

All are Invited to the
Rededication Ceremony
for the surviving portion of the
1904 MONUMENT HONORING
REBECCA SALOME FOSTER - THE "TOMBS ANGEL"
(1848-1902)

Tuesday, June 25, 2019 at 1:00 PM
60 Centre Street, Rotunda



The original Foster Memorial
Public Design Commission Archive



Detail of the marble bas relief, the surviving
portion of the original memorial

In the 1880s, Rebecca Salome Foster began to devote herself to missionary work. While many Christian missionaries of that era labored abroad, Foster attended to the overlooked needs of the inmates, especially the young and vulnerable, who were incarcerated in the original Tombs Prison. She devoted herself to providing counsel to and advocacy for inmates, and offered financial assistance to help ease the inmates' path back into society. Widely known and heralded as the "Tombs Angel," her work presaged in many ways the role of parole and probation officers, who were not officially introduced in New York State until after her death.

Beyond her service to the incarcerated, her advocacy extended to the settlement house movement of the period, which provided services to immigrants and other poor in the City's tenement districts, including the infamous Five Points neighborhood where the Manhattan County Courthouse at 60 Centre Street and the Moynihan Federal Courthouse at 500 Pearl Street would later be built. She also worked with a program that promoted employment opportunities for young women and girls in the sewing and the needle trades. After many years of this charitable work, Mrs. Foster died tragically in 1902 in the "Park Avenue Hotel fire," a conflagration that took 16 other lives.

Because of the impact of her groundbreaking work a campaign was organized after her death to erect a monument in her honor. Such was her renown that the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, donated to the memorial fund and commended the worthiness of the campaign.

The Tombs Angel monument was installed in 1904 in the old Criminal Courts Building. The monument consisted of a medallion likeness of Mrs. Foster, an elaborate renaissance-style bronze frame and a marble bas relief of an angel ministering to one in need by the prominent sculptor Karl Bitter. The monument was placed in storage in the early 1940s when the old Criminal Court Building was demolished. In time the tribute was forgotten, and both the medallion likeness of Mrs. Foster and the bronze frame were lost or stolen. What survives is the bas relief by Karl Bitter, which has recently been conserved and mounted on a newly constructed pedestal. On June 25, we will rededicate the monument, one of very few public memorials in New York City that pays tribute to a woman.

All are welcome!

The New York State Supreme Court, New York County
NYC Public Design Commission
The Municipal Art Society
NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services
The Historical Society of the New York State Courts

This project was made possible through a generous contribution from the Paul and Klara Porzelt Foundation.