

The Venerable Bishop - Then and Now

When the “venerable” Bishop Horatio Potter died January 2, 1887, an article in the New York Times the following day carried the sub-title “Dying at the age of 85, having given nearly sixty years to the work of the church”.

Although Bishop Potter spent his final hours at his home located at 38 East Twenty-Second Street in the City of New York, his earliest days were spent at the family homestead in the Town of Beekman, which is now LaGrange, Dutchess County.

Horatio was born February 9th, 1802, the youngest of the nine children of Joseph and Anne (Knight) Potter both members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) who removed to Beekman from Cranston, Rhode Island in 1792. Horatio’s elder brother Paraclete Potter born 1784, having established him himself in Poughkeepsie in 1807, was able to offer his brother Horatio better educational opportunities than the district schools in Beekman offered and by 1812 Horatio was enrolled in the Poughkeepsie Academy. Although Quaker in religious belief, Horatio accompanied his brother Paraclete to Christ Church in Poughkeepsie where he became impressed by services there.

Horatio remained in Poughkeepsie through 1822. During his years in Poughkeepsie he clerked at various times in his brother’s book store. After graduation from Union College in 1828 he became a professor at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut and in 1833 became rector of St. Peter’s Church, Albany. By 1854 he had been elected Provisional Bishop of New York and became Bishop in 1861 after the death of Bishop Onderdonk.

During his service as Episcopal Bishop of New York he obtained the Charter for the Cathedral Corporation which was later to erect the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Although Bishop Potter was the driving force behind the Cathedral he did not live to see his efforts realized. It was his nephew, Bishop Henry Codman Potter, who succeeded his uncle as Bishop, purchased the property for St. John’s and laid the corner stone December 27, 1892.

A January 8th, 1887 New York Times article entitled “*Bishop Potter’s Funeral*” is subtitled “Trinity Thronged with Sorrowing Friends. The Prelate committed to his long rest with all the impressive ceremonies of the church.” This same article goes on to say, “From the time of the brief services at the Bishop’s home early in the morning, until the interment at Poughkeepsie, when the shadows of the day were lengthening, the ceremonies were marked by a quiet taste akin to the prelate’s habits of life, and through all coursed manifest sorrow for the dead and sympathy for the mourners.”, and further states the special train bringing the Bishop’s remains to Poughkeepsie arrived at 2:30 . “When the cortege started from the railway station for Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery it was composed of twenty carriages and two large carryall sleighs.”. “As the cortege made its way through Poughkeepsie city streets the tolling of the bells of the Episcopal churches added to the solemnity of the occasion.” Following services at the gravesite, the casket was lowered into the grave with the lid covered with violets and evergreens for what was thought to be at the time Bishop Potter’s final rest. The funeral party departed for the railway station for their return to New York City.

In 1921, twenty-nine years after the 1892 laying of the cornerstone of St. John the Divine and 34 years after his interment here, an all white marble Sarcophagus was erected atop a tomb directly behind the high altar (a place traditionally reserved for the founder of a cathedral) of St. John's. The remains of Bishop Horatio Potter were disinterred from Section G of Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery in November 1921. The consecration of his new tomb, and the much later final resting place where Bishop Potter's remains were re-interred, was held December 27, 1921.

Today when you pass Bishop Potter's monument in Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery it probably looks much the same as it did when it was placed there following his death.



However his remains no longer rest beneath it. If you have ever wondered whose remains rest behind the high altar at St. John's the Divine with a recumbent 6 foot long figure surrounded by six white marble saints or who the Cathedral's founder was - you now have the answer or so it was told based on the published reports as of 1921 and the excellent office records kept at the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery Office.

Prepared for Friends of Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery by Virginia A. Buechele, March 4, 2007
Sources:

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As Published in the *Courier*, undated
- Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Website,
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- *New York Times*, St. John's Cathedral to have a new tomb. Sarcophagus in which Bishop Horatio Potter will Lie is Being Set Up., July 29, 1921, Page 9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1851- 2001).
- *New York Times*, Potter Tomb Completed, Consecration Services Will be Held at St. John Cathedral Dec. 27, November 8, 1921, Page 16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1851- 2001).
- Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery Office Records for Section G - Vicki Fells, Office Manager