

According to the United States Census, of the 3,500 people who called Red Hook home in 1900, by far the largest number were employed or benefited from agricultural activities. 221 described themselves as "farmer", 169 were "farm laborers", 236 were "day laborers" and 10 were "fruit growers". 11 wheelwrights built and repaired wagons used by 20 teamsters to carry farm products in barrels made by 8 coopers and cans made by 3 tinsmiths. 30 workers made chocolate with the abundant milk. William Plass described himself as an "apple speculator"!

Then, as now, the deep friable soils, the sloping land and gentle hillsides provided perfect air and water drainage. The broad Hudson River moderated temperatures and provided favorable conditions for growing field and orchard crops and convenient transportation to major markets in New York City and Europe. The rural landscape of northern Red Hook from Spring Lake on the east to the Hudson River on the west was home and classroom to **William Seward Teator** who created the photographs in this volume.

Will, as he was known to family and friends was born on April 28, 1860 on his father Andrew's farm on what is now known as Starbarrack Road in Upper Red Hook. Andrew grew hay for shipment to New York City and was one of the early exporters of apples to Europe. Will's formal education was received at the Mt. View Academy in the hamlet of Upper Red Hook but his rambles in the damp woods bordering rivers and springs led to a scholarly interest in land shell collecting and Native American archeology.. His intense curiosity and scientific mind led him to compile meticulous records of his collections. While still in his teens he corresponded and traded shells with the leading conchologists of the day. His article Collecting Land Shells in Eastern New York was published in the February 1890 issue of The Nautilus, a quarterly, devoted to the interests of conchologists and portions of his collections are in natural history museums in New York City and Delaware.

After graduation from the Academy, Will served as secretary to General J. Watts dePeyster in Tivoli who, recognizing the young man's talents tried to use his influence to win him a position with the U.S. Geological Survey but Will had begun to apply his scientific skills to the expansion of his father's small orchard with trees "designed for the private market". He developed his stock by collecting seedlings of Newtown and other historically successful trees, grafting and creating new and improved varieties.

Will had also begun courting a young teacher from neighboring Barrytown and on October 27, 1891 he married Nevada (Nena) Myers. His father had died earlier that year leaving Will fully in charge of the farm. He changed its name from Meadow Brook Farm to Blue Ribbon Orchards and focused his talents on the "production of apples of the highest type of perfection and quality". He pioneered methods of spraying and crop rotation using cover crops to enrich the soils beneath his trees. He shared his knowledge

with papers and lectures and farm tours. His apples won top awards in national competitions.

He and Nena raised two children, Roscoe and Marion, and around 1900 while the children were still young he began taking pictures with a camera using the new dry glass plate negatives. No longer was it necessary to carry a whole laboratory of chemicals and equipment into the field. The camera was bulky and exposures slow but he began expressing his artistic talents by photographing the landscape of his beloved Upper Red Hook, his friends and neighbors and their homes and activities, compiling a unique record of a farming community at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### AFTERWORD

William Seward Teator died on August 17, 1930. His photographic prints and negatives remained in his home until Nena, his widow, was moved out of the house in 1940, prior to the sale of the farm. Daughter Marion's son Dr. Ronald E. Losee on his way to setting up his medical practice in Ennis, Montana took the prints with him. The bulky and fragile glass plate negatives were rescued by cousins, Clara and John Losee who made prints from some of the negatives. After their passing their daughter presented the apple crate full of boxes of negatives to the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook. In December 2007 and January 2008, Ronald Losee made two DVD's from Will Teator's sometimes faded 100 year old prints and John Losee's newer copies and it is from those sources that this volume has been compiled. We are deeply indebted to them all for preserving these valuable records of Red Hook's agricultural past.