

# Problem 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis - Stauffen Mausoleum

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## Mausoleum of Ernest Stauffen, Jr.

Ernest Stauffen, Jr., was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1883 to a German father and a mother from Ohio. His father worked for the pharmaceutical company Sharpe & Dohme as the secretary and treasurer since 1880.<sup>1</sup> Stauffen, Jr., attended Columbia University and graduated in 1904. He then attended New York Law School until 1906. In November of 1907, he and Mary Brent Stewart would wed; after her death, he would remarry to Theodora B. Stauffen.<sup>2</sup> Although he achieved his law degree, Stauffen was an incredibly accomplished businessman that worked in many departments. For two years following law school, he worked at the firm Kirby & Wood, after which he became a partner in Gould & Wilkie. Interaction with the clients at Gould & Wilkie led him to the position of the first Vice President of the Associated Dry Goods Company which eventually acquired Lord & Taylor. He would remain the head of their retail business. After four years, he would start the beginning of a trend- working in banking. First of these positions was with Liberty National Bank where he was the Vice President. Throughout his life he would become either chairman, director or executive of many companies including New York Trust Company, Marine Midland Trust Company, Manufacturers Trust Company, Central Savings Bank, Coca-Cola Bottling Company of New York, International Products Corporation, Pacific Lumber Company, and Sharpe & Dohme, Inc., among many others.<sup>3</sup> Stauffen was part of high society in New York City with his name appearing in the *New York Times* Society section often. He was even elected as Chairman of the Special Committee to Arouse Patriotism during World War I.<sup>4</sup> In October 1916, Mary Brent died from tuberculosis. Records indicate that three years later on October 20, 1919, Stauffen purchased a plot in Woodlawn Cemetery. He and Ernest Stauffen, Sr., purchased adjoining plots at the same time. As of May 20, 1920, the architectural firm Walker and Gillette was commissioned for a mausoleum; and by July 1920, the drawings had been sent to Woodlawn.<sup>5</sup>

Walker and Gillette was an incredible prolific firm in the first half of the twentieth century. It was a partnership between A. Stewart Walker and Leon Gillette established in 1906 and remained so until 1945 when Gillette died. Walker was a Harvard alumnus, while Gillette graduated from University of

Pennsylvania and later attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The buildings they designed show a strong knowledge of many different styles - Colonial Revival, Spanish Revival, Beaux Arts, Neoclassical, Georgian Revival, Medieval Revival, and especially Art Deco.<sup>6</sup> Early in their career, they worked on private townhouses and office buildings designed for people like John Jacob Astor, Harold Vanderbilt, and William Loew. Then in the 1920s, their expanded portfolio included much larger and public commercial commissions including the Fuller Building and the First National Bank of N.Y. City. They continued with banking commissions in the 1930s and into the 40s and brought their practice to Cuba, Argentina, Panama and France. Following Gillette's death, Walker partnered with Alfred Easton Poor who would partner with Albert Swanke in 1952 (after Walker's death). Swanke would then partner with Richard Hayden and Edward Connell in 1979 to form Swanke Hayden Connell, Ltd. Consequently, the present Swanke Hayden Connell Architects consider Walker & Gillette to be the early history of their firm. After Gillette's death in 1945, the new firm restored the US Capitol and the original Senate and Supreme Court Chambers. Much later on, the firm would conserve the Statue of Liberty. From the two man partnership in 1906 to present day SHC Architects, the company has expanded and has satellite firms all over the globe.<sup>7</sup>

Walker and Gillette presented mausoleum plans that appropriately reflected parts of their own style. The designs were of a relatively small (14'3") mausoleum primarily constructed of Stoney Creek Granite (on the exterior) and Grey Tennessee marble on the interior. It allowed room only for the six catacombs and a narrow "hall" space. Pennsylvania Ribbon slate lines these catacomb beds. The construction was handled by Presbrey-Coykendall, Co. Three stacked catacombs rested on either side of the hall. One narrow window sits at the rear of the structure exposing the one foot thickness of the granite.<sup>8</sup> The building has very little detail, that which it has is very subtle. A bronze door molded with what seems to be a templar knight, chamfered corners, the etched name, and a stepped roof are all the details the exterior supports. The designers allowed the beauty of the stone to take the show; the structure is reminiscent of the banks they designed, particularly the East River Savings Bank on Cortlandt Street (1933). They were clearly comfortable working with stone.

The natural beauty of the granite ties into a much larger image; the landscaping of the Stauffen, Jr., plot plays an important role in the way this mausoleum is experienced. The Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, MA, were originally commissioned for the landscaping. Although these plans were abandoned, what did get planted is very much in the Olmsted manner of creating a landscape that could feel as though it were unplanned or natural. Four large pines border the rear plot line, and a cryptomeria grows on the west side of the structure with a Juniper on the east. The pines tower over the mausoleum and create a small enclosure. Records indicate that overgrown azaleas, barberry, and ivy plagued the site and were removed in 1994. It is not mentioned who originally planned for these plants.<sup>9</sup> The position of the mausoleum is on the edge of a small slope and generates an effect of the structure emerging from the earth giving it a very natural looking presence. The design also supports this feeling. The battered walls, chamfered corners, and curved base gives the illusion of upward growth similar to the trees surrounding it. This also tones down the heaviness brought on by such a large amount of stone. The lack of open space on the exterior facades furthers this heaviness, however, the contrast between the polished stone and natural stone gives it some depth, while the polish seems to soften the exterior. Despite the softness, the building is incredibly grounded. This could possibly be brought on by the use of simple geometry in the design. Simplified, the building is basically a square structure sitting upon a rectangular base, and capped off by a triangular roof. It lacks curves and arabesque forms; all lines are straight and edges are sharp.

The exterior hints at the interior plan. The centrally focused door and window help show where the open space may be. Although the exterior stonework does not line up with the catacombs, the three rows of stone reflect the stacking of three catacombs each on the interior. The stepped, pyramid shaped roof possibly appropriately reflects the Egyptian structures which symbolize eternal afterlife. Although other Egyptian inspired mausoleums exist in Woodlawn Cemetery, the Stauffen Mausoleum stands apart from them and the Neoclassical or Greek Revival mausoleums that are in abundance in the area by the lack of temple-like details. It also differs because of the stone; no others have polished pink granite.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Jews of Baltimore: a Historical Summary of their Progress and Status as Citizens of Baltimore from Early Days to the year 1910," Internet archive, [http://www.archive.org/stream/jewsofbaltimoreh00blum/jewsofbaltimoreh00blum\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/jewsofbaltimoreh00blum/jewsofbaltimoreh00blum_djvu.txt).

<sup>2</sup> "Miss Stewart Engaged," *New York Times*, September 3, 1907, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> "E. Stauffen, Jr., 67, Long a Banker, Dies," *New York Times*, November 30, 1950, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> "War Speakers Elected," *New York Times*, July 23, 1917, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Stauffen, Jr., Records, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives 1863-1999, Avery Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

<sup>6</sup> "Walker and Gillette: Ingenious Architects of the Early 20th Century," Preservation League of New York State Newsletter, v. 14, no. 3, p. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Studio History, Swanke Hayden Connell Architects, 2009, [www.shca.com/studio-history/](http://www.shca.com/studio-history/).

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Stauffen, Jr., Records, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives 1863-1999, Avery Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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