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Garvan Mausoleum



Francis Patrick Garvan Mausoleum  
Woodlawn Cemetery  
Bronx, New York

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A4510 Studio 1: Reading Buildings  
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Francis Patrick Garvan (1875-1937) is best remembered as the founding president of the American Chemical Foundation, Inc. (ACF), a prominent New York City lawyer who served as the assistant of District Attorney Senator Jerome, and for his immense philanthropy work.<sup>i</sup> In a mausoleum with space for sixteen crypts, nine is presently occupied with family members and a close family friend.<sup>ii</sup>

John Russell Pope built the Garvan mausoleum in 1931. Pope was a prominent architect in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and known for his monumental classical architecture. His major works include the National Archives (1930-1933), the Jefferson Memorial (1935-1937, completed 1943), and the National Gallery of Art (1935-37, completed 1941). All of the above mentioned were built during the same time period and share common classical forms.

The Garvan mausoleum is a typical tetrastyle Roman temple standing on a podium and is approached on a flight of stairs along a directional axis. The entire exterior is of Eureka stained white marble<sup>iii</sup> and the entrance wall is of ornamented bronze that because of the patina, has now tarnished to have a dark green color. The four Ionic columns support the entrance portico topped by an architrave, ornate frieze, and pediment. Bronze bas-reliefs of Greek mourners, sculpted by Edward Sanford,<sup>iv</sup> are on both sides of the entrance door. The double entrance door is also made of bronze with a window that is covered with a flower grill. The interior is of Botticino marble<sup>v</sup> in an off-white color. The interior space is a long corridor with two sets of eight crypts on opposite sides. A tall and raised window is on the opposite wall of the entrance and is covered on both sides with the same flower motif as the one on the door.

The Garvan mausoleum is an example of classical architecture because it employs elements that are derived from the antiquity of the Greco-Roman world. With the application of these components, a set of rules and order dictates how they were to be utilized. Especially with John Russell Pope, it is conceivable that he would adhere to every canon from the placement of columns to the most delicate groove and eave of the entablature. As described by Summerson in The Classical Language of Architecture, the "aim of classical architecture has always been to achieve a demonstrable harmony of parts."<sup>vi</sup> The floor plan is readily seen as following equal parts in a rectilinear pattern, especially in the size of the marble. In the mortar joints of the side elevation, the size of

the materials and the placement relate to how the structure is supported. Although the rubric is strict, it emphasizes a cohesion of parts that gives a refined rich composition.

If this mausoleum was clustered among a vast arrangement of grave monuments or even shadowed by an even greater mausoleum, its prominence and meaning would be diminished. The setting is then just as imperative as its form. Located at the intersection of Central Avenue and Myosotis Avenue and facing the cemetery entrance, Garvan mausoleum is one of the most visible monuments at Woodlawn Cemetery. The temple is placed in the middle of a large circular sitting and is seen on three out of its four sides. The circular plot is defined by a gravel outline that is raised slightly from the other neighboring plots. Of course with a large plot, the temple keeps itself isolated from all other gravesites. This then becomes a secondary platform that further enhances the monumentality of the Roman temple. In addition, no other mausoleum nearby can compare to size and scale.

It is the scale of the Garvan mausoleum that is the most alluring. Encountered from over fifty feet away, one can comprehend its immensity but determining the relative height is difficult. As one gets closer, a single direct access that is centered on the building is encouraged because of its symmetric form. The mysterious dark screen caused by the bronze work finally becomes uncovered upon the platform. Beforehand, the radiating white portico shielded any view of what lied beyond the columns. On the steps to the temple, the captivated eye begins to see the subtle ornamentation throughout. A dramatic entrance through the double doors uncovers the depth and height of the interior. It is only until one reaches the far altar where a human scale is finally met. All throughout this procession, the scale decreases with the relative distance. While one is never in a customary setting of normal heights, the diminution is nevertheless comforting for the visitor.

The relationship between the interior and the exterior is one of differences and similarities. While the platform has a horizontal grounding due to its expanse, the temple itself has a vertical to create loftiness in stature. Yet, the massing of these two sections is one of balance as while the platform is wide, the temple equates it with its heights. In both the exterior and interior, there is an underlying horizontality that comes across the visitor in the entire approach of the temple. It is most understandable in the interior where

long horizontal lines elongate to a one-point perspective view. As highlighted earlier through the experiential progression, it is evident of the closed container of the interior and the openness of the exterior. This moreover relates to the density capabilities where the prestige of the owner, Francis P. Garvan, most likely had a large funerary assembly where the majority that had attended probably kept to the outside grounds (the public realm) with only the immediate family allowed to enter the interior (private space). Thus, while the size and scale of the temple is outstanding, the interior is not as accommodating.

For the head of the American Chemical Foundation, a prominent lawyer, and a person of wealth, this mausoleum seems fitting for Francis Patrick Garvan and his family. One can acknowledge his prominence and importance in history through his mausoleum. The use of classical forms connotes immortality and the Roman temple is one of public service. However, while being an emblem of classical architecture, it is devoid of any personal emotion. Architectural historian of John Russell Pope, Steven Bedford, describes,

The overall impression of the structure is that it is well-mannered and appropriately dignified, tomb that, with the exception of the mystifying tragic screen, was designed and built in a clear, crisp, chaste, and properly respectful manner. It is not forceful or powerful or a moving tomb. It is simply a correct and politely respectful monument to the dead.<sup>vii</sup>

Bedford is correct in his analysis of the Garvan mausoleum. With too accurate of a mausoleum, it eliminates any individualization where the visitor must find their own method to memorialize the dead. Personal objects such as a Mickey Mouse figurine and a dog sculpture were left near the altar space to give a more private reflection. Nevertheless, the Garvan mausoleum describes John Russell Pope's desire to complete and perfect an ideal form.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "Francis P. Garvan, Lawyer, Dies Here." *New York Times*; Nov. 8, 1937

Through the ACF, Garvan created 64 scholarships in chemistry to stimulate interest. In addition, he endowed a large art collection to his alma mater, Yale University and named it on behalf of his wife, Mabel Brady Garvan (1887-1979), who is also rested in the mausoleum.

<sup>ii</sup> Other family members, whether children, children-in-law, or grandchildren, who are interred include: Francis Patrick Garvan, Jr. (1912-1972), Peter Dunne Garvan (1921-1976), Patricia Garvan (1911-1918), Frances Courtney Garvan (1949-1963), and Frank J. Coyle (1919-2005).

Interesting note is that a family friend, Finley Peter Dunne (1867-1936), is in the mausoleum. Dunne is known as the author of "Mr. Dooley," a cartoon series that was described as "witty" and "frank." He died a few months before Francis P. Garvan and Dunne's family was living in California at the time of his death. ("Finley P. Dunne, Humorist, Is Dead", *New York Times*; April 25, 1936)

Verna Mary Cook Garvan (1911-1993) is not labeled in the mausoleum and instead was self-interred. (Garvan Mausoleum, "Major Monuments," Woodlawn, [Bronx]. Avery Drawings and Archives)

<sup>iii</sup> Garvan Mausoleum, "Major Monuments," Woodlawn, [Bronx]. Avery Drawings and Archives

<sup>iv</sup> Bedford, Steven. *The Architectural Career of John Russell Pope*, Avery Classics, 1994. p.428

Sanford was a gifted sculptor who produced works of classical inspired figures in bronze and marble. His major commission included the pediment of the State Library and Courts Building, Sacramento, California.

<sup>v</sup> Garvan Mausoleum, "Major Monuments," Woodlawn, [Bronx]. Avery Drawings and Archives

<sup>vi</sup> Summerson, John. The Classical Language of Architecture. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, p.8

<sup>vii</sup> Bedford, Steven. *The Architectural Career of John Russell Pope*, Avery Classics, 1994. p.428

<sup>viii</sup> Bedford, Steven. John Russell Pope, architect of empire. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1998. P.222