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HP Studio I: Documentation and Analysis of Historic Buildings
Problem 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis
Flagler Mausoleum

Established in 1901, the United States Steel Corporation brought together businessmen with legendary reputations. Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, and Charles M. Schwab were three men who masterminded this merger to create the largest business enterprise to date. The reputations of these men have not diminished with time, their names still recognizable. However, few might remember the name John H. Flagler.

John Haldane Flagler was born September 3, 1836 in Cold Springs, NY. Choosing to forgo college after high school, Flagler entered the employment of Haldane & Co, iron dealers in New York City and relatives of his mother Sarah Haldane. He left to form Flagler & Co. in Boston, a manufacturing company of steel and iron. Flagler & Co. soon became the profitable National Tube Company, with a branch in Boston and in McKeesport, PA. The National Tube Company would be one of several smaller steel companies that eventually merged to form U.S. Steel. His work with the National Tube Company established him as a close associate of Carnegie, Morgan, and Schwab.

In 1922, John H. Flagler passed away from pneumonia in Greenwich, CT. Flagler was buried in The Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, NY in a mausoleum on the Whitewood plot with his second wife Alice Manderlick Flagler who also died suddenly from pneumonia in 1918. In 1950, Flagler's daughter Anna Harden Hickey was interred with her father and stepmother in their mausoleum.

Lot No. 15380 on the Whitewood plot in Woodlawn is located on Tulip Ave, a side avenue of the larger walkway, Whitewood Ave. The mausoleums along Whitewood Ave are much grander than those along Tulip Ave, such as the Jule S. Bache mausoleum modeled after the Temple of Isis in Egypt or the O.H.P Belmont mausoleum, which is a replica of Leonardo DaVinci's Chapel of St. Hubert in France. The Flagler mausoleum is set back on its lot on Tulip Ave with no maintained path to structure's entrance.

When approaching the Flagler mausoleum from Whitewood Ave, the viewer first sees the structure from its side, noticing its stacked blocks atop of a pediment finished with a stepped roof, all constructed out of Barre Vermont granite. As the viewer moves further down Tulip Ave, Flagler's front elevation comes into view and the viewer can now begin to make sense of the design they only glimpsed from the side elevation. It's a rectangular building 13'-2" by 13'-11" and 14'-12" tall. The mausoleum's pediment is sunk into a slight slope, so that at the entrance it's 19" tall, while in the back it's only 6".

When the viewer stands directly in front of the Flagler mausoleum, the design of the structure draws the eye in towards the bronze double doors, bringing the viewer's attention to this entrance behind which the bodies are entombed. The viewer's regard for the structure is directed towards these double doors through several elements of the buildings façade. One element is the two vertical



pilasters topped by an entablature that surround the entryway. The second element is the stairs flanked on either side by granite blocks that guide the viewer 19" off the ground and up the stairs to the doorway. Finally, the pilasters, the entablature, and the stairway all frame a recessed entrance that sits back 11.5" to the doorway molding where the doors themselves are recessed an additional 10". Only after the viewer's eyes are drawn into the entryway might they notice the structures verticality. The pilasters lead the eye upward to the stepped roof that serves to emphasize the height of the mausoleum.

This design brings attention to the mausoleum's most important feature; it directs the viewer to where the bodies are laid to rest. For once you enter the double bronze doors, the bodies are interred in two tombs stacked to either side of the entrance. The entire interior is fitted with Vermont marble and a Barre Vermont granite floor. There is no ornamentation besides a vibrantly colored stain glass window. Because of the simplicity of the interior, all thoughts are paid to those that remain here.

Following his death, Flagler's estate sought out an architect to design the deceased businessman's mausoleum. Edward I. Shire designed Flagler's mausoleum in the neo-classical style to resemble a classic temple. Shire is known for his neo-Classical and Romanesque inspired architecture as seen in his design of the Ansche Chesed Synagogue, both the old



location on 7th Avenue and 114 St as well as the current location on West 100th St in New York City.

Considering Flagler's wealth and societal standing, as well as taking into account his specially commissioned mausoleum, why is Shire's final design so plain? The Flagler estate could have easily afforded something in the vein of Bache or Belmont, and yet what was finally built is almost without ornamentation. Except for the stain glass window on the back wall, the structure consists of fine lines with no embellishments on the exterior or interior.

All these thoughts illustrate how a person is memorialized and the



consideration given to constructing an appropriate monument to the deceased. What does Flagler's mausoleum say? What will be our final impression of John H. Flagler? I think Shire's design speaks to the beauty of form found in the simplicity of classical architecture. Shire's arrangement revels in balance and reveals a sophisticated knowledge of classical works. I am left with a quiet sense of dignified celebrity that is

emphasized in linear structure rather than lost in a jumble of conceit or ostentation. Most notably, I am drawn to the mausoleum's stain glass, which further draws me in up the stairs through the recessed entryway straight towards the hooded figure leading me on down the river Styx to the Underworld.

Resources:

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