

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Robert Neher Lewis

1838–1915

Helen Shook Lewis

1835–1901

St Paul's Lutheran Cemetery, Red Hook

Centerish in back of the church, south side of path near odd roundish Curtis monument.

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The blue hue of the Lewis monument draws one's eye, as does the lettering of the last name Lewis shaped like wooden twigs. Knocking lightly on the surface will reveal this monument is made of zinc (also known as "white bronze"). In 1902, this option was advertised in the local paper as "practically indestructible" and "cheaper than granite". Purchasers would place custom orders through a catalog, assisted by local agent, R.N. Lewis. Neither the ad nor the monument itself tells us what the name of the company was, but only the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, CT offered such memorials. Despite zinc monuments' popularity at the time, Lewis' would appear to be the only one on this cemetery. The three sides of the memorial depict faith, hope, and charity. Helen Shook Lewis' years of birth and death are listed, but her husband Robert's death is not acknowledged. It can be assumed

that if people close to Robert had outlived him, they could have had Robert's year of death added to the memorial. Compounding this hurdle to posterity, in 1915 the Monumental Bronze Company was commandeered by the government for use in WWI to make gun mounts and munitions. For whatever reason the date of his death is not present, Robert Lewis lives on, just as the Lewis monument does.

Robert Neher Lewis was the son of Jacob P. Lewis and Catherine Neher of Red Hook. He married Helen Shook; Robert and Helen were listed in the 1860 census as living in Red

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Hook when Helen was 20 and Robert 22 and a laborer. They lived in Red Hook, neighbors of Thomas Paulmier and Aaron Shook, until the 1860s when they moved to Schodack in Rensselaer County, NY, for a few decades where Robert worked as a gardener and florist. When they returned to Red Hook sometime after 1880, he took up farming. Robert was a member of the Griffing Fire Company and the "Agricultural Club." He often showed vegetables he'd grown at various fairs and took first place a few times in the 1890s. In 1897, the Agricultural Club held a meeting at Robert and Helen's home with the topic "To what extent should the farmer become a student, and what should he study?" noted the *Red Hook Journal* of May 21, 1897. Perhaps Robert had a secret weapon beyond scholarship for his gardening success: prayers. He was appointed a Vice President for Red Hook of the Sunday School Association in 1904.

Lydia E. Shook, Helen's sister born in January 1857, was a lacemaker, single, and lived with Helen and Robert, as of 1900, maybe to help out her older sister. Helen Shook Lewis died at home in Red Hook on April 28, 1901, after a "protracted illness" at 65. Robert died at Vassar Hospital on September 15, 1915, at 78 years of age. They did not have any children.