

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

## **Maria Ryphenburgh**

7 Mar 1790 – 6 Jan 1883

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Red Hook

*Large granite obelisk topped with a draped urn, north side of path in back of church*

### **“Well done thy good and faithful servant”**

From the parking lot of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, the Ryphenburgh monument beckons. Who were the Ryphenburghs? To which prominent family are they related? What business did the patriarch establish? It's marvelous, then, when we realize that the monument belongs to one person, a woman who was a servant most of her life. In death her memorial towers, one of the tallest in the cemetery. To some, she is a queen, as the crown inscription near the top of the monument symbolizes, although this was probably intended as a connection to a heavenly prize. Maybe the cloth covering the urn atop reminds us to hide our good works done in loyalty in this world; in turn, we will be remembered for our servitude. In any case, it would be a hard heart that doesn't rejoice in a servant rewarded on this earth for her sacrifice to others.

Maria Ryphenburgh's name, as inscribed, begins the mystery. The spelling of her last name does not match any official records. A Maria Riphenburgh, age 60, does appear in the Red Hook census (with a Tivoli postal address) in 1850 living with the widowed Gertrude DuBois and her son William DuBois. A decade later, a M. Riphenburgh, 68 years old, was reported as working as a domestic servant for Gertrude DuBois, 69, in Red Hook, according to the 1860 census. William C., 38, with no occupation listed, also lived there. Another servant, Mary Dixon, 24, rounded out the household. This arrangement evolved, as the 1880 census reports Maria Rifinburgh as keeping house and Mary Ditson, (Dixon), both living together in Livingston and no longer with the DuBois family.

Some lives ended and other lives moved on. Things dramatically changed for the DuBois household in 1863 when Gertrude died on June 21 at the age of 71. This is what research shows us about Gertrude Brodhead DuBois's early life: she was the daughter of Dr. Thomas Brodhead of Clermont, and she married John Dubois on June 23, 1811, presumably at St. John's in Upper Red Hook; they were married by Rev. Kittle. Her husband John DuBois was a merchant who died January 8, 1828, at 43 years of age at his father-in-law's home in

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

Clermont when their son William was only six years old. John may have been the son of Christian Dubois and Helena Van Voorhees of Fishkill.

Gertrude's personal estate and real estate was listed as each being worth \$6,000, for a total of \$12,000, according to her will recorded with Dutchess County in 1863. Gertrude left \$1,500 to William, and she divided the remainder between William, her daughter Elizabeth, and the children of her deceased daughter Helen. The servants Maria and Mary apparently remained keeping house for William.

William was remembered by Edmund Bassett in his "Reminiscences of Red Hook" newspaper columns published in the *Red Hook Advertiser* in 1926-27: "Back to the Gedney house on the corner of North Broadway and West Market Street. This is one of the oldest buildings in the village and was formerly owned by William DuBois, a bachelor, and a very interesting man, who had lived in many places and seen much of life." Sadly, William passed away at the age of 38 leaving not much information behind about him. What is interesting is to whom he left his estate.

William made out his will in March of 1865, according to the document recorded with Dutchess County. He left almost everything to Maria Rifenburg, and on her death it would pass to Mary E. Dickson, the two domestic servants who resided with the family. Bassett had mentioned Mary in his column, writing, "A Mary Dixon was his housekeeper at Red Hook. After his death Miss Dixon moved to Johnstown, Columbia County, where she lived for many years."

Bassett doesn't mention Maria, but the 1880 census for Livingston enumerates Maria Rifinburgh, 88, whose parents were both from New York, as the head of a household in Livingston and keeping house and single, along with Mary Ditson (probably Dixon), 43, a servant and single. Maria lived for another five years: her death notice states that she died at age 92 years, nine months, and 29 days, having been born March 7, 1790, and dying January 22, 1883. Research shows she may have been the daughter of Adam Rifinburgh and Christina Saulpaugh Rifinburgh. Maria named Mary Dixon and Rennsalaer Magley, both of Livingston, the executors of her will, as recorded in Columbia County.

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

Mary Dixon, 61, was listed as the head of her household in the 1900 Livingston census. She freely owned the home and could read and write. Another person who was listed there? The answer is Ranseleer [sic] Magley, 58, a married day laborer who could not read or write. Fittingly, Mary's tombstone in the Rhinebeck cemetery belies her humble station just as Maria's does. Mary's parents' occupations would not anticipate the large monument. Mary's father Paul was from Scotland and worked as a carpenter, and her mother Sarah was from New York, as listed in the 1850 Rhinebeck census. In that census Mary is listed as 14, and she has a younger brother named James age 5. Mary passed away on December 16, 1904, at the age of 67 in Livingston. The previously mentioned Rensselaer Magley was named the executor of Mary's estate when she died in 1904, according to the court records of September 14, 1905; he died at age 80 in June of 1921.

Mary Dixon's name takes up the full side of the monument on the plot in the Rhinebeck cemetery. Maria's monument, with her last name spelled Ryphenburgh not Rifenburgh, towers over her plot at St. Paul's. After lifetimes of service, it's rewarding they could call the final shots. And one smiles to think that maybe, if paradise does exist, Maria and Mary and William are being served by the angels, living side by side in their heavenly mansions and with Rensselaer around the corner and Gertrude nearby, too. Well done, thy good and faithful servants.