



**William Bateman Leeds Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY**

**Problem 3: Field Documentation & Formal Analysis**

Fall 2011 HP Studio 1: Reading Buildings

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**Mayank Patel, October 17, 2011**

The William Bateman Leeds mausoleum designed by John Russell Pope in 1907 is located at Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, NY. The monumental structure was commissioned by Leeds' second wife, Nonnie May Stewart Leeds, for his late husband known as the "Tin Plate King" in the country.

Born on September 19, 1861, William B. Leeds, Sr. worked as a florist for his father initially in his hometown, Richmond, Indiana, before he made his large fortune. In July 1883, he entered into the railroad business through the influence of Harry Miller, a General Superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Mr. Miller was a relative of Jeanette Irene Gaar, Leed's first wife.<sup>1</sup> Leeds married to her in August 1883. On March 15, 1890, he was appointed a Divisional Superintendent of the Richmond Indiana Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The same year, Mrs. Gaar inherited a large sum of money after passing of her father, John Milton Gaar. Mr. Gaar was one of the owners of the Gaar, Scott and Company that manufactured tractors, threshers, plowing engines and other farm implements and shipped them throughout the world.<sup>2,3</sup> Mr. Leeds used this newly acquired fortune to purchase a tin-plate plant in Richmond together with Daniel G. Reid and later both were joined by two brothers, William H. Moore and Daniel G. Reid. The partnership of four became known as "the Big Four."<sup>4</sup> The group consolidated the tin-plate industry into a single corporation, American Tin Plate Company, and later sold it to the US Steel Corp. Then, they invested into the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company and Leeds was elected its president in January 1902.<sup>5</sup>

On August 1, 1900, Mr. Leeds, 38, divorced Jeanette Gaar and married to Nonnie May Stewart Worthington, 24, from Ohio the same month. Mr. Leeds died on June 23, 1908 at the Ritz Hotel in Paris because of poor health. His funeral was held on July 8, 1908 at his home on 987 Fifth Avenue in New York once his body was brought back from Paris.<sup>6</sup> After his death, his second wife and his two sons, one from first marriage and one from the second, inherited all his

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<sup>1</sup> Danny Tate, "William Bateman Leeds of Richmond Indiana," *Dan Tate's Blog, Richmond, Indiana, The History of Wayne County, Indiana*; <http://dantate.featuredblog.com/?m=200910>.

<sup>2</sup> *Arbor Familiae*, "The Tin Plate King," *A blog about family history, The Tin Plate King*, <http://arborfamiliae.wordpress.com/2011/03/14/the-tin-plate-king/>.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin F. Dalbey and Walter L. Dalbey, *Pictorial history of the city of Richmond, Indiana* (Richmond: Nicholson Printing & Mfg. Co., 1906), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Danny Danny Tate, "William Bateman Leeds of Richmond Indiana."

<sup>5</sup> "Leeds Left Widow Most Of His Estate," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1908, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F30B1EFD385A17738DDDAD0894D1405B888CF1D3>.

<sup>6</sup> "W. B. Leeds's Funeral To-Day," *The New York Times*, July 8, 1908, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F00616F63E5A17738DDDA10894DF405B888CF1D3>.

fortune. Mr. Leeds' widow married Prince Christopher of Greece and Denmark 12 years later in January 31, 1920 but their married life remained fairly short because she died of cancer three years later.<sup>7</sup> When Mr. Leeds died, John Russell Pope was working on Leeds' new city home on the southeast corner of the Fifth Avenue and Seventy-Ninth Street<sup>8</sup> and was asked to design a mausoleum.

The pink Knoxville marble mausoleum, situated on Walnut Ave in the cemetery, is in close access from the Central Ave that runs across the cemetery. However, the mausoleum is not clearly visible from where Walnut Ave and Central Ave meet the way it was hoped for when it was built. Because of growth of several tall trees over the years in place of conical evergreen trees that covered majority of the area in 1914, the mausoleum is lost in the mist of trees. In order to see it in its entirety, one has to stand in front of it which was not a requirement originally.

The plan of the Leeds mausoleum is square in design with a centrally placed dome. The cubic form of the mausoleum sits on a raised pedestal subtly above the ground. Two levels of steps, in the front, bring visitors up to the entrance and these levels are separated by a tesserae paved terrace that is laid around the mausoleum. The terrace invites visitors to experience the space and scale to its fullest by walking around and the experience is similar to that of walking around a Hindu shrine or a temple. The area to grow grass and plants is inserted between the terrace and the outer row of stones. The grass also surrounds the mausoleum except for the front side. Images from 1910s show conical topiaries grown in this area at certain distance, but these original decorations are no longer part of the space. Today, only grass fills this strip. Pope had a reason for not creating a continuous row of steps and separating them in two levels and adding a terrace and the landscaping element. In his essay "The Relation of the house to the Landscape" analyzing Pope's work, Howard Dwight Smith writes that "[l]andscape development adjacent to the house should enhance and support the architecture...[o]utlying features of landscape should perform the function of giving vistas and pictures from the house or from the grounds immediately adjacent to it."<sup>9</sup> The idea is to create an interest near the building so eyes linger

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<sup>7</sup> "Mrs. Leeds Wed To Prince Christopher," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1920, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F60713FA385F1B728DDDA80894DA405B808EF1D3>.

<sup>8</sup> "Leeds Left Widow Most Of His Estate," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1908.

<sup>9</sup> Howard D. Smith, "The Relation of the House to the Landscape," *The American Architect*, Volume 113, no. 2206 (1918): 401.

around the architecture and do not get lost in the distance views. Pope “considered the spaces adjacent to the house as intimate outdoor extensions of the house, external rooms”<sup>10</sup> and he has incorporated this very idea in many of his architectural works including Jefferson Memorial, American Pharmaceutical Association Building and Lincoln Birthplace Museum.

Pope who had studied at American Institute of Architecture in Rome and the Ecole des beaux-Arts in Paris was classically trained and was influenced by great European architecture. He refined Classicism by his flat, simple, and harsh treatment of it that speaks volumes without even trying. Leeds mausoleum has a cubic symmetrical form with four facades being identical in size and almost similar in their decoration that it seems to be inspired from Andrea Palladio’s design for Villa Rotunda. In exterior facades, the way four pilasters, two small and two very large, carry rectangular mass of stones on top gives a feel of looking at Arch of Constantine. In Pope’s other works, an original design for the Lincoln Birthplace Museum and American Pharmaceutical Association Building, this is even greatly observed.

The cornice above the door and top ornamentation of sarcophagus are copied from the Roman sarcophagus of Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus.<sup>11</sup> He also borrowed wreath ornamentation in the frieze course on exterior from Choragic Monument of Thrasylus in Athens.<sup>12</sup> A relief sculpture of lachrymatory is placed in stone on both sides of the entrance bronze door. Frequently found in Roman and Greek tombs, the vessel of this type with an elongated body and a small neck symbolizes bottles into which mourners dropped their tears.<sup>13</sup> Above cornice is a bas relief done by Adolph A. Weinman, an American sculpture whose great line of work include “Walking Liberty” relief on a half-dollar coin, sculptures for the Manhattan Municipal Church and Jefferson Memorial, and more. The relief sculpture is called “Silence and Memory” – stringless lyre symbolizes silence and an urn containing the soul represents memory.<sup>14</sup> The sorrow is further portrayed by the downward movement of falling draperies, weeping trees and heads of two figures looking down.

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<sup>10</sup> Meridian House International, *Washington Renaissance, Architecture and Landscape of Meridian Hill* (Washington, DC: Robey Graphics, Inc., 1989), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Bedford, *John Russell Pope, architect of empire* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1998), 122.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>13</sup> Mayank Patel, personal communication with Andrew Dolkart, October 3, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> David W. Dunlap, “For Historic Cemeteries, New Chapters,” *New York Times*, June 2, 2002.

Pope did not just design a space where Mr. Leeds' remains would be kept but instead, he created a monument that formed a relationship with the environment around it. He borrowed many classical proportions and elements but instead of strictly copying them, he refined and reduced them to create a style that was quiet but powerful. The monument did not have to rely on heavy ornamentation and sculptural carving to express power but the flatness of the façade, clean and sharp edges, emphasis on verticality and horizontality through one eighth of an inch thick mortar joints and raising of the mausoleum above the ground were comparable with old traditions.

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