

Eccles Mausoleum

Woodlawn Cemetery



Andrea N. Sforza

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Faculty: Françoise Bollack, Ward Dennis, Andrew Dolkart

The Eccles Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery

The Eccles Family

The story of Silas Wright Eccles is one of newly acquired American wealth from industrialization. Silas was born in Washington, Illinois in 1853 to a farming family from Kentucky. By 1880 he had married Margaret Eccles and was living in Denver, Colorado where he worked as a railroad agent for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Company.¹ His career in the railroad, mining, and smelting industries moved him and his family to Utah, California, and finally to New York City by 1910. He moved through the ranks of the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) and became associated with the Guggenheims.² By the time of his death in 1917, (due to health reasons he was living in Florida at the time) Silas Eccles, in addition to being the Vice President of ASARCO, was the President of the Alaska Steamship Company, President of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad, and President of the Nevada Northern Railroad.³

Within the year after Silas' death, his wife Margaret Williamson Eccles arranged for the construction of the family's mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery. There is an unfortunate lack of information on the women buried in the Eccles mausoleum. Other than census documents indicating her birth in 1860 in Illinois and a passport from 1926, no other records were uncovered. She and Silas moved around the country together and they adopted their daughter, Mildred, who was born in California in 1893.

The second name on the mausoleum is Preston Locke, Mildred's husband. His job, also with ASARCO, and his name inscription on the mausoleum indicates that he was very close to the Eccles family. Preston St. Clair Locke was born in 1888 in California and suffered an untimely tragic death in 1938 when he fell from a boat off a pier in Vancouver.⁴ Mildred and Preston had at least one son, Preston Locke Jr. who was the executor of the Woodlawn plot after Mildred's death in 1982.

William Ernst Bennett was the third person to be buried in the Eccles mausoleum in 1936. William also had ties with several large mining corporations and worked for railroad companies early in his career. His obituary states that he "came to New York in 1901 to be associated with Silas Eccles."⁵ The exact relationship to the Eccles family is unclear and his wife, who lived on after his death, is not buried with him in the Eccles mausoleum.

¹ United States Federal Census Record, 1880.

² "American Smelting and Refining Company," *Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History*, Ed. Thomas Carson and Mary Bonk, Vol. 1, Detroit: Gale, 1999, 39-40, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.

³ "Silas W. Eccles: Prominent Financier Dies in St. Augustine," *New York Tribune*, January 1, 1918, 11, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*.

⁴ "Pasadena Man Drowns in Fall" *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1938, A1, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*.

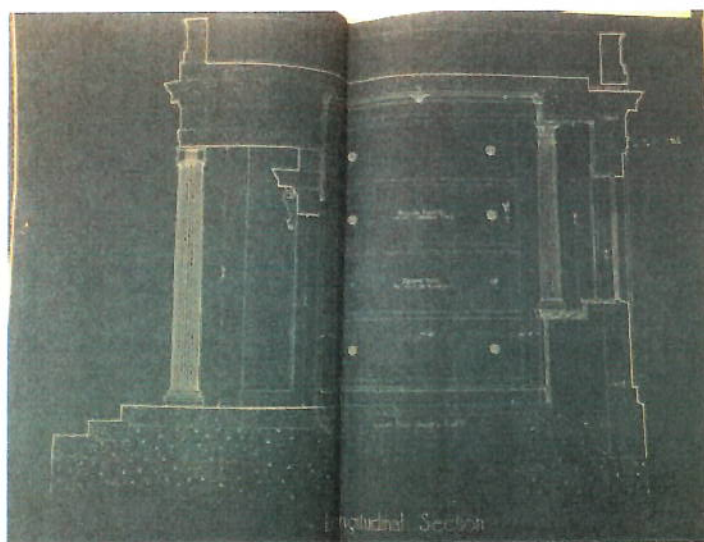
⁵ "William Ernst Bennett Dies; Mining Corporation Aid," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 22, 1939, 14A, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*.

Members of the Henry Meyer family are also buried on the Eccles plot at Woodlawn. The first to be buried was a 2 year old named Helen Meyer. According to Woodlawn records she died in 1907. When Margaret had the mausoleum built, there are records of Helen being buried in the ground on the east side, near the rear of the mausoleum. It may be possible that Helen was already buried in that location or somewhere on the newly acquired Eccles plot when Margaret purchased it. The cremated remains of Henry H. Meyer joined his daughter with his passing in 1951. Correspondence exists between Mildred, the executor of the mausoleum at the time and now living in New Orleans, and Woodlawn to arrange for Henry's ashes be buried with his daughter.

Reverend Dr. Henry Meyer was an educator, minister, advocate, and social worker. His most notable position was as the Dean of the Boston University School of Religious and Social Work from 1929 to 1942.⁶ His work took him and his wife Minna McEuen travelling internationally. Minna's cremated remains were buried in the same grave with her husband and daughter upon her death in 1971. There is no grave marker at this site, just a record from Woodlawn with the location on the plan.

The Architecture

Margaret Eccles' decision to choose the Presbrey-Coykendall company to build the mausoleum is not unusual as they were one of the most prominent companies for funeral monuments in the area. In fact, by mid-1916, Presbrey-Coykendall was the second largest monument plant in the world and was in the process of erecting an addition to their plant in Barre.⁷ Just two years after the completion of the Eccles' mausoleum, this company merged with another major monuments company to form the Presbrey-Leland Company. They advertised the new company as combining "Presbrey traditions in craftsmanship" with "Leland ideals in design"⁸



Original Presbrey-Coykendall Drawings:
Longitudinal Section

⁶ "Rev. Henry Meyer, Retired Educator: Dean Emeritus of the Boston U. School of Religious and Social Work Is Dead," *New York Times*, October 8, 1951, 18. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁷ "Barre the Greatest Granite Center." *American Stone Trade* XV.10, May 1916.

⁸ "Announcing the Presbrey-Leland Company, Inc.," *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening* XXX.6, 1920, 183. Google Books.

The Eccles mausoleum is listed in the Presbrey-Leland Book of Memorials that was published in 1929. Though the specific architect is unknown, it is clear that Margaret customized the look of this mausoleum.⁹ The Sweet's Catalog for the company boasted their collaboration with many accomplished architects of the day, including McKim, Mead & White, but they also employed their own architects, which were probably the designers of the Eccles mausoleum. Dolkart confirms this sentiment in Sylvan Cemetery by stating, "While some monument firms produced awkward, ill-proportioned work, many were anything but second-rate artisans. Several firms had talented architects on their staffs."¹⁰ This is evident in the Sweets catalog that boasts about the architecture firms that they have done work with.¹¹ While Presbrey's name is associated with dozens of monuments and mausoleums in Woodlawn, by observation, Eccles' is not exactly the same as any other. Certain elements, such as the Ionic columns, are repeated on other Presbrey mausoleums. The granite parapet with carved panels seems unique to this mausoleum.

The mausoleum is constructed upon a foundation of "rubble and concrete". The exterior structure is composed of large slabs of Barre granite from the Presbrey-Coykendall plant in Barre, Vermont. The entire interior of the mausoleum is clad with highly polished Tennessee marble. Most slabs are about 2" thick. Although not visible, dark Pennsylvania slate composes the interior of the catacombs, according to the specifications.¹²

Bronze features on the mausoleum include the doors, the window frame, the ventilator grills and mesh, and the sockets and rosettes on the catacomb tablets. The door of the mausoleum is composed of both cast and wrought bronze elements with plate glass behind these elements. Although the extent of customization for the door is unknown, Margaret did choose to inscribe the initials "SWL" in an interweaving pattern that is repeated on the lower portion of both door panels. The total cost of the mausoleum payed to Presbrey-Coykendall was \$18,750.00, not including the cost of the bronze and the custom stained glass window.

The frosted textured window that is set in the rear wall of the mausoleum is not original. An inter-office memo from Woodlawn Cemetery dated Nov. 1, 1983 reports that a gardener noticed the window missing. The gardener made a report but he was unsure when the robbery took place.¹³ Preston Locke Jr. was notified through mail but the letter was never received at his Nevada address and it was returned to the Woodlawn Cemetery, still unopened in the archive file.

The stolen window was presumably a custom Tiffany window. There were several other Tiffany windows stolen from private mausoleums, not only at Woodlawn, but in other cemeteries as well around the same time that the Eccles' window was stolen. "This nefarious practice came to appalling light in 1999 during a much-publicized case exposing the practice... Cemeteries, strapped for funds and

⁹ *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials*. Presbrey-Leland Studios, 1929.

¹⁰ Andrew Scott Dolkart, "Designing Woodlawn: Buildings and Landscapes," *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn* (New York: Woodlawn Conservancy, 2014), 59.

¹¹ "The Presbrey-Coykendall Co.," *Sweet's Architectural Catalogue Fifteenth Annual Edition* (New York: Sweet's Catalogue Service, 1920), 196. Google Books.

¹² Eccles Mausoleum Drawings, Eccles File, Woodlawn Collection, Avery Library.

¹³ "Inter Office Memo Woodlawn Cemetery" dated Nov. 1, 1983; Eccles File, Woodlawn Collection, Avery Library.

unable to offer the necessary security became easy targets for modern day tomb robbers intent on satisfying the demand for Tiffany windows. At Woodlawn alone, there are at least twenty windows known to have been removed by theft during the late 1970s to early 1990s.¹⁴ Unfortunately no photographs were taken of the Eccles' window prior to the looting and the family provided no description of it in records.

The Site

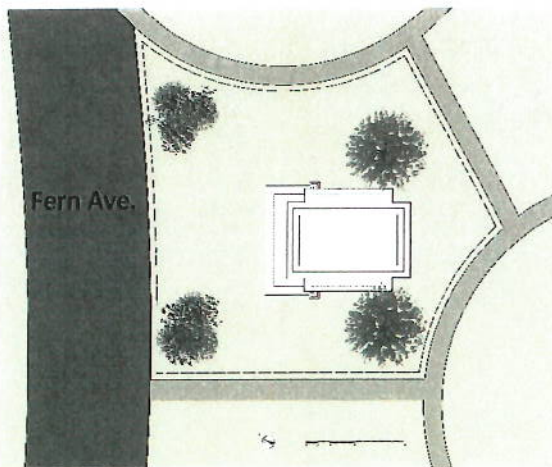
Mt. Vernon Avenue was once a road separating a section of Woodlawn at the northeast corner. The avenue was demapped in 1905 allowing Woodlawn to reconnect and acquire an additional parallelogram section.¹⁵ Although difficult to infer from the map, the Eccles plot was right along the edge of this area and might lie within the new 1905 section. Aerial photographs of this section from 1920 show a much more sparsely developed area than what exists today.

The approach to the Eccles Mausoleum via the Jerome Avenue entrances takes the visitor east down the curved Fern Avenue. All of the mausoleums located on this particular stretch of Fern Avenue are set back about 50 feet from the avenue. They are spaced evenly down the road. If the visitor took the route from the original entrance to Woodlawn on the northeast corner of the property, they would have come from the opposite direction down Fern Avenue. The view from this path is quite different as there are large shrubs blocking the views of the mausoleum, until finally the mausoleum is revealed.

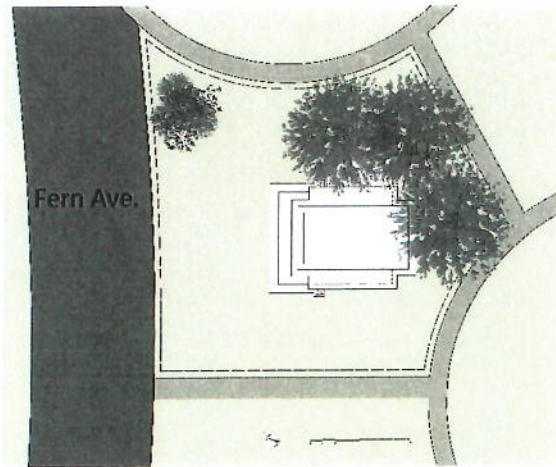
Records of landscaping plans from 1934 exist in the archive files and were approved by Margaret Eccles. However, these plans were never executed, possibly due to her death just over a year later in 1936. The large spruce trees that currently exist on the site, providing a nice backdrop when viewing the mausoleum from the road, were called out to be removed. Margaret chose to have 2 new, much smaller Taxus trees flanking the mausoleum towards the rear. She also wanted more, smaller Taxus shrubs planted at the corners of the lot along Fern Avenue. Overgrown shrubs do exist in the northwest corner but these were called out to be removed in the 1934 plan. This simple and carefully thought out landscaping, slightly rising up and away from the street, combined with the set back placement of the monument atop an elevated base, were designed to add to the stately appearance of the Eccles family mausoleum.

¹⁴ Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, "Behind Closed Doors: Notable Stained Glass Windows at Woodlawn Cemetery," *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn* (New York: Woodlawn Conservancy), 2014, 141.

¹⁵ Charles D. Warren, "Garden Necropolis: Planning Woodlawn's Landscape," *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn* (New York: Woodlawn Conservancy), 2014, 43.



1934 Site Plan with Landscape (never realized)



Site Plan with Landscape (as exists today)

The footprint of the lot is unusual because it borders two circular shaped plots. One of these is adjacent on the east and the other is behind it, slightly to the southwest. There are remnants of a 3' wide path completely surrounding and following the shape of the plot. "The growing use of paved paths to separate lots coincided with new rules made in 1876 forbidding fences, hedges, or enclosures on new lots."¹⁶ These paths appear frequently throughout this area of the cemetery even if they are no longer maintained.

Visual Analysis

While approaching the Eccles mausoleum, the visitor's eyes are drawn to the areas of texture on the stone structure. Although the sides are very flat, the eye is drawn up to the entablature around the entirety of the structure, especially up to the cornice. Above the cornice sits the parapet which is the same height from bottom to top as the entablature. The parapet does not follow the shape of the footprint of the structure, but instead is a rectangle emphasizing the width of the portico. The motif is a flowery, renaissance inspired carved design in the granite. The shadows on a sunny day especially highlight this feature. Being all the way at the top, this might be done to draw one's eyes up, making the monument appear even taller than it is.

The front portico area is especially textured. Changes in depth of the façade, combined with the four fluted columns and the steps rising from the ground, give indication that this area is the focal point of the approach. This is the destination point to walk towards. The urns set on plinths level with that the main floor widen the overall appearance of the monument and draw your eyes outward as well as up.

The entrance is located in a central recess in the façade within the portico and is behind four fluted Ionic columns. A comparison might be made here to the front entrance of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Richmond, Virginia, a design inspired by Neo-Classicism as filtered through English interpretations of the Classical started in the Renaissance. While the famous garden façade has an entry

¹⁶ Charles D. Warren, "Garden Necropolis: Planning Woodlawn's Landscape," *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn* (New York: Woodlawn Conservancy), 2014, 39.

that projects from the façade, the front entrance is also recessed within the portico behind four columns. Although there are several classic Greek motifs adorning the mausoleum such as the column capitals and the Greek key pattern on the urns, door, and interior floor, overall, the design has a Renaissance inspired style.



Thomas Jefferson's Monticello: Entry Portico Precedent

During the Renaissance in Europe, the classical forms were interpreted and popularized. Palladio's engravings of the orders were published. The columns on the Eccles mausoleum conform with the proportions outlined on these engravings. Other Renaissance ideas are also incorporated on the exterior. The stone parapet sitting atop the main body of the mausoleum adds a great deal of decoration. A precedent for this design might be Andrea Palladio's Loggia Bernarda begun in 1571 in Vicenza, Italy. The third story on this house conveys a similar style. The lines from the columns are expressed through the forms. The rectilinearity is also similar. As with other Renaissance architecture, "The classical elements of column, entablature, pediment, and arch remained, but the intellectual formal austerity was replaced with a new, deliberate sensualism."¹⁷ This describes the forms on the Eccles mausoleum as well when taking out the pediment and arch portion of the statement.



Andrea Palladio's Loggia Bernarda: Parapet Precedent

¹⁷ Leland M. Roth, *Understanding Architecture: Its Elements, History, and Meaning*, (Colorado: Westview Press), 2007, 393.

Even at first glance, without studying the proportions or style, it is apparent that this mausoleum is pleasing to the eye. The front and rear facades are completely symmetrical while the side facades are symmetrical in form only. The front façade has similar rectangles – the entrance and the overall shape of the central bay have the same proportions. In plan, the space created between the columns and the recess of the entrance is 1/3 the size of the space within the mausoleum, making the inside feel like it is opening up and drawing you in through the narrow entry decorative bronze doors.

The columns on the interior, although less than half the size of those on the exterior, are still kept in correct proportions and are Corinthian in style. They sit upon a deep window sill shelf, almost conveying an altar in this interior space. The order and the way it is used could be exemplifying the hierarchy of this interior space. The inside of the mausoleum is a much more sacred space where only the immediate family would go inside to visit their deceased relatives.

Conclusion

The Eccles Mausoleum is a visual statement of the family's quick rise to success and wealth. The large granite slab construction, quality materials, and the unique Renaissance style have conveyed this message to visitors of the cemetery since its' construction in 1918. Although seemingly abandoned today and stripped of one of its' unique decorative features (the Tiffany window), the Eccles Mausoleum is still structurally sound and visually striking nearly 100 years later.