

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Dr. William Wheeler & Eliza (Smith) Wheeler

1754–1810 & 1761–1788

St. John's Reformed Church cemetery, Upper Red Hook

His is a small white shouldered tympanum marble tablet near the southeast corner of the church, hers is a tall shouldered tympanum slate tablet with wheel symbol to the left of his.

Revolutionary War Veteran & Physician

William Wheeler's tombstone informs visitors that it is "In memory of William Wheeler, MD who chose a life of extensive usefulness". "Living meritoriously, discharging his several duties of Physician, Husband, Parent, Friend, & Citizen with skill, fidelity, tenderness, zeal & patriotism. His Death was consistent with a well spent life."

The local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter reported on those interred here who served the cause and claimed that Dr. Wheeler had "three services in the line" through December of 1780. Notice of his passing in the Poughkeepsie Journal stated that his "political career commenced under the banners of the immortal Washington" but this doesn't strictly mean he saw combat. Due to his name being common for the time and place, and his service probably being in Connecticut, it's not clear exactly which service record is his. He is, however, the same Assemblyman William Wheeler from Dutchess County who held the position in the 20th New York State Legislature from 1796–97. This fact is bolstered by his colleague in the same term, Salisbury Connecticut native and New York State Senator Ambrose Spencer, Esq., who was William's brother-in-law and an executor of his last will and testament.

It's also a bit confusing as to how Dr. William Wheeler and Dr. Gamaliel Wheeler (both buried here) are related. Both men moved from Pomfret, Connecticut along the Salisbury Turnpike to Red Hook and were doctors in the same village. Both men were baptized at Abington First Congregational church in Pomfret, one a generation before the other. Their age differences and proximity seem to indicate that William's brother John was Gamaliel's father.

On his way here, William resided briefly in Salisbury, Connecticut where he met and married Deidamia Spencer. They had



Detail: 1797 Rhinebeck map, surveyed by Alexander Thompson, Collection of Bard College, Montgomery Place Campus



Deidamia and Eliza's tombstones, both images from FindAGrave.com

one child, named for her mother, before she passed away. He was then married for a second time to Eliza Smith from Sharon, Connecticut and traveled with her along the Salisbury Turnpike until they made their home in Upper Red Hook. Eliza's parents were Cotton Mather Smith and Temperance Worthington. It's not often we have record of a fun nickname for a puritan given name like the shortened "Tempe" engraved on her daughter Eliza's tombstone. In 1785 William Wheeler bought land and built a home for his family called "The Ridge" one can see today at the top of the T formed by Route 9 and Old Post Road.

In addition to Diadama (born 1779), he and Eliza had daughters Eliza and Mary before she too passed away in 1788. Eliza's burial is reported to have been the first made in this cemetery and her beautiful slate gravestone still stands to this day. It matches the one William placed for his first wife in Spencer's Corners in the Town of Northeast in size, style, and material. In 1790, William was married for the last time to Wilhelmina Vreedenburgh and had at least one child, daughter Anna Maria, in 1795.

Eliza Smith Wheeler's daughters Elizabeth Maria "Eliza" Wheeler (1784–1859) married John A. Davenport and Mary Wheeler (1786–1864) married Hubert Van Wagenen. Deidamia Spencer Wheeler's daughter Diadema (1780–1818) married Bradford Waldo and moved to Ohio.

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Poughkeepsie Eagle, 02 May 1810 ·Page 3

Poughkeepsie Eagle, 24 Mar 1807 ·Page 4

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Poughkeepsie Journal, 2 May 1810

Will of William Wheeler, Dutchess County dated Feb. 10, 1806, proved May 10. 1810