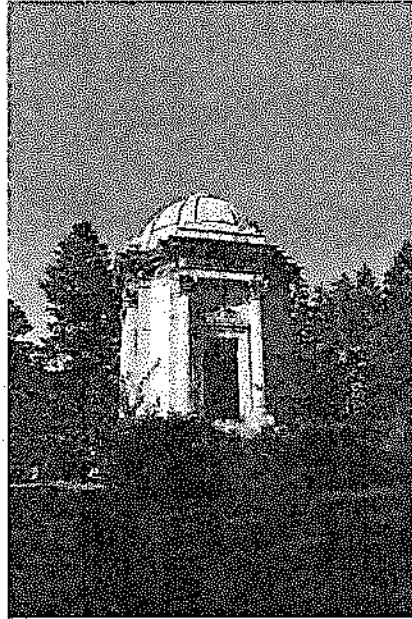


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Studio I: Reading Buildings

Supporting Paper



Henry A. C. Taylor Mausoleum

The Taylor Mausoleum, designed by McKim, Mead, and White in 1901 for Henry Augustus Coit Taylor following the death of his wife Charlotte Fearing in 1899, is an early 20th century neoclassical tomb that occupies one of the larger plots in Woodlawn Cemetery. The Taylor family is one of New York's oldest, most prominent, and wealthiest families and their relationship to McKim, Mead, and White dates back decades before the mausoleum was completed. In fact, the

relationship between Charles McKim and the Taylor family is incredibly storied and includes multiple mansions and summer homes designed for Henry, his brothers, and their father by McKim. But before diving into the context of the building, we should look at the mausoleum itself.

The Taylor Mausoleum was designed primarily by Charles McKim for H. A. C. Taylor in 1901, following the death of his wife Charlotte in 1899. Built at a time when the primary mode of access to Woodlawn was by the main train line, the Mausoleum faces toward the south east, looking out over the avenue that anyone approaching from the then-main entrance would have come along. Judging by the aerial photographs taken in the early twenties, the plot was not landscaped, but instead rendered bare; the towering white and bronze tomb dominating the open circular plot entirely from its very center. When compared to the smaller nearby mausoleums shaded by trees and clouded from view, the statement of power, wealth, and permanence made by Taylor's monument is absolutely unmistakable.

Approaching the building means walking across the open field, ascending a white marble stair and coming to a magnificent bronze entryway. The door assembly consists of two massive bronze doors behind a separate lattice-pattered bronze grate--both of which are incredibly heavy and difficult to move. The grate opens outward, the heavy doors inward; the mausoleum has a definitive weight, again, highlighting a sense of permanence and even monumental architectural reverence. In plan, the Taylor mausoleum is symmetrical along one central axis, broken along the perpendicular axis only by the frontal orientation of the stair and entryway. The plan ordering principle is a Greek cross, which consists of multiple nested squares, circles, and octagons. Called to mind are various classical subjects, not the least among them being the octagonal plan of the Baptistery at Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence.

The façade bears a frontal, central emphasis on the entry axis. Multiple layers of moldings are stacked atop each other, culminating in an overwhelmingly layered texture that all gives rise from the granite foundation up past the Corinthian order capitals topping each of eight engaged columns to the base of the dome. The façade organization is neither that of a temple front nor a church typology, instead

appearing to be an arrangement of layered moldings and classical motifs supporting the massive dome. An ornate interpretation of simple classical post-and-lintel construction.

Aside from the light granite foundation and the bronze doors, window grates, and lantern, the mausoleum is constructed entirely out of Vermont Marble, and is weathering, or 'sugaring,' quite terribly. Bronze stain is also present en masse, though probably to be expected or possibly even counted on by the architect as an aesthetic choice. The sugaring of the marble, however, is a bit more problematic. Much of the detail in the ornate crest above the door and many places in the capitals and moldings are wearing away.

By analyzing the building in plan, section, and elevation as well as by making detailed investigations into the building's style and history, the complexity of the Taylor Mausoleum has become apparent. Not only architecturally--it being a densely layered neoclassical artifact conceived by one of New York's most masterful classicists--but also as a living relic from a period of strife and turmoil in a relationship between McKim and Taylor that extended as far back as Taylor's late father. The significance of the mausoleum and its positioning with respect to the decline of the firm's career following the murder of Stanford White--as a monument not only to Charlotte Fearing and to the Taylor family,--is plain, and further lies also in the statement it makes about the refinement of form at the height of McKim, Mead, and White's career.

In order to understand the historical and architectural context in which the mausoleum is situated, one must understand the relationship between McKim and H. A. C. Taylor. In 1876, a friend of the McKim family through their shared local Presbyterian church--Moses Taylor--commissioned a young Charles McKim to build him a home in Elberon, NJ--then a popular beach location (Broderick, 46). Moses himself had risen to money and prominence, eventually becoming realized as one of the wealthiest men of the 19th century, referred to by the newspapers of the time simply as a "capitalist." Taylor's life includes involvements with various steel and iron companies, the railroad industry, and eventually the position of president with

City National Bank. His commissioning of McKim was a uniquely exciting opportunity, and one that McKim intended to take full advantage of (Broderick, 45).

Proceeding with the summer home for Taylor on a phenomenal budget of near \$60,000, McKim designed a lavish estate in the style of a British country home--gabled, wooden frame construction, employing open facades and several porches. The home, which has since been demolished, is widely regarded to have been McKim's first break (Broderick, 44); his earliest commission of any real significant import. What prompted someone with Taylor's status to turn a young architect loose with such an impressive sum of money is hard to say, but the Elberon home for Moses Taylor would be the beginning of a career-long friendship between the Taylor family and McKim.

Several years later, Henry A. C. Taylor, one of Moses' two sons, commissioned McKim to construct him a home in Elberon as well. McKim designed two homes on top of a bluff looking over the sea, one for Henry and one for another client, though the second home was quickly purchased by Taylor's brother-in-law (Roth, 96-97). During this time, Henry's brother George C. Taylor also commissioned McKim to design him a home in the area, though McKim's drawings weren't implemented by George until years later, and the home has proven difficult to locate (Roth, 97). Henry stayed in Elberon until his father died several years later, at which point he contracted McKim again to design him a farm for property he acquired after the Civil War in Newport, Rhode Island. The farm that McKim designed was constructed and staffed by a Colonel whom Taylor hired to run the estate as much of Taylor's time was spent in New York City. Though, he and even McKim would pay frequent visits to the Newport property over the next few years (Roth, 97).

By 1896, McKim, Mead, and White finished the 71st St. mansion for H. A. C. Taylor and his wife, Charlotte Fearing--just three years before her sudden death. The home, styled near the height of McKim, Mead, and White's career, was modeled after a renaissance Italian palazzo, and was the subject of several letters sent to McKim by Mead while the former was travelling in Greece and Egypt (Moore, 269). Mead recalls to McKim in these letters that Mrs. Taylor is overjoyed with their finished home, that it is 'simply too amazing for anything,' and that the mansion is

very near completion for the Taylors to 'do whatever they see fit with.' Mead also refers to Henry Taylor as one of McKim's personal favorite clients (Moore, 269). Interestingly enough, during Stanford White's financial spiraling after accruing some 1-million dollars in debts following the city fire in the early 20th century, White moved in to a property owned by H. A. C. Taylor, who allowed him 4 years delinquency on his rent payments (Broderick, 489). White would be murdered in Madison Square only a year later. Knowing the long history and familial relationship shared by not only the two men, but by McKim and Taylor's father as well, the mausoleum holds specific significance, as Charlotte's death must have been quite sudden; one can only imagine the nature of this particular commission.

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