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Problem 3: Field Documentation and Visual Analysis

Lamon V. Harkness Mausoleum - Chestnut Hill Sec. 125, Woodlawn Cemetery

FALL 2015 HP STUDIO I: Reading Historic Buildings

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The Lamon V. Harkness Mausoleum was built in Woodlawn Cemetery in 1905. The mausoleum is centered on a circular plot and set back from the street by 14 yards. The entrance faces west toward Chestnut Hill, and is hidden behind two overgrown yewberry shrubs. The Classical-style ashlar monument is faced with four highly-polished Ionic columns on a three-step portico with (Fig 1). There is nothing striking about the design of this mausoleum, and it is nearly identical to the four mausoleums on the neighboring plots. This mausoleum was not designed for the Harkness family, it was chosen, but that does not diminish the peace and beauty about its details. The mausoleum's uniformity augments a comfort in the classical form: behind the dedicated symmetry of the smooth Ionic columns and the well proportioned pediment rising over the raised letters of HARKNESS, the rough ashlar serves as a defensive surface of granite (Fig 2). The double bronze doors increase the complexity of the materials chosen, allowing a window just small enough to display the monument's dusty marble interior and a vibrant stained glass window on the back wall (Fig 3).

The mausoleum was built in 1905 after the death of Martha F. Johnson, Lamon's wife who died in her room at 933 Fifth Avenue in New York at the age of 55.¹ Little is documented about Martha's life, or her marriage to Lamon. After her death, the plans for the Harkness Mausoleum were submitted for review to Woodlawn. The construction plans were submitted with few specifications – the emphasis on the highly polished Blanco P Marble and specific material selection of New Hampshire Concord Granite would seem to stand out for their intent. There is also no direction given to the landscaping of the plot, an element of planning that appears to be of significant importance to the mausoleum in present day. The plan itself was designed by Colin Marsh, an otherwise unknown New York architect, and gives particular emphasis to the roof, which was to be built in three pieces, cut with lap joints and impervious to water.²

After he arranged for the mausoleum to be built, Lamon sold the couple's sixteen acres at One Elm in Greenwich Connecticut — the former estate of William Rockefeller, which the couple had torn down and was planning to enlarge — and left to begin a three year cruise around the world in his personally-commissioned steam yacht (Fig 4).³

Lamon's actions so soon after his wife's death indicate the romantic temper of an adventurer. Lamon V. Harkness was one of the wealthiest people in the country at the time, second only to J.D. Rockefeller. Having shared in the family fortune of Standard Oil, Lamon also

¹ Died: 19 Oct 1905. New York Tribune.

² Lamon Vanderbilt Harkness File: Woodlawn Cemetery Collection. Avery Library, Drawings and Archives, ca. 1905-1955.

³ Harkness to Tour World. 25 Nov 1906. New York Times.

overgrowth of the yewberry trees. It demonstrates a neglect of the marked singularity Warren discusses in Woodlawn's formal rural plan, and it distinguishes Lamon's plot in Woodlawn from his brother Charles Harkness's plot in Philadelphia's Laurel Hill Cemetery.

The body of Charles Harkness was next to enter the mausoleum in 1916. Charles' stay in this mausoleum is brief, as his body is moved to Laurel Hill before the year's end. His plot at Laurel Hill is also interesting in its investment in simplicity: inside a circular plot, Charles and his family rest under tombstones (Fig 8). Today the plot is bordered by a traffic circle, but like many of the lots in Laurel Hill, it is also enclosed inside the barrier of a low-lying stone wall. William Harkness, another brother of Lamon, also had a brief stay at the Lamon V Harkness mausoleum before he was moved to his own monument in Woodlawn in 1923. William's mausoleum is the greatest of the three, but sits on a stone platform with no interest in the surrounding landscape (Fig 9). Edward Stephen Harkness, half-brother to Lamon, Charles and William, was also buried in Woodlawn in 1940 and has the grandest mausoleum of the family.

The interior of the Lamon V Harkness mausoleum makes no note of these brief guests. Entering through the bronze doors, the interior of the tomb is about four and a half feet wide and 8 feet in length. The inside marble is dull now, but it was ordered in 1905 to be highly polished Blanco P marble, and still retains evidence of the smoothness of that texture. There is little ornament inside the tomb, except for carved marble flower urns, standing empty on the tomb doors and large, ornamental bronze drawer pulls on either side of the individual plagues (Fig 10).

The stained glass decorating the back wall — a torch emblazoned between geometric shapes and the Greek inscription 'εἰρήνη' (peace) — offers the only material communication to what is otherwise a disconnected interior and facade (Fig 11). The image of the torch is popular in cemetery art, meant as a metaphor for the afterlife, and here it could also be interpreted as Lamon's last tribute to Martha. The stained glass illuminates the interior in any weather and it emits a warm glow to the outside of the monument. This glow works to the advantage of any imagination of landscape. If the trees were meant to be planted to the rear of the building, as the 1921 photograph of Woodlawn Cemetery shows, the stained glass would offer an aura of majestic proportions. As it stands today, shaded and hidden from view, the glow of the stained glass gives the last impression of life to the inhabitants.

Of the eight catacombs, only four remain occupied. The last to arrive were the son and son-in-law of Lamon: Harry S. Harkness who died of influenza at the age of 38 in 1919 and Abraham Kingsley Macomber who died at 78 in 1955.

A. Kingsley Macomber was the husband of Lamon's daughter Myrtle, who died in California in 1952.⁷ The location of Myrtle's body is unknown. The couple owned the Paicines Ranch in San Benito, and also lived abroad in Paris and for many years at the Chateau de Quesnay. Both properties are rich in architectural detail and well documented in newspapers, and they also indicate that the couple shared Lamon's love of horses and exceptional capacity for breeding them, as well as his adventurous spirit, and in this case especially, a disregard for the material conditions of their afterlife.

⁷ Obituary 4 -- no title, 11 May 1952. Los Angeles Times.



Figure 1: Lamon V. Harkness Mausoleum and circular plot, Woodlawn Cemetery 2015



Figure 2: New Hampshire Concord Granite



Figure 3: Lamon V. Harkness Mausoleum



Figure 4 (top left): SS WAKIVA, belonging to Lamon V. Harkness." ca.1910-1915. Library of Congress

Figure 5 (top right): Walnut Hall, Lexington, Kentucky ca.1920. Library of Congress

Figure 6 (bottom left): Woodlawn Cemetery, Aerial View, ca 1921

Figure 7 (bottom right): Harkness Mausoleum, 2015





Figure 8 (top left): Harkness Circle, gravesite of Charles Harkness, Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia. 1989. Library of Congress

Figure 9 (left): Willam Harkness Mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery 2015

Figure 10 (right): Interior detail, Lamon V Harkness Mausoleum

Figure 11 (bottom): Interior, Lamon V Harkness Mausoleum

