

HISTORIC RED HOOK

John Emory Cole

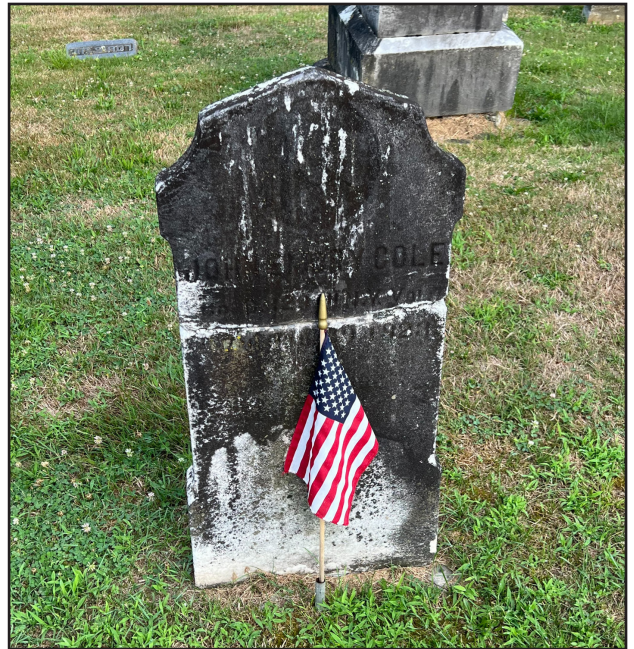
Born Apr 1839 Died Jan 29, 1923

Red Church Cemetery, Tivoli

Small marker with name somewhat effaced (and repaired) with curved top. Located near Cole family columnar marker, inscribed on its sides, with surname "Cole" on second level from base. Marker is Section D, Plot 99, to the south of the northern entrance, seven rows west of the entrance and four plots in toward the south. Veteran's flag and veteran marker present. Grave is fairly close to intersection of Old Red Church original gravesites and St. Sylvia Cemetery close to Bauer column.

Wife: Eliza Ann (Vankeuran) Cole, 1836–May 9, 1889

Son: James Starr Cole, May 13, 1860–Aug 6, 1886



Railroad Man & Union Veteran

J. Emory Cole, who had worked on the railroad since he was ten starting as a waterboy, enlisted with the 128th C Company on August 24, 1862.¹ The son of John Cole (b. 1812) and Emeline Bullus Cole (b. 1819), he was married to his first wife Eliza Ann (Vankeuran) Cole (1836-1889), with whom he had two children: James Starr Cole (1860-1886) and Benjamin Cole (b. 1862). In 1890, Cole married his second wife Christina (Wentworth) Couse Cole (1837-1907), and he wed his third wife Melinda (Kelse) Rifenburg Cole (Sept. 1854-December 23, 1925).

Cole was well known not only in the Tivoli area but along the New York Central Railroad, beginning as a water boy on the passenger trains when he was only ten years old. "Since that time he has filled various positions until 1882 when he was appointed at Tivoli crossing, where he is still employed," stated his wedding announcement to third wife and widow Mrs. Melinda Rifenburg.²

As the New York Central Railroad's oldest pensioner in 1921, Cole was invited to be an honorary passenger on the final run of the DeWitt Clinton; he had been on its maiden journey when it was the first train on the New York Central to make the trip between New York and Albany—and Cole had been on its first trip from Rensselaer to Poughkeepsie in 1851. In 1921, the train was on its way to the Pageant of Progress in Chicago: "On the last trip up the New York Central route Wednesday, three generations after its memorable pilgrimage in 1831, the DeWitt Clinton train attracted as much attention along the route as it did on its trial trip."³

From his Civil War service to his decades working on the railroad, Cole saw many things, but even he

must have wondered when he spied a hot air balloon floating near Tivoli in 1875: "Sunday afternoon last, about six o'clock, a party of young ladies and gentleman, residing at Glasco, Ulster county, while enjoying themselves to doors, saw a balloon descend near the Hudson River at Cruger's Island, about a mile from Glasco...The air ship seemed to touch the water; and then ascended and was soon lost to sight. The freight agent at Tivoli station, Mr. Emory Cole, also saw the balloon, and his statement agrees with the above. The question suggests itself, 'was the balloon the one in which Prof. Donaldson made his memorable ascension?'"⁴

A HUDSON RIVER MYSTERY THE SUSPECTED MURDER ON THE STEAM-BOAT ESCORT. PEOPLE AT TIVOLI HEARING SHOUTS OF MURDER—CALLS FOR HELP FROM A MAN INVISIBLE IN THE FOG—A VAIN ATTEMPT TO RESCUE HIM. POUGHKEEPSIE, Nov. 11.—There is hardly any doubt that a man was murdered on the Hudson, near Tivoli landing, before daylight Wednesday morning. Fifteen or twenty men at Tivoli are certain of it. The story was freely told at Tivoli this morning, and more in detail than has already been published. Louis Bauer is the Hudson River Railroad Company's night telegraph operator at that place, and all the villagers concede that he is in every way trustworthy. He was found at the depot telegraph office, which is only 30 feet from the river bank, and gave the following story: "At 4:02 Wednesday morning I was out checking the figures	on the sign-board for an up train. The morning was very dark, and there was a fog 10 feet high lying on the river. Suddenly I heard cries as if some one was in distress. I walked up the track about 100 feet, as the cries seemed to come from out into the river, near De Peyster's dock. I listened closely, and heard a voice from the river saying: 'They murdered me! they murdered me! Help! help!' I was much frightened but I yelled back: 'Have courage; stay up as long as you can.' Then I gave the alarm, and I heard the man cry out again: 'Oh! oh! oh!' I shouted to him again three or four times: 'Cheer up; they are coming with the boat,' and the man shouted back: 'Oh! I am freezing,' and that's the last I heard from him. All the while his voice sounded nearer and nearer as though he was swimming toward the shore. Emory Cole was some distance below me on the track, and he ran down to the hotel where some men were having a good time, and they all rushed out and a boat was procured, but they had only one oar, and before they could get to him the man sank." Joseph Myloid said he heard the man cry out, "Help! Help! For God's sake! They have murdered me!" Myloid also said that when the Escort landed at Tivoli last night, on her down trip, he had a talk with Capt. Ruton about the affair, and the latter said that after they landed at Tivoli that morning and got above the station he saw two trains passing each other and heard shrieks, and thought the cars had hit someone. Myloid said that at least 15 persons must have heard the cries, and that the man must have been a good swimmer.
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The New York Times. New York, N.Y. 12 Nov. 1880. Pg. 2.

Life along the river and railway lines of Tivoli was exciting, as evidenced in a news account report of a suspected murder occurring November 1880. A night telegraph operator named Louis Bauer stated he heard cries from someone in the river shouting he had been murdered. Bauer assured the victim help was coming, adding, "Emory Cole was some distance below me on the track, and he ran down to the hotel where some men were having a good time, and they rushed out and a boat was procured, but they had only one oar, and before they could get to him the man sank." Despite many joining the rescue effort, the man slipped under water and was not found; speculation was that he had been robbed and thrown off the steamer Escort. "J. Starr Cole [son of Emory], the night watchman, and Lewis Powers, the telegraph operator at the Tivoli depot of the Hudson River Railroad, claim to have heard the cries of the man in the water. Capt. Rutan, the clerk, and other employees of the boat heard no cries," concluded the article.⁵

In the last years of his life, Cole, the so-called dean of New York Central Railroad due to his length of service, had "become identified with the movement to organize a veterans' association of workers and officials in this state."⁶ His obituary noted of Cole's railroad career, that he "was the 'water boy' whose duty

it was to pass out water for the refreshment of the passengers,” and “In recognition of his pioneer service to the road, he held life pass No. 1 on the New York Central.”⁷

As a Civil War veteran, he was given full military honors at his funeral service. Throughout his life, he attended many gatherings of Union veterans. At one such meeting, “Emory Cole, of the 128th,...told of an incident during the war when the 128th had been sent out to halt Stuart’s Cavalry and after being out for three days returned to the camp short of rations, and the 150th, although not over-supplied, divided its food supply with them. He said he always has a warm place in his heart for the 150th from that day.”⁸

Research and writing by Thea Burgess, 2024

Sources:

1. J. Emory Cole went by Emory (sometimes spelled Emery) during his life. The J. stands for John.
2. Columbia Republican. Hudson, NY. 16 Nov. 1909.
3. “Strange Contrast in Trains of Then and Now—DeWitt Clinton Engine and Cars, 90 Years Old, See Here Wednesday by Hundreds—Old Employee Much Honored.” Poughkeepsie Eagle-News. Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 21 Jul. 1921. pg. 3. Newspapers.com. retrieved 4 Jul. 2024.
4. Poughkeepsie Eagle-News. Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 23 Jul. 1875. pg. 3. Newspapers.com. Retrieved 24 Apr. 2024. The Hudson River Maritime Museum history blog post of 6 Aug. 2021 titled “Ballooning the Hudson with W. H. Donaldson in 1874” covers two articles that “follow the exploits of balloonist or ‘aeronaut’ Washington Harrison Donaldson.” <https://www.hrmm.org/history-blog/ballooning-the-hudson-with-w-h-donaldson-in-1874>. Retrieved 16 July 2024.
5. “A Hudson River Mystery-The Suspected Murder on the Steam-Boat Escort-People at Tivoli Hearing Shouts of Murder-Calls for Help.” The New York Times. New York, N.Y. 12 Nov. 1880. Pg. 2. Newspapers.com. Retrieved 24 Apr. 2024.
6. Poughkeepsie Eagle-News. Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 10 Jan. 1922. pg. 6. Newspapers.com. Retrieved 4 Jul. 2024.
7. The Columbian Republican. Hudson, N.Y. 30 Jan.1923. pg. 10. Reprinted from Findagrave.com.
8. “29 of 150th Regt. At Annual Reunion.” Poughkeepsie Eagle-News. Poughkeepsie, N.Y. 12 Oct. 1917. pg. 10. Newspapers.com. Retrieved 24 Apr. 2024.