

Art Tells A Story Of Red Hook Immigrants

By Nancy Bendiner, October 27, 2022

Nancy is a longtime volunteer on the Historic Red Hook Collections Committee



These Shaw Portraits were recently donated to Historic Red Hook. Mamie Shaw (left) and Henry Shaw (right).

When Bill Stagias donated two portraits to Historic Red Hook (HRH), I was moved by the faces of the two people portrayed who stare with solemnity into what was their world. A young woman and man, whose names were handwritten by a now-deceased family member on the glass covering the images: Henry V. Shaw and Mamie Shaw.

Henry and Mamie's portraits found a place on the wall in the family home. They were honored, yet over time the details of who they were and their lives dimmed with each new generation. According to Mr Stagias, a descendant, family lore suggests they were a married couple.

The Collections Committee at Historic Red Hook often seeks to learn more than initially known about the items that come our way. Sometimes it is possible to discover glimpses of what Red Hook was like at the time an object was created. We go back in time, and the object speaks to us, offering a story about people, places, and long gone eras. Sometimes, new questions are raised whose answers for now remain elusive.

In this article, I hope to show you what I learned from the portraits themselves, trace Henry's family

back to England, and discover if possible how he and his family arrived in America and Red Hook. After their arrival, what was life like for them? How could their lives in Red Hook teach us about the experience of immigrants who came here?

Clues from the Art

What clues do these portraits offer?

The clothing of the subjects was, we thought, in early 20th century style. Henry Shaw wore what appears to be a formal military uniform which catches one's attention with gold braids and tassels. Mamie chose to wear a pastel blue dress or blouse adorned with a pink corsage. Perhaps they dressed for a special event, such as their marriage, or just for the sake of the image created in a studio. The portraits are held in elaborate wood frames.

A local art historian was asked to view the portraits at HRH. He shared with us that this type of portrait was a common practice around 1900, where paint and pastels were added by hand onto photographs. This approach to memorialize family members was not beyond the financial reach of average citizens.

The Shaws/Shiers from England to Red Hook

My research started at the Historic Red Hook Archives, which I thought might provide the names of Henry's and Mamie's ancestors, whom we could then possibly trace in English or immigration records.

Immigration to and settlement in America was often a "process" that involved other family members as well. As you will see, Henry and Mamie were not alone, and you will meet here some of those who participated in their life's journey.

In the Town of Red Hook marriage records, I found a Henry Victor Shaw, 26, soldier, born in London, England, whose mother's birth name was Alice Clark and whose father was William Shaw. On March 14, 1899, Henry married Florence Emma Feller, 21, born in Red Hook, whose father was John Fraleigh Feller and mother was Anna L. Teal. A 2011 interview with Jim Stagias, also found in the Archives, confirmed that Henry and Gus Shaw (Henry's brother) came from England. That interview also described family and real estate connections between the Stagias and Shaw families,

Then I went to Ancestry.com census and document records to see if a William Shaw, Henry's possible father, was connected to a lady named Alice, or ideally, Alice Clark.

A 1853 Church of England baptismal record from London, England, uncovers three children who were baptized on the same day from the same family in Shoreditch, London with the surname Shiers. The parents were Thomas, a plasterer, and Elizabeth. The three children were William Thomas (born 1850), Grace (born 1852) and Henry (born 1840). Could this William Thomas be the "portrait" Henry's father?

There is ample documented English evidence that a William Thomas Shiers was born in January 1850 in Shoreditch, London, whose father Thomas was a plasterer. About twenty years later, in 1871, the census for the town of Norwich reveals William Thomas Shiers, plasterer, age 21, in the same household as Alice Clarke, wife, born in Shoreditch, age 20 and a child, Grace. The transcription says that Grace was 13 years old, however on my close inspection of the actual handwritten census, I found that the age is illeg-

ible and could be 18. So is this our “portrait” Henry V. Shaw’s family- mom Alice, dad William Thomas, along with Aunt Grace, sister of his father? Henry however has not yet been born.

A look at 1881 English parish records finds the marriage of Alice Clark, a 28 year old “spinster” and Peter Marchketti, plaster modeler. Alice’s father is listed as Samuel Clark. We have already seen that the surname of our Red Hook Alice was Clark. The word “spinster” has collected a few meanings, but at that time I believe it referred just to a “single” woman.

Then we go to the 1891 English census in London, Clerkenwell, and find a Henry Shires age 18 working as a hairdresser. His brother in the same household, Gustave Shires, age 19, worked as an office boy. Also we find their mother Alice Marchette age 38, and J. Marchette age 36, plasterer, listed as stepfather. Additional records identify Peter’s birth name as Pietro Giuseppe Marchketti, born in Italy. In 1901, Alice Marchetti and Peter Marchetti- a “caster in plaster”- were in that year’s census still living in Clerkenwell, London.

Let’s not forget that the accuracy of census or other historic records was affected by a few conditions. It is possible to see how alterations or errors here and there could have occurred. First, a person in the dwelling offered what information he knew to the census taker who came to the door. Then the census taker wrote down the names, ages, and other information about those in the dwelling. Perhaps the informant’s memories dimmed over time, he never was knowledgeable about the facts to begin with, or may have been poor at spelling. The census taker was perhaps rushed, distracted, and/or wrote illegibly. A harried census taker could have taken some information from neighbors! Then transcriptions of the records were eventually made, probably more than once, so the information would be more easily read in typewritten form and accessible. Years later, sites like Ancestry.com also offer transcriptions from the original paper record, which over time could have been damaged, faded, or unreadable in some places.

It is notable that the name in the English census records is spelled Shiers rather than Shaw. Other names mentioned here have various spellings depending on the source- such as Clark vs. Clarke, Marchetti vs. Marchketti vs. Marchette. Whether these were misspellings by census takers or in church records is unknown. Also, many families or individuals altered their surnames for multiple reasons. I think the additional clues support that this is the same family that ended up in Red Hook, apparently without William Thomas Shaw.

I have done some research about William Thomas Shaw. At least one public family tree and a number of documents on Ancestry.com offer some evidence that this William Thomas Shiers/Shaw, born 1850, who was with Alice Clarke in London, eventually moved to Australia. This is not proven though. This is another example of the fact genealogy never ends, it is never quite complete, and there is always another path to explore.

My next discovery in the HRH archives was the 1913 death record of Alice Marchetti, 60, housewife, died in Red Hook, born in England, whose parents were Samuel Clark and Eleanor Hawkins, born in England. In the HRH Town of Red Hook marriage records for her son Henry, we have already seen and noted that Alice’s maiden name was Clark. We also saw in English records an Alice who married Peter Marchetti.

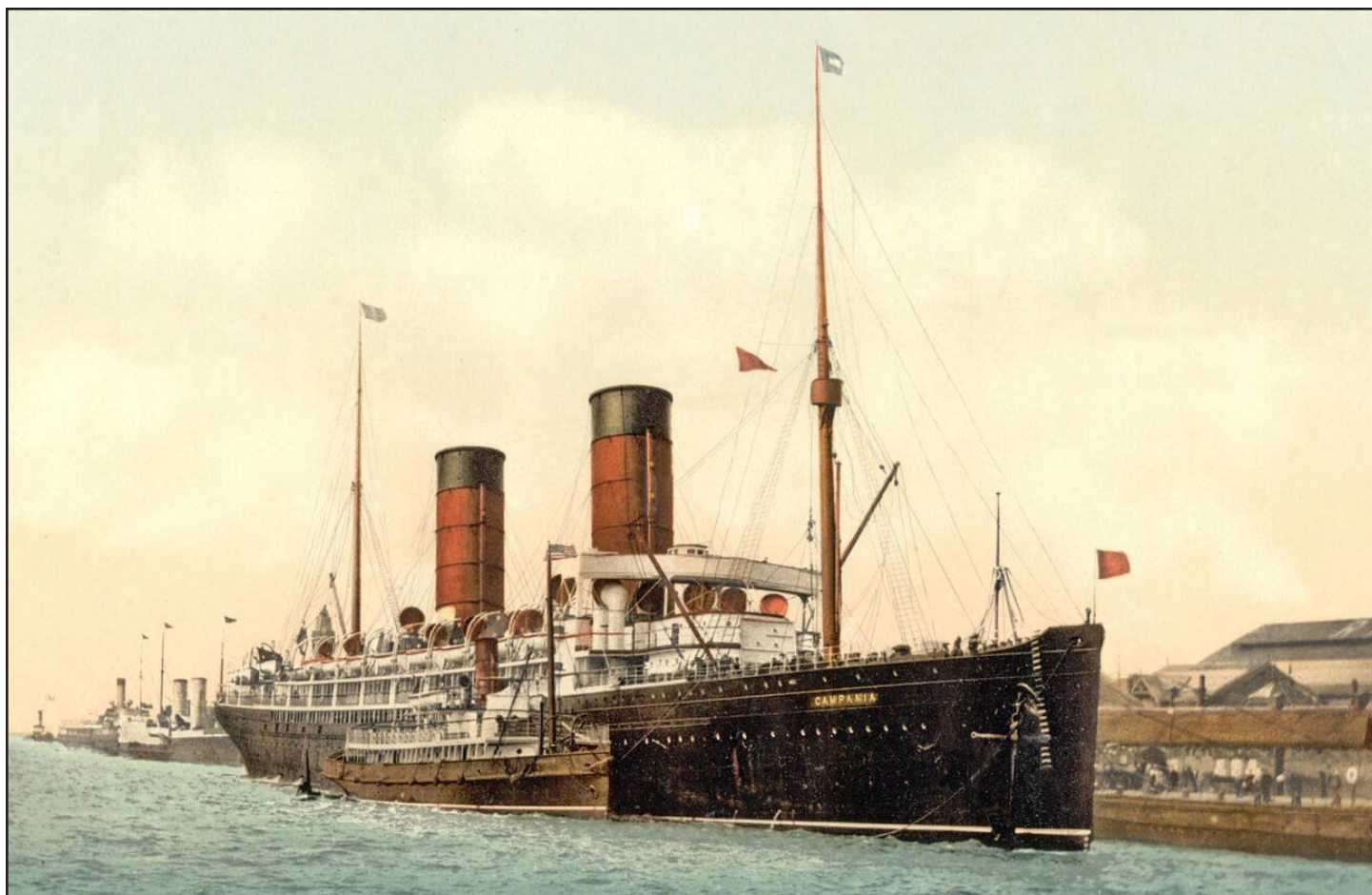
At least as far as these clues suggest, the Henry in the portrait is most likely the Henry Shiers born in 1873, whose family origins going back to at least 1850 have been described here.

There is no clear answer to explain why the younger Shiers/Shaw brothers came to America. It is

likely of course that they sought a better life, perhaps an adventure, perhaps to join family already in Red Hook, New York.

My effort to find Henry or his brother Gustave on ship manifests has so far failed. I found Gustave's wife Kezia Shaw and children William, Gustave, and Miriam, all born in England, arriving at Ellis Island on the ship *Campania* on November 6, 1909, sailing from Liverpool, England. The ship record says Kezia was on her way to join her husband in Red Hook, New York. You can google the *Campania*'s history, which is quite interesting. Meanwhile, Alice Marchetti, married, age 54, and Pietro Marchetti are found on the ship *Lusitania*'s manifest in May, 1910, traveling to be with H. Shaw in Red Hook, New York. As you may know, this ship was, as described on the Ellis Island web site, "torpedoed and sunk off the Irish Coast" in 1915, with vast loss of life. Fortunately no one in this Shaw family was on that voyage (as far as we know)!

There are some discrepancies in information about when Henry emigrated from England, as found in census records and his obituary. One census record states that Henry V. Shaw, age 57, "Farmer" and "Florist," arrived in 1893, another states 1894. Meanwhile, Henry's September 1940 obituary in the *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News* listed his immigration year as 1897.



The RMS Campania, Cunard Line- active 1893-1918. This ship was taken by Henry's brother's family to get to America.

Henry Victor Shaw in Red Hook

Henry V. Shaw, the likely subject in our portrait, appears to have had a busy and meaningful life, as suggested by newspapers and census records of his time.

Digital access of newspapers has vastly expanded the information available for family history study. HRH on its web site- www.historicredhook.org/collections- offers digitized local newspapers that cover a vast swath of local history. Additionally, HRH researchers often find troves of information on fultonhistory.com.

In the 1900 Federal Census, Henry was listed as a farmer, age 26, with his wife Florence and as yet unnamed month-old child. In 1916, he was described by the Columbia Republican as an expert in “growing ferns.” Henry was sometimes described as a farmer and a florist. The 1920 Federal Census described Henry, born about 1875 in England, who immigrated in “1894,” as a “Florist Farmer.” In other articles, he was described as a veteran of the Spanish American War, which could explain his military costume in the picture. He joined the US Army in 1898 and was discharged in 1903.

Newspaper articles about Henry also reveal that he sold flowers and many other items. In 1912, he placed a newspaper ad as a dealer in phonographs and records. He also placed ads for the sale of apples, cherries, and other fruit “at low prices” in the 1914 *Red Hook Journal*. One of his 1927 ads in the *Red Hook Advertiser* offered for sale “vegetable plants, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato” and other edibles as well as flowers. Perhaps one of his earliest ventures in Red Hook was as a barber, a business he sold in 1904. Remember that as a young man in England, the Henry we located on a census was described as a “hairdresser.”

What About Mamie?

Typical of official records of the time, there was less documentation about females. They took their husband’s surnames, were not usually landowners, and were often described as “at home” or doing “housework” on census records.

I have searched the ancestry of Henry V. Shaw’s wife Florence Emma Feller, and so far have not found a Mamie, nor have I found that name in Henry’s ancestry or descendants. However, I may not yet have the full name of his wife. Sometimes in those days, official names at birth could be quite long with more than one “middle” name. Also nicknames can also result for example when young children are unable to pronounce a name.

My tentative conclusion is that the “portrait” Mamie is indeed Florence Emma Feller, born 1878 or 1879 in Red Hook (depending on the source). Mamie could have been her nickname. She married Henry V. Shaw in 1899 and passed away in 1953 in Red Hook. Her ancestral family is well known in Red Hook where they settled long before Henry arrived, and included among others the Fraleigh family. Many were farmers. When John Feller, Florence’s father, was a two year old, his father Jacob is described as a “farmer” in the 1850 US Federal Census

Were there any ladies in the family whose names came close to the sound of Mamie? The wife of the Henry Shaw born in 1901- who was the immigrant Henry’s son- was Mary or May (depending on the source), born 1899. One of Henry Victor’s nieces, daughter of his brother Gustave, was Miriam- is that close to Mamie? These people would have been too young or not born yet when the portraits were created about 1900. As usual in genealogy, there is more to know. There are multiple directions in which to go, and surprises in store.

Who's Who- A Family Maintains Tradition And Contact

One challenge to the genealogist is the appearance of the same first names across generations of a family, as you have already seen in this article. In this Shaw family, or at least the one in Red Hook, there were multiple name repetitions. The brothers Henry and Gus/Gustave had children and grandchildren named Henry and Gustave, for example. Henry Victor Shaw— and now we know his middle name—was born in 1873, his son Henry V. Shaw was born in 1901, and grandson Henry was born in 1929. Henry Victor's other children were Florence, William, as well as Augustine and Alfred. Gustave, the elder brother of Henry, included more family names among his children: William, Alice, Miriam and Gustave. This type of repetition of course is a challenge sometimes in determining who's who on genealogical records.

There is some evidence that the extended Shaw family could be supportive of each other. Among a number of examples, one finds the 1918 Draft Registration Card of Gustave Warren Shaw, age 18, working as a farm laborer on the farm of his father Henry V. Shaw in Red Hook. There are a number of documented examples where family members lived with relatives. Peter Marchetti, listed as a 60 year old "lodger," is found in the 1915 US Federal Census living in the home of his stepson Gustave- who was working as a farm laborer and chauffeur. Peter's wife Alice had died in 1913. Florence Shaw passed away in 1953 at the home of her son Gus in Upper Red Hook.

Henry V. Shaw's extended family attended local churches, both in Red Hook and Upper Red Hook. The churches in Red Hook at the time provided social and religious activities and brought the community together. According to her 1953 obituary in the *Red Hook Advertiser*, Florence was a member of All Saints Chapel in Upper Red Hook. Henry and Florence are buried at St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery, Red Hook. Gustave, Henry's brother, is buried at St. John's Reformed Dutch Church Cemetery in Upper Red Hook.

Stories That Survive

What stories survive that are passed down to descendants? I have always felt that sometimes the most unusual or perhaps colorful stories survive by word of mouth. The stories are sometimes confirmed, expanded or even corrected by newspaper reports.

In June, 1912, the *Poughkeepsie Evening Enterprise* reported that Henry V. Shaw erected a "dancing pavilion" on his place between Red Hook Village and Upper Red Hook. In various publications, he placed ads about planned events. For one Saturday evening, the charge was to be "10 cents per set." In a 2011 interview Jim Stagias said Henry built a frame house "just south of the former Nelson and later Herb Saulpaugh house." He built a tea garden nearer the road. The frame house burned down and he replaced it "with the present large stucco house, just north of the present Hearthstone Motel. Gus built his house just south of there."

In the case of the Shaw/Stagias families, among a host of recollections that survive, the story of the "stills" stands out. During Prohibition, in December, 1928, according to *The Kingston Daily Freeman*, Federal agents demolished two stills on the Henry V. Shaw farm on Rockefeller Lane in Red Hook. 250 and 500 gallon stills were "turning out apple jack." He was arrested as the owner and operator and held on \$1,500 bail. Three months later, Henry was fined: \$250 for having two stills and 1000 gallons of apple

jack whiskey “in the abandoned greenhouse of his property.”

Then there are the obituaries, which can clarify much about the history of families, their names, their relations. One can see that this family was active in the Red Hook community. The obit that stays in my mind is that of “Gustav” Warren Shaw, born in 1900 in Red Hook, the son of Henry Shaw and Florence Feller Shaw. At the time of his death in 1979, he was a Town of Red Hook committeeman and previously town assessor and farmer. Several hours after his death in the hospital, his son Warren went to tell his mother Sarah about the passing of her husband. Warren found his mother passed away at home. Joint funeral services were conducted. The title of the obituary is “Couple not separated by death.”

The Story Moves Forward

Genealogy and articles as mentioned here can spur one to delve further into the crannies of a family’s past. I have found that the reasons to seek out one’s family history are varied- some wish to feel a deeper sense of who they are and where they “came from,” some are just curious, some hope to pass on a legacy which improves their sense of family status. Whatever the motives, as you can see, there is evidence somewhere that can lead to at least part of the story, but one has to find it.

This Shaw family was fortunate, from a genealogical perspective, to have a paper and document trail. It is worth remembering that some families, our country’s African American and Native American ancestors in particular, were less well documented in general (if at all) and many persons in those groups may never be known for who they were, what they did in their lives or where they lived or originated. This is a great misfortune.

One can conclude that the Shaw family represents in many ways the European “immigrant” story. They sought a better future, often joining relatives but sometimes were on their own. They used the tools at hand wherever they moved, as well as applied their talents and personalities to build new lives. For the new immigrant, the best economic possibility in Red Hook was often in farming. Henry offered his abilities as a florist, as a farmer and when a young man, as a barber. The immigrants often married local folks as Henry did. Those local folks were part of families that once immigrated as well. One finds throughout America that especially in the early years or their residence, many families remained in the same location where they first settled, or in nearby towns. Many young men joined the military.

From two names and two



*A postcard from the Tea Gardens,
established by Henry Shaw in the early twentieth century.*

portraits, it is possible therefore to uncover many clues if the information sources exist. I have offered a glimpse of one family using sources available to me, but as in any such project, there are more stories to tell, more ideas to explore, and paths which could lead elsewhere, and confirm or refute some of my findings.

As I gaze at Henry V. Shaw's fine military attire in the portrait, I am reminded of the images described at his funeral by the *Pine Plains Herald* in 1940: a large group of Spanish war veterans from his camp in the war came to honor him, with color bearers and a "firing squad" (as the honor is called). In all likelihood, a bugler played taps at the end.

If anyone reading this account has memories to share with Historic Red Hook, we can be reached at info@historicrodhook.org.

Nancy Bendiner | Historic Red Hook Collections Committee

Sources:

- Historic Red Hook Archives, Town of Red Hook Death Records and Marriage Records
- Historic Red Hook, Digitized Newspaper Collection
- Historic Red Hook Archives, interview with Jim Stagias, 2011, genealogy files
- In person meeting with Bill Stagias at HRH, 2021
- New York State Census Records, Red Hook, New York
- United States Federal Census Records, Red Hook, New York
- English Census 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901
- Military collection, Draft Registration Cards
- London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns
- London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms
- England, Select Marriages
- Ellis Island Immigration Records

Newspapers:

- *The Rhinebeck Gazette and Red Hook Times*
- *The Evening Enterprise*
- *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*
- *The Gazette Advertiser*
- *Pine Plains Register Herald*
- *The Kingston Daily Freeman*
- *The Columbia Republican*
- *Red Hook Journal*
- *Red Hook Advertiser*
- Burnett-White online tribute, William H. Shaw, March 2021