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Woodlawn Cemetery Biographical Research:

La Scala Mausoleum

Introduction

In the first half of the 1800's, the main cemetery used by New Yorkers as their final resting ground, was the Green-Wood cemetery in Brooklyn. However, in the 1860s, a group of affluent residents decided it was time a well-designed cemetery, easily accessible from Manhattan, was built; And so, in 1863, the Woodlawn Cemetery was established in the Bronx.¹ The cemetery, tastefully designed and kept by the Woodlawn corporation from the start, attracted people from all kinds as economic backgrounds as visitors and as lots purchasers, with its landscaping and interesting rotundas.² However, a key characteristic that makes Woodlawn such an interesting place is the autonomy for the lot owners to design their plots, especially the more affluent crowd who purchased big enough lots to build mausoleums for themselves, and, or, loved ones, and often designed them with the help of notable architects and mausoleum designers, also known as "memorialists".³

Walking through the mausoleums at Woodlawn can really tell you quite a bit about a person and their family, by observing the architectural styles and materials chosen, as well as how well kept the building itself is. I found this to be the case with the mausoleum I selected to document, the La Scala Mausoleum, located on Park Avenue, owned by Rosalia La Scala. Since there is not much information available about the La Scala family themselves, this paper will mainly focus on what was available in the Woodlawn Archives, at Columbia University's Avery Library.

¹ Woodlawn Cemetery, "Our History", 2022.

² Andrew Dolkart, "Designing Woodlawn," in *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn*, ed. Charles D Warren, 53.

³ Andrew Dolkart, "Designing Woodlawn," in *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art & Landscape at Woodlawn*, ed. Charles D Warren, 59.

Site and Mausoleum Context

Although not located on one of the characteristic circular lots, the La Scala lot is nothing short of impressive. It is a pentagonal shaped lot (fig. 1). with direct access to Park Avenue through the entrance, which faces west. It is the second plot north, at the intersection of Park Avenue and Oakland Avenue, and the 224.44 ft² mausoleum itself is located directly in the center of the plot, with no natural elements around except for two pine trees, the height of the mausoleum itself, framing the building (fig. 2).

The contract with the specifications of the mausoleum between The La Scala family and the contractor (Cardo Bros. & Company Inc.) was created in December 1941, therefore the lot was purchased at some point before that by Rosalia La Scala.⁴ Rosalia most likely decided to build the mausoleum for her husband, Rosario La Scala, who had passed away at 55 years old on May 7th, 1941 from respiratory paralysis.⁵ This is interesting as there is another family member, Salvatore La Scala, the father of Rosario La Scala, buried in the mausoleum with a much earlier death date- October 30th, 1933. In total, there are eight people buried in the catacombs, which are above the ground, and are distributed equally between two parallel facing walls. The southward facing interior wall contains all the men -Rosario La Scala (11/16/1886 - 05/07/1941), Salvatore La Scala (06/16/1847 - 10/30/1933), Cologero J. La Scala (02/18/1909 - 09/07/1965), and Salvatore La Scala (10/26/1905 - 05/07/1992) - while the northward facing interior wall contains all the women - Angela La Scala (05/07/1914 - 10/26/65), Rosalia La Scala (09/27/1888 -

⁴ Cardo Bros & Co. "General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery." 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

⁵ "Rosario La Scala," Index to Death Certificates, 1862-1948, New York, NY.

01/09/77), Marilyn A. La Scala (09/12/1942 - 08/04/1994), and Eleanor I. La Scala (09/30/1910 - 10/19/1995).

La Scala Family Historical Context

The La Scala family is originally from Sicily, Italy, with Rosario La Scala arriving to Ellis Island in 1902, at the age of sixteen.⁶ It is possible that Rosario's father, Salvatore, had arrived to the United States on his own, 2 years earlier, but it is not known for sure if he came before, at the same time, or after his son Rosario.⁷ Rosalia La Scala, already married to Rosario at the time, arrived to the United States from Naples in 1903; Rosario was waiting for her in New York.⁸ Rosalia (originally Rosalia Catania) was the sister of Ciro Terranova's wife, the infamous leader of the Morello Crime Family.⁹ A few decades later, in 1936, her son Salvatore, married Angela Terranova (who is buried at the La Scala mausoleum), the daughter of Vincent the Tiger, another notorious member of the Italian-American crime organization scene, as the leader of the Morello crime family (known today as the Genovese crime family).¹⁰ In 1917, Rosario submitted a petition for naturalization in the United States.¹¹

Rosario's draft registration card for World War I in 1918 listed him as a wage earner at a bakery called "... (the handwriting for the first portion of the name was not legible) & Freud

⁶ "Rosalia La Scala," US Naturalization Records, 1882-1944, New York, NY.

⁷ "Salvatore La Scala," US Book Indexes to Passenger Lists, 1899-1940, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁸ "Rosalia La Scala," Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1957, New York, NY.

⁹ "Terranova Dead; Once Racket 'King'", New York Times, 1938, New York, NY.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1938/02/20/archives/terranova-dead-once-racket-king-former-power-in-artichoke-trade.html>.

¹⁰ David Critchley, "The Origin of Organized Crime in America: the New York City Mafia, 1891-1931" (New York: CLIO Columbia University Libraries), 2009.

¹¹ "Rosario La Scala," US Naturalization Records, 1882-1944, New York, NY.

Bakery Corporation” in the Bronx.¹² There is no information about what happened to this bakery or how long it lasted. In the 1930’s Federal Census, Rosario was the head of his household, and living with him were his father Salvatore, his wife Rosalia, and his children Cologero, Salvatore, Anna, and Providence.¹³ Although Anna and Providence are listed as his daughters, they are not buried at the La Scala mausoleum. Perhaps they are buried in their respective spouse’s family graves, as the La Scala mausoleum houses the bodies of Rosario, Cologero and Salvatore’s wives. At this time, the La Scala family was renting a house on 3714 White Plains Road in the Bronx and Rosario was working at a chicken market with the help of his children Salvatore and Cologero.¹⁴ In 1934, Rosario filed for bankruptcy, scheduling liabilities of \$25,796, although there is no mention of the company name or industry.¹⁵ In Salvatore’s World War II draft card from 1940, he listed working at the S. La Scala Live Poultry company at the time, located in East 107 street, which could mean that Salvatore, after working at the chicken market with his father for a few years, opened his own company in the same field.¹⁶ However, in his brother Cologero’s World War II draft card, he listed employment at the R. La Scala & Sons Inc., located at 3714 White Plain Avenue, Bronx, the same address where his parent had been living at least since the 30s.¹⁷

¹² “Rosario La Scala”, World War 1 Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, New York, NY.

¹³ “Anna La Scala”, United States Federal Census, 1920, New York, NY.

¹⁴ “Rosario La Scala,” United States Federal Census, 1930, New York, NY.

¹⁵ “Business Troubles: Court Reserves Decision,” Womens Wear Daily, 1934, New York, NY.

¹⁶ “Salvatore La Scala,” World War ii Draft Cards, 1940-1947, New York, NY.

¹⁷ “Chlogero James La Scala,” World War ii Draft Cards, 1940-1947, New York, NY>

Mausoleum Design and Construction

The La Scala Mausoleum was designed between 1941 and 1942 by Cardo Bros & Co., who had an office on 3281 East Tremont Avenue in the Bronx, and worked on it both as the contractor and architect.¹⁸ Based on the thorough exchange between Rosalia and George C. Williams, an engineer at the Cardo Bros & Co. office, a lot of meticulous planning was done for the construction of the mausoleum.¹⁹ There were several iterations of the façade and floor plans of the mausoleum that were drawn by the contractors, all with a simple geometric block with an entrance containing Gothic details, along with a few neo-Classical features, such as the pair of columns framing each side of the entrance, as seen in figs. 3-8. The contract between Rosalie la Scala and Cardo Bros & Co., although titled “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be Erected in Woodland Cemetery” is actually an extremely detailed document, where the exact kinds of materials to be used in the erection of mausoleum are listed.²⁰ Overall, the contract demands for the best quality of both sourced materials and workmanship and construction, proving how important not only the erection of the mausoleum was to the La Scala family, but also the desire for it to last for an extended amount of time, which is evident today with its good condition and lack of structural damage.

As mentioned above, the mausoleum has a total area of 224.44 ft², and houses eight above ground catacombs, all made of dark Pennsylvania ribbon slate, with polished pink Tennessee marble faces. Each of the faces has the names and dates of the deceased family

¹⁸ Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

¹⁹ Cardo Bros & Co. “Re:Lot 14493 Larch.” 1942, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

²⁰ Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

member, as well as one bronze rosette on either end of the catacomb face.²¹ These sit on a polished Certified Barre granite floor. The wainscotings, ceiling and the altar, which sits at the opposite end of the entrance, are all made of Pink Tennessee marble.²² The emphasis of the interior of the mausoleum is placed on the altar, with it being the first thing one sees when opening the doors of the mausoleum, as seen in fig. 10. The altar has the letters “I”, “h”, and “s”, a symbolic monogram for Jesus Christ, carefully sandblasted onto a marble face, sitting between four small pediments, giving the illusion of supporting the altar top. The altar holds a number of pictures and memorabilia of the family, as seen in figs. 9 & 10.

Behind the altar, sits a colorful stained-glass window, fitting inside an arch-shaped opening in the back wall, depicting Jesus holding a haloed child, a symbol for the Dormition of Mary, where Mary’s sleeping soul is taken up to heaven.²³ (fig. 11).

The exterior of the building is made completely out of certified Light Barre granite from Vermont, all with a fine-axe finish.²⁴ The façade, as mentioned above, has a Gothic look to it, with elongated lines and buttresses to the sides, all symmetrically placed. Framing the bronze entrance door lies a pointed pediment bearing the “La Scala” name with a coat of arms sandblasted on top, containing the image of a ladder (as in Italian it translates to “scala”), and a knight’s helmet adorned with feathers (fig. 12). It is interesting to note that the bronze was demanded to be specifically of “the best United States Standard Metal, containing no less than

²¹ Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

²² Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

²³ Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, “Dormition of Theotokos.”

²⁴ Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

90% Copper, gauge #14”,²⁵ which serves as an example of the degree of focus on material quality and durability on the behalf of both the La Scala family and the contractors. Similarly, the type of cement for setting the granite, as well as the grouting and pointing are all specified as well.²⁶ Continuing with the rest of the façade, the pediment is supported by two pairs of Corinthian columns sitting on a 3-foot base at either side of the door, also framing the three steps- stair case leading up to the front entrance. The slightly pointed roof of the mausoleum is made out of three blocks of granite with an interesting geometry where the middle block partially sits on top of the side blocks (fig 13). On top of the middle block, right in the center stands a granite cross finial. Throughout the mausoleum there are various details pointing to the Catholic faith of the La Scala family, with the cross finial, the stained-glass imagery, several other smaller crosses and prayers on the altar, and a rosary hanging from one of the bronze rosettes, seeming like it was recently placed by a visitor, as it is the only detail that has not collected dust or remains of spiderwebs.

The side elevations are quite simple, with the side buttresses and the geometrically designed corners dominating the viewer’s focus (fig. 14). Both side elevations are identical and symmetrical, and contain four bronze ventilators, two located near the top and two located at about 3 ft from the ground. Lastly, the back elevation contains the same geometric corners as well as a view of the side buttresses, and the stained-glass window in the arch shape near the center of the elevation. According to the archives provided by Avery library, the cost of the construction is as follows: no more than \$450 for the bronze work, no more than \$150 for the stained-glass window, \$664.75 for the concrete and earth excavation for the base, and \$495 for

²⁵ Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

²⁶ Cardo Bros & Co. “General Specifications for a Mausoleum to be erected in Woodlawn Cemetery.” 1941, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

the exposed material cladding.²⁷ The total cost of the building is not included in the archival information, and would probably be a lot higher than what is merely mentioned above.

Existing Conditions

Overall, the mausoleum has no real structural damage, probably due to the high quality of materials and construction work planned by the La Scala family and Cardo Bros & Co. contractors. However, there are some minor evidences of deterioration from the elements. The most prevalent type of damage is the darkening of the granite on the façade due to moisture degradation (figure 15). This occurs mainly near the roof, the base of the building, and the sides, probably where water tends to hit most directly. On the façade, there are also signs of biological growth, mostly on the cross finial and along some of the areas that also experience moisture degradation.

As shown in figure 16, there is a large spot on the interior floor with signs of biological growth as well, most likely due to the moisture caused by the condensation formed on the ceiling above. The exterior portion of the bronze door is experiencing some oxidation, there are signs of flaking on the pediment, on-top of the coat of arms, the plate glass protection for the stained-glass window on the outside façade is cracked near the top, and finally, there are signs of efflorescence from condensation near the ceiling in the interior, dripping down onto the catacombs (figure 17). As mentioned before, the mausoleum seems to be in good shape and remains the way it was originally intended to look, based on comparisons with the final plans made by the contractor.

²⁷ Cardo Bros & Co. "Examination Sheet." 1942, La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

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Woodlawn Cemetery, “Our History”, 2022.

Figures

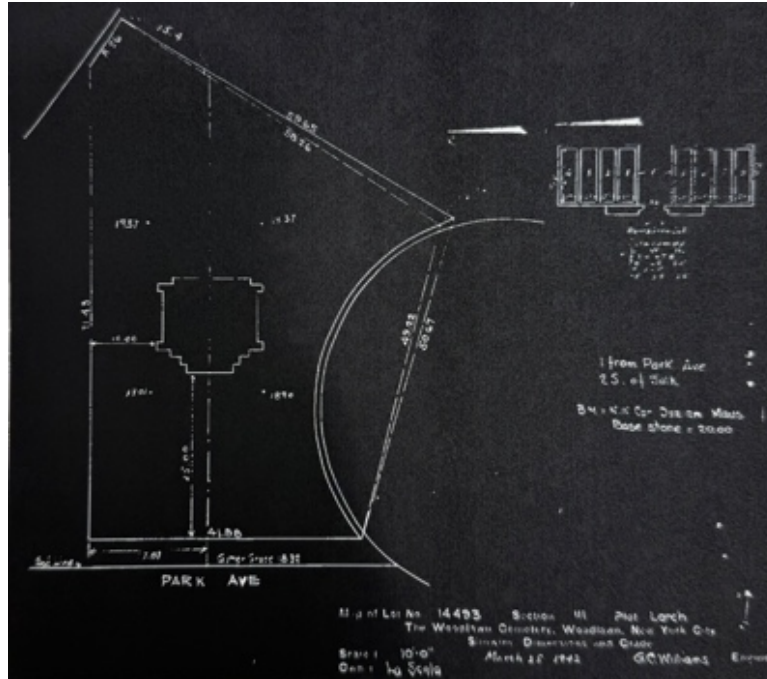


Figure 1: “Site Plan,” Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.



Figure 2: Anisa Estrada, Façade, 2025

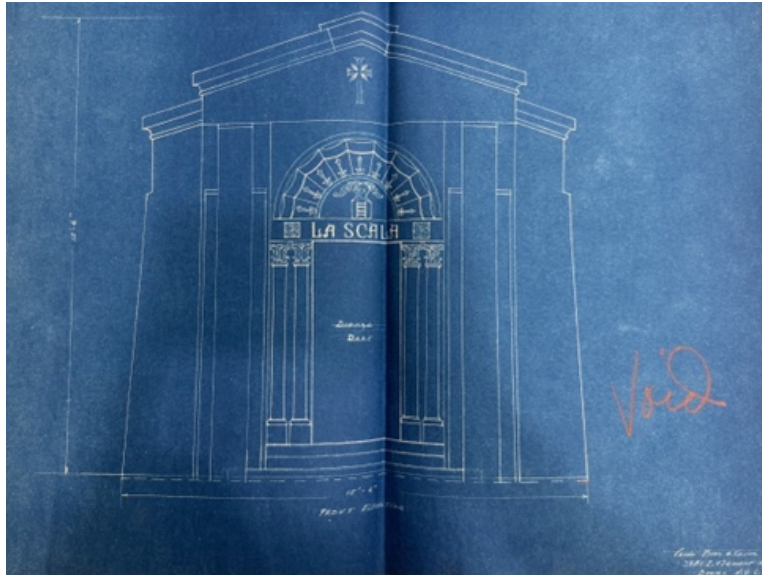


Figure 3: "Front Elevation," Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

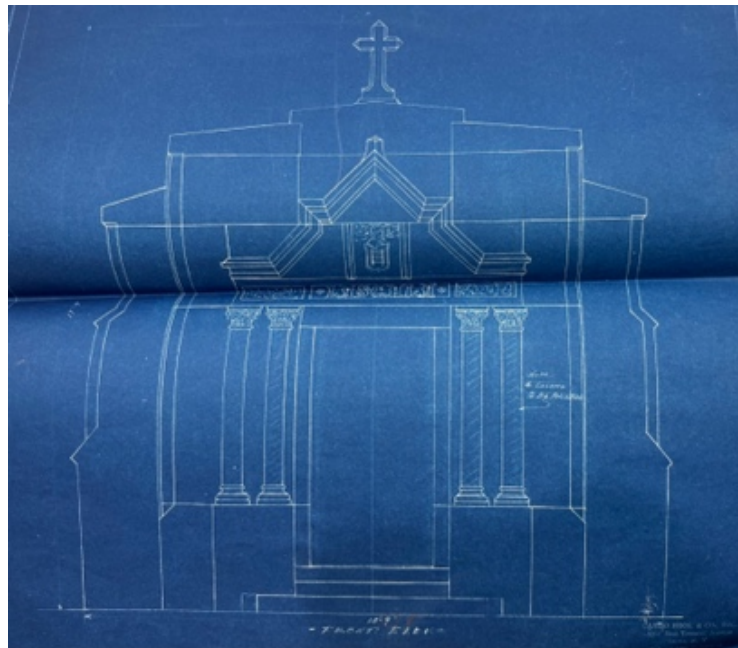


Figure 4: "Front Elevation," Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

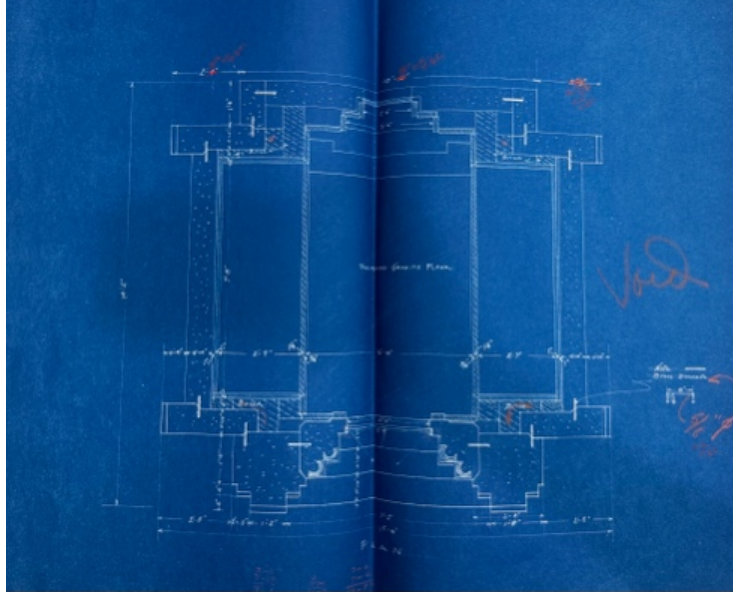


Figure 5: "Floor Plan," Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

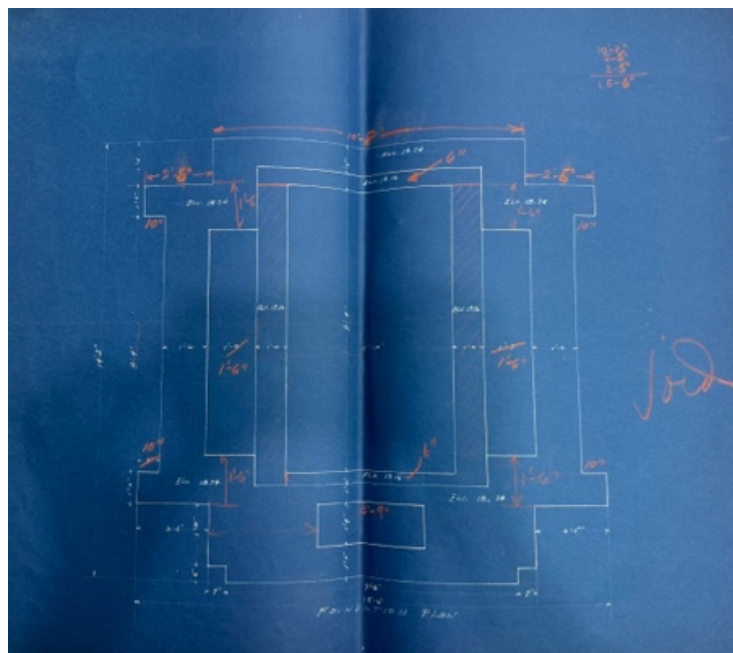


Figure 6: "Floor Plan," Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

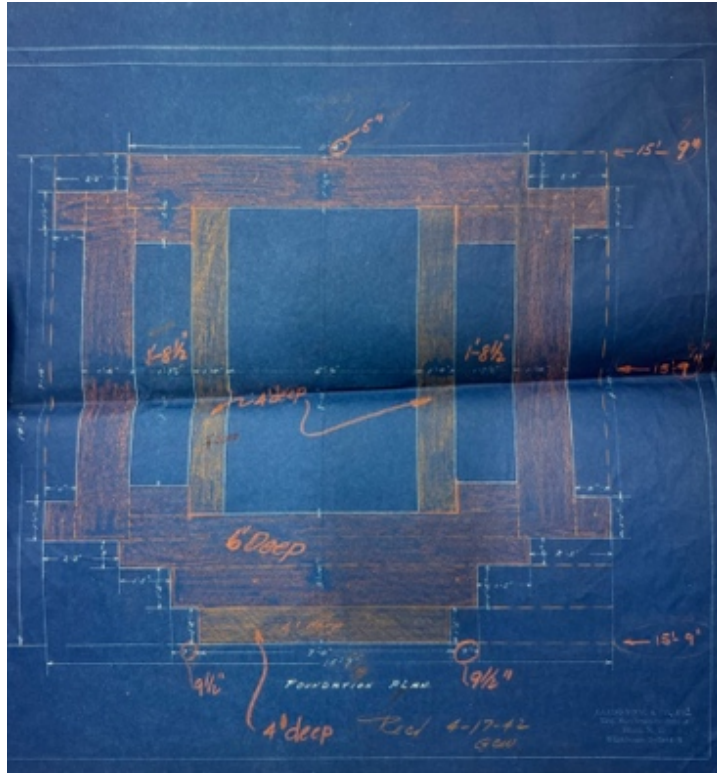


Figure 7: "Floor Plan," Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.

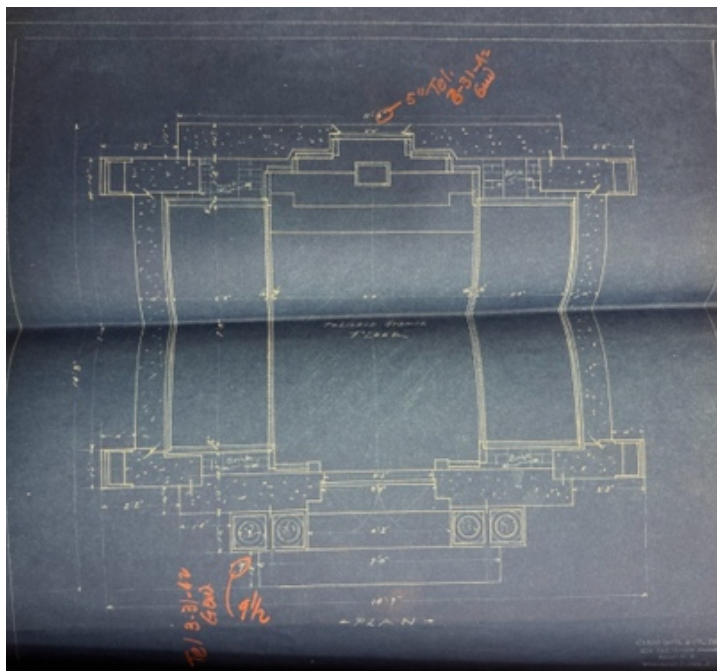


Figure 8: "Floor Plan," Cardo Bros & Co., La Scala Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University.



Figure 9: Anisa Estrada, Interior View, 2025.



Figure 10: Anisa Estrada, Altar Detail, 2025.

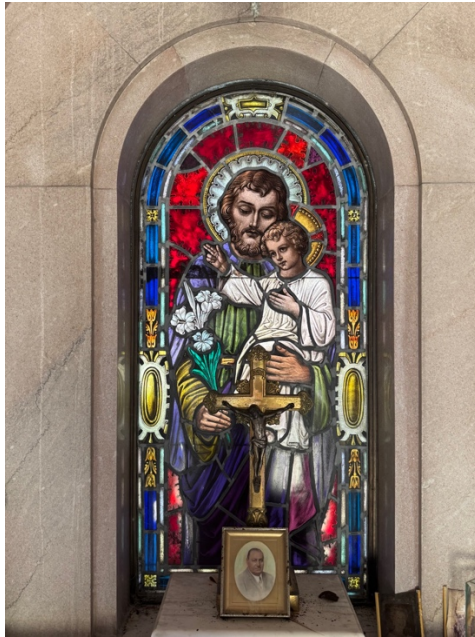


Figure 11: Anisa Estrada, Stained Glass, 2025.



Figure 12: Anisa Estrada, Front Façade, 2025.

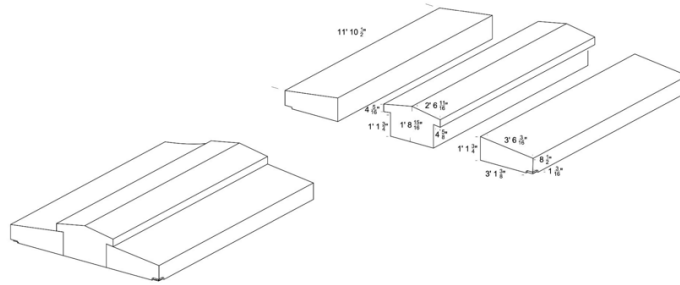


Figure 13: Anisa Estrada, Roof Geometry Detail, 2025.



Figure 14: Anisa Estrada, Side and Back Elevations, 2025.



Figure 15: Anisa Estrada, Moisture Degradation Detail, 2025.



Figure 16: Anisa Estrada, Biological Growth Detail, 2025.



Figure 17: Anisa Estrada, Condensation Detail, 2025.