

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

## **Estelle de Peyster, James B. Toler, & John Watts de Peyster Toler**

Estelle Born 1844 Died 1889

James Born 1841 Died 1889

John Born 1871 Died 1911

St. Paul's and Trinity Parish, Tivoli

*A large, impressive monument near the de Peyster vault  
with a patina medallion of Estelle*

### The de Peyster-Toler Family

With two older brothers and a younger brother and sister, Estelle Elizabeth de Peyster Toler was born into the middle of the family of Gen. John Watts de Peyster and Estelle Livingston de Peyster. She married James Boorman Toler, Esq. and they had a son John Watts de Peyster Toler who died in May of 1911. Estelle Elizabeth and her husband James both succumbed to pneumonia within days of each other.

Estelle's younger sister Maria died at the age of five in 1857. Her three brothers John, Frederic, and Johnston all served in the Civil War. In a speech dedicating a monument to local Civil War veterans, Gen. De Peyster noted an officer "WILLIAM P. WAINRIGHT, belonged to the 29th New York, whose beautiful BATTLE FLAG was presented by a lady of this vicinity (Miss ESTELLE ELIZABETH de PEYSTER), by the hands of the speaker [Gen. De Peyster], in their camp near Alexandria, Va., just as the regiment was moving off to the first grand conflict of the war, and only a few days before it began."

In 1870 Estelle Elizabeth married James Boorman Toler, and in 1871 they had a son: John Watts de Peyster Toler.

Estelle Elizabeth's husband James Boorman Toler was "the son of William B. Toler and the nephew and namesake of James Boorman, the projector and promoter of the Hudson River Railroad, on its present line, more than forty years ago," stated his obituary in the December 17, 1889, edition of The New York Times. It added that Toler was "a partner of Philip Minis, and the firm conducted a successful brokerage business, with offices in Exchange-place, until about ten years ago. Mr Toler was a member of the Union and Knickerbocker Clubs." James was known as a devoted husband to Estelle Elizabeth, with The Poughkeepsie Eagle of February 15, 1890, stating, that after the death of his wife on December 12, 1889, he



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“gave up, took to his bed and died of grief, a broken heart. He had been throughout his whole married life a devoted and, as far as human nature will permit, a perfect husband; and, dying thus, in the prime of life, an athlete in strength and development, it justified the remark in a letter of sympathy, ‘it is an unparalleled event.’” Just as his wife had, James succumbed to pneumonia with the added drawback of a broken heart, if these newspaper accounts are to be believed.

Known in life mainly as a Livingston descendant, a de Peyster daughter, and a Toler wife, at her death Estelle Elizabeth, sometimes called Lily, was mourned by her friends, acquaintances, and family. The Poughkeepsie Eagle of February 15, 1890, reported, “Mrs. Toler was the sun and soul of a large social circle, who all deplore the extinction of her light and life as something which will continue to exist in grateful and gracious memories even while it cannot shine or warm, as it was wont, among the living.” The piece continues, “Although a great sufferer for many years from pulmonary difficulties due to a severe cold, caught in the performance of an act of the purest Christian benevolence, Mrs. Toler found life sweet because her lines had fallen in pleasant places, and she was the object of so much affection and respect. Indeed, were the letters which deplore her loss presented to the public they would constitute such a tribute as can be very, very rarely laid upon a grave.”

John Watts de Peyster Toler, their son, survived them. When the schism between the General and his wife occurred, John sided with his grandmother Estelle and his uncle Johnston, declaring that his grandfather had an “unbearable temperament,” according to the Herald Democrat of August 12, 1891. John married Minnie Burbans after he graduated from Columbia University (1892) and Columbia Law School, according to The New York Times of May 28, 1911. “He was very interested in the politics of Dutchess County, and at one time was nominated for Assemblyman on the Democratic ticket. He traveled extensively abroad. Mr. Toler was a member of the Union, St. Anthony, and New York Athletic Clubs,” the obituary continued. He was survived by his wife and their son.

Later that year, a petition was made to rename John Toler after his great-grandfather, according to an article in The Sun on November 13, 1911. “That the name of Gen. John Watts De Peyster, statesman, soldier, and author, may be perpetuated, John Toler, one of his great-grandsons, will be renamed on January 1. Under an order signed by Justice Morschauser, John, who is six years old, will become John Watts De Peyster Toler. The child’s father, John Watts De Peyster Toler, died a few years ago and his mother petitioned Justice Morschauser for an order changing her sons’ [sic] name.” The article should have stated the General’s grandson passed away a few months ago, not years, but in any case, the General probably would have considered the name change to honor him a victory, a win from beyond the grave.