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Jacob W. Elseffer

Born 1822 Died 1907



St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Red Hook. Large granite monument in the older section of the cemetery, near the parking lot.

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Attorney and Bank Founder

Some names in Red Hook are instantly recognizable given the fame or reputation of the person. During his lifetime, Jacob W. Elseffer's name certainly was known in Red Hook and beyond. The son of John Elseffer and Katherine Whiteman Elseffer, he was an attorney and the organizer and president of the First National Bank of Red Hook, and at his death, he was said to be one of the oldest practicing attorneys in Dutchess County. Elseffer's first wife Delia Eliza Bonesteel Elseffer of Clermont and his second wife Harriet Eliza Mesick Elseffer of Claverack share the monument with him at St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery. His parents John and Catherine Whiteman Elseffer, eldest daughter Mary Elseffer, son John and his wife Emma Elseffer, and another Elseffer named Henry D. Elseffer are buried nearby, all in St. Paul's. His daughter Katherine Whiteman Elseffer Adams is buried with her husband William Platt Adams in the Rhinebeck Cemetery.

Jacob was "descended from two of the oldest and most prominent families in Dutchess County. The Whitemans came from Zurich, Switzerland, in 1720. Henry Whiteman and his son were noted patriots in the Revolution and the family became large landowners in Dutchess and Columbia counties. While in

1580 Louis Elzvier started in Holland, the Elzvier Printing Works, soon to be known throughout civilized world as the noted Elzvierian Bibles,” state the obituary of his daughter Katherine Whiteman Elseffer Adams, which appeared in *The Rhinebeck Gazette* on July 19, 1924.

The Elseffer home was located at 7518 N. Broadway. The original building is no longer extant, but it is on the 1867 map as “Mapelton, J. W. Elseffer.” The following description appeared in Edmund Bassett’s *Reminiscences* of 1926: “The Jacob W. Elseffer house is much the same as it was in the old days. All of his children have passed on to the beyond, from where no one returns, and the old place is now the home of his granddaughter and her father, William P. Adams,” recalled Bassett.

According to his 1907 obituary, Jacob lived a long and accomplished life in Red Hook:

“Jacob W. Elseffer the oldest practicing attorney in the county died at his home in Red Hook on last Friday evening,” “The deceased was the son of John Elseffer, once a member of Assembly from this district, and Katherine Whiteman. He was eighty-five years old at his death, having been born September 6, 1822. He took top academic course at Claverack, Columbia County, spending three years there. He passed the entrance examination to Williams College but took up the study of law with Judge Rowley at Upper Red Hook instead of going to college. He was admitted to the bar in 1845 and was very successful in the practice of law.

Mr. Elseffer was the organizer of the First National Bank of Red Hook and was elected president. For a long time he was a director and was also attorney for the bank. . .

Mr. Elseffer was a Democrat in politics. He was a member of the fraternity of F. & A. M., and was made a member of Monumental Lodge No. 374, at the first meeting, April, 1866. He was master of the lodge in 1860. During the Civil War the lodge was in bad shape and most of the members wished to surrender the charter. Through Mr. Elseffer's efforts this was averted, however, and the lodge removed to Tivoli where it has been in a prosperous condition ever since. At the time of his death Mr. Elseffer was the oldest member and Senior Past Master. The funeral was held on Monday afternoon from his late residence. The services were in charge of Monumental Lodge No. 374 of Madalin."

— The Rhinebeck Gazette, November 28, 1907

Jacob Elseffer's name made the front pages of many newspapers nationwide when Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan and his wife Mary Baird Bryan attempted to take a break from campaigning at the Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Perrine home in Upper Red Hook. That was not to be, however, as reported in the August 18, 1896, edition of the *Boston Post*: "The J. Watts de Peyster Gun Squad from Madalin, a nearby community, was at hand and fired a salute and a brass band discoursed popular airs during the evening. Jacob Elseffer, a lawyer of Red Hook, known as the lower village, in distinction from Upper Red Hook, introduced Mr. Bryan to the gathering in and about Mr. Perrine's house, and standing on the portico, Mr. Bryan made a short speech of thanks."

Mrs. Perrine had taught Mrs. Bryan at the Female Academy in Jacksonville, IL, hence the trip to Red Hook, explained the *Post*, which described the six-mile journey from the train station in Barrytown to the Perrine home in Upper Red Hook as having been through "beautiful farming country," something for which Red Hook is still admired. Being able to introduce the national presidential

candidate while standing on the portico of a home in small-town Upper Red Hook was an honor in the life of Jacob W. Elseffer.

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