

Though They Roam 'Midst Pleasures and Palaces The Vanderbilts Lie at Last in Quaint New Dorp

A Quiet Hillside on Staten Island Is the Burial Plot of the Family

By Arnold Prince
ANOTHER of the Vanderbilts has been placed beside his fathers in the family mausoleum in the placid, inconspicuous little hamlet of New Dorp, Staten Island.

When alive he was, in a sense, a citizen of the world, although, of course, he never severed his allegiance to the United States, the land of his birth. His great wealth enabled him to move about at will. For this good fortune he was indebted to the thrift and energy of his sturdy grandfather of Dutch antecedents, who piled up an amazing lot of money in a few years. He was able to go where he liked, and he liked the interesting places. In New York he had a home built after a famous chateau which is still pointed out by megaphone to visitors on sightseeing busses. He had another at Newport, the social capital of the country, and a third on Long Island. He had a residence in Paris and two estates in France outside the capital.

Knew the World's Capitals

He was familiar with the capitals of Europe, had more than a speaking acquaintance with royalty, and in his more youthful days at least, when he desired to make a trip across any of the seven seas, did not have to wait for the carriers catering to ordinary travelers. He had a yacht generally described in the newspapers as a "floating palace," and could go where and when he liked, without stopping to make reservations or troubling to find out whether his stateroom had a port opening on the ocean or was too near the propeller to be comfortable.

He lived in the splendid places of the world, but after death his body, in keeping with the family traditions, was taken back to New Dorp, the small community on the outskirts of Staten Island where he was born. It rests there now in a tomb which is impressive enough in appearance, but in surroundings contrasting sharply with the brilliance usually associated with the name of Vanderbilt.

From New Dorp he had come and to New Dorp he returned.

The name of this Vanderbilt was William Kissam Vanderbilt. He died in his home at Paris on July 22 last. His father was William Henry Vanderbilt, eldest son of that Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt who built up the transportation system and with it the family wealth.

Loyal to Staten Island

Although Willie K., as he was called in former days, traveled about a great deal and lived most of his later years in Paris and other European cities, he remained loyal to America and New Dorp. In this he displayed some of the Dutch characteristics which distinguished his father and grandfather. There was a great similarity between the three men, and, in fact, they looked much alike. They were good looking, and it was this very fact, perhaps, that caused the old commodore to entertain some doubts as to the business capacity of Willie K. and his brother Cornelius, who died twenty-one years ago.

The old commodore was what we in this age are pleased to call an old-fashioned man, with old-fashioned ideas as to thrift and character, and once, when discussing his two grandsons in general and his views on boys in particular, he said:

"If a boy is good for anything you can stick him down anywhere and he'll earn his living and lay up something; if he can't do it he ain't worth saving and you can't save him."

True to Family Traditions

The old commodore had no reason to worry about either Willie K. or his brother, Cornelius, however, for each, when in his turn he became the head of the family, conducted himself as became a Vanderbilt. Each took care of the family fortune, remained faithful to the standards established by the old commodore and faithful also to the tiny, inconspicuous hamlet that saw their birth.

Cornelius was the older of the brothers, and while he lived William Kissam remained somewhat in the background, as is the case in England and now generally in this country with great families, in which the oldest son succeeds to the leadership of his kin and to most of the money. It was Cornelius who built the beautiful mansion at the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street, which remains one of the show places of the city. William K., following the family style in architecture, as in most everything else, put up a

similar residence on Fifth Avenue and Fifty-second Street. Cornelius was an aristocratic looking man, with fair features and a narrow, finely modeled head. But for the fact that he wore no side whiskers he would have looked much like the old Commodore, and this may be said also of William. William was, perhaps, better looking than either of the others, and, in fact, had little of the appearance of the business man and financier. He looked more like a man destined for society than the money marts, and this impression was heightened by the slight wave of his abundant hair, the part in the middle of it, and the fresh, smooth complexion.

Home To Be Buried

But a strain as sturdy as that laid by the old Commodore and his tenacious forbears cannot be extinguished by any manner of wearing the hair or the color of a tie, and when Cornelius passed on and Willie K. succeeded to the leader-



ENTRANCE gate at Idle Hour, one of the Vanderbilt homes

ship, he proved himself a true Vanderbilt. A touch of reserve in his manner kept him from being as popular in his young days as some of the other members of the family, and he never aspired to be known as particularly democratic; but still afterward, when society and horse racing in Paris claimed most of his attention, he never forgot to pay his home land a visit at least once a year, and his last journey was made a few months before his death. He was in his seventy-first year when he died, and when he was in his final illness he directed that his body be taken overseas and placed in the sepulchre at New Dorp, a place which comparatively few New Yorkers know very much about.

As to this fidelity to New Dorp, the explanation, of course, is that it saw the beginning of the Vanderbilts as a family of great wealth and social position. It was there that some of the earliest Vanderbilt pioneers settled more than 200 years ago, and it was the home of the hard-headed old Commodore when he began his career by ferrying passengers and goods in his own boat between New York and Staten Island.

Tenacious of its traits as the Vanderbilt family itself, New Dorp has clung to its site on the island across the bay; not particularly beautiful to look upon, nor fashionable, nor distinguished, but in full possession of its native virility and ancient characteristics.

Of Dutch Origin

New Dorp is Dutch in its origin, as is the name of Vanderbilt, which before being modernized was spelled Van der Bilt. The Bilt in the name is said to come from the village of Bilt, a suburb of Utrecht in the Province of Friesland, Netherlands, where in the remote past the Bilt had their beginning.

The first to bring the name to this country was Jan Aertsen Vander Bilt, who was a farmer and settled near Brooklyn about 1650. For the next sixty-five years this emigrant ancestor and his descendants lived near Brooklyn, tilling the soil and living the quiet, frugal lives of their kind. But in 1715 the great-grandfather of the future Commodore forsook the attractions of Brooklyn for those of Staten Island and moved to New Dorp. The change, at first, had little effect on the family manner of living, the only incident of importance occurring when religious exiles from Bohemia converted the Van der Bilt to the Moravian faith. The great-



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FIRST home of the Vanderbilts at New Dorp, Staten Island



MR. AND MRS. W. K. VANDERBILT. Above is an individual photograph of Mrs. Vanderbilt



THE Duchess of Marlborough, nee Consuelo Vanderbilt, photographed while in New York for W. K. Vanderbilt's funeral

grandfather of Commodore Vanderbilt and his wife, Nietje, were devout members of this church and contributed to it as liberally as they could.

When the family became rich it continued to give, and much of the land in the Moravian cemetery came from that source. The Vanderbilt mausoleum is in a tract just adjoining it.

Founded the Family Fame

But as it was Commodore Vanderbilt who laid the foundation for New Dorp's present fame, as well as that of its greatest family, he deserves first place in any article touching on either subject.

The commodore's father, like the fathers of the Vanderbilts before him, was a farmer in moderate circumstances, who carried his produce to market in a sailboat, which he had quite a fleet engaged in trans-

portation along the shores of New York Bay and the Hudson River.

In 1827 he leased the ferry between New York City and Elizabeth, N. J., thereby materially increasing his income. He began to build ships of the latest design, which he placed into competition with those of the then wealthier capitalists who were trying to capture the water trade on the Hudson and Long Island Sound.

A Rich Man at Forty

It was through his success as a steamboat builder and manager that he won his title of commodore, and by the time he was forty years old he was widely reported to be worth as much as \$500,000, a rather staggering sum in those days.

He established steamboat service between New York City and Bridgeport, Norwalk, Derby, New Haven, Hartford, New London, Providence, Newport, Boston and other cities, and when the rush to the California gold fields began he shared in the rich harvest by establishing a line to the Far West by way of Lake Nicaragua.

The story of the Vanderbilt fortune is voluminous and could not be told in one newspaper article, but mention may be made of the fact that the Nicaraguan line alone brought the commodore \$10,000,000 in eleven years. Then he engaged in ocean transportation at a time when the British ships were being

Left 100 Millions

When he died in 1877 he had a fortune generally estimated at \$100,000,000, all of which he bequeathed to his eldest son, William Henry Vanderbilt, with the exception of \$11,000,000, which he left to William Henry Vanderbilt's four sons, and \$4,000,000 to his own daughters.

He was sixty-three years old when he died and his body was placed in the family mausoleum at New Dorp. William Henry Vanderbilt managed his inheritance with entire success, and even contrived to increase it by several millions. He lived as became one of the world's richest men, but when he died his body was taken back to New Dorp and entombed beside that of his father.

The bulk of the Vanderbilt wealth now went to William Henry's two eldest sons, Cornelius and William K., with Cornelius taking over the

business leadership of the family. He built two princely mansions, the one on Fifth Avenue and the other in Newport. That on Fifth Avenue is elaborate with carvings, decorations and furnishings selected by experts. The exterior is of brick and light Bedford stone, the architecture being a graceful reproduction of the French chateau. It remains one of the few homes of the rich on Fifth Avenue which has resisted conversion into a business establishment.

The other home in Newport, known as The Breakers, was built



IDLE HOUR, W. K. Vanderbilt's home at Oakdale, Long Island

on the site of the wooden mansion of the same name which Mr. Vanderbilt bought from Pierre Lorillard.

William K. Becomes Head

All the riches and splendors that money could command went into these houses, and brilliant were the gatherings which assembled there, but when Cornelius Vanderbilt died his body was taken to the cemetery at New Dorp.

With his death, William Kissam Vanderbilt became the head of the family. Like his brother Cornelius, he had served his apprenticeship as a salaried employee in the offices of the New York Central system, and was ready to take control when the time arrived. He had previously operated a little in Wall Street, but the experiment had been costly, and after losing several millions he never repeated it. For several years he remained in active control of the many Vanderbilt railroad properties, but finally the actual management went to what was called the Rockefeller-Morgan-Pennsylvania combination, and Mr. Vanderbilt began to spend more and more of his time in foreign lands and aboard his yachts.

He had two of these craft, one attaining the proportions almost of an ocean liner. He cruised about ex-



W. K. VANDERBILT watching a race at Auteuil, France

tensively aboard this yacht, touching at many ports in interesting lands.

His later years, however, were devoted to winning triumphs in other fields. He became a patron of the French turf, and his entries won many notable prizes, including the Grand Prix de Paris and the French Derby. He had a superb stud farm called Le Quesnoy in Normandy and racing stables at Poissy-St. Louis. He went about a great deal in society, and the entertainments given by him were never lacking in sumptuousness of detail or costliness in arrangement.

The Finest Farm in France

He was frequently at his place in Normandy, and those who had the good fortune to be admitted were warm in their description of its beauty. The farm was not only the finest in France in appointments, but it was also the largest in extent. The hills in this part of the country are strikingly beautiful, and the wide acres of Le Quesnoy were additionally decorated by the wonderful chateau.

Here the American millionaire would spend much of his time, finding exhilaration in the landscape and surroundings.

A visitor who spent some time at the chateau recently gave this description of it:

"Gracefully proportioned pediments and tourelles and a miniature donjon tower, windows of charming outline and a terrace of distinctly Italian suggestion, are set in a softly luminous white stone which dark masses of luxuriant foliage set off behind and on either side, and which contrasts again with a great expanse of shaded green sward relieved near at hand with parterres of flowers in the richest hues. The interior of the chateau contains a remarkable collection of furniture and art objects of the pre-Revolutionary periods."

Mr. Vanderbilt became ill on April 15 at Auteuil. He was reported afterward as being out of danger, but at 6 o'clock in the evening of July 22 he died.

Asked To Be Brought Home

By his direction, and in accordance with the ancient tradition of his family, his body, instead of being interred in some splendid cemetery near the scene of his many triumphs, was brought overseas and taken to the placid little community of New Dorp, which had been the final station in the material progress of his distinguished ancestors.

It was there placed in the family vault and the mantle of splendor on the shoulders of the next Vanderbilt, to be worn by him until he, too, had ended life's journey and ready for his final resting place.