

The Yawkey Mausoleum in The Woodlawn Cemetery

The Yawkey mausoleum (Image 1) in The Woodlawn Cemetery was built in the spring and summer of 1921, more than two years after the death of William Hoover Yawkey on March 5, 1919, in Augusta, Georgia.¹ In the interim, Yawkey was interred in Morningside Cemetery in Brattleboro, Vermont, possibly next to the remains of the family of his mother, a native of that state.² The historical record says relatively little about the life of William H. Yawkey (b. 1875). The eldest son of a Michigan-based timber magnate,³ he inherited a fortune large enough to have sustained a luxurious lifestyle: An obituary states that at the time of his death, Yawkey "maintained a shooting preserve in Georgia, a moose lodge in Cook County, Me., and a summer estate at Hazelhurst Wis."⁴ We also know that he owned a large estate on Long Island and a townhouse on West Seventieth Street in Manhattan.⁵ Among the achievements for which he is best remembered, Yawkey was president of the Detroit Tigers baseball team for a brief but successful period in the early 20th century.⁶ He wed Margaret Draper, a fellow Michigander, in Jersey City, NJ, on August 31, 1910.⁷ After her husband's death, Margaret continued living on New York's Upper West Side,⁸ engaging in numerous philanthropic enterprises until her death on July 2, 1933 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. At that point her remains were entombed next to her husband's.⁹

The mausoleum was built by the firm of Farrington, Gould & Hoagland, Inc., a Manhattan-based company responsible for at least 65 other mausoleums in Woodlawn, as well as numerous other types of monuments there and in various cemeteries in the Greater New York area.¹⁰ Franklin Reynolds Farrington was another Vermont native who provided the firm with its crucial connections to the granite and stone industries based there.¹¹ In the absence of any sort of catalogue illustrating all of the different mausoleum models constructed by this firm, I have conducted independent research in order to determine if the design for the Yawkey mausoleum is unique or if it is a template (the blueprints do not list an architect).¹² Although I did not find any other Farrington, Gould & Hoagland mausoleums similar to the Yawkey model, I did serendipitously encounter the O.J. Schwarzler mausoleum (Image 2), a nearly identical structure built by the Benisch Brothers firm in 1922. The design similarities between the two structures, the similar ages, and the absence of any specific signed architect for either one indicate that this design was likely a stock template.

in use by many firms; it may have even been of the type for which one could have pulled specifications out of an industry journal like *Monumental News*.¹³ With its rectilinear planters and other motifs vaguely reminiscent of roughly contemporaneous Prairie School designs,¹⁴ this concept seems to partake of the sort of loosely-defined "modern" aesthetic that such journals peddled along with their revivalist standbys.

The Yawkey mausoleum is located at an intersection in the northwestern quadrant of Woodlawn Cemetery. Its principal façade is oriented toward the center of the intersection, as are those of the monuments located on the other three corners. Among these four structures intentionally placed in positions more prominent and public than those of their neighbors, one is tempted to look for the most prominent among them. In this the Yawkey mausoleum has at least one significant advantage in the form of altitude. The slope that leads up to its façade is slight, but nonetheless places it on higher ground than the other three. The building's north-northeasterly orientation, however, means that the sun only briefly illuminates its façade, although this backlighting effect may ultimately work to the advantage of the building's efforts at prominence: looking up at it, one is often quite literally in Yawkey's shadow.

From whatever direction one approaches the mausoleum, the abundance of foliage and the dense building pattern in this portion of the cemetery do not allow for views of the building's principal façade from any significant distance. Thus one generally cannot see the Yawkey mausoleum until one is almost immediately upon it, where the aforementioned features of orientation and altitude can take effect. The mausoleum, essentially a square structure with a porch, is set back in the circular plot, creating a large lawn in front. Two large evergreen trees are located immediately in front of and to the sides of the building. These trees, working in conjunction with the projecting porch, the two planters located on either side of the front steps, and various façade features that I shall explain herewith, work to funnel the visitor into the building.

The major formal design components of the Yawkey mausoleum may be divided into two categories, which I call (1) "squares" and (2) "the rhythm of thick and thin." As noted earlier, the structure is essentially square, a feature readily evident when one views drawings in plan. An examination of the major elements in elevation reveals a square shape as well, taken from the bottom of the plinth to the peak of the pediment-like feature on the roof. (An aesthetic impetus to recuperate this square shape may even explain a major renovation, completed in 1932, in which an 18 inch course of stone was removed from beneath the cornice.¹⁵) It is in certain façade features that one finds the significant

use of squares. The two planters and the two decorative panels on either side of the nameplate form the four corners of one large square in the center of the façade, these features being linked not only by their obvious geometry, but by their shared use of the incised plant motif. This motif is further tied to another, smaller square formed by panels surrounding the upper portion of the door. These three squares--the massing, that defined by the planters and the panels, and that of the door surround--form a sequence of diminishing sizes, a telescoping effect that draws the visitor to the door at the center (Image 3).

"The rhythm of thick and thin" is another façade feature that draws the visitor to the door. If one creates a horizontal band linking the two panels beside the nameplate, and another linking the two planters, one gets two relatively thin bands above and below the thick band created by the door surround. Due to the building's symmetry, this same effect occurs vertically, as well, in this case requiring the viewer to link the similar plant motifs found on the planters with those found on the panels beside the nameplate (Image 4).

The granite planters may be the building's most striking features, evoking in miniature most of the major design features found on the building's exterior. Square in plan, they display the rhythm of thick and thin bands on their sides as they alternate between smooth surfaces and surfaces in which the building's unifying plant motif has been incised (Image 5).

The visitor is thus drawn inside by features of siting and façade design. In order to enter, one must ascend six rather steep steps and pass through a bronze door. Upon opening the door, one encounters an environment radically different from what has been left behind. Gray granite has now given way to smooth white marble. A window transmits soft, warm light through panes of glass on which have been painted an autumnal sylvan scene. A small marble bench suggests an end to the journey instigated by the building's exterior: Here one is invited to sit, ensconced in a white cocoon that evokes notions of permanence and purity, in order to remember and contemplate the lives of those entombed in the walls (Image 6).

As noted, the building is successful in utilizing its siting, geometries and internal arrangement to draw in visitors and shelter them in a suitable environment. These strengths, however, are somewhat offset by timidity of style: A clear departure from the more standard classical, Egyptian, and Gothic motifs that one finds in abundance in cemeteries, the mausoleum nonetheless does not seem entirely comfortable with its modernity, incorporating as it does a fairly

standard cornice with egg-and-dart molding, a classically-inspired pediment, and cookie-cutter interior. From a purely aesthetic perspective, the incorporation of these more hackneyed features work against the building's claims to significance. But it is this very quality of "in-between-ness" that make it so emblematic of the era of its construction—a time when traditional forms were being challenged and modern designs had achieved such mainstream acceptance that they assumed the form of banal stock templates, ready to be mass-produced and sold.

¹ William Hoover Yawkey mausoleum file. Woodlawn Cemetery records, 1863-1999. Avery Library. Columbia University in the City of New York.

² U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Tenth Census, 1880, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan, s.v. "Emma Yawkey," *Ancestry, Library Edition*, ancestrylibrary.com.

³ *New - York Tribune*, "American Millionaires," 8 May 1892, 13.

⁴ *New - York Tribune*, "William Hoover Yawkey," 7 March 1919, 10.

⁵ J. Russell Pope, "1,700 Acre Tract for Field Home," *The New York Times*, 19 June 1921, 94. And: *The New York Times*, "In the Real Estate Field," 20 August 1910, 12.

⁶ *The New York Times*, "78,086 Witnessed Games," 13 October 1907, 51. And: *The New York Times*, "Detroit Club Changes Hands," 14 September 1907, 7. William H. Yawkey should not be confused with the more famous baseball-affiliated Tom Yawkey, William's heir, nephew and adopted son, who owned the Boston Red Sox for a record 44 seasons. See: National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, "Yawkey, Tom," <http://baseballhall.org/hof/yawkey-tom> (accessed 17 October 2010).

⁷ *The New York Times*, "Wm. H. Yawkey Bridegroom," 4 September 1910, 9.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, Fourteenth Census, 1920, New York City, Manhattan Borough, New York, s.v. "Margaret A. Yawkey," *Ancestry, Library Edition*, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁹ *The New York Times*, "Mrs. W.H. Yawkey, Philanthropist, Dies," 4 July 1933, 13.

¹⁰ Farrington, Gould & Hoagland, Inc. "Mausoleums - Monuments - Statuary." New York: Bartlett Orr Press, 1927. From the special collections, Avery Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

¹¹ William Richard Cutter, ed. *New England Families: Genealogical and Memorial, volume IV*. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1914), 1712.

¹² William Hoover Yawkey mausoleum file.

¹³ *Monumental News*, "Original Design by A.S. Hill" and "Original Design by Joseph Wyckoff," Vol. 30, no. 3, March 1918.

¹⁴ Deborah Slaton, "Burnham and Root and the Rookery," *The Midwest in American Architecture, Essays in Honor of Walter L. Creese*, John S. Garner, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 77. And: Brian A. Spencer, *The Prairie School Tradition*, (New York: Walton Guptill Publications, 1979), 66.

¹⁵ William Hoover Yawkey mausoleum file.

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APPENDIX: IMAGES



Image 1: Yawkey Mausoleum. Photo by author.



Image 2: Schwarzler Mausoleum. Photo by author.



Image 3: "Squares." Image by author.

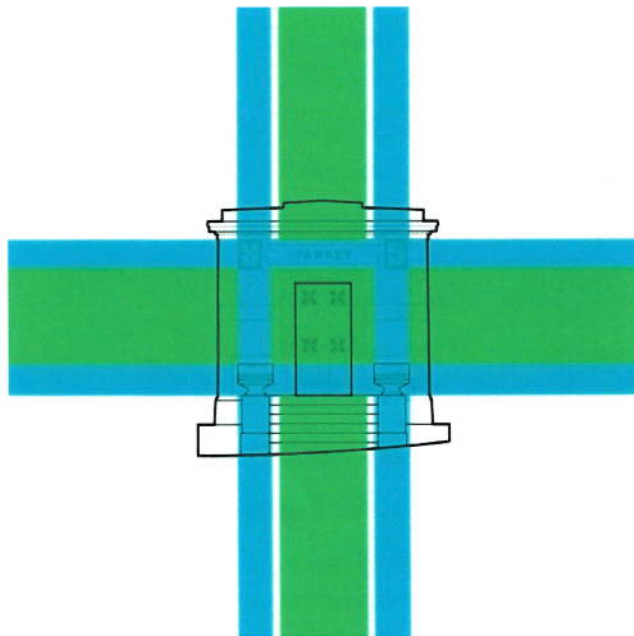


Image 4: "Rhythm of Thick and Thin." Image by author.

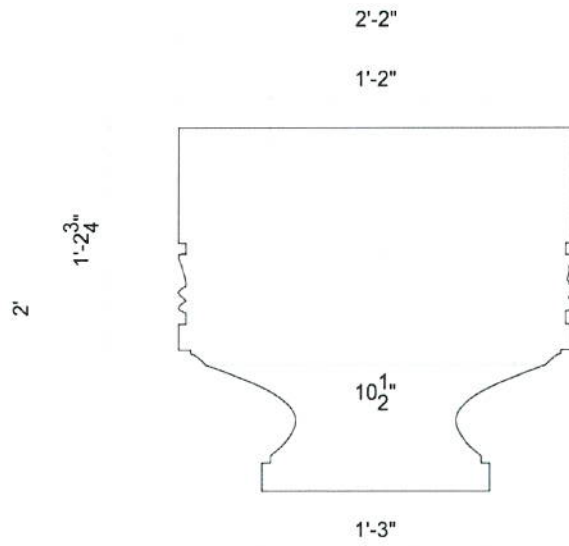


Image 5: Planter detail. Image by author.



Image 6: View into the mausoleum interior. Photo by author.