

**PROJECT 1: WOODLAWN CEMETERY**  
**Brakmann Mausoleum**

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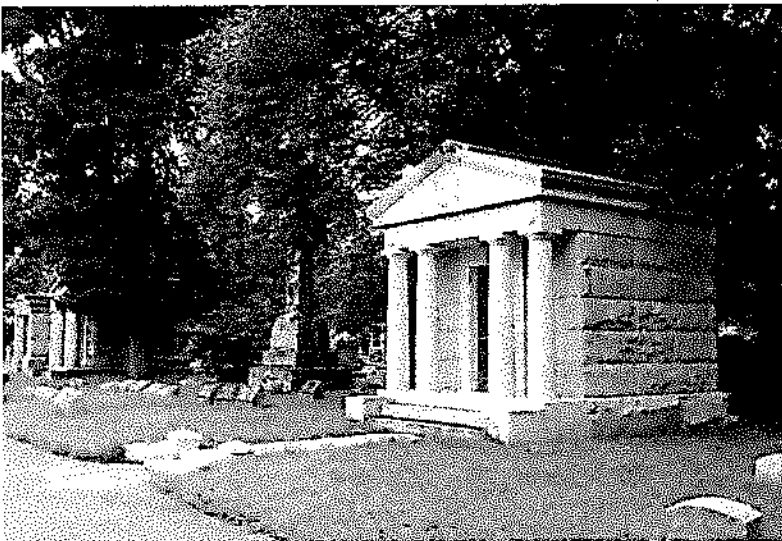
**PROJECT 1: WOODLAWN CEMETERY****Brakmann Mausoleum****Biography of the Brakmann Family**

Figure 1: Overall view of Brakmann mausoleum

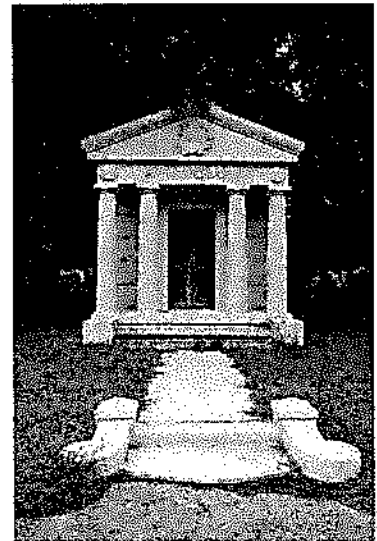


Figure 2: Front view of Brakmann mausoleum

Carved on the entablature of the front façade of the mausoleum, *A. Brakmann* stands for August Brakmann, the first of the nine family members to be buried here and the one who commissioned this mausoleum in the first place. An immigrant from Germany, August moved to the United States in 1872, one year after his wife Wilhelmina Brakmann who also emigrated from Germany. The couple had three daughters: Minnie, Bessie, and Ida.<sup>1</sup> August made a living as a local real estate agent in the New York area. He passed away in 1910 at the age of 58. Records show that the widowed Wilhelmina then lived with her second daughter (documented as Gussie in the 1910 census and later as Augusta) who, by that time, was married to Peter Helmsley.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *United States Census, 1900, Connecticut, Fairfield, Stamford, E.D. 107, p. 25.*

<sup>2</sup> *United States Census, 1910, Bronx A.D. 32, E.D. 1452, p. 2.*

Interestingly, the 1920 census shows that the oldest daughter, Minnie Helmsley, also married into the Helmsley family: her husband was Henry Helmsley, who was a department store manager.<sup>3</sup> They had three children, one of whom was to become the notoriously renowned billionaire Harry Helmsley (not buried here).

Ida, the youngest of the three daughters, her second husband William McIlvrid, along with her son from the first marriage, August Tonjes, are all buried here at this mausoleum.

From the biographical research, the fascinating lesser known fact about the family is that August Brakmann is in fact the maternal grandfather of the real estate billionaire Harry Brakmann Helmsley, and was the one who introduced Harry to the real estate business. Through his grandfather, Harry got his first job working in a real estate firm Dwight, Voorhis and Perry; he soon showed talent and rose in the real estate industry.<sup>4</sup>

Through the years, Harry and his wife, Leona Helmsley, had taken good care of the Brakmann mausoleum, as indicated through a letter written to the cemetery by Mrs. Helmsley, demanding that the cemetery take better care of the mausoleum.<sup>5</sup> Harry Helmsley was also initially buried at Woodlawn Cemetery (on a separate plot) but was later moved to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery following Leona's wishes.<sup>6</sup>

### Design of the Brakmann Mausoleum

In 1906, August Brakmann purchased a plot at Woodlawn and hired the firm Leland & Hall Co. to be the architect of his mausoleum. A firm specializing in mausoleums and memorials, Leland & Hall Co.

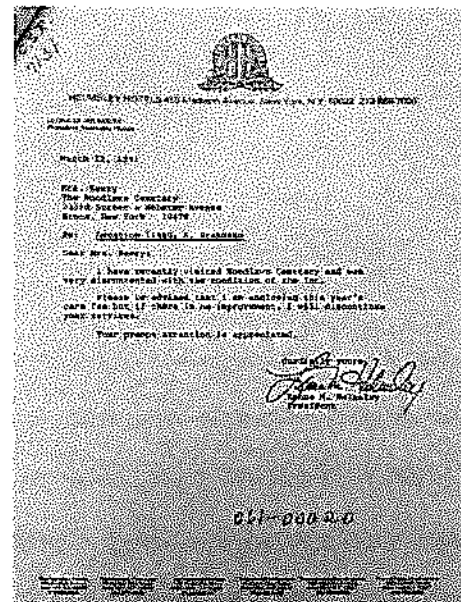


Figure 1: Letter from Leona Helmsley to Woodlawn Cemetery

<sup>3</sup> *United States Census, 1920*, Manhattan A.D. 23, E.D. 1502, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Ann T. Keene, "Helmsley, Harry," *American National Biography*, www.anb.org, accessed September 25, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> WCA Correspondence. Box 2, Folder 80. Avery Archive.

<sup>6</sup> Andrea Peyser, "I'm Dead Set on Moving Harry: Leona," *New York Post*, July 26, 2004.

designed many, mostly Classical, monuments. Later to merge with another memorial designer firm, Presbrey-Coykendall in 1920<sup>7</sup>, Presbrey-Leland continued their specialization in mausoleum design with granite works from Barre, Vermont.

Brakmann mausoleum is predominantly the work of Classical design in a contemporary form and proportion. The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials has catalogued the different architectural prototypes of mausoleum design and included a prostyle temple form similar to that of the Brakmann mausoleum with varying scale and details.<sup>8</sup> Typical bronze door and bronze window grille common in mausoleums of the period are also selected and applied.<sup>9</sup>

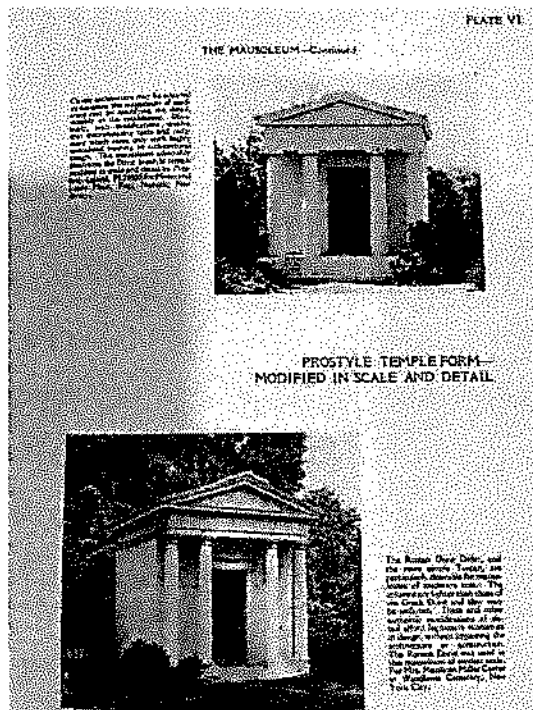


Figure 2: The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials

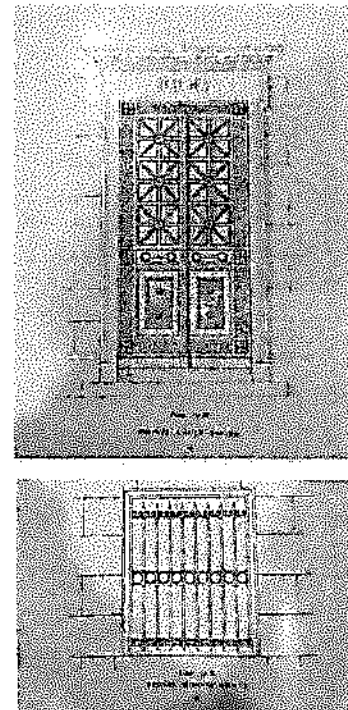


Figure 3: Bronze and Brass Work for Mausoleums and Monuments

The main structure of the mausoleum is constructed with granite, possibly quarried from the company-owned plant in Barre, Vermont. These big granite blocks are neatly cut and mortared; the surface is treated with rustication on the exterior and mitered crisp refined surface at the corners. Marble

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Scott Dolkart, "Designing Woodlawn: Buildings and Landscapes," in *Sylvan Cemetery: Architecture, Art and Landscape at Woodlawn* (Avery Library, 2014), 61.

<sup>8</sup> Presbrey-Leland, Inc., *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials* (New York: Presbrey-Leland studios, 1929), plate VI.

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Mott Iron Works, *Bronze and Brass Work for Mausoleums and Monuments* (New York: The Works, 1901), 25.

slabs are applied on the interior of the mausoleum, giving it a clean and elegant look on the inside. As previously mentioned, the door and window grille are of bronze material and a stained-glass window featuring image of a crown is the highlight of the interior space. There are also details of bronze rosettes on the walls of the sarcophagi as well as on the ceiling. The sarcophagi are stacked on both sides of the mausoleum and three more lay underneath the ground (only one body currently buried underground).

### Documentation and Observation

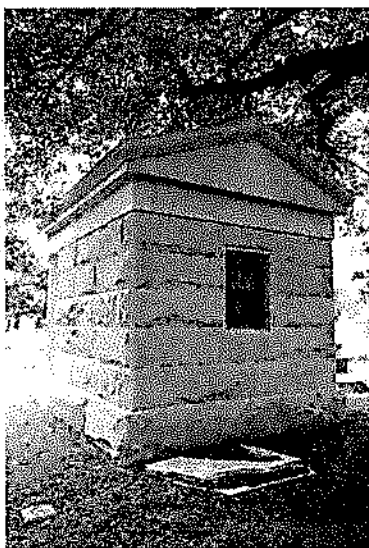


Figure 4: Remains of old marble slabs

Even more than a hundred years have passed, the granite remains in good condition with sharp, crisp edges and fine details. The stones are relatively clean compared to other mausoleums within the plot, reflecting the continuous care and attention paid by the patron. The building is cautiously designed with vents (two on each side wall) and there seems to be no major problem with water leakage. One interesting as-found condition is the two broken marble slabs found lying on the ground at the back of the building. Records from the archive indicate that when entombment was made in the underground catacomb in 1964, the floor slabs were in bad condition and the decision was made to not place them back for safety reasons.<sup>10</sup> The

slabs presumably still lay broken at the back of the mausoleum while new marble slabs seem to have been installed for the interior floor.

One of the most noticeable features of the design of the mausoleum is its thoughtful relation to the cemetery context. From afar, the mausoleum is visible and is given a unique presence due to its entrance walkway connecting the building to the road in front. The approach axis is intentionally designed to give the building

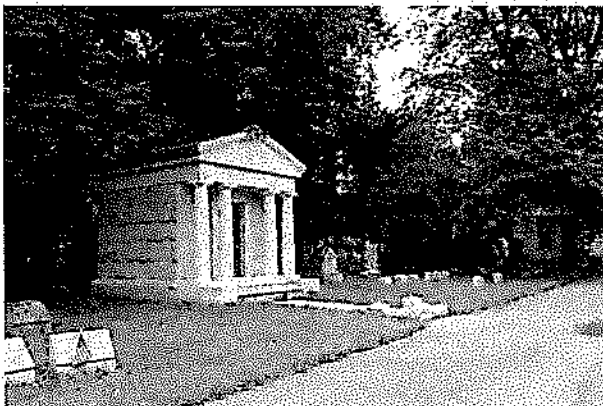


Figure 5: Entryway and relationship with the road

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<sup>10</sup> WCA Major Monuments, Box 2, Folder 60. Avery Archive.

prominence as one reaches the base and goes up the steps of the podium into the pronaos space. It clearly has Classical precedence in its design, for example the fluted Doric columns and temple typology (with a modified pediment). The rusticated surface treatment with the smooth refined corners gives the building a distinct look and stylized detailing.

The sacredness of the space is not only due to its Classical temple precedence, but also to the orientation of the building which faces east, allowing the evening sunlight to flood through the stained-glass window, filling the interior space with warm colorful rays of light.

From research and documentation, it is clear that the Brakmann mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery is a hidden jewel with an interesting historical association as well as the architectural design of the mausoleum.

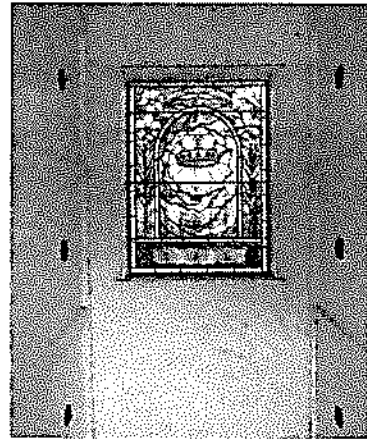
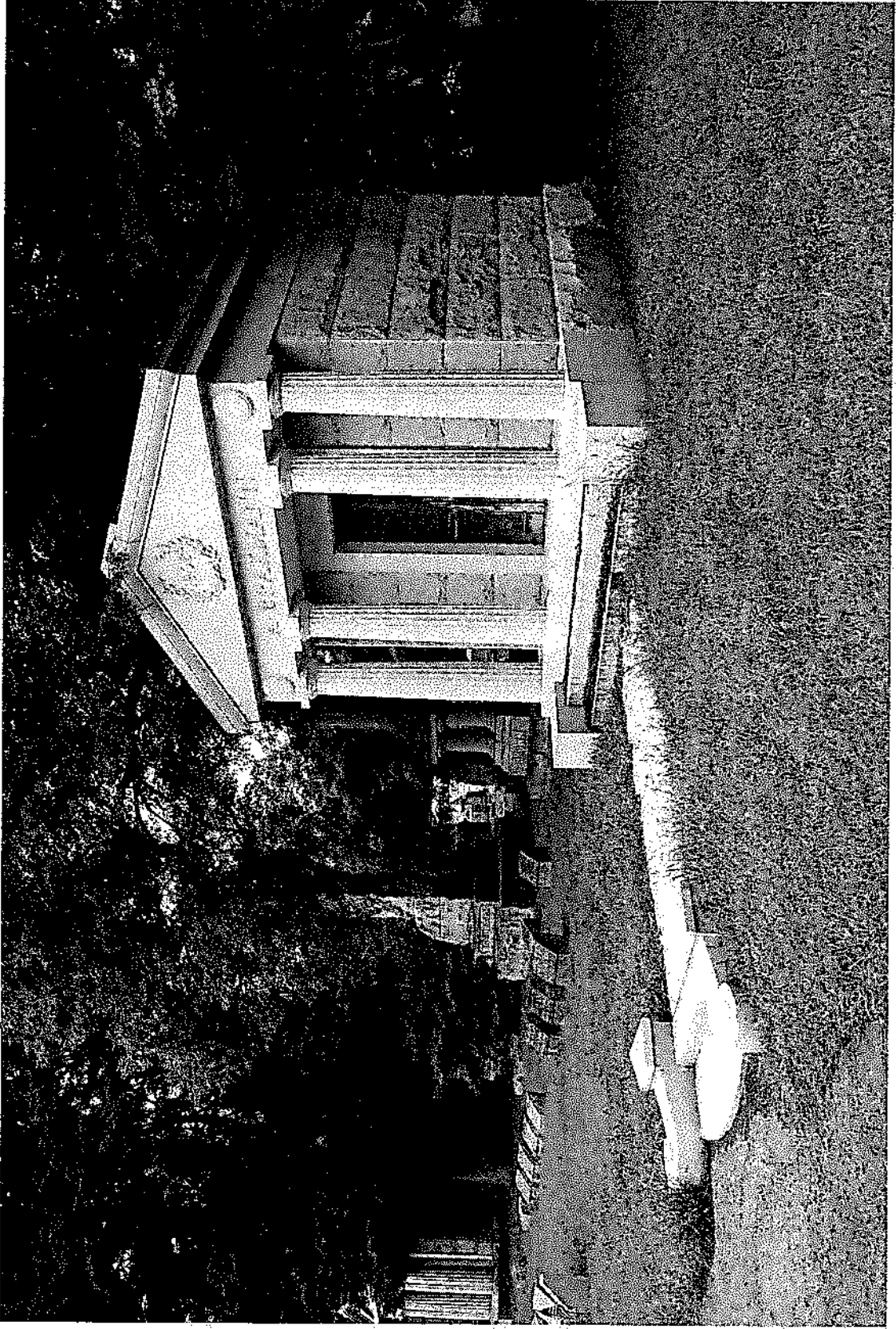


Figure 6: Evening light through stained glass window

# Overall Perspective



# Site Plan



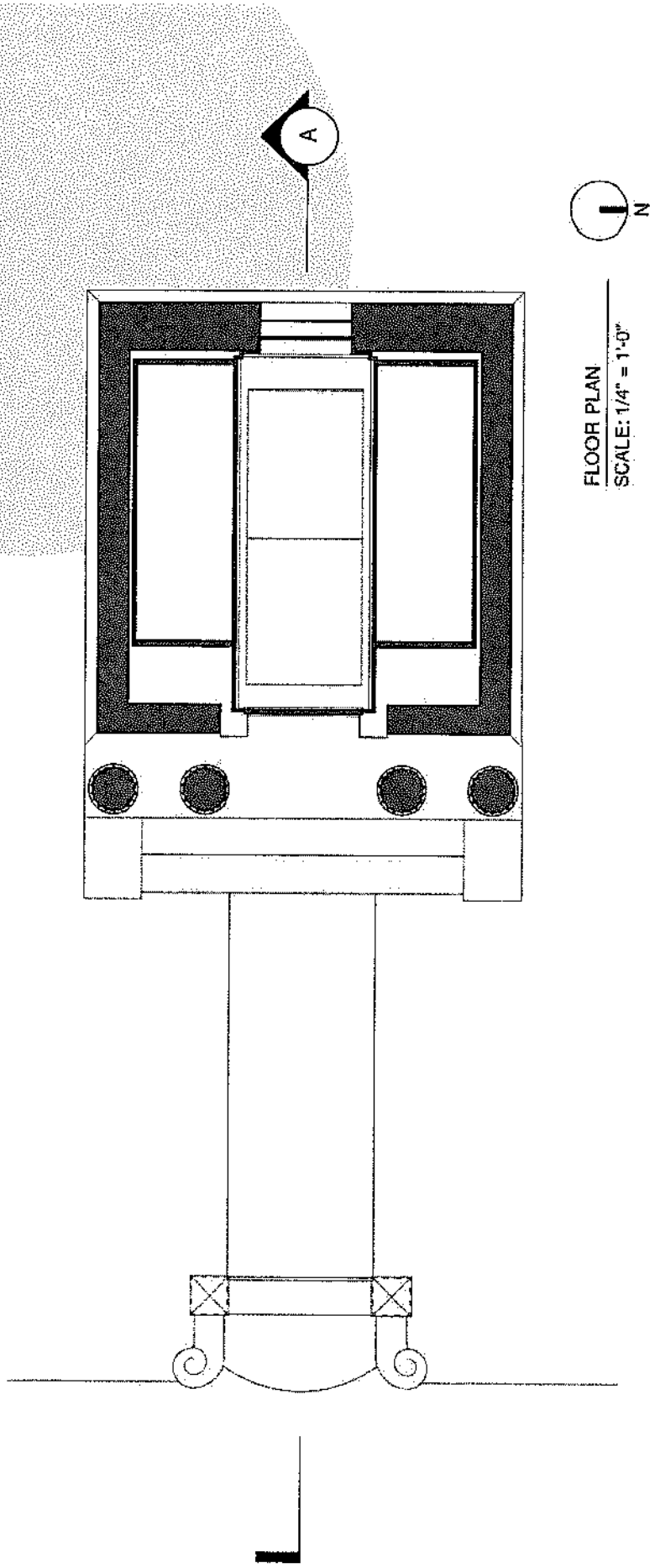
Holly Plot



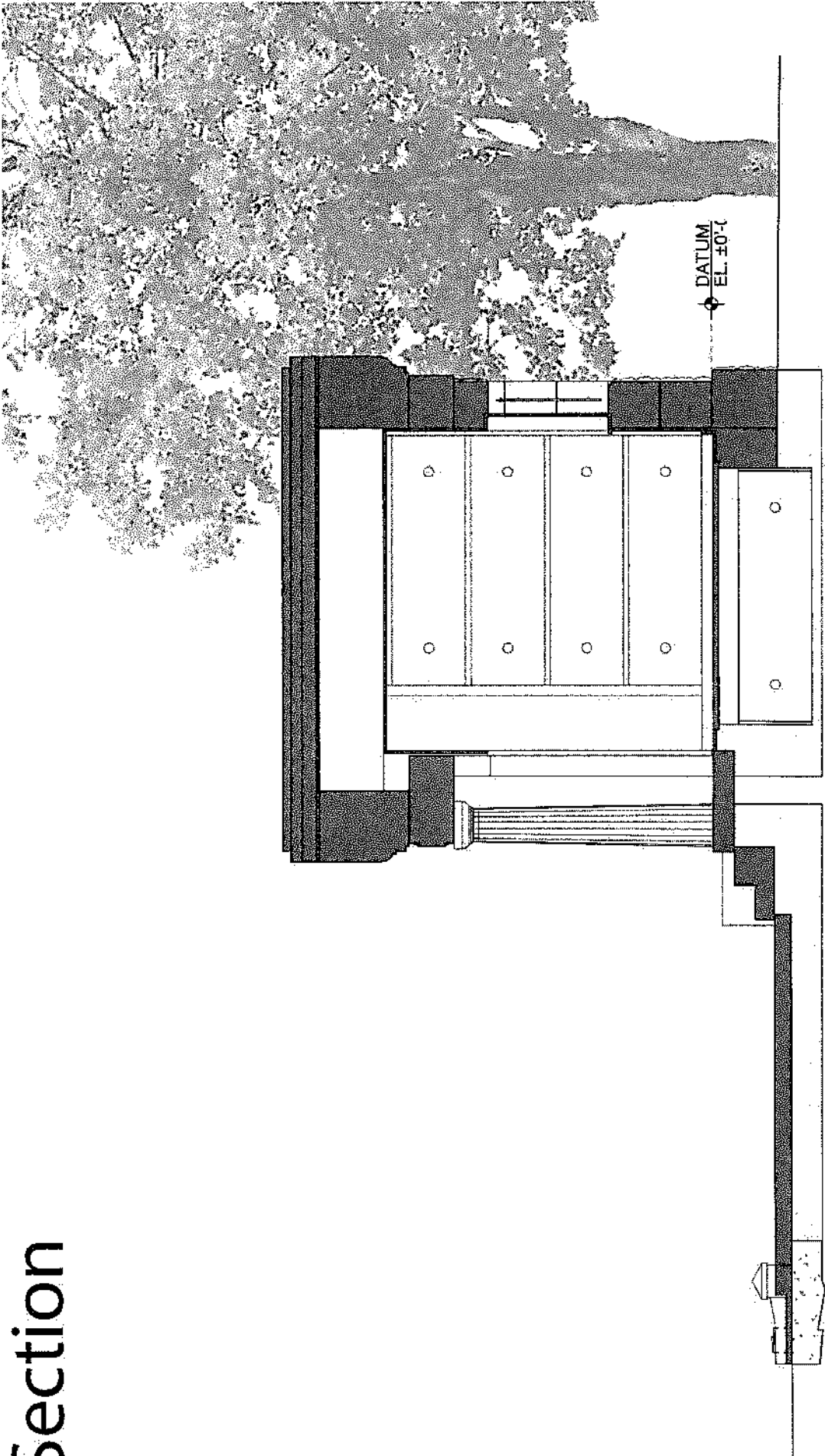
Brakmann Mausoleum



# Building Plan

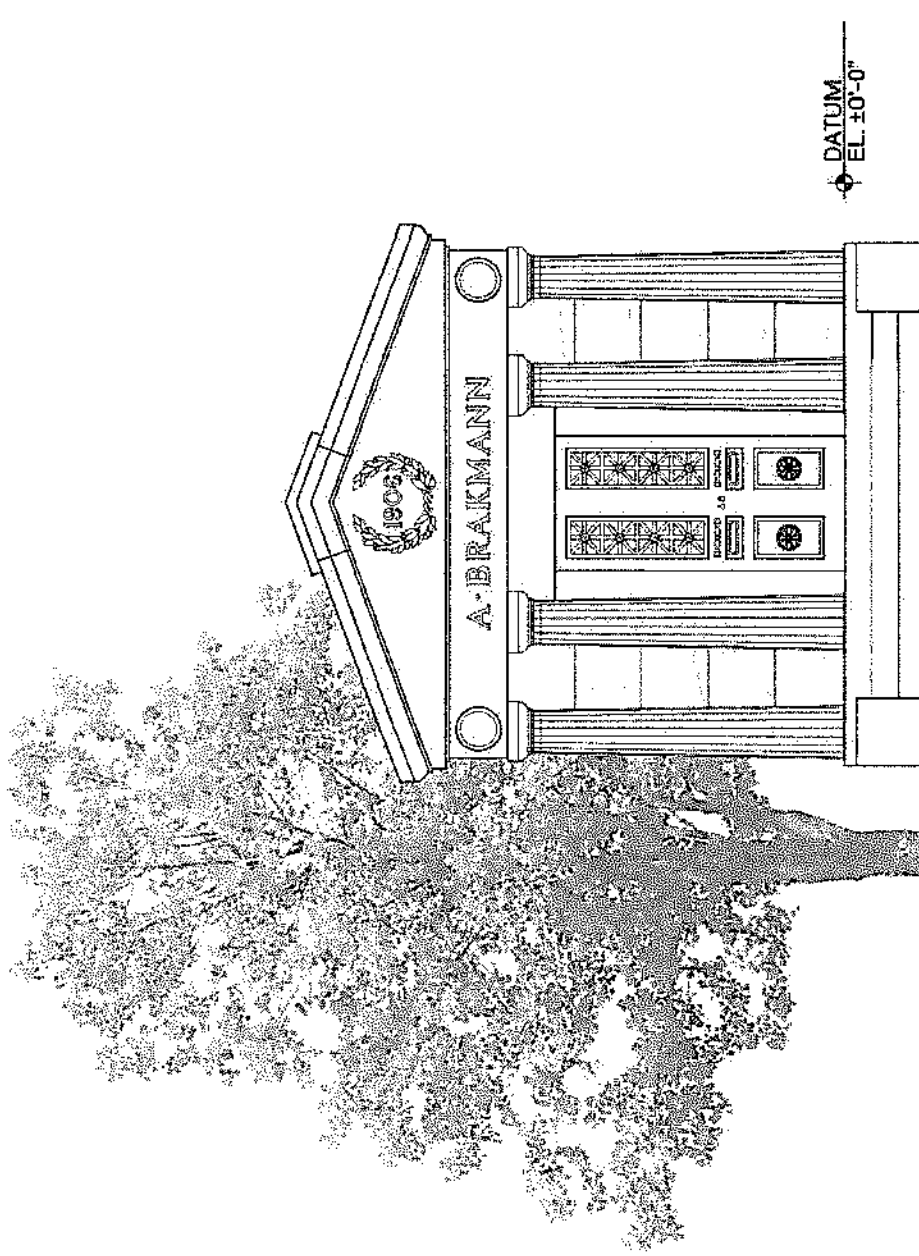


# Section



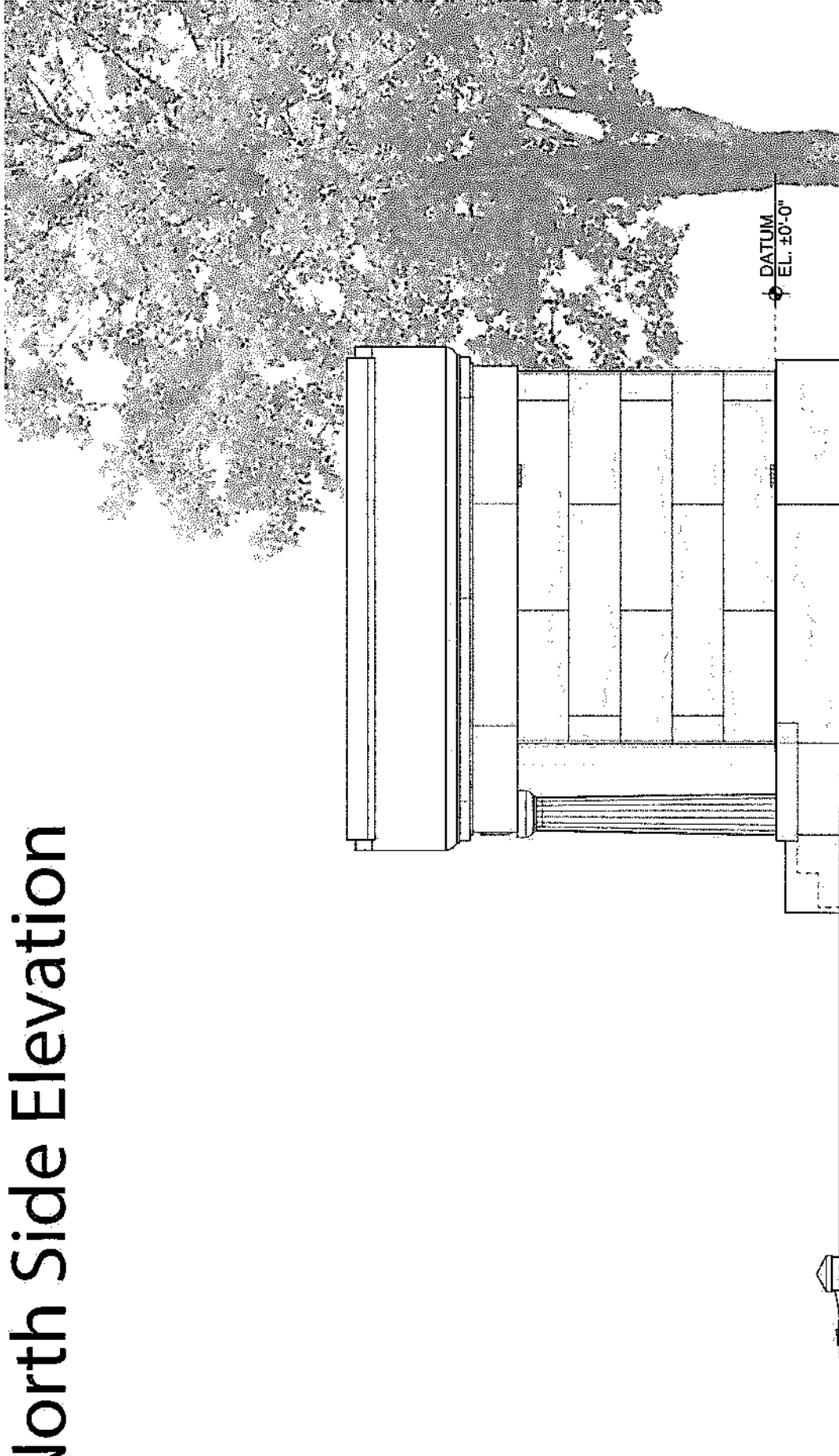
A LONGITUDINAL SECTION  
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

# Front Elevation



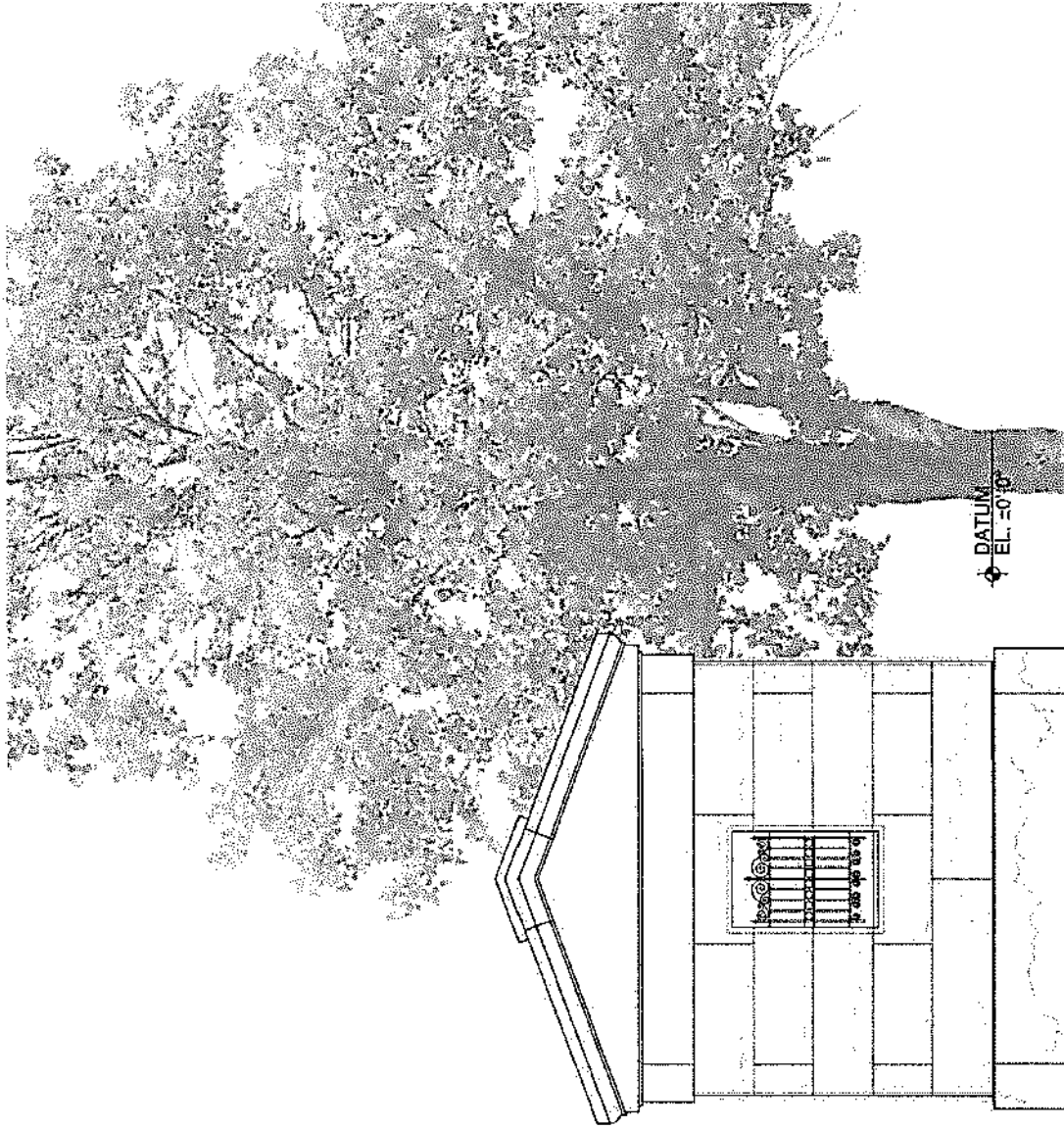
2 FRONT ELEVATION  
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

# North Side Elevation



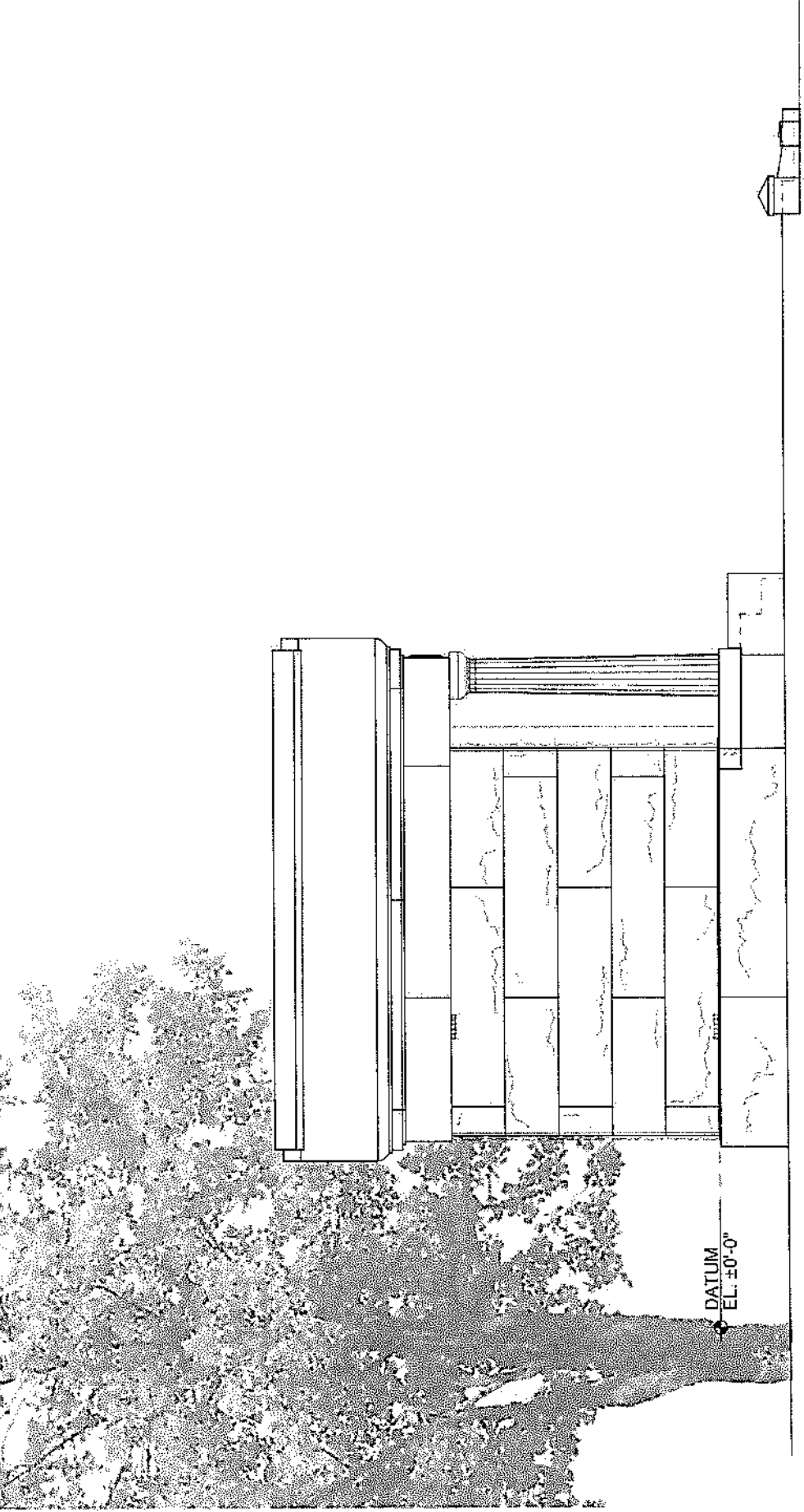
3  
SIDE ELEVATION  
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

# Rear Elevation



4 REAR ELEVATION  
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

# South Side Elevation



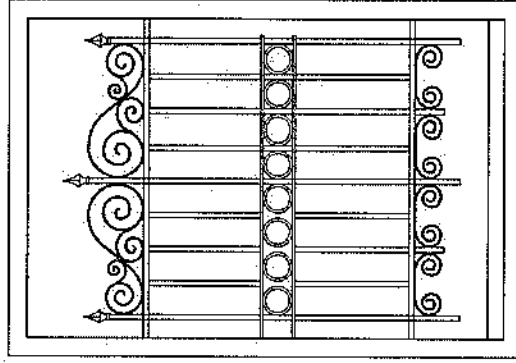
5

SIDE ELEVATION  
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

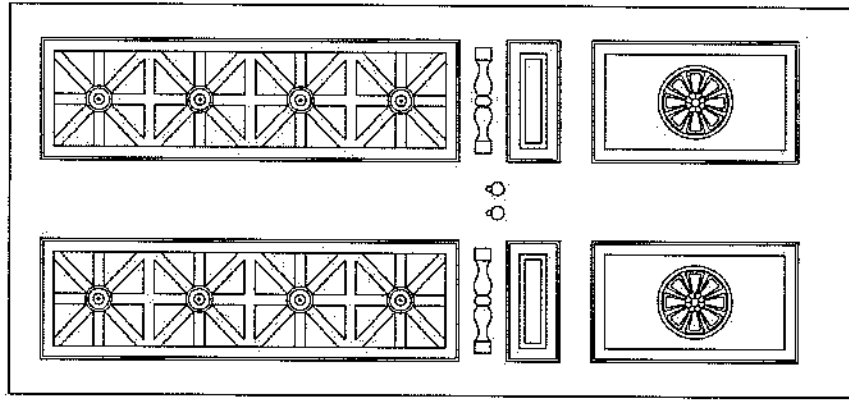
# Details



ORNAMENT ON FRONT FACADE



WINDOW GRILLE



FRONT DOOR

DETAILS

SCALE: 3/4" = 1'-0"

6