

MAJEWSKI MAUSOLEUM

Woodlawn Cemetery



Elaf Alsibyani

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Faculty: Andrew Dolkart, Claudia Kavenagh, and Kate Reggev

Teaching Assistants: Preme Chaiyatham and Jesse Kling

Introduction

The Majewski mausoleum is owned by Franks X. Majewski & his wife Amelia Majewski. It was built in 1922¹ on the Aster Plot of Woodlawn Cemetery, Woodlawn Heights, Bronx, New York, by Frank T. Lang. The mausoleum contains eight catacombs in total, but only five of them are occupied. With its Egyptian style, it firmly stands out from the surrounding mausoleums. This paper will discuss different aspects of the Majewski Mausoleum, including the biography of its owners and their family, the architect, and the used architecture style. It will also indicate the different types of materials used in the exterior and the interior, the visual analysis of the mausoleum and its symbolic meanings, and finally, the current conditions.

Woodlawn Cemetery

Woodlawn, which was founded in 1863, is not only the largest cemetery of New York City but also one of the most historically significant sites in America. It is located in the south of Woodlawn Heights, Bronx. Woodlawn holds the most extensive collection of memorial and funerary art. It's a living history museum, an open-air art gallery, and an urban paradise that draws visitors worldwide.²

Biography

Frank Xavier Majewski comes from German origin but was born in New York on July 10th, 1875. Later, at the age of 26, he married Amelia Nuhn, and two years later, they had their

¹ Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Majewski, Frank X. (Aster: Lot 15242, Section 210), 1922, Box MM 11 Folder 66

² "Woodlawn Cemetery • Crematory • Conservancy | New York's World Class Cemetery Since 1863". 2021. *Woodlawn.Org*. <https://www.woodlawn.org/>.

first child Louise D. Majewski³. In 1922, Frank and his wife Amelia Majewski commissioned Frank T. Lang to build the Majewski mausoleum on Woodlawn Cemetery due to the illness of their daughter, who passed away in the same year. They had three other children, George C Majewski, Fred Henry Majewski, and Francis M. Majewski.⁴ Commissioning a mausoleum in Woodlawn and owning a house at 325 East 79th St. indicate the success of Frank's business. Frank worked in the same industry as his father; he had a pork store on 607 second Ave called Majewski & Son.⁵ The strategic location of his store beside the train station contributed to the success of the business (see figure 1)^{6,7}. His son George, who worked as a clerk at the store, was the second person buried in the mausoleum in 1937. Nine years later and at age 71, Frank died, and then three years later, his wife Amelia died. Their son Fred took care of the mausoleum and its maintenance, and he was the last one buried there in 1956.

Architect

The Majewski Mausoleum was designed by the German American, mausoleum and monument manufacturer, Frank T. Lang. In the early 20th century, he built a building as a showpiece to operate his monument and mausoleum business in the corner of 69th Street along Metropolitan Avenue in Middle Village, Queens in front of the Lutheran Cemetery. His building

³ Ancestry.com. *New York, New York, U.S., Extracted Marriage Index, 1866-1937* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.

⁴ Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999, Majewski, Frank X. (Aster: Lot 15242, Section 210), 1922, Box MM 11 Folder 66

⁵ New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, First Department, Jan 21, 1924

⁶ Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002.

⁷ 1940s NYC: Street Photos of Every Building in New York City in 1939/1940
<https://1940s.nyc/map#13.69/40.7093/-73.99397>

is a fine example of Art Deco architecture. It was built to look like a monument and speaks to his ability in this industry. He gave attention to all the details and the symbolic values of the building; for example, on the top of the building, gargoyles project from the roof and give it a monumental appearance, as if these gargoyles are protecting the building (see figure 2,3).⁸

Egyptian Revival Architecture

When it comes to memorializing the dead, the world has looked to ancient Egypt for inspiration as they had a strong belief in the afterlife. Many examples of grave markers and mausoleums in Egyptian style can be seen in different cemeteries around New York, such as Woodlawn, Calvary in Queens, and Green-Wood in Brooklyn. Egyptian style, also, can be easily identified, as it is generally designed as a temple mausoleum, pyramid tombs, and ubiquitous obelisk tomb markers (see figure 4,5,6).

Design & Materials

The exterior of the mausoleum is symmetrical in composition. Initially, the mausoleum was raised from the ground by three steps, but only two stair steps can be seen. This issue could be a combination of both settlements, and the changing of the ground level (see figure 7,8).⁹ The roof consists of three pieces extending over the entire length of the building. According to the archival information, all the exterior stairs, walls, columns, vases, and roof are made of high-quality granite in the fine axed finish. Looking to the main facade, the east one, there are two vases flanking the mausoleum, two columns with papyrus capitals, and carved flowers on the

⁸ 1940s NYC: Street Photos of Every Building in New York City in 1939/1940
<https://1940s.nyc/map#13.69/40.7093/-73.99397>

⁹ Woodlawn Cemetery records, Majewski, Frank X. (Aster: Lot 15242, Section 210), 1922, Box MM 11 Folder 66

door enframement. The ornament on the main door and the roof are all influenced by ancient Egyptian temples. The stone around the letters of the word MAJEWSKI was cut away from the granite block that located above the entrance. The double door is made of bronze, and it has movable plate glass shutters for opening and closing to help ventilate the interior. Both the north and the south elevation have bronze ventilation grates, two toward the top and two toward the bottom. According to the archives, the grates were to be set in by Portland cement.¹⁰

Moving to the interior, the floor slab is made of polished granite. The first element a person will see when the door opens is a guardian angel in a pinkish stained-glass window. According to the archive, the frame of the window is made from bronze. There are eight catacombs, four on each side, and the faces of these catacombs that can be seen from the interior are made of polish Blue Vinod Italian White Marble with two bronze rosettes handles placed in each catacomb.¹¹ The same material is used on the walls and ceiling as well. Tennessee pink was used between the catacomb panels as frames and on the cornice all around the interior. Tennessee pink was also used at the window's enframement, brackets, and pediment of the window (see figure 9).

¹⁰ Woodlawn Cemetery records, Majewski, Frank X. (Aster: Lot 15242, Section 210), 1922, Box MM 11 Folder 66

¹¹ Woodlawn Cemetery records, Majewski, Frank X. (Aster: Lot 15242, Section 210), 1922, Box MM 11 Folder 66

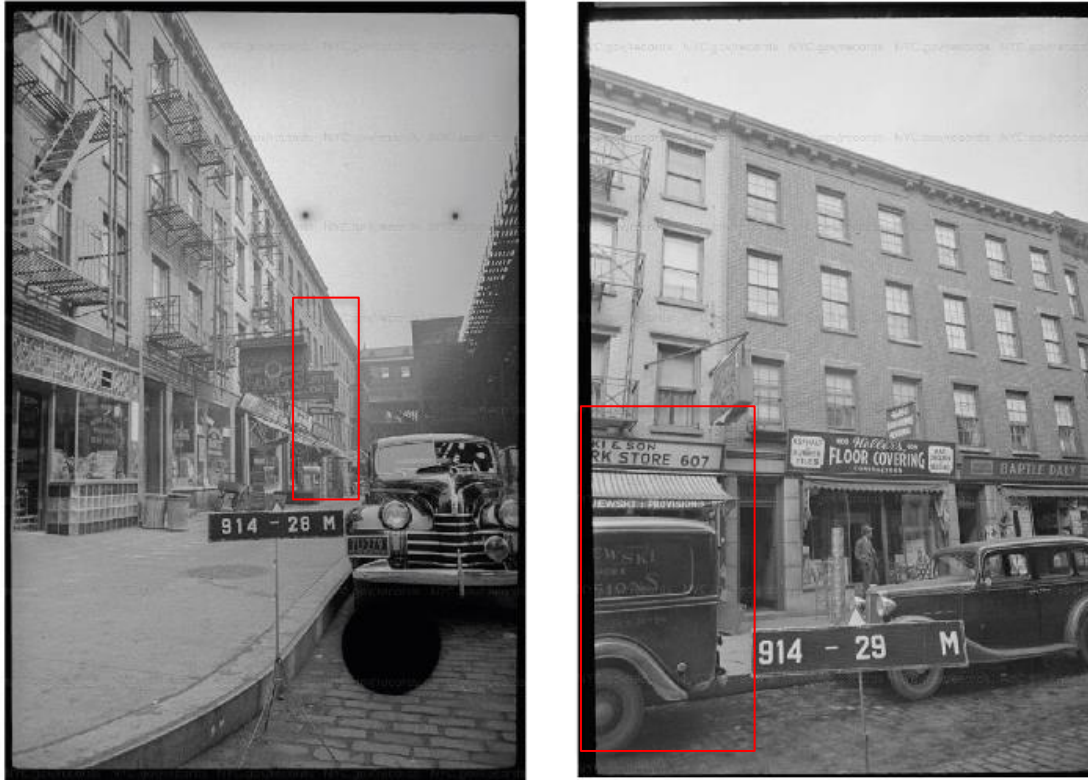


Figure 1. The Majewski Store in 1940. The left image shows the store on the context of the street and its relationship to the train station. On the right image shows a part of the store and its truck. Photograph from 1940s NYC: Street Photos of Every in New York City in 1939/1940



Figure 2. Frank T. Lang Building in 194. Photograph from 1940s NYC: Street Photos of Every Building in New York City in 1939/1940

Figure 3 Details of Frank T. Lang Building. Photograph from www.ctaarchitects.com

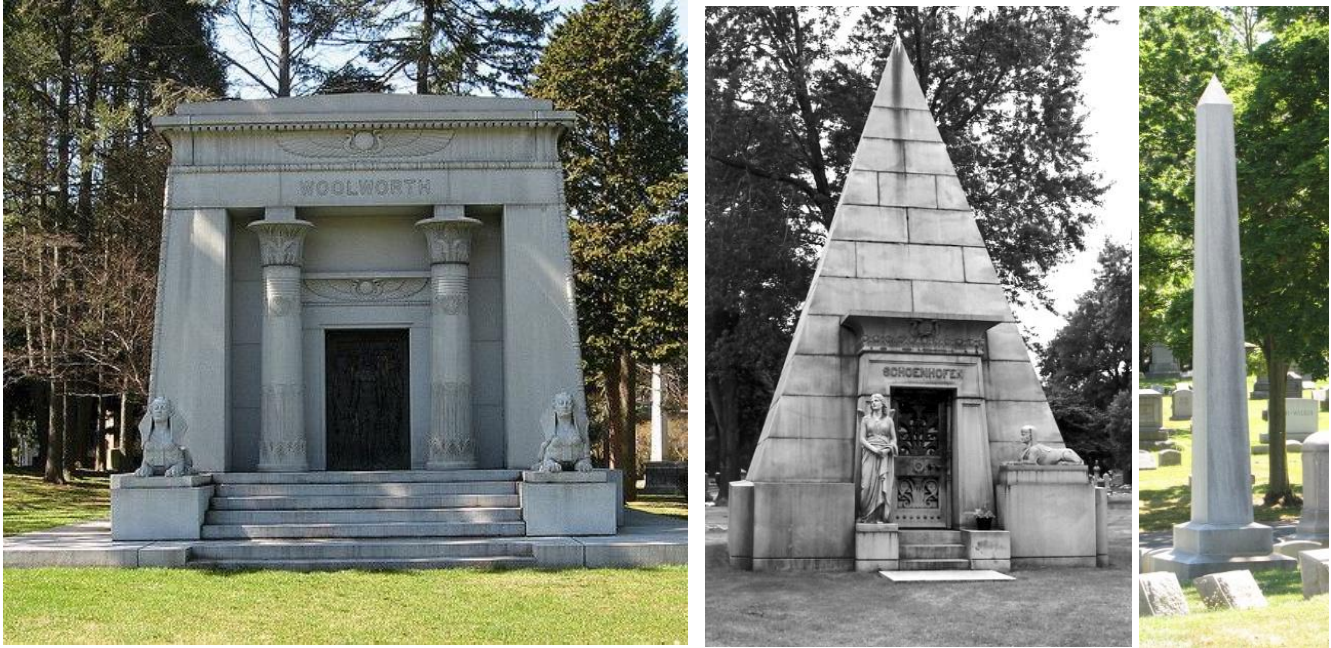


Figure 4. Temple mausoleum called Woolworth Mausoleum. Photograph from wikimedia.org

Figure 5. Pyramid tombs called Schoonhoven Mausoleum. Photograph from wikipedia.org

Figure 6 Obelisk tomb in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo, New York. Photograph from gravelyspeaking.com

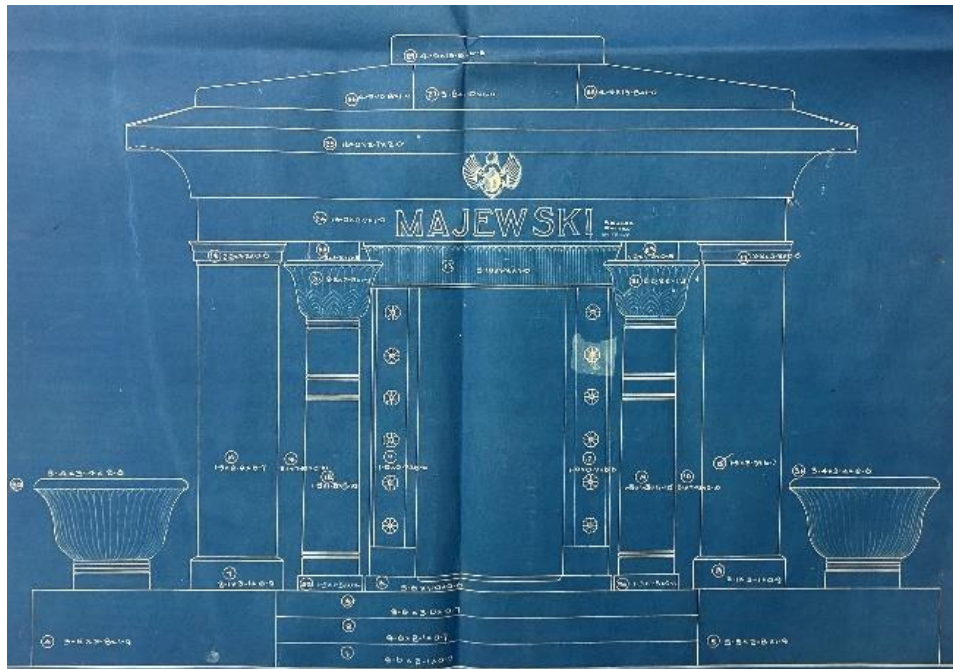


Figure 7 . Blueprint of the original drawings. Photograph from



Figure 8. Photographs of Majewski Mausoleum

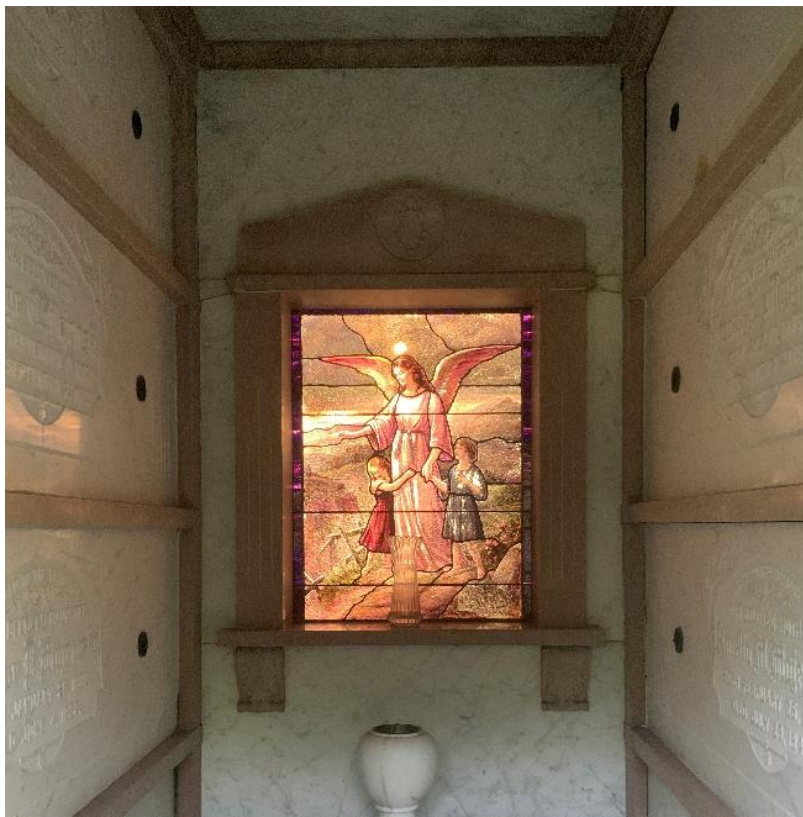


Figure 9. Interior of Majewski Mausoleum, 2021

Ornaments & Symbolism

The Egyptian style represents monumentality and nature through its organic motifs. Ancient Egyptian temple ornament has rich symbolic meaning. The winged sun found at the exterior cornice above the entrance is an ancient Egyptian symbol, but it is also used in other ancient cultures (see figure 10). The winged sun is associated with royal protection as some Egyptians used to wear it as an amulet.^{12,13} Beside the entrance, there are two papyriform columns with a circular shaft representing a single plant (see figure 11). The capitals incorporate a decoration with a papyrus flower.¹⁴ Lotus flowers along with papyrus symbolize the new creation. They are the most common motif at the mausoleum.¹⁵ These flowers are used to decorate the entrance and the interior, on the white marble of the catacombs and enframement of the window (see figure 12). The window's pediment has a scarab beetle symbol (see figure 13). Ancient Egyptians held this type of beetle in high regard. It also played an important role in the belief in rebirth and renewal¹⁶. As the frame and pediments are ornamented in Egyptian style, the bracket, the rosettes, and the glass have classical references. The stained-glass window has no Egyptian references, it shows a guardian angel who protects people in life and leads the souls into the afterlife. Therefore, even if the mausoleum has a non-Egyptian stained glass, its symbolic meanings are still related to the afterlife.

¹² El-Toukhy, M. "Protection Symbols on The Top of The Middle Kingdom Stelae (in Cairo Museum)." (2013).

¹³ Owusu, Heike. *Egyptian Symbols*. United States: Sterling, 2008.

¹⁴ Ireland, Jeannie. *History of Interior Design*. India: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

¹⁵ Owusu, Heike. *Egyptian Symbols*. United States: Sterling, 2008.

¹⁶ Owusu, Heike. *Egyptian Symbols*. United States: Sterling, 2008



Figure 11. The winged sun symbols above the entrance, 2021



Figure 10. Papyriform column, 2021



Figure 13 The main entrance decoration, 2021



Figure 12. Scarab beetle symbol on the pediment of the window

Conditions

The exterior is overall in a very good condition and clean. The door seems to be developing a verdigris patina. The building has several interior conditions that need to be fixed. Settlement and moisture infiltration seem to be contributing to a series of other problems that are affecting the mausoleum especially to the interior of the mausoleum, where many cracks are found. Starting with the Tennessee pink stone cornices that have cracked on some areas and are slightly displaced protruding (see figure 14). Also, the stone panels behind the door are tilted and shifted to the outside. Usually, the most significant cracks are found in such a situation where the building has the most stress areas, like on the corner of the windows or a door. The fact that the door was sticking out from its place is an indication that maybe there is settlement.

Moreover, the two marble panels on the ceiling have been shifted away from each other, and a gap has been created, allowing moisture and water to leak into the interior (see figure 16). The open joints and lost mortar in the roof allow moisture to come inside the building; in addition, the ventilation system is not functioning properly, allowing moisture to build up in the attic and work its way downward. The big tree that shades the top part of the mausoleum contributes as well to keep it very damp. Evidence of leakage can be seen in different forms. First, the marble panels' discoloration on the ceiling in addition to the drip marks on the cornice all over the interior. Finally, a large area of biological growth can be seen on the floor with some clean areas that show that water is dripping from the top (see figure 17). The mausoleum should be examined further to determine if settlement is in fact the cause and if it is, if it is still happening, and if this is the case, further action has to be taken.



Figure 14. Cracks on the Tennessee cornice



Figure 15. Cracks on the marble around the window.



Figure 16. Biological growth on the granite floor, 2021



Figure 17. Gabs between the two Marble panels on the ceiling

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