

### The Fahnestock Mausoleum

Harris C. Fahnestock was the patriarch of a wealthy family in New York City in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He and Margaret A. had seven children, six of whom lived to their adulthood. The family's wealth came from the banking industry; Harris C. was one of the founders of New York's First National Bank, and his eldest son William went on to found Fahnestock & Co.<sup>1</sup> Gibson, the family's second son, went on to be a successful stock broker.<sup>2</sup> These trades are carried down to the third generation, as well.<sup>3</sup>

The Fahnestocks had a weekend house in Lenox, Massachusetts called Eastover,<sup>4</sup> in addition to their NYC residence at 15 East 66<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>5</sup> Their home was one of the centers of the prestigious social circle, often hosting high-profile events.<sup>6</sup> The prominent Boston firm Peabody & Stearns designed many country homes in Lenox, including Elm Court, the Vanderbilt mansion. This familiarity may explain Harris' decision to hire the firm to design his family mausoleum at Woodlawn Cemetery.

Peabody & Stearns was a large firm founded by Robert Swain Peabody and John Goddard Stearns, Jr. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The company became popular for their wide variety of designs. Commissions included an array of programs, ranging from country homes, to civic buildings, to public markets, to educational buildings. No job was too big or too small, and the partners also showed a wide variety in their stylistic taste. Buildings were designed in whatever style was popular at the time, ranging from Queen Anne to Victorian Gothic.<sup>7</sup> Some criticize their work for being too heavily ornamented, often appearing cluttered and over-styled.

The Fahnestock mausoleum is also similarly detailed, accentuated by many belt courses on a domed, cylindrical form. This form, combined with the front pediment, bears a resemblance to the prestigious Pantheon, a building long revered for its timelessness and awe-inspiring powerful grace. Although the proportions are not exactly the same, the overall forms are consistent, and would still have invoked a memory of the Roman gem for those who knew of it. Fahnestock's mausoleum stands out within its setting, for although it is smaller than many, it exudes a strong presence with a definitively unique form. Many other structures in the area are heavy, block-like, and sit directly on the ground. The Fahnestock mausoleum sets itself apart by being raised on a considerable base, only to be reached by a

---

<sup>1</sup> "History." *Oppenheimer & Co. Inc.*

<sup>2</sup> 1880 New York Census.

<sup>3</sup> "History." *Oppenheimer & Co. Inc.*

<sup>4</sup> "Fahnestock Dance for Lenox Colony."

<sup>5</sup> White, p. 429.

<sup>6</sup> "Fahnestock Dance for Lenox Colony."

<sup>7</sup> Holden, p. 162.

long, monumental flight of stairs. Fahnestock made it clear that he was an important man, only to be reached by the few who were willing or worthy enough to climb these steps.

When the mausoleum was designed in 1895, the site between its plot and the main road sat empty, and the staircase and portico faced grandly onto the street. Southern exposure meant that the facade was always in available daylight, showing off the design with crisp shadows. In 1904, however, the Arents mausoleum was erected in the plot to the south west, and in 1919 it was renovated to the current massive structure that currently stands. This, combined with landscaping of bushes and trees, has made Peabody & Stearns' work almost invisible from the main road. The mausoleum is accessed obliquely from a side road, and the visitor has to turn to ascend the stairs rather than approaching them head-on, as was originally intended. No original landscaping plan was found, and there is no correspondence to indicate the existence of one. Currently, the only plantings are two large, round bushes flanking the stairs.

The mausoleum itself is made up of distinct formal elements, and the viewer's focus shifts between them upon approach. From afar, the silhouette reads clearly as a raised drum topped by a stepped dome, which are given a strong axuality by a monumental stair and shallow portico. Upon approach, the entablature of the portico and its detailed courses surrounding a wreath-and-leaf motif read strongly; the shadows cast against the gray speckled granite cause the elements to pronounce themselves. The monumental bronze doors with their wreath-shaped handles beg to be opened, but the visitor is then greeted by a second set of doors. Their open structure allows views to the interior as a sort of preview before entry.

Upon entrance, the visitor's eyes are immediately drawn to the brilliantly colored windows designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany,<sup>8</sup> and then to his mosaiced dome, pendentives, and semi-circular wall portions above.<sup>9</sup> The windows are styled with Egyptian motifs, and bear the words "Inri Deus." Unfortunately, they face north and are never illuminated by direct sunlight, which is a shame. The mosaiced angel above gives the space a lightweight, holy feel. This is further accentuated by the shift in material; while the exterior is a coarse gray granite, the interior is almost entirely pure white marble, including the floor. This allows for crisp detail at the entablature level, arches, and ring at the base of the dome. The dome itself is navy blue with gold stars, literally drawing the visitor's eyes up to the heavens. While not overtly religious, the space encourages the visitor to ponder the afterlives of the family laid to rest within. A century after construction, however, the mosaic is falling apart; tiles from

---

<sup>8</sup> Tiffany Studios, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Crouch, p., 103.

the dome litter the interior floor. Changes in grout color indicate previous repairs, which have clearly not held up. Fortunately, the window is in excellent condition, but the mosaic needs immediate attention if it is to be saved and still use the original Tiffany glass.

The interior space is larger than many of the other structures in the surrounding area, as there are tombs in the walls as well as the floor. In total, twelve bodies rest here. The design is for eleven catacombs, but one is shared by a grandson of Harris and his second wife. The space is square in plan, which is indeterminable and unexpected from the exterior, but necessary in order to fit the rectangular catacombs. Peabody & Stearns used proper and classical proportions between the interior and exterior; the radius of the interior dome, when multiplied twice by the golden ratio, is equal to the radius of the exterior drum and dome.

This attention to classical proportioning is also carried through to the portico in elevation. The diameter of the columns are carried throughout the facade as a unit of dimension for the door, portico width, and overall drum width. This balance is also seen in the relationship between horizontal and vertical elements. The details where the base meets the drum, the stone coursing, the string courses, the steps below the dome, and the ornament on the dome itself all give the structure a heavy, horizontal feel. This especially evident from the rear facade, where the portico is hidden and all that can be seen on the facade is the puncture from the interior windows. It should also be noted that the windows take up exactly the middle third of the rear facade vertically.

This strong sense of horizontality is contrasted, however, by the seeming weightlessness of the portico. The slender, monolithic columns seem to soar up from the stairs to lift the pediment above. The delicate and battered frame surrounding the doorway, although carved from the same stone, also appear to float on the facade, rising off the stairs. The semi-circular leaf details on the dome seem to peel lightly off the surface. This visually raises the small drum above, making it too appear to float upwards. This verticality perfectly balances the previously discussed horizontality, giving the entire mausoleum an effortless equilibrium.

The magnitude of the mausoleum designed by Peabody & Stearns accurately represents the class and status of the Fahnstock family around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mausoleum, although not ostentatious, stands out among its neighboring structures as one of elegance and refinement, meant to be respected by visitors for many future generations. It is well proportioned, of an appropriate weight and balance, and seems to perch delicately atop its gently sloping site. Despite this delicacy, however, it is still clearly a symbol of power from a wealthy banking family.

### Bibliography

Crouch, Edith. *The Mosaics of Louis Comfort Tiffany*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Pub., 2009. Print.

"Fahnestock Dance for Lenox Colony." *New York Times* 31 Aug. 1913: 11. Print.

*Great American Architects Series*. New York: Da Capo, 1977. Print. 1-6.

"H. C. Fahnestock, Banker, Is Dead." *New York Times* 5 June 1914: 11. Print.

Harris Fahnestock, *Residence in Lenox, Massachusetts. Terrace from below*. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Lenox, MA. *Library of Congress*. Web. 4 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/gsc.5a04090/>>.

Harris Fahnestock, *Residence in Lenox, Massachusetts. General view from road*. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Lenox, MA. *Library of Congress*. Web. 4 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/gsc.5a04088/>>.

"History." *Oppenheimer & Co. Inc.* 2010. Web. 12 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.opco.com/public/about\\_oppenheimer/history.html](http://www.opco.com/public/about_oppenheimer/history.html)>.

Holden, Wheaton Arnold. *Robert Swain Peabody of Peabody and Stearns in Boston : the Early Years (1870-1886)*. University Microfilms, 1969. Print.

Peabody & Stearns, Architects. *Tomb for H C Fahnestock Esq.* 1895. Blueprints. Boston.

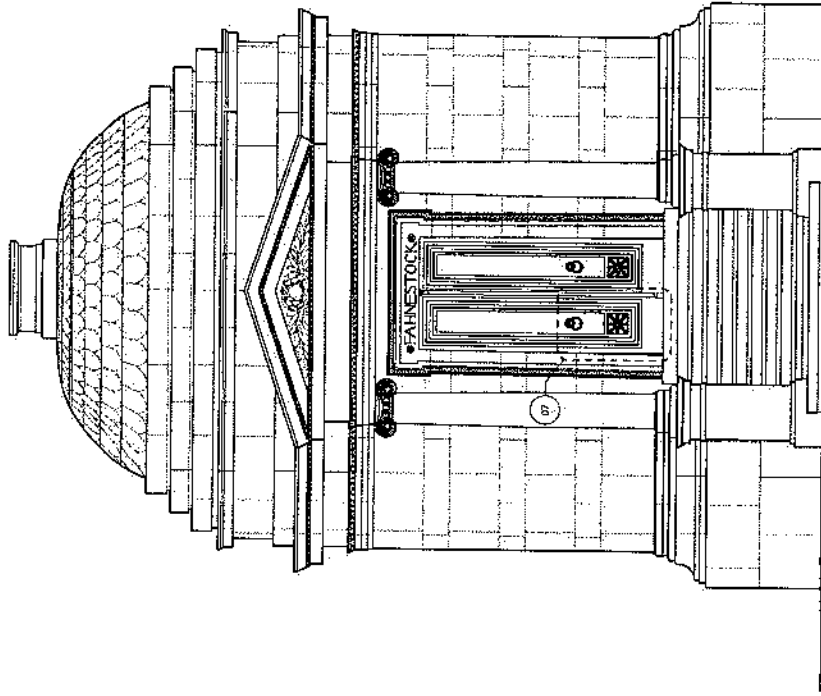
Tiffany Studios. *A Partial List of Windows*. 2nd ed. New York, 1973. Print.

White, Norval, Elliot Willensky, and Fran Leadon. *AIA Guide to New York City*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

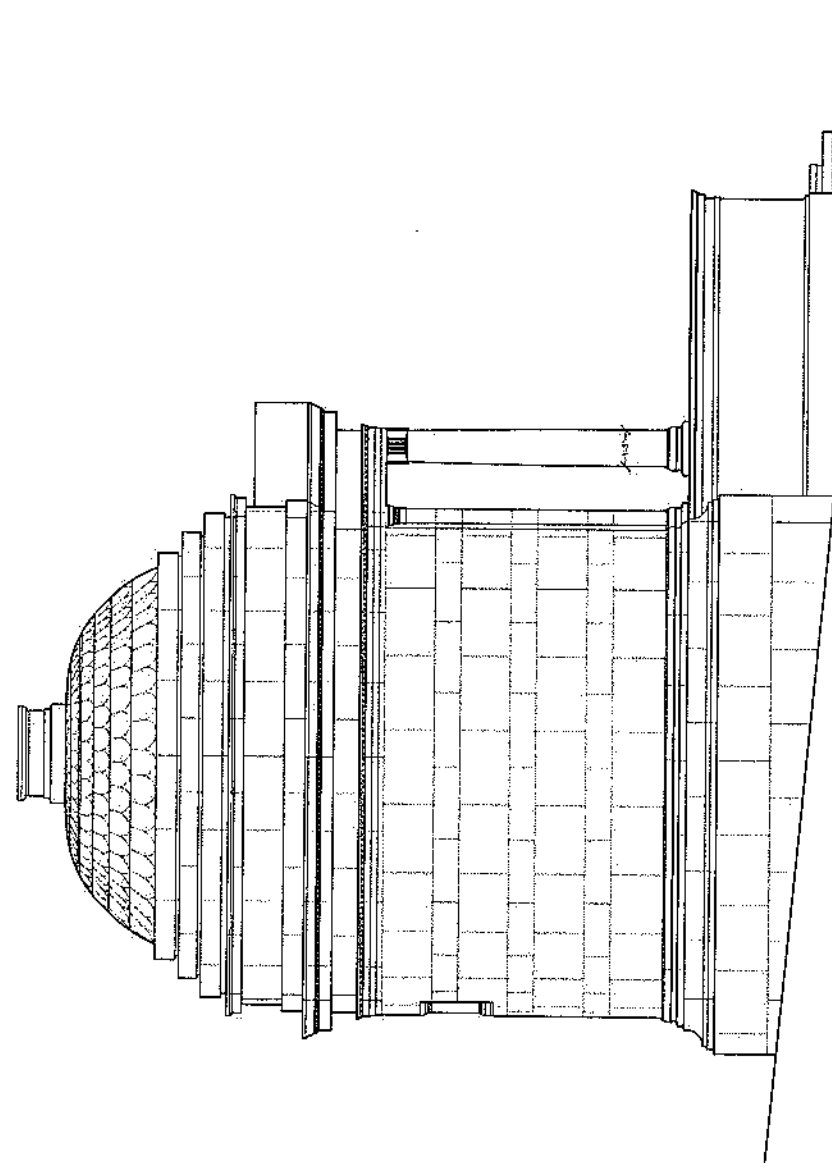
Wills, Charles T. "Sending Plans Furnished by Peabody & Stearns." Letter to The Woodlawn Cemetery. 15 Feb. 1915. MS. New York.

Year: 1880; Census Place: New York City, New York, New York; Roll 894; Family History Film: 1254894; Page: 166A; Enumeration District: 570; Image: 0326.

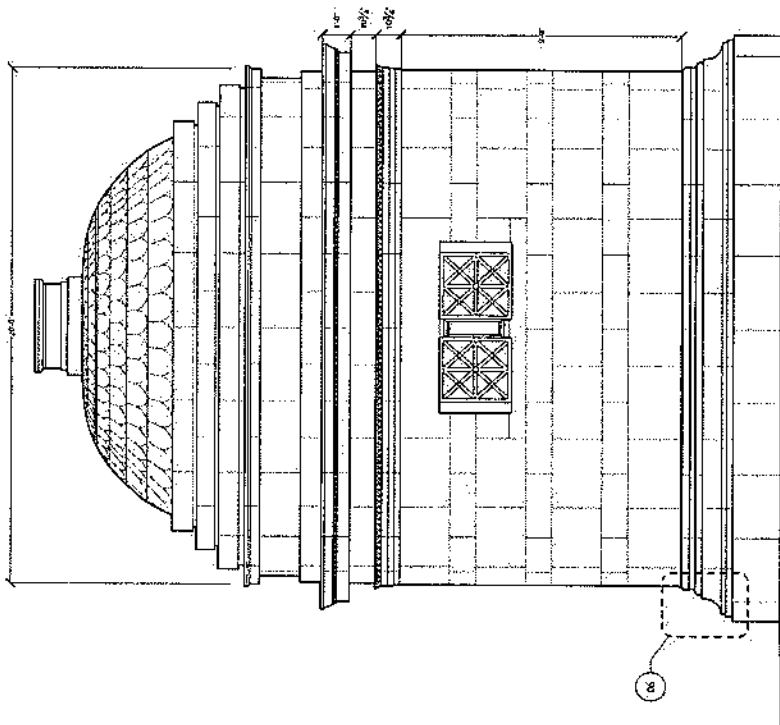
Year: 1930; Census Place: Manhattan, New York, New York; Roll 1567; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 562; Image: 425.0.



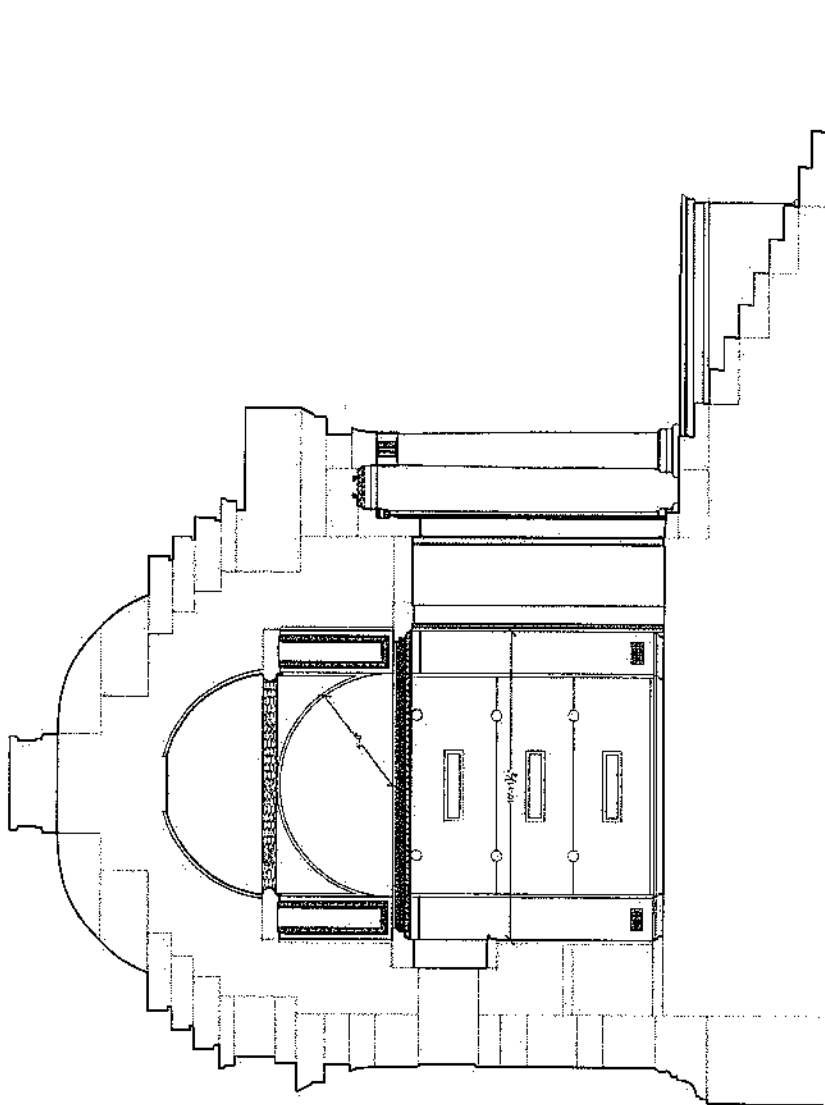
01 South Elevation  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"



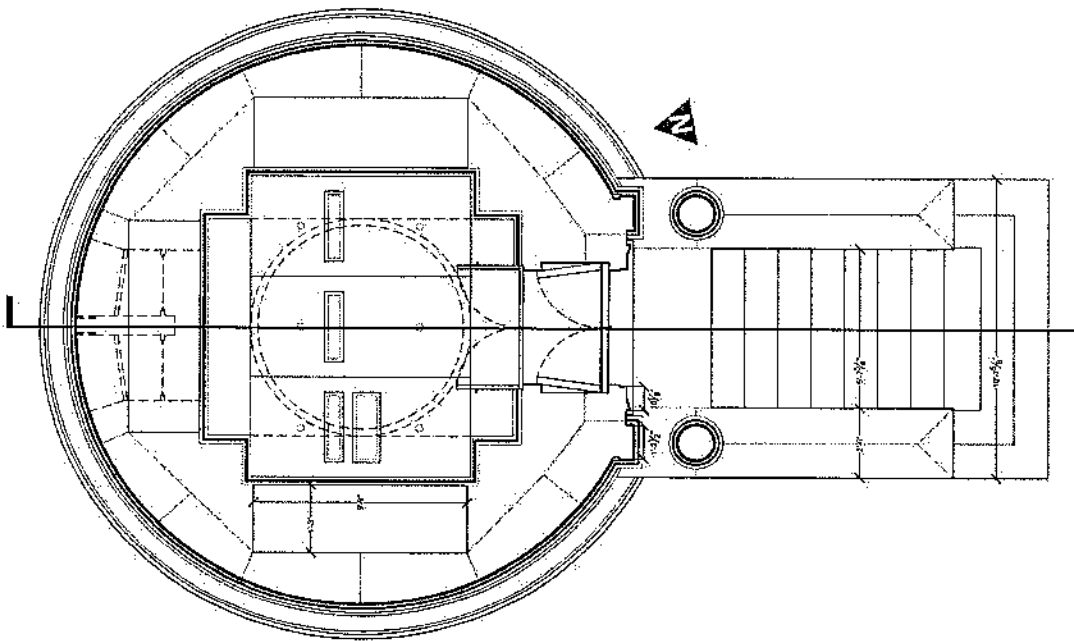
02 West Elevation  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"



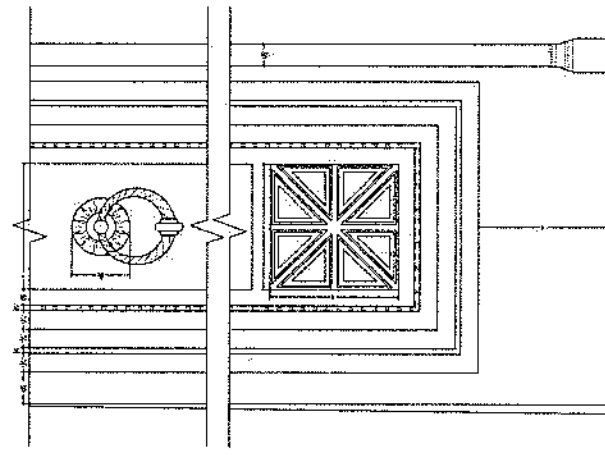
01. Main floor elevation  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"



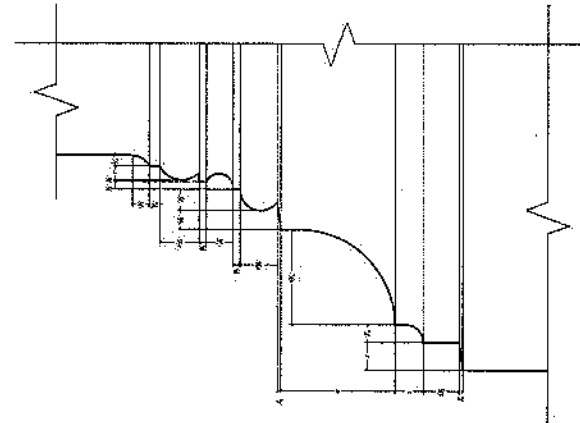
02. Lower floor elevation  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"



05  
 Plan  
 Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"



07  
 Detail Elevation of Case  
 Scale: 3/4" = 1'-0"



06  
 Detail Section of Door  
 Scale: 3/4" = 1'-0"

