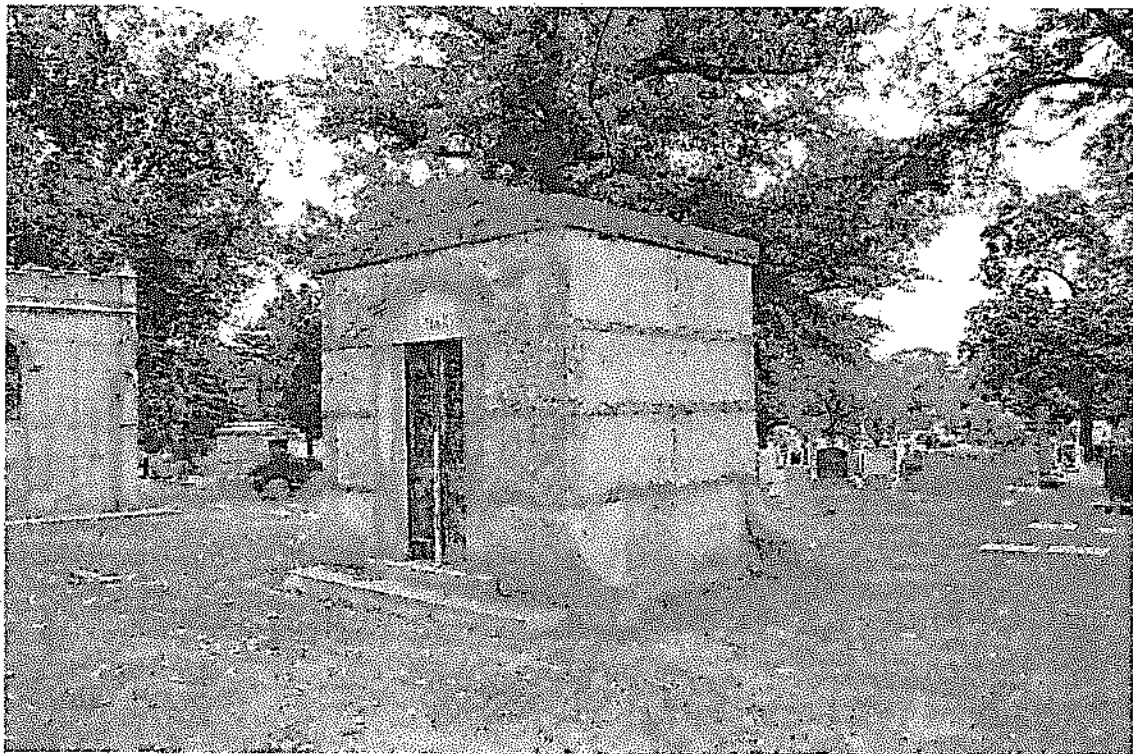


THE SAM HARRIS MAUSOLEUM AT WOODLAWN CEMETERY
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Samuel H. Harris was born on February 3rd, 1872 in New York to Jewish immigrants. Working from an early age at menial sales and delivery jobs, Harris eventually broke into show business and became one of the leading Broadway producers of the early 20th century.¹ Together with business partner (and lifelong friend) George M. Cohan, Harris earned a reputation as “the miracle man of the theater,” who could produce shows that still competed with the increasingly popular movie theaters.² His most notable productions included Cohan’s “Little Johnny Jones” (1904), Irving Berlin’s “Music Box Reviews” (1921-1924), the Marx Brothers’ “Animal Crackers” (1928), and Kaufman and Hart’s “The Man Who Came to Dinner” (1939).

Decades of box office success enabled Harris and his wife, Alice Rose (sister-in-law to George Cohan), to live extravagantly at residences first on Central Park West and later at King’s Point in Nassau.³ Census records indicate that the childless Harris couple employed up to seven servants (and housed their children), including a full-time chauffeur and gardener. Harris also confessed in interviews that he spent massive sums on racehorses and gambling, leading to periodic flirtations with bankruptcy. When Alice died suddenly of food poisoning complications in 1930, Harris purchased a plot at Woodlawn Cemetery adjacent to the Cohan family plot, on which the monument company Presbrey-Leland erected a mausoleum in 1932.⁴ Sam continued producing plays until he died of pneumonia in 1941. His funeral service was attended by over two hundred, including friends George Cohan and Irving Berlin. The funeral announcement

¹ “Sam H. Harris Tells Tabloid Life Story,” *The New York Herald, New York Tribune*, 23 May 1926: E4.

² “Harris Remembers When— Chiefly About Cohan,” *Toohy, John Peter, New York Herald Tribune*, 07 Feb 1937: F2.

³ New York State Archives; Albany, New York: State Population Census Schedules, 1925; Election District: 14; Assembly District: 02; City: North Hempstead; County: Nassau; Page: 11.

⁴ “Mrs. Sam H. Harris Dead: Wife Of Theatrical Man Was George Cohan’s Sister-in-Law,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 Nov 1930: 2.

in the Herald Tribune mentioned interment in a family mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery.⁵

The Harris mausoleum is set close to Park Avenue on the Butternut plot. Harris's taste for excess is almost entirely absent from the structure. The design is similar to many of the stock-design "Rock-Faced Mausoleums" offered by Presbrey-Leland.⁶ It appears modest beside the ornate Cohan mausoleum (designed by the Tiffany Studio) with which it was designed to align. The plot is minimally landscaped—the original plans show no paths or plantings. Although the mausoleum features very frontal siting and design, there was apparently never a clear path leading to the entry, and a large oak tree at the front of the plot now obscures direct view of the façade from Park Avenue. Visitors approaching from Woodlawn's entrance on Jerome Avenue would first pass by the Cohan mausoleum before arriving at the Harris plot, which may be an intentional message of the strong friendship between Cohan and Harris, in addition to the familial connection through their wives.

The Harris mausoleum is a symmetrical structure with a rock-faced granite exterior, an interior lined in Tennessee pink marble, and a polished granite floor. The entrance door surround and entablature feature granite with a smoother finish than the rest of the rock-faced exterior, providing transition into a highly polished interior. The visitor enters into a narrow space between the two pink marble coffins in which Samuel and Alice Rose are interred. The entire interior (floor aside) is lined with pink marble, even the hung ceiling comprised of four sheets attached at the center with a pin and

⁵ "Sam Harris Memorial Held at Actors Temple: 200 at Services Sponsored by Jewish Theatrical Guild," New York Herald Tribune, 12 July 1941: 8.

⁶ Presbrey-Leland Company. *The Book of Presbrey-Leland Memorials*. New York: Presbrey-Leland Studios, 1932.

rosette. The focal point of the interior is a window centered in the back wall of the mausoleum, a stained-glass landscape scene. Below the window is a small bench, although the generally dark interior and lack of space suggest that it was not a place intended to cultivate much reflection.

The façade is similarly simple: although the measurements are not exact, it creates the impression of a cube. The steps leading up to the entry, along with the projecting ears on either side of the building make the base more massive. A center line runs through the apex of the rooftop keystone and between the two entrance doors. "Sam H. Harris" is engraved on the entablature below a curved lintel, centered and seemingly supported by a symmetrical triple arrow motif that appears near the top of each jamb. The bottom joint of the entablature is aligned with the joints of the surrounding stone, creating a continuous line from one end of the building to the other. Large blocks of granite laid in a symmetrical arrangement form the rest of the façade, with beveling around the mortar joints. The emphasis on line created by the beveling makes for a building that is very readable structurally.

The Harris mausoleum is similar to other small mausoleums of the 1920s and 1930s at Woodlawn, many of which were the product of professional monument making companies like Presbrey-Leland. The design is simple, but the popularity of "rock-faced" mausoleums into the 1930s speaks to the lingering influence of 19th century revival styles featuring Gothic or rustic elements. The projecting ear elements at the base can be found on mausoleums of many different styles.

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