

**The Dey Family
of
Bergen County, New Jersey and Seneca County, New York
by Kate Lynch**

In the post-Revolutionary War period, the Dey family migrated from the old Dutch settlement of Bergen County, New Jersey to the relative wilderness of western New York. After the death of Gen. Dirck (Richard) Dey in 1811, his widow Hannah Pierson Dey and her adult children settled in Romulus. She was, however, preceded by Benjamin Dey, her brother-in-law, a government surveyor of the military lots. Traces of early Dey settlements are still visible along East Lake Road in Fayette at Henry K. Dey's abandoned farm house and the adjacent Hannah Dey burying ground; in Varick at the ruins of the county's first mills on Reeder Creek on Benjamin Dey's property, now owned by the Mormon Church; and at David Dey's steamship landing, Dey's Landing, where a few dock pilings remain.



In Totowa, New Jersey, Hannah Dey and her husband Gen. Richard Dey led a prosperous life in what is today a museum, the Dey Mansion. The Dey Mansion was built in 1740 by Gen. Dey's grandfather Dirck Dey, a master carpenter. The mansion, unusual for a Dutch farm house, is a two story impressive brick structure. George Washington headquartered here in 1780 while his troops camped on Dey property. Gen. Washington left behind his white ironstone shaving mug which was later donated to the Geneva Historical Society. The town of Varick was named after Gen. Washington's secretary, Richard Varick, a Dey descendent.

While in New Jersey, Hannah Pierson Dey and her mother-in-law, Hester Schuyler Dey, the wife of Col. Teunis (Anthony) Dey, raised funds for the relief of the American troops. After migrating to Seneca County at age 55, Hannah Dey spent the remainder of her life on her farm with her bachelor son Richard Jr. She died there and was buried in 1833 in the family cemetery on land she had selected:

East of the road [East Lake Road] on a rise of ground, just north of the home of Henry K. Dey and nearly crossed by the rail-road she set apart a plot of ground as a family cemetery. She herself was buried there, there are perhaps twenty others. There is said to be a colored man buried there, probably a slave who came to Fayette with her, as the family had slaves in N.J.

The late Mr. Marchant Nielson and Mr. Bernie (Peel) Long happened to mention the Deys to this writer one day several years ago on our way to a strawberry patch. Marchant said there was a Dey "monument" in the wooded lot near the abandoned farm house and south of the railroad underpass. As a boy, Peel recalled meeting the widow Dey, an elderly lady with long white hair, while she sat outside this farm house



in a rocking chair.

Peel and the Lerch boys “decidedly changed our opinion of her when she gave us permission to camp out on her lakeshore land.” Mrs. Jean Keefer has mentioned that her son-in-law Donny’s grandfather claimed there were slaves buried in the Dey cemetery. While this is difficult to verify, Maria Dey Berry’s husband, John Berry, buried in the Dey cemetery in 1849, owned a slave, according to the 1820 Federal Census for Romulus.

Hannah Dey’s son Pierson Dey’s small “monument” is standing and visible in the wooded lot north of the Dey farm house, but Hannah’s headstone has probably fallen over or broken into pieces. Hannah Dey’s headstone would read “Hannah Dey, wife of Richard Sr. of NJ, d. January 22, 1833 ae 76 yrs” according to cemetery records. Aside from Pierson Dey’s monument, a few headstones are still barely standing or fallen over but legible: Jane Dey (d. 1826) and John J. Berry (d. 1849), the husband of Maria Polly Dey.



While it is clear from the records that Pierson Dey was a slave owner in New Jersey, he became a “strong anti-slavery man,” and an abolitionist in Seneca County. Most intriguing are the entries made in New Jersey in his Record Book from 1810 regarding the sale of his slave, “Harry” to Riker and his hoped for purchase of another.

In 1867, there was a lawsuit, *Alleman vs. Dey*, regarding the Dey cemetery and the Deys’ right of way to it after Richard Dey Jr.’s land was sold to Jos. D. Alleman. An altercation broke out when Joseph Alleman tried to prevent the Dey procession from burying Teunis Dey, a nephew and blood relative of General Richard Dey, of Preckness, New Jersey. In court the Deys defended their right of way and invoked the memory of their ancestress:

...that the descendants of Mrs. Hannah Dey, whose body is interred there may have the privilege at proper times and seasons, when there is no crops in the adjoining ground that can be materially injured, to visit her grave, with the respect due to her memory.

The Dey family genealogy begins in Holland with Dirk Jansen Dey who emigrated to New Amsterdam c. 1640 as a soldier in the employ of the Dutch West Indies Company. From the New Amsterdam records, we know that on Dec. 2, 1641, he married Jannetje Theunis. Fortunately, in 1647, Gov. Stuyvesant pardoned Dirck Dey and another soldier John Reiger who were to be shot for “insolent behavior towards citizens on the Heeren Street [Broadway] and striking their superior officers.” In the 1650s, Dirck Dey purchased property from Simon Congo, a freed slave with the Dutch West Indies Company. Eventually Dirck Dey got various patents and leases above the “wall” (later Wall Street). The Dey farm became known as the Duke’s Bowery and later the sites of Trinity Church and the World Trade Center.

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