

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

## **George Howard Ellsworth**

8 Oct 1830 - 8 Apr 1928

## **Letitia Hoffman Ellsworth**

24 Dec 1840 - 14 Mar 1917

Old Red Church Cemetery, Tivoli

*Dark grey granite square pedestal monument near Cooke line of obelisks, north of the church.*

## **Gold Rush 1849er and Red Hook Hotel Owner**

Armistice Day on November 11, 1921, was a special holiday nationwide. Community members gathered at the Red Church of Tivoli, and a distinguished personage was chosen to mark the occasion, as reported by *The Rhinebeck Gazette*: "Ringing of the old bell at 11:50 A.M. for 5 minutes by Howard Ellsworth, of Red Hook, the oldest man in Dutchess county; a Forty-Nine, 93 years of age." At noon there were 12 tolls of the newly restored bell, continued press accounts noted Roger M. Leonard in *The Red Church* as he summarized the events of the long-ago day. When Ellsworth rang the bell, most people would know who he was, given that he had owned the Red Hook Hotel at the Four Corners of the Village of Red Hook since 1867 when he purchased the business.

His nineties were busy years for Ellsworth. He actually rang the bell when he was 91 in 1921, retired from running the hotel when he was 92, and was the guest of honor a birthday party given when he was 93: "A number of relatives helped Howard Ellsworth, for many years proprietor of the Red Hook Hotel, celebrate his ninety-third birthday at his residence Monday, October tenth. He was well remembered with many gifts and flowers. Among those present was a great-grandchild. Mr. Ellsworth crossed the isthmus of Panama during the gold rush in California and is now the only "forty-niner" in Dutchess county," reported the *Rhinebeck Gazette* on October 13, 1923. It was his success in the Gold Rush of 1849 which most likely allowed this former blacksmith from Annandale to purchase the hotel when he returned to the area in 1852, according to information given by Mrs. Howard Sheldon, married to Ellsworth's grandson and quoted in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* on January 13, 1963. She added it was Ellsworth's attestation that the Red Hook Hotel was built prior to 1700 and thus older than the Beekman Arms.

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Ellsworth gave the Red Hook Hotel its name, an appellation by which it was known by until a fire damaged the building in 1963. It was previously called Shaeffer's National Hotel before Ellsworth bought it for \$7,300 in 1867, reported Anthony P. Musso in the December 28, 2011, edition of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. "It remained in Ellsworth's family for 78 years, being assumed by his granddaughter Ethel Jennings and her husband, Thomas, in 1924, when the aging innkeeper finally retired at 92 years old. Ethel Jennings was born in the hotel and for much of her life called it home."

Two years before Ellsworth purchased the hotel, he was listed in the 1865 Red Hook census as a blacksmith residing at the household of Alexander and Catherine Minkler, his father-in-law and mother-in-law. Ellsworth's wife Letitia was the daughter of Catherine Minkler from marriage to her first husband Zachariah Hoffman. Alexander and Catherine Minkler left their farm and moved with the Ellsworths to Red Hook, serving as hotel keepers for the business their son-in-law had bought. The Ellsworths eventually had four children, as listed in the 1880 Red Hook census: Lilly, 20; Frederick, 17; Catherine, 11; and Mary, 9. Letitia predeceased her husband, passing away on March 14, 1917, at age 86. Ellsworth passed away at the age of 97 in 1928.

The Red Hook Hotel lasted almost another half century. It eventually was sold by the Ellsworth family to a series of other owners. After the January 1963 fire was deemed too expensive to recover from by its then owner, the building was sold, torn down, and replaced by a gas station and convenience store.