

***THE PRINCE AND MRS. POTTER***

***Why the dinner jacket  
is called a Tuxedo***

***Grenville Kane's Account  
as told to J. Earle Stevens, Jr.***

***Written with footnotes for  
the Tuxedo Park Library 1979***

## THE PRINCE AND THE POTTER

Fifty years ago, when I was a senior in college, Grenville Kane <sup>1</sup>, last of the founders of the Tuxedo Club <sup>2</sup> left alive, told me several times the following story.

In the summer of 1886, the year Pierre Lorillard founded Tuxedo Park <sup>3</sup>, James Brown Potter <sup>4</sup>, one of its first residents, and Cora Potter <sup>5</sup>, his beautiful wife from the South, went to England and met the Prince of Wales - later Edward VII - at a court ball. The Prince, who was fond of pretty women, asked the Potters <sup>6</sup> to come to Sandringham <sup>7</sup> for the weekend. The Potters of course accepted, and before going, Mr. Potter asked the Prince what he should bring to wear. The Prince told Mr. Potter that he had adopted a short jacket <sup>8</sup> in the place of a tail coat for dinner in the country, and that if Mr. Potter went to his tailors <sup>9</sup> in London, he could get a similar jacket made. This Mr. Potter did and apparently he and Mrs. Potter had a pleasant weekend while Bertie, as ~~he~~ <sup>the prince</sup> was called, undoubtedly enjoyed looking across the table at the beautiful Cora.

When the Potters returned to Tuxedo that fall, Pierre Lorillard, Grenville Kane, and other members of the Club were not only impressed by the Potters' visit to Sandringham, but also found the jacket Mr. Potter brought back more appropriate than *tails* for informal dinners, and ~~they~~ <sup>they</sup> had it copied. Eventually, after wearing the new jacket for dinner <sup>10</sup> in Tuxedo, some of the early members were bold enough to wear it one evening at a bachelor dinner at Delmonico's, the only place in New York where gentlemen dined in public <sup>11</sup> at that time. Needless to say, the other diners at *Del's* were astonished, and when they asked what it was the men in short coats had on, they were told, *Oh that is what they wear for dinner up in Tuxedo*. Hearing Tuxedo mentioned, the curious diners quite naturally started calling the new jacket by that name <sup>12</sup>.

And so due to the Prince of Wales' interest in the beautiful Mrs. Potter, the dinner jacket was brought to this country by Mr. Potter and, when first seen in public, was called a *Tuxedo*.

## Footnotes

1. Mr. Kane was 31 when, in 1885, he helped organize the Tuxedo Club. In the late 1880's, as fleet captain of the New York Yacht Club, he sailed his racing yacht *Ailsa* across the Atlantic to take part in the Cowes regatta. He was a partner with T. Suffern Tailer in the banking business and later, a director of the Erie Railroad, a consultant of the Morgan Library, and President of the Naval Historical Society.
  2. The founders of the Tuxedo Club were a notable group of New Yorkers headed by Pierre Lorillard who was 52. They included his eldest son Pierre Lorillard Jr., who was 25 and later called *The Squire*, William Waldorf Astor, later the first Viscount Astor, Robert Goelet, C. Oliver Iselin, Grenville Kane, Ogden Mills, Herbert Claiborne Pell, and Allen T. Rice, editor of the north America Review.
  3. The founding of Tuxedo Park in 1886 was one of Pierre Lorillard's most notable achievements. In the early 1880's he made Newport a yachting center with his schooner *Vesta* and his steam yacht *Radha*, and in 18861 he won the English Derby with his American bred horse *Iroquois*. France made him Chevalier of the Legion of Honor for fitting out the Charnay archaeological expeditions to Central America.
  4. Mr. Potter, who was 33, was the son of Howard Potter, a distinguished financier and a nephew of Henry Codman Potter, Episcopal Bishop of New York. He entered business as a coffee broker and later became a member of the international banking house of Brown Brothers and Co. founded by his grandfather, James Brown.
  5. Mrs. Potter, who was 29, was born Cora Urquhart, eldest of the beautiful daughters of Colonel and Mrs. David Urquhart of New Orleans, and she created a flurry socially when she came to New York.
  6. The Potters, who were married in 1877, became the leaders of the social life of New York, which centered around Washington Square, and were the first to recognize Tuxedo and make it a rendezvous for society.
  7. Sandringham was an 11,000 acre estate in Norfolk which the Prince, who was 45, had bought with his Duchy of Cornwall revenue and where he took pains to create an informal atmosphere.
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8. The Prince loved clothes and whatever he chose to wear became the prevailing fashion overnight. Most of his innovations were inspired by comfort and convenience, and when Lord Dupplin invented the dinner jacket the Prince adopted it.
9. Henry Poole and Co. of Savile Row was the Prince's tailor. This firm, founded in 1806, was discovered by the Prince when he went to see the well-known actor Fechter play *Robert Macaire*. Noticing the elegant cut of Fechter's coat, the Prince asked him the name of his tailor and soon Poole was making most of the Prince's clothes.
10. Wanting to play a prank, Griswold Lorillard, Pierre Lorillard's second son, who was 22, went to the first Tuxedo Autumn Ball in a *tailless dress coat*. This coat, being cut above the waist, was much shorter than the dinner jacket adopted by his elders, and according to Town Topics, a society gossip sheet, it made Grizzly look *like a royal footman*. Not surprisingly, Grenville Kane never mentioned the incident.
11. Although gentlemen had long given stag dinners at Delmonico's, a fashionable restaurant at 14th Street and Fifth Avenue, it was not until the turn of the century that Society started dining in public. The first mixed dinner party at *Del's* was given by Mrs. Ogden Mills, about 1900, and was considered *delightfully audacious*.
12. In 1888, before going to live in England, William Waldorf Astor looked into the origin of the name Tuxedo, and found it came from the Indian words *P'tauk-seet-tough* meaning *The Home of the Bear*, Bear being the name of an Indian chief who ruled the region.

### Personal Note

In 1929, Grenville Kane, who was a director of the Erie Railroad, got me a summer job in the Engineering Department of the railroad in Jersey City. In the evening after work, I used to see Mr. Kane at the Club, where I was staying while my family was abroad, and we would often talk about the Erie and the early days of Tuxedo. It was during these conversations that I asked him to tell me why the dinner jacket was called a *Tuxedo*, and at my request he repeated the above story several times.

J. Earle Stevens, Jr.  
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