

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

GARDNER EARL MEMORIAL CHAPEL AND CREMATORIUM

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 50 101st Street

Not for publication:

City/Town: Troy

Vicinity:

State: NY County: Rensselaer Code: 083

Zip Code: 12180

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: \_\_\_

Public-State: \_\_\_

Public-Federal: \_\_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: \_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_

Structure: \_\_\_

Object: \_\_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

\_\_\_

\_\_\_

\_\_\_

1

Noncontributing

\_\_\_ buildings

\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_ objects

\_\_\_ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ Entered in the National Register
- \_\_\_ Determined eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ Removed from the National Register
- \_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

|           |                                    |                                  |
|-----------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Historic: | Funerary<br>Mortuary               | Sub: Crematorium<br>Funeral Home |
| Current:  | Mortuary<br>Recreation and Culture | Sub: Funeral Home<br>Auditorium  |

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late Victorian: Richardsonian Romanesque

## MATERIALS:

|             |                       |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| Foundation: | Stone                 |
| Walls:      | Stone                 |
| Roof:       | Slate                 |
| Other:      | Stained glass, marble |

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**Summary**

The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is nationally significant as the most architecturally sophisticated of the early public crematoria in the United States. Built in 1888-89 by a wealthy Troy couple as a memorial to their only child, a son who was an early proponent of cremation, the project was freed from the usual constraints that limited the architectural development of crematoria in the early years such as the lack of public social support and the related lack of business capital. The result was a masterpiece of the type with interiors on a par with the best Late Victorian interiors realized in America. Resplendent in exotic and domestic marbles, carved stone and wood, and important works of stained glass by Tiffany and Maitland Armstrong, the luxurious rooms worked together to provide a ritual structure for the cremation process with an aim towards legitimizing it for a skeptical public. Only a few years after the building's opening, the addition of a new retort (cremation chamber) room that incorporated newly developed technology for kerosene-fed furnaces is a demonstration of the Victorian interest in and promise of science and technology. The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is the physical embodiment of many artistic and intellectual impulses defining the last decades of the nineteenth century.

**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.****Exterior**

The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium stands in Oakwood Cemetery (established 1848) on the western edge of a bluff nearly 300 feet above the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. It fronts on a circular drive, which is framed by two ponds that are part of the historic cemetery landscape. The elegant building is a sophisticated assemblage of forms and volumes rendered in the Richardsonian Romanesque mode. It spreads for 146' along the ridge, extending from a 90'-0" high bell tower on the southern end to the chapel and other rooms arranged in multiple stories on the northern end; the two portions are linked by an open loggia. The building has a water table that steps back twice, underscoring the building's visual strength—it seems to rise out bluff as a natural extension of the bedrock on which the walls are founded.

The tower is a romantic confection with largely blank lower walls giving way to a variety of corbels, setbacks, spires, and perforations defined by delicately carved stone that contrasts with the heavy rustication.<sup>1</sup> The dominant pyramidal roof is articulated with crockets and framed at its corners by three spires and a small, engaged tower that reaches to the ground; these four features are topped with conical roofs. Supported on squat polished granite columns, the round arches of the open loggia—three on the east (front) and two on the west—a character-defining element of the Richardsonian Romanesque, spring powerfully northward from the tower to meet a picturesque massing of dormers, towers, bays, and chimneys. The dormers each feature a round-headed window opening into the chapel proper, and the octagonal “crossing tower” and polygonal bay extending from the north wall mark the place of the chancel.<sup>2</sup> Although added just a few years after the building was completed, the 1892-93 retort room at its north end is a seamless addition. The word “CREMATORIUM,” incised in the stone panel situated between the windows located within a large arch in the north wall, unselfconsciously marks that room as the place where cremation occurs. A tall chimney of rusticated stone underscores the purpose and functional needs of the room below. A one-story, flat-roofed, concrete block addition extends outward at ground level on the west side of the building.

The dormers and gables are capped with ashlar-cut stone parapets with a crow-stepped design, which, like the stone framing the tower openings, provides pleasant relief from the rusticated stone elsewhere in the walls. The peaks of the gables, dormers, and pyramidal and conical roofs terminate in decorative pinnacles. The expanses

<sup>1</sup> The small windows in the tower contain window openings filled with simple, “work-a-day” glass by Tiffany.

<sup>2</sup> While spatially marking its location, the “crossing tower” does not actually open down to the chancel. It contains a room where families would wait after the service while the cremation was conducted.

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of smooth slate on the roof also create visual balance with the heavy rock-faced walls; a simple dentilled cornice marks the point where the roof and wall planes meet. Window openings without stained glass mostly contain double-hung windows, and the massive wooden doors feature ornate iron hardware.

**Interior**

The free composition and picturesque detailing of the exterior of the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium seem comparatively sober when compared to the elaborate and luxurious interior spaces of the building.<sup>3</sup>

**Loggia, Tower, and Bathroom (former Reception Room)**

These spaces comprise the transition from exterior to interior of the building. The open loggia features granite floor slabs and a quarter-sawn oak ceiling carried on stone corbels. Pairs of bronze gates mark the entrance to the tower on the south and the chapel on the north. The tower is the building's visually dominant feature and was originally intended to be the urn repository for the Earls.<sup>4</sup> An iron stair with marble treads extends upward to a landing where a ladder may be used to access a balcony embellished with a gargoyle and having sweeping views of the cemetery. Just before entering the chapel, on the left, is the door to a bathroom installed in the 1930s. The room formerly functioned as a reception room for guests and features a built-in marble desk, a built-in marble washbasin, and a small fireplace with a marble mantel and ornate iron surround. The walls are glazed brick and the ceiling of oak. The bathroom is located on the room's western end, separated by a marble stall wall.

**Chapel**

The chapel is accessed via bronze gates. The sumptuous room is divided into three parts: the nave, the chancel, and the altar. The nave has an oak ceiling with decorative trusses. The floors are bluestone slabs and the walls are wainscoted up to the sill line with pink-red Champlain marble and black marble below; brown sandstone comprises the rest of the walls. The east and west nave walls each contain two large, round-headed Tiffany stained-glass windows with non-figural compositions depicting the seasons. Each window is set off by low engaged columns that support the rafter ends. A "rose" window is set high into the rear (south) wall. This window is also from the Tiffany Studios and contains a substantial amount of "jewel" glass. The window accentuates the three-sided marble tomb below containing the cremated remains of the Earl family. The tomb is opulently rendered in Siena and other marbles, and Mexican onyx. The oak pews, lectern, and other chapel furniture are original to the room. A massive sandstone arch carries an ornately carved foliate frieze that encompasses the capitals of similarly carved columns marks the transition from the nave to the chancel. A marble niche in the wall on the east of this arch contains a bronze bust of Gardner Earl by Charles Calverly. The elaborate bronze radiator covers throughout the chapel and reception room were designed and executed by P. Guerin of New York.

The chancel is raised two steps up from the nave and features an elaborate marble mosaic floor. The sandstone frieze continues into the space, dividing the smooth sandstone walls from the quarter-sawn oak, barrel-vaulted and coffered ceiling. Elaborately carved oak choir stalls are situated along the east and west walls. Raised up three steps from the chancel is an altar of Siena marble and white onyx situated in a three-sided apse and set off by a simply rendered sandstone arch. Each side of the apse contains one Tiffany window bearing the figure of an angel and Christ in the center window; all have images of the Sea of Galilee in the background. There is an additional, small Tiffany window in the passageway between the nave and the reception room.

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<sup>3</sup> Details about the materials and interior features, drawn from Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects, *Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium: A Conditions Survey*, Albany, New York, 2002; and Frederick S. Hills, *The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium, Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, N.Y.* (Albany, NY, 1902).

<sup>4</sup> *Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium: A Conditions Survey*, Albany, New York, 2002, 15.

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**Reception Room**

As originally completed in 1889, this room was the simply finished retort room and contained two cremation chambers heated by wood-fired furnaces in the basement. In 1892-93, facility superintendent James Inglis added a new retort room to the north of this room that contained two cremation chambers heated by a kerosene-fired system, which he pioneered as a more efficient means of cremation. By 1899, the original retort room was repurposed as the stunning and lavish reception room, which provided a transition space between the ceremonial ritual in the chapel and the cremation in the new retort room. The once-utilitarian space was transformed into fantastical and significant Late Victorian public room. The steeply pitched roof of the new retort room allowed the ceiling to be substantially raised. The new cove ceiling features mosaic tile having figural, abstract, and floral motifs and its centerpiece is a 13'-0", stained-glass laylight. The walls are wainscoted with 3'-6"-high slabs of pink African marble with bases and caps of green Japanese marble. The same pink African marble is used for the jambs and arches. Above the wainscoting, the walls are sheathed with Siena marble, whose relative plainness is offset by seventeen columns rendered in rare Brazilian green onyx that set off arches in the room containing window and door openings, and marble mosaics. These columns were carved from a single block imported from London by James Batterson, the owner of a large Hartford, Connecticut stone carving and brokering business. The green onyx is also used for the panels set in the custom bronze doors that give access to the new retort room.

The sumptuousness of the room is further enhanced by two massive stained-glass windows, each measuring 11' x 8', set in the south and west walls. Important American stained-glass artist Maitland Armstrong designed the windows, which depict St. Paul preaching in Athens and King Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba. They are signed and dated "1899," which indicates that the renovation was likely complete in that year. The room also contains carved oak settees and an ornate wood catafalque on rollers, which provided an appropriate conveyance for the body from the chapel to the reception room for cremation. The opulence and beauty of the art and architecture throughout the chapel and reception room were consciously intended to create a sense of sacredness, beauty, ritual, and repose for the cremation process, and, more pragmatically, to convince visitors to consider the legitimacy and possibility of cremation.

**Retort Room and Basement**

While containing the mechanical elements of the cremation process, the new retort room is still nicely finished. The walls are ivory glazed brick with a blue Meander-key frieze in blue along the top. The floor is made up of bluestone slabs with 12" baseboards of pink Tennessee marble. The rounded-headed double hung windows have sills and arches rendered in the same pink marble. The two retorts extend into the center of the room from the south wall and flank a chimneystack. They are utilitarian with the iron plates riveted together, and doors at either end. Iron stairs descend from this room into the basement where there is a small work room with a boiler and closet containing remains in urns not picked up by family members. Off this space is a large workroom with the main boiler and two other work/utility rooms. A dirt-floored storage space extends under the sanctuary and loggia.

**Office and Waiting Rooms**

On the east side of the chancel is an office where the body would have been received via stairs and an exterior door north of the loggia. This area was also the space intended for the clergy to prepare for services. The walls are unglazed yellow brick and the floor sheathed in marble. The room also contains an enclosed flight of stairs leading to the second floor room where family members would wait while the body was cremated. This room contains a dry sink and accoutrements for washing. The walls and ceilings are finished in varnished pine as are the built-in cabinets and other furniture. Another enclosed staircase accesses the upper room occupying the whole of the octagonal tower visible on the exterior of the building. The ceiling and walls are also sheathed

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with varnished pine. An iron staircase and balcony gives access to windows allowing for views of the cemetery and the valley, although now the valley view is obscured by tree growth.

**Integrity**

The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium holds a very high degree of architectural and artistic integrity. There have been relatively few major changes to the building since 1899: ca. 1905, the original slate roof was replaced with copper (and since returned to slate); the ca. 1910 introduction of electricity to the building included the elaborate sconces in the chapel; the heating system was replaced in 1935 and 1974; and conversion of the waiting room into a bathroom was done in the mid-1930s. In 1969, a small one-story, ground level room was added to the west side of the building to accommodate new, natural-gas-fired retorts. The new retorts functioned improperly in this location, perhaps because of prevailing winds along the bluffs and updrafts, and they were moved in the mid-1970s to a new concrete block building fifty feet away (to the north).

While there have been few changes to the building, it is in great need of repair and upgrades. In 2002, Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker produced a conditions survey that identified over \$2,000,000 dollars of repair and upgrade work that should be pursued by Oakwood Cemetery in the coming years. Their recommendations ranged from restoration of the stained glass and installation of protective storm glazing to water proofing, systems upgrades, and asbestos abatement. The conditions assessment also recommended the removal of the degraded standing seam copper roof and restoration of the slate roof removed ca. 1910 because of leaks and failures. After several years of fundraising, black slate roofing with its copper cresting was restored to the building in 2006-07. While much work remains to be done, the quality of the building's original materials and construction have helped the building perform and age very well given its exposed location in a climate with great extremes.



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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.****Introduction**

A superlative and exceptionally well-preserved example of an early crematorium in the United States, the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium in Troy, New York, is nationally-significant under Criterion 4 for architecture. Built between in 1888-89, and enlarged and remodeled in 1892-99, the imposing granite building is an impressive Romanesque Revival architectural composition. It is constructed of the finest materials available after designs by highly skilled architects and artisans. The building contains important groupings and examples of stained-glass by Tiffany and Maitland Armstrong. Its sumptuousness of design and finish was an outcome of its memorial nature; however, architectural and artistic considerations were also employed to bolster the cause of cremation by providing an appropriate place to conduct rituals surrounding death. The Earl family encouraged the use of the chapel for funeral services for cemetery lot owners having standard burials as a way to educate people about cremation and normalize the process. The building's high state of integrity also includes the ca. 1892-93 retorts, which were part of a ground-breaking and highly efficient kerosene-fired cremation system devised by James Inglis, the first superintendent of the crematorium.

Jeffrey Baker, partner in the preservation firm of Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects, observes: "it can be safely stated that the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is a complete manifestation of the best that late 19<sup>th</sup> century design and craftsmanship had to offer. In terms of detailing, craftsmanship and materials, the chapel is on par with the best of Henry Hobson Richardson's work... As remarkable, the structure is completely intact."<sup>5</sup> Relating the building to others of its type, historian Stephen Prothero writes that the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium "was the most extravagant crematory in the United States at its opening in 1890."<sup>6</sup> Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, the Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, offers high praises for the beautiful and sophisticated building: "during the course of my career I had had the opportunity to visit many church and mausoleum interiors dating to the late nineteenth century, the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium [is] an astonishing site, and in my view, it is today one of the great treasures of America."<sup>7</sup> Largely unstudied until recently, the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium epitomizes the flowering and intersection of art, architecture, and technology in America at the end of the nineteenth century.

**Cremation and the First Modern Crematorium in the United States**

With the exception of major groups/civilizations as the Egyptians, Chinese, and Jews, cremation was the "standard practice of the ancients" worldwide.<sup>8</sup> The establishment and spread of Christianity in Europe that led to its subsequent demise in Western cultures. Early Christians generally held on to Jewish burial practices and identified with the burial of Jesus. As the centuries passed, the belief that a body needed to be buried whole in order to be rejoined with its soul at the Second Coming of Christ became the strongest disincentive to cremation in the West. By the time of European age of contact, cremation had all but disappeared among Western burial practices.

<sup>5</sup> M. Jeffrey Baker to the National Park Service, Heritage Preservation Services, 28 March 2002. Copy in the NHL file.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Prothero, *Purified by Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), captions for Plates 11A and 11B.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen to the National Park Service, Heritage Preservation Services, 26 Mar. 2002. Copy in the NHL file.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, general information about the history of cremation in this section is drawn from the introduction of Stephen Prothero's *Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 1-12, and David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 140-46.

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Beginning in the sixteenth century, religious, scientific, philosophic, and even political events hastened the conceptual return of cremation. Changes in thought associated with the Protestant Reformation provided a strong initial boost, as Stephen Prothero has noted:

By emphasizing the drama of the individual soul at the expense of the story of the collective rising of the church at the end of time, by supplanting the relatively clear authority of tradition with the more ambiguous authority of scripture, by edging the Christian world in the direction of a conception of the self as wholly spiritual, and by nudging the modern world in the direction of reverence for individual conscience, the Protestant Reformers contributed, albeit unwittingly, to the legitimization of cremation in modern times.<sup>9</sup>

In the centuries that followed events such as the French Revolution promoted the secularization of funeral rites through cremation. Similarly, the work of scientists grappling with the problems of burials in urban areas with regard to common (although incorrect) views about the cause of disease helped lessen cremation's stigma in the West.

While scientific viewpoints provided the most persuasive early arguments among Americans reconsidering long held ideas about cremation, social and philosophical changes also led them to consider the process as an alternative to burial. The commercialization of death beginning with the establishment of rural cemeteries in the 1830s and 1840s started to distance middle- and upper-class Americans from death processes and rituals that formerly occurred in the home. From a theological standpoint, the long-standing idea that the body needed to be buried whole in preparation for the Second Coming was called into question since a buried body ultimately decayed; this process, it was argued, was merely accelerated with cremation. By the 1870s a variety of ideological threads converged to give cremation a toehold in the United States.

On a practical level, technological developments during the second half of the nineteenth century that allowed for indoor cremation chambers pioneered in the United States by Dr. F. Julius LeMoyne bolstered these views.<sup>10</sup> Cremation chambers were preferable to open pyres to nineteenth-century proponents for a number of reasons. They were efficient and enclosed so that the destruction of the body was not visible to the living. The process itself was far more socially acceptable in that pyres burned bodies, often incompletely, while cremation chambers separated the body from the heat source, isolating it in a retort, which was heated to a point where it is reduced to ashes. In December 1876 to great publicity, Dr. F. Julius LeMoyne successfully conducted the first modern cremation in America in a crematorium constructed on property he owned in Washington, Pennsylvania.<sup>11</sup> This occurred only three years after the Italian Ludovico Brunetti "demonstrated a viable enclosed crematory" at the Vienna Exposition, which, in turn, compelled English surgeon Henry Thompson to pen the influential article "The Treatment of the Body after Death."<sup>12</sup> Thompson's article was highly influential among scientists and other intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic who favored cremation.

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<sup>9</sup> Prothero, 8.

<sup>10</sup> For LeMoyne and related contexts, see Prothero, 23-42, and Sloane, 146-48.

<sup>11</sup> The LeMoyne Crematory still exists at the intersection of Redstone Road (S. Main Street) and Elm Street. At the time it was constructed, the crematory was located on the outskirts of Washington. LeMoyne's residence was located at 49 E. Maiden Street in the city proper. The building now serves as a museum and the headquarters of the Washington County Historical Society. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1997 for LeMoyne's involvement with the Antislavery Movement and the Underground Railroad.

<sup>12</sup> Sloane, 143, for quote. The synonyms "crematorium" and "crematory" are used interchangeably and both have origins in the Latin word cremare, which means to be consumed by fire. Crematorium is the fully Latinized term and is believed to be older than crematory, which came into more common use in English in the 1870s and 1880s and may have been a way to link the building more clearly with "cemetery."

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LeMoyne and fellow liberal thinker and spiritualist, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott of New York, collaborated to conduct the first modern cremation in the United States. After reading a newspaper article about LeMoyne's crematorium, Olcott contacted him about having a fellow Theosophist, the penniless Baron DePalm, cremated there in a public relations event to highlight the advantages of modern cremation. Because of Olcott's efforts, the cremation received a great amount of coverage and was well attended; however, the impact of any scientific understanding and reporting on the proceedings was lessened by articles and editorials focused on the lack of a solemn ritual. Proponents continued to be cremated at the LeMoyne Crematory (including LeMoyne himself in 1879), and in other places, but the process remained, at best, experimental and on the fringes of the American consciousness as an alternative to burial.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Establishment of the Crematorium as a New Building Type**

While significant as the site of the first modern cremation in the United States, the architecturally modest LeMoyne Crematory did not advance the cause of cremation. Consisting of two small rooms—a spartan parlor or waiting room and another containing the cremation chamber—the building was not imposing in any way; rather, it appeared more like a schoolhouse or a domestic outbuilding. It would not be until 1884 that another function-specific public crematorium was constructed, this time in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. While still relatively small, with its Gothic Revival detailing, the **Lancaster Crematorium** began a move towards architectural distinction for crematoria, at least on the exterior as the interior's cement floor and four small rooms hardly evoked elegance on any level.<sup>14</sup> Since the establishment of rural cemeteries in the 1830s and 1840s, the landscape of death in cities and towns across the United States had become an aesthetic exercise in memorialization, a trend that accelerated during the last decades of the nineteenth century with increased industrial wealth. In the decades following the Civil War, the highly naturalistic, somewhat chaotic aesthetic typifying rural cemeteries evolved into the more regimented Landscape Lawn characterized by open lawn without fencing, simplified planting schemes, and the construction of major monuments and mausolea at the center of plots. The grand, at times architect-designed freestanding mausolea set a high standard for architecture related to death and memorialization; cemeteries considering the construction of any additional buildings—gateways, lodges, chapels, and crematoria—would have been conscious of public expectations. These buildings enhanced the aesthetic enjoyment of the cemetery landscape, but also provided an appropriate backdrop and stage for the increasingly elaborate funeral rituals that became commonplace in Victorian America.

The steady trend toward increased architectural opulence in the Gilded Age paralleled continued progress by adherents to cremation. In the 1880s and 1890s, negative reactions to the process as reported in many newspapers along with a more broad social and religious antipathy lessened somewhat. A range of factors—the establishment of cremation societies and publications, periodic epidemics, and legislative actions within states—gave cremation even more of a foothold in the United States. This general trend led to the establishment of the first crematoria having dignified and sometimes bold architectural statements. If not actually constructed in a cemetery, these crematoria were usually constructed by a cremation company on adjacent property.

Overall, the crematories constructed in the United States between 1884 and 1896, years that Prothero uses as bookmarks for the experimental period of crematory design in the United States, had architecturally distinctive exteriors rendered in a range of Late Victorian styles, with notable examples drawing from the Gothic, Romanesque, and Classical traditions. In form, some of the early period crematoria took on the appearance of

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<sup>13</sup> The social acceptance of cremation as a suitable alternative to burial was slowed by continued and formal opposition by some religious groups. For example, in 1886, the Vatican expressed the belief that cremation was associated with Satan and barred Catholics from the process. Prothero, 74.

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overscaled and aggrandized mausolea. Whether an outcome of the experimental stages of a building type or a conscious attempt to mask or legitimize the function, the designers of others looked to a variety of common civic building types: churches and chapels, auditoriums, even libraries. Whatever the form and exterior style, the new crematoria increasingly departed from the spartan interiors of the LeMoyne Crematory and Lancaster Crematorium. Marbles and other types of stone, decorative plaster, carved woodwork, and stained glass provided interior embellishments thought to be appropriate for rituals associated with death.

The cramped waiting rooms were translated into lavish auditoriums or chapels, which were reached via foyers and anterooms, and appropriately buffered from the working parts of the crematorium.

Although architectural features exist that broadly characterize the initial development of crematoria nationwide, imposing examples were atypical across the country. Lingering ambivalence and animosity towards cremation meant that demand was not high through the end of the century, making the business venture risky and discouraging the construction of expensive facilities. Historic images suggest that a number of the early public crematoria in the United States, while showing architectural ambition, were still very modest.<sup>15</sup> This group includes the **Baltimore Crematory** in Baltimore, Maryland (1889), the **Davenport Crematorium** in Davenport, Iowa (1891), and the **Waterville Crematory** in Waterville, New York (1893); each of these displayed Gothic or watered-down Romanesque detailing.<sup>16</sup> The **Graceland Crematorium** in Chicago, Illinois (1888) is small in scale and might also be placed with this group. Yet, its quietly sophisticated design with exquisite rusticated stonework with Gothic detailing suggests the hand of an able architect, in this case the famed Chicago firm of Holabird & Roche. The designers of this group of modish and well-executed early crematoria looked to chapel design for inspiration.

A second group of early crematoria shared affinity with the freestanding mausolea common in Gilded Age cemeteries and had an exuberant architectural presence in the landscape. They were, for the most part, centrally planned, sometimes further emphasized with a dome; raised up from the ground with a prominent stair and entrance; and enveloped, to differing degrees, by classical details and motifs. The main level of these buildings included or was taken up by a large auditorium or chapel. The **Fresh Pond Crematorium** in Middle Village, Queens, New York (1885) is situated across the street from the Mount Olivet Cemetery. The original building may have functioned in a one-story form; however, by ca. 1894, it had been raised to a full two stories and embellished with a variety of High Victorian classical revival details. The facility still functions as a crematorium, but the presence of the early building, while still visible, has been reduced through numerous significant additions. Likewise, the once tall and singular **Philadelphia Crematory** in the Cheltenham Hills Cemetery (1888) with its massive dome and cupola survives, but with major additions to the front and rear. The **Missouri Crematory** (now Hillcrest Abbey Crematory) in St. Louis, Missouri (1887-88; rebuilt 1889) was designed in a High Victorian expression of classical revival. It is a relatively modest, mostly brick building given presence with its tall proportions, bold Doric pilasters, and crowning acroteria. An embellished, one-story wing at the rear contained the cremation chambers. Finally, although not a crematorium, which was housed in a similarly opulent companion building, the highly ornate, domed **Odd Fellows Columbarium**

<sup>15</sup> Historic and contemporary images of crematoria throughout the United States can be found on a Flickr photostream assembled by J Ryan, accessed 29 Sep. 2010, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/arcremationist/sets/>. Crematoria at the site included: Baltimore Crematory, Buffalo Crematorium, Cincinnati Crematory, Davenport Crematorium, Forest Hills Crematorium, Fresh Pond Crematorium, Graceland Crematorium, Missouri Crematory, Odd Fellows Columbarium and Crematorium, Philadelphia Crematory, Waterville Crematory. A 1902 publication about the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium included a "Table of Annual Cremations in the United States," listing twenty-six crematoria starting with the LeMoyne Crematory. The list includes a range of crematoria, including quarantine hospitals (Swinburne Island, New York) and furnaces operated in a funeral home (Pittsburgh). *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (1897) also assisted with descriptions of some of the crematoria on the list, and it can be reasonably concluded that the most significant examples of 1880s and 1890s crematoria have been addressed in this nomination.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Prothero suggests that the crematorium in Baltimore "was in many respects a compromise between the simplicity of the Lancaster crematory and the grandeur of later examples;" however, historic images show Baltimore to be as architecturally unassuming as the ones he groups with Lancaster. Prothero, 114-15.

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(1898) once set within the Odd Fellows Cemetery warrants mention. Columbaria are places where urns of ashes are placed in niches, at times constituting an entire building and at others a room in a crematorium or mausoleum. The Odd Fellows Columbarium (now the Neptune Society Columbarium) is the last remaining element of an elegant San Francisco Cemetery that failed early in the twentieth century after the city passed a law barring further burials within its limits.

Romanesque Revival architecture was also a favored mode for early crematoria. The **Cincinnati Crematory** (1887) in Clifton, Ohio was perhaps the most austere of this group, with its primary interest being its form: a rectangular box terminating at its short ends with three-sided apses and fronted by a porch featuring a massive stone arch framing the door. The raised basement was heavily rusticated and the windows of the apses set high in the wall. A large chapel filled the entire main level. An 1889 article in a Troy newspaper about the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium mentioned the Cincinnati Crematory, noting that it was “the only other structure for similar purposes on this continent with which comparison of any sort can be made.”<sup>17</sup> In the next sentence, the obviously biased writer goes on to observe that Cincinnati was also “insignificant and perishable when contrast is made” with the newly completed chapel and crematorium in Troy. It is likely that the writer considered Cincinnati as its only worthy peer because the writer also noted that “Romanesque architecture has been defined as the architecture of rest and immobility.”

Interestingly, if Romanesque Revival architecture was the primary reason for comparing the two, the writer strangely overlooked the much closer **Buffalo Crematorium** (1885), which not only was Romanesque, but also had a direct connection to the Earl family as it was where Gardner Earl had been cremated. Located across Delavan Avenue from Forest Lawn Cemetery, the still-operating crematorium is a handsome building. If one agrees with the newspaper writer about the link between Romanesque architecture and cremation, the Buffalo Crematory probably more effectively conveys “rest and immobility” than the exuberant and visually complex Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium. Given the differences between the buildings, it is doubtful that the architect’s choice of Romanesque Revival architecture for the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium was directly influenced by Buffalo or Cincinnati.<sup>18</sup> As evidenced by numerous examples, the early period of crematorium design and construction in the United States was characterized by a great amount of experimentation with and interpretation of prevailing styles, an outcome reflecting both the newness of the building type as well as the existence of competing architectural modes for public buildings in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

### **The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium**

The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is, without question, the most architecturally distinguished of the early crematoria. The other late-nineteenth-century crematoria were generally constructed by cremation societies or cemeteries at a time when no one was certain that the process would be economically viable or become socially acceptable. The buildings tended to reflect these conditions. Even the most ambitious contemporary efforts paled in comparison to the opulence of the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium, whose richness in design and materials would be the lasting memorial to an only child whose life had been cut short. In the nineteenth century, Troy, New York was a major industrial center. In 1848, William Spencer Earl married Hannah Gardner, whose family owed its wealth to the manufacture of shirt cuffs and collars. The only child, Gardner Earl, was born in 1850, and at some point he traveled about Europe, learned first-hand about cremation, and became a supporter of the process. He died in 1887 and his parents sought to

<sup>17</sup> “Earl Memorial Chapel & Crematory,” *The Troy Press* 1 Nov. 1889.

<sup>18</sup> There was at least one other Romanesque Revival built in the United States in the 1880s and 1890s. The crematorium constructed across from Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plains (Boston), Massachusetts for the New England Cremation Society in 1893 showed clear influences, interestingly enough, of H.H. Richardson’s libraries. The crematorium still exists as a part of a much larger building.

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memorialize him with a crematorium. As explained in a 1902 booklet on the building: “The building was erected by Mr. and Mrs. William S. Earl, of Troy, as a memorial to their son, Gardner Earl, who, while traveling abroad, had become a convert to, and an enthusiastic advocate of incineration.”<sup>19</sup>

The Earls hired the Albany firm of Fuller & Wheeler to design the crematorium.<sup>20</sup> The firm was likely chosen because it had recently designed the Queen Anne-style Lower Gatehouse at the western entrance to Oakwood Cemetery at 101<sup>st</sup> Street. Neither Fuller nor Wheeler had gone to school for architecture; Fuller had apprenticed in the Albany firm of Ogden & Wright and William A. Wheeler in various Boston offices. The two entered into a partnership in 1883 and would practice together until 1897. Fuller remained an important architect in Albany, working, with various partners, through the 1930s. Although never developing a national reputation, Fuller was a major regional architect and, over the course of his career, did receive some commissions in other American and Canadian cities. Historian T. Robins Brown has observed: “Fuller’s buildings were competently designed, excellently constructed (in part due to his careful site supervision), and comfortably up-to-date in the accepted styles of the day.”<sup>21</sup> As with many firms practicing at the time, Fuller & Wheeler were greatly influenced by the public buildings of Henry Hobson Richardson, a source that they would draw on for the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium.

The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium was sited by the architects, patrons, and superintendent of the crematorium James Inglis for maximum impact on the ridge of a hill in the cemetery, overlooking the city and river valleys. The elegant building spreads for 146’ along the ridge from a 90’-0” high bell tower on its southern end to the chapel and other rooms on its northern end, with the two portions linked by an open loggia. The architectural elements and forms suggested both a public building and a church, which would have been one desirable outcome in attempting to normalize cremation for the public. People arriving at the building entered via the loggia where there was a small waiting room outside the door into the splendid barrel-vaulted chapel. From the raised chancel at the chapel’s northern end doors give onto a service passage and office on the east and, originally, the retort room to the west, which contained two retorts that could be shut off from the chancel by a massive pocket door. The retorts were heated by a wood-fired furnace in the basement. In 1890, Inglis invented a more efficient kerosene-fired system for cremation and, in 1892-93, had a new retort room added to the north of the existing one. The former retort room was later remodeled into the sumptuous reception room. Together, the chapel and reception room should be counted among the great surviving public spaces of the closing years of the Victorian period.

Among the early crematoria, the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is highly sophisticated in the merger of its architecture and art, and in no aspect of the building is this more evident than its luxurious interior fittings and decoration. Contemporary observers, both boosters as well as less biased observers, recognized the fineness of the building. In 1897, the writer for the entry on “Cremation” in *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform* devoted a full paragraph to the building, which begins: “More than a passing remark must be given to the crematorium at Troy, N.Y. This building is, perhaps, the most beautiful, as it certainly is the most costly structure of the kind in the United States.”<sup>22</sup> A 1902 booklet promoting cremation by highlighting the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium was expectedly effusive about the building, yet, despite the clear purpose for the glowing text, accurately conveys its probable architectural impact on visitors. “The building should be seen and studied, both outside and inside, in order to be really appreciated. The first impression

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick S. Hills, *The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium, Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, N.Y.* (Albany, NY, 1902), np (3).

<sup>20</sup> All information about Fuller & Wheeler is drawn from T. Robins Brown, “Albert W. Fuller,” in *Architects in Albany*, ed. Diana S. Waite (Albany, NY: Mount Ida Press and Historic Albany Foundation, 2009), 34-36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform*, ed. William D.P. Bliss (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1897), 398.

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produced by it is astonished admiration, but as one observes the edifice more closely and realizes its beauties more clearly the admiration grows to a feeling akin to awe.”<sup>23</sup>

With the passage of time, the building has remained at the pinnacle of architecture for the nineteenth-century crematoria. Stephen Prothero, an expert in the history of cremation, has observed that it was “the most expensive crematory constructed in Gilded Age America, it included an elaborate mosaic floor, onyx altar, carved bronze doors, and five Tiffany stained glass windows.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, cemetery historian David Charles Sloane has noted that the building’s architecture alone countered some of the negative period critiques of the process: “The reception room of Oakwood’s very ornate crematory had walls of black Siena marble, as well as wainscoting and arches of pink African marble. The crematory was elaborate enough to dissuade anyone who believed that cremation advocates cared little about memorialization.”<sup>25</sup>

Art specialists have also recognized its significance. The chapel and reception rooms, in particular, feature marble wainscoting and sandstone sheathing, delicately carved stone columns and friezes, stunning custom-made furniture, such as the catafalque, mosaics and wall paintings, and bronze fittings. Stained-glass conservator Diane Roberts Rousseau observed of the interiors:

Naturally, most of my attention was devoted to the Earl Chapel’s glass, but the other architectural elements contributed to the sumptuous dignity of the interior. Every square inch of wall, floor and ceiling represented an artistic choice, and all of it harmonized. I was especially struck by the trouble gone to, and the countries scoured – Mexico, Brazil, and Japan, in addition to the more predictable Italy – for colored onyx and rare marble to perfectly set off the mosaic and stone. Just when the eye could not appreciate any more detail, the artist had thoughtfully included a course of plain stone and a beautifully carved wooden bench from which to contemplate it.<sup>26</sup>

Rousseau’s mention of the “Earl Chapel’s glass” refers to another element establishing the building’s national significance for architecture: nine Tiffany stained-glass windows in the chapel proper and two Maitland Armstrong windows in the reception room. After six years of practice in interior design with a number of other artists, Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) established the Tiffany Glass Studios in 1885. In time, he became the most famous and commercially successful of an artistic trio of Americans, which also included David Maitland Armstrong (1836-1918) and John LaFarge (1835-1910), that revolutionized the production and artistry of stained glass. The group focused on creating windows and other works having the rich color tones and irregularity of medieval glass. Rousseau noted that the inclusion of two contrasting types of Tiffany windows—“in the nave, complex floral patterns, and behind the altar, nearly life-size figures”—“is very rare, in my experience,...contained in one small building.”<sup>27</sup>

While the presence of the Tiffany windows contributes greatly to the significance of the building and its decoration, the windows by Maitland Armstrong are of special note. Armstrong trained in painting in Rome and Paris, and shared a New York studio with sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. He became interested in stained glass and, along with Tiffany and LaFarge, experimented with opalescent glass to great ends. His windows in the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium stand with Armstrong’s most important extant works. Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

<sup>23</sup> Hills, (3).

<sup>24</sup> Prothero, caption for Plates 11A and 11B.

<sup>25</sup> Sloane, 153.

<sup>26</sup> Diane Roberts Rousseau to the National Park Service, Heritage Preservation Services, 27 Mar. 2002.

Copy in the NHL file.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. In her own letter of support, Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen also commented that the “chapel is important for the concentration of his windows in a single space” (Frelinghuysen to NPS, 26 Mar. 2002).

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in New York has observed: “the two windows documented and signed by Armstrong are, in my opinion, among the finest windows by Armstrong known to survive today. Their complex figural compositions, the jewel tones of the glass, and the quality of the painted details all contribute to making them masterpieces of their kind.”<sup>28</sup> Diana Roberts Rousseau described the windows as a “powerful presence in the reception room.”<sup>29</sup>

**Conclusion**

The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is nationally significant as the most architecturally sophisticated of the early public crematoria in the United States. Built as a memorial to a Troy couple’s only child, a son who was an early proponent of cremation, the project was freed from the constraints that limited the architectural development of crematoria in the early years such as lack of public social support and the related lack of business capital. The result was a masterpiece of the type whose interiors are on par with the best Late Victorian interiors realized in America. Adorned in exotic and domestic marbles, carved stone and wood, and important works of stained glass by Tiffany and Maitland Armstrong, the luxurious rooms worked together to provide a ritual structure for the cremation process with an aim towards legitimizing it for a skeptical public. The addition of a new retort room only a few years after the building’s opening, which incorporated newly-developed technology for kerosene-fed furnaces, also has significance as the building also embodies the Victorian interest in and promise of science and technology. The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is the physical embodiment of many artistic and intellectual impulses defining the last decades of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>28</sup> Frelinghuysen to NPS, 26 Mar. 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Rousseau to NPS, 27 Mar. 2002.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register: It is a contributing building in the Oakwood Cemetery NR District (1984), and was individually listed in 2003.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

## **10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: Less than 1 acre

| <b>UTM References:</b> | <b>Zone</b> | <b>Easting</b> | <b>Northing</b> |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
|                        | 18          | 608740         | 4734330         |

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary for the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium is the immediate footprint of the building.

Boundary Justification: The boundary was selected because this is the only resource in Oakwood Cemetery found to be eligible for NHL status within in the period of significance.

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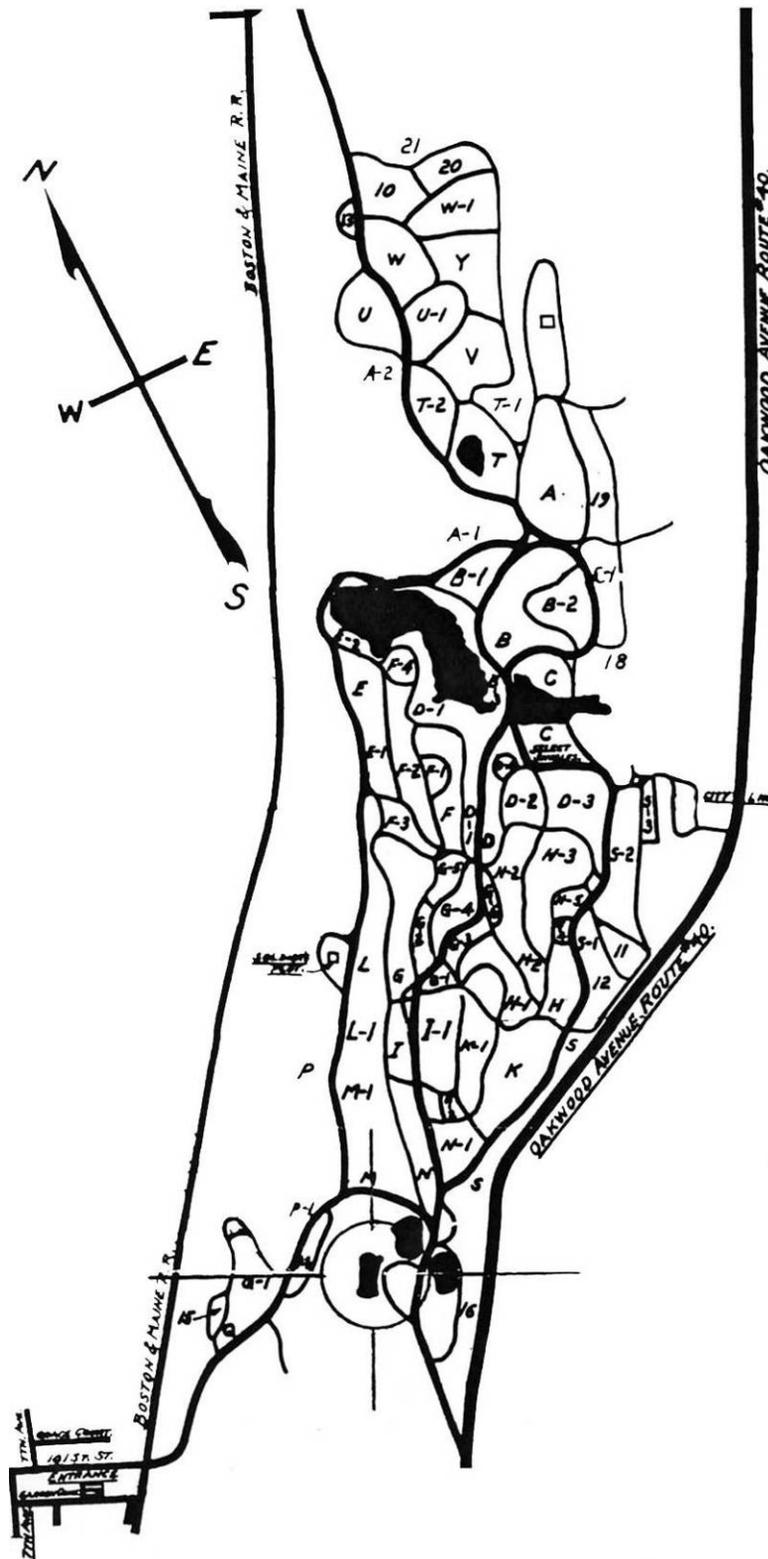
**11. FORM PREPARED BY****Name/Title:** Peter D. Shaver, Historic Preservation Specialist**Address:** NYSOPRHP, Field Services Bureau  
P.O. Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188**Telephone:** 518-237-8643**Name/Title:** Theresa Page, President of the Board of Trustees (1999-2008),  
Troy Cemetery Association, Inc. (Oakwood Cemetery)**Address:** 14 Hyland Circle  
Troy, NY 12182**Telephone:** 518-237-2188**Date:** 2008; revised Sep-Oct 2010**Edited by:** James A. Jacobs, Historian  
National Park Service  
National Historic Landmarks Program  
Historic American Buildings Survey  
1849 C Street NW (2270)  
Washington, DC 20240**Telephone:** (202) 354-2184NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM  
March 21, 2011

# GARDNER EARL MEMORIAL CHAPEL AND CREMATORIUM

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Oakwood Cemetery plan, 1972  
 The location of the Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium  
 is noted in the circle at bottom-center.  
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Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium, ca. 1890, looking southwest, showing the building as originally completed  
Frederick S. Hills, *The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium* (1902)



Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium, looking southwest  
Note the 1892-93 addition on to the north (right side of image)  
Theresa Page, photographer, 2008

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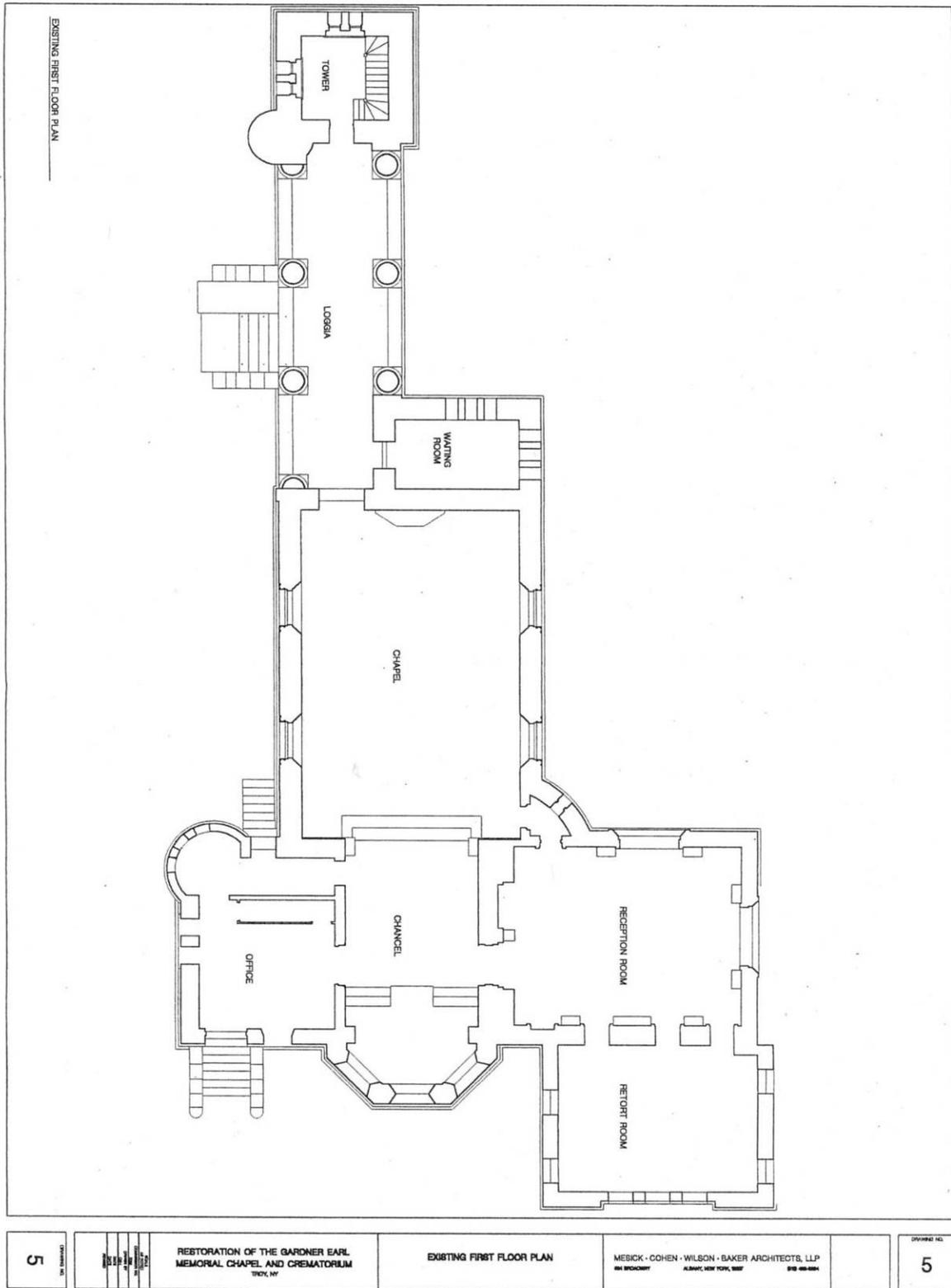
Roof detail, new copper decorative elements  
Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects, 2007

# GARDNER EARL MEMORIAL CHAPEL AND CREMATORIUM

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First-floor plan  
Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects, 2002

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Alter in chancel, looking north  
Tom Wall, photographer, 2000

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Chapel, looking south from chancel  
Tom Wall, photographer, 2000

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Reception room, looking east into the chancel.  
The mosaic on the right depicts the story of Rebecca at the well.  
Tom Wall, photographer, 2000

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Maitland Armstrong window depicting King Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba  
Frederick S. Hills, *The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium* (1902) (top)  
Tom Wall, photographer, 2000 (bottom)

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Reception room ceiling detail showing laylight  
Theresa Page, photographer, ca. 2003



Detail of the catafalque  
Theresa Page, photographer, ca. 2003

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Retorts

Frederick S. Hills, *The Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium* (1902) (top)

Theresa Page, photographer, ca. 2003 (bottom)

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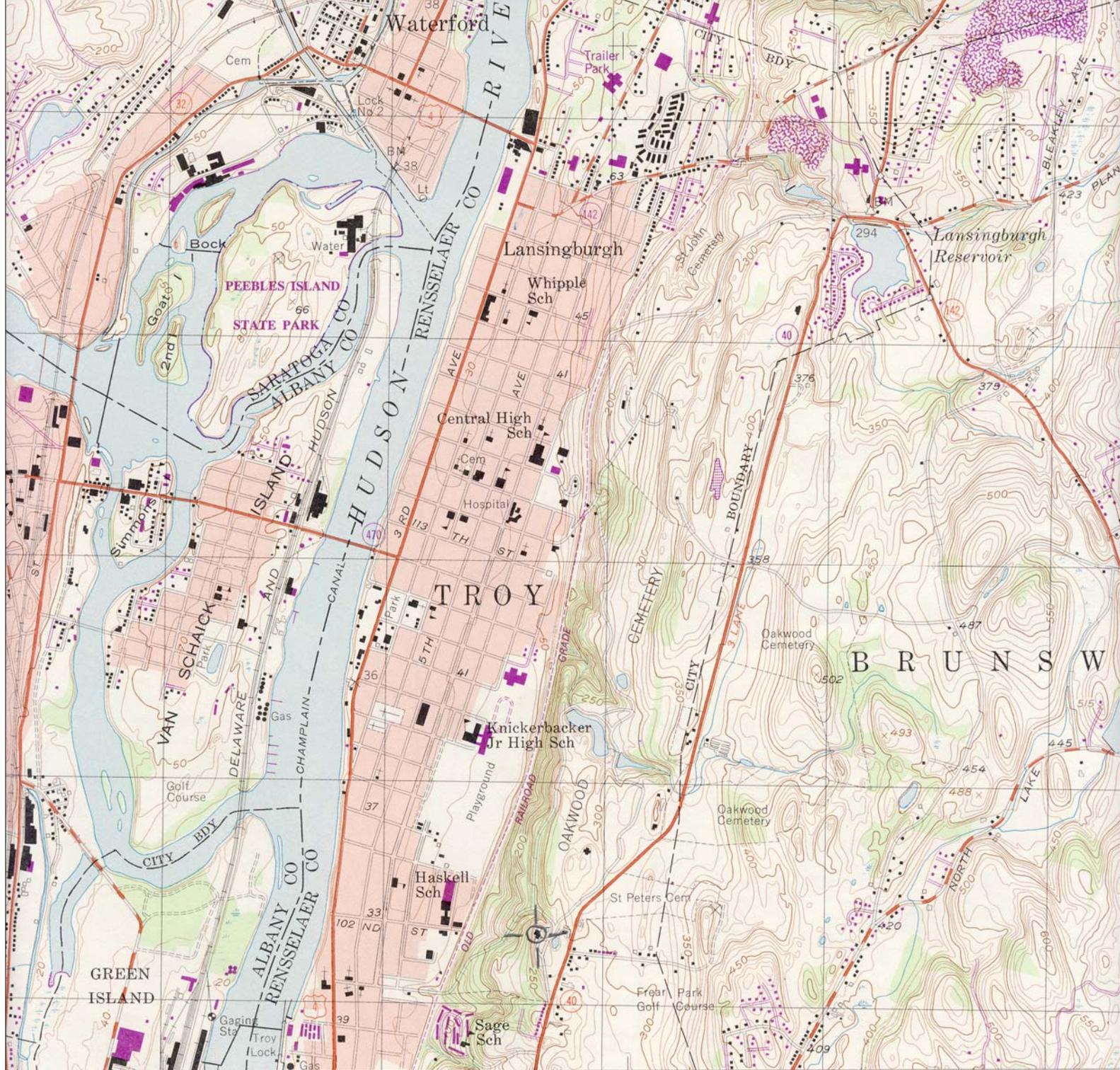
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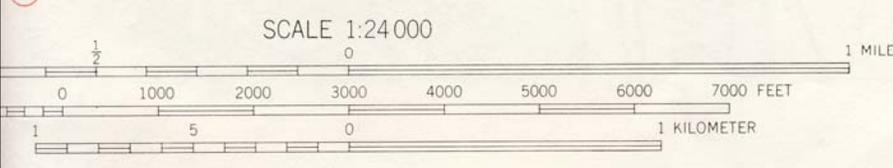
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Waiting room in cupola  
Theresa Page, photographer, ca. 2003



32 (TROY SOUTH) 6269 II NW TROY (COURTHOUSE) 1.6 MI. 11 MI. TO U.S. 9 & 20 09 40' 10



● INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

2.4 MI. TROY (COURTHOUSE)

ROAD

Heavy-duty ————

Medium-duty ————

U. S. Route

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092. FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF MAPS DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST