

The Past

The Red Church uniquely defines itself and gains meaning from the unique glacier-torn mountains, valley and tidal estuary which is in its midst. The earliest inhabitants of this nature rich valley called themselves Mahikan or people of the water that flows two ways. James Fenimore Cooper immortalized these people in his book *The Last Of The Mohicans*. Later, the English called the water way the Hudson River after that explorer. In truth, it is not really a river at all but a 175 mile long tidal estuary, in half of which one can taste salt water. Henry Hudson tells in his journals of the Indians harvesting and feasting on oysters the size of a man's hand and about small silver fish that filled one of his long boats almost to sinking. The Dutch claimed this land as a result of Henry Hudson's exploration of the area in 1609. His journals indicated that he anchored off a peninsula of land that had much red foliage on it, hence he called it Roode Hoek. Later the land would change hands to the English who held it until America's Independence in 1776. Little is known about the building of The Red Church. Dates range from 1750 to its official dedication in 1766. Dominies, Dutch overseers, governed the Church until it closed in 1840 for a lack of a viable congregation and a minister. Ironically, The Red Church was saved from destruction by the Cemetery which officially incorporated it into its property in May 1917. For the first time, "The Red Church" replaced "Reformed Dutch Church" on an official basis. The Red Church has been looked after by the local people, with minimal repairs every twenty years or so, thus preventing nature from reclaiming it. The last major repair was on our Bi-Centennial in 1976.

The Present

Approximately \$200,000 is urgently needed now to help preserve The Red Church. Braces or supports surround the building to prevent it from shifting or even collapsing in on itself. The bulk of repair or maintenance money in the past has come from individual local contributors. More recently, historical State grants have been sought. Grants on a Federal level are now being investigated since an adjoining section of the cemetery was used for slaves. This area of its history went un-noticed until recently. The Church and the Cemetery that surrounds it have seen thirteen wars come and go. During the Revolutionary War the British who burned Kingston actually camped for a night in the Cemetery. Since the British had burned several churches in the area, no one really knows why they spared The Red Church. The Church's lack of notoriety, innocence and humble setting could be what saved it from being destroyed by the British. Perhaps it is this same lack of notoriety, innocence and humbleness that still moves people today to protect it. Perhaps the Church itself stands today as a reminder to all who see and touch it that this is where America all began. In 1609 Henry Hudson sailing on the Half Moon anchored off Roode Hoek and sent a party of men ashore to barter for supplies with the Mahikan. This same area became the bread basket of the Revolutionary War feeding Washington's troops at Valley Forge with bread made from local wheat. This same valley would later become the birth place of the computer and micro chips that now help feed and protect America and the rest of the world. The Red Church is where America first took root; this national treasure must be preserved!

The Future

What does the future hold for The Red Church? With proper funding, The Red Church could be open for: tours, services, ceremonies, meetings, classes, a museum, weddings and funerals. Parking, rest facilities, information and other conveniences can be added. A local school has indicated an interest in making The Red Church part of its local history study. While waiting for its funding The Red Church has had stabilization work done in the form of braces. Grants have been applied for and there have been many fund raising sales, including paintings and books on The Red Church and a yearly wine and cheese get-together at the Village Hall. There is also a yearly Masonic Lodge Family Picnic. Each year the American Legion has Memorial Day Services at the Cemetery. There are also Village Board meetings and weddings hosted at The Red Church. All of the above can be expanded and built upon as monies become available. Generally speaking, The Red Church not only can be used as a historic site open to the public but as a meeting place for community clubs, organizations, services and classes. As mentioned earlier because of The Red Church's "non-denominational status," weddings, funeral services and other church related gatherings can be and have been held there. A committee called The Red Church Building Fund was established in the 1980's to raise funds for restoration. In the past five years, it has raised \$40,000. It is this committee that is sponsoring this brochure and is looking for more volunteers to help in this worthwhile effort. The committee's address and telephone number are on the last page of this tri-fold. Please contact them to find out how you can help.

The Red Church *(circa 1752)*

by Roger M. Leonard,
Author of: "The Red Church."

"In the northwestern corner of New York's Dutchess County is a red frame church. An iron fence seems to protect it from the intrusion of today's indifferent traffic. Walking through the iron gate gives one a feeling of stepping into another era. "The Red Church," as it has been known to the people of the area for over two centuries, is one of the oldest remaining church structures in the county. The graves of people from three different centuries spread out behind the church drawing ones eyes to the Catskill Mountains beyond. Here statesmen, first ladies, church fathers, landlords, farmers and even slaves have worshipped. It has seen the soldiers and smoke of war and its bell has rung out the hopeful peals of peace. It was never a thriving church. It ceased housing a congregation altogether a century and a half ago. But it abides. As though with predictable regularity, about every twenty years the people of the area gather together to "save it." The local people refuse to surrender the place to the inexorable elements. They find in the graves and church something tangible to remind them of some feelings they cannot touch called "faith" and "freedom." It does not matter whether their loved ones are buried here or whether the church was built to celebrate their particular faith. They love it as their own and want to keep it for future generations to love as well."



The oldest (intact church/meeting building) in Dutchess County peacefully sits on a hill in the Village of Tivoli.

Noted Guests of The Red Church



Martha Washington John H. Livingston Eleanor Roosevelt

A place for tools was desired. They considered building a partition inside the church to store them, but after thinking about that for awhile, in 1921 they built a tool house and toilet combined in the yard for \$191.57 instead. At about the same time in 1920 it was decided to build a receiving vault to hold bodies during the winter when it would be too difficult to dig graves. The usual work continued, cutting the grass and brush, straightening the stones, and repairing the church walk.¹²⁵

On April 5, 1920, C. W. Lasher was elected president. Dr. C. Pritchard was vice president, C. A. Denegar the secretary and Charles Sturges remained the treasurer. It was voted to buy another suitable book to enter the names of all plot owners and "kept as an official record." This was done.¹²⁶

The design for the vault took shape under Charles Sturges' guidance. It was to be sixteen by twelve by eight feet, inside dimensions, rock faced concrete blocks, gabled red tiled roof, with double metal doors, foundation three feet in the ground, a floor eight inches above the level of the driveway made of stone one foot deep, covered by three inches of cement with a rack which would hold twelve caskets. With few changes it was built as planned, except that Mrs. Hossiner offered to pay for the door if it met her conditions. Mrs. DePyster donated the lot on which it was built. Estimates for building it were between \$1500 and \$1800. No final figure was reported, but by the end of 1920, \$1,512.50 had been received and the vault was reported an accomplishment of the previous year at the 1921 annual meeting.¹²⁷