

HISTORIC RED HOOK

William Shook

Born 1865 Died Dec 2, 1908

Red Hook Methodist Cemetery

*HRH ME Cemetery Map Location: 13 A, front of cemetery,
west side, two plots from large Nicks monument*

William Shook's birth date of 1871 on the tombstone he shares with his parents is probably incorrect. A baby named William appears as a newborn in the 1865 New York State Census of Red Hook with Charles and Hannah Shook. It is possible that this baby died and they had another named William in 1871, but subsequent records confirm that he was born before 1870. William was killed when his wagon was struck by a train near Rhinecliff and controversy followed the tragedy.



While working for F.L. Asher as a teamster, Shook was transporting bricks from a dock at Tracy Dow's estate. He'd wrapped himself in a blanket as he headed back with an empty wagon on a blustery Wednesday morning in early December when a train struck his wagon, snapped it in two, and sent him flying. Shook's skull was "badly fractured" but the horses escaped injury. The blanket may have muffled the sound of the train's approach near the Morton dock, just south of Rhinecliff. There were no gates, and the level crossing was dangerous to begin with.

His widow Mary E. Briggs (born March 5th, 1881, daughter of Mary Rhynders and Jacob Briggs of Rhinebeck) sued the New York Central Railroad. Shook's father Charles challenged letters of administration in regards to his estate filed by Mary, but later withdrew his challenge. This and NYCRR's attempts to dispute the claim led to a closer examination of Mary and William's common law marriage in legal proceedings that dragged on for years in which Mary's life was scrutinized and published for all to read.

Mary first married Arthur H. Shufelt just one day before their first child, John R. Shufelt was born in July of 1899 when Mary was 17 years old. Shufelt went out to buy milk one day and never came back. Then Mary and William Shook started living together sometime around 1905 when their first child, Minnie Shook, was born. The defense for the New York Central Railroad hoped to prove that Mary hadn't waited long enough between being abandoned by Shufelt before she got together with Shook, and thus could not sue them as his wife. This led to testimony such as given by this witness who said that:

"...the couple lived together, referred to each other as husband and wife, that their children addressed

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RHINEBECK MAN FATALLY HURT BY FAST TRAIN

William Shook, a Teamster, Struck
by a New York Express This
Morning at Morton's Dock ---
Taken From Cowcatcher.

Poughkeepsie Evening Enterprise, 2 Dec 1908, page 1

them as "Papa" and "Mama" and that their life and domestic relations were altogether happy up to the time that Shook was killed..."

Rhinebeck Gazette April 9th, 1910

Mary had two children with Arthur Shufelt, John R. (1899), and Maggie (1901) and with William she had five, Minne (c.1905), William, Jr. (1905), Mary (1907), Ermina (c.1908), and Edward (1909). In 1910, six of her children (probably all but John) were taken by the New York State Charities Aid Association (which decided Mary was too destitute and simple to support them), and placed in orphanages upstate. William and Minnie would die in state institutions.

John can be traced for a few decades, but no trace could be found of Maggie Shufelt, Mary Shook or Ermina Shook. Edward found his way to Maryland at a young age, married, and had a large family. He died in 1982. It would appear that Mary never got any of these children back.

At last, in 1915, Mary's lawyer John E. Mack (of the firm that would become McCabe & Mack) proved to the court that the time was sufficient for her to have been considered William Shook's wife, and she was awarded a \$1,370 settlement. By the time the trial was over, she had gotten married for a third time to Charles E. Moshier, who died c.1924. She either took in his children from a previous marriage, or had more with him between 1910 and 1917. There was no mention of Shufelt or Shook in her obituary when she died at 89 in Poughkeepsie on August 20th, 1970.

Research and writing by Sarah K. Hermans, 2023

Sources:

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Rhinebeck Gazette, Apr 9 Apr 1910

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