

The Mausoleum

Ellis Fuller Lawrence is one more example of the close tie between the Masonic Cemetery and the University of Oregon. While an architect in Portland, he was associated with the Portland Mausoleum in 1913. He soon became the first dean of the School of Architecture and Allied Arts at the University of Oregon, and held that post from 1914 to 1947. He was responsible for the first full campus plan and the design of numerous fine buildings.



*Left: Ellis Fuller Lawrence, designer of Hope Abbey Mausoleum.
Right: Ditch-digging machinery from the time when mausoleum
was constructed, ca. 1913.*

by Kay Holbo

A visitor encountering the Hope Abbey Mausoleum for the first time today would be astonished to learn that this shabby building began life as an elegant, impressive entrepreneurial and marketing success. Years of neglect, resulting from insufficient funding and other circumstances, have hidden but not destroyed the qualities of one of Oregon's truly unique buildings.

Built by the Portland Mausoleum Company in 1913, Hope Abbey was one of six similar mausoleum projects in Oregon. It was constructed prior to World War I, during the period known as the Progressive Era. Many people believed that the future of American life would be shaped by science and technological advances, and that a new, modern way of thinking was necessary. This applied to their view of death as well. In the same way that the Model T displaced the horse and buggy, the modern mausoleum was marketed to replace the old-fashioned country cemetery.

Local Masonic leaders bought the concept. The mausoleum was built in less than a year at a total cost of \$40,000. Skilled laborers were paid thirty-five cents an hour. The building featured reinforced concrete walls and floor, complex pre-cast ornamental decorative details, bronze doors, extensive use of marble and terrazzo, and eighty golden glass clerestory windows. It was a splendid building, and its unique Egyptian Revival motif set it apart from the other more Classical mausoleum designs. It was — and is — unlike any other building in Oregon.

On June 14, 1914 the Hope Abbey Mausoleum was dedicated in a formal ceremony. The speaker of the day, Dr. H.S. Wilkinson of the Methodist Church in Eugene, linked the mausoleum to a tradition of ancient civilizations by tracing its history through the ages. A time capsule containing newspapers, the dedication program, historical documents, photographs, and statistical information was sealed and placed inside — to be opened in one thousand years. What confidence!

Some families were so impressed with the new mausoleum that they exhumed deceased relatives and moved the remains to the building. One family spent \$600 to purchase crypts for three relatives, including one who had died nearly a quarter of a century earlier. Mausoleum records show that there are thirty-one persons entombed in the mausoleum whose deaths pre-dated the building's dedication in June 1914.

Within ten years of its completion, nearly 90 percent of the 260 crypts and niches had been sold for \$200 each. Ten dollars from each crypt sold was put aside in an endowment fund for maintenance, perhaps without adequate consideration of whether an endowment of this size would provide enough for the job.



Issues of ownership, too, were clouded. The Portland Mausoleum Company built the structure and collected endowment, but it did not own the building. There was a provision for — no doubt a fervent hope for — the creation of an association of crypt owners. But no association was formed. The Masons had contracted for the building to be built on Masonic land, but apparently had not really intended to assume responsibility of ownership.

In 1926, the Portland Mausoleum Company closed its account for the mausoleum, sending to the Masons a check that included \$2310 for endowment from 231 crypt and niche sales, and interest of \$949 — apparently none of which had been spent for maintenance. The Masons found themselves, once again, with a burial site needing maintenance and only limited funds available for the purpose.

The Portland Mausoleum Company went out of business in 1929, the same year the American stock market crashed and ushered in the Great Depression. The following decade was a time when little money came into the treasury of Eugene Lodge #11 to take care of maintenance of either the mausoleum or the cemetery.

World War II focused energies in other directions, and when families associated with the mausoleum took a close look at the building in 1945, they found it in poor condition.

The Hope Abbey Mausoleum Crypt Owners Association, Inc. was formed by family members to address the “disgraceful condition of the mausoleum due to lack of maintenance and attention.” Charging members one dollar per year, the Association cleaned the facility, and made sewer and water hookups. They also hired a nearby neighbor as caretaker at ten dollars a month.

But the larger issues of roof replacement and restoration of the vandalized windows and grilles were beyond the means of the organization. They dissolved their association in 1957, returning all assets — and responsibilities — to Eugene Lodge #11.

During the 1960s, vandalism to the mausoleum worsened. And now, in an emigration that exactly

mirrored the immigration of 1914, families opted to transfer the coffins of relatives to other mausoleums that were judged more suitable.

In 1980, the Hope Abbey Mausoleum and Masonic Cemetery were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. But recognition of their historic value did not bring answers to the problems of ongoing neglect and vandalism.

The cemetery and mausoleum needed an infusion of fresh energy, skills and commitment. In 1995,

through a City of Eugene-initiated process, Eugene Lodge #11 deeded ownership of both the cemetery and the mausoleum to a newly formed, private non-profit organization named the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association. One of the group’s goals is to restore and operate the Hope Abbey Mausoleum while providing historical interpretation.

Restoration began in 1997. Eventual sales of restored crypts will help pay the total cost, estimated at between \$150,000 and \$200,000.



Right: Hope Abbey Mausoleum in its early days.