

Rev. Francis Ridgely Cotton (1895-1960)

By Jerry Long
c.2024



Bishop Francis R. Cotton



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky Paducah, KY, Turner Publishing Company, 1995, pp.48-49:

... Finally, on December 16, 1937 Pope Pius XI issued the decree entitled *Dilecto Filio*. This was the letter that answered the question that was uppermost among the Catholic populations of the new diocese. It told them the name of their new bishop. The man upon whom Pius XI had bestowed the title of First Bishop of Owensboro. This man was the Most Reverend Francis Ridgely Cotton.

In the selection of Francis R. Cotton, Pope Pius XI had chosen a priest whose ministerial experience included the opportunity to become well acquainted with the challenges and possibilities of Western Kentucky as well as the administrative duties that would be required of a bishop. Bishop Cotton had gained first hand experience in Western Kentucky when he served as an assistant pastor for four years (1922-1926) at St. Francis de Sales parish in Paducah, Kentucky. Following that, his work as both assistant chancellor (1921-31) and chancellor (1931-37) of the Diocese of Louisville kept him updated regarding the growth and the needs of the church in the

western third of the state, It came as no surprise to Francis Cotton on March 8, 1938, as he was bring installed as Bishop of Owensboro, that despite the tremendous progress since the pioneer days of Fr. Charles Nerinckx and Elisha Durbin, the new Diocese of Owensboro was still, in many respects, “mission territory”.



Courtesy of Brother Leo Willett, S.M. Marianist Provincialate

Birth: September 19, 1895, Bardstown, Kentucky

Baptism: October 4, 1895

Family: Only son of three children of Charles and Mary (Moore)

Education: Bethlehem Academy, Bardstown, KY (1903-1908); Valley Field Seminary, Canada (1908-1910); St. Meinrad Preparatory School, Indiana (1910-1915); Sulpician Seminary, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (1917-1920); Applinaris University, Rome, Italy (1932-1934)

Ordination: June 17, 1920

Ministry: St. Joseph’s Cathedral, Bardstown (June, 1920); St. Cecilia’s Church, Louisville (1920-1922); St. Francis de Sales, Paducah (1922-1926)

(Missions: LaCenter, Hampton, Dyersburg, Mason Mill and St. Marys Academy)

Assistant Chancellor: Diocese of Louisville, (1926-1931)

Chancellor: Diocese of Lousville (1931-1937)

Bishop: Diocese of Owensboro (1937-1960)

Consecration as Bishop: February 24, 1938, Cathedral of the Assumption, Lousville, KY – Archbishop John A. Floresh, Presider

Installaton as Bishop: March 8, 1938, St. Stephen’s Cathedral, Owensboro Archbishop John A. Floresh, Presider

Death: September 25, 1960, Owensboro, KY

Burial: Resurrection Cemetery, Owensboro, KY



Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015
(Evansville, IN, M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015)

page 14 – “Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology – 200 Historical Events,” by Jerry Long (compiled in celebration of Daviess County’s Bicentennial):

1937, 12-9 Owensboro Roman Catholic Diocese was formed out of the Louisville Diocese. On

16 December 1937 Rev. Francis R. Cotton was appointed bishop and on 18 January 1938 St. Stephen's was selected as the cathedral of the new diocese.

pages 137--140 – “The Catholic Church in Daviess County,” by Sarah Patterson:

Through the decades from the arrival of the first settlers in western Kentucky, the Catholic population continued to grow steadily. All of western Kentucky was under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Louisville, a situation that was becoming necessary to change. Increased population brought more responsibility to the bishop, but it also meant increased religious vocations of priests and sisters to serve the faithful. Soon came the time when the ability to further divide the state into separate dioceses was possible. In late 1937, Pope Pius XI announced that Louisville was to be raised to the dignity of an archdiocese and that there was to be a new diocese for western Kentucky with its seat in Owensboro. The Diocese of Owensboro would cover the western part of the state with the counties Breckinridge, Grayson, Edmonson, Warren and Allen being the eastern most parts of the diocese. Decreed on December 16, 1937, Father Francis R. Cotton of Louisville was named the first bishop. An astute businessman and planner, Bishop Cotton would strengthen the diocese financially and in the uniform practice of its faith. His consecration Mass was held at the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville the following February 24 and he was installed on March 8 in Owensboro at the new cathedral. With the elevation of Owensboro to the seat of the diocese, St. Stephen Church was elevated to the dignity of a cathedral, the home parish of the bishop. At the time of his installation, Bishop Cotton was responsible for the care of 24,000 Catholics in Western Kentucky. In 1938, Daviess County boasted of thirteen Catholic churches, ten parochial schools, two academies, and one junior college...

... Another women's religious community that came to County was the Carmelite Sisters with the particular task of viding care for the elderly. Bishop Cotton sought to est home for the elderly and purchased property on the east Owensboro. The fifteen acres of farmland previously bel to Mr. and Mrs. Fleming Bowlds became Cannel Home in 1951. At the invitation of Bishop Cotton, the Carmelite Sisters of Divine Heart of Jesus agreed to start the home and provide for the residents, which was opened in October 1952. The facility held forty-seven beds and the residents were cared for by sisters...

... In the 1940s Bishop Cotton secured the services of the newly formed Glenmary Home Missioner priests to minister in rural parishes of the dioceses. Founded by Father William Howard Bishop, a community of sisters was also formed in 1941 to serve the impoverished in the rural south and Appalachia. Since Daviess County has a high Catholic population, the Glenmarys have served in other parts of the diocese...

... The Sisters of the Lamb of God was founded in 1945 in France as a religious community for women with physical limitations who discerned the call to religious life but were refused by other communities due to their handicaps. Bishop Cotton visited their community in France and in 1958 invited the sisters to come to the diocese. Arriving in Owensboro in November of that year, the sisters were given a home on Parrish Avenue and the task to take a census of the diocese, beginning with Sts. Joseph and Paul Church...

... Bishop Cotton assigned Father Robert W. Connor to minister to the black community and his first accomplishment was to open a K-12 school at a home on 5th and Plum Streets. This school was taught by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and was called Catholic Colored School. The school would have anywhere from thirty-five to fifty-five students and was open to non-Catholic black families. The first graduating class was in 1945 and the ceremony was held in the basement of the cathedral since the school had no hall to accommodate such an event.

Five years after the founding of the school it was moved to a property on 7th and Sycamore, a predominantly black area, and renamed Blessed Sacrament School. At this time black Catholics were attending Mass at St. Stephen Cathedral but had to sit in the choir loft and receive communion only after the white Catholics had received theirs. Blessed Sacrament Chapel, located next to the school, was dedicated in June 1949...

... Looking to provide health care to the residents of Owensboro and beyond, Bishop Cotton began plans in 1944 to have a Catholic hospital built in the city, but these plans had to be postponed due to materials being channeled to the government for use in World War II.

Coming from Cincinnati, the Sisters of Mercy were set to manage the hospital. At that time, they operated ninety-two hospitals and sanitariums in the United States. They would have financed the project completely in 1944, but rising costs made them unable to do so when the project was revisited in 1946. The bishop organized a fundraising campaign for the hospital in the churches and peoples' homes and even received donations from non-Catholics. The sisters contributed \$388,000 to the hospital with \$150,000 being added from the people of Daviess County. Called Our Lady of Mercy Hospital, the four story building was located on Ford and Junction (later Robin Road) Avenues and held eighty beds. It included a chapel, chaplain's quarters, rooms for the sisters, a coffee shop and pharmacy. Dedicated on February 22, 1948, the hospital greatly relieved the workload of Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital, which was unable to service the population size of the area. By 1958, the need to add another wing became a necessity and forty-five beds were added. The hospital went through changes over the years in services offered. Obstetric services were ended in 1968 and a psychiatric unit was opened, which closed in 1975. Over the years the Sisters of Mercy would offer holistic health services to the sick and would reach out to the poor in the local community.

As the population in Owensboro was growing and transportation improving, a restructuring of the parishes and schools became necessary. In an announcement given on April 3, 1948, Bishop Cotton made the following changes.

St. Francis Academy and St. Joseph High School would be combined and the academy would be the central building with the intention to build a new high school facility (mentioned earlier).

Blessed Mother Church was created and a new church would be built on East 23rd Street. The church would include a school taught by the Ursuline Sisters of Mount St. Joseph.

The former Blessed Mother School would become an elementary school for St. Stephen Cathedral, taught by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth.

St. Joseph and St. Paul parishes would be combined to form Sts. Joseph and Paul Church. The children of this new unified parish would attend the grade school of St. Joseph, now Sts. Joseph and Paul.

The creation of the new parish and mergers were the result of much study of the layout of Owensboro. The schools and parishes were concentrated in the northern part of the city, but accommodations needed to be made as the city expanded southward. Already at this time the bishop made mention that it would be long until another parish would need to be erected in the near future in addition to Blessed Mother Church...

... The two final Catholic churches to be established in Daviess County were added in 1959 and 1960. The former, Our Lady of Lourdes, was erected on the south end of Frederica Street... Precious Blood Church was established in August 1960 on the west side of Owensboro on Fenmore Street. Parish boundary lines had to be changed and many parishioners were taken from the St. Stephen boundary. It was dedicated in September by Bishop Cotton, who would pass away just

twenty days later...

... The 1960s brought many transitions for the Catholic Church worldwide and for the Diocese of Owensboro in particular. After having celebrated Mass on September 25, 1960, Bishop Cotton retired to his room for a rest and was found to have died in his sleep,...



Kentucky Irish American, Louisville, KY, Saturday, 19 June 1920, p.1:

PRIESTS FOR OUR DIOCESE.

The Rev. Francis R. Cotton, of Bardstown, and Rev. Felix N. Pitt, of Fairfield, will be ordained priests for the Louisville diocese by Cardinal Gibbons at Baltimore on June 17. They will come to Kentucky immediately and will celebrate their first mass at their respective home towns.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, Thursday, 13 October 1932, p.7:

FATHER COTTON TO STUDY IN ROME

The Rev. Father Francis R. Cotton, chancellor of the diocese of Louisville, will leave Saturday for Rome, where he will take a postgraduate course in canon law. It is not determined exactly which college Father Cotton will be enrolled in on reaching Rome.

Father Cotton is a native of Bardstown and was ordained in 1920, serving a pastorate in Paducah before his appointment as chancellor about four years ago. He completed his studies for the priesthood in St. Mary's College, Baltimore, and the Catholic University at Washington.

Announcement of the new assignment is made in the current issue of The Record, official diocesan publication. Father Cotton is the second young priest of the diocese to be sent abroad by Bishop John A. Floersch. The Rev. Father Felix Newton Pitt, head of the diocesan school system, was sent abroad nearly two years ago for graduate study.

It also was announced that the Rev. ! Father Edmond Obrecht, abbot of Gethsemene Abbey, sailed Wednesday for America aboard the Isle de France after a tour of Cistercian monasteries of his order in central Europe.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 16 December 1937, p.1:

**Rev. Francis R. Cotton Is Named Bishop of Owensboro
Chancellor of Diocese of Louisville Appointed , By Pope Pius.**

Washington, Dec. 15. (AP) – The Apostolic delegation announced tonight that Pope Pius had appointed the Rev. Thomas H. McLaughlin to be bishop of Paterson, N. J., the Rev. Bartholomew J. Eustace to be bishop of Camden, N. J., and the Rev. Francis R. Cotton to be bishop of Owensboro, Ky.

All three dioceses are newly created.

The Rev. Father McLaughlin is now vicar general of Newark and rector of Immaculate Conception seminary of that diocese.

The Rev. Father Eustace is pastor of the Blessed Sacrament church, New Rochelle, N. Y.

The Rev. Father Cotton, the present chancellor of the diocese of Louisville, was born Sept. 19, 1895, at Bardstown, Ky. He was a student at St. Mary's seminary, Baltimore, and the Sulpician seminary, Washington. He was ordained June 17, 1920, and took a post graduate course in canon law at the Apollinaris in Rome. He spent six years as assistant in the Louisville diocese, and later was secretary to His Excellency the Most Rev. John A. Floersh, D. D.

Pope Pius also announced recently the establishment of two new archdioceses at Newark and Louisville.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 7 March 1938, p.5:



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 8 March 1938, p.1:

**1500 Attend Reception Here
for New Bishop; Installation Today**

The Most Reverend John A. Floersh, Archbishop of Louisville, presented to the new diocese of Owensboro its first bishop, the Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton, at a civic reception held in his honor at the Knights of Columbus home last night, as "a man of God: one who is devoted to the glory of God and salvation of souls. And withal," added the archbishop, "I wish to say he is human. He can see the human side of life. You may go to him, a father who has a heart, who will listen to you, sympathize with you and rejoice with you. That is your new leader."

Archbishop Floersh referred to the severance of the new Owensboro diocese from his old diocese as a "major operation, and not a painless one." When he learned that the then Father Cotton,

his chancellor, had been made bishop of the diocese, established by Pope Pius, the archbishop said he was consoled "because I knew the people in this section I had learned to love would have an able leader and because of the honor which had been bestowed on him."

Archbishop Floersh was applauded by the 1,500 Owensboroans and other residents of the new diocese at the reception as he announced he had granted a special dispensation for today so that the members of the Catholic Church may "enjoy the privilege of not fasting" on the day of installation. "On the next day you may continue your Lenten observance," he counselled.

Bishop Cotton referred to himself as the "junior bishop" and said he had been termed "a baby bishop in an infant diocese." He expressed his appreciation of the reception he had been tendered, which he said had already made him feel at home in Owensboro.

"One of my fondest memories is when as a boy I made trips from Bardstown to Owensboro to visit my relatives who were in business here," he recalled.

After receiving his appointment as bishop, he said, he read some history of this section and learned many residents of Daviess County came from Bardstown and were originally from Maryland. "My people also came from Maryland and Bardstown; therefore I must be related to many of you. I am glad I came from Bardstown to Daviess County," the new bishop added.

Bishop Cotton offered his assurance to Mayor Harry C. Smith of cooperation with him and the other civil officials and cooperation of the diocese, priests and laity, in all things that "are right."

In addition to Owensboro and Daviess County officials, civic leaders, members of the clergy and others in attendance, the father and two sisters of Bishop Cotton were there. They are C. R. Cotton and Mrs. Harry Loble, Seattle, Wash., and Mrs. Louise Jones. San Francisco.

Prelates and members of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church from various sections of the United States arrived in Owensboro Monday to participate in the installation of the Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton as first bishop of the new Owensboro Diocese at St. Stephen's Cathedral today.

Among the dignitaries here last night were the Most Reverend William Adrian, Bishop of Nashville, Tenn.; Most Reverend Moses Kiley, Trenton, N. J.; the Most Reverend John A. Floersh, Archbishop of Louisville; Abbot Ignatius of St. Meinrad, Indiana; Abbot Dunn, Gethsemane, Ky.; and Abbot Columban of Cullman, Ala.; the Very Reverend Erie B. Willet, vicar general, Louisville; and Monsignor R. C. Huff and the Rev. Aloysius G. Myering, Louisville.

Bishop Cotton arrived in Owensboro Monday afternoon with his party which included Archbishop Floersh and Bishop Kiley. The party was met at Lewisport by an Owensboro escort in charge of Martin Lancaster and J. V. Connor. The escort included priests of Owensboro and Daviess County, city and county and state police, Mayor Harry Smith, City Commissioners, County Judge James R. Wilson, County Commissioners and others. Bishop Cotton was escorted to St. Stephen's Cathedral and the rectory which will be his place of residence. The approach of the bishop's party was heralded as it entered the city with the ringing of church bells, which continued until Bishop Cotton arrived at St. Stephen's Cathedral.

Civic Reception

Ceremonies leading to the installation today, opened with a civic reception at the Knights of Columbus home on Frederica Street Monday evening. Rev. Albert J. Thompson, pastor of the cathedral, was master of ceremonies. Speakers included LaVega Clements, Mayor Harry Smith, Hugh P. Aud, County Judge James R. Wilson, Martin Yopp, Paducah. Bishop Cotton also spoke.

The installation of Bishop Cotton will take place at St. Stephen's Cathedral at 10:30 a.m. today with Archbishop Floersh presiding. A procession, originating at the Knights of Columbus home, will be led by the cross-bearer and acolytes, and will include about 250 priests from the new Owensboro Diocese and other dioceses. When the priests reach the Cathedral the Bishops and their chaplains, vested for the Pontifical Mass, will join the procession coming from the rectory.

The middle section of the Cathedral will be reserved for members of the clergy, Sisters and delegates. The side aisles of the church will be open to the public. Admissions to the reserved sections will be by card. Choirs from the three Catholic churches in Owensboro and St. Anthony's Church, Browns Valley, will sing and an orchestra under the direction of Prof. George R. Vestal will furnish the music for the ceremonies. A Pontifical Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Cotton.

At 1 p.m., a banquet in honor of Bishop Cotton will be served at the Cathedral auditorium. More than 200 priests will attend. Banquet speakers will include Msgr. Raffo, Bishop Adrian, Rev. A. C. Zoeller, Archbishop Floersh and Bishop Cotton. An orchestra composed of musicians from Mt. St. Joseph College and Academy, St. Frances Academy and St. Joseph School will furnish music for the banquet.

Another banquet, open to the public, will be served at the K. of C. home.

In addition to the down town section, the three Catholic churches, the rectories, St. Frances Academy and St. Joseph School have also been decorated for the installation. The papal colors of yellow and gold and the national colors have been combined in the decorations.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 8 March 1938, pp.1 & 9:



Left: Close-up of the first bishop of the Catholic diocese of Owensboro, the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton. Right: Bishop Francis R. Cotton's father, C. R. Cotton, Seattle, Wash., and two sisters, Mrs. Louise Jones, San Francisco, and Mrs. Harry Loble, Seattle, attended the installation of Bishop Cotton. LaVega

Clements, Owensboro, is shown welcoming the members of the family. Left to right they are Mrs. Jones, Mr. Clements, Mr. Cotton and Mrs. Lobley.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 March 1938, pp.1 & 3:

**Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton Is Installed As Bishop
Of New Diocese At Colorful Ceremony**

Archbishop John A. Floersh, of Louisville, Presides at Historic Occasion
At St. Stephen's Cathedral In Owensboro Tuesday; Church Dignitaries
Attend Installation and Pontifical Mass.

The Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton was installed first bishop of the recently created diocese of Owensboro at impressive and colorful ceremonies held at St. Stephen's Cathedral at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday.

His excellency, the Most Rev. John A. Floersh, D. D., archbishop of Louisville, presided at the ceremony. The ceremony started with the procession originating at the Knights of Columbus home, with the cross-bearer and acolytes leading.

The ceremonies, which began at 10:30 a.m., marked by the rendition of beautiful music, continued until 12:45 p.m., were followed by banquets at the Cathedral auditorium and the Knights of Columbus home in honor of Bishop Cotton.

Archbishop Floersh and Bishop Cotton spoke briefly to the enormous crowd that filled the Cathedral that was decorated in the papal colors of white and gold. The entire installation ceremonies were carried on the air by Radio Station WOMI.

In the line of march about 250 priests from various dioceses took part. When the last of the priests reached the Cathedral, the bishops and their chaplains came from the rectory, where they had vested for the Pontifical Mass. The first was Most Rev. Wm. Adrian, Bishop of Nashville, followed by Most Rev. Moses Kiley of Trenton, N. J. The third was Most Rev. Joseph Elmer Ritter of Indianapolis, followed by Most Rev. Theodore Reverman of Superior, Wisconsin, Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton, newly consecrated bishop and then Most Rev. John A. Floersh, Archbishop of Louisville. Rev. Bernard Stoelker, Russellville, was the crosier bearer and Manuel Carrico, the standard bearer.

Official Installation

After making an act of adoration at the side altar where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, the Procession of all the ministers of the Mass went to the Sanctuary to prepare for the official installation of the new Bishop. Bishop Cotton took the faldstool in the center of the sanctuary, while Archbishop Floersh took the throne on the left side of the Sanctuary.

The Bull having been read, which is the official document of the Incoming Bishop, the Te Deum was sung, and the Archbishop escorted Bishop Cotton to the throne on the left, and he, the Archbishop, proceeded to his throne on the right of the main altar. At this juncture of the ceremony, Bishop Cotton had full juris diction over the diocese and full power as Ordinary of the Diocese of Owensboro. Each of the priests of the new diocese now made their obeisance to their new bishop by kneeling and kissing his ring and promising obedience.

Archbishop Floersh spoke a few words to the assembled congregation and Bishop Cotton responded.

Vested for Pontifical Mass

Bishop Cotton then returned to the throne, where he vested for the Pontifical Mass.

Ministers were Archpriest, Rt. Rev. Hugh O'Sullivan; deacons of honor, Rev. James F. Norman and Rev. Joseph McAleer; deacon of the Mass, Rev. James Iug-don; chaplains to Archbishop Floersh, Rev. Edwin Russell and Rev. L. Beruratto; Masters of Ceremonies, Rt. Rev. D. A. Driscoll, Rev. A. J. Gerft, and Rev. Geo. Boehmicke; minor ministers, seminarians from St. Meinrad,

The choirs of the four parishes, St. Joseph's, St. Paul, St. Stephen of Owensboro and St. Anthony's of Browns Valley, Ky., sang Charles Gounod's Solemn Mass in Honor of St. Cecilia. At the offertory Gounod's Ave Maria was sung by Mrs. Spalding Wathen, with violin obligato by Prof. Vestal. An orchestra of 12 pieces played the accompaniment of the Mass. Prof. George Vestal directed, and Mrs. J. W. Richardson presided at the organ. The choirs taking part in the Mass music were as follows: St. Joseph's: Leone Stengell, Mrs. F. X. Hayden, Miss Catherine Teenes, Mrs. F. W. Arnold, Minnie Ebelhar, Agnes Kamey, Paul Mischel, Herman Oberst, Mrs. Will Mischel, Dolly Mischel, Rachel Gillis, Mrs. Sidney Hayden, August Graf.

St. Stephen's: Sydney Brown, Mrs. Glenn Coulter, Mrs. Catherine Boggess, Mary Ellen Rapier, Dorothy Rapier, Mrs. Spalding Wathen, Mrs. Reginald Lancaster, Mrs. Geo. Glahn, Mrs. A. H. Williams, Ms. Bernard Hill, Mrs. Chas. Sweeney, Elizabeth Sweeney, Helen Ling, Mrs. Joe Urban, Mrs. J. B. Willett, Corine Coombs, Bernard Hill, Sam Ewing, Billie Phillips.

St. Paul's: Lucy Henning, Core Jane Jesse, Mary Elizabeth O'Bryan, Mary Louise Payne, A. X. Robertson, Mrs. Frank J. Medley, Mrs. James R. Higdon, Anna Rhodes, Nina M. Howard, Mrs. Mabel O'Bryan, Hallie Murphy, Mrs. Robert McCormick, Mrs. F. A. Brake, Elmer Brown, Chas. Clary, Mrs. Ernest Rogers, Mrs. Hubert Thompson, Bert Snyder, Parker Medley, Mrs. Walter Garry.

St. Anthony's, Browns Valley: Rita Wethington, Angela Wethington, William Wethington, and Herman Wethington.

Orchestra: Erminia Winter, Mrs. Bernard Alvey, Elizabeth O'Bryan, Joan Bamberger, Mrs. Stiles, Martha Baumgarten, James Danhauer, Joseph Murphy, Helen Wethington, Hart Rapier, George Weldon, Arthur Lee Small, Mrs. S. W. Richardson, organist, Prof. Geo. Vestat, director.

At the conclusion of the Mass, a recessional by the organ and orchestra consisted of Gounod's March Romaine. The clergy proceeded to the K. C. hail and the bishops to the rectory.

Banquet for Bishop

A banquet in honor of Bishop Cotton, for more than 200 members of the clergy was held at the Cathedral auditorium at 2 p.m. This concluded the festivities of the day. Banquet speakers included: Rt. Rev. Msgr. Charles R. Raffo, "The Archdiocese of Louisville"; Most Rev. William L. Adrian, D. D., "The Holy Father"; Rev. A. C. Zoeller, "The New Diocese of Owensboro"; The Most Rev. John A. Floersh, Archbishop of Louisville, "Remarks," and the Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton.

The banquet hall was decorated in the papal colors, yellow and white. Crystal containers of snapdragons were used in decoration of the tables, and crystal candlesticks held yellow candles. Favors were yellow miters with tiny gold crosses. The guest of honor table was decorated with crystal containers of yellow roses and all of the pointments were in silver.

Music for the banquet was furnished by an orchestra composed of designated members of the orchestra of Mt. St. Joseph College and Academy, St. Frances Academy, and St. Joseph School, Owensboro. They included the following:

Personnel of Orchestras

Mt. St. Joseph College, Catherine Sands, conductor; viola, Janice Woods; harp, Helen Easton; Mt. St. Joseph Academy, accompanist, Mary Christine Wachter; violins, Hazel French, Mary Margaret Clark, Mary Margaret Fecher, Mary Margaret Evans; cello, Mary Ann Grievy; flute, Alicia Mahoney.

St. Frances Academy, violins, Marian Allen, Mary Margaret Baseheart, Ethel Wimsatt; trumpets, Mary Rose Emler, Angela Wethington; flute, Helen Wethington; cello, Betty O'Bryan; bass, Lorraine Cockriel; drums, George Bell.

St. Joseph School, violins, Martha Baumgarten, Lena Mae Hartz, Gertrude Cox, Eleanor Herman, Marjorie Higdon, Mary Ruth Johnson; clarinets, Beverly Jane Frey, Elizabeth Ann Mischel, Mary Louise Wilkerson; trombone, Paul Coomes.

Among the visiting church officials were Archbishop J. A. Floersh, Louisville; Most Reverend Theodore Reverman, Superior, Wis.; Most Reverend Moses Kiley, Trenton, N. J.; Most Reverend William Arian Adrian, Nashville, Tenn.; Most Reverend Ritter, Indianapolis, Ind.; Abbot Ignatius, St. Meinrad, Ind.; Abbot Dunn, Gethsemane, Kentucky; Abbot Columban, Cullman, Ala.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 March 1938, p.3:

Official Notice Of Election Of Bishop Francis Cotton Is Read

The Papal Bull, announcing the election of the Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton as Bishop of the Owensboro Diocese, was read at the installation services at St. Stephen's Cathedral Tuesday by Father Richard Maloney, Louisville, formerly of Owensboro. It was as follows:

"Pius, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to our beloved children the clergy and laity of the city and diocese of Owensboro, health and apostolic blessing. To the new Cathedral Church of Owensboro, which was erected by Apostolic Letter 'Universal Catholici Orbis,' given under the seal on the ninth day of this month and year, and which was constituted a suffragan of the Metropolitan Church of Louisville, by the letter 'Quo Christifidelium' given on the following day, by virtue of Our Apostolic authority and on the advice of our venerable brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, we have this day elected our beloved son, Francis R. Cotton, chancellor of the archiepiscopal curia of Louisville, and we have placed him over it as Bishop and Pastor.

"By this our letter we now make known this fact to all of you and we command you in the Lord that, while receiving this same Francis, your elected Bishop, as the father and pastor of your souls with devotion and due honor, you also show to him reverence and give obedience to his salutary admonitions and commands, so that he may rejoice to have found in you devoted children and you may have joy in receiving him as a kind father.

"We also wish and command that it be the concern and duty of the Ordinary who now governs your Diocese to have this Our Letter read publicly from the pulpit of the Cathedral Church on the first Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation following its receipt.

"Given at Rome at St. Peter's, in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and thirty-seven, on the 16th day of December, in the 16th year of Our Pontificate.

"Sig.

"Thomas Pius Cardinal Boggiani, O. P.

"Chancellor of the Holy Roman Church.

"Registered in the Apostolic Chancery, Vo. 58 No. 54 Aloysius Trussardi."



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 March 1938, p.3:

**Personal Letter To New Bishop
From Rome Is Read At Service**

The official letter from Rome to Bishop F. R. C. was read by the Rev. Richard Maloney, Louisville, at the installation services, held at St. Stephen's Cathedral Tuesday. It was as follows: "Pius, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God.

"To Our beloved son, Francis R. Cotton, chancellor of the archiepiscopal curia of Louisville, elected Bishop of Owensboro, health and apostolic blessing.

"The office of the supreme apostolate, committed to Our humble Person, by which we rule the whole Christian world, places on us the burden of most diligently providing for all churches bishops endowed with knowledge and ability to feed, guide and govern well the Lord's flock entrusted to their care.

"Therefore, since the Cathedral Church of Owensboro, erected by our Apostolic Letter 'Universal Catholici Orbis,' given under the seal on the 9th day of this month and constituted a suffragan see of the Metropolitan Church of Louisville, by Our Letter 'Quo Christifidelium,' given on the following day, must be provided with its pastor, We, on the advice of our venerable brothers, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, and by virtue of Our Apostolic authority, elect you to it and place you over it as Bishop and Pastor. We commit to you in full the care, government and administration of the Church of Owensboro in spiritual as well as in temporal matters, together with all the rights and privileges, duties and obligations attached to this pastoral office.

"It is our wish, moreover, that besides fulfilling the other requisites of law, before you receive episcopal consecration, you make the profession of Catholic faith, and take the prescribed oaths according to the established form, in the presence of any Catholic Bishop whom you choose who is in peace and communion with the Apostolic See, and forward these documents, signed and sealed by you and the aforesaid Bishop as soon as possible to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation.

"For your greater convenience, we grant you the privilege of being lawfully consecrated Bishop outside the city of Rome, by a Catholic Bishop, with two other Catholic Bishops assisting you on the condition that they enjoy the favor of and are in Communion with the Apostolic See.

"Wherefore, to our venerable brother, the Bishop whom you choose for this, by this same letter, do we commit the office and mandate of conferring upon you episcopal consecration. However, we strictly command that unless you have first made the profession of faith, the customary oaths mentioned above, you should not dare receive episcopal consecration, nor should

the Bishop, whom you choose, confer it upon you, under the penalties provided in law. Should you disregard this our command.

"We firmly hope and trust that with the strength of p the Lord assisting you, the new Church of Owensboro, through your pastoral industry and fruitful zeal, may be beneficially governed and may receive an ever greater increase in spiritual as well as in temporal growth.

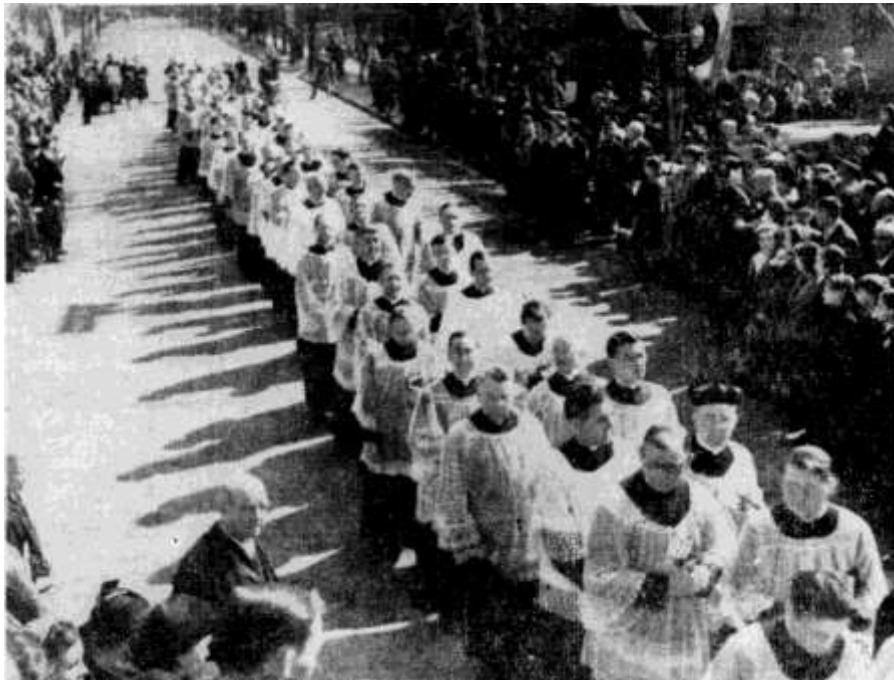
"Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, in the year of our Lord one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-seven, on the sixteenth day of December, in the sixteenth year of our Pontificate.

"Thomas Pius Cardinal Boggiani, O. P.

"Chancellor of the Holy Roman Church. Registered in the Apostolic Chancery, volume 58, No. 54, Aloysius Trussardi. "



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 March 1938, p.10:



Member of the Catholic clergy are pictured here at they proceeded to St. Stephen's cathedral Tuesday morning, from the Knights of Columbus home, for the installation of the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton as bishop of the Owensboro diocese.



Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1953, William Foster Hayes, Messenger Job Printing Co., Owensboro, KY, 1944, pp.201-203:

THE NEW DIOCESE

A little over a century after Father Durbin began his missionary labors in that section of the wilderness mentioned above, and almost exactly one hundred years after Father (later Bishop)

Spalding preached his memorable sermon in the Court House, the centenary was fittingly observed by the establishment of the new Diocese of Owensboro. And it is further appropriate that this Diocese covers approximately the same territory traversed by the zealous missionary in his lonely journeyings.

By papal bulls of the 9th and 10 of December, 1937, the Diocese of Owensboro was erected and the Diocese of Louisville was raised to the rank and dignity of a metropolitan church, to which the new diocese was attached as suffragan. The Owensboro Diocese contains an area of 12,502 square miles and embraces thirty-two counties, being all the Kentucky counties west of (and including) Grayson, Butler, Allen, and Warren. Its creation was naturally an occasion of great joy among the adherents of that faith, and indeed of lively interest in the entire community.

On December 16, 1937, the Holy See announced the appointment of the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton, then chancellor of the Louisville Diocese, to be Bishop and Pastor of the new Diocese, an appointment which was received with as much pleasure and enthusiasm as was the creation of the Diocese. But one other matter of great interest and importance was yet to be decided. One of the Owensboro churches would be designated the Cathedral, but which one?



The interest and accompanying suspense were naturally greatest in the two larger parishes, St. Stephen's and St. Paul's. The members of the former based their anticipation on the fact of their new church building and the handsome new rectory which was then building; while those of St. Paul's reasonably expected the honor because it was the largest parish and was for many years the ranking parish in Owensboro. Even an outsider can readily understand that such a situation must have aroused an interest amounting to anxiety. This was finally relieved on January 18, 1938, when at a meeting of the clergy of the new Diocese, St. Stephen's church was selected as the cathedral.

The new Bishop was solemnly consecrated in the Cathedral of the Assumption at Louisville on February 24, 1937, Archbishop John A. Floersh (of that cathedral) being the consecrator and Bishops Moses E. Kiley of Trenton, New Jersey, and Edward F. Hoban of Rockford, Illinois, the co-consecrators.

Bishop Cotton, first bishop of the newly-created diocese, was installed as such with elaborate and impressive ceremonies held at the newly designated cathedral on March 8, 1938; Archbishop Floersch presided. Some 250 priests from various dioceses were in attendance and a vast throng filled the great cathedral.



Messenger Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 26 September 1960, pp.1: & 14:

Bishop Cotton Dies Of Heart Attack At Home

Has Headed Diocese Here Since 1938

The body of the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton, the first bishop of the Owensboro Diocese, will be taken to St. Stephen's Cathedral Tuesday afternoon, to lie in state until funeral services there Friday morning.

Bishop Cotton, who has headed this diocese of 32 western Kentucky counties since 1938, died Sunday of a heart attack.

He was found in his bed, where he apparently had died two hours earlier, by the Rev. Anthony Higdon, when he failed to respond to a call to lunch at the bishop's residence at 1535 Frederica St.

Funeral services for the 65-year-old bishop will be held at 10:30 a.m. Friday at St. Stephen's Cathedral. The Most Rev. John A. Floersch, archbishop of the Diocese of Louisville, will officiate at the solemn pontifical requiem Mass.

A number of bishops and archbishops from other dioceses are expected to be in Owensboro to attend the Mass. Telegrams advising of the bishop's death were sent to other dioceses Monday morning.

Bishop Cotton is survived by his stepmother, Mrs. Corrine Cotton, Seattle, Wash., and two sisters, Mrs. Louise Gilmore, Orlando, Fla., and Mrs. Mildred Culliton of Seattle.

The bishop has been the head of the Owensboro diocese since his appointment in December of 1937. He was consecrated a bishop Feb. 24, 1938, at the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville. He was installed as bishop at ceremonies in St. Stephen's Cathedral on March 8, 1938.

Bishop Cotton was born Sept. 19, 1895, at Bardstown, Ky. His 40 years of church work were spent in Kentucky.

He first received schooling at Bethlehem Academy in Bardstown and began his education for the priesthood at Valley Field Seminary in Canada. The bishop later attended preparatory school, at St. Meinrad, Ind., and received his A. B. degree at St. Mary Seminary at Baltimore, Md., in 1916. His A.M. degree was conferred at the latter institution the following year. He was a student of theology at Sulpician Seminary, Catholic University, from 1919 to 1920. He did his graduate work at Apollinaris University, Rome, Italy, from 1933 to 1934.

He was ordained a Catholic Priest June 17, 1920. His first assignment was as assistant pastor of St. Joseph's Church, in Bardstown. In 1920 he went to Louisville where he was assistant pastor of St. Cecilia Church. In 1922 he moved to Paducah where he was assistant pastor of St. Francis de Sales Church until Feb. 7, 1926.

Bishop Cotton had been elevated to assistant chancellor of the Louisville diocese in 1926, a post he served until 1931. At this time he also served as assistant pastor of St. John's Church, Louisville.

In 1931 he was elevated to the position of chancellor of the Louisville diocese, where he served until the creation of the Owensboro diocese and his appointment to head it.

In 1949 he and Archbishop Floersch were received by Pope Pius XII in private audience.

That was one of several visits he made to the Vatican, where in 1959 he was received privately by Pope John XXIII.

Serving as administrator of the diocese until Bishop Cotton's post is filled will be the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Gilbert Henninger. His appointment was announced following a meeting of diocese

consultants Sunday evening. Msgr. Henninger will serve as head of the diocese until Pope John XXIII appoints a new bishop to fill the vacancy left by the death of Bishop Cotton.

In the year in which Bishop Cotton took office, there were 58 parishes served by 40 priests, compared to the present 75 priests who serve 63 parishes. Catholic hospitals were established at Owensboro, Morganfield and Paducah; the Catholic census increased from 24,000 to 36,000 and the Catholic school enrollment from approximately 4,700 children to more than 11,000. To take care of this increase in enrollment the original 33 grade schools were increased from 11 to 22 and a Catholic college (Brescia College) was created.

The Paducah hospital established through the efforts of Bishop Cotton was purchased at a cost of \$500,000. The Paducah Riverside Hospital was named the Lourdes Hospital, and is the only Catholic institution of its kind in the Purchase area of southwestern Kentucky.

Among achievements noted during Bishop Cotton's tenure was the establishment of two additional orders of men, bringing the total to four. The original four religious orders of women was increased to 10. The 33 churches with resident pastors was increased to 39, and the 23 churches without resident pastors was increased to 26.

Officers of the funeral Mass will be the Most Rev. John A. Floersh, D. D., archbishop of Louisville, celebrant, assisted by the Very Rev. Anthony G. Higdon, rector of St. Stephen's Cathedral and dean of the Owensboro Deanery. Deacons of Honor: the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Felix Pitt, superintendent of schools, archdiocese of Louisville, and the Rt. Rev. John M. Higgins, diocesan consultant, St. Vincent.

Deacon of the Mass: the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Albert J. Thompson, dean of the Eastern Deanery, Leitchfield.

Subdeacon: the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph L. Spalding, dean of the Central Deanery, Morganfield.

Masters of Ceremonies: the Rev. Thomas Clark and Rev. Leonard Alvey.

Funeral sermon: the Most Rev. Henry J. Grimmelman, S.T.D., bishop of Evansville.

The chancery office announced today that the Office of the Dead will begin at 10 a.m. (CDT) Friday, with the funeral mass to start at 10:30 a.m.

Burial will be in the new Catholic Cemetery on the Leitchfield Road.



Messenger Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 28 September 1960, p.4B (editorial):

Bishop Cotton Will Be Remembered As One Of Our Greatest Men

In the death of the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton, Owensboro has lost an ardent advocate, and the Catholic people of his diocese have lost a devoted leader. To the advancement of forces that make a progressive community, in a good spiritual climate, Bishop Cotton gave his life.

Shock, and a deep sense of loss are the first reactions to the unexpectedness of his death. The magnitude of the void left by his sudden departure from the Owensboro scene of today, which he helped to create, slowly impresses itself upon this city and the diocese of which he made it the headquarters.

Looking backward upon the accomplishments of Bishop Cotton during the 22 years he presided over the Owensboro diocese, one is impressed by the growth of his establishment in both his physical and spiritual aspects.

His achievements marked him as a great builder of human life in his area, religious thought, and the material things necessary to the growth of education, religious life, health facilities and economic opportunities for Owensboro citizens of today and tomorrow.

Monuments to his genius for the expansion of the physical dwellings of the activities he supervised meet the eye in many places in the diocese. Outstanding in Owensboro are: Brescia College, Our Lady of Mercy Hospital and Catholic High School. Churches and schools have multiplied in the generation he served here as in few places in the nation.

In the 20-year span from 1938-58, the growth of the diocese is shown below:

	1938	1958
Bishops	1	1
Diocesan priests	41	58
Churches (w/ resident pastor)	33	39
Churches w/out resident pastor)	23	26
Chapels	5	30
Parochial Schools	29	48
Pupils	3081	8329
High Schools	7	20
Pupils	458	1 859
Colleges (junior-1938, senior- 1958)	1	1
Students	33	583
Public School Pupils Under Religious Instruction		552
Total Under Catholic Instruction	4734	12,266
Teachers	186	375
Religious Orders of Women	4	10
Religious Orders of Men	2	4
Seminaries	0	1
Seminarians (Diocesan)	22	45
Hospitals	0	2
Bed Capacity	0	145
In-patients	0	6125
Out-patients	0	6786
Homes for the Aged	0	1
Baptisms (infants)	856	1 444
Baptisms (adults, converts)	96	168
Catholic Population	24,509	37,335

In 1938 approximately 30 percent of Catholic students were enrolled in parochial schools. Now the figure is around 90 percent -- just about tops in the United States.

Bishop Cotton was a churchman of many talents. He had a keen grasp of law -- of the courts as well as of his church. He could sketch a building design till an architect's work was well started before he took over. His business acumen, especially in real estate and construction, was the envy of those with whom he dealt. It prompted one of his admirers, when addressing a recent money-raising dinner, to say of him that if he were not wedded to his church, he could have

commanded a salary in six figures as a corporation executive. When told of this, his modesty and manner were construed to indicate he would have preferred not to have been thus complimented, remarking: "This is why I don't attend these affairs."

As an organizer, Bishop Cotton was conspicuously successful, both in his ecclesiastical capacity and in his work as a business executive. It has been said of him that though his shoes may be hard to fill as a combination of the religious shepherd and businessman, they will be easy to fill to the extent that organization may make it easy. Every detail of every activity in which a successor must engage has been recorded and catalogued by Bishop Cotton.

Bishop Cotton sometimes seemed austere to his members, due to his adherence to the belief that principles, and the rules made by an organization to protect them, are the foundation of enduring rectitude and success. He was not one to do as many do in civil life; that is, to find out the popular position and then take it, his closest associates tell us. His course he believed was in the ultimate best interest of those he sought to serve. They also saw in Bishop Cotton a flexibility of mind that, though it would not permit a compromise with principle, would place the ultimate good of a member, as he saw it, first in making a difficult decision.

Bishop Cotton will be remembered by many for his personal charms. Talks with friends around the Third and Allen Streets intersection were always enjoyed by both parties. His humanism and sense of humor were keen. At gentle ribbing he shone, as his barber and many others well know. In light moods, his laughter went deep, as did his sober thoughts on serious occasions.

Born an aristocrat, and reared in an environment of relative opulence, Bishop Cotton was a democratic bishop. He was expected to have a chauffeur, but he drove his own car. He was expected to take a secretary on his trips in the interests of his church. He went alone, or with other churchmen. He was generous to a fault with his own money, but scrutinized closely every expenditure of the diocese or any funds entrusted to him by his people.

Bishop Cotton will be remembered for his many good qualities, not the least of which was his outstanding emphasis on education, and the fruits it bore in Owensboro.



Messenger Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 28 September 1960, p.1A:



Body Lies In State – The body of Bishop Francis R. Cotton, who died Sudan morning, was moved to St. Stephen’s Cathedral yesterday where it will lie in state until the time of funeral at 10’30 a.m. Friday. The bishop had been head of the Owensboro Diocese, which encompassed 32 Western Kentucky counties, since 1937.



FORM V. S. NO. T-4 REV. 1-56 FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE NATIONAL OFFICE VITAL STATISTICS		COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		FILE NO. 116 60 21403
Registration District No. 410		Primary Registration District No. 2145		
1. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY <u>Daviess</u>		2. USUAL RESIDENCE a. STATE <u>Ky.</u> b. COUNTY <u>Daviess</u>		
b. CITY OR TOWN <u>Owensboro</u>		c. LENGTH OF STAY (in this place) <u>22 yrs</u>		c. CITY OR TOWN <u>Owensboro Ky.</u>
d. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION <u>1535 Frederica St.</u>		d. STREET ADDRESS <u>1535 Frederica St.</u>		
3. NAME OF DECEASED a. (First) <u>Francis</u> b. (Middle) <u>R.</u> c. (Last) <u>Cotton</u>		4. DATE OF DEATH (Month) (Year) (Day) <u>9-25-60</u>		
5. SEX <u>Male</u>	6. COLOR OR RACE <u>W.</u>	7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED <u>Single</u>	8. DATE OF BIRTH <u>9-19-95</u>	9. AGE (In years last birthday) <u>65</u>
10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) <u>Bishop Catholic Dioceses</u>		10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY		11. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) <u>Bardstown Ky.</u>
12. FATHER'S NAME <u>Charles R. Cotton</u>		14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME <u>Mary C. Moore</u>		
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U. S. ARMED FORCES? (If yes, give war or dates of service) <u>NO</u>		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <u>404-52-500</u>		17. INFORMANT <u>Res. Robert Carnas</u>
18. CAUSE OF DEATH PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY: IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a) <u>Coronary Thrombosis</u>		INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH <u>Instantly</u>		
Conditions, if any, which gave rise to above cause (a) stating the underlying cause last. DUE TO (b) _____ DUE TO (c) _____		PART II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE TERMINAL DISEASE CONDITION GIVEN IN PART I(a) <u>4201</u>		
19. WAS AUTOPSY PERFORMED? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		20. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		
21a. DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED (Enter nature of injury in Part I or Part II of item 18.)		21b. TIME OF INJURY Hour Month, Day, Year a. m. p. m.		
21c. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/> NOT WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/>		21d. PLACE OF INJURY (e. g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)		
21e. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION		COUNTY STATE		
22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from <u>Oct 1956</u> to <u>9-25, 1960</u> , that I last saw the deceased alive on <u>5-25, 1960</u> and that death occurred at <u>11:30 a.m.</u> , from the causes and on the date stated above.				
23a. DATE SIGNED <u>9-28-60</u>	23b. ADDRESS <u>9207 Frederica</u>	23c. SIGNATURE <u>Thomas Brown MD</u> (Degree or title)		
24a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL (Specify) <u>Burial</u>	24b. DATE <u>Sept 30 1960</u>	24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY <u>New Catholic Cem.</u>	24d. LOCATION (City, town, or county) (State) <u>Daviess Co Ky</u>	
25a. DATE REC'D BY LOCAL REG. <u>9-30-60</u>	25b. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE <u>Nancy D. Shoemaker</u>	26. FUNERAL DIRECTOR <u>Owensboro Funeral Home</u> ADDRESS <u>734 Frederica St Owensboro Ky</u>		



Messenger Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 1 October 1960, pp.1 & 5:

Funeral Services Held For Bishop Cotton, Who Was First Head Of Owensboro Diocese

Catholics of the Owensboro diocese Friday paid their final respects to the Most Rev. Francis Ridgely Cotton; the first and only bishop of this comparatively young, but growing diocese.

Bishop Cotton died of a heart attack Sunday morning while resting before lunch in his room at the residence at 1535 Frederica St., just five days after his 65th birthday.

Members of the diocese were joined by several hundred church dignitaries, including archbishops, bishops, monsignors, priests and nuns as funeral services were held Friday morning at St. Stephen's Cathedral.

The Most Rev. John A. Floersh, archbishop of the Diocese of Louisville, officiated at the solemn pontifical requiem mass, assisted by the Very Rev. Anthony G. Higdon, pastor of St. Stephens Cathedral.

The funeral sermon was given by the Most Rev. Henry J. Grimmelman, S. T. D., bishop of Evansville.

Services at the grave in the new Catholic Cemetery on the Leitchfield Road were conducted by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Gilbert Henninger, who has been named temporary administrator of the Owensboro diocese.

The cortege to the cemetery produced probably the longest procession of automobiles in Owensboro's history.

St. Stephen's was comfortably filled for the funeral services, which started at 10 a.m. with the Office of the Dead.

High-ranking dignitaries of the church occupied the first five pews to the left of the altar. Across the aisle were seated relatives of the bishop, including his step-mother, Mrs. Corrine Cotton, Seattle, Wash., and two sisters, Mrs. Mildred Culliton of Seattle, and Mrs. Louise Gilmore, Orlando, Fla,

To the right of the family sat visiting dignitaries of state and city, including Lt. Gov. Wilson Wyatt, representing the state of Kentucky; Owensboro Mayor Ben Hawes, City Councilman Frank X. Murphy and City Manager Max Rhoads.

Along both sides of the aisles back of the family and dignitaries were nearly 200 priests and more than 50 nuns representing the various orders in the Owensboro diocese.

The monsignors and priests formed a procession which led the visiting archbishops and bishops and principals in the mass to the altar from the priest's house adjoining the cathedral.

Preceding Archbishop Floersh to the altar were assistant celebrants to the mass, including the Deacons of Honor, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Felix Pitt, superintendent of schools in the archdiocese of Louisville, and the Rt. Rev. John M. Higgins, diocesan consultant, St. Vincent.

Deacon of the Mass, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Albert J. Thompson, dean of the Eastern Deanery, Leitchfield; subdeacon, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph L. Spalding, dean of the Central Deanery, Morganfield, and Masters of Ceremonies, the Rev. Thomas Clark and the Rev. Leonard Alvey.

Bishop Grimmelman delivered his sermon at the conclusion of the mass. He lauded Bishop Cotton for his "loyalty to the diocese, to his priests and people." He said loyalty was always his conspicuous trait.

The Evansville bishop declared that Bishop Cotton was a loyal brother to his fellow bishops. In an exceptional degree he was a loyal spiritual son to the Archbishop of Louisville."

Bishop Grimmeisman said this loyalty dictated personal sacrifices for Bishop Cotton, and "few bishops surpassed him in the number of hours he spent in his chancery or in the care he took in fulfilling or supervising its tasks."

The speaker said the progress of the diocese since its erection has been more than considerable. He pointed to the increase in the number of Catholic students attending parochial school as compared with the small number attending when Bishop Cotton became bishop. He also pointed to the increase in the number of schools and parishes and the larger number of seminarians preparing for the priesthood.

Bishop Grimmeisman concluded by saying: "It remains our duty to make two requests of you, the priests and people of this diocese. The first is: Remember the first bishop of Owensboro in your prayers, your good works and your sacrifices . . . second, build well on the sure foundation Bishop Cotton laid."

(The complete text of Bishop Grimmeisman's sermon is published elsewhere in today's paper.)

Following Bishop Grimmeisman sermon, the final rites inside the cathedral were conducted the blessing of the casket with incense and holy water.

As the body was removed from the cathedral, where it had lain in state since Tuesday afternoon, the priests in their white surplices lined the aisle and the steps outside the church as the casket was carried to the hearse.

The bells of the cathedral tolled the Angelus hour of noon as the priests moved out of the church. A shroud of black was draped over the center entrance to the cathedral through which the casket passed.

This entrance was one that had been constructed under the direction of Bishop Cotton as part of a new front for St. Stephen's which became a cathedral with the consecration of the first bishop in 1938.

Another reminder of Bishop Cotton's progressive tenure as bishop was the presence of male students of Brescia College who acted as ushers at the cathedral, and later directed traffic at the cemetery. Bishop Cotton had organized Brescia College here.

Perhaps most fitting was the fact that Bishop Cotton was the first person to be buried at the new Catholic Cemetery. It was he who had supervised the selection of the site, the purchase of the ground, and the landscaping. His grave is at the highest point on the gently rolling countryside that marks the new cemetery.

While the bishop's casket was placed in the hearse shortly after noon, it was 12:30 before the procession started for the cemetery. A delay was necessary while many of the clerics removed their church garments in preparation for the trip to the cemetery.

The procession moved north from the Cathedral to 4th Street, thence to Frederica, where it turned south to 18th Street and across 18th to the Leitchfield Road. The length of the procession is best illustrated by the fact that the lead police car, containing two Catholic policemen, Capt. James Thompson and Sgt. William Pyland, was crossing 18th and Triplett as the last cars were leaving the cathedral. It took 22 minutes for all cars in the procession to enter the cemetery.

Police reported the motorcade behind the hearse was 27 blocks long. Police had been stationed at strategic intersections to insure safe passage of the procession, which was much longer than had been anticipated. Persons in the long procession were joined at the cemetery by several hundred others who had arrived earlier. Along the procession route, many cars were parked in driveways to watch the bishop's hearse carry him to the cemetery.

At graveside, a group of priests sang the "Benedictus," with the rest of the priests joining in the answering choruses, before Monsignor Henninger pronounced the final rights. After the casket had been lowered, the clergy, led by the archbishops, dropped a symbolic spoon-full of dirt on the casket.

Church dignitaries in Owensboro for the funeral included Archbishop Floersh of Louisville, Archbishop Karl J. Alter of Cincinnati, Archbishop Joseph E. Ritter of St. Louis and Archbishop James Peter Davis of Puerto Rico, and the following bishops:

John P. Cody of Kansas City, Joseph M. Gilmore of Helena, Mont., Dermot O'Flanagan of Juneau, Alaska, William L. Adrian of Nashville, Tenn., William A. O'Connor of Springfield, Ill., Richard H. Ockerman of Covington, Charles G. Maloney of Louisville and Bishop Grimmesman of Evansville.



**History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky,
Hugh O. Potter, Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, Montgomery, AL &
Louisville, KY, 1974, Chapter VIII – Early Religious History, pp.41 & 54:**

In 1937 Owensboro was made headquarters of a new diocese of the Catholic church.

In December of 1937 Pope Pius XI raised the Diocese of Louisville to the rank of an archdiocese and united the 32 counties of western Kentucky to form the Diocese of Owensboro. The Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton was named the first bishop. Bishop Cotton was a native of Bardstown and had served as vice chancellor and chancellor of the Louisville diocese.

In 1937 Bishop Cotton found himself with 41 diocesan priests, 53 churches, 29 parochial schools, seven high schools, one junior college and 186 religious teachers in a Catholic population of 24,059.

At the time of Bishop Cotton's death in September 1960 the diocese had grown to 64 diocesan priests, 66 churches, 51 parochial schools, 21 high schools, one senior college, and 748 teachers in a Catholic population of 37,653.



This Far By Faith: The Story of Catholicity in Western Kentucky, A Commemorative Edition Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Diocese of Owensboro (1937-1987), Judy Hayden, editor, Owensboro, KY, 1987, p.43-44:

Bishop Francis R. Cotton
by Judy Hayden

Francis Ridgely Cotton, was born Sept. 19, 1895 in Bardstown, Kentucky, to Charles and Mary Moore Cotton. He had two sisters, Mildred and Louise.

Born in a town that was itself a landmark in American Catholic history, the late Bishop Cotton himself got his own place in history when he became the first bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro.

Francis Cotton began his studies for the priesthood at Valley Field Seminary in Canada and later attended preparatory school at St. Meinrad, Indiana. He received his A.B. and A.M. degrees from St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, graduating from there in 1917. From

1919-1920, he was a student at the Sulpician Seminary at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He also did graduate work at the Apollinaris University in Rome, Italy from 1933-1934.

He was ordained to the priesthood June 17, 1920, and began what was to be a 40-year vocation. For the first few months, he served as assistant pastor of St. Joseph's Church in his hometown, then St. Cecelia's in Louisville. In 1922 he came to western Kentucky to assist at St. Francis de Sales parish in Paducah. He remained there until Feb. 1926 when he was assigned to the post of assistant Chancellor of the Diocese of Louisville. During that same period, he also served as assistant pastor of St. John's Church in Louisville.

In 1931, Father Cotton became Chancellor of the diocese, a position he retained until December, 1937, when he was appointed to head the newly created Diocese of Owensboro.

He was ordained to the episcopacy February 24, 1938, at Louisville and installed in Owensboro March 9, beginning a 22-year reign as head of the Catholic Church in western Kentucky.

Undoubtedly, there are many who remember the late Bishop Cotton and can recall many stories. However one might remember him, he was an intelligent, hardworking priest who used his business and architectural skills much to the benefit of the diocese.

Though he began with practically nothing, he gave the diocesan people a good beginning and a diocesan church of which to be proud.

When he came in 1938, there were six counties in western Kentucky still without a Catholic church; his ambition was a church in every one -- a goal much strived for but not reached by either him or his successor.

The Most Reverend Francis R. Cotton, western Kentucky's first bishop, died of a heart attack at the age of 65 on September 25, 1960. He was still head of the diocese.

His funeral mass was held at St. Stephen's Cathedral with Archbishop John A. Floersch of Louisville officiating. Bishop Cotton was the first person be buried at Resurrection Cemetery in Daviess County.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 13 January 1989, p.1A:

Catholic educators expressed joy and sadness as plans for the Owensboro Catholic Consolidated School System were made final Thursday at Immaculate School.

Nearly 200 people gathered to hear the formal renaming of four elementary schools and the appointments of five elementary school principals and one middle school principal.

While the consolidation, which includes closing three schools, has been a painful process, Sister Amelia Stenger, superintendent of Owensboro diocese schools, said the future is bright for Catholic schools.

"We can ensure the future of Catholic education in this area for a long time," Sister Amelia said.

... St. Pius X was renamed Francis R. Cotton School, after the first bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro...



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 26 September 1992, p.5B:



Reverential care Students at Bishop Cotton Elementary School displayed items belonging to its namesake, the late Bishop Francis R. Cotton, Friday, the 32nd anniversary of his death. Paul Haycraft, a fourth-grader, held up the bishop's mitre at the beginning of the Mass at St. Pius X Catholic Church. The bishop's staff, ring, pectoral cross as well as a pair of shoes and his coat of arms were also displayed. The items were borrowed from the Pastoral Center Archives. The motto of the bishop "Learn from Jesus" also hung on the church wall during the Mass.



Diocese of Owensboro: A Celebration of the Catholic Church in Western Kentucky,
Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 2010,
pictures submitted by Diocesan Archives, p.7, 44, 45, 47 & 51:



Left: Francis R. Cotton during his seminary days. Right: Francis R. Cotton, right, with fellow seminarians at school sometime prior to his ordination to the priesthood which occurred on Jun 17, 1920.



The ordination of Bishop R. Cotton, the first bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro, took place at St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro on March 8, 1938. Bishop Cotton is seated at left facing the altar.



Left: Bishop Francis R. Cotton at his ad limina visit to Pope John XXIII in Rome in 1959. The Decree of The Consistorial Congregation, issued by order of Pope Pius X in 1909 states that every bishop must render to the pope an account of the state of his diocese once every five years. Bishops, when they come to Rome in fulfilment of their obligation of ad limina, must also visit the tombs of the apostles. These quinquennial periods began in 1911 and Bishops from the Americas report in the fourth year of each period. Right: Bishop Francis R. Cotton at a Mass at Camp Breckenridge near Morganfield in the fall of 1951. Bishop Cotton confirming soldiers into the church as their sponsors lay on hands from behind.



**The Diocese of Owensboro, Freely You Have Received, Freely Give:
75 Years of the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky,
Sarah L. Patterson, Strasbourg, France Editions du Signe, 2012, pp.7, 18 & 20:**



The coat of arms for Bishop Cotton displays the five bleeding wounds of the stigmata of St. Francis Assisi, the bishop's patron saint. At the bottom the three hanks of cotton are a play upon the bishop's family name. The motto chosen by Bishop Cotton was "Disce a Jesu," meaning "Learn from Jesus."





Gravestone of Francis R. Cotton (1895-1960)
Resurrection Cemetery, Daviess County, KY

Volume 47, issue no. 9, November 2020, p.6:



A historical marker notes that Bishop Francis R. Cotton of the Diocese of Owensboro was the first to be buried at Resurrection Cemetery on Sept. 30, 1960.

**Some Churches, Institutions and Services created
during the tenure of Bishop Francis R. Cotton**

- 1939 St. Stephen school opened in Owensboro
- 1939 St. Anthony school opened in Axtel
- 1940 Blessed Sacrament Chapel established in Owensboro
- 1940 Catholic Colored School opened in Owensboro
- 1941 St. John Evangelist school opened in Sunfish
- 1941 St. Benedict school opened in Wax

- 1943 St. Leo parish organized in Murray
- 1943 Blessed Martin school opened at Waverly
- 1943 St. Thomas More parish established in Paducah
- 1945 Our Lady of Mercy Hospital opened in Morganfield
- 1945 St. Joseph High School opened in Mayfield
- 1946 Passionist nuns come to Owensboro and found the St. Joseph Monastery
- 1947 Rosary Chapel & school in Paducah opened
- 1947 Immaculate Conception school dedicated in Hawesville
- 1947 Sacred Heart school opened in Russellville
- 1947 St. Edward school opened in Fulton
- 1948 Mercy Hospital opened in Owensboro
- 1948 Blessed Mother parish & school created in Owensboro
- 1948 Blessed Sacrament school opened in Owensboro
- 1948 St. Paul & St. Joseph parishes are merged to form Sts. Joseph & Paul parish
- 1948 St. Joseph school in Leitchfield opened
- 1948 St. Paul school opened in Princeton
- 1949 St. Maur's Priory (seminary) opened in South Union
- 1949 Immaculate Conception school opened in Hawesville
- 1950 Brescia College established in Owensboro
- 1950 Sts. Mary & James parish in Guthrie dedicated
- 1951 Owensboro Catholic High School opened
- 1951 St. Joseph School opened in Leitchfield
- 1952 Carmel Home is opened in Owensboro
- 1952 St. Francis Borgia parish in Sturgis dedicated
- 1952 St. Sebastian school opened in Calhoun
- 1954 Immaculate parish & school created in Owensboro
- 1954 St. Pius X parish & school in Calvert City dedicated
- 1957 St. Pius X parish & school (1958) created in Owensboro
- 1958 Sisters of the Lamb of God come to the Owensboro Diocese
- 1959 Our Lady of Lourdes parish & school created in Owensboro
- 1959 Sisters of St. Francis come to Paducah & begin what is now Lourdes Hospital
- 1960 Precious Blood parish & school created in Owensboro
- 1960 Resurrection Cemetery at Philpot established



Priests ordained by Bishop Francis R. Cotton:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| • Alvey, Leonard Leslie | (1933-2012) | 3 May 1958 |
| • Boarman, Victor Clement | (1910-1993) | 3 June 1939 |
| • Clements, Richard Madden | (1919-2002) | 5 June 1946 |
| • Connor, Robert Wright | (1912-1963) | 18 May 1940 |
| • Fischer, Charles George | (1924-2003) | 30 May 1950 |
| • Glahn, Carl Joseph | (1925-2015) | 30 April 1952 |
| • Glahn, Gerald Jerome ('Jerry') | (1933-1990) | 1 May 1959 |
| • Hagman, William Joseph | (1929-2004) | 3 May 1955 |

- Hancock, George Hiram (1919-2021) 27 May 1947
- Hayden, Lucian Paul (1924-2001) 7 June 1949
- Higdon, Anthony George (1911-1992) 11 June 1938
- Libs, Charles Thomas (1912-1957) 3 June 1939
- Mattingly, Martin Oldham (1925-2003) 30 May 1950
- McAtee, William Marvin (1916-1976) 30 May 1942
- Mills, Joseph Mearle (1927-2020) 26 May 1953
- Murphy, Thomas Aquinas (1911-1978) 4 May 1943
- O'Bryan, Henry Pius (1914-2001) 7 June 1941
- Pettit, Clarence Ernest (1913-1991) 18 May 1940
- Powell, Paul Pike (1923-2018) 5 April 1948
- Powers, Aloysius Francis (1921-2019) 5 April 1948
- Powers, Bernard Alphonsus (1926-living 2024) 30 April 1952
- Powers, Richard Martin (1932-2023) 1 May 1959
- Reisz, Leonard Francis (1923-2011) 30 May 1950
- Rhodes, Joseph Vernon (1915-2010) 7 June 1941
- Riney, Charles Philip (1924-2014) 5 April 1948
- Saffer, Charles Allard (1914-1989) 7 June 1941
- Ward, Francis Martin (1911-1984) 18 May 1940
- Willett, Ernest Ezra (1919-1992) 24 February 1945
- Willett, Henry Louis (1916-1999) 24 February 1945
- Ziegler, Anthony Theodore (1933-1998) 1 May 1959

