



Fig. 1. Crosby mausoleum, 1846.

EGYPTIAN REVIVAL FUNERARY ART IN GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY

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Introduction

Much of mainstream American architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts in the nineteenth century is characterized by "revivalism" and "eclecticism". The same influences and attitudes that inspired these revivals and eclectic styles also carried over into funerary art. A nineteenth-century fascination, or preoccupation, with death, inspired by the Romantic movement, led to the creation of dramatic images and forms in funerary art. Nineteenth-century attitudes towards death and dying were reflected in the iconography of funerary monuments while stylistically drawing from classical, medieval and even Egyptian art. In this essay, I propose to briefly discuss and analyze Egyptian Revival forms and motifs as they are expressed in certain elements of the funerary art of Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. In walking through Green-Wood, I have often wondered why there are fewer Egyptian Revival monuments there compared to the relative abundance of other Revival styles. Were they considered inappropriate from a religious point of view and incompatible with traditional Western/Christian iconography, or could they mean the same things? Perhaps they were not as aesthetically pleasing as other more familiar and fashionable styles such as Classical or Gothic. In the course of this discussion, I will cite some of both the historical criticisms and the defenses of Egyptian Revival (it intrigues me that, despite controversy, people still commissioned this style). Primary emphasis will be placed upon the Egyptian Revival style as it appears in pyramid and mastaba shaped tombs, and upon certain of the individuals who commissioned them. The obelisk, another very popular funerary monument, is also of Egyptian origin, but has lost over time the mystique of a pyramid and has, moreover, acquired other symbolic connotations of its own. Nonetheless, they are worthy of an entire discussion unto themselves, a project so detailed it will have to be reserved for a future essay. There is, of course, a strong association between Egyptian forms and iconography and Freemasonry, a connection which often appears on gravestone art. However, that too is somewhat beyond the scope of the current enquiry and will therefore also be reserved for future discussion.

A Short Overview of Green-Wood Cemetery

Located in Brooklyn, New York, Green-Wood Cemetery was incorporated in 1838 and had its first burial in 1840, representing a part of the new "Rural Cemetery" movement in America that had begun several years earlier with the establishment of Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was specifically designed with the intention of creating a garden cemetery wherein sculpture and architecture would contribute to a serene and beautiful park-like open space – a site where visitors could stroll and where the dead could literally rest in peace. It quickly drew weekend visitors and tourists from all over the country because of its idyllic atmosphere and beautiful grounds. Green-Wood rapidly became the most popular cemetery in New York, and for a family to own lots and be buried there carried with it the same prestige as an address on Fifth Avenue. The monuments found within the cemetery range from the most humble stones to the most elaborate statues and structures. The word "Victorian" is frequently used in reference to certain nineteenth-century American cemeteries, and the attitudes and culture of the Victorian era in America are certainly reflected in Green-Wood Cemetery. Realizing this is critical to an understanding of why such a variety of eclectic monuments and Revival styles, including the Egyptian, exist in Green-Wood today.

Nehemiah Cleaveland (1796-1877), the principal of a girls school in Brooklyn, was also a self-proclaimed cemetery observer, critic, and historian, and the contemporary voice of authority relating to matters concerning Green-Wood Cemetery. He wrote his first treatise on Green-Wood in 1847, updating and amending his writings again in 1853 and 1857. An invaluable source for contemporary thoughts and attitudes about cemeteries, and more specifically about the history and monuments of Green-Wood, Cleaveland, like a number of his contemporaries, expressed a cautious and often ambivalent opinion about the Egyptian Revival. He was very much concerned with both the propriety and the aesthetic merits of Egyptian obelisks and architectural styles in public monuments and cemeteries. In an era when graceful Neo-Classical sculpture produced inspiring allegorical figures of Hope and Faith, and beautiful, sentimental angels transported souls to Heaven, the massive blocks of stone that constituted Egyptian monuments amounted to an eyesore, according to Cleaveland, amidst the poetic cemetery landscape. Even while admiring the art of Egypt, as well as that of Classical Greek and Rome, Cleaveland was a staunch supporter of the then widely popular Gothic style in archi-

ecture, and posed the question: "Is Christian architecture so poor and scanty, is modern genius so sterile, that we must seek the models of our churches in 'superstitious' Athens, and derive the forms of our sepulchral monuments, gateways, and chapels, from calf-adoring Egypt?"¹

An Overview of Egyptian Revival

Before a specific discussion of Egyptian Revival monuments in Greenwood Cemetery, it might be useful to provide a background of the Egyptian Revival in general, with some attention to this style as manifested in American funerary art and to the significance of the major forms used in the Egyptian Revival. The pyramid, mastaba form, and many of the Egyptian decorative features that appear in the monuments of Greenwood Cemetery all have roots in earlier revivals.

Richard Carrott's extensive study of the Egyptian Revival movement in the nineteenth century (for a brief listing of some key secondary sources pertinent to this area see the appendix to this essay) demonstrates that it can be broken down into three different artistic style phases that actually began in the eighteenth century. The first is the Rococo, which in architecture was used to provide a picturesque effect, the second the Romantic/Classical phase, and the third the "archaeological" phase that was a result of the Napoleonic campaigns into Egypt. According to Carrott, the existence of eclectic styles in monuments indicated that there was a strong case for revivalism based on the importance of their past associations. He indicates several reasons why the Egyptian Revival took place, one being that it was a concept of architecture that symbolized death based on its ancient forms and use. A second reason is the concept of the museum, which in the eighteenth century meant creating an atmosphere where there were many references to the past for an aesthetic impact.

The motivation for architectural eclecticism as symbolism is that a structure, although in a current style, may refer to an earlier one for psychological or religious reasons. The most obvious parallel in the Egyptian Revival is the use of the pyramid form for funerary monuments. Pyramids are probably the most highly recognized and distinctly Egyptian form: they contain the aura of mystery that ancient Egypt represents and are most closely associated with burial and death. The Napoleonic idea of the exploitation of eclectic styles for the purpose of creating an architectural museum is another principle of pre-nineteenth

century revivalism. Carrott's concepts of the symbol and past associations, in relation to ancient Egypt and modern funerary art is one of the strongest and most obvious points for the popularity of Egyptian Revival in cemeteries. Applying Carrott's concept of the museum has the most exciting possibilities in looking at Egyptian Revival in Green-Wood Cemetery. The cemetery was designed to be a garden cemetery in which there was a variety of sculpture and architecture, an aim that conformed with one of the main objectives of the American nineteenth-century Rural Cemetery movement.

One of the earliest Egyptian Revival movements actually took place in the ancient Greco-Roman world. The best known of several pyramidal Roman tombs is that of Caius Cestius, c. 12 BC, from the time of Augustus, in Rome. This pyramid served as a model for later Egyptian Revivals. In the mid eighteenth-century, the Egyptian Revival experienced another burst of popularity with the Rococo period, in which the most important stylistic qualities were variety, novelty, and being "picturesque". The idea of using the iconography of Egyptian art for any other reason was not considered at this time. The Egyptian Revival would surface again later in the eighteenth century, during the Neo-Classical and Romantic eras. A primary concept associated with the Romantic movement was the idea of the sublime vs. the beautiful. The sublime aesthetic stated that certain works of art produced emotional qualities such as fear, astonishment, terror, and awe. Egyptian architecture, it was felt, could produce these effects, with dramatic results, in funerary art. The Egyptian Revival experienced its greatest popularity since Greek and Roman times with the Rococo phase of the mid-eighteenth century. The manifestation of the Rococo Picturesque, which took place primarily in France, was for the most part for the purposes of providing an ornamental function for an architectural framework. The Egyptian Revival aspects of the Rococo Picturesque phase began with the writings and designs of Italian architect and designer Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), one of the foremost inventors of fashions using Egyptianizing forms in an eclectic style. In his 1769 book, *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini*, whose title translates to *Diverse Ways to Decorate Fireplaces*, he used authentic Egyptian designs based on drawings and engravings from antique models, while incorporating other design elements of his own invention to create a stylistic vocabulary that went beyond the use of obelisks, pyramids, and sphinxes.

The next phase of Egyptian Revival, the Romantic Classicist, began in the late eighteenth century. Romanticism embraced the exotic and the foreign; it indulged in a longing for other times and places. The architectural historian Wayne Andrews has stated that "The Romantic architects were interested in introducing into architecture the fourth dimension, time itself, and their Grecian, Gothic, Italian, Egyptian and other fantasies are best remembered as so many invitations to explore the poetry of time."²

Geometrical logic and purity were potent forces in the Neoclassical aesthetic, and these ideas could be embodied in the Egyptian taste. The primitive, massive, and solid aspects of Egyptian architecture were desirable and pleasing attributes, and these were bound to appeal as well to the Romantic Classicists.

The Napoleonic Campaigns – Authentic Ancient Egyptian Monuments

The next critical stage, the "archaeological" phase, had the greatest impact on many art forms: poetry, painting, decorative arts, and architecture all incorporated imagery, symbols, or designs from ancient Egypt. It produced the most widespread creation of Egyptian Revival styles in art and architecture since ancient times. This phase is marked by Napoleon's campaigns into Egypt in 1798-1799. Napoleon brought with him an army of scholars and artists who documented the topography, geography, natural history, and antiquities of ancient Egypt. One of them, Baron Dominique Vivant Denon, wrote the illustrated *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* in 1802, and between the years 1809 and 1828 produced the 22-volume *Description de l'Egypte*. This treatise and the numerous detailed drawings it contained had a tremendous influence on scholars and artists and fired up the imagination of the public, providing inspiration for the nineteenth-century Egyptian Revival movement.

The designs of several Egyptian Revival mausoleums in Green-Wood Cemetery, which I will discuss in detail later, can be traced directly back to these early source books. Early in the nineteenth century, one of Napoleon's many reforms was the establishment of the first modern-era cemetery, Père Lachaise, in Paris. Because of the close association of this event with Napoleon's campaigns into Egypt, as well as the association of Egypt's architecture with death, an Egyptian Revival within the new cemetery movement was inevitable.

The Egyptian Revival and the Sublime

Egyptian Revival appealed to the Romantic sensibility because it evoked ideas and feelings related to an ancient past: picturesque ruins and the exotic locale of Egypt conjured up visions of unfamiliar faraway places. One of the key ideas of Romanticism, and a critical concept behind the Egyptian Revival and a direct influence on its use for funerary arts, was the concept of the Sublime. The roots of the concept of the Sublime may be traced to British statesman and essayist Edmund Burke's formulation of what he termed the 'Sublime versus the Beautiful'. In brief, the sublime aesthetic stated that emotional qualities such as fear, astonishment, terror, dread, and awe were produced by certain works of art. It was realized that Egyptian architecture could give the effect of awe and dread. Not only were its iconographic associations based upon an aura of "Wisdom and Mystery," as well as the Cult of the Dead, but visually these qualities were implied through the very characteristics of the style.³ Upon seeing Egyptian funerary monuments, viewers would, it was felt, be infused with sublime associations of gloom, solemnity, and the finality of death, as well as the idea of eternity.

French architect Etienne-Louis Boullée (1728-99) understood and believed in the ideas of the Comte de Caylus and Edmund Burke, and set about creating designs for massive tombs. His vast schemes featuring blank walls, stupendous scale, and Egyptianizing elements suggest the desolation, terror, and finality of death. Boullée's drawings of pyramidal structures go back to the more wide-angled proportions of the ancient pyramids at Gizeh: his designs sought perfect symmetry on an enormous scale. The mood and atmosphere Boullée tried to create in his cemetery designs has been explained in this way:

... By cutting decoration to a minimum, Boullée gave his buildings a 'character of immutability'. He could think of nothing more appropriate or melancholy than a monument consisting of a flat surface, bare and unadorned. No gloomier images exist and if we make abstraction of all the beauty of art, it would be impossible not to appreciate in such a construction, the mournful effect of the architecture.⁴

Americans were exposed to Egyptian Revival styles through eighteenth century furniture and design books, and other archeological publications. Knowledge and understanding of Egyptian culture and art became more widespread as new archaeological discoveries and treasures

were found: books, photographs, and artifacts being brought to America increased interest and awareness of ancient Egypt. Influenced by French and British art and architectural trends, Egyptian Revival popularity in Europe was soon followed here, eventually evolving into our particular American versions of those trends.

Arguments For and Against Egyptian Revival

Aesthetic Criticisms

There have been arguments both for and against Egyptian Revival styles for a variety of reasons. With regard to their appropriateness for Christian funerary monuments, there are strong arguments from both sides. The style has its detractors and proponents for its aesthetic qualities too. On aesthetic principles, critics and the public thought Egyptian Revival was too depressing and fearsome; there was a somewhat too much of the awesome quality about it, which oddly enough might well be the strongest argument for its proper use in funerary art. The authenticity of Egyptian art in its applications for funerary art was often its only justifiable reason for use.

Religious Criticisms and Considerations

The average nineteenth-century family knew that death was a frequent visitor and took comfort in religious faith and teaching. The devout Christian of the Victorian era was exceedingly preoccupied with belief in the Resurrection of the soul, eternal life, and the idea of the afterlife. The appropriateness of Egyptian styles for funerary art and architecture posed religious questions and objections.

The use of more traditional Christian symbols to express faith and hope in the hereafter included angels, crosses, and monuments that incorporated Gothic elements reminiscent of great Christian cathedrals. At the same time, the use of obelisks and Egyptian funerary art was acceptable to some because of the ancient Egyptian's belief in the afterlife: their whole culture, art and architecture revolved around preparation for the afterlife.

Green-Wood, as part of the Rural Cemetery Movement, provided an appropriate material setting for the nineteenth century belief in Victorian America that the living would eventually be reunited with their loved ones who had passed on. The word cemetery connotes not finality, but

sleep – a resting place – a sentiment which often appears as brief epitaphs on gravestones. Both Christian and Egyptian iconography supports this idea of a life after death, and many of the monuments in Green-Wood reflect this attitude toward death in symbolic or written form.

Nonetheless, articles appearing in influential magazines such as the *North American Review*, denounced the Egyptian Revival and declared it tantamount to blasphemy:

It is very doubtful whether the Egyptian style is most appropriate to a Christian burial place. It certainly has no connection with our religion. In its characteristics it is anterior to civilization; and therefore is not beautiful in itself. But more than this, Egyptian architecture reminds us of the religion that called it into being, - the most degraded and revolting paganism that ever existed. It is the architecture of embalmed cats and deified crocodiles; solid, stupendous, and time defying, we allow; but associated in our minds with all that is disgusting and absurd in superstition....⁵

In the 1840's, some critics denounced "modern sepulchral monuments" as, "pagan". Urns, broken columns, inverted torches, extinguished lamps, and sarcophagi, all of which were based on Classical Greek and Roman art, were looked upon as immoral and un-Christian. The cross, recumbent effigies, and emblems of mercy and redemption were the only acceptable emblems on tombs.⁶

Nehemiah Cleaveland wrote that the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans had no Christian belief in the Resurrection and a Life Everlasting. He admired the aesthetic qualities of ancient art forms, but pointed out that by using the pre-Christian symbols, people who employed them were denying the faith which offered them the hope and salvation they professed to believe in:

Of these imitations, the emblems most used are of Greek or Egyptian origin. No one can doubt that in their own time and place, these symbols were natural and appropriate, as well as beautiful. But are they so still?... To the mourners of pagan antiquity, death was extinction. To them, no voice from heaven had spoken. (should he) employ the same symbols with the pagan and the infidel? ...Those who will use the gloomy hieroglyphics of some perished creed, should at least place near them the cheering emblems of a living faith.⁷

Critics denounced the Egyptian Revival by saying it offered no meaning, visually or spiritually, to those looking for either inspiration or consolation. The architects who did champion the Egyptian Revival, did so

largely because of its simplicity of form, inherent symbolism concerning death and mortality, and its suitability for funerary art. Despite the relatively small number of Egyptian Revival funerary monuments in Green-Wood Cemetery and elsewhere, Egyptian Revival was more popular in funerary art than in other areas.

Green-Wood and The Rural Cemetery Movement

Early in the nineteenth century, Romanticism and eclecticism led to criticisms being hurled back and forth concerning the use and abuse of different historical styles in architecture. It seems everyone was favoring one style for brief periods of time and then casting that one off in favor of something else that had suddenly become more popular. The result was an ongoing struggle for the dominance of one revival style over the other.

Understanding the Rural Cemetery movement is critical for understanding why such a variety of revival styles and eclectic monuments exists in Green-Wood today. Egyptian Revival stands among the Gothic and the Greek Revival monuments because patrons were encouraged to choose monuments and architecture that would create a varied and interesting visual landscape.



Fig. 2. Crosby mausoleum, 1846.



Fig. 3. Crosby mausoleum, 1846.

The garden-like setting of the Rural Cemetery movement can in many regards be traced back to Romantic gardens in England, which made use of fake tombs and ruins designed for Romantic effect. In Romantic garden parks, a variety of styles could often be seen together. In Green-Wood Cemetery, the concept of the eclectic garden cemetery was realized early on, as demonstrated by the variety of architectural styles and sculpture that were chosen to commemorate the dead. The fantasy landscape appealed to a sense of adventure that was so much a part of romanticism. Green-Wood was landscaped with ponds, hills, valleys, and a dizzying maze of meandering paths and drives.

The Monuments of Green-Wood Cemetery

With the exception of large and striking figural statues, the mausoleums are the most impressive and elaborate structures in Green-Wood Cemetery. To be sure, there are small, modest mausoleums in the cemetery, but a number are as big as many houses, and the appearance of certain others tend to make the visitor forget that they are in Brooklyn, USA.

One of the earliest Egyptian Revival mausoleums in Green-Wood cemetery, and one that Nehemiah Cleaveland would certainly have seen,

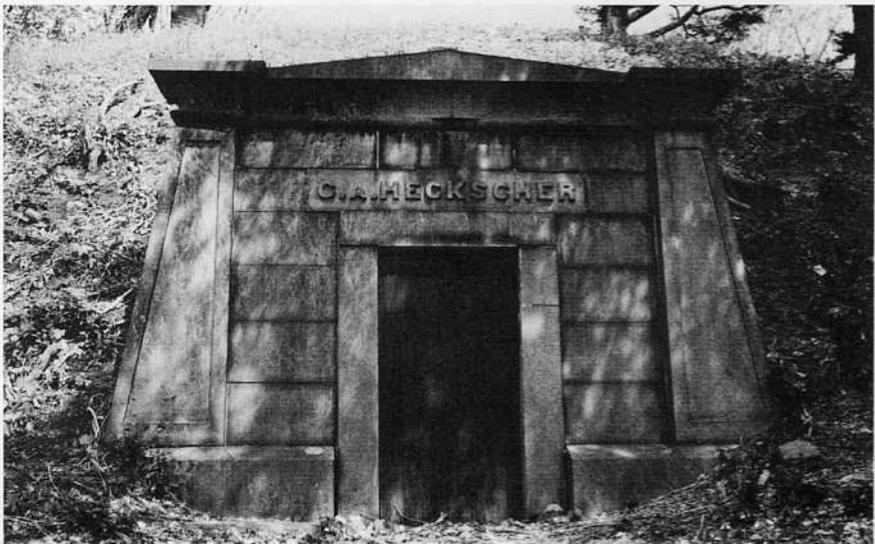


Fig. 4. Heckscher mausoleum, 1866.

is the tomb of William B. Crosby (Figs. 1-3). The inner door behind the wrought iron gate in the center of the façade displays incised letters stating "Erected 1846". The mausoleum is constructed of blocks of brownstone and is set into a hillside. Such hillside mausoleums are fairly common in Green-Wood and other rural cemeteries because of the terrain, and it is often difficult to judge the actual size of this type of mausoleum since the entire structure is not visible. This early Green-Wood tomb is a good starting place to explain what primary features characterize an Egyptian Revival monument: it is Egyptian in its use of pylons, cavetto cornices, winged globe, and torus molding. Unlike the other mausoleums I will be discussing, the walls of the Crosby tomb are not battered at an angle in the common ancient Egyptian or Egyptian Revival style, but rise straight up perpendicular to the ground. Later examples that I will examine use a more authentic Egyptian basic structure in that their walls are battered at a 70-degree angle, and their overall shape is not rectangular or square, but rather trapezoidal, shaped wider at the base and tapering off at the top.

The two main pylon blocks that flank the facade of the mausoleum are topped with a simple torus molding, which is a semi-circular or cylindrical molding used on the corners of walls and around doorways. The Crosby vault displays another essential Egyptian architectural feature, the cavetto cornice, which is a gorge, or semi-circular, hollow overhanging molding found at the tops of temples or tombs (see Figs. 1-2). Many Egyptian decorative elements are organic, derived either from plants or animals. The torus molding design, for example, simulates long bundled plants, and the Crosby door frame features this more elaborate torus molding (see Fig. 3). Above the doorway (also Fig. 3) is one of the most commonly used Egyptian motifs, the winged globe with uroei. The winged globe, or sun disc, was seen as a royal symbol of the god Horus. The wings of the falcon represented the sky, the sun and the king. The uroei are rearing snake's heads which in the iconography of gods and kings are the beings that ward off evil, and are a symbol of protection often found carved or painted on the cavetto cornice above the doorways of temples. The wrought iron gate also incorporates another popular Egyptian decorative element, the lotus buds, which are doubled one above the other. Even though this is a small mausoleum compared to the others I shall discuss, one still gets the impression of solidity and massiveness. The two pylons seem to tower at a great height and give a feeling of weight on solid ground: they are constructed of three large blocks

of sandstone instead of many smaller pieces, which would diminish the monumental effect. The pylons are slightly higher than the basic vault, so that they form towers on each side which add a sense of height. The simple, flat surface of the entire shape also makes it appear much larger than it really is and helps to impart an imposing appearance despite its relatively small size.

Some examples of the stark and massive type of architecture that Boullée may have envisioned, though here on a smaller scale, are the mausoleums of C.A. Heckscher (1866/Fig. 4) and Percy R. Pyne (1895/Fig. 5). If we were to compare these and other non-pyramidal shaped tombs to authentic ancient Egyptian tombs, they could be described as mastaba forms, an ancient Egyptian rectangular tomb with a flat roof and battered sides.⁸ At first, and from a distance, I didn't consider them Egyptian until I saw their basic pylon structure and battered walls, which thereby render them Egyptian Revival in its simplest form. They feature cavetto cornices, but are completely without ornament and have no torus moldings, winged globes, or columns. Constructed of large, flat blocks of stone, they are certainly some of the most forbidding look-

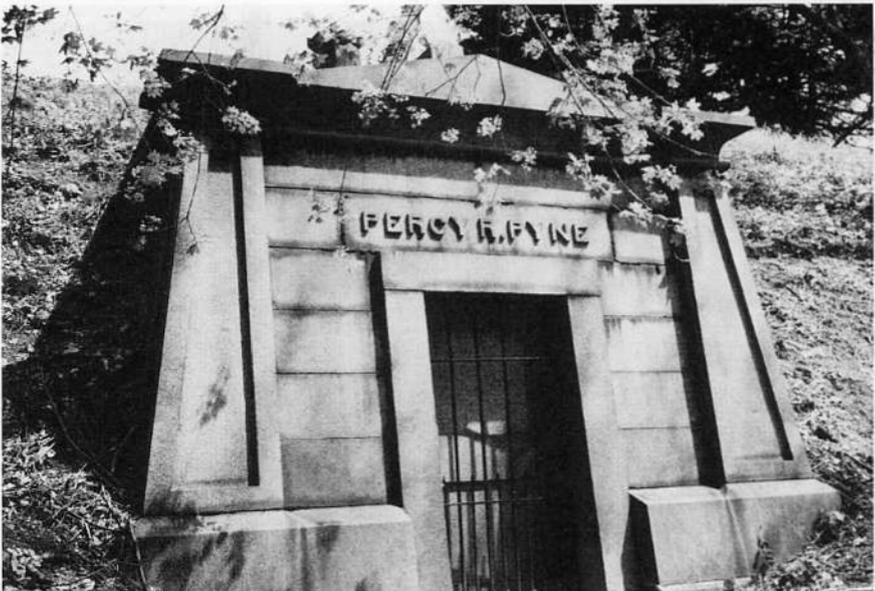


Fig. 5. Pyne mausoleum, 1895.

ing mausoleums in the cemetery. In no sense are they pretty or decorative: in fact, set into hillsides and located along high, dark, and overgrown cliff paths, it might be said these tombs do indeed inspire a certain degree of dread or terror. Despite their relatively small, compact size, they are imposing because of the forbidding blankness of their walls. Part of their aura comes from their location and the fact they are literally half buried.

Another larger but still relatively simple and unadorned Egyptian Revival mausoleum is the Abeel tomb (Fig. 6). The earliest interment for which I can find a record for this lot is 1894, but I suspect it was erected earlier based on its location and appearance. The entire facade is one flat unbroken surface constructed of solid slabs of stone without any protruding pylon structures, with simply the name ABEEL above the doorway in raised block letters. The facade is higher than the two side walls and has an odd narrow rectangular block of stone about five feet long placed in the center above the top of the cavetto cornice. On this stone a winged globe is carved, but without the uroei the block looks as though it could almost have been added as an afterthought to the top of the mausoleum. The sides of the facade are edged with torus molding. All three walls are battered, with the sides of the vault on a steeper angle than the

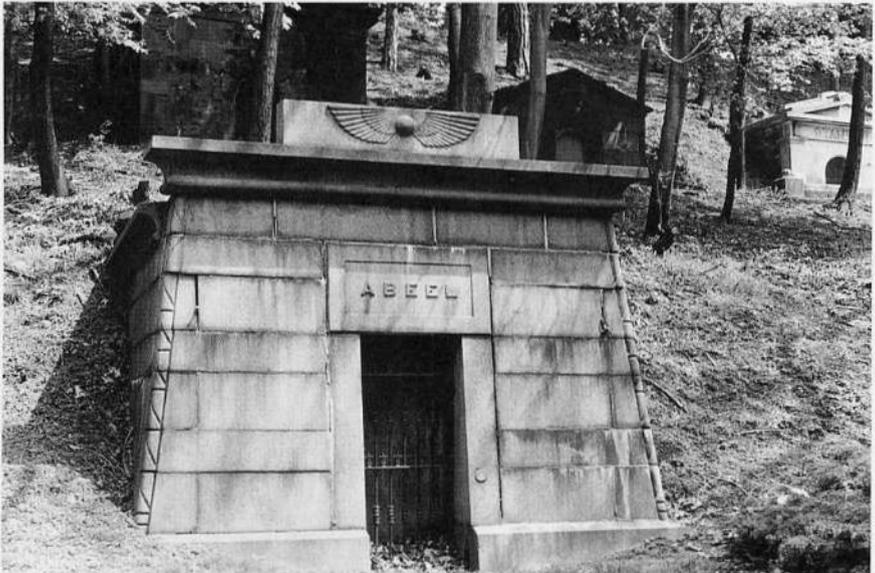


Fig. 6. Abeel mausoleum, 1894?

facade. Except for the stone with the winged globe and the torus molding and battered sides, this vault is simply a trapezoidal block of extreme simplicity. It does, however, evoke a feeling of permanence and severity.

One of the more interesting Egyptian Revival tombs in Green-Wood is the Johnston mausoleum (Figs. 7-10). It stands in one of the older sections of Green-Wood and probably dates from around 1847. John Johnston was a wealthy New York merchant, and his son John Taylor Johnston, who became the first President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is also buried here. This early mausoleum is a much more elaborate structure than the preceding examples, featuring a number of decorative elements which make it look more like a temple than a stark tomb. Like the other mausoleums, it is built of large, flat blocks (in this instance unpolished gray granite) of alternating narrower and wider heights of stone. Its shape is trapezoidal.

An immediately apparent difference, however, is the fact that the Johnston mausoleum projects more of a feeling of height and verticality because of the columns that are used. These are in antis, framed in a recessed area (Fig. 8) The columns are adorned with beautifully carved



Fig. 7. Johnston mausoleum, 1847.



Fig. 8. Johnston mausoleum, 1847.

palm leaf capitals; the shafts are carved to look like bundled reeds, and the base of the columns feature stylized overlapping pointed lotus blossom designs.

The doorway is a quite interesting feature because it incorporates a four-stepped corbelled arch, a design which goes back to the mid-eighteenth century designs of Piranesi and which became a common theme in Egyptianized designs. Piranesi brought ancient Egypt indoors: his sketches for fireplace designs made use of inverted stepped pyramids of antiquity, which we refer to as corbelled arches.⁹ The doorway of the Johnston mausoleum employs four canted corbelled steps identical to one of these fireplace designs by Piranesi.

The cavetto cornice surrounds the top of the structure on all three sides, but in this case is not simply a plain unadorned gorge, or hollow, but has incised vertical bands of lines that are also considered torus moldings (Fig. 9). Unlike the others we have seen, there are winged globes with uroei (also Fig. 9) on all three sides of the mausoleum. The two corners of the walls are edged with a more prominent torus molding – prominent both in size and in depth of the carving (Fig. 10). The structure itself is archaeologically accurate in the vegetal design motifs and in that there are



Fig. 9. Johnston mausoleum, 1847.

columns distyle in antis above the cavetto cornice portal based upon plates from Denon's *Description*.

Another tomb in Green-Wood that drew my attention was the Arundell-Osborne mausoleum (Figs. 11-13). Although it is a four-sided structure, it is not, strictly speaking, a mastaba since its sides are not battered at an angle, but are perpendicular to the ground. It strikes me as

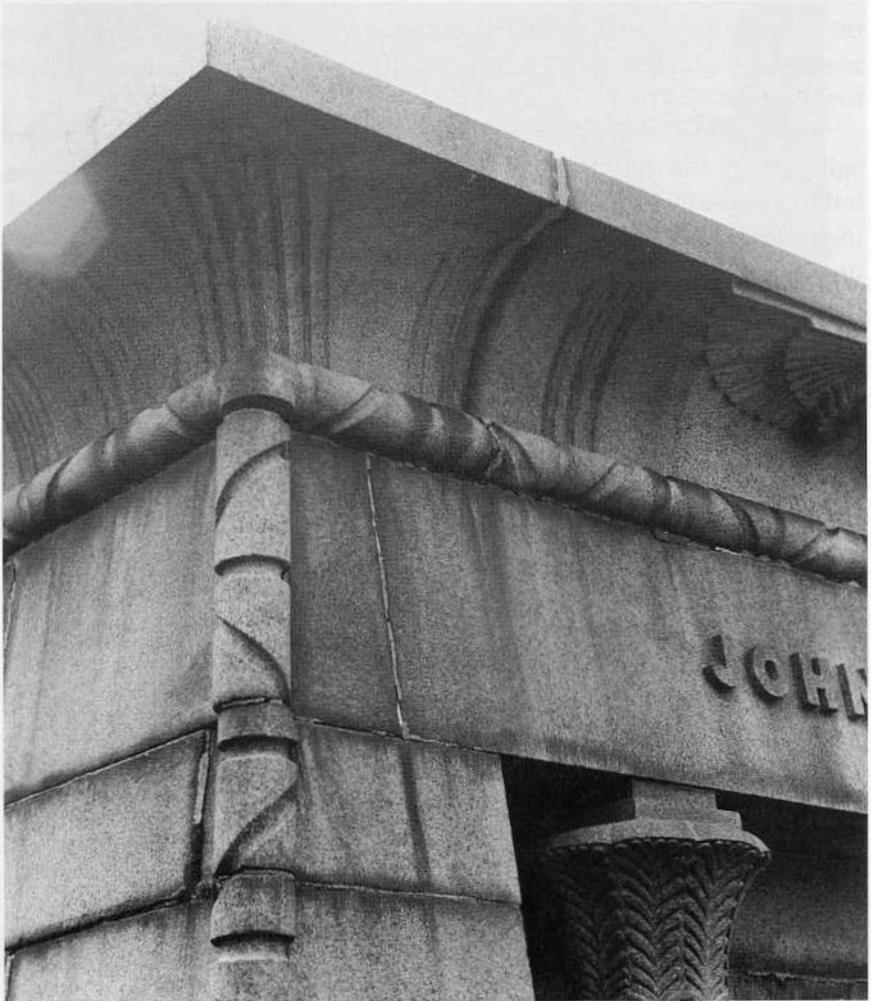


Fig. 10. Johnston mausoleum, 1847.



Fig. 11. Arundell-Osborne mausoleum, 1909.

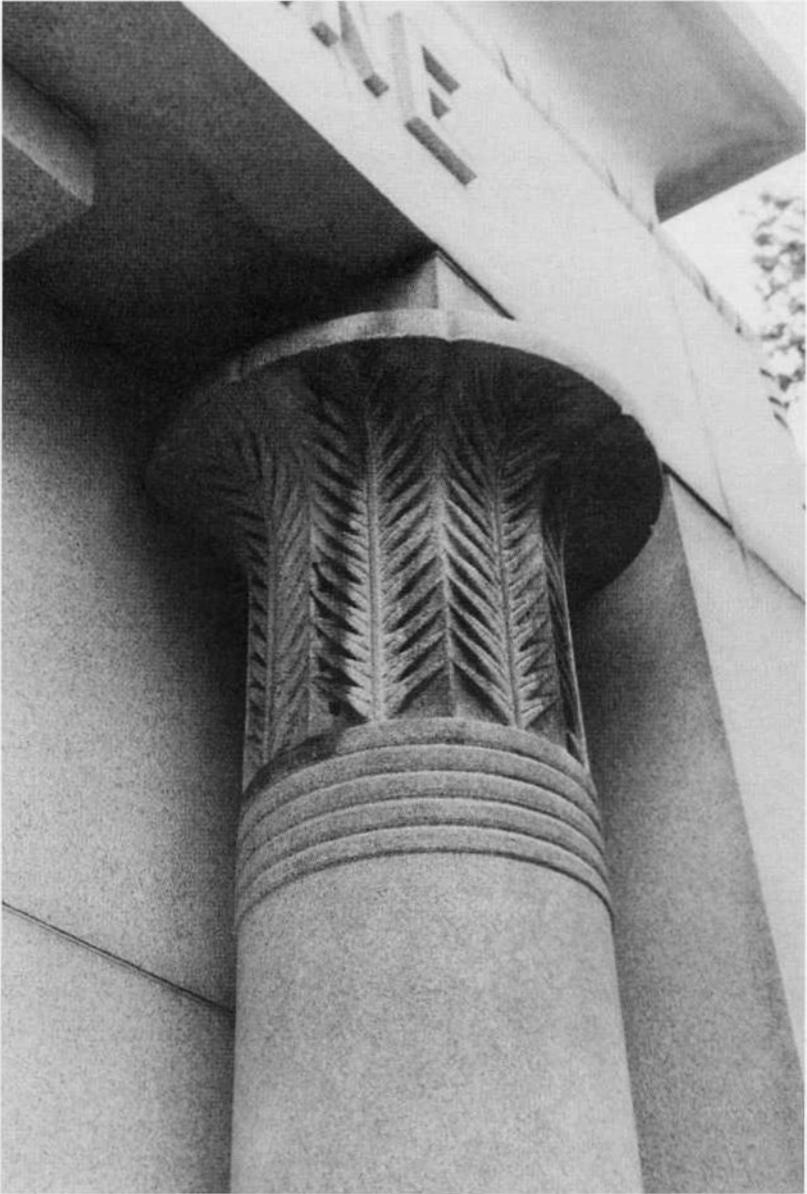


Fig. 12. Arundell-Osborne mausoleum, 1909.

more modern looking somehow, perhaps because it is a freestanding structure and not set into a hillside. It is situated amongst a profusion of Greco-Roman, Renaissance, and Gothic Revival mausoleums and truly stands out as part of an architectural fantasy landscape. Perhaps the Egyptian Revival style was chosen by the patrons in order to set their monument apart visually from the surrounding other variety of architectural styles; or perhaps they embraced a spiritual or ideological philosophy that Egyptian iconography could express.

The Arundell-Osborne mausoleum was erected in 1909 of granite, marble, and bronze. Unlike the other Egyptian Revival mausoleums in Green-Wood, this one has a series of four steps leading up to the door, with an urn on each side of the staircase. The staircase gives the monument a more formal appearance: having to mount steps makes it seem somehow more like sacred space, much in the way the ancient Egyptian temples and tombs were approached by long roads and steps.

The entablature of the mausoleum employs the basic pylon form and is highly decorative, using many Egyptianized designs and motifs. The columns again are in antis, with palm leaf capitals (Fig. 12). Above the lintel is a cavetto cornice with a winged globe and uroei with a double layer of feathers. The four corners of the building feature banded torus moldings, which also encircle the bottom of the cavetto cornice. The back and sides of the mausoleum are unusual in that they have columns with palm leaf capitals identical to the ones in front.

The doorway itself (Fig. 13) is very ornate, consisting of double bronze doors with elaborate decorations. The top halves are windows with bars of lotus flower and buds, and papyrus towards the top. Above the decorative bars on each window are winged globes with the double layers of feathers. The bottom panels of the bronze doors display the ankh¹⁰ symbols, which are topped with more lotus flower decorations. Later identified with the nimbus and Cross of the Crucifixion, the ankh came to signify life and resurrection.

Many of the finer mausoleums in Green-Wood contain stunning stained glass windows inside them. If, for example, one peers through the Egyptianized bronze doors of the Arundell-Osborne tomb, it is possible to see a stained glass window that depicts a Risen Christ in jewel-like colors. The stained glass window Christianizes the otherwise non-Christian elements of the Egyptian Revival structure. The subject of the Risen Christ makes an additional statement about Resurrection and an afterlife which



Fig. 13. Arundell-Osborne mausoleum, 1909.

does not appear disharmonious with the message behind Egyptian tomb architecture.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, pyramids, with their simple geometry, were felt to indicate progressiveness in architecture and adhered to the Neo-Classical desire for purity of line. The pyramidal form had funereal connections ideally suited to monuments and even to individual mausoleums, and there are numerous examples of late eighteenth century pyramidal mausoleums in Europe. Green-Wood Cemetery has three of these pyramidal shaped mausoleums.

The first two pyramid tombs in Green-Wood we shall examine are those of Henry Bergh (1888), and Benjamin Stephens (1890). Like the ancient pyramids, or even the Roman Cestius pyramid, which are much larger than these two monuments, they are nonetheless imposing because of their sense of mass and weight. They project an aura of mystery because, depending on how you perceive them, they are either emerging from within a hillside or are being slowly buried under and being absorbed into one.



Fig. 14. Bergh mausoleum, 1888.

One of the criticisms of the Egyptian Revival style dealt with the issue of comparisons with the original ancient monuments. The ancient pyramids at Gizeh are overwhelming because of their incredible size and mass, and thus the much smaller scale of modern Egyptian Revival structures was seen as a ludicrous imitation. Criticisms of the Egyptian Revival, and of revival styles in general, were aimed at their attempts to copy the originals, while disregarding the size or materials used in the originals. This may be true in some cases, but I don't think that the pyramids in Green-Wood Cemetery lose any of their visual impact or expressive power in their modern adaptation. Their more human size, in other words, does not detract from the message they send and the feelings they were meant to evoke. True, one might not feel the awe or dread a more colossal structure might inspire, but these seem to be self-contained and serene. The word immutability still comes to mind.

The tomb of Henry Bergh, founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), is a pyramidal shaped mausoleum built into a hillside (Figs. 14-15), largely unadorned except for the winged globe on the architrave on the triangular pediment (Fig. 15). The



Fig. 15. Bergh mausoleum, 1888.

symbolic device is carved in great detail and features three layers of feathers, with uroei – the rearing snakes. This particular winged globe is carved onto a flat lintel instead of onto the curved surface of a cavetto cornice such as those on the Crosby or Johnston vaults. The doorway displays a recently restored bronze plaque that features the logo of the ASPCA, a round bas-relief depicting an avenging angel with upraised arm wreaking wrath and vengeance on a horsecart driver who is brutally beating his horse.

The pyramidal mausoleum of Benjamin Stephens (Figs. 16-17) is similar to the Bergh pyramid except that its proportions are slightly different. They are both the same width at the base, but the Stephens tomb is higher. The Bergh pyramid's base is longer than its sides, while the sides of the Stephens' pyramid are the same length as its base. The Bergh pyramid is angled lower and has a block-like shape that seems more firmly planted on the ground. The Stephens' sides are more steeply pitched and it presents a loftier appearance because there is more surface area between the top of the lintel and the pyramidion: it appears to be reaching skyward, whereas the Bergh monument seems to have a solid, heavy center of gravity that is firmly planted in the ground.



Fig. 16. Stephens pyramidal mausoleum, 1890.



Fig. 17. Stephens mausoleum, 1890.

The projecting portico and Classical doorway with a triangular pediment is a feature common to both the Bergh and Stephens tombs. Winged globes with uroei beneath the pediment carved onto a flat lintel appear on both pyramids. However, unlike the Bergh monument, which has a simple flat granite door, the Stephens mausoleum features an elaborate bronze door that employs Egyptian decorative motifs. An outer gate consists of a cast iron grille door with vertical bars that are decorated with stylized lotus buds.

One of the things I have been trying to discover about the Egyptian Revival in Green-Wood Cemetery is why it was chosen over other more popular funerary art styles. The Victorian era favored the Gothic above nearly everything else, and Green-Wood is very much a Victorian cemetery, in both its "garden cemetery" philosophy and by the customs of the culture its patrons observed. I believe that choosing an Egyptian style funeral monument was more than a meaningless choice based on simple preference or popularity, especially since a more overtly beautiful and sentimental memorial art dominated the nineteenth century. Given that people were generally more demonstratively emotional about death and their loved ones during this period, why did some patrons deliberately choose a style so seemingly cold and unemotional? Some people are naturally more reticent; others might not have wanted to seem hypocritical by choosing a more overtly religious monument if they had no true religious conviction. Choosing a pyramid or other Egyptian monument must have expressed meaningful ideas and deep convictions outside of the mainstream of popular religion, culture, and funerary tradition.

Researching the pyramid of Benjamin Stephens revealed nothing to me that would indicate any particular interest in or affinity with ancient Egypt or the Egyptian Revival until I looked into the other family members buried in the tomb. I discovered that the younger brother of Benjamin Stephens was the famous explorer and author John Lloyd Stephens, who died in 1852 of the lingering effects of fevers contracted during his travels. In 1837 he wrote *Incidents of Travels in Egypt, Arabia, Petraea, and the Holy Land*, but he is most famous for his books written about his travels in Central America and those concerning Mayan civilization. I think there is a distinct possibility that the older Benjamin commissioning a mausoleum many years later may have chosen the pyramid as an appropriate tribute in memory of his younger brother's interests and activities.

Since Henry Bergh is a fairly famous person, I had hoped to find some definite documentation relating to his choice of a pyramidal tomb. Indeed, I did discover that Bergh had a personal interest in and knowledge of Ancient Egypt, and it would appear that this firsthand experience probably made him more likely to commission a memorial in which Egyptian forms dominate and convey more esoteric meanings.

One of the more important sources for Egyptomania in America, and most particularly in New York City, involved the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the corresponding gift by Egypt to America of an ancient obelisk.¹¹ With this announcement, a new craze for Egyptian design developed. In 1881, the 69-foot tall Alexandrian obelisk known as *Cleopatra's Needle* was finally raised in Central Park.

When the base for the obelisk was constructed, a "time capsule" was put together for the cornerstone which contained objects and documents relevant to the history of the United States and New York City. I was elated to discover that "documents of the ASPCA" were included in this time capsule,¹² at least one manifestation of Henry Bergh's obvious awareness of and interest in ancient Egyptian artifacts and culture. There are other indicators as well. As was the custom during this period for wealthy people of a certain social class and genteel background, prolonged European



Fig. 18. Van Ness-Parsons mausoleum, 1931.

honeymoons of several years were common. Henry Bergh's honeymoon of 1847-1850 took him throughout Europe, as well as to Turkey and Egypt. Bergh had had a fascination for the pyramids since childhood, and in his journals he recorded his travels, writing that his "... first sight of the Pyramids – since youth, (were) the strongest desire of my heart,"¹³ Bergh was an avid art patron and had, among other things, collected from his travels nymphs, cupids, a view of Naples, a bronze horse, and an Egyptian stone mummy.¹⁴

Although a member of the Episcopal Church, Henry Bergh was not an especially devout Christian and was known to be interested in other religions and familiar with the teachings of other religious leaders, including Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed. I believe it is highly possible that Henry Bergh chose an Egyptian pyramid mausoleum for his wife and himself in part because of his broader religious interests, and because it offered a meaningful and viable alternative to traditional Christian memorial art without seeming to reject it outright. It may also have satisfied his aesthetic, intellectual, and personal spiritual affinity for the Egyptian pyramid since childhood, experienced firsthand on his honeymoon.



Fig. 19. Van Ness-Parsons mausoleum, 1931.

Another fascinating pyramidal shaped mausoleum which delights and mystifies visitors to Green-Wood is the Van Ness-Parsons monument, constructed in 1931 (Figs. 18-21). The mausoleum is constructed of granite, concrete and white brick, and the pyramid is much wider angled than the Stephens or Bergh mausoleums, more like the ancient Egyptian proportions of the structures of Gizeh and those envisioned by Boullée in the eighteenth century. The portico projects out from the front of the pyramid, and at the top is a cavetto cornice within which is carved a winged globe with uroei (Fig. 19). The door to the tomb is constructed of bronze with a rather elaborate and detailed relief carving. There is a rectangular plaque centered on the door depicting Christ on the Cross on the top half of the plaque, and a circle with the Sun in the center encircled by the signs of the Zodiac.

What is so striking and unusual about this mausoleum are the statues flanking the entrance (Figs. 20-21). On the left of the door as one faces it is a marble statue of Jesus holding a Lamb on his left arm. His right hand is outstretched in the pose of holding a staff, which has broken off, leaving only the bottom portion. On the right side is a corresponding marble statue of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus up in her outstretched



Fig. 20. Van Ness-Parsons mausoleum, 1931.

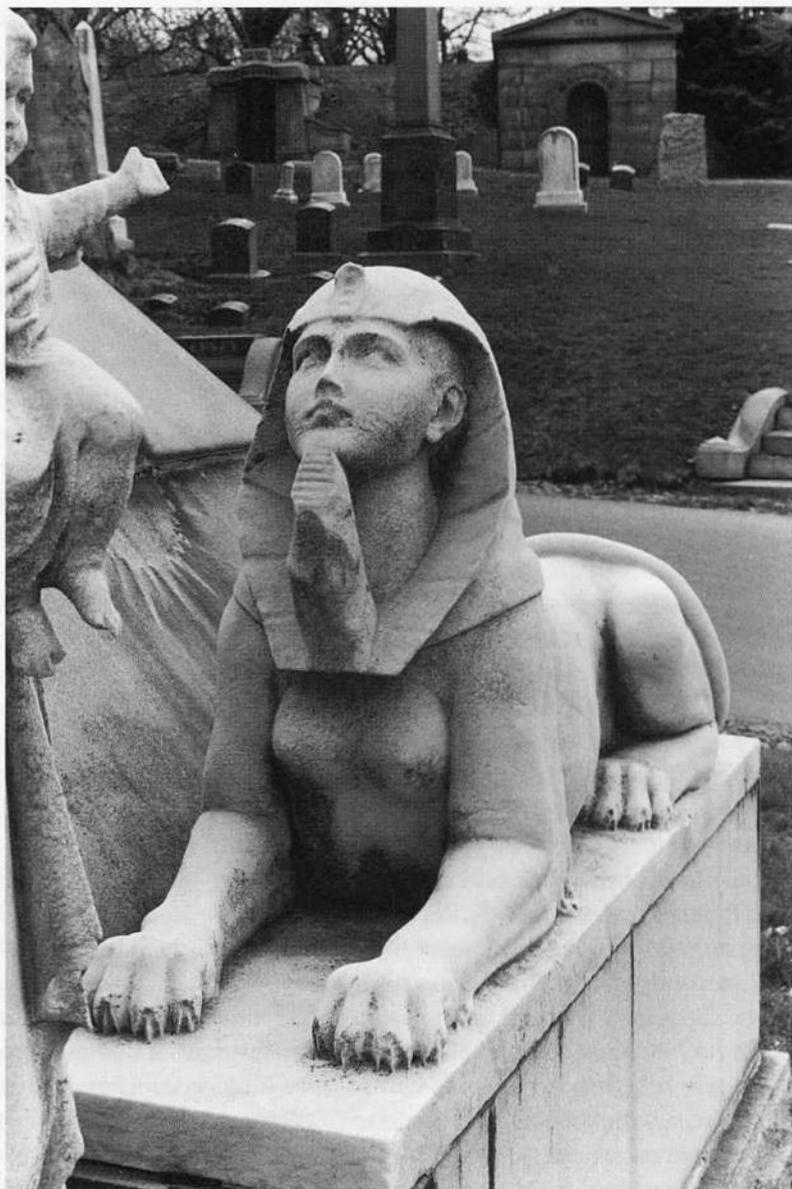


Fig. 21. Van Ness-Parsons mausoleum, 1931.

hands. Directly to the right of the statue of Mary is a Sphinx in the couchant (recumbent) position (Fig. 21). The Sphinx is bearded, with breasts, and appears to be gazing up at either Mary and Jesus or at the heavens. These marble statues are "sugaring"¹⁵ badly, and sharp definition of the features has been lost. The sight of this pyramid and Sphinx, juxtaposed with these Christian statues, has always been beautiful and strange. On the face of it, I always imagined this pyramid was an overtly dramatic attempt to Christianize Egyptian iconography, or, at the very least, indicated a strong fondness for exotica or Egyptian art while wanting to retain Christian symbolism.

As it turns out, the iconography of this mausoleum is extremely complex, based on the philosophy of its designer, Albert Ross Parsons (1847-1933), who is best known as a musician and music teacher. A composer and poet who wrote several books on music, his efforts most relevant to this monument were his ventures into philosophy and metaphysics. Amongst the latter is a volume with the somewhat ponderous title *New Light from the Great Pyramid ... The Astronomico-Geographical system of the Ancients Recovered and Applied to the Elucidation of History, Ceremony, Symbolism, and Religion, with an Exposition of the Evolution from the Prehistoric, Objective, Scientific Religion of Adam Kadmon, the Macrocosm, of the Historic, Subjective, Spiritual Religion of Christ Jesus, the Microcosm*, published in 1893.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the work makes for extremely difficult reading, but in the course of his commentary Parsons explains the significance of the pyramid and the zodiac, as well as the reasons why the ideas and images of Ancient Egypt were so relevant and important to America.¹⁷ In his book, Parsons provides a visual illustration of his belief relating to the importance of Pisces nearing Aries at the time of the Crucifixion, and it is this very drawing which is reproduced in bas-relief on the bronze door of the mausoleum.¹⁸

Albert Parsons' pyramid is an architectural and sculptural statement that reflects his personal philosophy, which postulates a long-standing identification between Americans, Christianity, and ancient Egypt. In this instance, we see that the use of Egyptian motifs is not only related to the common themes of the appropriateness of Egyptian architecture for funerary monuments representing eternity and the hereafter, but, additionally, to a whole and somewhat idiosyncratic philosophical system which Parsons derived from Ancient Egypt.

Finally, it is worth noting that funerary art in the period under discussion not only reflected the religious sentiments of the deceased, but also reflected the social and economic position of the deceased in society. Mausoleums were generally built for wealthy families: they represented prestige and success. The more elaborate ancient Egyptian tombs were built for Pharaohs. In the case of the individuals whose more modern tombs we have examined here, each was an accomplished and respected person in his profession and in society. In choosing Egyptian Revival styles to memorialize themselves, they perhaps felt themselves worthy of the distinction and esteem given to those Pharaohs of old.

Conclusion

Green-Wood Cemetery offers a wonderful variety of the types of funerary monuments that the Egyptian Revival produced. As a nineteenth century rural garden cemetery, it invited a diversity of revival styles and eclectic monuments and provided a compatible setting for Egyptian Revival monuments. Among its many patrons, Green-Wood had an extremely wealthy and elite class of residents. In a city with numerous architects, sculptors, artisans, and monument companies, they had the resources to create memorials that are works of art. Monumental art reflects the tastes and aspirations of its culture, and Green-Wood Cemetery reflects the varied culture of mid- to late nineteenth-century New York and Brooklyn.

Middle and upper class cemetery patrons became, in effect, art patrons and made decisions involving artistic and cultural expression when they commissioned a monument to commemorate their loved ones or themselves. Were these decisions made for sentimental reasons? Were they aesthetic decisions based on the fashions of the time? Or do they represent attempts to make more meaningful symbolic statements? Were the patrons in some instances following the dictates of their religious feelings, or perhaps choosing memorials that reflected the character or beliefs of the deceased? Except in the case of the omnipresent obelisks, the choice of Egyptian Revival for funerary monuments in nineteenth century Green-Wood Cemetery seems to have been limited to certain types of patrons. By rejecting more conventional, popular architectural styles and choosing Egyptian Revival, they were perhaps making a more adventurous artistic decision. Obviously, these patrons did not see the religious or aesthetic objections that critics expressed as a conflict and discounted the many and

varied criticisms aimed at the Egyptian Revival. With the exceptions of the Arundell-Osborne and Van Ness-Parsons tombs, all of those individuals who commissioned Egyptian Revival mausoleums in Green-Wood omitted any Christian symbolism. They may conceivably have chosen Egyptian iconography because they were making a more sophisticated, esoteric statement regarding their own mortality and death. In the case of Benjamin Stephens, Henry Bergh, and Albert Ross Parsons, we have seen that they were well educated, traveled, cultured, and had a known interest in Egyptology. Their choice of funerary architecture reflects both their unique, unconventional characters and perhaps their uncommon perceptions of themselves. They were of a more intellectual bent, which probably would have made them more receptive to the possibilities and implications of Egyptian iconography in spite of, or in addition to, any personally held religious beliefs and practice. In the case of the other Egyptian Revival patrons, I can document nothing about their intentions, although I would venture to suggest that they too were choosing to express themselves apart from the mainstream, whether for aesthetic or personal reasons. I also believe that in choosing the Egyptian Revival, patrons sought a more malleable and timeless vehicle to commemorate themselves – one which reached beyond the ubiquitous and sentimental Christian Victorian funerary art so prevalent during this period.

NOTES

All photographs in this essay were taken by the author and are here reproduced with the full knowledge and consent of Green-Wood Cemetery.

1. Nehemiah Cleaveland, *Green-Wood Illustrated: In highly finished line engraving, from drawings taken on the spot, by James Smillie: With descriptive notices by Nehemiah Cleaveland* (New York, NY, 1847), 52.
2. Wayne Andrews, *Architecture, Ambition, and Americans: A Social History of American Architecture* (New York, NY, 1978), 98.
3. Richard G. Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Moments, and Meaning, 1800-1858* (Berkeley, CA, 1978), 51.
4. James Steven Curl, *Egyptomania: The Egyptian Revival: A Recurring Theme in the History of Taste* (New York, NY, 1994), 105.
5. James Gallier, "American Architecture," *North American Review* XLIII: 93 (1836): 356-384.
6. Curl, *A Celebration of Death*, 363.
7. Cleaveland, *Green-Wood Illustrated*, 50, 51.
8. James Steven Curl, *A Celebration of Death: An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western Tradition* (London, 1993), 8.
9. Although Piranesi's fireplace design drawings were never executed, the design was displayed as early as 1812 in the Egyptian Exhibition Hall in London.
10. A cross surmounted by a circlet used in hieroglyphics, later identified with the nimbus and Cross of the Crucifixion. It signifies life and resurrection. Curl, *Egyptomania*, 229.
11. A pair of obelisks were originally erected by Tuthmosis III c. 1468 BC at Heliopolis, but were moved to Alexandria by Augustus in 10 BC to stand in front of a temple to Julius Caesar. The move was at the behest of Cleopatra – hence the popular title *Cleopatra's Needles*. The American gift was one of this pair: the other was a gift to England and erected in London in 1878.
12. Martina D'Alton, *The New York Obelisk, or How Cleopatra's Needle Came to New York and What Happened When It Got Here* (New York, NY, 1993), 41.
13. Zulma Steele, *Angel in a Top Hat* (New York, NY, 1942), 24.

14. *Ibid.*, 295.
15. Sugaring is a deterioration of stone, especially marble, that causes it to look and feel like granulated sugar. It is caused by weathering, and in recent years, more rapidly by acid rain. Sculptural details and lettering "melt" or dissolve like sugar.
16. (New York, NY, 1893).
17. The use of the pyramid on the dollar bill, the adaptation of the obelisk for important national monuments, ancient Egyptian migration to North America, and other ideas are repeated and elaborated on in Parsons' book. He believed we were the spiritual descendents of ancient Egypt. *Ibid.*, 66; 502.
18. *Ibid.*, 261.

APPENDIX

**A Select List of Secondary Sources
Dealing with Egyptian Revival Styles**

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