

# **John Volz Mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery**

## **Bronx, New York:**

### **The Legacy of an Upper Eastside Real Estate Investor**



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Located on the Lotus Plot of Woodlawn Cemetery, the John Volz Mausoleum faces west towards Jerome Avenue. The Volz Mausoleum is comprised of thirty-four large, red granite blocks bonded together by a red-tinted mortar; it may be Listavena Granite mined by the Vermont Marble Co. Due to a slow cooling process, it is easy to decipher the large chunks of predominately quartz, feldspar, black mica, and black hornblende which gives the granite its color and pattern.

The Volz mausoleum was a project completed by Tedeschi & Tedeschi Co. in 1931. The building is symmetrical and decorated with geometric interlocking motifs (refer to figure 7). Tedeschi & Tedeschi Co. was established in 1900 and based out of Queens, New York. They referred to themselves as "Designers, Manufacturers, and Builders of Mausoleums and Monuments." There are seventeen mausoleums attributed to the work of Tedeschi & Tedeschi Co. at Woodlawn, which were created between the 1920s-1940s. At its height, the Tedeschi & Tedeschi Co. had two locations in New York—one work site in Astoria, Queens, and another a showroom for displays in Woodside, Queens. In particular, the Volz Mausoleum was associated with the work of Romolo Tedeschi and Arthur J. Kessler.<sup>1</sup> On the bronze door, there are motifs of acorns and calla lilies (refer to figure 6). On the mausoleum's interior is a stained-glass depiction of Jesus as the "Good Shepard" associated with the Gospel of John verses 10:11 and 10:14 in the Bible.

John Volz was a real estate investor who lived on the Upper East Side and a first-generation American born in 1859 to German immigrants. The Volz family was wealthy and was known to buy and sell properties in the Upper East Side. An article

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<sup>1</sup> Kessler, Arthur and Tedeschi, Romolo (1930-1931). Tedeschi & Kessler correspondence. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. Department of Drawings and Archives, Columbia University

from The New York Times entitled "The Real Estate Field" gives some insight into this, "Mr. Volz has been an active operator in the upper east side residential center having recently purchased the five houses known as the New England apartments, at 480 Park Avenue, between Fifty-eighth and Fifty-ninth Streets, with frontages on both of those streets, and he also sold a short time ago the northwest corner of Lexington Avenue and Eighty-fifth Street to the Ayer estate of Boston."<sup>2</sup> The Volz residence was also mentioned in the article and was noted for its high price and all cash purchase, "On the upper west side an unusually large residence was purchased by a buyer (Mr. Volz) for occupancy. The east side Yorkville district furnished a good deal in the purchase by John Volz of the six-story apartment house on the northeast corner of Madison Avenue and Eight-seventh Street, fronting 50 feet on the avenue by 115 on the street...The property has been held at \$180,000, and the brokers, McDowell & McMahon, state that it was an all-cash transaction."<sup>3</sup>

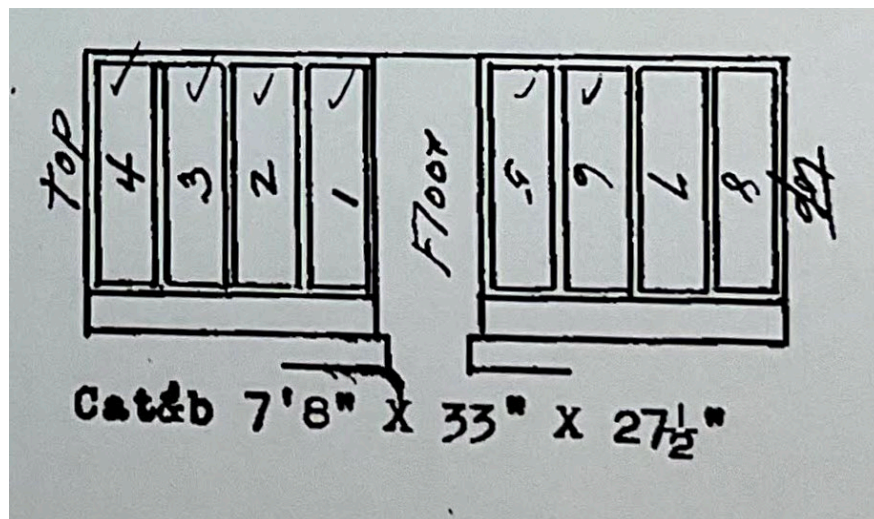
John Volz died in 1930 at the age of 71. His wife, Caroline Stöhr Volz, was a first-generation German like John and was a homemaker for their household. She lived from 1866-1953, when she died at the age of 86. John is interred in a catacomb on the right side of the interior (6), his wife on the left (2). Interred with the two of them are their three daughters and one son-in-law. Louise Volz was the first daughter of John and Caroline Volz; she lived from 1889 – 1974 (age 85) and is interred on the right-side Catacomb (5). Gertrude Volz Crosby was the second daughter of the Volz, she lived

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<sup>2</sup> "The Real Estate Field: Upper Madison Avenue Apartment House Held At \$180,000 Sold To John Volz -- J. Louis Schaefer Buys West Side Dwelling -- Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., Leases Newport Villa." *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 07, 1915

<sup>3</sup> The Real Estate Field: Upper Madison Avenue Apartment House Held At \$180,000 Sold To John Volz -- J. Louis Schaefer Buys West Side Dwelling -- Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., Leases Newport Villa." *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 07, 1915

from 1893 – 1968 (age 74) and is interred on the right side of the catacomb (1). The last daughter Hilda Volz Feuerbach is interred with her husband Frederick J Feuerbach Jr. Hilda lived from 1897 – 1972 (age 74) and is interred on the left-side Catacomb (3), Frederick lived from Dec 26, 1893 - Dec 14, 1979 (age 85) and is interred on the right-side Catacomb (4) above Hilda. The two of them were married on Sep 12, 1921.



**Figure 1:** Drawing of catacombs. Courtesy of Drawings and Archives at Avery Fine Arts and Architecture Library, Columbia University

Two types of stone are used in the construction of this mausoleum: granite and marble. Granite is a hard, igneous rock with very low porosity which makes it suitable for a mausoleum. Granite damage is present in some areas with missing crystalline particles of quartz, feldspar, silicate. It is possible that these inclusions occurred during the polishing process. Marble is a metamorphic rock with minimal porosity; the Volz mausoleum's interior uses marble from floor to ceiling. However, water damage has affected the marble and left drip stains, affecting the texture of the marble. The large blocks at the exterior are bonded mortar. Mortar, in contrast to

granite, has a high porosity. The mortar used on the structure is tinted by a red pigment, unsuccessfully chosen to match the red hue of the granite. It looks to be repointed by an inexperienced stone mason, with commercial mortar (since it was constructed in 1931). Rapid deterioration of the mortar is occurring, it is cracking into segments and falling out, the vibrant coloration only making it easier to spot areas of loss.

Moving onto the category of metals, bronze is the only metal used. Bronze is a cooper-tin alloy that is perfect for casting. Bronze is remarkably impervious to changes imposed by time and weather. Moreover, bronze has been the preferred material for doors in comparison to iron due to its hardness and easier mode of production.<sup>4</sup> A cross is on the center of the cast bronze door with acorn and leaf motifs (refer to figure 5). There are four bronze air vents on each side at the exterior and eighteen decorative circular finials, at the interior two on each catacomb.

### **Condition Report of Materials**

The mausoleum should be repointed as there are large areas of mortar loss (refer to figure 8). Without intervention, water damage will persist until the structure is made watertight. There could very well be issues with lack of air flow in the void between the granite and the interior marble. Areas without mortar are susceptible to water damage which has led to changes in the color and texture of a given material (refer to figure 9). Moreover, it is possible that the bronze air vents are not functioning as the designer intended, leading to moisture retention.

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<sup>4</sup> Waite, John G. at al. *Metals in America's Historic Buildings: Uses and Preservation Treatments*, Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Preservation Assistance, 1992

Photo Archive



Figure 2: Front Elevation



Figure 3: Side Elevation



Figure 4: Rear Elevation



**Figure 5:** Bronze Doorway



**Figure 6:** Calla Lilly and Acorn Motif on Door



**Figure 7:** Geometric Design in Granite



**Figure 8:** Areas of Mortar Loss on exterior door frame



**Figure 9:** Stained Glass Detail and Documentation of Water Damage around Joint Lines



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