

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Legrand Beaumont Curtis

November 3rd, 1841–August 1st, 1906

St. Paul's Lutheran Cemetery, Red Hook

Tiered square marble monument with arched faces on the north side of the hill not far from the access road. Perhaps once had an obelisk atop it.

Note: Some of the following text is included here verbatim from the author of this entry's book, *The 1903 Jackson Corners Signature Quilt*.

Legrand Beaumont Curtis, born in 1841, was the son of John Curtis and Jane Carter Beaumont. They and Legrand's aunt, Martha Beaumont (who suffered from mental illness and was institutionalized in the 1860s) are buried in the Red Hook Methodist Cemetery. His grandfather Legrand Curtis was an undertaker and furniture dealer in Rhinebeck and his father John started the tinsmith and hardware business in Red Hook that bore the family name for three generations. Legrand married Helen Andrews and had one son, John Andrews Curtis. After Helen's death in 1876, he married Mary Alice Massoneau and had two more children, Robert M. and Elizabeth W. Curtis. One of his brothers, Edwin Styles Curtis, was a West Point graduate who had a successful military career.

Legrand was a veteran of the Civil War, serving from 1862 until September 1865 when he furnished "a substitute for the balance of the term" of the four years he'd been enlisted to serve. The effects of that conflict were often suffered in silence by those that endured them, however, this would not be the case for Legrand B. Curtis. It's possible that a combination of pressure to succeed in a prominent family, post-trauma stress, and a genetic predisposition to poor mental health had something to do with Legrand's own struggles.

In 1889, Legrand spent a few months at the Jackson Sanatorium in Danesville, NY. At the same time, his business partner in the family hardware store and brother, Herbert Curtis separated from him and then left him in charge of the business in June 1890. By December of the same year, Legrand was "declared of unsound mind" and taken to the Hudson River State Hospital in Poughkeepsie. It was reported in the *Rhinebeck Gazette* that "he labors under the delusion that he is bankrupt and it is feared that he will harm himself or others." His business passed to his brother-in-law, Edward Massoneau, and later to his son John A. Curtis, in 1895.





*Legrand Beaumont Curtis
photo courtesy of Sarah K. Hermans*

In 1892 Legrand received a Civil War pension as an "invalid" for his service as a private in the Marine Corps. In April of that year, his second wife, Mary Alice Massoneau Curtis, was also declared of unsound mind and her friends felt it was their "painful duty" to step in and have her "removed" to Hudson River State Hospital. It's possible that the stress of her husband's mental illness became too much for her to bear. Perhaps she had a nervous breakdown or her behavior outside her home was disturbing to her so-called friends. It was not uncommon at the time for community members to step in and have someone committed if their mental state didn't mesh with polite society.

In 1900 Mary Alice moved into a home of her own in Poughkeepsie with her two children, and, oddly, the census counts her husband Legrand B. Curtis, fifty-eight, a hardware merchant, among the household members. However, the Red Hook Journal reported in December 1899 that "Mr. L.B. Curtis has been quite seriously ill at the H.R.S. Hospital." It's unclear if Mary Alice lied to the census taker to save face or if

Legrand somehow managed to stay with her while the census was taken, but it is doubtful that he would have been able to return to work. "Former well-known resident" of Red Hook, Legrand B. Curtis, died August 1, 1906, as his obituary stated, "at the Hudson River State Hospital at Poughkeepsie where he has been under treatment for nearly sixteen years."

Research and writing by Sarah K. Hermans, 2025

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