

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Ella A. Mooney

August 27, 1850 - December 4, 1909

St. John's Reformed Church Cemetery, Upper Red Hook

A square base with a cross on top, located left of the western-most cemetery road, just after the large Potts-Budd marker on the eastern hillside of the road

Artist and Benefactress

“Make her to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting” are the words carved onto the tombstone of Ella A. Mooney, daughter of Edward Ludlow and Laura Blanchard Mooney. Adorned with a cross atop, the monument symbolizes Ella's devout faith. Although she and her father are buried next to the Piers, her paternal aunt and uncle, in St. John's Reformed Church cemetery in Upper Red Hook, she was an Episcopalian.

Born in New York City, Ella was the second oldest of her family, according to the 1855 U.S. Census—her brother Edward Lawrence Mooney (known as Lawrence) was two years older, and her sister Laura four years younger. Ella outlived all her immediate family. Younger sister Laura may have died in childhood, as there is no reference to her in the 1860 or 1870 Censuses—although listed are Alice Mooney and younger sister Amelia in the 1860 Census as daughters of Edward; there is no Alice nor Amelia in the 1870 Census—but an Ella appears in that roster. Given that Ella's middle name begins with an A., the best guess would be that she is the Alice of the 1860 Census, and the listed Amelia was actually her younger sister denoted as Laura earlier but not appearing in a census again.

The Mooney family, devoutly religious, faced additional familial loss and further testing of their faith when Ella's older brother Edward, employed as a brakeman, was one of 22 people killed in a train accident in southern Dutchess County. A disabled south-bound freight train was struck just north of New Hamburg by a north-bound passenger train on the Hudson River Railroad line on February 6, 1871. That collision caused the trains to catch fire and sent several cars into the Hudson River, as recounted by Anthony P. Musso in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* of October 13, 2015. Edward's body was recovered from the river February 17, 1871, reported the February 18, 1871, edition of *The New York Times*, which noted Edward had been a brakeman for only two weeks, adding “Uniform testimony is borne to his faithfulness and sobriety and when the summons came he was at his post of

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duty...A very warm attachment existed between him and a younger sister, who always was at the door with outstretched arms of welcome when he came home. All of his comrades speak of him as a whole-souled, genial fellow." Funeral services were conducted at the Mooney home in New York City by Rev. Dr. Adams of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church, with the eldest Mooney child laid to rest in Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, MA, according to the February 20, 1871, edition of the *New York Herald*. When Ella's mother Laura A. (Blanchard) Mooney died on January 4, 1885, following an illness, she was buried in the Blanchard vault in Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, joining her son.

Ella resided with her father at their home named Maple Hill in the hamlet of Upper Red Hook until his death in 1887. He left his estate to Ella: "It was with his brush that he acquired the fortune that he left his daughter," reported the *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News* on December 25, 1909, after Ella's death, adding "Miss Mooney was also an artist of ability and she left a gallery of 82 paintings, some the work of her father, some of her own work and the rest by prominent artists in this country and abroad." Her estate was valued at over \$60,000 reported the *Eagle-News*; the *Record-Journal* of Meriden, CT, estimated it at \$100,000 in a piece on December 25, 1909.

Ella's faith was as fervent as her father's, and she exemplified that by generous donations to the Episcopal diocese, having converted from being a Presbyterian to an Episcopalian. She gave land "for the building of All Saints' Episcopal Chapel behind her home in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and she developed her house into a home for deaconesses of the Episcopal Church. It was called St. Clare's House and was in use as a retreat center until the mid-twentieth century," according to Roger Leonard's *Upper Red Hook: An American Crossroads*. Upon her death on December 4, 1909, Ella left a "big estate" to various causes, including \$15,000 in a trust to the National Academy of Design to "enable pupils to study art in foreign countries" in memory of her father and \$8,000 to create a trust fund for All Saints' Chapel, stated the *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*, as well as bequeathing sums of money to friends and family, including \$1,000 to Maria E. Burgess of Upper Red Hook.

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Ella's longtime friend and companion Ina Gibson Russell, who resided with her at Maple Hill, was left the remainder of Ella's estate for life. Leonard states that Ina, who was the niece of Tivoli resident Clara Gibson Platt, moved in with Ella the winter after the death of her father to keep her company, but he surmises Ina may have been befriended Ella years before when Ina "had been a teacher in a fine arts school in New York City" where the Mooneys had previously lived. "The two women were patrons of All Saints' and taught Sunday School there," according to Claire O'Neill Carr's *A Brief History of Red Hook*. Ina died May 12, 1940, at age 87, having been a resident of Upper Red Hook for 70 years and outliving her friend Ella by more than 30. Ina's funeral services were held at All Saints' Episcopal Chapel, and she was interred in Mahaiwe Cemetery in Great Barrington, MA, where her parents were born and buried, according to the *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News* of May 14, 1940.

After the deaths of Ella and Ina, All Saints' "became St. Clare's House, a home for retired Episcopal deaconesses, endowed by the Mooney estate. It operated for about 15 years. Both St. Clare's and the chapel were closed and sold by Christ Church in the 1950s," according to O'Neill Carr.