



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 1813 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

SPRING 2000

TOM DALEY TO SHOW SLIDES OF "ENDANGERED TREASURES OF THE HUDSON VALLEY" at ANNUAL DINNER MEETING, JUNE 20th

Tom Daley needs no introduction to members of the Society, many of whom enjoyed his personally narrated slide tour of some of the great Hudson Valley historic homes at last year's Fund Raiser at Rokeby. This year Tom returns to show us some of the great architectural gems which are threatened by neglect or lack of funds for restoration. His talk will follow the Annual Dinner Meeting of the Society which will be held at the Elmendorph Inn in the Village of Red Hook, beginning with Punch and Hors d'oeuvres at 6:00 p.m..

Among the treasures is the palatial Federal-style Plumb-Bronson House, built on a hillside overlooking the Hudson River in the City of Hudson in 1812. The house and grounds were purchased in 1838 by Dr. Oliver Bronson, who promptly commissioned his friend Alexander Jackson Davis to "refit" the house in the "bracketed" style he had popularized. In 1849, Davis returned to add a 3-story Italianate tower, ornamental verandas and other improvements. Today, the forlorn but still beautiful home sits unoccupied on the grounds of the Hudson Correctional Facility.

Details about the Annual Dinner Meeting and a reservation form can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Due to the limited seating, early reservations are recommended and current members of the Society will be given preference. Please check your mailing label to be sure your dues are paid up through 2000.

FRANK TEAL: The curious life and mysterious death of Red Hook's most notable surveyor

Clare O'Neill Carr

Frank Teal was a surveyor by trade. He was a remarkable man, whose brilliant mind, laconic manner and simple lifestyle were in stark contrast to the violent and mysterious nature of his death – an unsolved murder that has boggled the minds of Dutchess County authorities to this day, and is still remembered by old-timers in Red Hook.

After a lifetime of work and study, surveying in meticulous detail the historic properties, farms and homes of northern Dutchess and southern Columbia counties, Teal met his fate a few days before Christmas, 1949, when he was found shot to death, his body burned almost beyond recognition, in the smoldering, locked farmhouse on Stone Church Road where he had lived for most of his 82 years.



Frank Teal in the field, Nov. 1927 Tracy Dows Collection Hudson River Heritage

Frank Lincoln Teal earned his living as a surveyor, a very knowledgeable, quiet and private man whom friends described as nearly a recluse. Teal was not a man who drew attention to himself. But attention was paid to the tall, lean man who, it is said, carried the dimensions of hundreds of properties in his head, never bothered to take notes in the field, operated with the same old-fashioned surveying tools he started out with sixty years before, and charged such out-of-date prices that it was once reported that after surveying the Bard campus for its WPA-era barracks housing, the contractors from Kingston in charge of the project returned Teal's bill, saying it was too low to be acceptable to the authorities in Washington.

"He was not a man who was guided by money," said Attorney Bill Walsh, who met Teal around 1935, when he came to Red Hook with his family to open his first law office in the old Red Hook Hotel. Teal surveyed many places for the attorney's clients over the years, as well as working with him on village projects, such as the Red Hook Village Water system, which the surveyor laid out in the 1930s. "He was a very quiet, proper, cerebral type, who didn't waste any words – a very modest man – absolutely independent - and an extremely good engineer."

Meticulous work

In his lifetime, Frank Teal meticulously surveyed, documented and mapped hundreds of properties in Red Hook, Rhinebeck and surrounding villages, including most of the historic houses and lands we so value today. His earliest surveyor fieldbook relating to this neighborhood dates from 1897. Because he had a keen interest in history, as well as in mathematics and engineering, he documented properties well beyond the requirements of most surveying jobs, researching the titles of many, back to the 18th century. With his meticulous notes, written out in a fine, long hand in the margins of maps and surveys, Teal left an invaluable historical record.

"Mr. Teal's survey maps are models of beauty, clarity and precision," said J. Winthrop Aldrich, a Red Hook native and assistant to the New York State Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, whose family had known and employed Teal. As Red Hook town historian, Mr. Aldrich helped hunt down the Teal collection, which is now housed in the archives of the Egbert Benson Historical Society at the Elmendorph Inn {see accompanying story by Barbara Thompson}.

Frank Teal was born in 1867 at the Teal homestead on Old Stone Church Road in the Town of Red Hook (now the site of the Rhinebeck Airdrome), the son of John and Mary Rossman Teal. His ancestors were among

the first Palatine Germans to settle in Red Hook in the 18th century. As a young man, he aspired to higher education at a time when few sons of farmers did so. He graduated from Hartwick Seminary in Oneonta, NY and taught school in Germantown. Not content with this, Teal traveled to New York City in the 1890s, where he received most of his engineering training in the office of the well-known bridge engineer David B. Steinman. He worked on the City Transit System and large bridge projects during those years.

Seeking a more formal education, he returned to Red Hook and entered the class of 1901 at St. Stephen's Theological Seminary in Annandale – now Bard College. His formal education was cut short when his father died in 1899, and Teal returned to the farm to work as a surveyor and to

support his mother and sisters. He never married. He continued his studies at home for the rest of his life, reading constantly, surrounded by books.

19th century man

Living well into the 20th century, in many ways Teal did not leave the 19th, always dressing in the formal style of the Victorian period. He wore an old-fashioned high starched collar and necktie, and a hat when he was working, as well as puttees, which looked something



Frank Teal's graduation picture, Hartwick Seminary, Oneonta, NY 1890. Collection Egbert Benson Historical Society

like spats, over his pants. He was fastidious in his work, producing meticulous maps and surveys, recalled Mr. Walsh - "No small thing escaped him" - yet the living room of his house was in apparent disarray, with maps, books and surveys piled on top of one another. However, ask him about a certain property, and he would think a while, and go directly to the spot where the record was. "The only index he had was in his head," said Mr. Walsh.

Teal refused to clutter his life with such amenities as electricity, running water, telephones or central heating. He carried on all of his correspondence by mail, as well as his grocery and meat shopping, and received items the same way - even the local butcher in Rhinebeck mailed his weekly meat packages to him. It was through the mail that he ordered his books, which accumulated in his rooms almost to the tops of his ceilings.

He refused to have a car, even when one was offered him, and walked, or rode his bicycle, with a speedometer and a small watch on the handlebars, wherever he wanted to go. The late Helen Chapman wrote in the *Barrytown Explorer* in 1959 that the late Tracy Dows, who took the above picture of Frank Teal working in the field at his house, Glenburn in 1927, once offered to give Teal a car, so put out was the wealthy patron that the aging surveyor still resisted modern transportation. "If Tracy buys me a car," Teal reportedly retorted, "I'll buy him a bicycle!" Teal continued to walk and bike until his untimely death at 82.

Christmas tragedy

In the week before Christmas, 1949, Teal was, as usual, in the midst of a new project. The morning of the 22 of December, he had just started a surveying job for Fred Cotting in Red Hook. The day before, he had broken his longtime habit of avoiding social invitations and had agreed to attend Christmas dinner at his cousin Mary Rossman's house in Rhinebeck. He would be alone that Christmas for the first time in many years. His sister, Eva, who had kept house for him after their mother's death in 1942, had just died in May. His other sister, Agnes Teal Wey, had died seven years before.

A neighbor, Mrs. John Zietz, had promised his sister, Eve, before she died, that she would look after the elderly bachelor. As was her custom, therefore, Mrs. Zietz came to prepare supper for him that evening, not forgetting to leave out the single glass of milk, which Teal always heated up to drink before going to bed between 10 and 11 p.m.

Following her routine, she returned early next morning, the 23rd, to clean up the dishes. However, when she got there, she found the door locked, which was unusual. Assuming Teal had left for work especially early and forgotten to leave the door unlocked for her, she returned home. At 7 p.m. she came back. Sensing something was amiss, she brought her son, 19-year-old John Jr. The house was dark; the door still locked. Thinking Teal was ill, she sent her son around to the back of the house, where he entered through a back kitchen window.

The house was full of smoke. Frank Teal was lying dead on the floor of his work room, the burned remains of the rocker in which he was sitting collapsed around him, the surrounding floorboards charred, the half-empty glass of milk still on the drafting table next to him. A kerosene lamp was broken and overturned nearby. Teal was burned beyond recognition. Only the airtight state of the closed house, it was surmised later on, had prevented the fire from spreading to the stacks of papers and maps piled throughout the room, and from those, to the entire house.

When the state police came to examine the body, they found what they would consider a motive for the fire. Teal had been murdered, shot through the head twice with a .22 caliber gun, the fire set to cover up the crime.

Unsolved mystery

There were few leads to work with. Frank Teal had no known enemies. Robbery was a possibility, though weak. Although his Studebaker watch was missing, he had six dollars in his hand when he was shot, which he was possibly counting. Besides, he was known to have only enough money necessary to live, and he had no



The murder scene, late December 1949. Collection Egbert Benson Historical Society

bank accounts. The investigation found he had cashed a number of large checks that week at the Rhinebeck bank. However, his habit was to accumulate his checks, cash them all at once and then proceed to pay all his bills the same day. No large amount of money was found at the house, so it was assumed he had followed his usual pattern.

The “passing tramp” theory was considered, but discounted because of the isolation of the old farmhouse, along a dirt road far from a main thoroughfare where people would be passing by.

There was a flurry of excitement when an official search of the neighborhood yielded two small caliber guns in the possession of two teenagers living nearby. Although they were held on charges of possessing revolvers, with ammunition and without a license, the inquiry went nowhere, and the boys were released.

In January, there was a dramatic, and unconvincing “confession” of the Teal murder from a 15-year old runaway, a foster child who had lived in Red Hook. The many accounts of his “crime” were so conflicting, that police and psychiatrists alike concluded he had invented the whole story.

The investigation went nowhere.

“In his life,” wrote Wint Aldrich in a memorial for the surveyor on the occasion of the historical society’s acquisition of his work, “Frank L. Teal was honored and respected for what he was – a gentleman, a scholar and a hardworking professional who upheld high standards... and knew and loved the land hereabouts and its history.

“In his death he was widely mourned and his unsolved, apparently motiveless, murder continues to perplex... the community in which he lived.”

DEBORAH DOWS ON FRANK TEAL

[Note: The late Deborah Dows, the well-known Rhinebeck equestrienne who established Southlands Farms and introduced hundreds of local children over the years to horses and horseback riding, visited Frank Teal for the first time in 1935. He had worked for her father, Tracy Dows, who, like most people, had great respect for him. When Deb, as a young woman, went to call on him, unannounced, to conduct some business – he of course had no phone – he was already something of a legend. She wrote about her experience the same day. The following excerpt is reprinted from her papers, courtesy of Gale and Paul Schaefer, longtime friends of Deb Dows, and executors of her will.]

(Mr. Teal) asked me to step into his study – a very large room... Here too was an iron stove in the center of the room and several more gas lamps. In other respects, however, this room was quite different from the parlor. Two huge drafting tables, three stools, one plain wooden chair, and a small table on which was a very old gramophone – just a wooden box with no lid on it and the loud speaker in the shape of a horn attached to the handle which holds the needle, comprised the furniture of the room. This room had also a great deal of light - and seemed to be an ideal workshop, in just enough disorder to look used without looking messy.

Mr. Teal strode over to the drafting table by the window and started to sort papers. He seemed to have forgotten me but I felt sure that he had not; that he was really observing and appraising me even while appearing to have forgotten my presence. I sat down on the only chair and timidly asked him, “Do you mind if I smoke?”

He turned, looked at me and said, “Camels or Chesterfields?”

I said, “Camels,”

Then he remarked, “Women smoke too much. They don’t know when to stop – one cigarette after another.”

Then, as if he thought that perhaps he had been too abrupt, he smiled, a lovely, friendly smile, and continued, “I prefer a good cigar. Never liked cigarettes. What is it that tastes so bad?”

“It’s the paper, I think,” I replied.

“Then why doesn’t somebody do something about it? One would think that somebody would have had time to think of something.”

With that remark, Mr. Teal went back to his maps...

At last he seemed to have found the (map) he was looking for: the map of my property. He unfolded it and looking at it, we decided that we could tell nothing about the place without going to see it...

Mr. Teal dressed for the elements was a strange sight. He wore a pair of black rubbers over his low brown shoes. Above these he had on buttoned khaki gaiters, above which his heavy outdoor black and white speckled trousers bagged grotesquely. He had, covering all, a warm dark blue overcoat, and on top of his head sat a light tan felt hat...

Knowing how Mr. Teal disliked automobiles, I feared he might not be willing to ride in one with a woman driver. But apparently my fears were unfounded, for Mr. Teal never hesitated in accompanying me. The roads were slippery and snowy, and I had to drive very slowly...

I parked the car and we got out, leaving our heavy overcoats. The sleet had changed to snow and there was already about two inches of it on the ground.

Mr. Teal, with a cheerful, “Are you ready!” started off through the woods at a steady six miles an hour pace. I followed practically running to keep up with him. The trees were thick, the ground steep, rocky and slippery, and I had all I could do to keep from falling down, but Mr. Teal seemed unaware of the difficulties. He strode unfalteringly ahead, never pausing for breath. Although a good many of the boundary lines were unmarked, he knew just where they all were. He also knew the history of every tree and every lot of land, and he told it to me as we walked along.

Once or twice we got off the track and then Mr. Teal would say, “There’s no need for you to walk unnecessarily. You wait here. I’ll find the track,” and with a smile, he would go bounding off like a young deer whose home is the forest.

No one, then seeing Mr. Teal for the first time, would have supposed that he was over sixty years old.

Deborah Dows
November 25th, 1935

THE HOW & WHY OF THE TEAL PAPERS

Barbara Thompson

The Teal papers are a collection of surveys, field notes, maps, deeds and miscellaneous information that were part of the life work of Frank Teal, surveyor, historian, mathematician, and man extraordinary. Included in this collection are some of the surveys of Robert Decker who became the lead surveyor for Northern Dutchess acquiring Teal’s work after his death. The first papers date from the early 1920’s to just a month before Mr. Teal’s death in 1949. They include surveys from Red Hook, Milan, Rhinebeck, Clinton and Hyde Park.

The papers take up 16 cubic feet of space in the new file cabinets in the Rosemary Coons Archive Room of the Egbert Benson Historical Society at the Elmendorph Inn. The maps, which are anywhere between 10” to 54” in length take up another 8 cubic feet and there are some that have not been sorted yet, awaiting storage space.

Determination of property boundaries most often entailed searching deeds for that particular piece as well as some of the adjoining lands. There are several lawyer’s Abstract of Title as well as Frank Teal’s own research. Some deeds were never recorded, the land being passed at the death of the owner through a

will. These searches are all part of the files, some of the abstracts going back to the mid 1800's. One of the more interesting items, from a historical point of view, are the references of Teal to the "Field Book of Surveys of Farms of Hon. John Armstrong". These surveys were done in 1801 by B.B. Van Sternburgh. I have found three copies of maps made by Van Sternburgh in the papers: those of John Sipperly, Peter Ackert and William Waldorph. As far as I can tell, these properties would be to the west of present day Rte 9 and south of the Village of Red Hook. The problem now is to find where that book of surveys is located, if it still exists.

I am not sure how Robert Decker came into ownership of these files. At his death, his widow sold them to Vincent Sheridan, a surveyor in Catskill. When plans were under way for the Bi-Centennial celebration, Wint Aldrich thought these files would make a great addition to the history of the area. Frank Teal had done work for the families of Rokeby and Wint started to track them down. By the time he got to Leeds, he found the papers had been stored in cartons in the chicken shed for years, as Mr. Sheridan had thought about expanding his practice into the Northern Dutchess area, but given up the idea. With patriotism flying high, Mr. Sheridan said he would be happy to give the files to Red Hook Historical Society. That same day, Wint, Clara and John Losee collected the cartons and brought them back. Clara and John then went through the cartons and sorted the files into geographical areas, boxed them and left them in the basement of the Red Hook Library. They stayed there almost twenty years until they were moved to Elmendorph Inn and then last year into the restored archival room.

We are now cataloging each file for names, dates, acreage, wills, deeds etc. They are a great resource for people searching for the history of their houses and in some cases, their families. The fact that these papers have been through fire, neglect, dampness and other 'non-archival storage' for so many years and are still in a viable condition is amazing, but no more so than the man who created them.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S KEYBOARD

Barbara Bielenberg

In this issue we feature the **life and work** of **Frank Teal**, who was the principal surveyor and civil engineer in northern Dutchess County for fifty years until his mysterious murder in 1949 at the age of 82. The vast collection of **Teal's** maps, files and field notes, acquired for the Society by **Winthrop Aldrich** and the late **Clara Losee**, are proving to be a valuable resource to the many researchers who come to our Archive Room every Tuesday, now that the Red Hook files have been indexed on our new computer by **Barbara Thompson**. The flat box of maps acquired by the Bicentennial Committee is probably our most consulted resource – studied by writers, archeologists and homeowners seeking long ago locations of houses, schools or missing buildings.

We are deeply grateful for the many donations received this year, ranging in size from **Alvin Sheffer's** tiny business card from **W.E. Burnett's Steam Cider, Wine & Vinegar Works** in Tivoli and **Carol Brener's** postcard of **The Swimming Pool at Camp Tivoli** to **Betty Mae VanParys's** gift of two tall steel library shelves for our growing collection of books.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any non profit organization, and our Archive Room couldn't serve the



Postcard: *The Swimming Pool, Camp Tivoli, Madlin, NY.*
Egbert Benson Historical Society Gift of Carol Brener.

public without the attention of **Bobbie Thompson, Kate Dewsnap and Linda Keeling**. Our thanks to **John Cioffi** who photographs our meetings and **Mary Cioffi, Nancy Hetzler, Evie Seils** and the many anonymous donors who enrich our diet with plates of delicious cookies for the refreshment table.

But most of all, I want to thank **Mary Cioffi** for her years of service as Treasurer of the Society, arranger of our dinners, greeter at our receptions and writer of countless thank you notes. She has begged to retire from her financial responsibilities but I trust she will continue to bless us with her gracious participation in our other activities. They say no one is indispensable but **Mary** has served in so many quiet ways we can't even imagine not having her participation. Thank you **Mary** and **John** for all you contribute to our Historical Society.

CHANLER CHAPMAN'S HAT

Mary Kelly had given us a smudged old pith helmet which belonged to **Chanler Chapman**. Prominently hand-lettered on the back is "Buck a Year" (the price of Chapman's newspaper, the Barrytown Explorer), on the side is "Bury Goldwater" and on the front, "Barrytown Explorer" "Let GEO. Do It"

Searching for a meaning, Kate Dewsnap looked for the expression "Let George do it" on the internet and discovered the term grew out of the use of autopilots in World War II. Using the autopilot became "letting George do it". Other than that legitimate use the "Let George do it" attitude was discouraged. US Propaganda posters told people not to pass the buck, and referred to the autopilot switch on military planes.

Another website contained the lyrics of a song sung by Walter Van Brunt. We quote from the first stanza:

*"Last year when cousin Georgie from the country came to call
I made him go along with me to see a game of ball.
The players wrangled as to whom the umpire should be
So I suggested that the team let Georgie referee
And Georgie did it. The crowd began to shout.
A player ran to second base, and Georgie said, "you're out!"
The captain said he wasn't; an argument took place,
That evening a conductor came to pick up Georgie's face..*

NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR HERITAGE AWARDS

Each year the Historical Society solicits nominations of individuals or projects which have made significant contributions to the historic heritage of the Town of Red Hook

Nominations may be made in one or more of the following categories:

Written or Recorded: typed or published texts; taped, photographic or audiovisual material; documents or research work.

Architectural: historic restorations, preservation or design applications that reflect or enhance the vintage character of the Town.

Artistic: artwork, artifacts or replicas, in any media or material, which depict, typify or enlarge comprehension of the past.

Environmental: site works that conserve, restore or beautify settings reminiscent of the area's past.

Nominations may be made in each of these two categories:

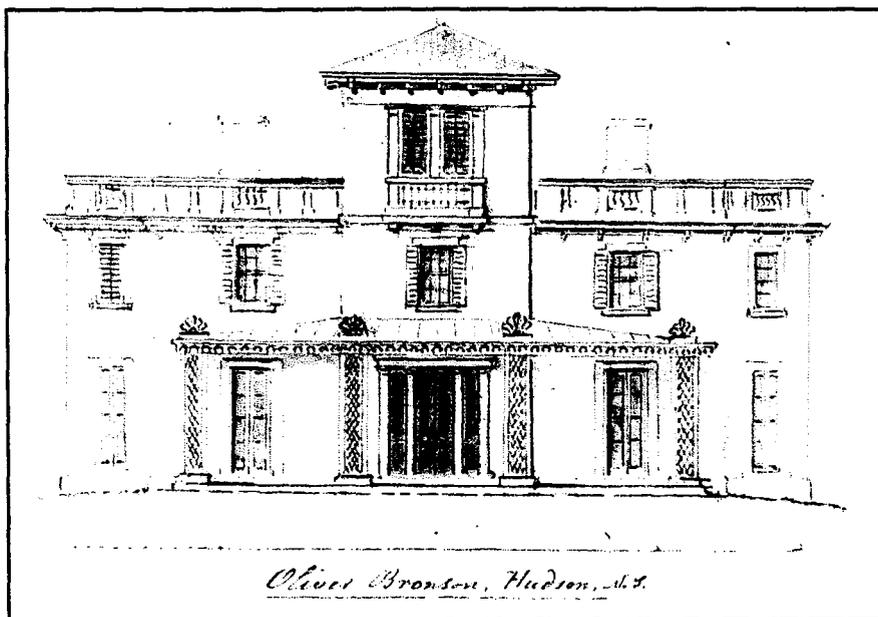
Senior: an individual or group over the age of 21;

Junior: an individual or group under the age of 21.

Nominations must be received by June 9th. Mail to the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook, Box 1813, Red Hook, NY 12571. Please include the following:

- a. Award category;
- b. Identification of the nominee by name, title or location;
- c. Your name, address and telephone number in case we need more information.

Nominations received by the due date will be evaluated by an objective **Heritage Awards Committee**. Winners will be notified and a formal presentation made at the Annual Dinner Meeting on June 20th. Awards include a complimentary membership, award certificate and complimentary dinner. For more information, call 758-2923.



The Plumb-Bronson House, Hudson, NY. One of the "Endangered Treasures" to be shown by Tom Daley at our Annual Meeting, June 20th.

**DON'T MISS THE
ANNUAL DINNER MEETING OF THE
EGBERT BENSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK**

Tuesday, June 20, 2000
at the Elmendorph Inn
North Broadway, Red Hook

6:00 p.m.	Punch and Hors d'oeuvres	7:30 p.m.	Meeting & Awards
6:30 p.m.	Buffet dinner	8:00p.m.	Speaker, Tom Daley

Dinner Menu

Fruit Stuffed Pork Loin	Roasted Red Potatoes
Chicken Breast with Asparagus	Saffron Rice
Bouqueterie of Vegetables	Rolls and Butter
California Fruit Torte	
Coffee and Tea	
Cost: \$15.00 per person	

DINNER RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE BY JUNE 12th
Please make checks payable to RENNERS
And mail to: Mary Cioffi
Old Post Road North
Red Hook, NY 12571

RESERVATION FORM

Names(s) (please print) _____
Phone _____ Number of Persons @\$15.00 _____
Amount Enclosed _____

In order to participate in the Annual Meeting your membership must be brought up to date. Check your mailing label and use the Membership Form on the back page.

PROXY

I/We will **not** attend the Annual Meeting of the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook on June 20, 2000. In my absence, I hereby appoint the President or her deputy or _____ as my proxy to vote on all matters that may come before the membership at the meeting.

Signature
Date _____

Signature
Date _____

Normal



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 1813 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0357

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2000

Name(s) (Please Print)

Mailing Address

Telephone Number (Area Code)

ANNUAL DUES

Check appropriate line(s): make check payable to "Egbert Benson Historical Society"

Family \$12 Individual \$8 Student (under 18) \$1
Contributing \$25 Sustaining \$50 Life (\$100 or more)
Business or Organization \$15

Additional contributions are most welcome and are eligible for company matches: DONATION \$

We invite you to help with the work of the Society. Please check here () if you would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities.

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP: • Advance notice of monthly meetings • Three newsletters each year • The knowledge that you support the collection, preservation and dissemination of the history of the Town of Red Hook.

NO 2000 ON YOUR MAILING LABEL? PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP.

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