

HISTORIC RED HOOK

William S. Teator

April 28th, 1860–August 17th, 1930

St. John's Cemetery, Upper Red Hook

Grey granite tablet with curved top, large engraved "TE-ATOR" facing the access road in the newer section, western side of the cemetery.

Musician, photographer, artist, naturalist, farmer.

"...Mr. Teator was a genius. Nothing was too small or apparently inconsequential to escape his notice, and nothing was too much trouble." —Burton Coon



William Seward Teator (named for Lincoln's secretary of state) was the son of Andrew H. Teator and Ruth Monfort. He grew up on a farm that had been in the Teator family since 1767, and, though a future in farming was all but destined for him, Will Teator did not let that (and the fact that his only schooling was at the Upper Red Hook Academy) limit his curiosity. In his lifetime, Will would express himself with art, investigate the natural world of our local area, and document his neighborhood in photographs.

The farm he called "Blue Ribbon Farm" was at first, like most of the 18th and 19th century, a "general farm" with diverse crops, livestock, and activities. Will focused his attention on apples, hay, and grain. His scientific mind applied to farming resulted in experimentation in cultivating prize-winning apple varieties, and he freely shared his knowledge in journals and amongst locals.

Interest in history and the outdoors led him to go on expeditions in the Catskills with his local friends Ned Kerley and Harvey Losee in search of Native American artifacts. Nearly everyone in our area had a small collection of arrowheads which in the 19th century were found in abundance along the Hudson.

Farming and roaming the area gave him an appreciation for nature and his inquisitive mind latched on to one creature in particular—the freshwater mollusk. When he collected their shell specimens from all around he made sure to document where and when he found them. This well-organized collection was said to be "especially useful" to researchers, but according to his daughter Marion, the only local interested in them



International Apple Shippers' Association Presidents Cup, Chicago, 1915, on Ron Losee's mantle in 2009. Photo by Sarah K. Hermans.



Artifact Hunters, left-to-right, Harvey Losee, W.S. Teator, & Ned Kerley. Collection of Sarah K. Hermans.

was the infamous John Watts dePeyster. The aristocratic dePeyster took an interest in this erudite local young man, employing him as his personal secretary, and thought Will was “a fine looking fellow, healthy, strong, active, enured to toil.” DePeyster died in 1907, perhaps the only one who would have kept the shells after Will passed, but fortunately, a home was found for them in the Delaware Museum of Natural History.

Will published three articles about his farming methods in Rural New Yorker magazine (“a journal for the suburban and country home”) and, after he passed, the October 1930 issue featured an article about Will written by local historian Burton Coon and one of Will’s landscape drawings of the Catskill mountains he had done for dePeyster. Coons said that, to Will, “the tree was more than a stock of wood with branches and leaves—a means to an end. It was a living, breathing, sensitive thing that could appreciate a kindness and feel a hurt.”

An avid photographer for a time, Will captured images on glass plate negatives around the turn of the 20th century. These were handed down to John Losee, then to his widow Clara, then to his daughter, and his teenage granddaughter almost destroyed them by turning them into an art piece. Fortunately, they were gifted to Historic Red Hook and have been preserved for generations to come. Visit our website to see them! historicrodhook.org/collections.

As if these interests weren’t enough, Will also played piccolo in the Red Hook Band. One wonders when he had the time to practice!

Will married Nevada “Nena” Myers, daughter of Alexander Myers and Mary Flynn, in New York City in 1891. They had two children, Roscoe (1893-1932) and Marion (1895-1992). Marion married and divorced Edwin Lamb Losee and had one child, the incredible Dr. Ronald E. Losee who donated many Losee and Teator family photos and documents to Historic Red Hook. His autobiography, Doc—Then and Now with a Montana Physician, talks of bygone days in Upper Red Hook, as well as his incredible career as a physician in Montana in the second half of the 20th century. Ron always spoke of his grandfather Will with fondness, having been partially raised by the Teators. Roscoe Teator married Isabelle Massonneau and had three children, Jeanette, Annabelle and William.

William S. Teator passed away in 1930 two years after having surgery on his throat in a New York City hospital. He left his heirs an estate worth \$100,000 (more than 1.8 million today) and his farm went to his son Roscoe, who passed away only two years later. Roscoe’s widow Isbell tried her best to run it, but went out of business in 1942. Thanks to Will’s great-grandchildren Becky and Jon Losee sending boxes of their father Ron’s old family documents back to Dutchess County after his passing, a complete record of this great man’s life is



W.S. Teator in his band uniform, HRH Archives.



VIEW OF THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS FROM THE HEIGHTS EAST OF UPPER RED HOOK, DRAWN BY WILLIAM S. TEATOR.
EXECUTED BY N. Y. ENGRAVING CO. FOR GENERAL J. WATTS DE PEYSTER.

*"View of the Catskill Mountains from the Heights East of Upper Red Hook, Drawn by William S. Teator.
Executed by N.Y. Engraving Co. for General J. Watts De Peyster" HRH Archives*

preserved by Historic Red Hook. For more information about W.S. Teator, visit Bard College's interactive site dedicated to him "The Life and Times of W.S. Teator" at projects.eh.bard.edu/teatorfarm

Research and writing by Sarah K. Hermans, 2025

Sources:

1910 Federal Census, Red Hook, Dutchess Co. NY - William S. Teator

1920 Federal Census, Red Hook, Dutchess Co. NY Pitcher Lane - Roscoe Teator

Beacon News, 23 Aug 1930

Coon, Burton, "In Memory of William S. Teator", *The Rural New Yorker*, 19 Oct 1930

delmns.org/

findagrave.com/memorial/82316626/marion_losee

findagrave.com/memorial/82316655/william-s-teator

findagrave.com/memorial/82316672/nena_teator

Garlinghouse, Helen M. "William Seward Teator (1860-1930)" *The Nautilus*, 29 Oct 1976 Vol 90 #4 p.148-149

Harlem Valley Times, 21 Aug 1930

Leonard, Roger M. *Upper Red Hook, an American Crossroad*. self-published, 2012, p. 166

museumstudies.udel.edu/resources/de-musereviews/natural-history/

New York, U.S., Episcopal Diocese of New York Church Records, 1767-1970 Kent Cliffs & Richardsville St John the Baptist 1870 - 1940

New York Sun, 19 Aug 1930

Poughkeepsie Eagle-News, 13 Jun 1932

projects.eh.bard.edu/teatorfarm/general/ws-teator-about-page/

Rhinebeck Gazette, 18 Oct 1930

Rhinebeck Gazette/Red Hook Times, 14 Mar 1931

Rhinebeck Gazette/Red Hook Times, 24 Jun 1932

Strayer, David. "Ecology and zoogeography of the freshwater mollusks of the Hudson River Basin - a report to the Hudson River Foundation (project 28-84B-29)" Institute of Ecosystem Studies, The New York Botanical Garden, Millbrook NY. March 1986