

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Martha Ann Beaumont

February 18, 1818 – June 24, 1878

Red Hook Methodist Cemetery

[ME Cemetery Map](#): 57 F, western side toward the back in Curtis plot

Martha Ann was the daughter of Abraham Beaumont and Mattie Carter who came from Yorkshire, England, and the sister of Jane (who married John Curtis) and Eliza Beaumont. She never married. In the 1860 census she is recorded as living in Poughkeepsie in the home of Lucy Hedding, age 77.

STARTLING OCCURRENCE.—On Monday last an incident occurred at the residence of Mrs. Hedding, in Washington street which created no little excitement. Mrs. Hedding is the widow of the late Bishop Hedding, and is quite infirm, requiring the constant service of an attendant. Martha Ann Beaumont, who has been employed for several years by Mrs. H. as nurse and housekeeper, became deranged, and made a violent assault upon Mrs. Hedding—drawing her off the bed, holding her down and choking her, Fortunately the proceedings...*[a line is missing from the newspaper text]*...vent her evident intent of taking life. She was taken off and placed under confinement. Mrs. Hedding was badly, but it is believed not fatally injured.

➤ *Rhinebeck Gazette*, May 6, 1866

Her brother-in-law John Curtis recorded a bout of her madness in his diary in April of 1856 when she was living at home in Red Hook. He documented her being “out of her mind” and the family having to quiet her for hours on end, presumably from loud and/or physical outbursts beyond her control. He found her condition “a source of great trouble and affliction. It is almost to make a sound person insane to endure it.” He was an ardent Methodist, and a good thing, too, because he said it was “utterly impossible to exercise charity at all times and in all cases without assistance from on high.”

He had her examined by Dr. Benedict (who is also buried in the Methodist cemetery) and in his opinion “her insanity does not arise from any local complaint or cause, but it is likely to be permanent.” John also sought advice from County Judge W.H. Nelson and William M. Davis and started looking into sending her to an insane asylum. Toward the end of the month, Martha had improved somewhat, but he wrote to Mrs. Hedding, her employer, that it might be some time before she could return to work if at all. About ten days later he

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wrote “Martha much better. Idea of an insane asylum has been a great incubus upon me and I am truly thankful to the Giver of all Good that it is removed.” Commitment was off the table, for now. At the end of the month, he wrote that she was back at work and “doing duty in a consistent, rational manner. What a relief to us.”

Of course, that would not last. As early as 1870 Martha can be found in the census, not in Poughkeepsie or Red Hook, but in Utica, NY, residing with hundreds of other inmates of the New York State Lunatic Asylum. It would appear that when she was “taken off and placed under confinement” after the 1866 incident, the family were forced to take steps to put her away. This was a very common practice in the 19th century as insane asylums sprang up all over the country—some of the most notorious of which were in New York State. Then, the treatment of mental illness was the stuff of horror movies. The asylum at Utica that Martha Ann was sent to for at least five years (if not twelve) was infamous for developing the “Utica Crib”—an adult-sized, shallow, sturdy, short-legged crib with a lid in which unruly inmates were confined for hours or days. It wasn’t until the 1930s that the state banned barbarous methods of restraint such as this.

The Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane opened in 1871 in Poughkeepsie, too late for Martha Ann who was committed by at least 1870 (but probably in 1866) when she was enumerated in the federal census in Utica. Her nephew, Legrand Beaumont Curtis would be sent to Hudson River in 1890 because, it was reported in the *Rhinebeck Gazette* of December 13 of that year, “he labors under the delusion that he is bankrupt, and it is feared that he will harm himself or others.” He died there, 16 years later. The paper reported that Martha Ann Beaumont died in Red Hook in 1878, aged 60 years, but she was in Utica through at least 1875.