

# Best In Show: The Farmers' Club Of Dutchess And Columbia Counties

By Thea Burgess, HRH Second Vice President, August 18, 2021

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The best week of the summer in the Hudson Valley, arguably, would be the week of the Dutchess County Fair, held in the dwindling days of August in Rhinebeck. Summer is winding down. Fall routines and the beginning of the school year loom but can be ignored for a bit longer. However, in the early 1800s, September and October and even November were the months when people congregated to compare and admire their agricultural bounty. The Elmendorph Inn (once known as Loop's Hotel), Jacob Loop who ran the hotel, and the eponymous Cornelius I. Elmendorph are all names woven in the history of farmers and their celebrations. While the Dutchess County Agricultural Society and its corresponding fair, did not occur at the Elmendorph Inn site, The Farmers' Club of Dutchess and Columbia counties did meet in Red Hook and more likely than not, once held a fair (whose location shifted from year to year) at the site of the Elmendorph Inn.



*Time for a new sign? This new research reveals that while the Elmendorph did not host the first Dutchess County Fair, it did act as the meeting place for another early agricultural group: the Farmers' Club of Dutchess and Columbia County.*



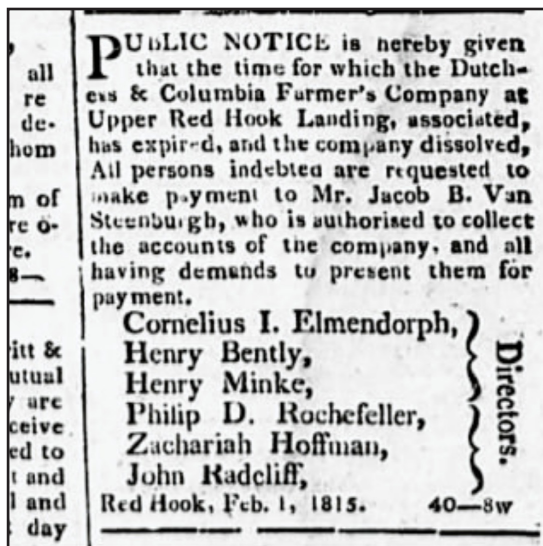
*1815 Map of Red Hook, featuring "Loops Inn" (the Elmendorph Inn) located along the Post Road from New York City to Albany.*

We know the Dutchess County Fair did not occur at the Elmendorph because there are three official sites where it has been held: Washington Hollow in the Town of Pleasant Valley, the City (then Village) of Poughkeepsie, and Rhinebeck. Red Hook does have a connection to the Dutchess County Fair, of course. The Agricultural Society was formed in 1841, with Red Hook one of 18 towns in the county that raised subscriptions to match \$157 in New York State funds. The Society held its first gathering in Washington Hollow in 1842 and the next in Poughkeepsie in 1843.

The fair moved between locations in these two spots until the Society faced financial difficulties in 1918; no fair was held that year. The Rhinebeck Realty Company reorganized the Society in 1919

and moved the fair to its current location on Springbrook Avenue in Rhinebeck. (Molly Ahearn's book, *The Dutchess County Fair: Portrait of an American Tradition*, is a superb resource for more information). However, there are even earlier beginnings for the tradition of an end-of-the-season gathering to exhibit livestock, produce, skills, and wares in this area.

Because agriculture was so integral to the Hudson Valley, farmers, and landowners wanted a way to share best practices and encourage one another through associations. There was a meeting, for example, of the Society of Dutchess County from the Promotion of Agricultural announced in the November 13, 1810, *Poughkeepsie Journal*. This is true, too, for the Red Hook area, although it may not have gone as smoothly as desired, as suggested by a February 1, 1815, statement from a company directed by Cornelius I. Elmendorph, Henry Bently, Henry Minke, Philip D. Rochefeller, Zachariah Hoffman, and John Radcliff:



“PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given that the time for which the Dutchess & Columbia Farmer's Company at Upper Red Hook Landing, associated, has expired, and the company dissolved. All persons indebted are requested to make payment to Mr. Jacob B. Van Steenburgh, who is authorized to collect the accounts of the company, and all having demands to present them for payment” ran an advertisement in the March 22, 1815, *Poughkeepsie Journal*.

Likely this was just a re-organization of a group because the same March newspaper printed an announcement, dated February 23, 1815, that had appeared first as a circular in Clermont that “An association has been formed by several gentlemen residing in the counties of Dutchess and Columbia for the purpose of promoting improvements in Agriculture, and to collect such information as may be advantageous to those who are more particularly engaged in this highly respectable and useful occupation.” Thus The Farmer's Club of Dutchess and Columbia counties (sometimes called the Farmers' Club) was born. There would be three meetings held each year, new members would be recommended by other members, dues of five dollars annually were expected and one dollar was collected if members missed a meeting, officers would be elected, and “an annual exhibition to take place for such premiums as the Society shall offer...and such objects are to be selected as it is presumed will be the most useful to the advancement of the Agricultural interest of the country.” The group seemed optimistic about its success and planned a meeting in Hudson on June 20, 1815, to determine the premiums it would present at its exhibition in October of that year.

The Farmers' Club noted in its rationale for farming that improved husbandry occurred in Great Britain and in a neighboring state in our area because of similar associations, and it anticipated similar gains, stating in the same announcement, “To those who have witnessed and been benefitted by the improvements in farming which have taken place with a few years, no additional inducement can be necessary to obtain their aid, particularly as it is generally acknowledged that much still remains to be done. We also feel confident that many from patriotic motives will be willing to lend their assistance, knowing

that Agriculture is the basis of Commerce and Manufactures, and that every advance of the former must be useful to the latter. If to these considerations we add that every improvement which may increase the production of the soil must advance the value of the land, private interest as well as public good points out advantages to be derived from a well regulated institution of this nature which merit the attention of every enterprising farmer." This circular was attributed to Edward P. Livingston, W.M. Wilson, J. Center, David Van Ness, John C. Stevens, John S. Livingston, and John Radcliff. Keeping in mind that battles and skirmishes with the British were still fresh in the memories of local residents, this appeal to patriotism, especially to outdo the farmers and businesses in Great Britain, would be a great incentive.

It worked. There would be a fair. Premiums for the Farmers' Club would "be awarded and paid at their meeting on the 18th of October next, at the house of Mrs. Loop, in the town of Redhook [sic]" reported Edward P. Livingston, the president, on July 8, 1815, and whose announcement appeared in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* of August 30, 1815. Prizes would be given for \$25 for the best fattened ox not less than five and no more than eight years old and owned by the member as of July 1; \$20 for the best pig, sow, or boar

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>AGRICULTURAL.</b></p> <p>The <b>FARMERS' CLUB</b> of Dutchess and Columbia counties, offer the following premiums to be awarded and paid at their meeting on the 18th of October next, at the house of Mrs. Loop, in the town of Redhook.</p> <p>For the best fattened Ox exhibited to the society not less than five, nor more than eight years old, and owned by the claimant on the 1st of July, <b>TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS.</b></p> <p>For the best Pig, Sow or Boar, not more than 8 months old, and raised by the claimant <b>TWENTY DOLLARS.</b></p> <p>For the best native full bred Merino Ram and Ewe which shall be exhibited to the society and raised by the claimant, <b>FIFTY DOLLARS.</b></p>	<p>The Club will purchase the best Cheese which shall be presented, weighing not less than 25 nor more than 35 lbs. made within the counties of Dutchess or Columbia, and will pay for the same <b>FIFTY CENTS</b> per lb.</p> <p>The Club will also purchase the best fattened Sheep killed and dressed, not more than five, nor less than three years old, raised and fattened by the claimant, (who is also to furnish a description of his mode of feeding) and will pay for the same <b>TWENTY FIVE CENTS</b> per lb.</p> <p>All premiums offered by the Farmers' Club, are to be adjudged under the following regulations:—</p> <p>Unless there are two or more competitors, only one half the premium to be paid. Persons not members are to pay one eighth of the amount of the premium for which they may wish to become competitors. The Association reserves the right to judge whether the subjects offered are such as to merit a premium.</p> <p>The articles exhibited to be the</p>
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*Poughkeepsie Journal, Wed, Sep 13, 1815. Historic Red Hook has a subscription to Newspapers.com, available to researchers.*

not more than six months old and raised by the owner; \$50 for the best native full bred Merino ram and ewe and raised by the claimant; and 50 cents per pound for best cheese of no less than 25 pounds and no more than 35 pounds and made within Dutchess or Columbia Counties. Finally, the best fattened, killed, and dressed sheep no more than five and no less than three years old and fattened by the claimant with a description of the means of feeding would have the animal purchased at 25 cents per pound. Various contingencies were added to ensure the exhibits met the standards, and the Association reserved "the right to

judge whether the subjects offered are such as to merit a premium.”

This is where the Loop’s Hotel (now Elmendorph Inn) connection comes in. During that era, the Inn was known as Loop’s Hotel because Jacob Loop was the proprietor. We assume that Jacob Loop is connected to Mrs. Loop, presumably his wife. The siting of the event “at the house of Mrs. Loop, in the town of Redhook [sic]” in October 1815 apparently went well as Red Hook hosted the event again, perhaps at Loop’s Hotel, in the late fall of 1817, according to a write-up in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* of November 19, 1817. It does not indicate who won what however, as the article stated, “We understand, there was an exhibition of stock, and other products of the earth, highly creditable to the Framers of the two counties. Fully aware of the the importance of Agricultural Societies, to the advancement of interests of our farmers, and through them, of the wealth and prosperity of our country, we are very desirous of having a very particular account of the exhibition; and should not the society (as we think they ought) publish an official account, we shall be very much obliged to any gentleman who attended the Fair, for such particulars as he may be enabled to publish in time for our next paper.” Perhaps the gentlemen (and gentlewomen) were busy wrapping up the harvest for the winter’s coming, and the news would be forthcoming.

Interestingly but not surprisingly, Jacob Loop was the go-to person in town, often listed in ads as the person to contact if one were interested in purchasing a property, such as the “296 acres of land (60 of which were wood land), adjoining the farm formerly owned by the late Col. Devereaux in Red Hook.” An advertisement that also appeared in that same November 19, 1817, issue extolled that “on the premises are a farm-house, barn, and a small orchard of the best apples. This farm can at a trifling expence [sic] be made a first rate grazing farm. Apply to JACOB LOOP, at Red-Hook.” Loop’s fame is understandable given the location of the hotel halfway between New York City and Albany.

Sadly, two years later in April of 1819, Loop passed away. “DIED - at Red Hook on Sunday night last, of a lingering illness. Mr. JACOB LOOP, in the 34th year of his age. Mr. Loop was deservedly beloved and

<p><b>DIED--at Red Hook on Sunday night last, of a lingering illness. Mr. JACOB LOOP, in the 34th year of his age. Mr. Loop was deservedly beloved and respected by a numerous circle of friends and acquaintances, who have to lament the loss of a worthy member of society.</b></p>	<p>of Red-Hook, Dutchess County, consisting of a House and twelve and a half acres of land. The house is sixty four by thirty four feet, two stories high—an excellent cellar under the same, with a large kitchen on the same floor, two excellent wells of water near the door. The barn, horse sheds, and other out buildings, are large and convenient—the land is in the highest state of cultivation—it is the half way house between the City of Hudson and Poughkeepsie. There is but very few, if any more celebrated stands for business between the cities of New-York and Albany. To the enterprising man of business, such an opportunity very seldom occurs—a further description is deemed unnecessary; for the stand is well known to any person who has ever travelled the post road from New-York to Albany. The terms of payment will be made easy, or the rent low, and an indisputable title given.</p> <p>Likewise for sale, that beautiful stud Horse <b>Highlander.</b></p> <p>For beauty, activity or stock, he is not excelled by any Horse in America.</p> <p><b>A. G. BENEDICT, MATTHIAS ROW, PETER P. FRALEIGH.</b> } Executors.</p> <p>April 21. 1819. 60—tf</p>
<p>April 21st, 1819. 60</p> <p><b>RED HOOK HOTEL.</b> FOR SALE OR TO LET. The subscribers offer for sale or to let, that valuable stand for a <b>T A V E R N,</b> lately occupied by Jacob Loop, deceased, and well known by the name of <b>LOOP'S HOTEL,</b> situate on the post road, in the flourishing village of Red-Hook, Dutchess County, consisting of a</p>	

Clippings from Poughkeepsie Journal, 14 Apr 1819 and 21 Apr 1819.

respected by a numerous circle of friends and acquaintances, who have to lament the loss of a worthy member of society,” reported an announcement in the April 14, 1819, edition of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. Immediately after, on April 21, 1819, an advertisement for the sale or rent of the Red Hook Hotel appeared in the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. The location was described as “that valuable stand for a TAVERN lately occupied by Jacob Loop, deceased, and well known by the name of LOOP’S HOTEL, situate on the post road, in the flourishing village of Red-Hook, Dutchess County, consisting of a *House and twelve and a half acres of land*.” The virtues of the business and its opportunities are emphasized. There was more: “Likewise for sale, that beautiful stud Horse Highlander. For beauty, activity or stock, he is not excelled by any Horse in America.” One would hope that the stallion Highlander, if such a opportunity existed, would have taken the premium as best in show at any fair in which he were exhibited.

The Farmers’ Club’s events were wrapping up. A reminder was made in the October 6, 1819, *Poughkeepsie Journal* that the Agricultural Society of Dutchess and Columbia “is not dissolved, nor will it be till after January 1820” and that its “annual fair for the Cattle Show, and the exhibition of Domestic Manufacturers will be held at Clermont, on the 29th day of October 1819.” It seems the group’s exhibition end was nigh, but a bigger event would replace it. In 1820, the Dutchess County Cattle Show and Fair occurred on November 2 when, “at an early hour the roads in the neighborhood of Washington Hollow were filled with carriages, wagons, horsemen and cattle, all converging on the grounds attached to the inn maintained by Luther Gay,” according to a report of the Dutchess County Agricultural Society, corresponding to the establishment of a county-wide annual event and a precursor to the Dutchess County Fair we know today.