

HISTORIC RED HOOK

The Coopernail & Prentice Children

St. John's Reformed Church, Upper Red Hook

Coopernail: A few rows up from the large tree behind the church in the old section next to each other, the stones have an arched, pointed top

Prentice: Old section, a single stone with three distinct lobes, against Starbarrack Rd, very close to taller family tombstone

The Sadness of the Loss of Children

There can be nothing sadder when one walks in a cemetery than coming across the gravestones of children. We can only imagine the heartbreak and grief their families, especially their parents, endured. Some plots and their monuments point to fathomless mourning as we see the markers of young siblings who were laid to rest before they could experience life. Two families' markers were chosen for their poignancy in how they commemorated the passing of their youngest children.

Frank and Douglass Coopernail were brothers who died in the 1860s. Frank's marker is a child's marble tombstone with lamb engraving. The lamb is found on children's tombstones of this era, symbolizing an innocent life lost and the corresponding Biblical idea of Christ not leaving behind even one of His flock. Over time, Frank's tombstone has become fairly badly eroded. The identifying information is still legible, indicating that Frank died on April 2, 1863, at age four years, six months, and 17 days. Unfortunately, the epitaph is totally obscured. Next to Frank is his brother Douglass whose tombstone is the same shape but does not have a lamb engraving. Douglass died on May 3, 1868, aged three years, nine months and 25 days.

Next to the brothers' markers is the plain granite marker of the boys' parents John William Coopernail (1830-1913) and Julia A. Hapeman Coopernail (1834-1912). John Coopernail is enumerated in the 1860 census in Red Hook as a 28-year-old farmer; in the 1865 census he is listed as being 34 years old and married to Julia who is then 33. Two children are noted. One is Duglass, age 11/12, which is confusing given that Douglass's tombstone gave his age as three when he died in 1868. The second child could be their daughter Catherine, who is listed in the 1870 Red Hook census as being five. Further confusing the matter is the listing of Cathern Lasher



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from Columbia County, 13, living with them as a servant. Also noted as part of the household is John M. Felty, 20, working as a servant and from Dutchess County.

Next door to the family, according to the census, is William Coopernail, John's father and 74, a farmer, who lived with his daughter Catherine, 48. This does make sense because John William Coopernail was recorded as being born to William and Deborah (Rowe) Coopernail on June 5, 1830, and baptized November 9, 1832, at St. John's Reformed Dutch Church in Upper Red Hook. William Coopernail was born in 1791 and died in 1866; Deborah was born 1790 and died in 1849. Both of their tombstones are also in the same church's cemetery. William Coopernail is mentioned in Roger Leonard's *Upper Red Hook: An American Crossroad* (2012): "Another farm on Pitcher Lane was owned by William Coopernail. Their American Gothic house still stands on the north side of Pitcher Lane, just west of route 9...William Coopernail purchased his farm from Philip Smith in 1823."

Finally, the 1870 Red Hook census gives John's age as 40 and employment as a laborer while Julia is listed as 34 years old. There is also five-year-old daughter Catherine. Catherine is again listed in the 1875 Red Hook census with her parents, and she is again age five, obviously a mistake has been made somewhere regarding her age.

Whatever the discrepancies may be, we know that Catherine (Kate) Coopernail married Frank T. Shaffer of Madalin on February 21 at St. John's in Upper Red Hook, according to a February 23, 1893, newspaper account, which added, "On their return [from NYC, presumably for honeymoon] they will make it their home in Madalin, where they have a bright and cheerful life to look forward to, which is the wish of their many friends." Sadly, the couple did not have a long life together. Initially, all seemed well. Work was done on their home in Cheviot as noted in the April 16, 1896, newspaper: "Frank Shaffer is having some improvements made on and about his house

which improves it very much. John W. Coopernail, of Upper Red Hook, is doing the carpentry work." However, Frank became ill with a report in the news on May 20, 1897, stating he was "convalescing slowly" and then reporting in the summer of 1897, "We are pained to say that Frank Shaffer was taken very suddenly with a hemorrhage on Saturday Night. He had been complaining for a long time of a severe cough. His many friends hope for a speedy recovery; he is attended by Dr. W.O. Smith. Franklin Shaffer died June 25, 1898. and was buried in the Valley View Cemetery in North German-town, Columbia County. By 1904, the widowed Katie Shaffer who lived in Poughkeepsie with her



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two children, was noted as visiting her parents in Upper Red Hook according to a newspaper account on Feb. 4, 1904, a practice she most likely continued until her parents' deaths in the next decade.

Another poignant tombstone is that of the three young sisters Helen, Susannah, and Adelaide Prentice, little ones whose stone links their resting places together. This simple monument points to what could have been and the grief their parents Garret Dewitt Prentice and Diana Maria (Groom) Prentice endured. Helen Susannah Prentice (1827-29) died first on September 7, 1829, at the age of two years, seven months, and 11 days. Four years later tragedy struck the family again when in 1833 Adelaide Amanda (1832-33) died on November 2 at 17 months and 16 days old, and her sister Susannah Bathsheba (1831-33) succumbed on November 4 at two years, six months and 24 days. Next to the sisters is the monument of related Prentice family members: Josiah (1759-1806) and Bathsheba (Handee) (1761-1842) Prentice and their two children Charlotte who lived to be 13 and David Handee who lived to be one.

The young Prentice sisters had three siblings who survived into adulthood: son Homer (last name spelled Prentiss in some records) who moved to Long Island and is buried in Amagansett, Suffolk County, married twice, worked as a farmer and peddler, and was survived by several children with one named Homer after his father; daughter Mary, and daughter Emeline. Both Garret and Diana Prentice were members of the Dutch Reformed Church where their three daughters are buried. The gravesites of Garret and Diana Prentice are unknown, but the three sisters are forever next to one another.

Coopernail research by Sarah K. Hermans, writing by Thea Burgess, 2021
Sources:

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1880 Federal Census, Upper Red Hook, Dutchess Co NY, John W Coopernail
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