Welcome To

THE TOWN OF RED HOOK'S

175th

ANNIVERSARY *

Wednesday~April 6, 1988~6 pm

at

MAIZEFIELD

Home of Gen. David Van Ness
The First Supervisor of Town of Red Hook

≈

*Red Hook Came Into Existence on April 6, 1813
~ Having Been Separated from Older Rhinebeck

Town of Red Hook created in 1813

by Clare O'Neill Carr

One of the larger issues facing Red Hook and Rhinebeck 175 years ago could be taken from a page of the 1988 town records: how to best control growth.

Red Hook is celebrating those forefathers' solution to that problem this week.

On April 6, 1813, Red Hook, then the northern part of the precinct of Rhinebeck, entered a new era in its history and became a separate town.

The act creating it had been passed by the New York State Legislature nearly a year before, acting on a bill introduced by State Senator Morgan Lewis of Staatsburg (then part of Rhinebeck). It was approved June 2, 1812, to take effect "the first Monday of April next — April, 6, 1813.

This week, the town celebrates its independence, 175 years after the first annual town meeting of the town of Red Hook.

All indications are the town divided because it began to get too large.

The voices of the past are not always easy to come by, but some have sifted through, even through 175 years, to give a picture of that time.

The split seemed to take place quietly that spring. The Republican Herald, published weekly in Poughkeepsie and frequently carrying news of settlements along the Post Road, had notices of real estate sales and mortgage foreclosures from Red Hook. It posted legal notice of David Van Ness' new slate quarry company, "seven miles east of Livingston's Landing (Barrytown)" in what is now Clinton.

The big news of the day was the war with Britain. A notice in May 1813 told of the British fleet defeated at Sackett's Harbor on Lake Ontario. An advertisement for "young men of patriotism courage and enterprise," promised $40 if a man signed and three months pay and 160 homestead acres, if he served out his tour of duty. Debates in the New York Legislature over freeing of slaves ran alongside ads selling them.

But there appears little mention in the Republican Herald that year of the split in the town, though some copies of the weekly county paper are missing.

There is evidence of some debate, however, the year before, when "the act for dividing the town of Rhinebeck in the county of Dutchess" received approval in the state assembly.

The bill was read three times in both houses before it was finally approved, then only after an amendment was added. The amendment may have referred to a passage in which Rhinebeck and Red Hook agree to divide the money and poor of Rhinebeck precinct "as soon as

may be after the first Tuesday in April next — at the house of Nicholas Bonesteel.''

John Armstrong, who was building his estate Rokeby at the time, was a prominent landowner through his marriage to Alida Livingston. He presented arguments in favor of the split. A George Burroughs of Rhinebeck presented testimony two days later, though it's not clear whether for or against the resolution.

But two days after that, the chairman of the committee in charge of the bill moved to defeat it. It was only saved when, in a vote of 62 to 29, the motion was killed.

The bill was reviewed again, agreed to, and passed on to the Senate as amended, where it also passed. It was signed into law by Governor Tompkins, June 2, 1812.

It had been nearly 125 years since Colonel Pieter Schuyler had been granted a patent for what was to become Red Hook. It had been over 75 years since the land had passed by sale or will to the large landowners and leaseholders of the time, the Van Benthuysens, Staats, Hoffmans and Beekmans.

The growth in the decades of the late 1700s was part of an economic boom that affected the entire Northeast. More land came into possession of smaller freeholders and leaseholders like the Heermances, Elmendorphs, Fellers and Martins, Red Hook names that remain a century later. By 1813, the Gottlieb Martin family in the lower village of Red Hook (home of Clara Cookingham) had been farming three generations.

The population in Rhinebeck precinct had grown from 3,662 in 1790 to 4,485 in 1810.

In 1813, according to a study published in the 1941 Dutchess County Society Yearbook, three hundred families lived in Rhinebeck.

The following year, in Red Hook alone, there was a population of 2,395 persons.

It became difficult for so many to make the long treks to town meetings and other civic committees. David Van Ness who lived at the corner of the Post Road and Starbarrack Road in what is now Upper Red Hook, was supervisor of Rhinebeck in those days. To attend a meeting at the Rhinebeck Flats meant a horseback ride of a good eight miles.

It was time for a change.

But Red Hook was not the only town changing in 1813.

The 35th and 36th sessions of the state legislature passed several bills redefining boundaries and dividing towns in New York, from Long Island to Clinton County.

''The general theme was towns split from one another based on the size of the population, so civil government could be more responsive to people,'' said Clinton historian William McDermott.

''A town didn't have to defend its case (for division), so much as it just had to qualify. Rhinebeck precinct was reaching that magical number of about 5,000 people. That was about the time when towns began to divide.''

A snapshot view of life in 1813

by Clare O'Neill Carr

Life was proceeding as usual in the spring and summer of 1813 in the newly formed town of Red Hook. Though there are no photographs to show the unblemished picture of that time, there are pieces to be found of a picture — in old newspapers, in early houses still standing, and in the exacting language of a transplanted English law that faithfully laid down the rules men lived by. In the process, it showed some glimpses of the life they led.

That spring, while the political split of the town came into law, a horse, stolen from the home of Barent Lewis, was retrieved by the local riders of the Society for the Apprehension and Detention of Horse Thieves. The cost was duly reported in the minutes of the association meeting at the corners (Upper Red Hook) at the home of Stephen Holmes opposite the new St. John's Church. The society, founded in 1796, was already 17 years old.

Peter Fraleigh, (ancestory of Elmore and David Fraleigh) was in full spring operation at Rose Hill Farm (Rose Hill Farm, Fraleigh Lane). John Van Benthuysen was trying to sell his 230-acre farm in Red Hook at auction. And at the Lower Red Hook Landing (Barrytown), John Martin had the whole place — 25 acres and the dock, four houses, barn, horseshed, orchard and a new storehouse — for sale on "easy terms," according to a notice in the county paper, The Republican Herald.

Red Hook had grown around four settlements: The corners (Upper Red Hook) and the lower village (Red Hook Village), both along the Post Road; and Livingston's Landing (Barrytown) and Cantine's or Red Hook Landing (Tivoli) along the river.

Until the late 1700s, the river landings had been the hubs. But toward the end of the decade, activity had increased enough inland to warrant moving the "low" Dutch church at Hoffman's Mill (Tivoli) to Red Hook (Upper Red Hook) where St. John's Reformed Church was built in 1788.

Postmaster David Van Ness lived in a house at the corners (Starr-barrack Rd and the Post Road) across from St. Johns where he kept a store.

Newspaper reports increasingly referred to events at the lower village, where Cornelius Elmendorph and later, the Loops, kept an inn (the Elmendorph on North Broadway) and stagecoach stop. Here also Henry Walter, innkeeper, leased his house, the site of the first town meeting.

It is possible that Walter's house is the site of the old Red Hook Hotel (Mobile gas station at Broadway and Market Streets). Built by neighbor Cornelius Elmendorph in 1799 it has since been destroyed.

Walter was something of an entrepreneur, stabling horses for stud fees at the barns behind his inn to supplement his income. In a notice in the Herald that June: "Celebrated horse Kingston, will stand to

cover at the stable of Henry Walter in the village of lower Red Hook at reduced Price, $4 the leap."

Walter would not live out the year. He died the following January at the age of 39, leaving a "large and infant family." The following month his widow was seeking other quarters.

Peter Sharp and John Dubois "living near the premises,"advertised the former Walter establishment for lease or sale that February in the Herald. Described as large and roomy, the ad says the house is situated on the Post Road near the Red Hook post office.

The question remains whether the post office (brought by Van Ness years before to the lower village) was located at the general's house, Maizefield on "the road to Livingston's Landing (Barrytown)," or at the Post Road nearer to the Walter and Loop inns.

A newspaper notice in May lists letters left at the Red Hook Post Office, posted by Jacob Van Ness, postmaster, who by then had succeeded his father. The location of his house, possibly the post office then, is not known.

Jacob also had a law practice in Rhinebeck, served as county clerk, signing all printed mortgage foreclosures printed in the Herald, and was primary tax assessor for the county.

But his prominent position could not shield him from a personal tragedy that fall, when in September his 24-year old wife died "leaving a daughter but a few hours old, her early death leaving a severe effect to her affectionate husband."

The second town meeting at Red Hook was held at the "widow Walter's house." But by 1815 it is likely the inn was bought or leased by a man named Andrus. The first official map of the town shows this site as the Andrus Inn.

An 1810 census listing residences adjacent to Walter helps add to the picture of houses that may have been strung along the Post Road by then. Starting at a point presumably near the present four corners and proceeding north, they are Cornelius Van Duran, H. Walter, Claudius Massoneau, George Barnes, Frederick Maul (Moul), Phillip Broaf, Phillip Bonesteel, John Benner, and Mathias Rowe.

By 1813, John Armstrong and David Van Ness, seeing the chance for a profit like the good businessmen they were, had set up what amounted to the town's first subdivision, platting out small lots for sale in the lower village.

A few years later, the Elmendorph Inn began to be used more frequently as a public meeting place. By the end of the century, it would be used as a kindergarten and town hall.

It would be less than 20 years before the Tobacco Factory was built in the village, bringing in workers, generating more services and boosting sales of Armstrong and Van Ness's subdivision. Red Hook would become something of a factory town.

But by 1813 the population of Red Hook had already shifted from the corners to the lower village.

And the gesture begun in 1796 when Red Hook's first postmaster, Van Ness, made his move to a new house and and a new place, was by his death in 1818 secured.

A MAP

of the Town of

RED HOOK

Laid down from Surveys made by

Alexander Thompson & Ben.ᵛ V. Steenbergh.

At request of

Peter T. B. Myers Esq.ʳ Supervisor

9.ᵗʰ Dec.ʳ 1715

Per John Cox jun.ʳ

Hoffman Grist Mill

Cooks

Woolen Factory

Road to Livingston

Aragman

White Saw Mill

Hen's Saw Mill

H U D S O N

Scale

Forty chains to an Inch

PART OF RHINEBECK

R I V E R

Bergmans Wharf

North River

Lewis Inn

Priest Saw Mill

Andersons Inn

Kemptocks Inn

Martins landing

Shultz's Landing

David Van Ness was town's first supervisor

General David Van Ness was already an elderly man when he was elected Red Hook's first town supervisor in April 1813.

The 71-year old merchant and Revolutionary War soldier would remain in Red Hook only another year, leaving the town for Troy where he died in 1818.

Van Ness had lived in Red Hook at least 45 years at the time. Though in his 70s, his political service and business pursuits were regularly mentioned in the county paper, The Republican Herald.

Van Ness had come to Red Hook probably about the time of his marriage to Cornelia Heermance, daughter of a prosperous farm family that lived on the road from Red Hook to Tivoli (West Kerley Corners Road), in a stone house built in the 1750s (home of Peter and Alice Bulkeley).

Reportedly Red Hook's first postmaster, Van Ness lived with his wife and family at the corners in Red Hook (Upper Red Hook) opposite St. John's Church. The house has since been destroyed.

At the time he was elected Red Hook's first supervisor, he had long since moved his family — and the post office, so legend has it — to the lower village (called Hardscrabble), thus changing the official location of the town.

There he built the mansion Maizefield, the imposing federal-style brick house that stands between the junior and senior high schools, behind the brick wall in the village.

It still commands an impressive view of "the blue mountains," as Van Ness described them when he built Maizefield about 1796.

Van Ness served as a captain in the Continental Army, and a major in a regiment of Dutchess militia. After the war, he rose in rank in the militia. Between 1793 and 1801 he held a commission as general of a brigade. He was referred to locally as Gen. Van Ness.

After the battle of Lexington, when the people of Dutchess County were asked to sign a pledge repudiating the British government and put themselves under "new men and new measure," David Van Ness signed the pledge right above the signature of Egbert Benson, another famous local citizen.

Van Ness served in both the New York Assembly and the Senate. He was a presidential elector in 1793 and in 1812. Locally he chaired the meetings of the county Republicans.

He served two terms as supervisor of Rhinebeck in 1792 and again in 1806.

Van Ness served on the consistory of the "new" Dutch church built in Upper Red Hook in 1788, where church records show the baptisms of his 10 children, born between 1771 and 1798. The earlier baptisms had taken place at the Old Red Church in what is now Tivoli.

Opinion

Historic Red Hook

The world of April 1813 was much simpler than the world we find in 1988. Here in Red Hook, the crucial issues of the day were keeping swine and sheep from roaming loose, as recorded in the minutes of the first meeting of the first town board of the new township.

Red Hook had just been created by an act of the state legislature, being separated from the original precinct of Rhinebeck.

Agriculture was the principal occupation at the first meeting, which was fitting since that was the principal occupation of most of the town's 2,000 or so residents.

Today's population is far more diversified, though agriculture still plays an important role in the economy.

We still see evidence of the contributions of the town's founding fathers, particularly in noting how many of the family names of that era can be found on the town's tax roles today.

Another living legacy is a strong sense of place that Red Hookers share and relish, epitomized by the bumper stickers that proclaim: I'm hooked on Red Hook.

Next week, April 6, supervisors from the modern-day towns of Red Hook and Rhinebeck will gather with other local dignitaries to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the separation of the two towns.

John Gilfeather, supervisor of Red Hook, will use an antique saw to separate the Red Hook portion from a replica of an 1815 map of Rhinebeck held by Supervisor Donald Quakenbush of Rhinebeck.

It is an occasion for pride for residents of both towns. It may be a more complicated age, but recent and long-time residents of this old town ought to join in and celebrate. After all, many of us won't be around to mark the 200th.

Congratualations to Red Hook, 175 years of age and still going strong.

The first town board

The first annual town meeting of the Town of Red Hook was held at the house of Henry Walter, innkeeper, the first Tuesday of April 1813.

The "majority of the freeholders and inhabitants of the Town of Redhook" elected the following:

Supervisor — Gen. David Van Ness

Town Clerk — Matthias Rowe

Assessors — Peter Cantine Jr., Nicholas Allendorph, George Shook, Henry Cooper and Jacob Miller

Overseers of the Poor — Phillip Bonesteel and Jacob Stall

Collector — Simon Hermance (Heermance)

Commissioners of Highways — Cornelius Elmendorph, Jacob Whiteman, John Stikle (Stickle)

Contstables — Jeremiah March, George Shaver and Lary Luis (?)

Poundmaster — Nicholas Hofman Jr. (Hoffman)

Fence Viewers — Peter Van Benthuysen, Jacob Henericks (Hendricks), Dyer Trook (Shook?), Henry George, John W. Pither (Pitcher) and John S. Hermance (H e e r m a n c e).

In April, 1813, the following entry appeared in the Town Record Book of Red Hook:

"Resolved, by a majority of free holders and inhabitants of the Town of Redhook at this first annual town meeting.... First, that all swine running at large shall be sufficiently rung and yoked and if any are found trespassing without...the owners shall be subjected to the extraordinary penalty of two shillings for each swine..."

That no boar or male swine shall be permitted to run at large (between April 1st and December 1st)...if found...any person shall have the right to castrate the same at the risk of the owner or put such boar into the public pound...."

The same unfortunate fate awaited unpenned rams

Other laws passed that day: that fences must be four and a half feet high, garden and orchard fence, five feet and that the owners of cattle running loose would be fined $5 a "creature."

The apparent forerunners of today's zoning enforcement officers, "fence viewers," were paid six shillings for their

time in policing fences, settling boundary disputes and seeing that neighbors bore repair fees equally.

Penalties collected from violating the town code were to be distributed to the poor. Taxes were levied, with a primary duty being the poor. In Rhinebeck precinct the year before, $1,750 had been spent on their care.

Among the state directives mandated in those days, the town was "to make provision and allow such rewards for the destruction of wolves, bears, panthers...and for the destruction of the noxious week, Canada Thistle."

TOWN OF RED HOOK
INDEPENDENCE COMMITTEE

J. Winthrop Aldrich, *Chairman and Town Historian*
Rosemary Coons, *Co-Chairman and Village Historian*
Leocadia (Lottie) Kittner, *Secretary and Coordinator*

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Barbara Bielenberg   Robert Bielenberg
Shirley Brown   Joseph Cherney
Herb Elsemore   Barry Fair
Linda Keeling   Pat Merrall

☆ ☆ ☆

GRATEFUL APPRECIATION
to
SHARON and DAVID HESSNEY
(for the use of their historic home)
-and-

Red Hook Supervisor — Jack Gilfeather
Rhinebeck Supervisor — Donald Quackenbush

St. John's Dutch Reformed Church - the Rev. Roger Leonard
St. Paul's Lutheran Church — the Rev. Richard Holzer
V.F.W. — Sid Delanoy, Barry Fair
Red Hook Village — Mayor, Police, Clerk
Red Hook Century Farms and — Elmore Fraleigh
"Horse Thieves" Association

REFRESHMENTS
Helen Roberts, *Chairman*

Mary Kay Budd, Nadine King, Anna Teator, Julia O'Neill,
Barbara Fraleigh, Helen Garlinghouse, Edith Michael,
Doris Williams, Ray and Doris Wedlake, Doreen Alexander,
Elizabeth Thomas, Jeanne Campbell, Friede Mundhausen

RED HOOK SCHOOL - Matt King, Maynard Ham, Martin Tirsch
and students who participated
BROWNIE TROOP — June Elsemore
SPECIAL THANKS
to the GAZETTE ADVERTISER
Paul Smith, *Editor*
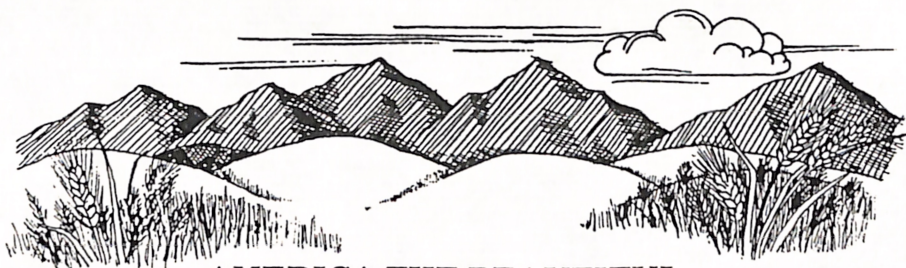Clare O'Neill Carr, *Research/Writer*
☆ ☆ ☆

Flowers - *Compliments of the Flower Basket*
Champagne - *Compliments of Joseph Cherney*
Anniversary Cake - *Compliments of the Spirit of 1813*
Red Hook

The magnificent view from Pike's Peak in Colorado inspired Bates, an English teacher, to write this poem. The melody was originally a hymn.

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Katharine Lee Bates, 1893   *Samuel A. Ward, 1882*

1. O beau-ti-ful for spa-cious skies, For am-ber waves of grain, For pur-ple moun-tain maj-es-ties A-bove the fruit-ed plain! A-mer-i-ca! A-mer-i-ca! God shed His grace on thee, And crown thy good with broth-er-hood From sea to shin-ing sea!