

HISTORIC RED HOOK

John Curtis

Born 1818 Died 1879

Red Hook Methodist Cemetery

Northwest side, against the fence line in a plot with his Curtis and Beaumont family

John Curtis was the son of Legrand Curtis and Rachel Canfield. He married Jane Carter Beaumont, an immigrant from Yorkshire, England. He was “a man among men because he possessed all the noble qualities of a man” according to an obituary from an advertisement flier and newsletter called the Aurora Borealis, self-published by Massonneau Brothers Dry Goods and Groceries. The obituary notes that he was a Sunday School teacher and “as a mechanic, he stood in the front rank...having been in business nearly forty years.” He sold stoves and hardware in Red Hook and The Curtis Hardware and Tin shop is now Williams Lumber on the northside of East Market Street. He was, by his own account and others’, a handyman of some skill who also installed roofs and lightning rods, and crafted little tin “jewels” for the Masons.

John was a fervent Methodist and “was a kind, affable, genial, and most excellent neighbor and friend.” Judging from words written about him by others after his death and by his diary in the holdings of Historic Red Hook, John was an easy-going, even funny guy. He used some great turns of phrase in his own writing. When his wife Jane was ill and he was obliged to take over housekeeping duties he was “installed in the domestic service by dire necessity” and his then four children were the “victims” of his cooking in her stead. “The long visages at [the] table I considered a reflection on my system of cookery.” When bored one day he said the weather was “Rain & fog, times dull, very dull, uncommonly dull, exceedingly dull, excessively dull.”

John told us that he was “not a social being. I always had a dislike to enter into society”. In 1856 John recorded that the family was paid a visit by a certain couple, and though he did not approve, he put up with it. The husband proceeded to play the melodeon at their house and John remarked that he was “...a “surface man”...everything of value or depth about him is on the surface.”

John taught Sunday school, and his family regularly attended the Methodist church, but at one point “removed our places about 4 seats nearer the altar and found it much pleasanter, being out of range of



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tobacco spitters, mockers and whisperers.”

He and Jane had eight children; Grace, Florence, Willis, and James died very young and are buried with them, and Legrand Beaumont, Edwin Styles, Lucy Irene, and Herbert Jackson lived to adulthood.

John made mention in his diary that he “attended (the) funeral of Pulver’s child [Susanna, also buried in the cemetery] in the [Red Hook Methodist] church” on March 12th, 1856. Having lost several of his own infant children recently and seeing so many of his neighbors also lose young ones must have had a profound effect on him as four days later, he and three of his own children would be baptized as Methodists, though he’d been practicing for many years.

That summer, he orchestrated erecting a wood fence around the Methodist cemetery and also spruced up his own plot with Griffin and Cornelius Pulver. He fretted that “from present appearances more of our children will soon occupy a place in it” because his daughter Lucy Irene was ill, but fortunately she made a full recovery. In September, John noted that Jacob Martin and C. Staley started to make a fence around the Curtis plot and he and John Hapeman “leveled and sodded graves in our plot and I moved the marbles and set them straight.” By the first of October, the chains had been looped through the posts of his gravesite, and around the cemetery itself the gate had been added and the wood fencing was complete.

John Curtis himself was laid to rest here after he had a stroke and died quite suddenly at around four in the afternoon on Sunday, July 7th, 1879 after attending services and conducting Sunday School. He was 61 years old.

Research and writing by Sarah K. Hermans (his second-great-granddaughter), 2022

Sources:

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/42985854/john-curtis>

Diary of John Curtis, Red Hook c.1850

Death notices, Dutchess & Columbia County, New York: From Red Hook newspapers

Reminiscences of Red Hook (A story of the Village), E. Bassett

Curtis/Fraleigh family records

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