

## Julius Grossman Mausoleum



Field Documentation and Formal Analysis  
Fall 2010 HP Studio 1: Reading Historic Buildings  
Problem 3

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The Julius Grossman mausoleum, located in Woodlawn Cemetery, Lot 16705 of the Columbine Plot, was built in 1930 for Julius Grossman (1866-1930). Grossman, the first occupant of the tomb, shares the mausoleum with his wife Ella Kern Grossman (1868-1955), two of his three children, daughter Ruby H. Winter (1893-1976) and her husband Charles G. Winter (1893-1976), daughter Alice Grossman Staff (1905-1985) and her husband Samuel G. Staff (1900-1965), and lastly his grandson and namesake, Julius Grossman Staff (1931-1997). Three catacombs in the building remain unoccupied.

Julius Grossman was a successful New York City shoe manufacturer. The business, Julius Grossman, Inc., was founded by Julius' father Adolf Grossman, a Hungarian immigrant, as A. Grossman Shoes in 1872.<sup>i</sup> Julius took over, renamed his father's small company in 1890, and developed it into a nationally known shoe manufacturing business. Julius Grossman, Inc. operated a factory on De Kalb Avenue in Brooklyn for many years where they manufactured women's shoes that were distributed nationwide. The manufacturing business was one of dozens located in what was a sizable shoe manufacturing district in Brooklyn.<sup>ii</sup> In 1930, Julius Grossman, Inc. opened a well known store on Fifth Avenue and 39th Street in Manhattan, expanding the business to include a retail component. In the 1930's, Julius Grossman, Inc. served as a sponsor for a coast to coast radio program on NBC and became famous for their commercial slogan: "Julius Grossman Shoes...Bad feet need 'em and good feet deserve 'em."<sup>iii</sup> The shoe business was good for the Grossman family. At the time of this death, Julius Grossman was worth \$536,022, the equivalent of \$8.4 million dollars in present day terms.<sup>iv</sup>

Before his death in May of 1930, Julius Grossman commissioned the construction of his granite mausoleum from Adler's Monument and Granite Works in November 1929. Founded by Samuel Adler in 1878, Adler's Monument and Granite Works was a local granite and marble supplier and custom monument design firm that had offices in New York City and a distribution center on Long Island.<sup>v</sup> They specialized in the design of custom monuments, mausoleums, headstones, fences, vaults and "cemetery work of every description."<sup>vi</sup>

Due to its height, shape, massing, and use of materials, the Grossman mausoleum appears large and assuming on its site. It was specifically designed to be set back as far to the south on the site as possible.<sup>vii</sup> The site slopes slightly up to the south and the mausoleum sits on the highest point, flanked on either side at the rear by two trees. The trees were not shown on the original site plan, and were possibly added by the family later. In the front of the building, a granite platform extends 7 1/2 feet in front of the facade. On each side of the platform, there is a granite bench attached to a planter. The mirrored benches and platform were added in July 1930, a few months after the mausoleum was completed and Julius Grossman had been entombed, and were not part of the original 1929 design.<sup>viii</sup> Although added later, the addition does not take away from the design of the facade and provides an area of quiet reflection and contemplation within the peaceful setting of the cemetery. The benches and platform create a social seating area outside of the building, which serves as an intermediate semi-private space between the public ground of the cemetery and the very private inner chambers of the mausoleum. Additionally, as you approach the mausoleum from the street, the orientation of the benches and planters, forces the visitor to approach the mausoleum head on, emphasizing the drama of the building's placement on the site.

The mausoleum's design is very symmetrical. The heavy granite walls of the mausoleum are battered inwards on all four sides. This is counterbalanced by horizontal bands of alternating rough and smooth cut stone that wrap around the building, and vertically oriented building elements. The building is not heavily ornamented, but it exhibits a unique design that is conveyed through the use of massive forms assembled together, projecting into separate planes, and featuring different material treatments. The interaction of these separate elements creates a simple, yet sophisticated design.

The front facade features two battered pilasters to either side of the central door, which project slightly from the face of the battered wall. The building is then capped with a large roof slab that appears to sit on top of the pilasters, suggesting a heavy post and lintel construction. These massive forms

dominate the facade, and are supplemented by delicate lotus flower engravings within the pilasters, a central recessed entry, and a projecting sign band displaying the Grossman name in polished granite.

The battered walls and pilasters, the implied post and lintel construction and engraved lotus flower designs suggest a slight, yet deliberate Egyptian Revival styling. The motif is carried through to the interior where a stained glass window depicts a sunset scene beyond a colonnade of Egyptian columns with campaniform bell capitals representing the open papyrus profile.<sup>x</sup> In general, the Egyptian Revival style was not as widely adopted as the other revival styles, but is usually deliberately chosen for its more somber, exotic, and mysterious characteristics.<sup>x</sup>

The highpoints in the use of the style are typically associated with historical events related to highly publicized events connected to Egypt such as Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign, the deciphering of hieroglyphics, and the opening of the Suez Canal.<sup>xi</sup> The style reached its peak in use in the United States in the 1830's and 40's, primarily being used for iconographic and funerary architecture.<sup>xii</sup> The use of Egyptian architectural features for the Grossman mausoleum can possibly be attributed to both the popularity of the Egyptian style for use in funerary monuments in America since the mid 19th century as well as the renewed interest in all things Egyptian following the 1922 discovery of the tomb King Tutankhamen.<sup>xiii</sup>

Monuments, cemetery gates, and mausoleums designed in the Egyptian style became increasingly popular in the mid to late 19th century through the first decades of the 20th century. The Grove Street Cemetery gate (1845-1848) in New Haven, Connecticut designed by Henry Austin, and the F.W. Woolworth mausoleum (1920) at Woodlawn cemetery designed by John Russle Pope, are two highly styled examples that reflect Egyptian revival funerary grandeur.<sup>xiv</sup> While the Grossman mausoleum does not achieve that level of significance as a work of Egyptian Revival funerary architecture, its simple and sophisticated use of Egyptian architectural features, massing, and materials, and the remarkable legacy of Julius Grossman contribute to what makes this mausoleum a highly significant building.

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- <sup>i</sup> Edwards and Critten, *New York's Great Industries*, (New York: Historical Publishing Company, 1885), 162.
- <sup>ii</sup> "A Guide to Brooklyn," *Boot and Shoe Recorder*, July 16, 1921, p. 40.
- <sup>iii</sup> Rose Marie, *Hold the Roses*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002) p. 15.
- <sup>iv</sup> "G.F. Schwartz Left Estate of \$707,671," *New York Times*, December 21, 1932.
- <sup>v</sup> Edwards and Critten, 247.
- <sup>vi</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery Records, 1863-1999: Julius Grossman Collection. Department of Drawings and Archives, Columbia University.
- <sup>vii</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery Records, 1863-1999.
- <sup>viii</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery Records, 1863-1999.
- <sup>ix</sup> Illustrated Dictionary of Architecture, Ernest Burden, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002) "campaniform capital" and "Egyptian architecture."
- <sup>x</sup> Peggy McDowell, and Richard E. Meyer. *The Revival Styles in American Memorial Art*. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994).
- <sup>xi</sup> Humbert, et. al. *Egyptomania*, p. 22.
- <sup>xii</sup> Richard G. Carrott, *Egyptian Revival: Sources, Monuments, and Meaning, 1808-1858*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Jean-Michel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christine Zeigler. *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930*. (Paris: Reunion des Musees Nationaux, 1994).
- <sup>xiv</sup> McDowell, et. al., *The Revival Styles in American Memorial Art*. p. 158.

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