

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Benjamin Seymour Pier

1811-1863

Anna Marie Mooney Pier

1815 - May 13, 1861

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

A stacked rectangular rough-based stone to the north of Edward and Ella Mooney, just after the large Potts-Budd marker on the eastern hillside of the road.

Merchant

Two portraits painted by Edward Ludlow Mooney flank the fireplace in the South Room of the Elmendorph Inn. The subjects are Benjamin Seymour Pier and his wife Anna (Mooney) Pier who was the sister of Edward. Fittingly, the Piers's gravesite is next to that of Edward Ludlow Mooney in the cemetery of St. John's United Dutch Reformed church in Upper Red Hook.

The Piers purchased a home formerly known as the Swart Inn just south of the Green in Upper Red Hook, writes Roger M. Leonard in *Upper Red Hook: An American Crossroad*. "Pier was one of the merchants of Upper Red Hook. Tunis Pier had been in the North Ward since the early 1700s and was listed as one of the constables. By the mid 1850s it became a store owned by Benjamin Seymour Pier and his wife Anna Marie Mooney...Earlier, in 1842, Benjamin and his wife had been members of the Cannon St. Baptist Church in New York City. When they moved to Upper Red Hook and opened the store, they were instrumental in spearheading a Baptist Conference in preparation for organizing a Baptist church near the river in Tivoli. The conference was held at the home of Edwin Knickerbocker, with Lewis Beckwith and his wife as well as a Mr. And Mrs. Hanford. Later Benjamin and Anna became members of St. John's Church, where Pier was the choir leader" explains Leonard.

"Benjamin Pier was born in 1811. Anna was born in 1815. They had one infant daughter, Laura, who sadly died in 1847. They had two children who joined St. John's, Emily in 1860 at 17 and Sylvester in 1863 at 15. They had two older sons, William and Edward,

HISTORIC RED HOOK

who were in their twenties and did not join, perhaps because they were involved in the Baptist Church of Tivoli.”

The Piers were both active beyond the faith community. Benjamin was on hand for a “great meeting of the republicans of the town of Red Hook” which was held at the home of Edward Hermance on August 22, 1856, reports the *Poughkeepsie Journal* of August 30, 1856. This meeting supported the beginning of the national Republican Party which was rallying behind candidate John Charles Fremont as the fledgling party’s first nominee for president, running on a platform against both incumbent president Franklin Pierce’s administration and the spread of slavery into the west. As part of that August meeting in Red Hook, a “Fremont club was then organized by the appointment of Benjamin S. Pier as President...” continues the article which describes discussions regarding “the great issues of the day, the principles to be sustained, and the duties of freemen in meeting the crisis... The meeting was so large that to proceed within doors was entirely out of the question, the room not being sufficient to accommodate a fourth of those present, consequently the proceedings were held in the open air, where along the multitude could be collected. Red Hook, like Rhinebeck, is prepared to do her duty.” Fremont lost to Democrat James Buchanan; the vote for the anti-slavery Republican Fremont was diluted by Know-Nothing party nominee and former president Millard Fillmore.

Pier was also involved with the establishment of a parochial school in Upper Red Hook at the site of the former Mountain View Academy—the local academy that had been established in 1822 through about 1842. The school Pier backed opened on April 1, 1858; Pier was a subscriber and the treasurer of the executive committee, stated Leonard, but the venture lasted only two years. When the academy was restarted yet again in 1867, Edward Ludlow Mooney was key in its purchase and rejuvenation. Both Mooney’s sister Anna and brother-in-law Benjamin had passed away by then and did not see the decade of success the new venture experienced before it too wound down when the number of pupils dwindled due to the rise of the public school system; the academy building was ultimately put up for sale in 1893.