

The Fitch Monument or The Hunt & Hunt Monument at The Woodlawn Cemetery

Introduction

This paper focuses on analyzing the Fitch Monument at the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. This also includes archival and biographical research carried out to have a better understanding of the monument and its history. A part of the investigation is carried out by visiting the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx and the Woodlawn Cemetery Archives in Avery Library located at Columbia University.

The first part is concentrated on analyzing the monument on site, understanding the design, location and the context. This also includes the study of materials, layout, approach and the design style.

The second part comprises of the Biographical research. This includes the in-depth study of William Clyde Fitch, in order to get a clear understanding of the history of the monument.

The Woodlawn Cemetery at the Bronx

Woodlawn Cemetery in The Bronx, New York, opened in 1863, spans close to 400-acres with over 300,000 individual interments in approximately 47,000 family lots, 48,000 single grave spaces and ten community mausoleums. It is one of the largest cemeteries in New York City and is noteworthy for its cemetery design and individual memorial lots, after a gradual shift from the rural cemetery pattern to the landscape-lawn plan, inspired from the Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio. The initial rural cemetery plan was carried out by landscape architect J.C Sidney. However, after 1867, the cemetery design concentrated more on landscape-lawn planning with close attention to individual plots and lot. The cemetery is built on a hill slope with landscaped and tree-lined roads.

Woodlawn Cemetery hosts many of the finest examples of funerary art in the nation and also includes collaborative works by architects, landscape architects and sculptors.

An article in *American Landscape Architect* highly praised Woodlawn for its planning and design in 1932:

“With changes in elevation of 200 feet, Woodlawn’s 400 acres are rolling and rugged. Aside from the advantage of natural drainage, the deep contours and native woodland growth have provided opportunities for unusual landscape effects. The ravines, rockeries, lake, and streams

have been effectively used by the landscape designers to form vistas, lawns, park areas of rare charm.”¹



1.1 Aerial View of Woodlawn Cemetery²

The Monument

The Fitch Monument located on the Wintergreen Plot on Linden Avenue was designed by Hunt & Hunt architects in 1911. Hunt & Hunt were commissioned to design several structures in Woodlawn, including the famous Belmont Mausoleum. Mrs. Alice Maud Fitch had commissioned this monument as a memorial to her son, William Clyde Fitch (1865-1909). The sarcophagus in the centre of the monument contains the ashes of Clyde Fitch, and was later joined by his parent’s ashes, William Goodwin Fitch (father) in 1914, and Alice Maud Fitch (mother) in 1917. The monument resembles a white Tuscan temple with a simple and elegant design.

¹ John C. Plumb, “Woodlawn Cemetery at New York” in *American Landscape Architect*, 7 October 1932.

² Copyright by the Woodlawn Cemetery. Aerial Photograph by Captain James Suydam. Woodlawn Cemetery Archives in Avery Library at Columbia University.



2.1 View from Linden Avenue, 1914³

Location

The monument is located near the Jerome Avenue entrance and lies on the Wintergreen plot on the Linden Avenue. It is also very close to the intersection between Linden Avenue and Whitewood Avenue and stands on lot number 12667. The neighbouring tombs include the Chase H. Warren mausoleum and a few headstones and tombstones.

The access to the structure is from the Jerome Avenue entrance and is roughly a 15-minute walk from the main entrance and the Woodlawn Conservancy Office. The neighbouring area is not categorized by a particular style or scale of monuments or mausoleums. The types include simple headstones, elaborate tombstones, stand-alone statue monuments or building monuments and mausoleums of varied sizes.

³ Photograph by Shanon, 1914 from an album in the Woodlawn Cemetery Archives in Avery Library at Columbia University.



2.2 View from Linden Avenue



2.3 Aerial View of the Cemetery⁴

⁴ Copyright by the Woodlawn Cemetery. Aerial Photograph by Captain James Suydam.

Design and Style

The monument displays elegant austerity and the features suggest the Italianate style of architecture. It consists of a pavilion supported by fourteen Tuscan columns with a stepped stone roof.

Tuscan is a classical Roman order, that was developed in ancient Italy and resembles the Greek Doric column but with a smooth shaft, without carvings and ornaments. The shaft is set on a simple base and is plain and not fluted or grooved, with smooth round capitals. The shaft is slender with proportions similar to the Greek Ionic column. Because of their simplicity, Tuscan columns can be found in many 20th and 21st century homes.

The sarcophagus decorated with stone garlands is located in the centre of the pavilion. The sides of the sarcophagus are carved with festoons in bas-relief. The inscription on the monument reads "Clyde Fitch". However, no words or numbers record his birth, death, occupation, or achievements.

A description in the book, *Clyde Fitch and the American Theatre: An Olive in the Cocktail*, perfectly summarizes the experience of visiting the monument:

"The memorial has been restored in recent years, but on a spring day dandelions and violets sprout from cracks between the marble stones. Someone has left a penny and a dime-eleven cent-on the floor of the tomb, and a faded America flag flutters by the low steps. Canadian geese, with their peculiar pride, strut on the grass behind the monument, and a black squirrel darts out of the magnolias in pursuit of something unexplained. Behind the Fitch memorial two old cedars grow like additional columns, deeply rooted, majestic and striving upward. Ambitious trees."⁵



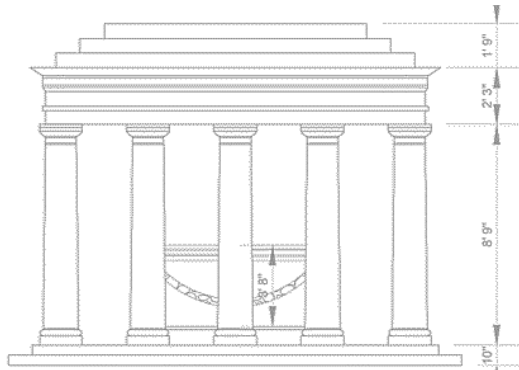
2.4 Front View from Linden Avenue

⁵ Kevin Lane Dearing, *Clyde Fitch and the American Theatre: An Olive in the Cocktail*; 531.

Analyzing the Structure and the plot

The monument sits on lot number 12667 which is 24 X 50 feet. The approximate size of the monument is 14'8" X 18'3". The monument is oriented in the north-west direction overlooking Linden Avenue.

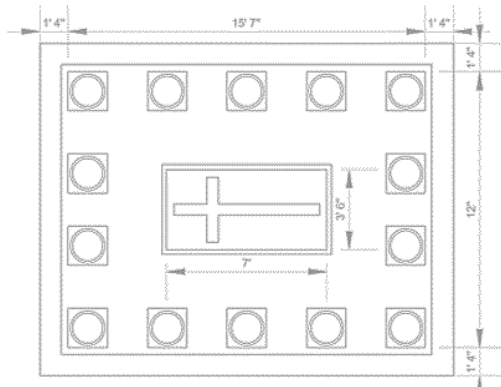
The tomb is situated inside the colonnade and the entrance is through a single step from either side of the monument. The fourteen Tuscan columns support a three-stepped roof having a deep drip out on the underside.



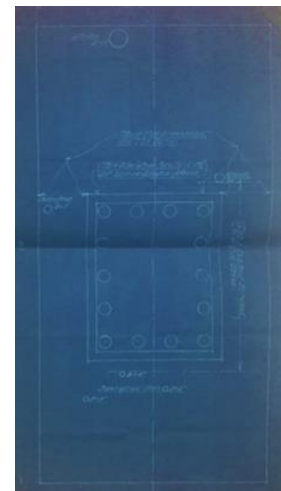
2.5 Longitudinal Elevation drawing



2.6 Front and Back elevation. Original blueprints by Hunt & Hunt architects⁶



2.7 Plan drawing



2.8 Site Plan. Original blueprints by Hunt & Hunt architects⁷

⁶Clyde Fitch monument, Woodlawn Cemetery archives at Avery library at Columbia University.

⁷ Clyde Fitch monument, Woodlawn Cemetery archives at Avery library at Columbia University.

Materials

The material used for constructing the Fitch Monument is the Gray Knoxville or Tennessee marble which is white in colour, having a grainy texture. All marble is polished with an exception of the tomb and steps that have a bare honed finish. The marble is clean cut having sharp angles, set on its natural bed in Puzzalon cement.⁸

The material used for the 2'11" foundation is cement rubble and the brand used for the cement is Atlas. The cement used for mortar is Portland cement.⁹



2.9 Interior view of the ceiling

Landscape

The Wintergreen plot is lined with sassafras trees, wild cherry, maple and Linden. However, it doesn't seem to have a specifically designed landscape.

⁸ Specification by Hunt & Hunt architects, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Avery library in Columbia University.

⁹ Specification by Hunt & Hunt architects, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, Avery library in Columbia University.



2.10 Front view of the adjacent plot (Warren) – It is safe to assume that the Warren’s tried to block the view of the Fitch monument from the intersection by strategically placing trees. This was a common practice in terms of landscaping at the Woodlawn cemetery.

Brief Overview

- Name - Clyde Fitch Monument
- Owner - Now: Clyde Fitch fund, Then: Mrs. Alice Maud Fitch
- Location - Wintergreen Plot, Linden Avenue
- Lot number - 12667
- Architect - Hunt & Hunt
- Materials – Gray Knoxville marble and Atlas Cement
- Interments – William Clyde Fitch (44 years), William Goodwin Fitch (82 years), Alice Maud Fitch (70 years); All cremated.

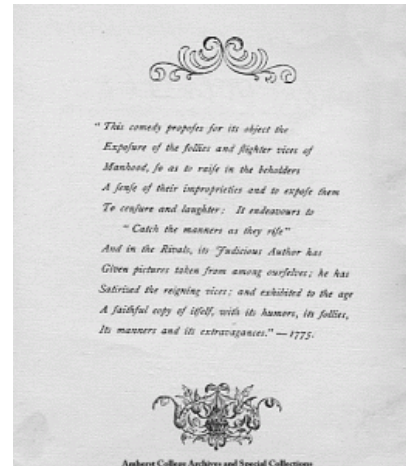
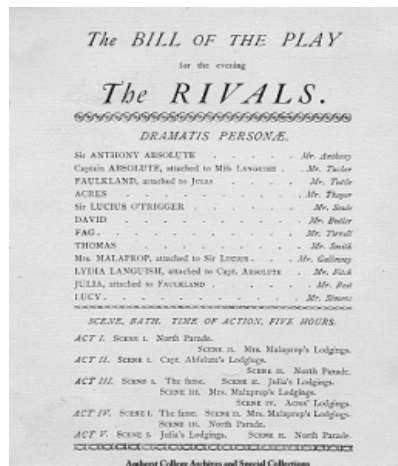
Biographical research on William Clyde Fitch



3.1 Clyde Fitch.¹⁰

William Clyde Fitch (1865-1909), born in Elmira, New York was a prolific and highly successful dramatist and playwright. He was best known for plays of social satire and character study. He was also a lyricist of the popular song, *Love Makes the World Go 'Round*. He wrote and produced over thirty-six original plays, twenty-one adaptations, and five dramatizations of novels in a twenty-year period. His works were produced throughout the United States and in Europe as well. He still holds the record for having four plays running concurrently on Broadway.

Fitch was educated at Holderness School and Amherst College where he was active in dramatic productions; his literary publications in college were mainly verse, including his Grove Oration speech in 1886.



3.2 1885 Senior Dramatics: The Rivals by Sheridan. Clyde Fitch as Lydia Languish.¹¹

¹⁰ Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

¹¹ Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

Fitch was an avid collector of books, antiques and art, with which he filled his home at 113 East 40th St, New York City, as well as at his other homes at Katonah, New York, and Greenwich, Connecticut. The “Clyde Fitch Memorial Room” in Converse Hall at Amherst College was a gift to the college from Fitch’s mother. It contained many of the furnishings and most of the books that were in his study in New York City.¹²



3.3 Clyde Fitch in the library of his East 40th Street home, New York City.¹³

Fitch believed that the object of a play was to entertain and amuse, and not to preach. Hence, he had little patience with the problem drama. As for the kind of play that would prove popular he said that the public had no taste for any particular style, but that no play would succeed unless there was something really good in it. Historical subjects appealed to him the most. Most of his work was done in the winter. His summers he spent abroad, rambling around searching for treasures of art in out of the way towns. Both his town and country homes showed the results of those excursions. No. 113 East 40th street is a characteristically quaint little house, where he stayed while in town. It was filled with pieces of Old World furniture, fountains in marble basins from Florence, a Della Robbia removed from the wall of a chapel in an old Italian town, odd little heads holding brackets, candlesticks, tapestries and many other curios. His country home, Quit Corner, was at Greenwich, Conn.¹⁴

Shortly before his death, Clyde Fitch the dramatist expressed the wish that some of the works of art he had collected be placed permanently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Fitch Collection includes painted wall panels of a small French room of the first empire period. A

¹² Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

¹³ Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

¹⁴ Clyde Fitch Dead: Appendicitis Cause Playwright Fails To Rally After Operation In France; New-York Tribune (1900-1910); Sep 5, 1909; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

number of small eighteenth century sculptures in wax which were highly prized by Clyde Fitch were also placed in the collection.¹⁵

Estate and Will – Attorneys for Clyde Fitch filed a settlement of his estate in the Surrogate's court at White Plains. According to the schedule filed by the lawyers, the estate of the dead playwright was 212,727.89 dollars. The estate went to William Goodwin Fitch, the father and only heir at the time.¹⁶

Death

Clyde Fitch died on the Sept 4th, 1909 in Chalons-en-Champagne in France, after suffering from a fatal appendicitis attack. Fitch suffered from appendicitis attacks but refused his American doctor's recommendation of surgery, instead trusting the specialists in Europe who assured him cure over time without surgery, and left for Europe in the spring of 1909 against his doctor's wishes.

"The playwright died at 9:30 in the evening with the doctors and his friend, Eugene Gauthier, present at the bedside. Mr. Fitch was taken with an acute attack of appendicitis while travelling in a motor car from Germany. He was operated on by Dr. Alquier. The patient was conscious up to 3 in the afternoon but became delirious later and died."¹⁷

The body was returned from France and entombed for a time in the Swan Callendar Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery which belonged to a friend. In 1910, the body was removed and taken to New Jersey for cremation and the ashes were returned to the Swan Callendar mausoleum until the Fitch monument by Hunt & Hunt architects was finished. His ashes were then placed in a sarcophagus in the monument.

Memory of Clyde Fitch

Critics, painters and actors, associates in the field of letters and art, gathered in the church of the Ascension, at Fifth avenue and 10th street on October 1st, 1909 to pay their respects to the memory of Clyde Fitch. There were present delegations from the Players, Friars and Lambs clubs and the Chi Psi fraternity, of which he was a member, as well as a number of his classmates at Amherst in the class of '86, many of them coming from distant parts of the country to attend the funeral. A short eulogy was pronounced by Dr. Grant. Only Captain

¹⁵ Many new Acquisitions: Metropolitan Museum gets work collected by Clyde Fitch; New-York Tribune (1900-1910); Jul 13, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁶ "Yale Alumni Weekly" Change; New-York Tribune (1900-1910); Nov 19,1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷ Clyde Fitch Dead: Appendicitis cause playwright fails to rally after operation in france; New-York Tribune (1900-1910); Sep 5, 1909; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

William G. Fitch and his wife, the father and mother of the playwright, and a few intimate friends accompanied the body to Woodlawn Cemetery.¹⁸

One of the letters written by Brander Matthews, during the Tribute to Fitch on January 23rd, 1910 read – “I held him in very high esteem both as an artist and a man, and I feel that his career was unfortunately cut short at the very moment when his talent was about to display itself even more indisputably. Great as was his actual achievement, I think his promise was even greater. No powerful or a more truthful scene that that which ends the third act of “*The Girl With The Green Eyes*” and other scenes of his, not a few, are only a little less poignant and veracious than this,”¹⁹

Daniel Frohman wrote that if the playwright had lived he would have stamped himself as “the Sheridan of the age.”²⁰

John Emerson, one of the chief producers of Mr. Fitch’s plays, spoke of his experiences of the author – “He was the most long-suffering and modest of men. The harshest thing I’ve ever heard him say after a long and tedious rehearsal with an actor, who would not do what he wanted, was ‘It was very boring.’ ”²¹

Letter from Channing Pollock read – “I have always believed that Fitch was alone in the extent of his service to the stage in America. He was the founder of a National school, and in his maturity, he made the young dramatist possible by making possible the kind of drama that always is written by the young. Fitch took the commonplace things of life and made them interesting and humorous or pathetic.”²²

After glancing through the letters and telegrams of regret from Clyde Fitch’s friends, other playwrights, actors, critics and playgoers, it can be concluded that his works were highly praised, he was loved by many and considered to be modest in nature and an inspiration to many.

Some of his notable works include *Nathan Hale* (1898), *The Climbers* (1901), *The Girl With The Green Eyes* (1902), *The Woman in the Case* (1905) and *The City* (1909)

¹⁸ Funeral of Clyde Fitch; New-York Tribune (1900-1910); Jan 24, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁹ Tribute To Fitch: Praise his artistry John Emerson tells playgoers of Dramatist’s Modesty; New-York Tribune; Jan 24, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁰ Tribute To Fitch: Praise his artistry John Emerson tells playgoers of Dramatist’s Modesty; New-York Tribune; Jan 24, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²¹ In Memory Of Clyde Fitch: The American Playgoers meet to pay the dead playwright tribute; New York Times Pg. 9; (1837-1922); Jan 24, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²² In Memory Of Clyde Fitch: The American Playgoers meet to pay the dead playwright tribute; New York Times Pg. 9; (1837-1922); Jan 24, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

