

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Warren Miller

Born 1881 Died 1941

Red Hook Methodist Church

Small metal marker provided by the funeral home, misplaced, wedged by George Fraleigh's granite marker, northwest side of the cemetery near the tree line



Warren C. Miller was the son of Reuben Miller and Mary Paulmier (daughter of James and Sophia, also buried in this cemetery) of Red Hook, and in the 1900 census he was enumerated in his parents' house on Prince Street as a 30 year-old "ice-man" (working to harvest ice). He married a woman named Olive on December 15th, 1908 in Red Hook and had two daughters, Dorothy and Margaret. It's unclear if there's a relation between Warren Miller and Martha (Miller) Stall who is also buried in this cemetery.

On Monday, June 25th, 1923, Miller (40) and two of his friends, Sylvester Holt (50) and Frank VanWagner (43) went out drinking. This would be a perfectly normal thing to do, had it not been during prohibition. They drank hard cider and became sufficiently inebriated as to be arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct.

On the same night, three barns owned by John Coon "just south of the school house" were burned to the ground. The structures and their contents were lost, including a team of horses and a Ford car. Shortly after firemen had finished trying to fight that blaze, another popped up—this time to the east of town at "the box factory connected with the chocolate factory, a large building filled with lumber." Losses at both sites totalled "\$10,000, partly covered by insurance."

Because the fires seemed suspect and there had been a number of them in recent weeks, the drunks were interviewed and Miller admitted to setting the Coon fires, helping the firefighters to put it out, then crossing town to set the Chocolate Factory (his former place of employment) ablaze as well. In his confession, Miller said "while he was under the influence of hard cider he wanted excitement so started the blaze in order to help the firemen extinguish them."

Holt and VanWagner got 10 days for drunk and disorderly, and Miller faced four indictments, including two counts of arson in the second and third degrees and two counts of "unlawful entry of a building with intent to commit a felony." He opted to be tried before a grand jury and was sentenced to a minimum of seven years, six months with a maximum of 15 years, six months, and sent to Sing Sing prison.

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A year later, 90 Red Hook residents signed a petition asking the New York Supreme Court to let Miller out on probation because he was in poor health and he had a wife and children to provide for. Governor Alfred E. Smith commuted his sentence on February 15th, 1926 to two years and four months with time served and Miller was released. In 1930 he appeared in the census with his wife and daughters as a 50-year-old laborer working odd jobs and living on Railroad Avenue in Red Hook.

He died on August 23rd, 1941 at 62 years of age. A small metal marker (the kind provided by funeral homes in lieu of a stone monument) was found pressed into the ground in front of John & Irene Fraleigh's tombstone in 2019. There is no relation between these families so it is thought that a visitor found it loose and did their best to secure it.

Research and writing by Sarah K. Hermans, 2022

Sources:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/43538807/warren-c-miller>

New York Death Index

1940 Federal Census, Red Hook, Dutchess Co NY, Warren Miller

1900 Federal Census, Red Hook village, Dutchess Co NY, Reuben Miller

Rhinebeck Gazette, 8 Jan 1942

Rhinebeck Gazette, 6 Dec 1924

Rhinebeck Gazette, 7 Jul 1923

Pine Plains Register-Herald, 21 Jul 1923

Poughkeepsie Eagle News, 19 Feb 1926

Rhinebeck Gazette, 30 Jun 1923