

# John L. Miller Mausoleum Research



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## Introduction

John L. Miller Mausoleum is located on the second row from Linden Avenue at Woodlawn Cemetery, at plot 12835.<sup>1</sup> It is the place where John L. Miller, his wife, Albertina Miller, and their five children: Emma J. M. Earp, George H. Miller, Alice Miller (Warren A Miller, name appeared on the census), Charles Edwin Miller, and John L. Miller Jr., rest eternally.<sup>2</sup> Besides them, there is also Stonewall Jackson<sup>3</sup>, John and Albertina's servants in old age, Amelia F. Miller<sup>4</sup>, John L. Miller Jr.'s wife, and Imogen Earp Richardson<sup>5</sup>, daughter of Emma.

Researching the background of John L. Miller's family mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery can reveal important details about the family's lineage and wealth through its architectural design. Investigating the mausoleum's designer can provide further insight into its significance. Additionally, exploring the family history of John L. Miller, including their business ventures and property holdings—particularly their development work in New York City's Upper West Side in the late 19th century—can help explain their affluence and prominence. There are many family mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery that are owned by reputable and wealthy families. It is usually a symbol of financial and social success.

The objective of this research is to trace the course of development of the Miller family, exploring the factors that contributed to their prominence in social and financial status. Additionally, New York's weather conditions are the key to consider during the preservation works of the Miller Mausoleum. The research seeks to assess the condition of the Miller Mausoleum after all these years by examining the architectural features, material deterioration

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<sup>1</sup> The Woodlawn Cemetery, "Plot Plans", Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer 367.

<sup>2</sup> 1880 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: 892, Page: 208d, Enumeration District: 521.

<sup>3</sup> 1910 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: T624\_1048, Page: 11a, Enumeration District: 1394.

<sup>4</sup> 1950 United States Federal Census, Sarasota, Florida, Roll: 5854, Page: 75, Enumeration District: 58-14A, National Archives at Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> 1920 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: T625\_1198; Page: 27A; Enumeration District: 572.

and conditions. The approach will provide both a historical and analytical perspective on the Miller Family and the Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery.

### **John L. Miller Mausoleum In Woodlawn Cemetery**

In 1911, John L. Miller commissioned Adler's, a monument and granite works firm, to design and build a mausoleum for his family. The mausoleum was completed in 1912.<sup>6</sup> The mausoleum hosts ten catacombs, four on each side above the ground and two underground.<sup>7</sup> (Figure. 1) The cemetery plot is rectilinear, and the mausoleum is situated at the center, on a gentle sloping terrain. The John L. Miller Mausoleum is adjacent to neighboring mausoleums with no path or divisions in the plans shown at the archive. However, the two adjacent plots have planted trees, with two at the neighboring Coe's plot leaning towards the Miller's mausoleum. (Figure. 2)

John L. Miller Mausoleum appears to be a Neoclassical structure that reflects the architectural trends popular among the affluent families of New York in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The material of the exterior is mainly granite. As described in "Specification of the Mausoleum", it was "the best light Barre granite"<sup>8</sup>. The granite used on the exterior is finely hammered on the steps, columns, entablature, and pediment. The door and window frame at the rear elevation are made of bronze. The mausoleum sits on sloping terrain with a few steps leading up to the entrance. The mausoleum is perfectly symmetrical. The doorway is centrally located, and flanked by two columns on each side. The fluted columns are carved in one solid piece of granite each, and have simple round capitals on top, which is a typical Doric order.

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<sup>6</sup> The Woodlawn Cemetery, "Mausoleums, Monuments, etc. Examination Sheet", Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 3.1: Folder 60.

<sup>7</sup> Adler's Monument & Granite Works, "Cross Section", Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 3.1: Folder 60.

<sup>8</sup> "Specification, For the erection of a Mausoleum in JOHN L. MILLER'S Plot at Woodlawn Cemetery, New York", Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 3.1: Folder 60.

(Figure. 3) Above the columns are raised polished, carved granite “John L. Miller”. Atop of the that is a triangular pediment, and a piece of angle granite at the top along the ridge.

On the side elevations (Figure. 4), the entablature continues to the side, and there is cornice sculpted at the corner of the facade and the side elevation that is adjacent to the front, totally four. There are four rectangular drainage holes at each side, two at the bottom and two under the entablature, each covered with a bronze cap, cut in at the exterior granite ashlar blocks. The exterior wall is finely hammered granite, stacked in order, and the mortar is La Farge cement<sup>9</sup>.

The rear elevation (Figure. 5) is simple and clean, it has the same triangular pediment, entablature, and cornice as the facade, but with no sculpting. Directly underneath the cornice is the window frame which is made of bronze, and there is a hint of color and shape of pattern can be seen from the exterior because of the treatment of the glass surface. There are holes left in the granite around the window, likely for bronze grills to protect the glass window from damage. However, according to the Rear Elevation and Specification from the archive.<sup>10</sup> there is no evidence showing a plan for this element. The window sill starts from the glass frame straight approximately three inches and then cut diagonally in a forty-five degree angle.

Walking up to the entrance, there are double bronze doors that feature elegant metalwork with rectilinear patterns and the letter "M" in a circular leaf motif attached on the straight metalwork, symbolizing the family. Below that is the door bar horizontally set. The lower part of the door has a sculpted metalwork, it seems to be an up-side down torch with flame.

(Figure. 6) These heavy, double-panel doors lead directly into the mausoleum. When opening the door, the interior of the mausoleum is revealed. The predominant material throughout the

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<sup>9</sup> “Specification, For the erection of a Mausoleum in JOHN L. MILLER’S Plot at Woodlawn Cemetery, New York”, Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 3.1: Folder 60.

<sup>10</sup> “Rear Elevation”, “Specification, For the erection of a Mausoleum in JOHN L. MILLER’S Plot at Woodlawn Cemetery, New York”, Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 3.1: Folder 60.

interior is white marble, offering a clean, timeless appearance, with catacombs on both sides engraved and traced in gold paint with names and dates of birth and death. There are two bronze made floral motif bolts on the front of each catacomb. When looking up to the ceiling, it is made of the same white marble as the interior elevations. Also, there is one floral motif bronze made ventilating hanger at the center of it, to create air flow. The focal point of the interior when walking in is the stained-glass window at the back (Figure. 7). The art glass depicts Jesus Christ, dressed in a red and white flowing robes, standing with his arms outstretched, palms down, against a background of pinkish-blue sky. Below the window sill is a small fluted column base that supports the extended curved window sill. The overall design conveys an atmosphere of serenity and devotion with classical and religious elements.

## **Miller Family**

The John L. Miller family as originally from Germany. However, John L. Miller was born in New York, on July 13th, 1847. He married Albertina (Edinger) Miller<sup>11</sup>, who was born in 1847 in Hesse-Darmstadt, and immigrated to the United States in 1852 at the age of five. Albertina spent her life after arriving in the United States in Ohio instead of New York, records can be found in the 1860 census<sup>12</sup>. In the early years of their marriage, John L. Miller and his wife Albertina faced humble circumstances, lacking the wealth and prominence they would later achieve. According to the census from 1870-1910, John L. Miller's occupation has changed in

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<sup>11</sup> 1910 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: T624\_1048, Page: 11a, Enumeration District: 1394.

<sup>12</sup> The National Archives in Washington D.C., Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group Number: 29, Series Number: M653, Residence Date: 1860, Home in 1860: Chillicothe, Ross, Ohio; Roll: M653\_1030; Page: 3; Family History Library Film: 805030.

various fields, including grocer<sup>13</sup>, flour and feed<sup>14</sup>, boarding stabler<sup>15</sup>, and employer of real estate<sup>16</sup>, Empire Square Realty Co..

From the record, the earliest building John L. Miller developed was 1931-1939 Broadway (110 W. 65th St.)<sup>17</sup>. The date of construction is in 1900, and it is a Renaissance Revival Building, later called “the Miller Building” in 1916. In the following years, John L. Miller kept developing real estate around that area, which is now the Lincoln Center area. 1947 Broadway<sup>18</sup> was first constructed in 1903, then was reconstructed in 1931 after John’s death by his son, John L. Miller Jr., who inherited his Empire Square Realty Co. In 1905, 133-143 West 65th Street (Lincoln Square Theatre)<sup>19</sup> was constructed, then was demolished and replaced by the Juilliard School. The same year, the most notable real estate developed by the family is the landmark Riverdale, located at 67 Riverside Drive, also known as 320 West 79th Street. The information about it was published in the *Real Estate Record and Builder’s Guide*<sup>20</sup> in 1905 (Figure. 8). The publication states that Mrs. Albertina Miller, of 127 Riverside Drive, commissioned architect George Fred Pelham to design a 9-story, high-class elevator apartment building at 65-68 Riverside Drive. Estimated to cost \$450,000, the building would accommodate 20 families, with two apartments per floor. It was to be a fireproof structure, featuring brick, stone, and terra-cotta exteriors, along with both passenger and service elevators. It was constructed around 1905, and

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<sup>13</sup> 1870 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: M593\_1013, Page: 575A.

<sup>14</sup> 1880 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: 892, Page: 208d, Enumeration District: 521.

<sup>15</sup> 1905 State Population Census Schedules, New York City, New York, Page: 40, Election District: A.D. 19 E.D. 04, New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

<sup>16</sup> 1910 United States Federal Census, New York City, New York, Roll: T624\_1048, Page: 11a, Enumeration District: 1394.

<sup>17</sup> “1931-1939 Broadway.” LANDMARK WEST. accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.landmarkwest.org/san-juan-hill/1931-1939-broadway/>.

<sup>18</sup> “1947 Broadway,” LANDMARK WEST, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.landmarkwest.org/san-juan-hill/1947-broadway/>.

<sup>19</sup> “133-143 West 65th Street,” LANDMARK WEST, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.landmarkwest.org/san-juan-hill/133-143-west-65th-street/>.

<sup>20</sup> Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide, New York, F. W. Dodge Corp. v. 41, no. 1,034 (Jan. 7, 1888) - v. 45, no. 1163 (June 28, 1890), v. 47, no. 1190 (Jan. 3, 1891) - v. 102, no. 2650 (Dec. 28, 1918); v. 103, no. 1 (Jan. 4, 1919) - v. 110, no. 27 (Dec. 30, 1922). New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2010. Electronic reproduction. Digitized by the Internet Archive. Accessed via the World Wide Web.



it marked one of his major developments in real estate. He built this structure under his wife Albertina's name, and it reflected his growing involvement in Upper West Side real estate development.

Albertina, John L. Miller's wife, died in 1911<sup>21</sup>. After her death, John commissioned The Adler's to design and build the family mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery. Construction was finished in the next year. Five years later, in 1917, John passed away in his 70th year, at 67 Riverside Drive<sup>22</sup>, survived by his five children. However, there is a record<sup>23</sup> of the will and probate related to Albertina Miller, who distributed her assets and real estate to the children.

Not long after the Millers deaths, the real estate company was hit with a lawsuit run by the children<sup>24</sup>. The defendants were four corporations, each owning a parcel of real estate for rent in New York City. The entire capital stock of these four companies was owned by Charles E. Miller, John L. Miller, Warren A. Miller, George H. Miller (brother) and Emma J. M. Earp (sister). These five also formed the board of directors of each company. The officers of the companies were also the same: Charles E. Miller was president; Mrs. Earp was vice president; and John L. Miller was secretary-treasurer and also general manager. Disagreements within this family interfered with the business of the company and resulted in the cancellation of stockholders' and directors' meetings.

## **Mausoleum Conditions**

Deterioration of a building is said to be the general wear and tear that all buildings face over time. In preservation, the term of deterioration often refers to the slow decomposition and weakening of materials due to natural forces (including weathering, environmental exposure) or indirectly man made neglect. Decay in historic buildings represents not only an issue of health

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<sup>21</sup> "Obituary 1 -- no Title." New York Times, Jan 05, 1911.

<sup>22</sup> "Deaths." New York Herald, Feb 02, 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Record of Wills, 1665-1916; Index to Wills, 1662-1923 (New York County), Author: New York. Surrogate's Court (New York County), Probate Place: New York, New York.

<sup>24</sup> *The Daily Record*. "Appellate Division Supreme Court," June 15, 1921. Rochester-Syracuse Edition. Page 1.

and safety but also a danger to cultural and architectural heritage. Preservation issues are important to know how this process arises and what their effects are.

Exposure to the environment is one of the biggest reasons that a building falls into disrepair. Rain, snow, and temperature fluctuations cause expansion and contraction which means that surfaces crack, and become damaged due to the weather. Corrosion can also be worsened on the metal surfaces because of moisture, and simply because of pollution in urban areas. Cracks in mortar and ashlar allow water, biological matter (mold, algae, roots from plants), etc., to penetrate them which can then lead to additional structural damages.

The Miller family mausoleum is a great example of how even the wealthiest families in New York City cannot protect from its harsh weather conditions over time and are exposed to environmental factors that harm them. The exterior of the mausoleum was constructed with pieces of granite, and used mortar to secure the blocks. As time passed, the mortar joints were eroded, and the edges of the granite piece eroded. This is probably caused by extreme or sudden temperature changes, then resulting in expansion and contraction, and losing parts. The surface of the granite also has a large portion of moisture degradation and salt efflorescence. At the lower part of it, the connection between the columns and the base stairs, there is also some organic growth detected, which is likely because of the storm and snow weather happening in the area. The bronze doors now show signs of oxidation, creating a green patina. The bronze oxidation also occurs on the window frame at the back and the vent covers at the sides. The deterioration on the exterior not only happens on the elevations, there is also cracking on the floor with bulging, and spalling of the granite.

The interior portion of the mausoleum is not in good condition either. The piece of marble that is set in the middle of the floor is totally cracked from the middle. There is very little moisture degradation at the surface of the marble, however, they are curved or bulging out. The surface of the granite at the floor and small gaps between the doors and the ceiling are showing signs of water leakage. The bronze bolts at the surface of the catacombs appear dark brown, not



oxidized as a metal alloy as the exterior's bronze work. Surprisingly, without the protection of the grills, the stained-glass window is preserved perfectly, there is no cracking or pitting. These issues not only compromise the mausoleum's aesthetic appeal but also threaten its structural stability and the preservation of its historical elements.

Building deterioration is a pressing concern that must be addressed to preserve not only the structural integrity of buildings but also their cultural significance. In the case of historical buildings like the Miller family mausoleum, to ensure that their legacies endure, allowing future generations to appreciate their historical and architectural value. Neglecting such deterioration not only risks the building itself but also diminishes the richness of our shared heritage.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the John L. Miller mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery stands as a significant monument reflecting the prominence and wealth of the Miller family. The mausoleum, a neoclassical structure built from granite, is an enduring testament to early 20th-century architectural trends and the family's influence on New York's real estate development. Despite its grandeur, the structure shows signs of deterioration due to environmental factors and material aging. The preservation of such a historic site is crucial, both to maintain its structural integrity and to honor the legacy of the Miller family for future generations.

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Figures

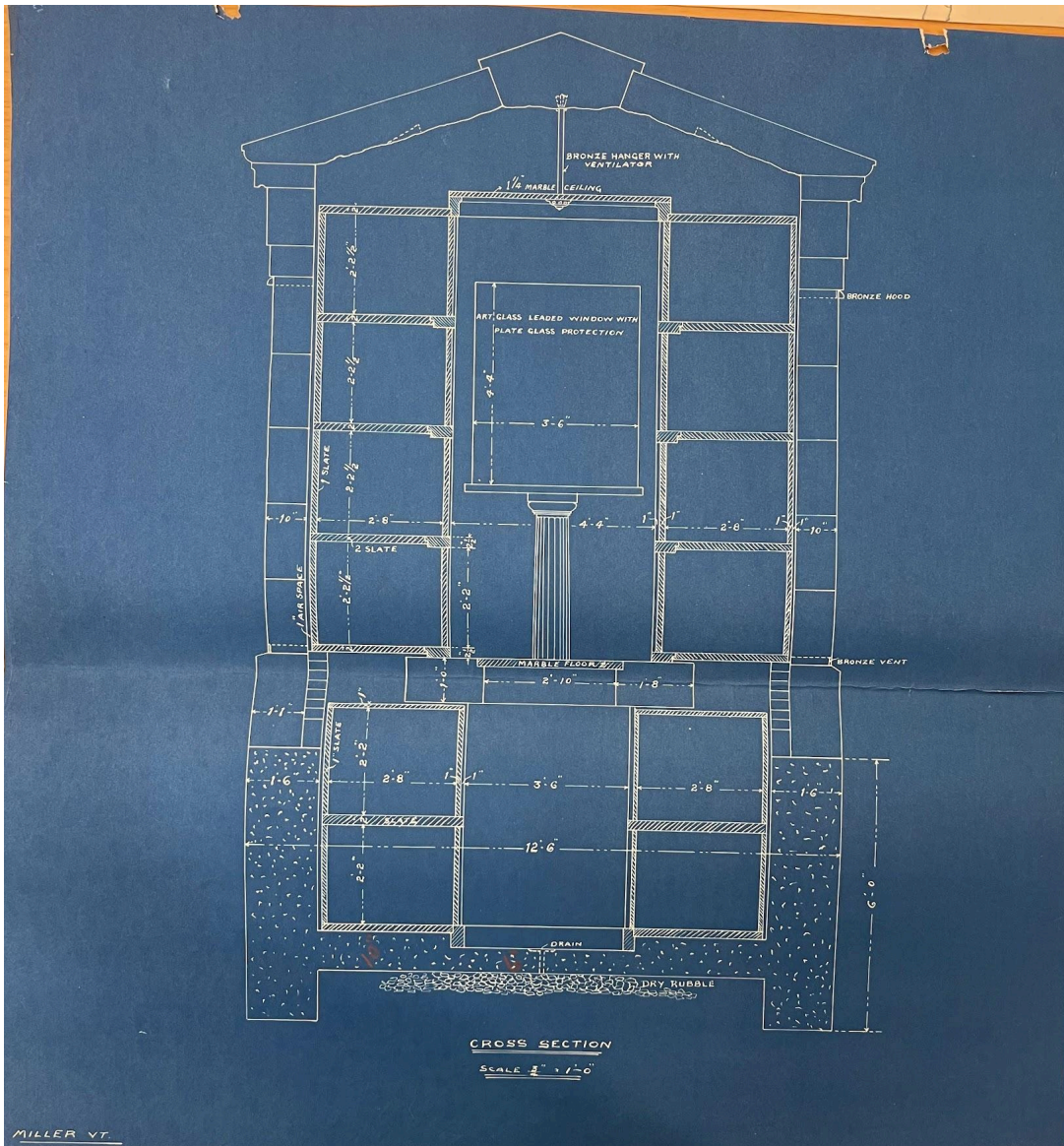


Figure. 1: "CROSS SECTION", Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Drawer MM 3.1: Folder 60.



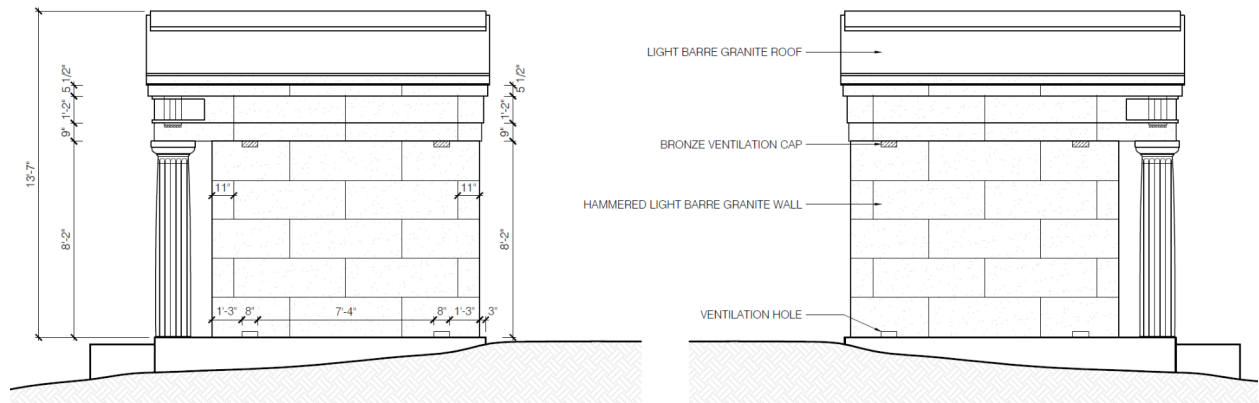


**Figure. 2:** Chuyan Zhou, *Context Photo 1*, 2024.



**Figure. 3:** Chuyan Zhou, *Doric Column*, 2024.





**Figure. 4:** Chuyan Zhou, *Side Elevations*, 2024.



**Figure. 5:** Chuyan Zhou, *Rear Elevation*, 2024.





**Figure. 6:** Chuyan Zhou, *Doors*, 2024.





**Figure. 7:** Chuyan Zhou, *Interior Elevation W/ Stained Glass Window*, 2024.

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**High Class Apartment for Riverside Drive.**

RIVERSIDE DRIVE.—Mrs. Albertina Miller, of No. 127 Riverside Drive, has commissioned George Fred Pelham, 503 5th av, to prepare plans for a 9-sty high-class elevator apartment house, to be erected on a plot 93.7x86.8x76.4, at Nos. 65-68 Riverside Drive, at an estimated cost of about \$450,000. There will be apartments for 20 families, with two families on a floor. It will, of course, be of fireproof construction, with exteriors of brick, stone and terra cotta, electric passenger and service elevators, etc. No contracts have yet been awarded. These will be made through the architect.

Figure. 8: *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, New York, 1905.