

The Eidlitz Mausoleum



Caroline Peters

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Project 2: Woodlawn Cemetery: Graphics and Research

Faculty: Andrew Dolkart, Claudia Kavenagh, Kate Reggev

Teaching Assistants: Noramon (Annie) Bodhidatta and Gwen Stricker

Woodlawn Cemetery

Established in 1863, Woodlawn Cemetery has been an integral part of the New York City landscape ever since its inception. Covering over 400 acres of land, and serving as the final resting place for a plethora of cultural icons, the site was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2011, and continues to be an active burial site, a unique feature to the majority of historic cemeteries.¹ Within this site, on the south side, in close proximity to the newest burial spaces being built, lies the Columbine lot. A combination of both burial plots and mausoleums, the lot appears quite unassuming. Just down the road is the mausoleum of Celia Cruz, a world-famous music artist, and thus large draw for tourists of the cemetery, meaning the Columbine lot may be a lot that a higher percentage of visitors actually encounter in their journeys through Woodlawn. On this lot sits a small gable-roofed mausoleum, affectionately nicknamed “The Doghouse” by staff based off its appearance. It stands out as being quite unique in the lot, as there are no mausoleums that appear particularly similar in style to the gable-roof. Owned by builder Robert Eidlitz, the structure was designed and built in 1933 by Presbrey-Leland, a prominent building business specializing in cemetery construction, in a neo-Gothic style that had become quite popular in the time of Mr. Eidlitz’s planning. As Robert Eidlitz was an architect by training, and a prominent builder by trade, his mausoleum serves as a look into the aesthetic choices of the 1930s, as well as the influence Presbrey-Leland held over the industry during their heyday. A number of Presbrey-Leland mausoleums can be viewed in Woodlawn, and Eidlitz’s is one that is sure to catch the eye.

¹ “Explore Our History.” The Woodlawn Cemetery. Accessed December 10, 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20131020220700/http://www.thewoodlawncemetery.org/history/explore-our-history/>.

Robert James Eidlitz & Sadie Scott Boulton Eidlitz

By the mid-19th century, the name Eidlitz had become entrenched as the premier name in New York City construction, with Marc Eidlitz establishing the firm in 1854. Immigrants from Austria, Marc and his elder brother Leopold, an accomplished architect, soon dominated the New York City grid with their works. Marc solely directed his firm until his eldest sons completed their higher education, all attending Cornell University.² While the eldest of his sons Alfred would only apprentice for a year before passing away in 1877, his sons Otto and Robert would go on to become key members in the firm, and lead it on some of its largest projects, including, but not limited to: The New York Clearing House, The New York Savings Bank, The Altman Building, Hotel Manhattan, The New York Stock Exchange, The Metropolitan Opera House, the St. Regis Hotel, Riverside Church, the Cloister Museum and even the Frick Art Gallery.³ After the death of Otto in 1928, Robert continued his work with the firm, being named president soon after.

While his career had been that of a builder, Robert's interest lay with the pursuit of architectural design, as that had been his college major during his studies at Cornell University and the Berlin Polytechnic. Robert became a leading collector of architectural medals during his lifetime, and had the opportunity to publish his collection of medals in a book entitled "Medals and Medallions Relating to Architects" in 1927. This text would eventually become the leading standard on the subject, and has remained such since Robert's death in 1935. After joining the American Numismatics Society in 1910, Eidlitz served on its Council from 1916 until his death

² Eidlitz, Marc & Son. *Marc Eidlitz & Son, 1854-1914*. New York, NY, 1914. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100759640>.

³Recheigl, Mila. "The Eidlitzes." In *Beyond the Sea of Beer: History of Immigration of Bohemians and Czechs to the New World and Their Contributions*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse

in 1935, and was a highly involved member. After his death, his collection was gifted to the society, and it has been regarded as one of the largest collections of medals relating to architecture and architects⁴. In part of his devotion to the society, Eidlitz's firm was responsible for the expansion of society's headquarters, and Eidlitz himself personally oversaw the project.⁵ While there are no primary sources that indicate Eidlitz designed any of buildings constructed by his company, the subject of his studies always remained a strong influence on his life.

As a Cornell alum, Eidlitz is mentioned multiple times in the student directories, including his involvement in societies such as the social fraternity Delta Upsilon.⁶ Upon analyzing these directories, such as *The Ten Year Book of Cornell University II*, his name is accompanied by a Mrs. Robert J. Eidlitz, nee Sadie Scott Boulton. Both were graduates of the 1885 class, with Robert in the Architecture program and Sadie studying Science and Letters. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1864, Sadie Scott Boulton was the daughter of George Boulton and his wife Mary. A childhood friend of Andrew Carnegie, George Boulton was the president of the Acme Oil Company, one of the first oil companies to supply western Pennsylvania with natural gas.⁷ After entering Cornell at age 17, Sadie became involved in on-campus organizations such as the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority, and presumably met her future husband during her time at the school, as no primary sources suggest otherwise.⁸ Even after her

⁴ "Robert J. Eidlitz Correspondence and Photographic Plates, 1925 - 1935." ARCHER | Archives: Robert J. Eidlitz correspondence and photographic plates, 1925-1935. American Numismatic Society Archives. <http://numismatics.org/archives/ark:/53695/nnan0047>.

⁵ "Eidlitz, Robert J. (Robert James), 1864-1935." Archer Authorities. Numismatics Society. Accessed September 27, 2019. <http://numismatics.org/authority/eidlitz>.

⁶ *The Delta Upsilon Quarterly*, Volume 5, 1887

⁷ "George Boulton Dies Suddenly on Visit East" Obituary of George Boulton. *The Iron Age*, Vol. XCVIII, July-December 1916

⁸ *Kappa Alpha Theta Journal*. 4th ed. Vol. 30, 1916.

graduation, Sadie maintained her relationship with both her former sorority and the Cornell alumni network, all the way up to her death in 1955.

Sadie and Robert were married on June 5th, 1890 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, Sadie's hometown.⁹ After their marriage, the Eidlitzes maintained homes in both New York City and Ardsley-on-Hudson. For 45 years the Eidlitzes maintained their lifestyle in New York and travelled together to destinations such as England and France.¹⁰ When Robert passed away in 1935, he left in his will half of the stocks of the construction company that he owned to his employees, as well as bequests to New York Presbyterian Hospital, Roosevelt Hospital, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Children, amongst others. Mrs. Eidlitz established the Robert James Eidlitz Fellowship in 1938, a scholarship still available annually to Cornell students studying architecture, in order to facilitate professional development for those who could not otherwise afford to do so.¹¹ Mrs. Eidlitz continued to travel solo to locales such as Los Angeles and Bermuda in her later years, as per a multitude of ship manifests bearing her name¹².

The Mausoleum



⁹ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; *Pennsylvania County Marriages, 1852-1973*; County: *Allegheny*; Year Range: 1889 - 1890; Roll Number: 549757

¹⁰ 1911; Arrival, The Rotterdam: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Microfilm Roll: Roll 1678; Line: 29; Page Number: 119

¹¹ "Robert James Eidlitz Fellowship." AAP. Cornell University. Accessed September 30, 2019. <https://aap.cornell.edu/academics/architecture/about/fellowships>.

¹² Year: 1937; Arrival: *New York, New York*; Microfilm Serial: T715, 1897-1957; Microfilm Roll: Roll 6079; Line: 30; Page Number: 92

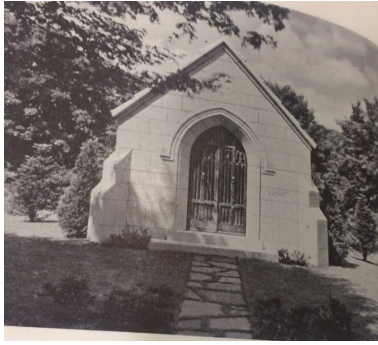


Fig. 1: The mausoleum of Mr. Charles D. Berta, as presented in the 1932 Presbrey-Leland Catalogue

In 1933, Robert paid for and arranged the construction of a Presbrey-Leland designed mausoleum on his previously-bought plot in Woodlawn Cemetery. While Robert himself was a builder and trained architect, there is no evidence that suggests he designed the mausoleum, leaving its design and building in the hands of Presbrey-Leland studios.

The design of the Eidlitz mausoleum is similar to one of a Mr. Charles D.

Berta that was illustrated in the 1932 Presbrey-Leland catalogue, listed under

the style “Gothic and Gothicised Mausoleums”.¹³ As Eidlitz had built a plethora of Gothic-style and inspired buildings during his career, as well as studied and travelled abroad to Europe during his lifetime, it is possible Eidlitz may have picked the style of mausoleum based upon his and Mrs. Eidlitz’s preferred aesthetic, although we cannot know for certain. What is interesting about the design of the mausoleum is its lack of ornamentation, to the degree that a casual passerby may even consider it “plain.” The other Gothic-style mausoleums represented in the Presbrey-Leland catalogue tend to be much more

ornamented, showcasing elements such as multi-stepped entrances, crosses, and in some cases even small towers. However, in the case of the Eidlitz mausoleum, the ornamentation mainly is the the bronze quadrille window and the bronze door (based upon the green-tinged color of deterioration), with the rest of the facade being sparse in decoration. While there are no primary source documents that definitively conclude Mr. Eidlitz’s reasons for picking this style, the



ST. THOMAS' CHURCH AND PARISH BUILDINGS, MAMARONECK, N. Y.

Fig. 2: St. Thomas Church and Parish in Mamaroneck, NY, an example of Gothic-style architecture built by Eidlitz

¹³ Inc., Presbrey-Leland. *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials*. New York, NY: Presbrey-Leland Studios, 1932

design draws a viewer's eye to the architectural elements of the building, such as the sloped roof and arched doorway, instead of any ornamentation. In a similar vein, unlike other mausoleums in the area, the Eidlitz name is quite small in scale to the mausoleum as a whole, and is carved into the base of the building instead of above the door, as is commonplace. While it could be merely a preferred aesthetic choice, these choices do allow for the design of the mausoleum to shine through, and become the true focus of a casual viewer. Again, while there are no such documents that confirm this, as the correspondence on Mr. Eidlitz's end is quite brief, Mr. Eidlitz's passion for architecture may have been what influenced this decision to lean towards a simplified design. The original blueprints drawn up tell the same story, and the only changes that appear to have been made between the blueprint and mausoleum itself is the design of the front door.

In some cases, this choice of a minimal design may have been an economic solution in able to afford a mausoleum, however, this does not seem to have been the case with the Eidlitzes. When Robert died, he left an estate worth over \$2 million in 1935, which would be worth over \$37 million today.¹⁴ Thus, while Presbrey-Leland advertised their solutions, the Eidlitzes may have had alternative reasons for choosing the company to erect their mausoleum. The benefit of Presbrey-Leland having a Woodlawn outpost, as well as a studio on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, close to the Eidlitz's residence, may have been key factors in the decision. Not only that, but the company allowed for the personalization of design, as well as materials, all under their services of being a company that specialized in memorial and monument building. During

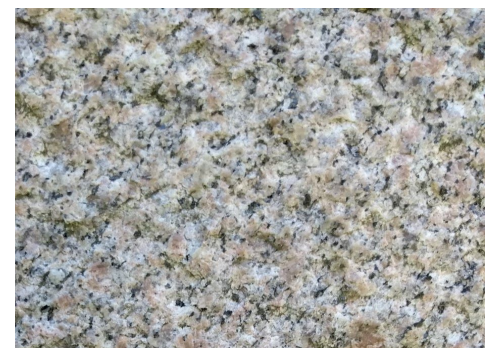


Fig. 6: Red Westerly Rhode Island Granite, Eidlitz Mausoleum

¹⁴ *Robert J. Edlitz Estate*, The Wall Street Journal, New York, NY: 1937

the design process, Mr. Eidlitz chose a red Westerly Rhode Island granite for the external stone, and the Presbrey-Leland granite from West Dummerston, Vermont for the floor of the mausoleum.¹⁵ Eidlitz specifically requested Westerly Rhode Island granite be used as the exterior stone in his contract, as



Fig. 7 Detail of Tennessee Pink Marble walls of Eidlitz mausoleum



Fig. 8 Interior of Eidlitz Mausoleum, Tennessee Pink "Marble" walls

the Presbrey-Leland granite was actually originally typed into the contract for the chosen exterior stone, then crossed out and replaced with Westerly Rhode Island granite, which on-site visual analysis of the stone confirms is in place. Inside the mausoleum, both the interiors walls and sarcophagi are made of "Tennessee Marble", which is in actuality a pink-colored limestone with distinctive veins.

While the interior is quite simple in its design of just the sarcophagus and a small bench, mirroring the exterior aesthetic, it does include an amber-colored stained glass window featuring symmetrical designs

depicting natural elements, as well as an ornamental vase and bench, all of which were present in the original contract.



Fig. 9 Detail of stained glass window and vase, Eidlitz Mausoleum

¹⁵ Presbrey-Leland Studios, *Agreement between Presbrey-Leland Studios and Robert J. Eidlitz on the erection of his mausoleum*, August 2nd, 1933.

Conditions of Mausoleum



Fig. 10 Side elevation of mausoleum, with conditions visible (biological, lime mortar deposits)

Considering that the mausoleum is over eighty years old, the materials have held up somewhat well, as the foundation walls are structurally sound. Overall, considering the Eidlitzes provided a \$3,000 perpetual care fund in 1935, which has most likely run out by this point, the building's structure has remained solid on the exterior side walls. However, problems become apparent once one starts to examine the roof, as well as the other point in which water can enter. It should be noted that the roof eaves have largely been able to protect the exterior walls from the biological growth seen on the base

and roof, thus allowing for the red Westerly granite to be seen in these areas,

but much of the roof's functions have been compromised. The roof and base

have developed dark streaks over the years, that on-site visual inspection points to being

biological growth, with specific type to be determined. From a visual identification, the growth

could be a cyanobacteria or microalgae growth, and if either is the case the growth may actually

be leading to damage to the roofing materials, thanks to water retention by the growths.¹⁶ The

recommended solution to biogrowths such as these is the use of a biocide on the growth and then

removal by a cleaning agent, with periodic follow ups.¹⁷ These growths are known to be more

common in humid climates, and thus requires follow ups for materials in climates prone to

higher humidity.

¹⁶ Pinna, Daniela. *Coping with Biological Growth on Stone Heritage Objects: Methods, Products, Applications, and Perspectives*. Oakville, ON: AAP Apple Academic Press, 2017.

¹⁷ "Masonry Cleaning: Removal of Atmospheric Soiling, Graffiti, Stains, and Biogrowth." Section 04510.01. City of New Orleans, n.d.

<http://www.nola.gov/getattachment/18802386-521b-4b03-9aeb-2aea08a6ec9f/Masonry-Cleaning-Gr.>

On each of the corners of the building, just under the eaves of the roof, appear what would seem to be lime mortar deposits, although no testing was conducted to confirm such, just the on-site visual observation of calcite deposits. These deposits point to a much larger issue at play, that water has somehow gotten into the joints and has allowed for these minerals to become displaced. While this itself is concerning, when one examines the roof to try and pinpoint a possible cause for this water issue, what may be the most likely cause of the water damage appears even more concerning on closer inspection. The roof ridge, which is a separate piece of masonry from the side roofstones, has large cracks along the joints on both sides. While in the original plans for the mausoleum it was specified that the ridge stone would have lips to cover the joints, it seems as if this may have actually backfired, and instead concentrated the elements into the weaker spaces near the joints. Thus, these cracks may be the beginning of a chain of water damage in the mausoleum, however, this can not be concluded

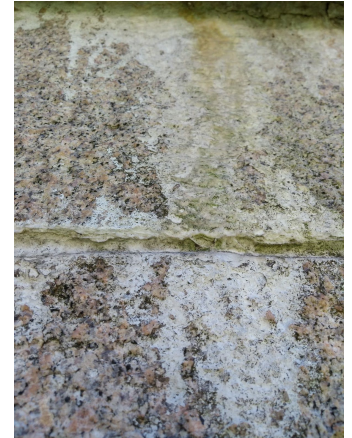


Fig. 11 Detail shot of calcite deposits, Eidlitz Mausoleum

until further analysis is performed. The repair of the joints may end up being the start of the solution, but will require more in depth study to conclude this definitively.



Fig. 12 The crack on the roof ridge can be seen here, extending from the sides to center

Inside, there are quite a few issues, some of which may be related to this structural issues of the mausoleum previously mentioned, although it cannot be confirmed. The interior floor is covered in

biological growth, specifically what appears to be a form of green algae. The algae is mainly concentrated in the middle and front sections of the interior, and does in fact line up with the cracked joint on the roof ridge, and thus may

point to this failure in the roof. The algae has gotten to the point that it has started to grow on the side of Mrs. Eidlitz's sarcophagus, and may eventually spread to Mr. Eidlitz's as well. While there are no puddles on the floor, the algae is very much alive and moist, indicating that there is an ongoing moisture issue within the space. The back walls and ceiling also show signs of water damage, pointing to the roof once again as a potential cause. The interior room also has a musty smell, one of the signs that the National Parks Service lists as a sign of moisture damage in areas of high humidity or poorly ventilated space.¹⁸ Thus, the vents of the mausoleum should be thoroughly examined for any sort of blockage or damage to the system, as this could also contribute to the growth of algae within the space. As the original plans do include a small attic space above, it is crucial to examine the roof and attic thoroughly, as they may well lead to the discovery of the cause of this water damage. Until the definite cause is found through a thorough examination, cleaning of biogrowth will not be of use, as the conditions will persist and it will return. However, if the cause for the moisture issues are found through examination of the vents and roof/attic, there is a good chance that repair of the issue and maintenance of the structure will benefit its future greatly.



Fig. 13 Biological growth on floor & side of Mrs. Eidlitz's sarcophagus

¹⁸ "Preservation Brief 39: Holding the Line: Controlling Unwanted Moisture in Historic Buildings." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed December 10, 2019. <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/39-control-unwanted-moisture.htm>.