

# **Red Hook's Renaissance Man; William Seward Teator Historical Society Receives Rare Negatives**

by **Barbara W. Bielenberg**

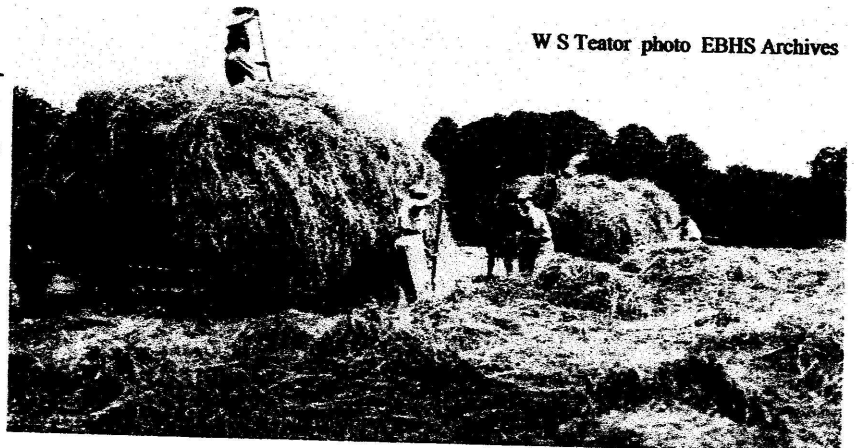
Our adventure began last June with a phone call from Clara and John Losee's daughter, Martha Hermans. She had a box of glass plate negatives she would like to give the Society. The box turned out to be an ancient wooden apple crate filled with original cardboard cartons of "Eastman's Dry Plates", "The Standard Extremely Rapid Dry Plate for Out and In-Door Photography", etc. all purchased from "HAHN, Kodaks & Optical Goods, Developing & Printing" in New York City – each box tightly packed with fragile glass plate negatives – 287 images of Upper Red Hook families, farms, and scenic vistas taken by William S. Teator in or around 1900! For several weeks we opened each box, listed each image and enjoyed a rare look backward 100 years or more!

John Losee was distantly related to Will Teator, as he was known to friends and family' and we had a thick file of papers – mostly genealogical records given us by Clara before her death. We also remembered that years ago, a large collections of shells was found in one of the schools' closets and passed to our neighbor Helen Garlinghouse, who was a serious amateur "conchologist". She discovered it was an extremely important and well documented collection of land and fresh water snails, collected and identified by W.S Teator. Could the same "scientist" also have been a photographer as well as a farmer?

William Seward Teator was born on his father's farm in Upper Red Hook on April 28, 1860. An old Palatine family, the Teators had been among the original settlers of the Rhinebeck Precinct and were related to most of the old Red Hook families. Will received his education at the Academy in Upper Red Hook. Beyond that he was self taught. A business card in our collection lists him as a collector of Indian relics and he is known to have accompanied Dr. Harvey Losee and Ned Kerley on a collecting expedition in the Catskills. According to an 1890 diary, he catalogued nearly 400 relics, wrapping and packing every bundle in large dry goods boxes until they could be properly arranged. "They all have rare value"

Perhaps he was preparing for a new life as a married man for on October 27, 1891 he married Nevada (Nena) Myers. They had two children Roscoe and Marion. His wife and children appear in many of his photos. Will had been working as a Private Secretary to General J. Watts de Peyster of Tivoli. DePeyster had an engraving made of a drawing by Teator of the "Catskill Mountains from the Heights East of Upper Red Hook" and tried to get him a job working for the US Government "in connection with exploration which requires drawing and Commitment to paper". Instead the artist became a farmer!

As a young man, Teator exhibited an intense scientific approach to his collections of Indian relics, rocks and minerals and snails. He explored the nearby woods and marshes, carefully noting in his diary, details of terrain, soils, trees and wildflowers where specimens were found. He transplanted snails to new locations to test their best habitat and reported his findings in academic journals, corresponding with the leading conchologists of the day.



Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

## Red Hook's Renaissance Man; William Seward Teator

Once he took over the family farm he applied the same scientific dedication to his crops. In the 1880's he had helped his father plant a couple of small orchards. Andrew Teator was one of the early shippers of apples to Europe. Will studied the productivity of old varieties and retained a few 100 year-old Newtowns on his farm. In a lecture to Grange members, he described collecting seedling trees along fences or from pumice dumps of old cider presses. He experimented with grafting and new varieties and reported "I now have in bearing, or approaching a fruiting condition 100 acres in trees and I am rather proud of them."

He tested sprays and reported his findings to his fellow farmers, eventually accepting losses of 30% of the crop from insect injury. He was interested in the rotation of crops and developed a regular system of rotation on the younger orchards. "Corn or potatoes this year followed next spring by early plowing and frequent harrowings till July, then buckwheat and a liberal seeding of red clover, 4 parts, with timothy and red top each 1 part from which we take a crop of buckwheat and hope to have the ground well covered for the winter with strong clover and grass plants ... We are getting something from the soil while the orchard is growing, and we are giving much to the soil and to the vigors of the trees..." His letterhead read "Our Great Specialty **Pedigree Seed Potatoes** Leading varieties in their original strength and purity. We aim to produce the finest grown in this county." Ever the artist, near the end of this paper he wrote, "In our apple business we design many of our finest apples for the private market." Having achieved his goal of producing apples of the highest type of perfection and quality, he renamed his father's "Meadow Brook Farm" "Blue Ribbon Orchards". Among his negatives are a number of shots of the orchard and artistically composed close-ups of individual sprays of apple blossoms.

William Seward Teator died on August 17, 1930. During his lifetime he made several trips to Florida, the Bahamas, Cuba, California and the New England States. He found time to play the fife, the flute and the recorder. In 1884 he was a member of the Red Hook Cornet Band and 20 years later, Robert Chanler's Red Hook Band. His daughter recalled that he cross pollinated peonies, naming one particularly beautiful pink, single variety "Marion" after her. Today his shell collections are held by the Delaware Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Natural History in New York City. In 1941 Will's beloved orchard was sold to Albert B. Cole who continued to raise apples. Twenty-five years later Bruce and Frank Geiger purchased the orchard and continued the business. The property has since been subdivided and Will's house and barns on 18 remaining acres are privately owned. John Losee printed a number of Will's negatives which we treasure in our collection. We intend to seek a grant to help us have many of the negatives digitally copied allowing us to produce an album of William S. Teator's images of Upper Red Hook farms and families, honoring Red Hook's Renaissance man. ~

Trying to write a genealogy in a Newsletter is a daunting project- but here goes. The name, as we know is Teator, has been spelled: Dather (with an umlaut over the a), Dieter, Titter, Doder, Deithardt, Teter, etc. The origin of the name was Dather.

Lorenz Dather was the immigrant of Palatine origin to come to America in 1710. He was in Dutchess, the North Ward, in 1717-1718. His first child was Henrich. He married Catharine Benner and they had nine children. Sixth in the line was Henrich, married to Anna Maria Prosius. He was born in 1753 and died in 1835. They had six children and another Henrich H. wed to Eva Feller. This Henrich was born in 1787 and passed on in 1860.

The fourth generation of this line was Andrew H. Teator born in 1819, died in 1891. He married Ruth Moffit and they had four children, one of whom was William Seward Teator. He was born 28 April 1860 and married Nevada Myers, daughter of Alexander Myers and Mary Ann Flynn, on 27 October 1891. They had two children, Roscoe Teator who wed Isabella Massonneau, and Marion who married Edwin Lamb Losee.

The Teators were related to practically every family in Red Hook. The first generation was connected to the Thomas's, Rifenbergh's, Fulton's and Stall's. The second generation was related to the Fraleigh's, Allendorf's, and Feller's. The third to the Phillip's, the Snook's, the Clum's, the Pitcher's and the Lasher families. Who is to say that the Teator's are not well linked and known.

By Barbara Thompson