

An Unsolved Mystery: Red Hook's African American Cemetery

By Claudine and Christopher Klose, February 8, 2022

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In honor of Black History Month, it is a privilege to share our quest to piece together the story of Red Hook's long-lost African American burial ground and its people.

Writ large or small, history depends on research. Lots of it! Old deeds, church, town and village birth and death records, census data, tax records, family correspondence, personal reminiscences, newspapers, family histories, letters, photo albums, and much more are our sources.

From a copy of a deed in our archives, we know that on June 12, 1850, local landowner Elisha Finger sold a small plot near the Mill Pond located on Mill Road for \$150 to the "Cemetery Association of Colored Inhabitants." The founding trustees of the cemetery were Uriah St. Paul, Thomas Jefferson, Prince Ells-

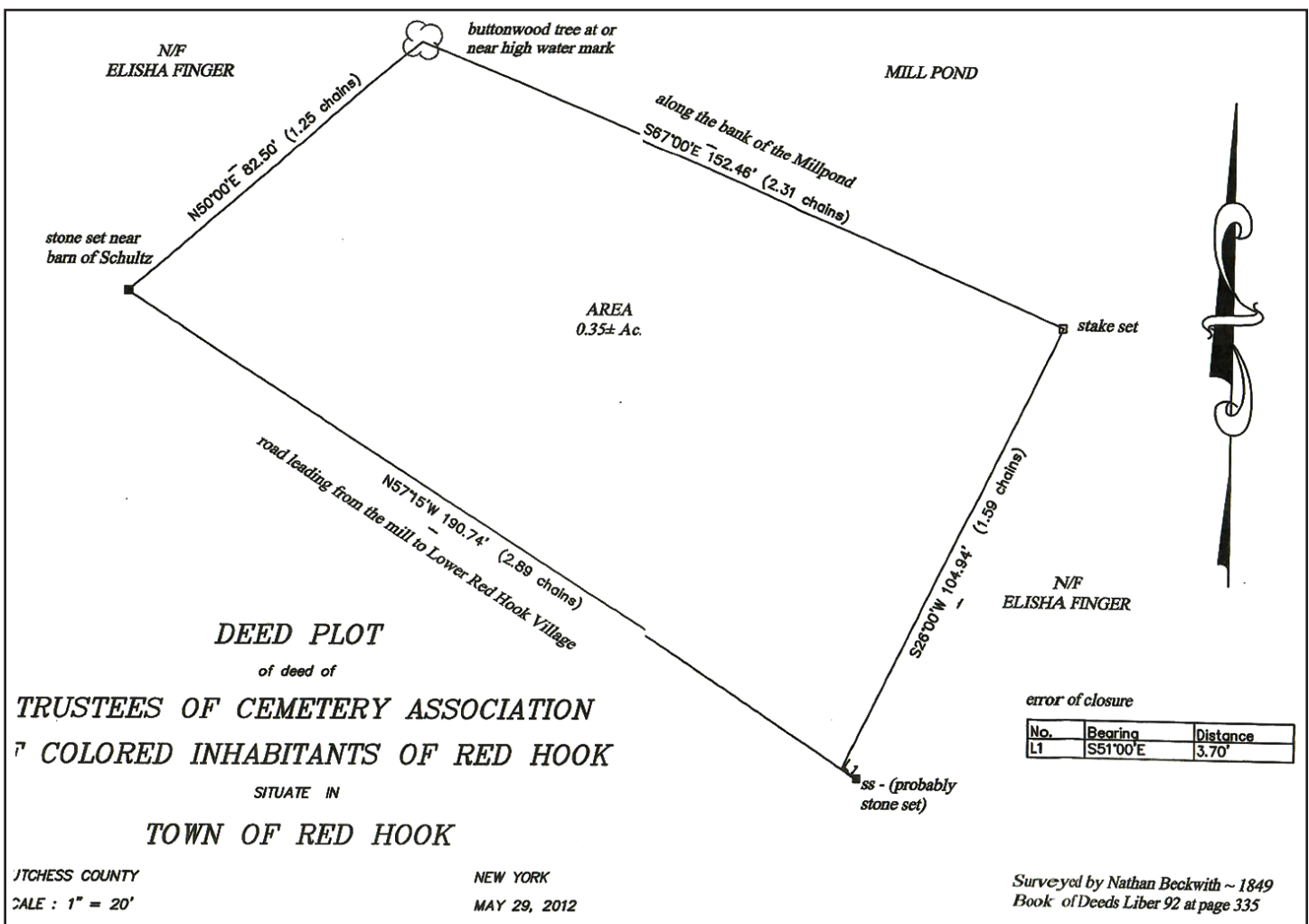


Illustration of plot map: Cemetery plot survey by Nathan Beckwith, 1849

worth, Tobias Grant, Philip Johnson and Joseph Human (Herman misspelled perhaps?).

To this day, we have not discovered a name for the cemetery, and past attempts to pinpoint its exact location have failed. Most recently, however, Bill Jeffway, Executive Director of the Dutchess County Historical Society, overlaid the plot map on both historic and current local maps, finding that Mill Road had been redirected at some point and that the Mill Pond itself has expanded. He now surmises the cemetery is under water.



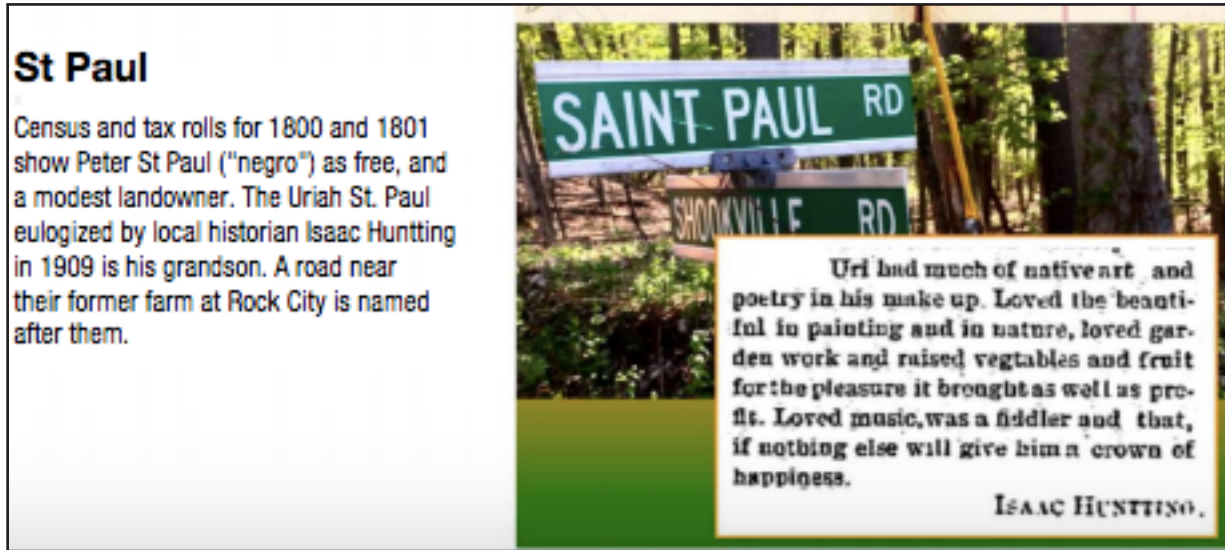
Bill Jeffway's overlaid map of the plot which today is likely underwater. dchsnny.org/afam-burials-red-hook-colored

In preparation for last October's Cemetery Crawl, we enlisted Marisa Hayes, a volunteer intern with a B.A. in history, to help us search out more information on the six cemetery trustees. Who were they? What were their roles in the community? How did they provide for their families? Were any of them buried in their own cemetery? Not surprisingly, given how little was ever recorded about African Americans and that we are not expert in African American history, we relied on the resources at hand – the photocopied cemetery deed; the transcribed church, town, and census records; and the *Red Hook Journal* – and found only shreds of information. What follows is what we've gleaned so far.

Uriah St. Paul

Thanks to Roger Leonard's book *Upper Red Hook: An American Crossroad*, we know something of the St. Paul family. Leonard cites a 1942 history of a local farm, "Whalesback," by Kirtley B. Lewis. Lewis references a 1797 manumission record for Uriah's father, Peter St. Paul. In it, Peter Cantine, Jr., Esquire of the Town of Rhinebeck, frees "My Negro Man named Peter St. Paul" on April 27, 1797, noting that he "is of sufficient

ability to provide for himself." Tivoli's Old Red Church records Peter St. Paul as being "received into membership" in 1803. Leonard also found him listed as a "free African" in the 1813 Upper Red Hook tax roll.



A page from This Place Called Milan by Bill Jeffway

We discover Peter's son, Uriah, in the 1850 Federal Census, listed as a Black farmer in Red Hook, age 30, with wife Anna, and four children. Twenty years later, the *Red Hook Journal* (April 22, 1870) reports "P.G. Fraleigh sold a house and 15 acres of land to Uriah St. Paul for \$3,000." On the Dutchess County Historical Society website page "Red Hook Black History Trail," dchsny.org/RHBHT Jeffway points to an 1876 map that shows Uriah's house on what is now Route 199. Also, the map shows the road linking Hapeman Hill Road to Shookville Road, in Milan, is "Saint Paul Road." Red Hook Town records list Uriah as dying, in Milan, on October 26, 1883, due to "General Dropsy" (heart failure). Jeffway also mentions the St. Paul family in his book *This Place Called Milan*.

Thomas Jefferson

St. John's Dutch Reformed Church records of 1856 show that Thomas Jefferson ("colored") in Red Hook is married to Maria Thompson ("colored") from Milan. Jefferson then appears in the 1865 New York State Census as a Black farmer in Red Hook, age 47, with wife Anna, age 42 (his second wife perhaps?) and one child. Roger Leonard also found that in 1882, local farmer John Feller had entered into an arrangement with Thomas Jefferson (an African American tenant farmer) and Harry B. Stall of Red Hook, permitting them "the use of a 2 ½ acre plot and teams to plow..." in order to plant "eight bushels of potatoes and 1 ½ pounds carrot seed and the balance of the land in cabbages, providing all the seed except the cabbage." In return, Feller would receive half the produce.

In 1894, then St. John's Church pastor George Lydecker praised Jefferson, noting his being "77 years old – impressive service." Five years later, the July 14, 1899, *Red Hook Journal* notes "the death of Thomas Jefferson, an old and well known colored man occurred at Upper Red Hook, Friday last. He was 81 years of age." Town Death records confirm that Jefferson died on Friday, July 7, 1899, and his place of burial as "Fraleigh Mills."

“Fraleigh Mills” appears as a handwritten citation on the back of a photo of the Mill Pond bridge from the same period. This may – or may not – have been the cemetery’s name. In any case, most Red Hook burial records cite only ‘Red Hook’ as the place of burial. Only once do they name “Mill Road” as a burial place, and that, in 1893, for a Jane Caroline Martin, who is not identified as Black. However, a further search of death records may reveal more named places of burial.

Prince Ellsworth

Firsthand accounts of people and places are the stuff of re-search gold! In this regard, we are indebted to Edmund Bassett, who, writing in the 1920s of his “Reminiscences” of late 19th Century Red Hook, recalls: “On the north side of Prince Street, west and south of the Methodist property was the first house on

the street. It was built by a colored man by the name of Prince, hence the name of the street.” In his “Red Hook Black History Trail,” Jeffway also notes that Prince Ellsworth bought that house in 1851 with another family.

The Other Founders

To date, we have found scant information about the Cemetery Association’s three other founding trustees. The 1850 Federal Census lists Tobias Grant as a Black laborer, age 38, with wife Harriet, age 24, and three children. The 1865 New York State Census then lists him as a farmer, age 52. Philip Johnson also appears in the 1850 census as a Black farmer, age 55, with wife Sally, age 48. He does not appear in the 1865 state count. Sadly, Joseph Human (sic), the sixth founder, remains unknown.

Epilogue

Like the making of books, of the making of history, there is no end. Of the making of local history – yesterday, today, and tomorrow – there also is no end. No end to the thrill of discovery, the quest that succeeds, the people and places past and present to meet and greet. We hope others will join us as we try to better understand Red Hook’s African American community of the nineteenth century.

Below: Red Hook Journal, 14 July 1899		Place of Death	Near Crugers Isalnd
		Cause of Death	Drowning
		Place of Burial	Madalin
<div>The Red Hook Journal.</div> <div><small>1899. Editor and Proprietor: AN INDEPENDENT, LOCAL FAMILY NEWSPAPER. 25 STATE STREET, N.Y.</small></div> <div><small>JUNE XL. RED HOOK, DUTCHESS CO., N.Y., FRIDAY, JULY 14, 1899. NUMBER</small></div> <div>The death of Thomas Jefferson, an old and well known colored man of this town, occurred at Upper Red Hook, Friday last. He was 81 years of age.</div>		Register No.	106
		Date of Death	7 July 1899
		Name	Thomas Jefferson
		Age	51
		Marital Status	Black M
		Occupation	Farmer
		Birthplace	Red Hook
		Residency	
		Fathers Name, Birthplace	
		Mothers Name, Birthplace	Sarah
		Place of Death	Upper Red Hook
		Cause of Death	Chronic Endcarditis
		Place of Burial	Fraleigh Mills
Right: transcript of town death records			

Left, obituary of Thomas Jefferson in Red Hook Journal, July 14 1899.
Right, transcript of town death records.

Postscript

After this article appeared in our blog and social media, we subsequently heard from two people who had extensively researched Annandale history. They had come across evidence of a Black family named Humans (written as 'Human' in some records) living in the Cedar Hill section of Annandale in the early nineteenth century.

The land was owned by John Cruger and an 1850 map shows a grist mill and woolen factory there. The 1850 Federal Census lists a Charles Humans as a woolen spinner living in Cedar Hill with his wife and three children, one of whom, Joseph, is six years old. Land records from the early 1850s indicate that Cruger subdivided and sold off individual plots to tenant mill-operators, including one to Charles Humans for \$350.

Although there is no proof, we suspect that Joseph, Charles' little boy, was named after his grandfather, the Joseph Human listed as one of the six founding trustees of the 'Cemetery Association of Colored Inhabitants of Red Hook.'

The research continues! We are grateful for this addition to the story of Red Hook's long-lost African American cemetery.

4-3.	Dwelling Number: 295	Humans:	33	M	M	Woolen Spinner	My	
		Eliza Humans	34	F	M		My	
		Lirara Lane	16	F	M		My	
		Larah Lane	73	F	M		My	
		Joseph Humans	6	M	M		My	1
		Anna M Humans	3	F	M		My	
		Estella Humans	1	F	M		My	

DESCRIPTION.		
Age.	Sex.	Color, { White, black, or mulatto, }

The 1850 Federal Census had a column for Color ("White, black or mulatto") under which the Humans family is listed as "mulatto." Left: The listing for the Humans family. Right: Categories used in the 1850 Federal census.