

## The Eccles Mausoleum

The first idea that one could have, seeing the mausoleums at Woodlawn Cemetery, is that they look like a group of toy Greek temples dispersed through an amazing garden. But these small buildings are more complex than one might imagine. They represent a specific architectural typology which has an established architectural program merged with a meticulously ornamental concept. One of these mausoleums is the Eccles Mausoleum.

The Eccles Mausoleum was built by Margaret Williamson Eccles in 1918, with the purpose of creating a memorial building where the remains of her husband could rest. Slias Wright Eccles, her husband, died in 1917. He was a director of important mining and railroad companies from the beginning of the twentieth century. "Mr. Eccles, who was considered an expert in mining and railroad affairs, was born in Washington, Ill., Jan. 3, 1852... In 1900 he became identified with the smelting and refining business, and became a Director of the American Smelting and Refining Company. At the time of his death he was also President of the Nevada Northern Railroad, and an officer and Director of other corporations."<sup>1</sup> Today the remains of Mrs. Eccles and her only daughter and son-in-law also rest in the mausoleum.

The Eccles Mausoleum is on an irregular land plot in the Golden Rod section of the Woodlawn Cemetery. It is located in the back portion of the plot, just in front of three gigantic pines that are the best background that any mausoleum could have (fig. 1). The mausoleum has a clear volumetric composition; two granite blocks are merged together and settle above a platform on the uneven topography (fig. 2). These two volumes have different functions. The bigger volume that crowns the composition is an ornamental shell situated above a second one which functions as a sacred vessel. The first one protects the building and displays its beauty to the outside; the second one, the sacred vessel, contains the catacombs and displays its powerful memory meaning in the interior space. Both volumes sit in a platform that separates the mausoleum from the mundane ground in a clearly Classical temple composition (fig. 3). "The archetypal temple is not a real temple, but an idea... the "temple" stands on a platform which replaces the uneven ground with a controlled surface as a foundation for building. This flat platform is a starting level (a datum) for the geometric discipline of the temple itself, and detaches it from the found world... the temple provides shelter against the *weather*, to protect its content (the image of a god)."<sup>2</sup>

The juxtaposition of these volumes also creates a portico (fig. 4). This portico is delimited with Ionic columns and accentuates the hierarchy of the spaces. People approach the mausoleum from the garden, climbing the stairs of the platform and arriving to this portico, which has a dual interior-exterior relation as a transitional space. "Experiencing products of architecture involves movement. One passes from the outside

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<sup>1</sup>Obituary I, New York Times, , Jan 1, 1918, 17

<sup>2</sup> Simon Unwin, *Analysing Architecture*, New York: Routledge 1997, 87

to inside, or through the serial stages of a route... Many religious sites have some form of gateway which marks the entrance, all contribute to the effect that a static place - the heart of a house, the altar of a temple - is set apart from the rest of the world."<sup>3</sup> The urns located at the sides of the portico extend the horizontal composition of the façade and create an imaginary barrier that prevents people from going to the back of the building. Entering the sacred vessel is the last step of the processional movement (fig. 5). The interior space is finished in a cloudy Gray Tennessee Marble. The interior is a narrow space flanked by catacombs, four on each side and one above the other. In front of the entrance and looking to the south is the altar. This altar is created with two Corinthian columns located above a continuous pedestal framing the central window. Originally the mausoleum had a stained-glass window but it was stolen in November of 1983; nine windows were stolen from the cemetery that year.<sup>4</sup>

The juxtaposition of the volumes also defines the plan of the mausoleum (fig.6). We can relate this layout plan with the compositional schemes of house designs by James Gibbs. In his design for a Villa, *built for his Grace the Duke of Argyll at Sudbrooke*<sup>5</sup>, we can identify the intersection of two volumes that defines the hierarchy and function of the interior spaces and the external composition (fig. 7). Here the idea of the classical temple language is translated to a more mundane activity of house design. It seems that Gibbs was designing houses for the new eighteenth-century gods.

The plan of the Eccles Mausoleum also demonstrates the importance of proportion in the design. The mausoleum's general dimensions are based on the proportion of the Ionic columns in the portico. The frontal length dimension is formed by twelve diameters of the column base and the depth of the building is formed by fifteen diameters. The central space between the two pairs of columns corresponds to two base diameters and the four columns are separated from the mausoleum wall by one diameter. (fig. 8)

Proportion is also used in the front façade. The Ionic columns and the entablature of the front portico respond to the classical proportions of Vitruvius's Ionic Order. The upper element above the entablature is a neo-classical feature that appeared with the manipulation of the classical orders to increase the height and accent principal façade elements. "The visual or functional needs of a building may not be satisfactorily answered by a simple application of the orders in the basic form. The height of an entablature can be raised by adding a small block, or further raised by adding details to this block that correspond to the proportions of a column pedestal of an imaginary upper order. The pedestals can be expressed more literally and provide more interest at the top of the building. Some examples have sufficient height to become a

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Unwin, *Analysing Architecture*, New York: Routledge 1997, 157

<sup>4</sup> Susan Olsen, e-mail message to the author, October 13 2013.

<sup>5</sup> James Gibbs, *A book of Architecture, containing designs of buildings and ornaments, 1728* reprinted B. Blom 1968. Plates 40 and 44

separate storey, known as attic storey.”<sup>6</sup> In the Eccles Mausoleum this element has the same height as the entablature. (Fig.9)

The Eccles Mausoleum was built and designed by The Presbrey-Coykendall Company.<sup>7</sup> This retail, manufacturing and design firm had, according to their own advertising, the largest retail granite cutting plant in the United States at Barre Vermont (fig.10). The principal office of this company was located at 198 Broadway, New York City and they specialized in “Monumental Art”. The Presbrey-Coykendall Company designed around forty mausoleums in Woodlawn Cemetery and several monuments.<sup>8</sup> Later they merged with W.W. Leland Co. and formed a strong design and manufacturing office specialized in Monumental Art. “In 1920 came the merger of Presbrey-Coykendall Co. and the W.W. Leland Co, which combined one of the best known retail manufacturing concerns with one of the best firms specializing in design. Its business has steadily grown both in volume and quality.”<sup>9</sup>

Walking through Woodlawn Cemetery I was able to see several mausoleums designed by the Presbrey-Coykendall Company. They present similar characteristics but vary in certain ornamental and style features. It was quite surprising to find that one of them, the Gale Mausoleum, has the same design as the Eccles Mausoleum and was built first, in 1917. The design features are exactly the same however they present different urn and capital types (fig. 11). The fact that the same company designed and built forty mausoleums in the same cemetery could only tell us that choosing mausoleums from a catalog was normal and fashionable. I do not know the reasons why Mrs. Eccles chose that design for her husband mausoleum. However, something that is true is that the personal experience of this kind of building is more related with personal memories, with the approach to the site and with the immediately surrounding features. In this case the Gale Mausoleum is far enough and does not interfere with the experience of the Eccles Mausoleum. Also the architectural features of the Eccles Mausoleum and the way in which they are related through proportion, scale, materials, craftsmanship and site confirm that it is true that Mrs. Eccles did not choose a unique building but she certainly chose a quite unique design.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Adam, *Classical architecture: a comprehensive handbook to the tradition of classical style*, New York Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1991, 130

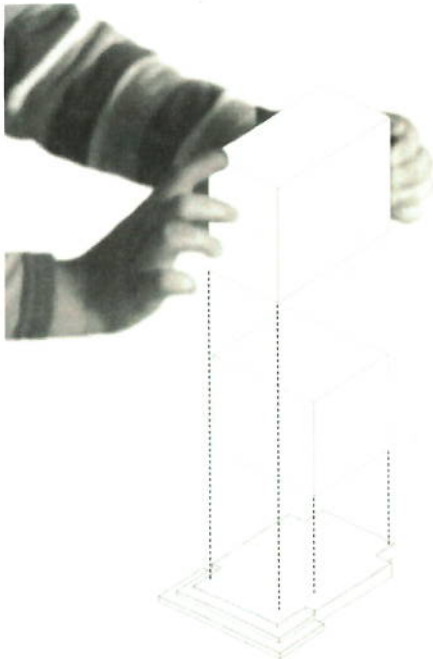
<sup>7</sup> Eccles Mausoleum file, The Woodland Archive, Avery Library.

<sup>8</sup> Monuments file, The Woodland Archive, Avery Library.

<sup>9</sup> The late W.W. Lelan, *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening*, 34, 12, Feb 1, 1925

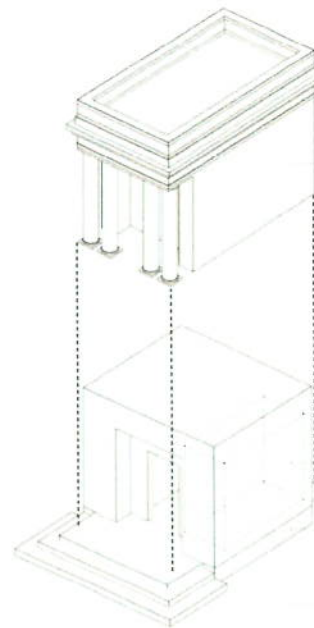


Fig 1



VOLUME

Fig 2



TEMPLE

SHELL

SACRED VESSEL

PLATFORM

GROUND

Fig 3

JUXTAPOSITION

HIERARCHY

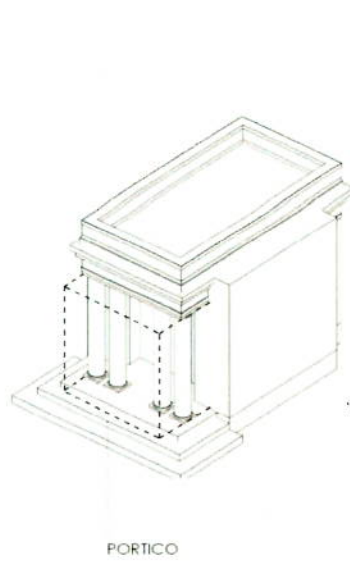


Fig 4

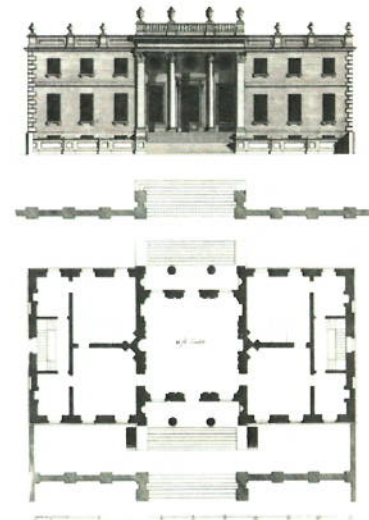
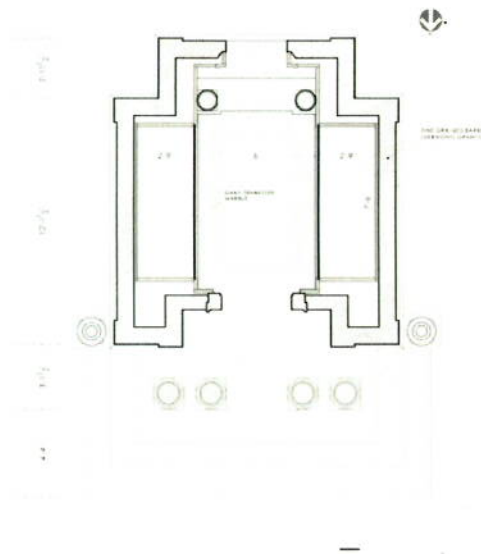
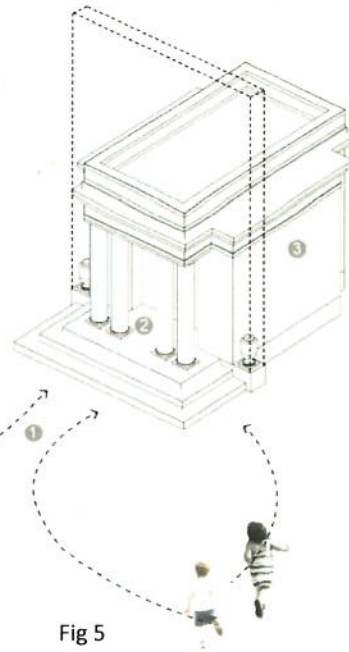


Fig 7. James Gibbs. *Design for a Villa, built for his Grace the Duke of Argyll at Sudbrooke. 1728*

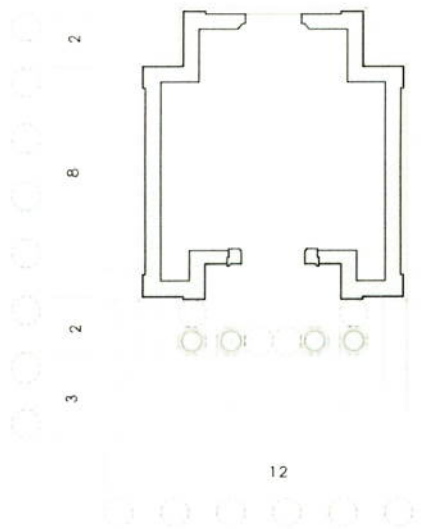


Fig 8



Fig 9. Image of Vitruvius Ionic Order from: Robert Chitham, The Classical Orders of Architecture, Architectural Press 2005, 43

*The Presbrey-Coykendall Company*  
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Fig 10. *Park and Cemetery and Landscape Gardening*, Advertisement 2, No Title, Aug 1, 1919, American Periodicals 157



Fig 11. Eccles and Gale Mausoleums