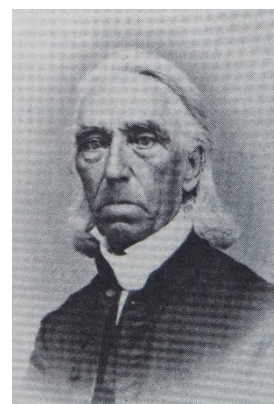


From Arts & Architecture: Horace Baldwin Hitchings



Outside the east wall of the Cathedral, at the edge of All Souls' Walk, a large Celtic cross stands guard above two long gravestones. One of them simply lists the name of our first Dean, Henry Martyn Hart. The other is "In loving memory of Reverend Horace Baldwin Hitchings DD." While there are two bronze plaques inside the cathedral for Dean Hart, the only other place we see mention of the Reverend Hitchings is on the large Kountze plaque in the narthex: "Placed here by Horace B. Hitchings, Rector of this parish 1862-1869."

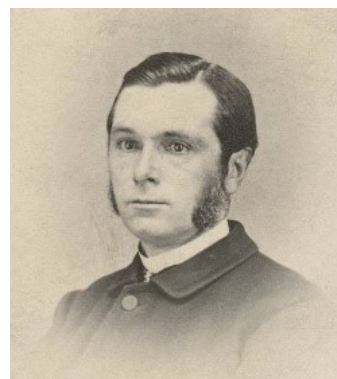
We know that the Church of Saint John's in the Wilderness was begun in Denver in 1860, and most of us have heard stories about Father Kehler, who came early that year to be our first priest and to minister to a small congregation. Bishop Joseph Talbot, the new "Bishop of all Out Doors" (Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah and Nevada) made a visit to Denver in 1861, and was pleased to find a "congregation of intelligent and apparently earnest worshippers" and confirmed eight new members. Unfortunately, little more than a year later, in June 1862, Kehler was called to become the chaplain of the First Regiment of Colorado Volunteers, and the congregation was left without a priest.



Father Kehler, circa 1860

During an unexpected second visit in 1862, Bishop Talbot reflected: "It appears that I arrived in Denver just when I was needed. I found the parish here considerably depressed...my visit has been the means of reviving the interest of the people in the church." Soon after his arrival, a group of parishioners were able to arrange the purchase of the former Methodist church at 14th and Arapahoe, and Bishop Talbot contributed to the purchase of the building. On July 20 he consecrated the Church of Saint John's in the Wilderness before a congregation of two hundred.

Continuing his efforts to support the young congregation, on August 1, Talbot sent a letter to a priest at the Church of St. Stephen in East Haddam, Connecticut. The Reverend Horace B. Hitchings was the grandson of a Revolutionary hero who had participated in the Battle of Bunker Hill, and was a graduate of Trinity College and Berkeley Divinity School. He had never heard of Denver, or Colorado, and at first thought that the offer was a joke, but when the offer was confirmed by Talbot, asking him to "come west in the service of the Lord," he decided to answer the call. Just four months later he made the long trip west and arrived in Denver in December 2, 1862. He was officially installed as rector by Bishop Talbot in August, 1863.



During the following years, Hitchings conducted regular Sunday morning services at the new little brick church in Denver and also held Sunday afternoon services for a small black congregation. He reported that he also met them two evenings in the week to teach them the Psalter. He worked diligently to find

resources to enlarge the church building and wrote, "In the months June, July and August of 1863 an addition of wood was joined to the old building of the same dimensions as the brick edifice *vis.* 40 by 30 ft. This enlargement was necessarily of wood as no brick could be found in the territory." A letter from the visiting Bishop Talbot in 1863 relates: "the church which had been enlarged in my absence is nearly treble its former capacity...The church is now really a church-like edifice and the urgent need of the enlargement was sufficiently manifest today. A member of the church has built a parsonage of two rooms, study and bedroom for Mr. Hitchings."

In addition to his many duties in Denver, Hitchings was also called to accompany Bishop Talbot on his visitations to develop new congregations in other Colorado locations. They traveled long distances through the mountains on horseback, delivering Prayer Books, and hymnals, and holding meetings, often out in the open when there was no indoor space available. Hitchings continued these travels after the retirement of Bishop Talbot and the arrival of Bishop George Randall in 1866. He reports riding in Bishop Randall's "wagon" to go down through southern Colorado to visit Colorado City, "Craig's ranch on the Huerfano," Canon City and through South Park to Buckskin where they "lodged in the wagon under the stars." Going on to Fairplay and Breckenridge, they held services in a grocery store and hotel dining room.

The new priest was also called upon to deal with some catastrophic local events. The Denver fire of 1863 began down on Blake Street and soon was leaping across streets and devouring dry timber frame buildings. More than seventy business buildings were consumed, but luckily the little brick and wood church on Arapahoe was not hurt. Then, early in 1864, after a series of cloudbursts, a great wall of black water twenty feet high came rushing down Cherry Creek. Dozens of buildings, including the City Hall with all its records, were swept away and several lives were lost. Once again, the Church in the Wilderness was spared.

These were difficult times in Denver, and many prospectors who had hoped to make a good living there decided to sell up and go back home. Hitchings was able to help them do this by buying up claims and properties. This required a small amount of investment at the time, but soon began to grow in value. It is probable that Hitchings received advice from banker Charles Kountze, who had come to Denver at the same time that Hitchings had arrived, and they had become close friends. In a letter written toward the end of his life Hitchings wrote, "When he came to Denver, a boy of 19, we commenced rooming together and we were constant companions." This friendship lasted the rest of their mutual lives.



Trinity Church Wall Street NYC

In 1869, Hitchings left Denver after receiving a call to Saint John's Church in Bangor, Maine. After only 18 months there Hitchings found the climate too severe for his chronic bronchitis. He left his position in Maine and accepted a call to Trinity Church, Wall Street, New York, where he served as Assistant Minister for eight years from 1873 to 1881.

Following his resignation from Trinity, in 1882 Hitchings began the first of a series of travels abroad, with a trip to Rio de Janeiro.

Returning to New York, he once again took up priestly duties as Assistant Minister at St. Andrew's, a small church in Harlem. Records from St. Andrew's report: "The labors of the

Rector being increased by the growth of the congregation the Rev. Horace B. Hitchings was this year, June 5, 1883, elected Assistant Minister without salary,





the engagement to terminate at any time at the option of either party. In explanation of this it may be said that Mr. Hitchings was understood to have ample means and in consequence of his health and other personal reasons he did not wish to bind himself for any definite time.” After three years at St. Andrews, in April 1886, Hitchings resigned, with “the Vestry expressing their obligations to him for his valuable services rendered.”

It appears that the end of his service at St. Andrew’s marked the beginning of Hitchings’ remarkably active retirement years. Seven passports issued from 1882 to 1908 indicate his

passion for travel, with such destinations as London, Panama, Rio de Janeiro, Australia, and Turkey, and a passage from Hitchings’ obituary in the Trinity College yearbook states that he “traveled extensively in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.” The passports all list his residence as New York City, with an address “c/o Kountze Brothers Bank, 120 Bdwy,” but a series of letters from Denver beginning in 1910, written to his nephew in Indiana, indicate that between travels he used Denver as his home base. “I feel very much at home in Denver and am delightfully settled at the Denver Club, my home for the past 20 years (since 1890). I have a telephone in my room and can talk with friends all over the city.” Another letter says “I have a host of friends here and feel more at home here than anywhere else in the world.” The Denver Club, a massive red sandstone Romanesque building at 17th and Glenarm was built in 1889 on property owned by Charles Kountze, and was an exclusive club for men of Denver. It contained a restaurant, billiards room, library, squash court and seventeen sleeping rooms, with a winding staircase from the basement to the third floor servants’ quarters. Original members were prominent men of Denver including David Moffat, Horace Tabor and Walter Cheesman.



Records show that soon after he left Denver Hitchings had begun purchasing ranch land in El Paso County, Colorado in 1870 and 1871, and had spent some time there. In 1888 he made a further series of El Paso land purchases which amounted to over 3,000 acres. His Denver letters talk frequently about time he spent at the ranch, with comments such as: “down at the ranch for several weeks;” “splendid fields of rye;” “planted about 500 acres;” “splendid prospect of a big crop this year;” “send mail to Denver, not down here –too far to get to post office;” “I’ve been tramping over pastures, riding horseback” and in 1912 during the presidential election; “rode 15 miles to put in my vote.” At that time he was 81 years old.

Further appreciation of his life in Colorado is revealed— “grand climate all year round. I don’t have that horrible throat trouble that bothered me back east.” He also wrote a glowing description of a trip, driven “in one of the most magnificent cars I have ever seen,” by Colonel Meek, president of the Yule Marble Company, to the town of Marble; “8,000 feet in the air and a solid ledge of the purest, whitest marble.” He enjoyed a visit to Glenwood Springs and a “splendid hotel.” Hitchings was also generous in his praise of Denver “no city has the beautiful situation Denver has,” and “Denver will rank as one of our greatest cities.”

Ranch land was not the only property that was purchased by Hitchings. In 1892 his longtime friend and financial advisor Charles Kountze bought for him over 200 city lots in downtown Denver, largely in the

Berger addition, in what is now the historic Lower Downtown District. Many of the buildings in this district were the location of the mercantile business of prominent businessmen and are examples of the craftsmanship of Denver brick masons of the 1880's and 1890's. One of these is the Hitchings Block, with a building still preserved as The Hitchings Building.



It is interesting to note that the retired Hitchings' Denver letters never mention St. John's cathedral, and his name is never included in the list of clergy assisting Dean Hart during the Dean's long ministry. However, a Denver paper reported that Hitchings assisted Bishop Olmstead and the Dean at the laying of the new cathedral cornerstone in 1909, and in 1910 Dean Hart made Hitchings the Rector Emeritus of the cathedral. A photograph taken at Christmas time in the new cathedral shows the choir with Dean Hart on one side and the robed Hitchings the other side.



cathedral.

In 1911, his friend Charles Kountze died, and Hitchings wrote: "this loss is one of the severest blows I have ever had... Though I left Denver and he got married and raised a family, there was never a letup in our intimacy. His home was virtually my home when in Denver though I wouldn't room there as I was more independent at the Club. I cannot tell you how much I shall miss him." Hitchings' name is included in the dedication to "a true and loving friend" on the Charles Kountze memorial plaque in the

Hitchings' last available letter from Denver was written in 1913, and it is likely that he soon after returned to his family back east. He is listed in the Living Church Annual reports from St. John's Cathedral in 1915, 1916 and 1917 as "Rector Emeritus, Mishawaka, Indiana." He lived there with his nephew J. Alvin Scott until his death on April 13, 1917. In his will Hitchings states: "My body I would have committed to the earth if possible in the city of Denver, Colorado that it may go back again to dirt and awaiting the general resurrection of the last day when the earth and sea shall give up their dead at the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." St. John's Vestry minutes from April 14 say: "The vestry should meet the remains of the late Rev. H.B. Hitchings at the Depot on Wednesday, April 15, 1917, and attend the funeral at 4:00 p.m. on April 18, 1917."



Charles Kountze Residence, Denver

Not only did Horace Hitchings declare in his will his desire to be buried in his beloved Denver, but he also expressed his wish to be remembered there. "I give and bequeath the sum of \$2,000.00 for the purpose of placing in the church...some memorial of my rectorship." The result of this request, chosen by the vestry, was the beautifully carved Cathedra which now sits behind the communion rail in the cathedral.



The chair, a
the cathedra



copy of
in



Worcester, England, was carved by J&R Lamb, NYC and was installed in the apse in 1918. The three faces carved at the top of the cathedra represent Bishop Randall (Hitchings' Colorado mentor and mountain traveling companion), Bishop Franklin Spencer Spalding, and Hitchings. The choice of the portrayal of Bishop Randal, and, of course, Hitchings, is understandable, but it is still not known why Bishop Franklin Spalding is portrayed. He was the son of the first Colorado bishop, John Franklin Spalding, and he did serve as the dean of the church's newly established military school, Jarvis Hall in Montclair (now the site of Saint Luke's church), from 1893-1896. He went on to be the Missionary Bishop of Salt Lake and died in an auto accident in 1914. It is possible that he and Hitchings might have met in Denver, but there is no evidence of any particular connection. Vestry records do not indicate the reason for the choice and though the firm of Lamb Studios is still in existence, their records from the early 1900's have been given to the Library of Congress.

Hitchings' will is a revelation not only of his wealth, but also of his wide-spread generosity. Bequests were given to Berkeley Divinity School and to Trinity College for a ministry scholarship, to the town of Malden, Massachusetts for the care of the graves of his relatives, for books for the local library that "treat of Christianity," and "to the rector, wardens and Vestry of St. Stephen's, East Haddam, Connecticut, my first parish...an endowment to be used in support of the Rector of said parish."

In addition to the gift of a few personal possessions to his relatives, he requests: "The watch given to me by the Ladies of St. John's Parish, Denver Colorado in November 1868 I would have returned to the Ladies of said parish to be kept by them in some suitable place where it may be seen, as token of my high appreciation of the untiring zeal and effectual labor of the Ladies of Saint John's from the foundation of said parish."

Unfortunately, the watch was never found, but in the archives at St. John's there is a small silver cup inscribed "Rev. H.B. Hitchings from the Sabbath School children of St. John's Parish. 1868." It is good to know that Hitchings remembered and appreciated the early support of the women of St. John's, and the children of the Sabbath School.

The remainder of Hitchings' will provides for the sale of a very large amount of real estate, with 1/3 given to his nephew, J. Alvin Scott, 1/3 to Saint John's Cathedral, and 1/3 to Saint Luke's Hospital. He also left \$5,000 to the hospital for the endowment of "a free bed in said hospital to be known as "Hitchings Free Bed." Allen Breck in his book, *The Episcopal Church in Colorado, 1860-1863*, estimates that the 1/3 amount given to each recipient would have equaled around \$75,000.00.

It was a long journey for the grandson of a Revolutionary hero, from a quiet Connecticut town to a small brick church in Denver; his travels took him not only through the high mountains of Colorado and into the busy streets of New York City but also over the seas into other continents. His life as a priest brought light to thousands, and his generosity has provided countless years of support for the work of the God he served.

