

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

**Pierre Louis Armand de Potter D'Elseghem**

4 Jun 1852 - 1905

& His wife, **Aimee S. Beckwith**

1857 - 1938

St. John's Reformed Church Cemetery, Upper Red Hook

*Short, square, tiered monument w/ square hole over the hill, close to the access road near a lilac bush.*

To make things easier on the Americans he did business with, this globe-trotting French man went by Armand de Potter. Armand's passport application from 1885 when he was 36 years old described him as being 5'8" tall with a high forehead, blue eyes, aquiline nose, medium mouth, round chin, chestnut hair, fair complexion, and a round face.

Armand was born in Paris in 1852. His parents were from Belgium, and his father was a philosopher and revolutionary leader during the 1830 war for Belgium's independence from the Netherlands. Armand was well educated, attending the lycée Saint-Louis in Paris and École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr in Brittany. He served in Algiers as a "sub-lieutenant" in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. After this, he came to America to teach foreign language and literature. He was naturalized while living in Brooklyn on June 28, 1879, the year after he married Aimee Beckwith, daughter of William S. Beckwith and Anna Collyer. (William was a son of Col. Nathan Beckwith and Betsey Gale, and they are all buried in St. John's cemetery).

Armand's title of Colonel, as well as the Cross of the Order of Leopold was awarded him on the 50th anniversary of Belgium's independence. He was also granted some honorific titles by various social organizations that sprang up in the Victorian era such as "Knight of the Order of Melusine." His obituary in the *New York Sun* of October 18, 1905, said that "he also received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Italy and was a member of the Archaeological Society of France and of the American Oriental Society. Mr. de Potter had an extensive collection of Egyptian curiosities which were exhibited at the Chicago Exposition and afterward loaned to the University of Pennsylvania."

For a quarter century Armand was a travel agent with an office at 45 Broadway in Manhattan, guiding tours of the world. The *Albany Argus* reported on one of the de Potters' tours in 1889 in a story titled "Return of the de Potter Party From Abroad—The Queen of

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the Adriatic. Reception—Courtesies Extended by Foreign Governments—A Glimpse at the Capitals of the Old World.” Their group left New York aboard a steamship in June and toured Europe for 14 weeks before returning in early October. Shortly after this, the couple toured the world for two years, returning from Yokohama, Japan to San Francisco in March of 1891. Armand’s obituary said he traveled around the world three times, at least once with Aimee.

The couple had only one son, Victor Armand de Potter D’Elseghem who went by Victor A. de Potter who served in WWI in France in the Ambulance Field Service. He married Eleanor Mead and had at least two children--Aimee and Yvonne de Potter.

Armand de Potter died at sea in 1905 off the coast of Greece having just made a trip to Delphi and Argos which he had been visiting for scholarly archaeological reasons.

Aimee died in Upper Red Hook after a long illness at 80 years of age. She lived in France with Armand for many years but had returned home probably after Armand’s death, about two decades before her death on June 6, 1937. (Her tombstone is incorrect). She left an estate of over \$215,000 which went to her grandchildren Aimee and Yvonne de Potter.

When her son Victor died five years earlier, he had filed a will written in French. The *Rhinebeck Gazette* said that it was only the second such document filed in a foreign language in Dutchess County history. Armand, Aimee, Victor, and Eleanor are all buried in the same plot, not far from Aimee’s Beckwith family.