

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Harmen Whitbek

13 May 1755–4 February 1814

Old Red Church cemetery, Tivoli

A sandstone tombstone with shouldered tympanum and stunningly clear inscription.

Harmen Whitbek, born May 13, 1755, was descended from some of the first settlers of the area, served as an associate of the 6th Regiment of the Dutchess County Militia, and was an elder of the Old Red Church Consistory, and yet, as we often see, had a life of irony and complicated actions given that he enslaved others.

Whitbek (whose name is sometimes spelled Haremanus Witbeek, Harmen Witbek, Herman Whitbeck, or Harman Whitbeck among other variations with the fluid nature of spelling during the era) was baptized Haremanus Witbeck on June 15, 1755, as the son of Folkert (Volkert) Witbeck and Dorothea Vosburg (Vosburgh)—both of whom are buried in the Old Red Church Cemetery as well—with Jacobus Heermansen and Catrina Vosburg as witnesses, according to the Holland Society of New York. On December 6, 1779, he married Maria Silvester or Sylvester in Rhinebeck (ibid.).

Whitbek is listed as an associate of the 6th Regiment of the Dutchess County Militia, according to records of the DAR, accessed through Ancestry. An older brother John (1747–1831), who is buried in the Claverack Dutch Reformed churchyard, served in the 8th Regiment of the Albany County Militia, according to Find a Grave's memorial page. Here is where the irony appears: even as Harmen Whitbek fought for Americans' liberty from the British, he enslaved four people in 1790 and three in 1800, according to the U.S. Censuses from those years.

Whitbek's parents were among the 14 people who were "received as members" when the Old Red Church was founded, according to Roger M. Leonard's *The Red Church* (1). Whitbek himself is noted as participating in church matters in 1793 (46) and 1807 (48) relating to payments of the ministers, and was listed as an elder of the consistory (82) in church records, reports Leonard.

Whitbek died February 4, 1814, and he was interred in the cemetery of the church where he had served for many years.



Research and writing by Thea Burgess, 2026

Sources:

- findagrave.com/memorial/7049005/john-witbeck: accessed August 3, 2026), memorial page for John Witbeck Sr. (13 Apr 1747–10 Feb 1831), Find a Grave Memorial ID 7049005, citing Claverack Dutch Reformed Churchyard, Claverack, Columbia County, New York, USA; Maintained by 46512307 (contributor 46512307).
- Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; Provo, Utah; Index to Burial Records of Revolutionary War Soldiers [card index] Citing: Annual reports of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution to the U.S. Senate, 1900-1974. Daughters of the American Revolution. Located Graves of Soldiers and Patriots of the American Revolution March 1, 1974–March 1, 1977. Washington, D.C.: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1977. Daughters of the American Revolution, Located Graves of Soldiers and Patriots of the American Revolution 1977– 1982. Washington, D.C.: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1982. Daughters of the American Revolution. Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine 110–121 (November 1976–November 1987).; Name Range: Whaley, Hezekiah-Williams, Isaac.
- findagrave.com/memorial/82916356/harmen-whitbeck
- Holland Society of New York. New York, New York. Poughkeepsie and the Flats. Book 39. Accessed from ancestry.com 3 August 2026.
- Leonard, Roger M. *The Red Church*. Upper Red Hook, NY: 1990.
- The National Archives in Washington, DC; Washington, DC; First Census of the United States, 1790.; Year: 1790; Census Place: Rhinebeck, Dutchess, New York; Series: M637; Roll: 6; Page: 144; Family History Library Film: 0568146.
- 1800 Federal Census Rhinebeck, Dutchess Co, New York; Series: M32; Roll: 21; Page: 154; Image: 159; Family History Library Film: 193709