



John Unger Mausoleum

Woodlawn Cemetery

Bronx, New York

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2013 Historic Preservation Studio: Reading Buildings

Problem Three: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis

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In June 1905, John Unger (1844-1931) commissioned H.K. Keller to design and build a mausoleum for himself and his family at Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, New York City. The first occupant of the John Unger Mausoleum was Unger's wife, Philippina Ruppert Unger (1847-1905), who died six months after the commissioning of the structure.¹ The mausoleum holds two of their children, Sarah Bricklemaier (1869-1951) and John Unger Jr. (1871-1924), and their spouses, Francis Bricklemaier (1859-1912) and Flora P. Müller Unger (1877-1967). Additionally, there are the remains of three grandchildren, John Unger III (1901-1989), Margaretha Bricklemaier (1901-1959) and Frances S. Grossman (1902-1998), as well as her husband, Martin C. Grossman (1903-1973). Ten crypts in the mausoleum remain unoccupied.

John Unger was the eldest of three sons born to German immigrants, John and Rosina Unger, on October 15, 1844 in New York City.² In 1861, with the onset of the American Civil War, Unger left school at the age of 16 and joined the Staten Island Infantry. During most of the war, he was a member of the Army of the Potomac, with which he fought at Gettysburg, where he was injured five times. In addition, he was part of the Thirty-Eighth and Fifty-Fifth New York Infantry, as well as a volunteer in the 40th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, also known as the Mozart Regiment.³ Through his marriage to Philippina Ruppert, Unger was able to increase his social standing in New York City. As first cousin to Jacob Ruppert Sr., who founded the Jacob Ruppert Brewing Company and whose son owned the New York Yankees and built Yankee Stadium, Philippina Ruppert was most likely the person who financed the construction of the mausoleum, through her family funds. Following the Civil War, Unger worked as a sign

¹ John Unger Mausoleum. Woodlawn Archive, Special Collections- Avery Library, Columbia University. October 3, 2013

² Ancestry.com, United States Federal Census, 1850 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009.

³ "Obituary 3 -- No Title." New York Times. 4 February 1931, <<http://proquest.com>>.

painter in New York City with his son, John Unger Jr., under a company he opened called John Unger & Son.

Located on Spruce Avenue in Hickory Knoll, the mausoleum of John Unger and his family was designed and constructed by H.K. Keller of Woodlawn, a mausoleum company that worked specifically with Woodlawn Cemetery on a number of different commissions in the cemetery.⁴ The exterior of the mausoleum is composed of various sized blocks of Light Barre Granite, and is designed in a Neoclassical style based on Greek prostyle temple forms. Raised on a 2.5' podium are four 9-6'2" Doric columns with entasis. Above this stretches the entablature, where a triglyph is centered above each column, framing three metopes, of which the central is the widest (Fig. 1). Within the break of the rhythm of the columns stands the door to the mausoleum, which is made of bronze that has, since the time of construction, turned a cool shade of green, and contains a number of symbols and inscriptions that are important to understanding the history of the family. Most significant of these are the two polished red diamonds that are placed at eye level on either door, surrounded by different inscriptions. On the left door, this inscription reads "MOZART REGIMENT", while on the right, "FORTIETH N.Y. VET. VOL", both containing the years 1861 and 1865, announcing the time John Unger spent as a member of this group during the Civil War. The red squares relate back to this regiment as well, referring to the different shaped pieces of red fabric soldiers would cut out from their jacket and pin to their hats and shoulders in order to be recognized more easily by their leaders, with a red diamond representative of the Mozart Regiment. Around these diamonds, each door contains a laurel wreath, which is a common symbol of victory. Below this, lion heads hold the door knockers on either door, representative of strength and protection in the afterlife. Finally, at the bottom of

⁴ John Unger Mausoleum. Woodlawn Archive, Special Collections- Avery Library, Columbia University. October 3, 2013

each door is placed an upside down torch, which signifies the end or extinguishing of life. Framing the doors is a carved encasement that reads "JOHN UNGER." (Fig. 2). Topping off the mausoleum is a low pitched gabled roof that is divided into three parts, while at the base of the mausoleum, two Baroque-inspired scrolls reach out from the podium towards the street. Inside the mausoleum, twenty crypts are arranged in rows of two over five on either of the longer walls. On the wall directly across from the door is a stained-glass window with an image of the gravesite of John Unger's children who did not reach adulthood, and who are buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. The walls of the interior are made of a highly polished veined Italian marble that contrasts greatly from the darker, more roughly cut granite of the exterior (Fig. 3).⁵

Precedents for the John Unger Mausoleum are varied, and although constructed in a Doric style, the larger elements of the mausoleum are a composite of several Greek temple architecture. The Doric order of the mausoleum can be attributed to a number of buildings in the Acropolis, such as the Temple of Hephaestus (Fig. 4). However, within Greek architecture, Doric temples such as these are generally constructed with a peripteral style with six columns along the façade, rather than the tetrastyle seen on the John Unger Mausoleum. For this reason, the designers of the building could have also looked at sites such as the Temple of Athena Nike in Athens, which has four columns along its façade, although unlike the mausoleum it is designed in an Ionic amphiprostyle (Fig. 5). Another example that elements for the mausoleum may have been taken from is the Erechthion, which is designed in the Ionic order, but from the east side has a prostyle plan, similar to the John Unger mausoleum (Fig. 6). Finally, the Propylaea, or entrance to the Acropolis, in which the central columns are unevenly spaced in order to allow for

⁵ John Unger Mausoleum. Woodlawn Archive, Special Collections- Avery Library, Columbia University, October 3, 2013

a larger entrance space, an element that is also seen in the John Unger mausoleum, but not in temple architecture, where columns are often, although not always, evenly spaced (Fig. 7).

What is notable about the design of the John Unger mausoleum in contrast to many of the others that surround it is the strict way that its design forces one to enter and view the building. Reaching from the base of the mausoleum to Spruce Avenue is a sidewalk flanked by urns on either side that direct the viewer as to where and how to enter the building, compared to many others that are completely surrounded by grass and allow one to approach it from all directions. Additionally, the Baroque scrolls on the base, which draw the eye in towards the center of the building and work to emphasize the central entrance. Finally, the landscaping around the building plays an important role in the way that it is experienced. Framing either edge of the sidewalk are two trees that hide the mausoleum from neighboring buildings and work to anchor it on its site, while a large tree from behind has grown tall enough to reach above and in front of the building, making it difficult to see unless you are standing directly in front of it (Fig. 8). The overall effect of having this entrance is important to the way in which visitors to the cemetery view the mausoleum, because it gives it a much more formal atmosphere, because design has gone not only into how one views the building but how one interacts with it.

Although relatively simple in its overall design, the John Unger Mausoleum, through its door details that highlight Unger's achievements in the Civil War, as well as its relatively secluded placement on the site, is successful in creating an impressive structure that honors the memory of John Unger and his family members who rest there.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8