

# Woodlawn Prigge Mausoleum

Research methods Columbia University

*Prigge Mausoleum*

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Woodlawn Cemetery is a national historical landmark located in Bronx, New York. From its first interment in 1865 during Civil War, it had grown to host 230,000 burial grounds in one hundred and ten years.<sup>1</sup>The general landscape has been maintained to elevate the status of Woodlawn from its fundamental function as a cemetery, to a place of public enjoyment with life and vitality.<sup>2</sup>The micro landscapes within the cemetery have been designed by numerous gardeners and landscape architects, they work for; or sometimes against the compositions and layouts of adjacent monuments.



*Figure 1 Photograph of Prigge Mausoleum by author*

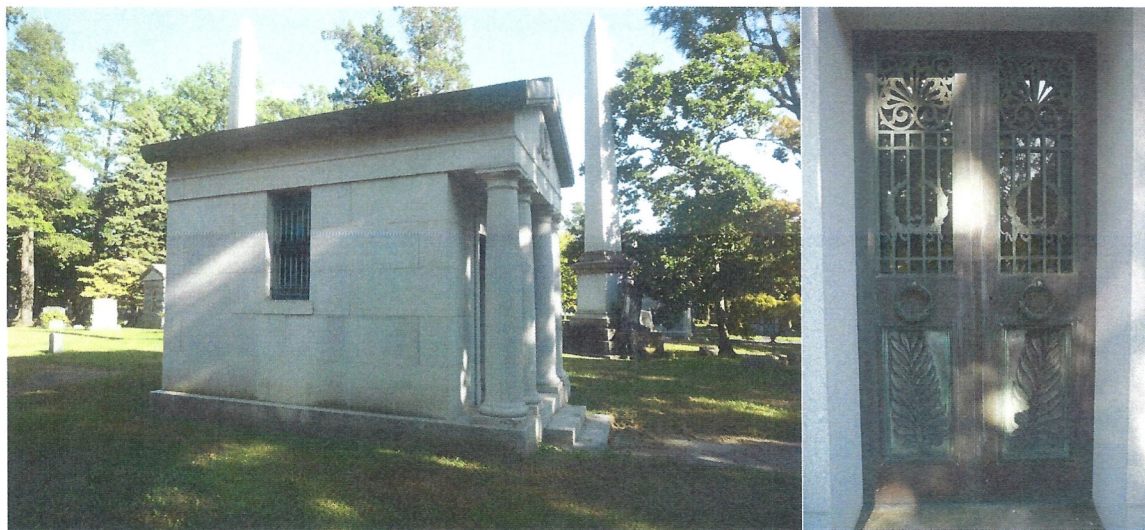
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<sup>1</sup> Streeter Edward, *The story of Woodlawn Cemetery* [electronic resource] / by Edward Streeter. (New York : Woodlawn Cemetery 1975c), 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

The Prigge Mausoleum is located in Junifer plot, section 88& 89 with Lot number 10997.<sup>3</sup>

The cemetery was originally contracted by Hannah Ellias in 1903, it was built and organised by the contractor Robert Caterson, the design was listed as General Design S with Door selected as American Bronze.<sup>4</sup> Within the Junifer plot the Mausoleum is set within a circular plan, which is very common within the cemetery for a monument at this size. As can be observed in a 1922 aerial photo of the Woodlawn cemetery (Figure 1), the mausoleum is bounded on all four sides by adjacent plots, however no major visual obstruction is incurred by vegetation between the site and Prospect Avenue. This makes the mausoleum at the time highly visible to passing visitors, and it reflects the owner's aspiration to exhibit prominence and wealth.



*Figure 2 Photograph of Prigge Mausoleum and door by author*

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<sup>3</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery records. Record of interment of "Lot 10997, Owner John A Prigge", 1969, Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

<sup>4</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery records. Specification card on Lot 10997, Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



*Figure 3 Aerial Photographs by Captain James Suydam with Junifer plot located in the centre, copyright Woodlawn cemetery. Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.*

The Prigge/Elias plot is composed of a freestanding mausoleum in the form of a Greek temple with a ramp extending to the boundary of the site from the entrance, at the end of the ramp there are two cement vases on each side. The mausoleum is 8'4" by 15'4" in dimension (see Figure 2), it is arranged in the form of a prostyle Greek temple with a portico in the front.<sup>5</sup>

The four columns and the exterior roof and walls were constructed out of Barre Vermont Granite,<sup>6</sup> the columns were polished to be made more prominent, they are Doric order

<sup>5</sup> Summerson John, *The Classical Language of Architecture*. (Copyright 1963 John Summerson and the British Broadcast Corporation), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery records. "Specification of Workmanship and Materials", Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

with a belly in the Roman style. There are two panels at the lower bottom part of the door, the panels contain laurel leaf motif. Two round bronze door rings sit on top of the panels, above which are two glazing panels with bronze security grille in front, the security grille is decorated with laurel wreaths and heart-shaped bronze works on top.

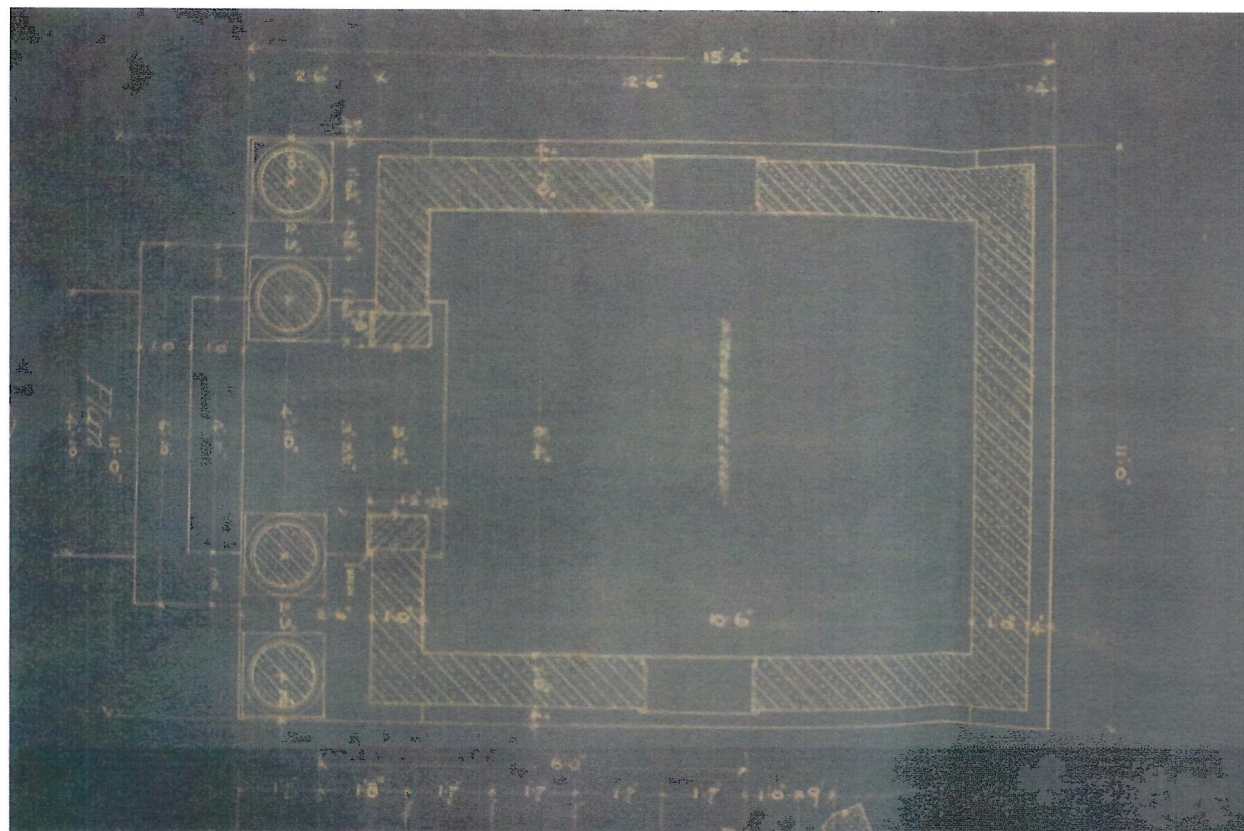
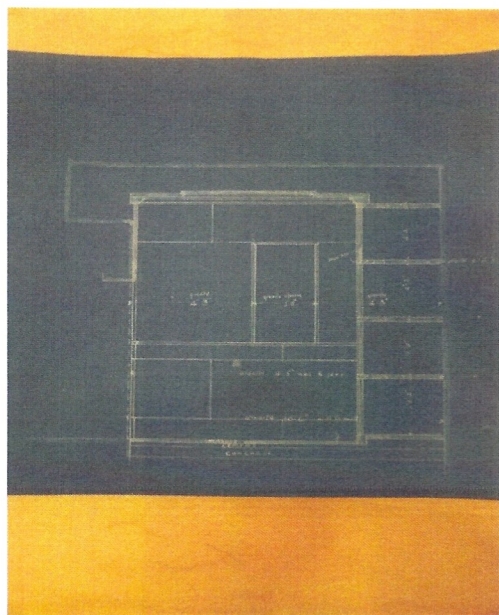


Figure 4 Blueprint plan of Prigge Masoleum, drawings prepared by Robert Caterson association, copyright Woodlawn cemetery. Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University

Inside the Mausoleum, four catacombs were entombed at the back, which now contain the remains of John A. Prigge; his wife Gesine Prigge and their son and daughter. On the sides there are two cremation boxes of Theodora. E Prigge and John A. Prigge Sr.<sup>7</sup>The exposed

<sup>7</sup> Record of interment of "Lot 10997, Owner John A Prigge", 1969, Columbia University.

surfaces of the interior are all lined with marble veneers, the catacombs are also made of marble with slate in-between individual ones (see figure 3). There are two openings in the mausoleum dimensioned 4' 2" by 2', both embellished with stained glass windows with bronze spear-head security grilles on the outside, one of the stained glass window pictures an angel, the other depicts a saint with caption "They that sow with tears show reap with joy" from the song Psalm 126 in the Holy Bible.<sup>8</sup> The foundation of the mausoleum is made up of quarried stone laid in cement mortar, the foundation reaches 6 feet below ground.<sup>9</sup>



*Figure 5 Blueprint plan of Prigge Mausoleum, drawings prepared by Robert Caterson association, copyright Woodlawn cemetery. Woodlawn Cemetery records. Located in the Dept. of Drawings & Archives Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University*

The plot was originally purchased by Hannah Elias and transferred to John A. Prigge on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1915.<sup>10</sup> Hannah Elias was born in Philadelphia in 1865,<sup>11</sup> She was mulato by origin, As in

<sup>8</sup> Holy Bible, Psalm 126, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc, <http://biblehub.com/niv/psalms/126.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery records. Specification of Workmanship and Materials, Columbia University.

<sup>10</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery records. Transfer Deeds from Hannah Elias to John A. Prigge, 1915.

<sup>11</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill. [Chicago, Ill]01 June 1904: 1, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/173223386/70D6A726F6C54AD5PQ/7?accountid=10226>

1910 she resided in 236 Central Park west.<sup>12</sup> A lawsuit in 1904 came up and it was alleged Hannah Elias blackmailed a millionaire, John R. Platt, she demanded a large sum of money over a few years which culminated at 685,000 dollars.<sup>13</sup> It was reported that she met Mr Pratt in 1896 while representing herself as of Spanish origin, the newspaper alleged that she then enticed Mr Platt and threatened to expose him to his family of two daughters and friends.<sup>14</sup> She later conceived a child named Gwendolyn Elias, and alleged she was related to John thereby demanding more money from him.<sup>15</sup> The child died within a year in 1903 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in a small grave numbered 42, never making to the mausoleum.<sup>16</sup> It was reported at the time Hannah Elias lived in a very extravagant lifestyle, “for she not only lived in a palatial residence in one of the most fashionable residence sections of the city, but she had a number of servants, most of them foreigners, devoted to her service.”<sup>17</sup> The mausoleum in Woodlawn cemetery which she purchased fitted into her vision of a lifestyle of splendor, and perhaps a wish to glorify hers and her children’s heritage.

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<sup>12</sup>Census, census year: 1910; Census Place: Manhattan Ward 22, New York, New York; Roll: T624\_1045; Page: 18A; Enumeration District: 1292; FHL microfilm: 1375058

<sup>13</sup> The Sun (1837-1991); Baltimore, “Special Dispatch to the Baltimore Sun”. Md. [Baltimore, Md]07 June 1904: 1 <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/536870441?accountid=10226>

<sup>14</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922); Chicago, Ill. [Chicago, Ill]01 June 1904: 1,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Woodlawn Cemetery records. Interment card for Gwendolyn Elias, 1903

<sup>17</sup>Afro-American (1893-1988); Baltimore, “Blackmail charged”, Md. [Baltimore, Md]11 June 1904: 1, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/530273797/70D6A726F6C54AD5PQ/5?accountid=10226>

After the lawsuit which was termed “one of New York’s greatest sensations”,<sup>18</sup> it was reported that Hannah Elias maintained only her apartment at Central Park West, the mausoleum was sold to the Prigge family during 1915. John A. Prigge was an immigrant from Germany, he had a grocer during his early years and then worked in the Real estate.<sup>19</sup> He and her wife lived on 234<sup>th</sup> on 130<sup>th</sup> West Street, He passed away on January 8<sup>th</sup> 1922, the ceremony was held at st Paul’s Lutheran church,<sup>20</sup> he was interred three days later.

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<sup>18</sup> Afro-American (1893-1988); Baltimore, “Hannah Elias Case in 1904 Gave New York Society a Jolt”, Md. [Baltimore, Md]01 July 1933: 13, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/531031443/70D6A726F6C54AD5PQ/9?accountid=10226>

<sup>19</sup> Census, Year: 1910; Census Place: Manhattan Ward 12, New York, New York; Roll: T624\_1022; Page: 7B; Enumeration District: 0543; FHL microfilm: 1375035

<sup>20</sup> New York Times (1857-1922); Obituary 3 No Title, New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]10 Jan 1922: 16. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/100060283/1A6F9DB3AED84F61PQ/1?accountid=10226>



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