

The Bauerdorf Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery



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ARCH 4510: Studio I - Historic Preservation

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October 31, 2025

The Bauerdorf Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx is located on the Park View plot, Section 138, Lot 12252.¹ It is a Doric temple-like structure measuring 14'-6" wide and 20'-6" long, situated near the back of a roughly rectangular plot 30' wide and 40' deep with a convex side on the north adjacent to a larger circular plot. It sits on the west side of Spruce Avenue, with the entrance opening to the east.

The lot was purchased by Charles Frederick Bauerdorf on October 26, 1908.² Charles Frederick was born in New York in 1853 to George Frederick (1823-1898) and Adelheide Bauerdorf, both German immigrants.³ Although his father was a tailor, Charles Frederick attended Columbia Law School and became a lawyer with the firm Deyo, Duer & Bauerdorf, representing West Side Bank and served as legal representative to numerous real estate transactions and wealthy trusts throughout his career.⁴ He purchased and sold properties himself, made acquaintances with several prominent figures of his day around the turn of the century, and inherited from their estates. Charles F. also joined high society clubs like the Manhattan Club and New York Athletic Club, in addition to legal and German heritage associations.⁵

¹ "Record of Deed," October 26, 1908, Charles F. Bauerdorf, Major Monuments Folder, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture Library Columbia University, Box MM 01 Folder 76.

² "Record of Deed."

³ *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 61, no. 1558 (1898): 160, Columbia University Libraries Digital Collections; 1880 United States Census, New York City, New York, New York, ED 108, role 871: 88b, digital image s.v. "George F. Bauerdorf," *Ancestry.com*; 1880 United States Census, New York City, New York, New York, ED 387, role 885: 230c, digital image s.v. "Charles F. Bauerdorf," *Ancestry.com*.

⁴ 1880 United States Census, s.v. "George F. Bauerdorf"; "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, June 4, 1907: 12; "New Bank Building," *The Independent*, January 5, 1911, 63; *Real Estate Record* 47, no. 1202 (1891): 496.

⁵ "Taken to Stockbridge: Remains of the Late David Dudley Field Removed from New York City," *The Washington Post*, April 17, 1894: 1; "Obituary," *New York Tribune*, January 20, 1915: 9.

Charles F. married Annie Rohe (1860-1930) in 1879, the daughter of Charles and Thekla Rohe (fig. 1).⁶ They had three sons, Charles Rohe Bauerdorf (1880-1953), George Frederick Bauerdorf (1885-1961), and Walter Julius Bauerdorf (1888-1925).⁷ Together they owned and lived in a townhouse at 625 West End Avenue on the Upper West Side in Manhattan.⁸ The eldest son, Charles R., followed in the footsteps of his father by becoming a lawyer specializing in real estate and estate planning with the firm Bauerdorf & Taylor. He attended Princeton and received his law degree from Columbia Law School like his father. He also was a member of society organizations like the New York Athletic Club.⁹ He was mentioned in news articles for notable events like the inheritance in the will of restaurateur Arthur Luchow to the sum of \$240,840 in 1925; reservation for a box at the National Horse Show in Madison Square Garden in 1930; and a Halloween party for the benefit of the Women's Aid Society in 1935, to name a few.¹⁰ As the eldest and a lawyer, he became the executor of his father's estate upon his death on January 19, 1915.¹¹ Charles R. managed real estate transactions among his mother and brothers in order to

⁶ "Marriage License of Charles F. Bauerdorf," *Index to New York City Marriages, 1866-1937*, cert. 6596, October 13, 1879, s.v. "Charles F. Bauerdorf," *Ancestry.com*; 1870 United States Census, New York City, New York, New York, Ward 20, District 11, role M593_1047: 466A, digital image s.v. "Annie Rohe," *Ancestry.com*.

⁷ 1900 United States Census, Manhattan, New York, New York, ED 0523, roll 1105: 4, digital image s.v. "Charles R. Bauerdorf," *Ancestry.com*; "Obituary," *New York Times*, September 11, 1953: 21 [Charles R. Bauerdorf]; "Obituary," *New York Times*, July 25, 1961: 27 [George F. Bauerdorf]; "Deaths," *The New York Herald, New York Tribune*, June 11, 1925: 21 [Walter J. Bauerdorf].

⁸ 1900 United States Census.

⁹ "Obituary" [Charles R. Bauerdorf].

¹⁰ "Appraisal Shows Luchow Left \$1,860,725 Estate," *The New York Herald, New York Tribune*, October 17, 1925: 15; "National Horse Show at Garden November 6-12," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 19, 1930: 2; "Halloween Dance Helps Women's Aid Society: Fete at the Astor for Relief of Widows and Orphans," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 31, 1935: 15.

¹¹ "Last Will and Testament of Charles F. Bauerdorf," *Record of Wills, 1665-1916*, New York County Surrogate's Court, January 27, 1915.

settle the inheritance, in addition to managing the creation of the Bauerdorf mausoleum on their plot at Woodlawn Cemetery.¹²

However, at the time of the death of his father, there was already a burial on the plot, that of Helen Bauerdorf. Helen was born to Charles R. and his wife Mabel Ronan (1883-1972) in 1912 and died only a few days later.¹³ The cause of death and circumstances surrounding it are unclear, but her body was laid to rest in the southwest corner of the plot before the mausoleum was built. They never had any more children. They were married on June 8, 1907 at the Bauerdorf home at 625 West End Ave, and after his death in 1953, Mabel remarried in 1959 to Ernest Herb, thereupon taking up his surname.¹⁴ She was still interred with her former husband, and in 1972 was the last to be buried in this mausoleum.

George F., the younger brother of Charles R., not to be confused with their grandfather of the same name, grew up to become an oil executive. Perhaps he is the most notable Bauerdorf in the mausoleum due to the infamous death of his daughter Georgette (1924-1944) at the age of 19

¹² *Real Estate Record* 97, no. 2511,(1916): 249; *Real Estate Record* 98, no. 2534,(1916): 192; Gustav Benisch, "Longitudinal Blueprint," July 26, 1915, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive; Gustav Benisch, "Specifications for Mausoleum to be erected for Mr. C. F. Bauerdorf, in Woodlawn Cemetery, N.Y.," August 9, 1915.

¹³ "List of United States Citizens," *New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957*, February 8, 1934, digital image s.v. "Mabel Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com; Connecticut Department of Health, *Connecticut Death Index, 1949-2012*, file 21343, October 9, 1972, s.v. "Mabel Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com; "Births Reported in 1912—Borough of Manhattan," *New York, New York, U.S., Birth Index, 1910-1965*, cert. 69819, digital image s.v. "Helen Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com; *New York, New York, U.S., Extracted Death Index, 1862-1948*, cert. 33167, s.v. "Helen Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com.

¹⁴ *New York, New York, U.S., Extracted Marriage Index, 1866-1937*, cert. 16242, s.v. "Charles Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com; *New York, New York, U.S., Marriage License Indexes, 1907-2018*, license 11424, 1959, s.v. "Mabel Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com.

after a grizzly murder in the bathtub of her Los Angeles apartment, which remains unsolved.¹⁵

However, she is buried at another Woodlawn plot with her older sister Constance Ann (1920-2014). Their mother and first wife of George F., Constance Danhauser (1894-1935), died young before her daughter's murder and is buried at the Bauerdorf Mausoleum along with George F., who was the last of the three Bauerdorf sons to die in 1961. Although he had a long second marriage, he still chose to be buried with his first wife and brothers.¹⁶ The third son of Charles Frederick Bauerdorf, Walter, was a milliner living with a physical disability and first of the three sons to die with no family of his own.¹⁷

Altogether, there are eight burials in the mausoleum, with Charles R. and Mabel's daughter Helen being reinterred in the foundations after originally being buried in the ground on the lot in 1912. The mausoleum was planned and constructed in 1915 following the death of the elder Charles F. Bauerdorf on January 19. At the time of construction, Helen was already buried in the southwestern corner of the lot. The site was surveyed on April 30, 1915 in preparation for construction, and then Charles R. hired Benisch Brothers Monumental Works as contractor and Gustav Benisch as the designer on July 26, 1915.¹⁸ The builder requested from Woodlawn a

¹⁵ "Oil Executive's Daughter Found Dead in Bathtub," *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1944: 5; Ruth Reynolds, "Dreams of Adventure Brought a Girl One that Puzzles Police," *Daily News*, July 21, 1946: 62.

¹⁶ 1940 United States Census; "Constance Ann Bauerdorf Cartwright," *Find a Grave*, last modified April 5, 2005, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/281343451/constance-ann-cartwright>; 1910 United States Census, Manhattan Ward 9, New York, New York, ED 0158, roll T624_1006: 3A, digital image s.v. "Constance Danhauser," Ancestry.com; Extracted Death Index, cert. 5616.

¹⁷ John S. Major, "Registration Card," *U.S. World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, no. 72, June 5, 1917, digital image s.v. "Walter Bauerdorf," Ancestry.com; "Deaths," *The New York Herald, New York Tribune*, June 1925: 21.

¹⁸ R. Storm, "Map of Lot No. 12252," Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, April 30, 1915; Gustav Benisch, "Front Elevation," Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, July 26, 1915.

more thorough survey of the lot with the grading in early August and sent the drawings for review by the cemetery on August 9.¹⁹ After communications between the contractor and Woodlawn regarding the dimensions of the foundations and the disinterment of Helen's body, revised plans for the mausoleum with her reinterment in the center of the foundations were sent in the end of September.²⁰ In October, stakes were set out and the foundation work by Woodlawn began in November.²¹ The engineer from Woodlawn requested that Helen's body be removed from the ground once the foundation was constructed and there was a request via the contractor that Charles R. be present upon her disinterment.²² According to the specifications, the mausoleum would have been finished by December 15 of that year.²³ The completed structure was inspected on March 20, 1916 with the inclusion of the elder Charles F. in the first of the eight catacombs with the inscription, "The world was the brighter and the happier for his having lived in it."²⁴

The mausoleum is designed in the Doric order with an east-facing porch supported by four fluted columns and topped with a triangular pediment. It sits at the back of the plot facing Spruce Avenue on a lawn gently sloping toward the street, with a Japanese maple tree on the northeastern corner (fig. 2). It is among lower chest tombs to the south along the street and

¹⁹ Benisch Bros. Monumental Works, Letter to Woodlawn Cemetery, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, August 9, 1915.

²⁰ Benisch Bros., Letter to Woodlawn Cemetery, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, September 28, 1915.

²¹ M.G., "Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Inspection," Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, October 19, 1915: 1; J. A. Doolittle, "Mausoleums, Monuments, Etc. Computation," Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, November 1, 1915: 1.

²² R. Storms, Letter to Benisch Bros., Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, October 1, 1915; Benisch Bros., Letter to Mr. Storms, Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, September 28, 1915.

²³ Gustav Benisch, "Specifications," 3.

²⁴ M.G., "Inspection," 1.

behind it to the west, and a larger rectilinear mausoleum on a circular plot to the north on the corner where Spruce meets Hickory Avenue.

A frieze wraps around all four sides of the structure with alternating triglyphs and unadorned metopes above a plain architrave except for the regula and guttae below each triglyph and “BAUERDORF” inscribed on the front. The four monolithic columns are eight feet tall, 1’-6” in diameter, and capped by an echinus on three rows of fillets and a square abacus that juts out beyond the entablature it supports (fig.3). The stolid fabric of the design is consistent with large, flat blocks making up the four walls of the building. Each side has five rows with each block around 20” tall, 4-6’ long, and 10” thick, in a coursed ashlar fashion.

The exterior is made entirely of light Barre granite from Vermont with a hammered finish.²⁵ The base of the porch itself is a single block 14’-6” wide, 7’ long, and 19” tall. Two steps lead up to a flat surface except for the congés below the columns. This leads to the bronze door that was provided by Charles R. for installation by the contractor.²⁶ It is a double door, each panel with a large glass pane behind latticework of repeating fleur-de-lis surrounded by pointed arch openings. Surrounding these panels are a continuous scrolling foliate pattern with off shooting volutes running in tight repeat, ending in squared flowers at the intersection points of the border. Toward the bottom is a square panel on each door with an inset circle and a rectangle below (fig. 9). The doorway measures 7’-0” height and 3’-6” wide. The overall effect of the bronze details of the door, well-defined moldings, large courses, and sharp edges juxtaposing the

²⁵ The Woodlawn Cemetery, “Examination Sheet,” Woodlawn Cemetery Archives, August 15, 1915.

²⁶ Gustav Benisch, “Specifications,” 3.

subtly sloping landscape is both that of a stoic and refined structure, qualities continued inside the mausoleum.

The doors swing outward, leading to an interior chamber that is about 12' deep and 10'-7" high. The floor is elevated 2" above the surface of the porch. The tile floor is made of polished Barre granite; each tile is 8" wide and range 4"-16" long, laid in alternating courses bordered by long tiles dividing the four parts of interior—north, south, and center squares in the front just beyond the entrance, and the center hallway running behind the catacombs to the back window (fig. 7). The granite blocks surrounding the door are 1'-3" to the inside framing the opening from the inside as well.

The wall and ceiling panels of the interior are entirely of "veined white imported Italian marble polished where exposed," likely Carrera, with soft grey streaks and splotches evenly distributed (fig. 8).²⁷ These wall panels are all roughly 3' wide and 5' tall. On the ceiling are four panels in a T-formation suspended from the roof by two bronze ceiling rods with a rosette end. The catacombs run about 8' to the rear of the interior, flanking the rear window. They are stacked to the ceiling four-high, with marble beams surrounding each, and each individual catacomb covered by an inset marble slab measuring 8' long by 2'-4" high ornamented by two bronze medallions flanking the inscription of the family member entombed there. Seven of the eight catacombs are occupied, the first being Charles Frederick Bauerdorf from 1915, and the last is the wife of Charles R., appended with the surname from her second marriage, "Mabel Bauerdorf Herb." The couples are buried across from each other, men on the south and women on the north, except for Walter on the bottom who was never married.

²⁷ Gustav Benisch, "Specifications," 3.

At the bottom rear of the mausoleum is a marble panel inscribed with “Helen Bauerdorf/ 1912—1912” (fig. 7). However, she is buried under the floor of the mausoleum within the foundations, oriented north-south in a 3’ slate case.²⁸ Above that panel is a stained-glass window of an angel by an unidentified maker. The colored-glass panels are set between lead comes. The work measures 35” wide and 57” tall, surrounded by a bronze frame 3/8” wide, and inset 6” from the marble surface of the inner back wall (fig. 10).

The work contains an angel surrounded by opalescent glass cut in abstract curved panels, transitioning from orange and yellow tones at the top one-third to greens, light blues, and then darkest blues filling the bottom half of the background. The figure is an angel, with a single panel for the halo, face, and hair, painted onto the glass. Its hair flows beyond its neck, colored light brown with golden streaks and a wreath containing two pink blossoms. Its face is turned to her left, delicately painted with a high brow and large grey eyes. It is clothed in a flowing gown made up of large panels of opalescent glass with hues of yellow, ochre, and cream, and folds in the garment expressed in green tones. Her robe has a golden-yellow symbol over her chest—five dots representing the five wounds of Jesus on the cross, surrounded by a fleur-de-lis for innocence and purity, perhaps in honor of Helen, or the Trinity, and on top of a rectangle of a horizontal line across the middle. A crimson sash is tied around her waist with lead came to give the impression of folds. Her feet jut out beyond the robe at the bottom and are also painted. The two other painted panels are her hands, the right holding a pale-yellow feather, and a cluster of palm fronds expressed by thin, vertical panes of green in her left, a symbol of peace and

²⁸ Gustav Benisch, “Longitudinal Blueprint.”

eternity.²⁹ Finally, she is flanked by large wings contracted in a host of colors—amber at the top and opalescent panels of blue and purple moving downward—to frame the figure against the background. With the window placed on the western side of the mausoleum, and with mostly chest tombs in the adjacent plots behind it, this allows the setting sun to shine directly through.

This shock of color above Helen within a gleaming white interior shows how the would-be burial place for the family of the elder Charles F. became adapted during the execution of the mausoleum under his son, Charles R., for it to become a monument for his short-lived daughter. The Italian marble as specified and the door and window procured by Charles R. with these symbols of purity and eternity create a heavenly space for Helen to reside on the Earth for which she never got to inhabit. Perhaps, the fleur-de-lis wrapping the five dots on the angel's chest points to a life born and died at once, juxtaposing the fleur-de-lis that can represent the Annunciation, the forthcoming birth of Jesus, with the five wounds that surrounded his death. Helen's soul is accompanied to Heaven by the angel in the stained glass above, meanwhile her body remains quite literally part of the foundation of this mausoleum which entombs the rest of her family.

That being said, the heat from the sun has caused the window to bow 2" inward from the lead came deforming over time. According to an analysis done in 2020, there has been no restoration of this piece.³⁰ All of the panels and lead comes are intact. The marble panels on the interior are well preserved with no signs of deterioration except for the ceiling, where one of the

²⁹ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (New York Graphic Society, 1971–72), 1:47,51; *Iconography* 2:18, 188–189, 202.

³⁰ Brianne Kozlowski and Drew Anderson, "Woodlawn Cemetery Stained Glass Condition Assessment," *Liberty Stained Glass Conservation*, December 11, 2020.

three panels has moved askew so that there is a gap between two of the panels where they meet the bronze hanging rods. The floor is an entirely different story—the polished Barre granite tiles are heavily yellowed from water damage, and there are many chips in the surface. Likewise, the exception to the good preservation of the marble slabs is the back panel below the window, which shows significant discoloration due to water damage in the bottom half.

The exterior of the mausoleum is in very good condition overall. The blocks of Barre granite mostly show little note of deterioration. The front stone block of the base has biological growth on the bottom step and the projections beyond the porch, and water damage where the bronze door sits above the granite surface (fig. 3). There is also minor biological growth along the bottom course of blocks and under the sill of the roof at the rear of the mausoleum (fig. 5). There is more biological growth as expected on the north side of the mausoleum toward the bottom and along the column where it does not get any sun (fig. 6). The grass on the lawn is well-maintained and the only other vegetation on the lot is a Japanese Maple tree at the northeast corner, which is several decades old. However, there are no original plans in the archive or physical indications that there was a more elaborate landscape design.

Altogether, the Bauerdorf Mausoleum from 1915 is an excellent example of a Doric style structure at Woodlawn Cemetery. It stands out for its relatively well-preserved interior and exterior, ornate bronze door, and in situ stained-glass window. The interior of Italian white, which is possibly Carrera, marble is also unusual compared to the other Woodlawn mausolea that use domestic Carrera-like stone. Gustav Benisch, the designer, and his firm as the contractor, Benisch Bros., made a well-proportioned structure that follows many of the conventional Doric principles with a rectilinear Roman temple layout sitting on a podium. The mortar joints are

consistent throughout the structure at 1/4" thick. Although not uncommon for other nearby mausolea, the sheer mass of the granite blocks used for the structure, like the front base block of the porch and the three 18'-7" long slabs of the roof, is a feat. Today this mausoleum stands in honor of Charles F. Bauerdorf, who came from German immigrants in New York to become a successful lawyer, and his progeny, some of whom were not as fortunate to enjoy this wealth during their own short lifetimes.

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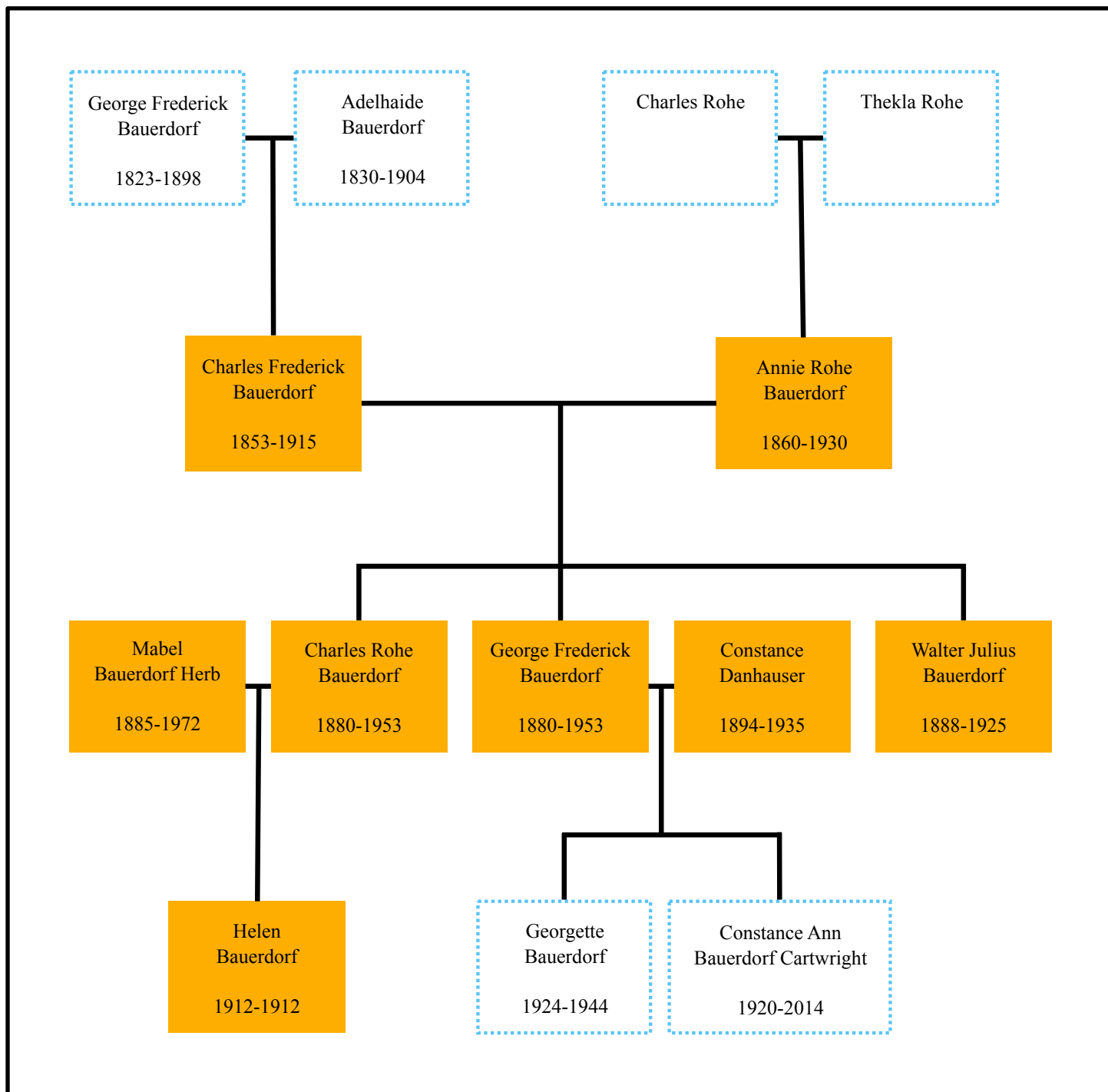


Figure 1. Bauerdorf Family Tree



Figure 2. Site view from Spruce Avenue, looking north.



Figure 3. Front elevation from the east.

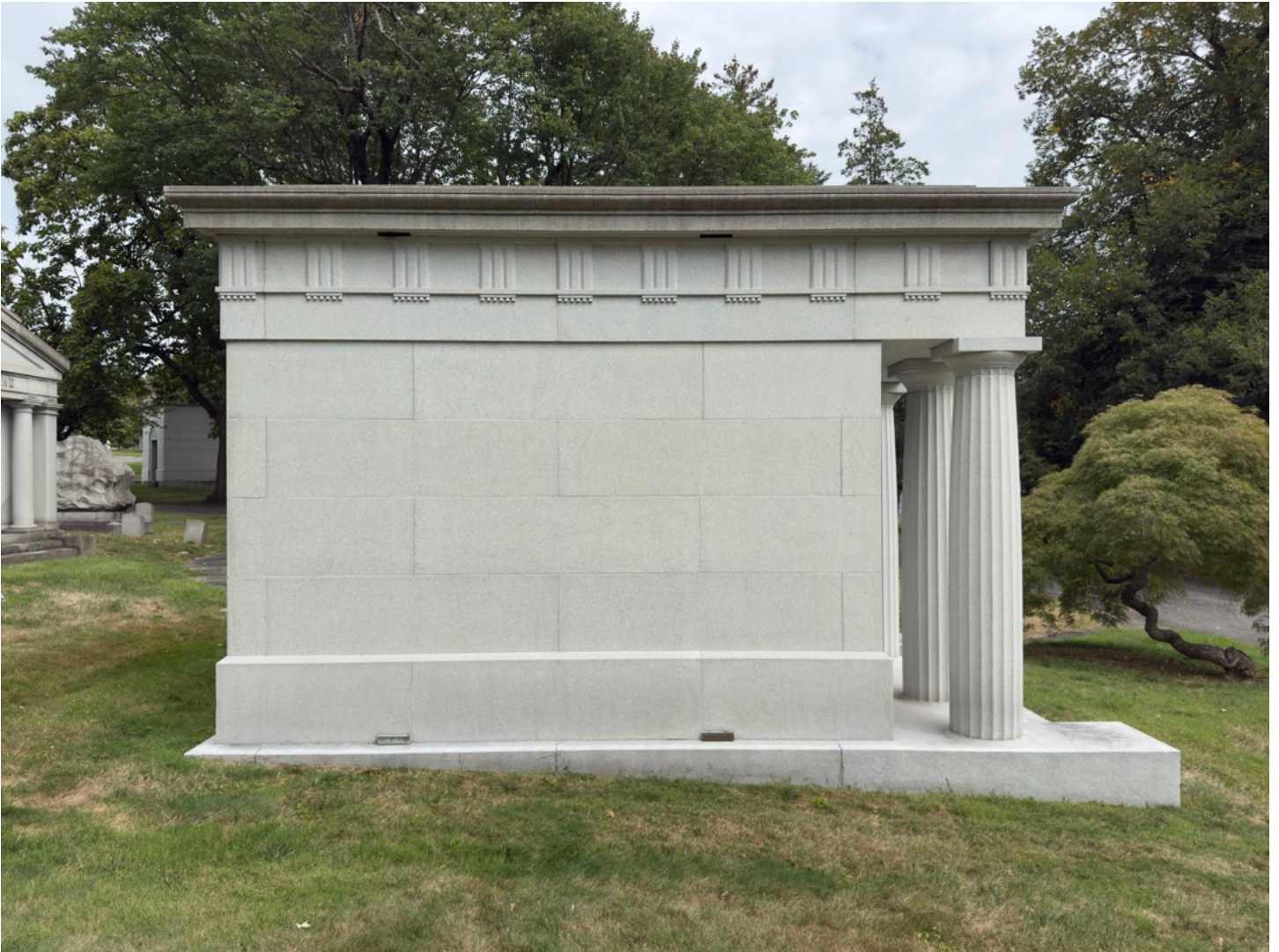


Figure 4. Side elevation from the south.



Figure 5. Rear elevation from the west.



Figure 6. Side elevation from the north.



Figure 7. Interior rear looking west.



Figure 8. Interior looking south, Carrera marble panels.



Figure 9. Bronze door.



Figure 10. Rear window.