

Baer-Gratz Mausoleum Analysis

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Isaac Baer is the first body to be located in the Baer-Gratz mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery. A newspaper clipping from his home town of Monroe, Louisiana indicates the significance of his passing and the legacy of his business that afforded him luxury in life and in death. "For forty years or more, he was one of the most conspicuous business leaders of Monroe and vicinity."¹A first generation immigrant from Alsace-Lorraine Germany, Isaac came to Louisiana in his youth and grew a small garment store in Monroe County from obscurity to a highly profitable business. Local newspapers write about his social gatherings and describe his home as a palatial residence.² Local newspapers show that his wife Maud was well traveled, spending summers in Canada with her children and France after Isaac passed away.³ They often entertained wealthy society parties and guests from around Louisiana. In the 1900 Federal Census there is a record that they employed a cook and two day-laborers as servants in their home.⁴

Isaac, Maud, and their son Raphael Baer are all buried in the Mausoleum, along with Peola and Joseph Gratz. Peola is Isaac and Maud's oldest child. Born in 1890, she was the oldest child of four. She and her sister Rosalynde, separated in age by one year, both married and took the names of their husbands. Peola is married to Joseph Gratz in 1910,⁵ and by 1920 Isaac, Maud, Raphael, and Peola have moved to New York and reside at 155 Riverside Avenue. Given Isaac's ties to Monroe County, it is interesting that he chose to move to New York and to place his final remains there. In his last public speech in Louisiana on December 15th, 1921, Isaac claims that his "children say that [he] must live with them in New York" but that he preferred to live in Monroe County.⁶ Isaac and Maud's other son Alvin Baer marries a New Yorker in Saratoga in August of 1921, several months before Isaac's death, further tethering the family to New York. The addition of Joseph Gratz to the mausoleum, and the incorporation

¹ *The Times*. January 6, 1922.

² *The Ouachita Telegraph*. May 17, 1873.

³ *The Times*. September 28, 1902.

⁴ U.S. Census, 1900, Ouachita County, Louisiana.

⁵ *Monroe News-Star*. January 6, 1910.

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of the name Gratz to the mausoleum header alludes to an urge by the Baer family to formally merge their life with the Gratz's. The year the Baer family formally moves to New York coincides with the birth of Peola and Joseph's first child.

The Baer-Gratz Memorial is sited on the Aster plat within Woodlawn cemetery. A 1900 map of the cemetery shows Aster plat as completely unplanned cemetery space, but by 1914 the updated map shows a new vehicular entrance at the corner of Jerome Avenue and East 23rd Street.⁷ This map shows the adjacent Aster, Dahlia, Lotus, and Butternut plots developed and connecting to the main Jerome Avenue entrance and the entrance at Webster Avenue and East 23rd Street. Citing the Baer Mausoleum near this entrance may have been a statement of affluence since car ownership was still mostly for the affluent classes when the mausoleum was built in 1922. The plot is further demarcated by the circular walkway that separates it from the rest of Astor plot. Today, this path allows the viewer to easily experience the mausoleum at all angles, however this was not likely the intention of Maud Baer. In photographs as early as the 1940's and plans from the 1950s it is clear that vegetation was grown along the east and western facing facades of the mausoleum to frame it from the vantage point of North Border Avenue(Figure A).⁸⁹ In correspondence as early as September of 1926 Maud Baer complains that two of the plants on her plot are dead.¹⁰ The cemetery confirms that these plants are "Mugho Pines" and that they will be replaced. In Maud's will she specifies "special care to the turf, top dressing as required and for the maintenance of the planting now established upon the lot for any replacements that may become necessary."¹¹ She also specifies that the two exterior vases should receive "pansies in

⁷ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Map of the Woodlawn Cemetery" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed October 1, 2019.

<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a6a42f20-f94a-0130-073e-58d385a7bbd0>

⁸ Photograph. New York, 1940-1950. Woodlawn Cemetery.

⁹ Photograph. New York, 1970-1980. Woodlawn Cemetery.

¹⁰ Maud Baer to Woodlawn Cemetery, September 25, 1926.

¹¹ Mr. Edwards to Woodlawn Cemetery, January 23, 1935.

the spring, suitable flowers for summer, [and] evergreen for the winter.”¹² Within the marble vase on the interior of the mausoleum, resting on top of the bench, flowers are specified to be placed on the anniversary of Isaac and Maud’s death and birthdays, as well as on several Jewish holidays.¹³ The oldest photo of the mausoleum, from sometime in the 1940’s, shows several large trees on either side of the mausoleum framing it from the street. These trees are clearly much taller than the mausoleum itself. In 1952 the landscapers tasked with documenting the site provided for by the trust in Maud Baer’s name write that “all [of the] evergreens are very poor – a detriment to the good appearance of the lot.” These trees include two hemlock bushes, one American Arborvitae tree, one Japanese yew tree, and three other undistinguishable plants.¹⁴ They go on to suggest “complete removal – no replacement.”¹⁵ One month later Woodlawn writes a letter to Peola recommending that the landscapers “thin out one of the trees” and re-sod. In 1955 another annual planting plan shows the introduction of an Arborvitae tree, while two plants have been removed from the eastern side and replaced.¹⁶ In an internal endowment funds estimate for the plantings in 1968 the author notes that only the two *taxus capitata* remain, while the other plants including hemlock and arborvitae are replaced with *Thuja occidentalis*, *tsuga sieboldii*, and *taxus brevifolia*.¹⁷ A 1970s photograph shows one of the *taxus brevifolia* next to the eastern urn, *taxus capitata* and *Thuja occidentalis* have all grown taller than the mausoleum. Another *taxus cuspidata* and *taxus capitata* have grown just short of the roof line. Two azalea bushes sit in front of the urns on the northern façade and appear to be the only remaining vegetation that dates from this period. The remaining six trees are documented again in 1988 with an attached recommendation to remove them. With Joseph Gratz’s permission, the trees are removed in October of 1988.

¹² Mr. Edwards to Woodlawn Cemetery, January 23, 1935.

¹³ Mr. Edwards to Woodlawn Cemetery, January 23, 1935.

¹⁴ Woodlawn Cemetery to C. M. Smith, June 9, 1952.

¹⁵ Woodlawn Cemetery to C. M. Smith, June 9, 1952.

¹⁶ Woodlawn Cemetery to Maud Baer, September 7, 1955.

¹⁷ Woodlawn Cemetery to Mrs. Peola Gratz, January 15, 1968.

The style of the Baer Mausoleum is Egyptian Revival, incorporating many of the same elements used by the designer of the Woolworth Mausoleum less than three years prior.¹⁸ The designer, Frank T. Lang, was a professional mausoleum and monument designer. When Maude Baer commissioned him to design the family's mausoleum in 1922 he had already designed an Egyptian-themed mausoleum for the Maupai family directly across the street in the Dahlia plot in 1920 (Figure H). He would go on to design an almost identically planned and decorated Egyptian mausoleum for the Majewski family in 1922 less than 20 feet away in the Aster plot. Frank Lang was based out of Queens and designed eleven Mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery, all between the years 1919 and 1932.¹⁹ Given the apparent popularity of the style, its suitability for mausoleum design and powerful motifs of the afterlife, Egyptian seems like a natural choice. Indeed, if the style was good enough for F. W. Woolworth, it ought to be good enough for the Baer-Gratz family.

Much of the symbolism in this and other Egyptian mausoleums refers to the ideas of immortality, life after death, and infinity. At the same time, the scale, proportions, and material used also give a sense of weightiness and importance. Similar to the Maupai, Woolworth, and Majewski monuments (Figure G), the exterior of the Baer-Gratz mausoleum is dominated by the winged orb that rests just above the entrance. This was indicative of Egyptian royalty, depicting the unification of Northern Egypt and Southern Egypt in the two serpents surrounding the sun.²⁰ The carvings on the large urns and the capitals of the columns represent the flowers, or umbrel, of the papyrus plant. The symbol of papyrus is common in Egyptian temple architecture because in Egyptian origin myth papyrus pillars

¹⁸ Peggy McDowell and Richard E. Meyer, *The Revival Styles in American Memorial Art* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1994).

¹⁹ Major Monument Records, entries 89, 352, 683, 1278, 1506, 1642, 1678, 1726, 1704, 1771, 2484, 2814, Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Columbia University, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library Archives, New York, New York, US.

²⁰ John Baines, Byron E. Shafer, and John Baines, *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (London: Routledge, 1991).

are said to hold up the sky.²¹ This column capital design resembles the unfinished Hypaethral Temple in the Island of Philae, showing the papyrus plant at multiple stages of growth. In both designs, four full grown expanding Papyri reach the top of the capital, while two smaller expanding flowers of the papyrus stand in between each petal.²² The base of each column shows a repeated pattern of the interlocking petals of the lotus flower.²³ The lotus symbolized rebirth, as at night its bud sinks below the waters surface and in the morning it rises again to catch the suns rays.²⁴ Immediately adjacent to the door are two columns of Greek meander-key pattern carvings. This common pattern is meant to symbolize infinity, recalling the twisting and turning path of the Meander River in Asia Minor. These carvings are located in the entrance supports which are slanted slightly to emphasize the weight of the slab construction. Floral symbols on the bronze doors again allude to the lotus flower at different stages of growth. Near the door knob are budding lotus petals, interlocked, while at the top and closer to the head the lotus is shown as a single flower with unified petals. Above the door is a curved cavetto pediment, followed by a cavetto cornice at the top. The form of this curve is meant to speak to the weight of the entablature above it, and again references the tendency of reeds, when bound in bunches, as used in ancient supports, to protrude outward at the top.²⁵ The cornice carries the weight of the three granite slabs that cover the mausoleum and so also exaggerates the weight of the roof in form. The interior of the mausoleum is also intricately carved. Lotus buds are lightly etched into the marble frame of the window at the far end of the room. Supporting the base of the window sill are two classical corbel supports, each carved out of marble with intricate leaves. Above the window is a cavetto pediment, centered with a scarab carved out of Tennessee marble. With wings outstretched, this scarab is likely a depiction of the pectoral scarab, similar to the one found in the tomb of Tutankamun. In the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Day and Son, 1856).

²³ Owen Jones, Plate V.

²⁴ Owen Jones, 19.

²⁵ Owen Jones, Plate VI.

traditional mummification process the scarab would be sewn onto the chest of the mummy. The scarab with outstretched wings represents the god Khepri, who can represent creation or renewal of life.²⁶

Each interior wall is made up of four catacombs, individually sealed with a marble slab and bronze rosettes. The names of the deceased are demarcated in polished marble surrounded by sandblasted marble in half an inch relief on the surface. The contract that Frank Lang and Maud Baer agreed upon specified “ceiling, catacomb tablets, and wainscoting shall be of Blue veined Italian Marble, or Riverside Vt. Marble.” From the appearance of the Marble, it could be from the Vermont Marble Company given this specification, the patterning of the veins, and white appearance. The remaining trim elements of the interior, excluding the floor, appear to be Tennessee Pink Marble. The size of the sediment crystals, pinkish color, and visible fossils within the grain of the sediment all support this classification as well. The remainder of the mausoleum, excluding the mortar joints and bronze functional ornaments, is granite. The builder’s contract indicates that the Granite is a “light Barre.”²⁷ Comparison of photos to lab samples of Granite indicates that it most closely resembles Woodbury Gray Granite from Barre Vermont. The monumental exterior slabs seem to be axed finish, as indicated in the Frank Lang’s contract, as opposed to the interior floor granite which is polished. Detailed instructions from Lang instruct the craftsmen on the use of Portland cement, followed by Hemp and a layer of white Atlas Portland cement “to harmonize with the stone” for the exterior joints.²⁸ The plans and contract also indicate the use of slate and brick in the shelves of the catacombs, however these areas are not visible. The window frame, door, ventilator gratings, and 32 rosettes are recorded as US Standard Bronze, composing of 90% copper, 7% tin, and 3% zinc.²⁹ Lang indicates that the glass window that

²⁶ Scarab pectoral, from the tomb of Tutankhamun, in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes, c.1361-52 BC, New Kingdom. <<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/xir68344/scarab-pectoral-from-the-tomb-of-tutank-xir68344-egyptian/>>

²⁷ Woodlawn Cemetery to Frank Lang, September 1, 1922.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

illuminates the interior is made of “cathedral leaded stained art glass,” although the glass seems to be clear with minimal lead joints and painted over to create fine detail.³⁰

Although the mausoleum no longer receives scheduled plantings and floral arrangements, the exterior seems to be in fine shape. Biological growth has accumulated on the front slab of granite on either side of the entrance, and again on the floor immediately in front of the entrance. On the rear of the building, orangish residue can be seen accumulating on the exterior granite below the window. This may indicate that iron or steel was used in the framing of the window.³¹ As for the roof, correspondence between the cemetery and Maud Baer show that the roof was determined to be defective as early as 1926, and that Frank Lang was contacted to repair it. In his specifications Lang indicates his intention for the roof to have “three pieces [of granite] extending over the full length of the building as indicated on plans, and shall be properly lapped, jogged, and mortised where indicated and finally laid in a mortar of best Portland Cement.”³² However the Woodlawn inspection recommended “cutting out the joints and refilling with a good compound suitable for such joints.”³³ In 1989 the cemetery contacted Joseph Gratz to notify him of vandalism of the mausoleum, resulting in some damage to the large urns in front.³⁴ The urns were reset, and the only physical evidence of the vandalism that remains are several cracks that appear to be filled in with cement. Otherwise, all correspondence and photographs indicate that the physical appearance of the mausoleum remains virtually unchanged.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Andrew E. Nagle to Joseph Gratz, November 20, 1989.



Figure A: Baer-Gratz mausoleum. Photograph. New York, 1940-1950. Woodlawn Cemetery.



Figure B: Baer-Gratz mausoleum. Photograph. New York, 1970-1980. Woodlawn Cemetery.



Figure C: Baer-Gratz mausoleum. Photograph. New York, 2019. William McCallum.



Figure D: Side Elevation. Frank T Lang, 1922. Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.

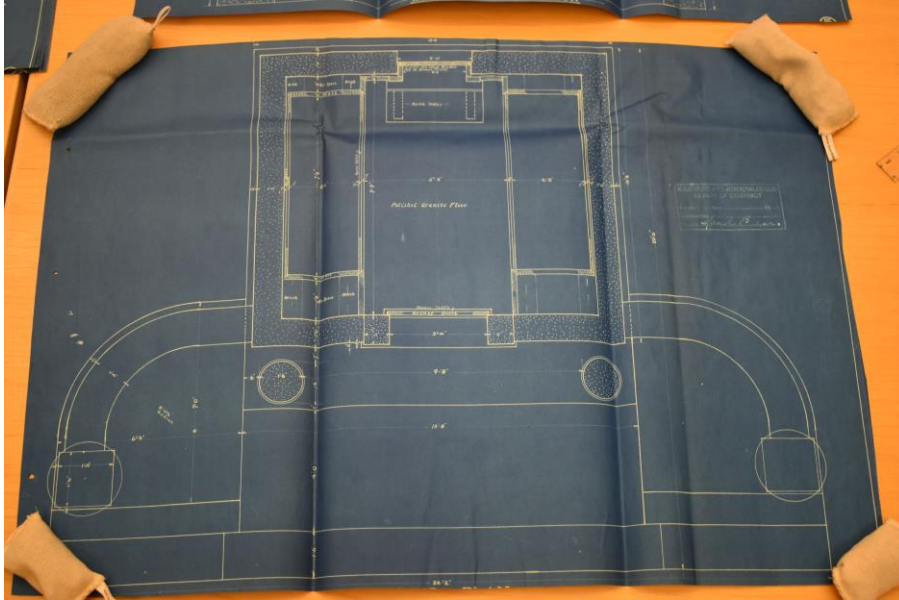


Figure E: Plan. Frank T Lang, 1922. Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.



Figure F: Front Elevation. Frank T Lang, 1922. Woodlawn Cemetery Records, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.



Figure G: Majewski mausoleum. Photograph. New York, 2019. William McCallum.



Figure H: Maupai mausoleum. Photograph. New York, 2019. William McCallum.

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