained-glass window of two figures overlooking land to shine a light into the room. The interior of the mausoleum is clad in polished Tennessee Pink marble, with polished Light Barre granite on the floor. This interior is not decorative or indicative of the very monumental feel of the outside, but rather warm and inviting for the family to visit their loved ones there (see Fig. 8). The only design elements are the recessed panels and the materials chosen. Outside, this mausoleum is also clad in large slabs of Light Barre marble, which comes from Barre, Vermont. The design of the face of the mausoleum also draws you in as much as the floor plan in entering of the site. From the road, the design is symmetrical and monumental; the large building creates a frame. There are multiple large slabs making up the roof, with a simple and large cavetto cornice and the name Frederick Gerken carved on it. On each side of the roof, large battered walls come down and meet with the second layered step, creating a large frame. The next layer is recessed from the first, but also creating a frame in itself, largely with nicely cast shadows of a deep space. Within this frame are the columns, which are smooth and strong, further drawing you towards the center. They help lead your eye to the groove that is carved into the back pieces

¹⁴ In ancient Egypt there were two main types of lotus that grew, the white and the blue. If one is to observe the many hieroglyphics, it is easy to see that the blue lotus flower is the most commonly portrayed. This plant is known to be associated with rebirth. This is a consequence of it supposedly retracting into the water at night, and emerging a fresh in the Sun the next day. As something that is associated with rebirth, it is no surprise that the lotus flower is also associated with death, and the Egyptian Book of the Dead is known to include spells that are able to transform a person into a lotus, thus allowing for resurrection." (Ravencroft)

of granite, framing the door. The door itself is recessed and also creates its frame. In each door, there is a piece of glass, with decorative brass work in front. (see Fig. 9) Each of these frames uses the golden ratio, as was incredibly popular in the time of the Egyptians as it was sacred to their religion.¹⁵ These frames, both on the face of the mausoleum, as well as the ground plan help draw you in, speak of the important of the man this mausoleum was built for. The mausoleum itself is also in very good condition, and appears to be visited regularly, judging by the wreath that was inside (although the recent addition of an urn in 2003 may play a part in this). In 1952, the mausoleum had much of its landscaping removed; the blue spruce trees that sat behind the curved benches were diseased and the hanging ivy plants in the pots were overgrown and unsightly. Now, there are only two young deciduous trees at the corner of the plots where evergreen bushes used to sit, no plants in any of the pots, and other trees on the plot (see Fig. 10). This choice in landscaping still allows for a symmetrical, specific entrance, but does not lend itself to the grandeur that once existed. At the same time as this landscaping, the mausoleum underwent general maintenance. It was re-pointed, and the white lead caps on the cornice were re-capped with putty-tape and then metal for added protection (see Fig. 11). It shows that the family was still very much involved in the resting place of the loved ones.

The rest of the family members who resides within the mausoleum also have their own stories to tell. Frederick and Charlotte's first two children, Frederick Ernest and Charlotte Margaret, were placed in one box, as they died at the ages of 6 months and 2 months respectively. Charlotte passed away in June 17, 1933, leaving behind her children Mr. Frederick Gerken Jr., Mrs. L. Tschirky, and Mrs. J.L. Egan and their children.¹⁶ When she died, the mausoleum passed to her

¹⁵ "They used the golden ratio when building temples and places for the dead. If the proportions of their buildings weren't according to the golden ratio, the deceased might not make it to the afterlife or the temple would not be pleasing to the gods." (Paryeen).

¹⁶ "Gerken: On Saturday, June 17, Charlotte Gerken, beloved wife of the late Frederick Gerken and mother of Frederick Gerken Jr., Mrs. L. Tschirky and Mrs. J.L. Egan. ... Interment Woodlawn Cemetery." (Deaths, 1926-1962).

son, Frederick Jr., who was not buried in the mausoleum, but had a plaque placed within it. Through a series of correspondences that were found with the Woodlawn Archive in Avery Library, Mrs. Frederick Gerken, Jr. (Hellen Hillcoat Gerken), who was at the time a widow, relinquished the right to be buried in the mausoleum (see Fig. 12). A plaque to her husband, Frederick Gerken, Jr. also resides on the shelf. Due to Hellen Hillcoat Gerken's relinquishment, Mrs. Florence Gerken Tschirky became the sole owner of lot #1-4767, as Mrs. Irene Gerken Egan also gave up her ownership (see Fig. 13) (although she was too buried here). Eventually, Florence and Irene were both placed in the mausoleum, as was the urn of Leopold Tschirky, Florence's husband, regardless of their separated life. Their son, L. Robert Tschirky, is also placed in an urn on the shelf, as the most recent addition to the mausoleum in 2003. This mausoleum now serves three generations of the Gerken family.

Overall, the mausoleum design and landscaping lend themselves extremely well to the lifestyle of the Gerken family. It, like them, was expensive. The lot itself was purchased at \$4.00/sq. foot, making the cost of the plot over \$7000 (see Fig. 14). The design chosen was monumental and public, just as the Gerkens' led their lives to be. The materials were chosen to show off the financial and social grandeur of those that reside within, as well as welcome in those who wished to pay their respects. This mausoleum perfectly fit the Gerken family and will continue to serve it as time comes.

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Figures 1-9



(Photo Credit: Corey Manchenton)

Figure 1: On Lot #14767 of Wistaria Plot in Woodlawn Cemetery stands a monumental, well-groomed mausoleum.

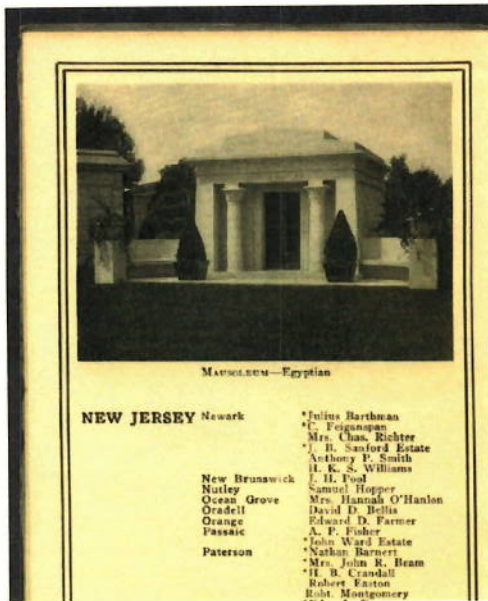


Figure 2: “This catalogue contained twenty pictures, one of which was the picture of the mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery built for John W. Butler, labeled as “Mausoleum- Egyptian.””

(Source: Harrison Granite Company. *Harrison Granite Company Clientele Catalog (c. Monuments)*. New York: Harrison Granite, 1918. *Stone Quarries and Beyond*. June 2011. Web. 12 Oct. 2013.)



Figure 3: The mausoleum is an Egyptian Revival design, with minimal carvings that are only present in the column capitals and the two vases that mark the front outside edges.

(Photo Credit: Corey Manchenton)

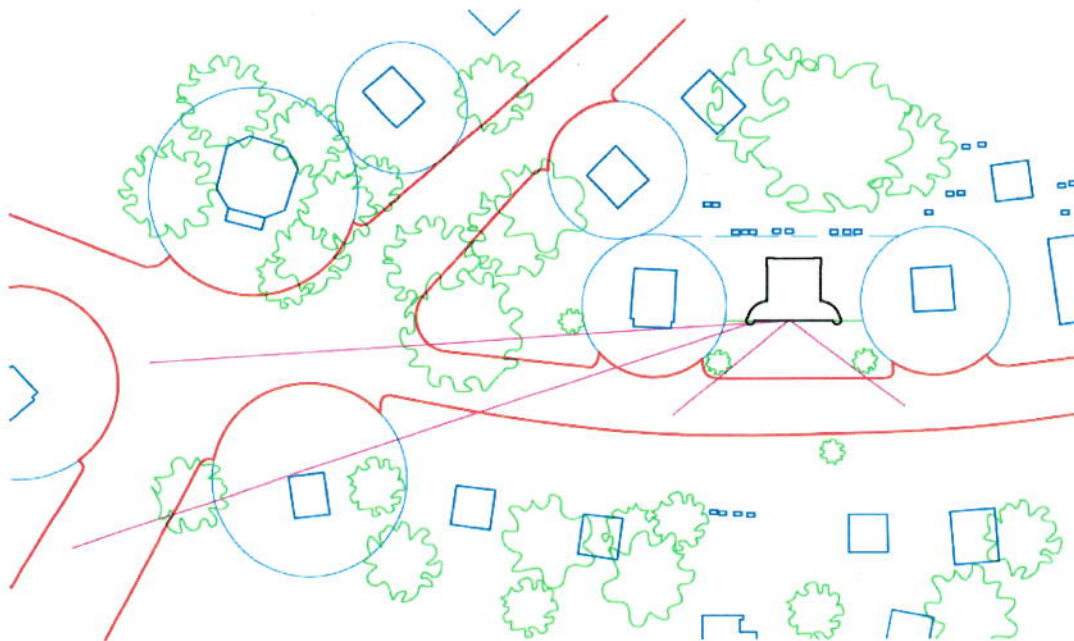


Figure 4: Site plan.

(Drafted by: Corey Manchenton)



Figure 5: Author's interpretation and Recreation of previous landscaping. Beautiful, symmetrical landscaping with mature Blue Spruce trees just behind the curved benches, hanging ivy in the pedestaled pots at the front, and small, groomed evergreen in the stone planters inset on the multiple layers of stepped entrances.

(Photoshop Credit: Corey Manchenton)

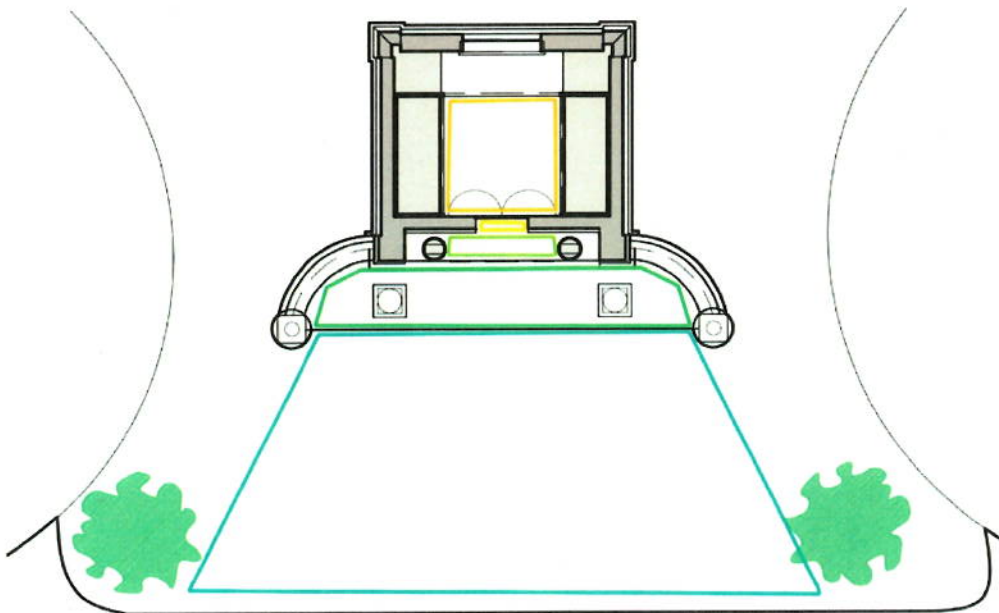


Figure 6: Ground plan, showing the welcoming shaping of the site.

(Photoshop Credit: Corey Manchenton)

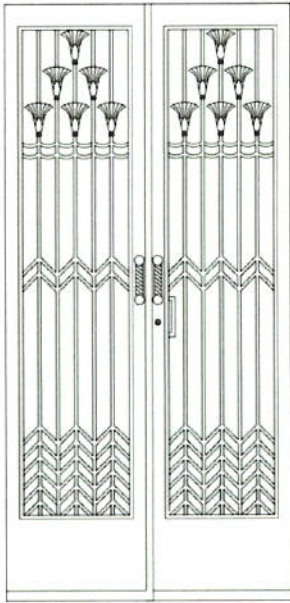


Figure 7: Intricate brass doors covered with Egyptian symbols including the lotus, which is associated with rebirth

(Drafted by: Corey Manchenton)



Figure 8: This interior is not decorative or indicative of the very monumental feel of the outside, but rather warm and inviting for the family to visit loved ones there.

(Photo Credit: Corey Manchenton)



Figure 9: Visual analysis of frames created by mausoleum design

(Photoshop Credit: Corey Manchenton)

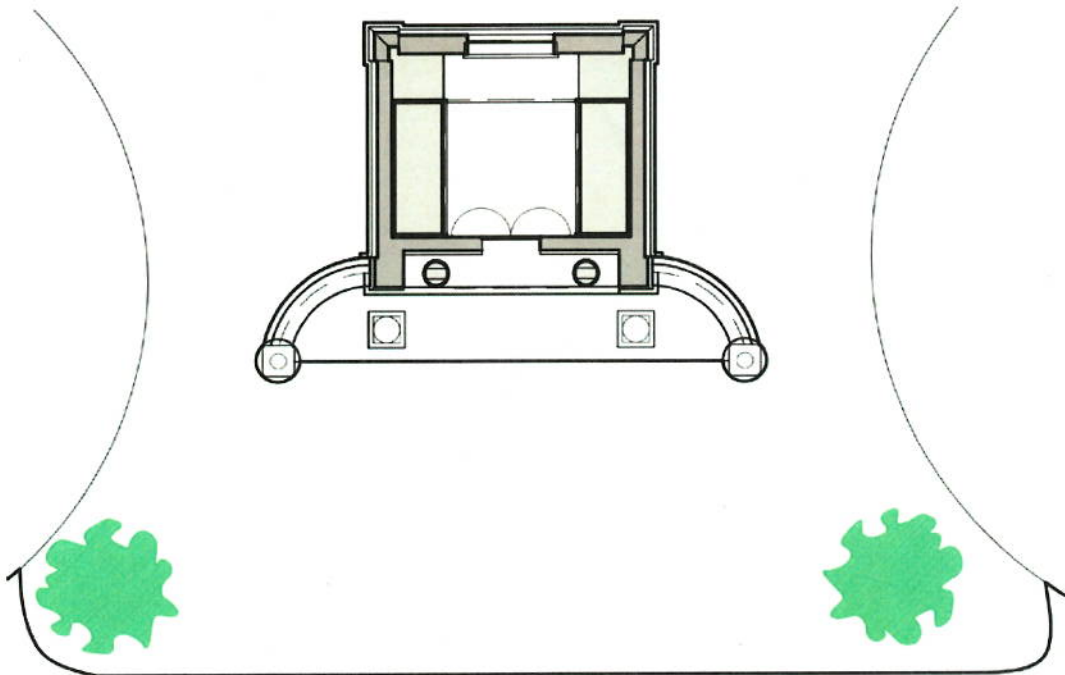


Figure 10: Now, there are only two young deciduous trees at the corner of the plots where evergreen bushes used to sit, no plants in any of the pots, and other trees on the plot.

(Drafted by: Corey Manchenton)

Rosemont, Pa.

Re: Lot 14767 - Wistaria Plot - Charlotte Gerken

Dear Mr. Tschirky:

When the repointing of the roof joints of the "Gerken" mausoleum is done, it is understood that after the joints are cleaned out and pointed with white lead and varnish that they will be covered with putti-tape, and after this is done the present metal coverings will be replaced over the tape so that there will be double protection to these joints.

In regard to additional interment spaces in the front portion of the lot, our regulations do not allow interments to be made in front of the facade of the building. We are, therefore, returning the diagram that you sent us for approval.

As soon as the repair work has been completed, we will notify you.

Very truly yours,
THE WOODLAWN CEMETERY

Figure 11: It was re-pointed, and the white lead caps on the cornice were re-capped with putti-tape and then metal for added protection

(Source: Columbia Libraries, Avery Library, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Gerken)

New York 10, N.Y.

Subject: Lot #14767 -Wistaria Plot
Original Owner -Mrs. Charlotte Gerken

Gentlemen:

Your files will disclose correspondence with your Mr. Caswell M. Smith, President in the Fall of 1952 and in connection therewith I have been requested by my wife, Mrs. Florence Gerken Tschirky, to send you the enclosed original and one copy of "relinquishment of right of interment" form duly signed by Mrs. Helen Hillcoat Gerken, the wife and sole heir of the late Frederick Gerken, Jr.

Also enclosed you will find the original and one copy of "heirship affidavit" signed by Mrs. Tschirky together with my check in amount of \$2.00 to cover recording fee.

I will appreciate your acknowledging receipt of this letter and the enclosures and in doing so kindly also send a copy to Mrs. Tschirky's sister, Mrs. Joseph L. Egan, 42 N. Mountain Avenue, Montclair, N.J.

Figure 12: Mrs. Frederick Gerken, Jr. (Hellen Hillcoat Gerken), who was at the time a widow, relinquished the right to be buried in the mausoleum.

(Source: Columbia Libraries, Avery Library, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Gerken)

The Woodlawn Cemetery
20 E. 23 Street
New York 10, N.Y

Att: Mrs. Sophie D. Baldus, Secretary

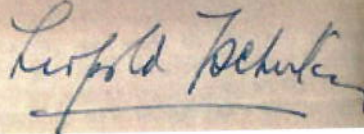
Re: Lot #14767 -Wistaria Plot
Original Owner - Mrs. Charlotte Gerken

Gentlemen:

I enclose herewith your form of release in triplicate signed by Mrs. Irene Gerken Egan before a Notary. Also enclosed is my check for \$2.00 to cover payment of your recording fee.

It is my understanding that my wife, Mrs. Florence Gerken Tschirky, is now the sole owner of lot #14767 - Wistaria Plot and that after you have made record of Mrs. Egan's release you will return to me a recorded copy of the release for my file.

Very truly yours,



LT:me
enc.

Figure 13: Mrs. Florence Gerken Tschirky became the sole owner of lot #14767

(Source: Columbia Libraries, Avery Library, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Gerken)

ORDER FOR DEED NUMBER 23021
Woodlawn, N.Y. City May 24th, 1920

Make Deed to Mrs. Charlotte Gerken, of 90 West Broadway, New York City.

Lot No. 14767	Section 140	Plot Wistaria	
No. Feet 1787	Price per foot \$4.00	Amount \$7148.00	
Valentine Tract..	No-Mounds.Yes	Checked by J.A.D. Engineer	

Deed to be mailed upon receipt of balance.

Remarks Bill mailed. Will pay \$1,000. now, \$1,000. July 1st 1920 and balance before foundation is started about August 1st 1920. For mausoleum

F. M. MacDougal (Signed)
In charge of lot sales."

Very truly yours,

Caswell M. Smith
President

Figure 14: The lot itself was purchased at \$4.00/sq. foot, making the cost of the plot over \$7000.

(Source: Columbia Libraries, Avery Library, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Gerken)