

A Modest Man in an Opulent World
The Isaac D. Fletcher Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery

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Isaac Dudley Fletcher was born in Bangor, Maine, and moved to New York City when he was 25 years old, in 1865. Here he made a fortune in the coal tar, roofing, and paving industries. He was the president of the Barrett Manufacturing Company, and at the time it was organized in April, 1896, the company held a capital of \$15 million (equivalent to \$450 million in 2018). This placed him prominently in New York society and afforded him membership to the Lotos Club, Union League, Metropolitan Club, and New York Whist Club. In 1897, likely at the increasing pinnacle of Fletcher's fortune, he hired C.P.H. Gilbert to construct a house for him and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Pickering. At this time, Gilbert was becoming established as a principal architect for the elite, and would design many prestigious mansions in the years to come. The plot of land selected was owned by the railroad tycoon, Henry H. Cook, and included the stretch of the block between E 78th and 79th streets on Fifth Ave. Cook sold Fletcher the northeast corner lot, with specifications that any house constructed on this block must be of high quality¹. Fletcher requested from Gilbert a style similar to that of William K. Vanderbilt's neo-Gothic Loire Valley chateau on Fifth Avenue, designed by Richard Morris Hunt 15 years prior. The prominence of this location is remarkable, as is the execution of the design. The house is carefully designed to blend with its context, and features rich ornamental details that suitably commands its corner position² (Figure 1). It is one of the few Fifth Avenue mansions that remain standing, and is now owned by the Ukrainian Institute. The Fletcher residence was included in the Metropolitan Museum Historic District which was landmarked in 1977, and underwent an extensive restoration in 1997.



Figure 1. 2 East 79th St. New York, NY.

When Fletcher passed in April, 1917, he left a bequest in his will on behalf of his wife and himself to the Metropolitan Museum of Art of their entire collection of art and residuary estate. He expressed their desire to have a collection in their name, displayed in one space together, the "Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Collection." Interestingly, he explicitly states an understanding of the workings of the Museum and its resources, recognizing that his requests might not be possible or sustainable for the institution to execute. The Museum's president at the time, Robert W. DeForest, collaborated with Fletcher on his will, and noted in a bulletin how Fletcher had provided a solution for museums on how to address large bequests and funds from

private donors: "Legally, his bequest is absolute; but DeForest his making it absolute while expressing a strong desire puts upon the Museum the strongest obligation of honor to meet that desire to the farthest extent consistent with wise museum policy." ³. The museum selected 251 objects from his collection ranging from tapestries and porcelain to ancient Greek and Egyptian artifacts ⁴. Fletcher's desire was honored, and these objects were displayed in their entirety in Gallery D6 for one year beginning on March 4, 1918 ⁵. The Museum does not currently include a 'Fletcher collection', but most of his collection is still on display in the appropriate galleries.

A friend commented in a newspaper obituary that "Mr. Fletcher loved to live among the beautiful things he had gathered from all corners of the earth. His collection represents a labor of nearly forty years. Mr. Fletcher cared nothing for society. His pleasures in this city were limited to meeting friends on Sunday afternoons..." ⁶.



Figure 2. Approach from Spruce Ave. to Fletcher mausoleum.

The Fletcher's extravagant private residence and their notable contribution to the primary cultural center of New York City makes a statement of their social prominence, but the language he chose to use in his will and his sensitivity to the operations of the Museum over his own desires speaks to his character. In death, this sentiment seems to be realized in an inconspicuous, yet elegant and well-crafted mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery. His wife

passed in February, 1914, so Fletcher was responsible for the decisions regarding the monument selection and construction. The site is intended to be approached from Spruce Avenue, and is tucked behind some neighboring landscape. It appears purposefully framed by symmetrical bordering mausoleums at the street edge, angled facing away from Fletcher's (Figure 2). Each of the three displays an individual variation on the classical Ionic order, creating a uniquely cohesive composition. On the right is the mausoleum of C.P.H. Gilbert, architect of 2 E 79th St. The proximity of his monument to his client's does suggest that their collaborations could extend beyond a singular house design project. According to Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services at Woodlawn, Fletcher's mausoleum was designed by Gilbert, however there is no known written documentation to support this proposition.

The mausoleum itself was designed by New England Granite Works, a granite quarry and monument manufacturer located in Westerly, Rhode Island. A light blue unpolished

Westerly granite was used for the construction and exterior carved ornamentation. For the interior floor, a polished red Westerly granite was used which features a carved Greek key border between the two sarcophagi. The interior walls are clad with Pink Tennessee Marble panels; the pilaster capitals and moldings are carved from a lighter, cool toned marble which perfectly aligns with the sarcophagi, also carved from this same stone. According to construction specifications, the sarcophagi are to be carved from Blue Ribbon or Black Pennsylvania Slate, but the stone used appears to be Pennsylvania Blue Marble. The specifications also indicate all carvings and ornament to be of a high quality, which appears to be largely executed both in craftsmanship and construction. The double doors are heavily ornamented bronze, with glass behind the upper grill panels. There is a stained glass window in the rear, with a bronze grill on the exterior side of the window.

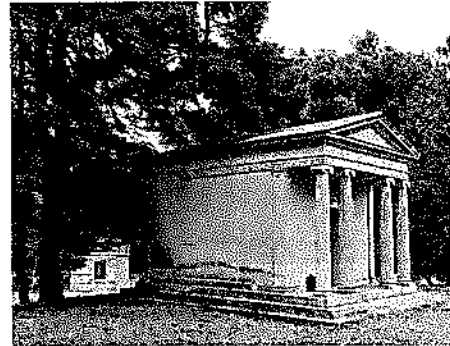


Figure 3. Biological growth on north facade.

The exposed exterior faces of the granite are mostly in good condition. A pine tree is growing approximately five feet from the northeast foundation corner which shades the entire north elevation. This has caused some biological growth along the north granite face and steps (Figure 3). The interior does not appear to have any significant damage, from water or other factors. There is a distinctive pattern of cracking on the north and south facades, specifically on the interior corners of the pilaster bases, which appears to be related to structural movement (Figure 5). The archive construction drawings show a later modification made on the plan. Drawn in pencil were two added stone joints on the north and south peripteral steps: one is along the steps on center with the pilaster base, and the other is at the corner of the base (Figure 4). The current cracks appear to spring from these mortar joints, which have possibly been recently repointed. The site was also significantly regraded as it sits on a hill, and

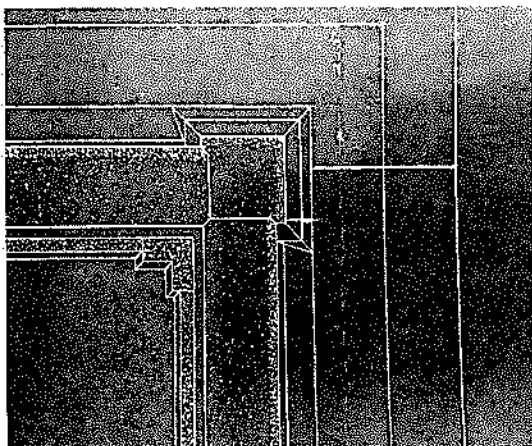
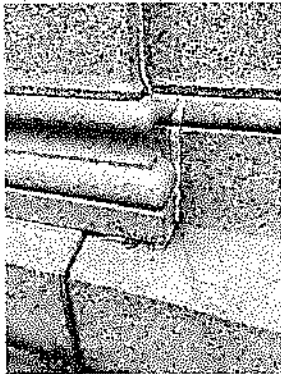


Figure 4. Stone joint modification on plan, noted in pencil.

adjustments were made on the elevation height up until construction began. It is possible that this deterioration could be from the settling of the foundation and these cracks happen to be where that is manifested visually, however a definite conclusion cannot be provided as more investigation would be required to have more evidence of a cause.

Figure 5. Foundational cracks visible on pilaster bases.



Southwest pilaster.



Southeast pilaster.



Northeast pilaster.



Northwest pilaster.

Notes

¹ Tauranac, John. 1985. *Elegant New York*. New York: Abbeville Press, pp. 181-183.

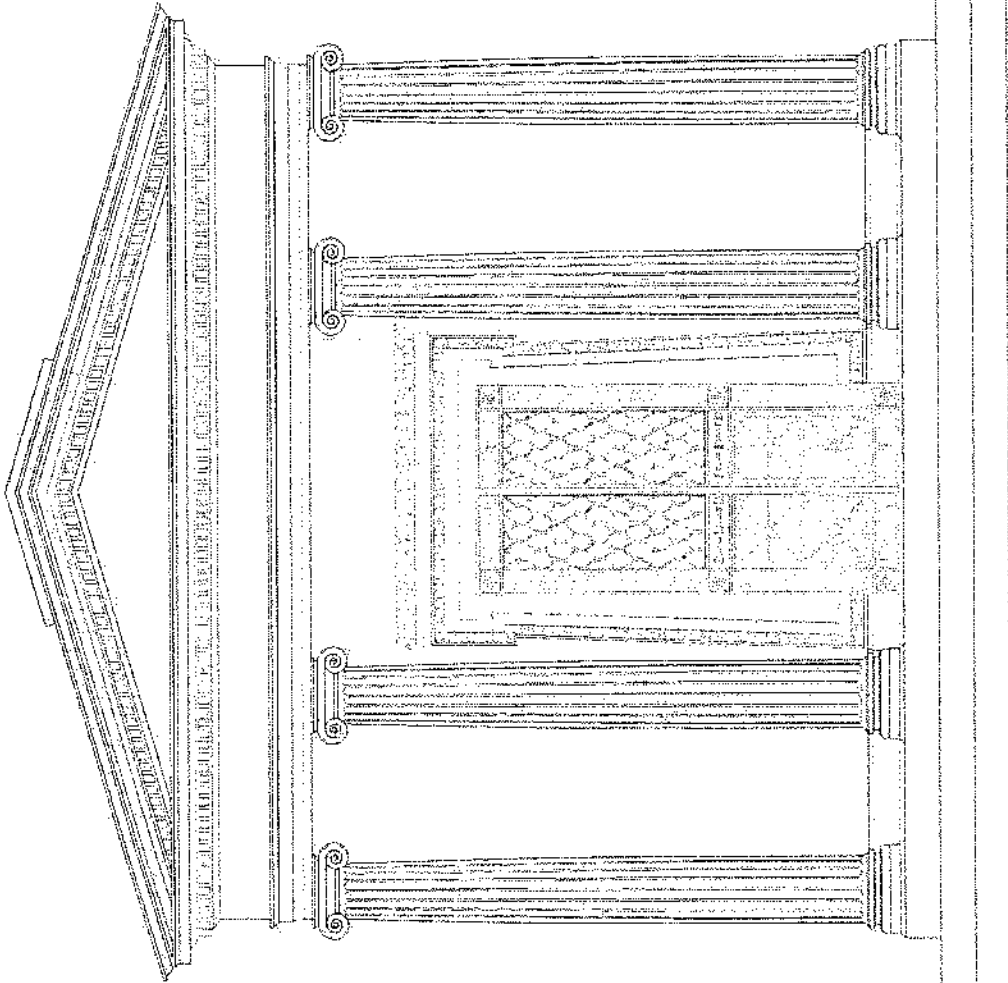
² New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. 1977. *Metropolitan Museum Historic District Designation Report*. September 20, 1977, p. 29.

³ DeForest, Robert W. 1917. "The Notable Bequest of Isaac D. Fletcher: His Solution of the Museum Problem of Conditional Gifts." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*. November, 1917, pp. 216-218.

⁴ Howe, Winifred E. 1946. *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, pp. 77-80.

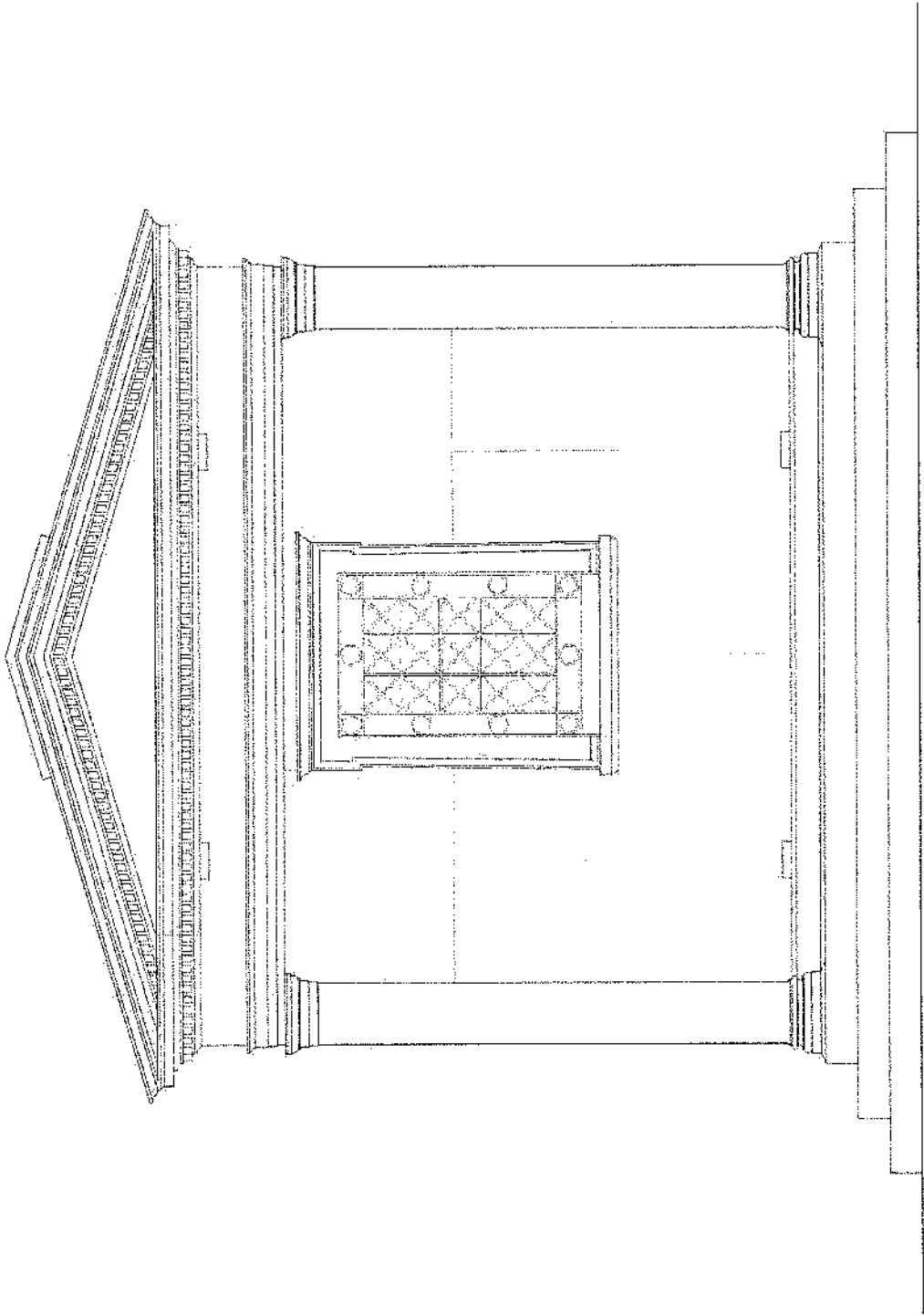
⁵ "The Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Collection." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*. March, 1918, pp. 58-65.

⁶ "Fletcher Art Gift May Be \$8,000,000." *New York Times*, May 4, 1917.



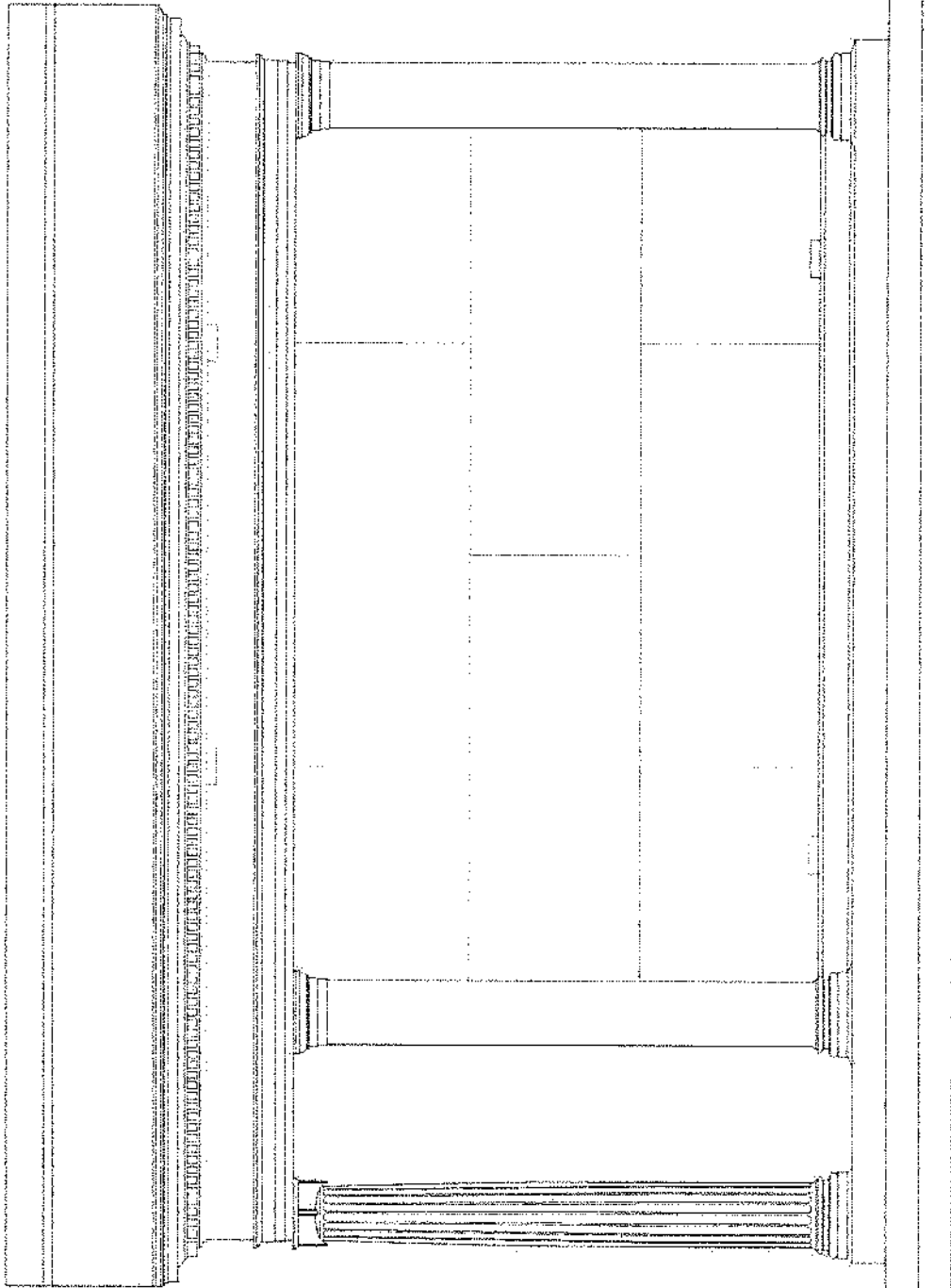
WEST ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

ISAAC D. FLETCHER MAUSOLEUM
MICAH TICHENOR



ISAAC D. FLETCHER MAUSOLEUM
MICAH TITCHENOR

WEST ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

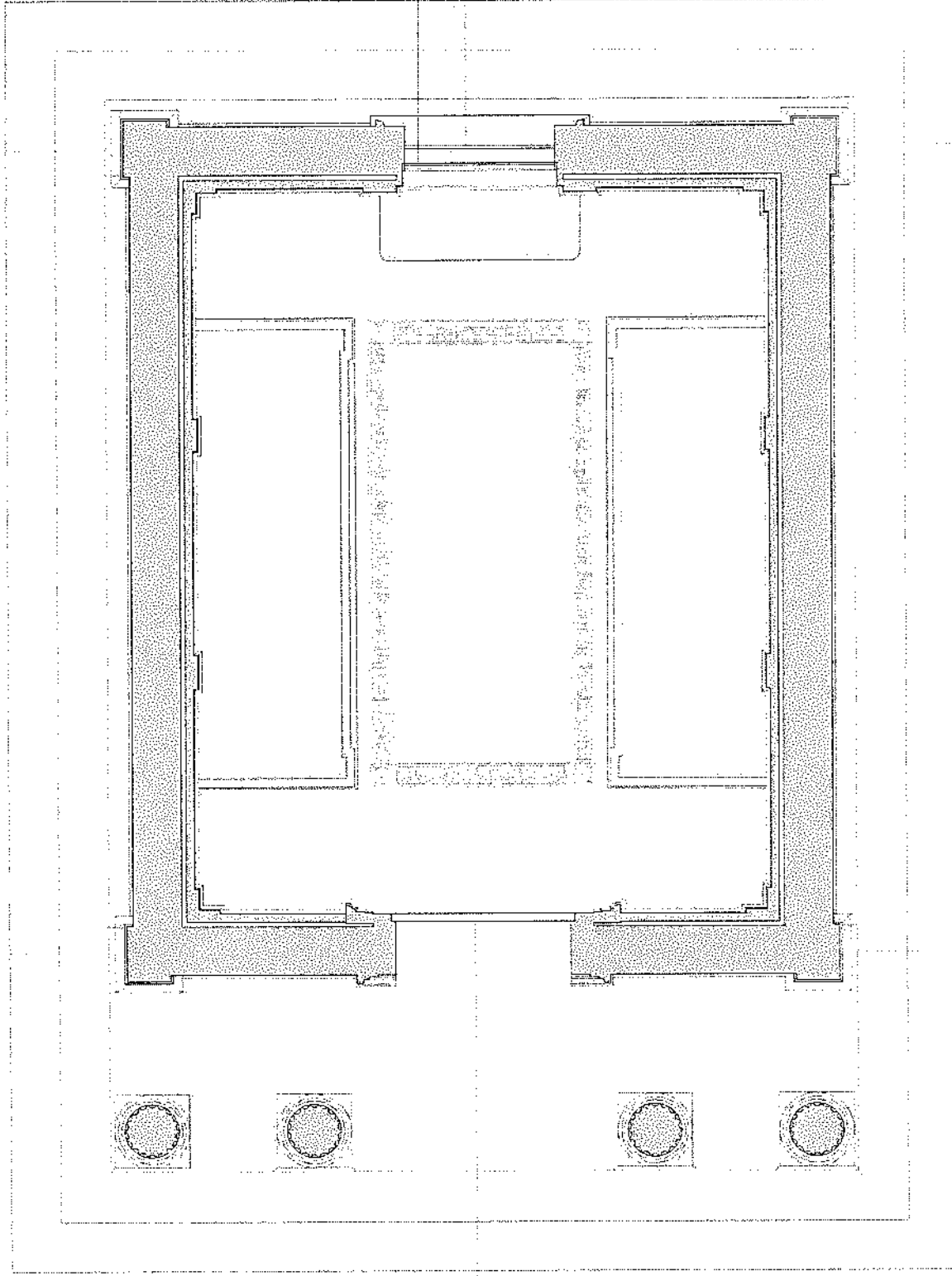


ISAAC D. FLETCHER MAUSOLEUM
MICHAEL TICHENOR

SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'



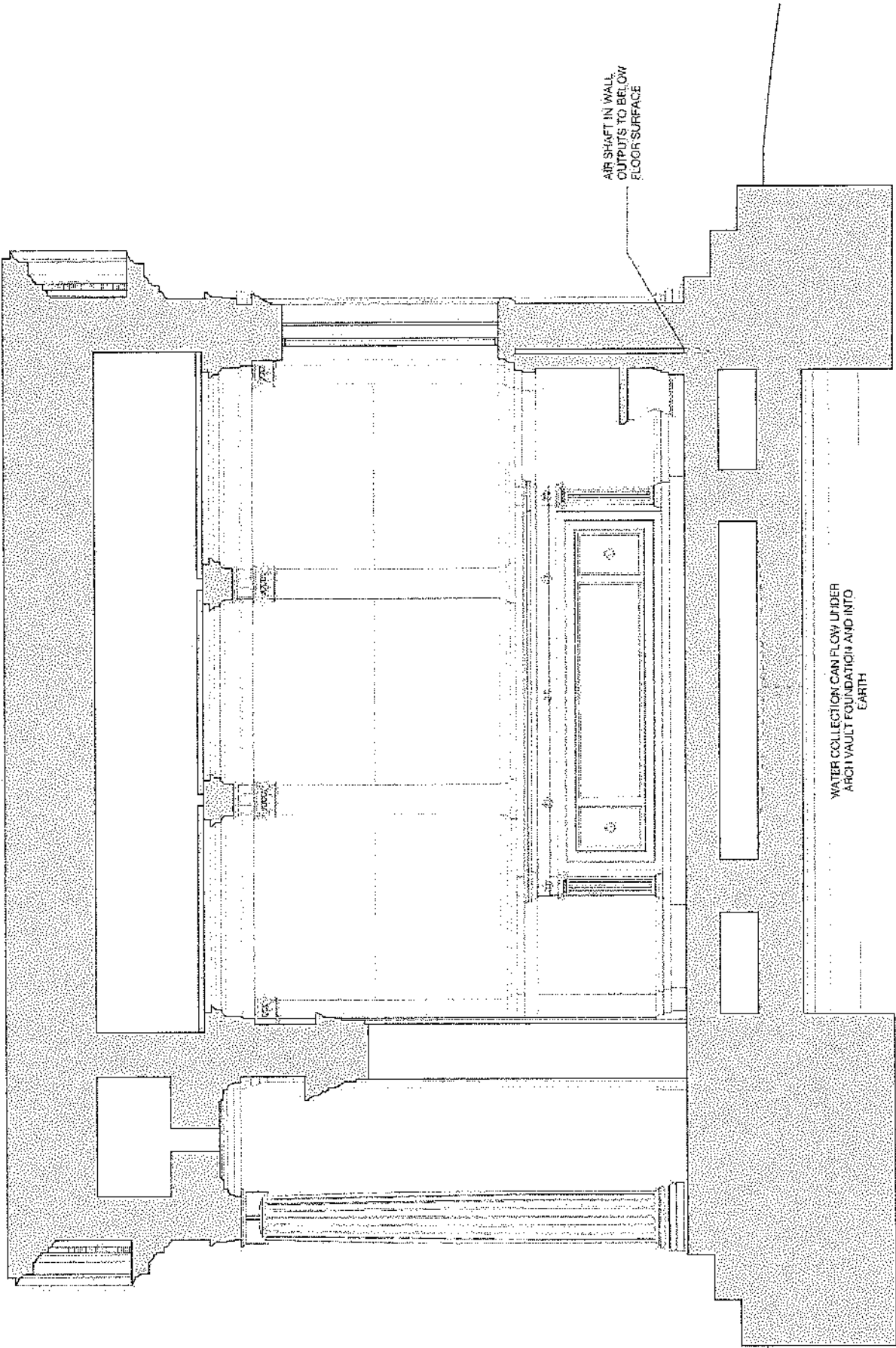
BRONZE ORNAMENT
DOUBLE DOOR WITH
UPPER GLASS PANE



STAINED GLASS
WINDOW PANE
BRONZE GRILL

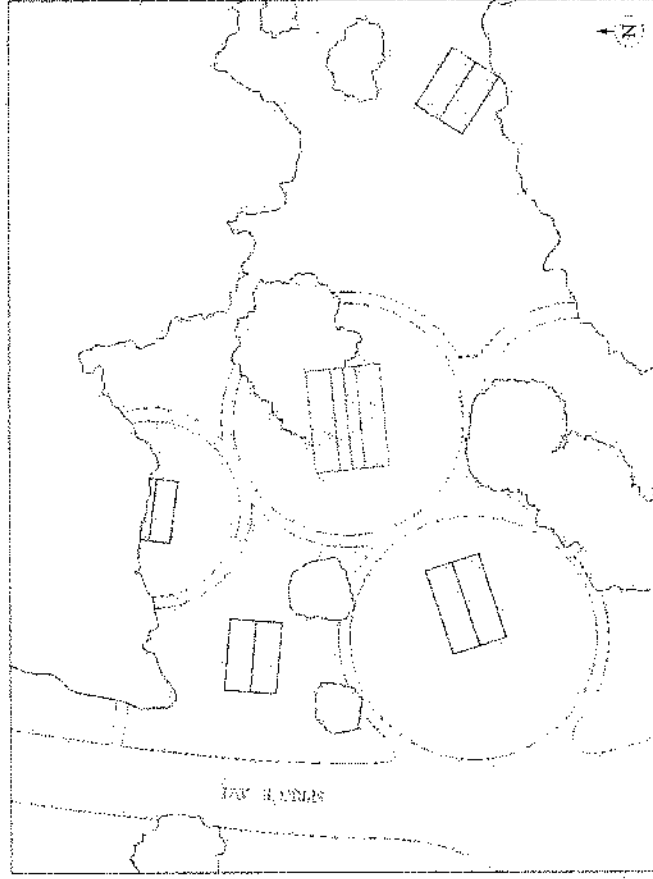
ISAAC D. FLETCHER MAUSOLEUM
MICAH TICHENOR

PLAN
SCALE: 1/2" = 1"

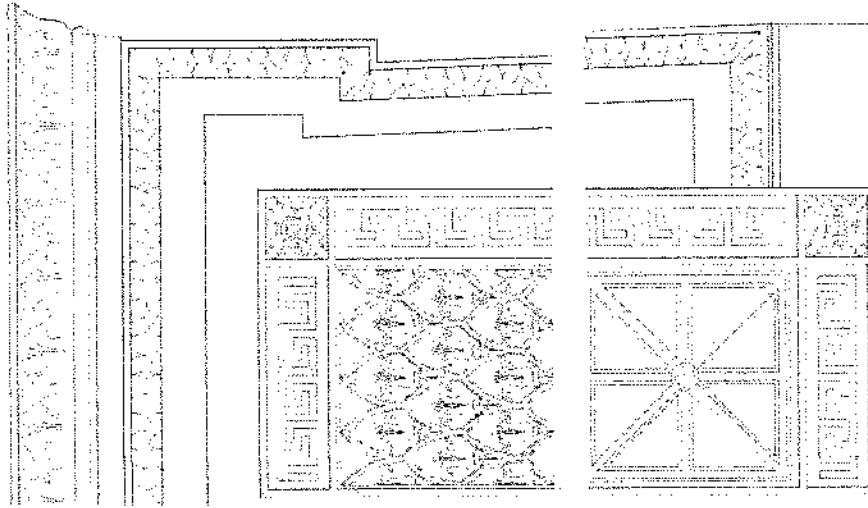


ISAAC D. FLETCHER MAUSOLEUM
MICAH TICHENOR

EAST - WEST LONGITUDINAL SECTION
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'



SITE PLAN
SCALE: 1/32" = 1'



BRONZE DOOR DETAIL
SCALE: 1 1/2" = 1'

ISAAC D. FLETCHER MAUSOLEUM
MICAH TICHENOR

