



The Search for the Remains of the Town of Milan's Early African American Community Leads to Identification of Burial Ground

This article was written by Bill Jeffway, Executive Director of Dutchess County Historical Society

The identification of "lost" African American burial grounds is not limited to downtown Manhattan. In examining a more complete history of the Dutchess County town of Milan (pronounced MY-lun) during the bicentennial year of its incorporation, we wanted to better understand what had happened to our town's early communities of color. Part of the answer rests in a small burial ground, beneath a handful of rough, blank stones within a triangular stone wall.

With the opening up of the west and migration to cities between 1820 and 1930, the population of rural Milan dropped to one third its size; from 1,846 to 622.

In 1820 there were 65 persons of color. In reverse proportion to prior decades, the majority of them, 47, were identified as "free colored" while 18 individuals were noted as enslaved. By 1930, there were only 6 persons of color, aging descendants of two of the early founding families, the last of whom would die in 1952.

To find evidence of the remains of these earlier individuals or their extended families is challenging because of the early 19th century practice, which you'll see lasted into the 20th century, of burying persons of color not only separately, but with temporary or no markers.

We knew of one location for burial of persons of color. "Section E" of the cemetery in the adjoining town of Rhinebeck was established in 1853 for this purpose.

We learned of a second location, the southeast corner of Yeoman's cemetery in Milan. Oral histories and the discovery of newspaper references led us to understand that burial of persons of color took place in this section, allowing only wooden crosses or no marker. Not a single headstone stands.

We now know of a third place.

Within a 1-acre parcel on Turkey Hill, there is a 1,000 square foot area right at the road that is enclosed by a stone wall. Today it has five visible stubs or headstones. An earlier town historian noted that there were eight in the 1970's. There is no visible writing.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the fact that there is a 1935 NYS Education Department historic marker which we will address later, the history of land ownership tells the story. The 1-acre lot was purchased in 1813 by Jacob Lyle and his wife, Betsy, both of whom are identified as persons of color in census records. Jacob served in the Revolutionary War in his home state of New Jersey. We know this through dozens of pages of sworn testimony in pension applications. We believe the Lyle's died in the 1840s, aged in their 80s. But we are not certain of the year they died. We believe they were buried on their homestead as was the practice of many at the time—and that this was the start of the "cemetery for colored people" as it was called in the early 1900s. There are several similar, roadside, extant home cemeteries nearby.

The lot was subsequently owned by a woman indicated as "black" in census records. Nancy Bradford had bought a similar, small, adjoining lot after the Lyle's had bought their lot. She came to own both after the death of the Lyle's. She died in 1865 and we believe she was also buried in the cemetery.

We believe this, in part, because the property deed (from the 1870s to today) references the cemetery as "Nancy Crow Lot or Place." We believe "Crow" is used in this instance as a racial epithet to describe African Americans, a use common for a half-century from 1840 in the north, according to the Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State University in Michigan, and other sources.

The published obituaries of Ellsworth Jackson and Lemuel Jackson in 1917 and 1927 respectively, report that they were buried in this cemetery. They are identified as "black" in census records. In the latter case, the obituary reads, "burial will be in a private cemetery for colored people at Turkey Hill."

Now a word about the New York State historical marker at the burial ground.

On October 8, 1934, Edith Harrison (sometimes Mrs. C. V. Harrison), submitted one of what would be a total of over 100 successful historical marker applications to New York State. The sign still stands and reads, "Indian Burial Ground. Chief Crow and other Mahican Shacomecos of Moravian faith buried here. Last burial about 1850." In terms of historic significance and sources she notes, "Last Indians of this section buried here," and "Old men of this section tell of their grandparents seeing these daily and of their burial in this place."

A Chatham Courier article of June 28, 1934, four months before the sign application, reports on a historic meeting hosted by Mrs. Harrison at her home.

At that meeting, Herman Case tells the story that he says was frequently told by his mother. In summary, Mary Allendorf (1835–1911) was frightened as a small child by the "war whoop" of old Chief Crow. The article reports that the Chief lived in a wigwam (later referenced as a log cabin) given to him to live in after he sold land to white settlers. Seeing her cry, the Chief swept her up in his arms and took her to school. The article goes on to report that the Chief was married to a woman named Nancy, who was, of course, Nancy Crow. The story goes that they are buried in the "Indian cemetery" and that is why it is called, "Nancy Crow Lot or Place."

There are several technical difficulties in the story, such as Chief Crow being old enough circa 1840/1845 to have sold land to white settlers, but young enough to make a marathon run to the school carrying young Mary. It is entirely possible that Mary Allendorf told that story. And it seems certain that Herman Case told it in 1934. The "Shacomeco" reference is to a well-documented Moravian mission set up to convert Native Americans to Christianity that existed from 1742 to 1746. It was located fifteen miles to the southeast of this cemetery in what is now the town of Pine Plains. The mission was ordered to disband and persons ordered to leave the colony of New York as it had come to be perceived as a group (without evidence) that was conspiring with the French and "Papists." Between the ban and threats of assassination from some locals, the mission was completely shut down and evacuated in 1746.

The timing, then, of 1850 burials of those from the mission is hard to reconcile.

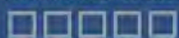
We only recently found the newspaper article describing the Chief Crow story, and believe there are lessons to be learned from the stories of all. If there are sometimes vague lines separating fiction, folklore, and historical fact, there are equally overly-strict-and-simple lines of black, white, and mulatto in the census-takers' notebook, in a multi-racial historical area.

It is comforting to see the gradual emergence of the names of those who genuinely rest below the blank stones. The Town of Milan has added Jacob Lyle to its honor roll of Revolutionary War Veterans at the Town Hall.

More information at www.historyspeaks.us/milan-burialground

Bill Jeffway is the Executive Director of the Dutchess County Historical Society, Milan Town Board liaison to the Milan Bicentennial Committee and Trustee of Historic Red Hook.

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How Jim Crow became Chief Crow:

Rival voices on race and identity at Milan's Turkey Hill



**A 1935 State roadside marker says
“Chief Crow” rests here ~ but the facts tell a very different story**

“Because of our ways of indifference, there is little likelihood of our ever finding out [who lies there]... we have lost a valuable part of our history and culture.” ~ Barbara Thompson, then-Milan-Town-Historian, 1973

*“We wish that there were a few more clues so that we could better understand those that went before us.”
~Patrick Higgins, then-Milan-Town-Historian, 1999*

Humbly submitted by Bill Jeffway, Former Milan Town Historian,
with the support and encouragement of Barbara “Bobbie” Thompson, 2017

LEGEND & LORE

1920

1936



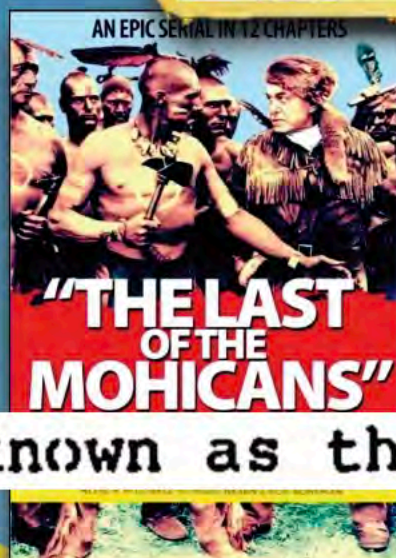
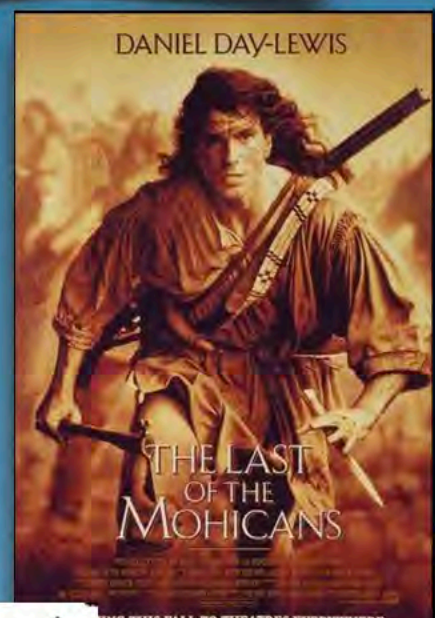
INDIAN BURIAL GROUND
CHIEF CROW AND OTHER
MOHICAN SHACOMECOS OF
MORAVIAN FAITH BURIED HERE.
LAST BURIAL ABOUT 1850

NEW YORK

STATE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT 1935

1935

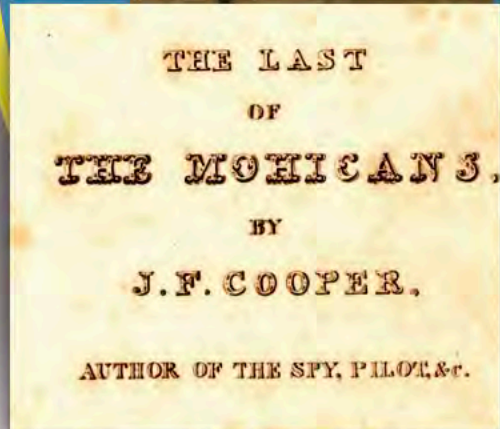
1991



1932

known as the "Nancy Crow" place or lot

1826



Jim Crow
noun phrase

1. A black man; African-American (1828+)
The Dictionary of American Slang, Fourth Edition

The "Chief Crow" Legend Evolved Between 1924 and 1934

The German Moravian missionaries' venture to convert Native Americans to Christianity at Shacomeco in Pine Plains was very real and is very well documented in diaries, first-hand accounts and other records. Lasting less than four years between 1742 to 1745, the group was ordered to be disbanded. Governor Clinton and the State of New York passed a number of prohibitive laws and ordered the disbanding of the 44 persons who remained at the mission, driving them to relocate to Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

Meanwhile, the roadside marker that stands today reminds us of James Fenimore Cooper's eternally-popular 1826 novel "The Last of the Mohicans." But the 1935 State Education Department sign actually stands above the burial ground of local African Americans, persons of color, no doubt mix-race individuals, including Revolutionary War Veteran Jacob Lyle, his wife Betsy, resident and professional cook Nancy Bradford and at least six others. Lyle is from New Jersey. Bradford from Albany. Not Shecomeco.

The "Crow" reference is born from the lot being known as "Nancy Crow place or lot" as noted in title deeds from the late 19th century up to the present. Perhaps a pejorative reference to her African heritage in the late 1800's, "Nancy Crow" had by 1934 evolved into Mrs. Nancy Crow, the wife of Chief Crow in a fanciful tale (see last page). In 1924, Poucher & Reynolds published detailed records of 19,000 graveyard inscriptions in Dutchess County, showing Milan with 10 cemeteries and 441 inscriptions including cemeteries with as few as 3 headstones. But they failed to even mention the existence of this lot. So it seems the concept of a Chief Crow being buried there had not yet materialized. Local historian Edith Harrison in 1934 submitted over 100 sign applications for Dutchess and Columbia Counties. In this instance she cited only hearsay as evidence: "old men of this section tell of their grandparents seeing these daily." She figures prominently in the story of Chief Crow, as the host of the 'historical meeting' described on the next page, where this story is told.

A CLOSER TRUTH



NEW YORK

AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUND

REVOLUTIONARY WAR VETERAN
JACOB LYLE, HIS WIFE BETSY,
OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR REST HERE

KNOWN LOCALLY AS CROW LOT

2015

called York

Jacob Master

boy out of his gun

LUYSTER, PETER. Captain Vroom's company, Second Bat-
talion, Somerset.
LYLE, JACOB.

Jacob Lyle of Milan

*his
Jacob + Lyle
mark*

I always volunteered Captain of fife & musician

Typical of burial practices at the time.

Prior to New York State's 1847 rural cemetery act, the tradition of burying one's family on the landowner's homestead was common and lasted for some time after the act passed. There are two such small lots near this site (Shear and Platner families). Furthermore, African Americans and "non-whites" were buried separate from whites, often in unmarked or lesser-marked graves.

Born in New Jersey and age fifteen at the outset of the Revolutionary War, Lyle, whose fellow soldiers called him "York," volunteered between 1778 and 1784 as a Master Fifer, an armed guard of ammunition stores and a forage master herding cattle. He came to Milan in 1813 at the age of 50 with his wife Betsey where he worked as a basket-maker until his death at age 88.

He had purchased a one acre piece of land (site of the burial ground) from Frederick Bathrick. The 1830 census shows a girl (of color) under 14 living with Jacob and Betsy. A granddaughter? Each Federal Census shows Jacob and Betsy as persons of color. After their death prior to 1844 Nancy Bradford, a "Black" cook from Albany, became the subsequent owner. She died in 1865.

Where did Chief Crow story come from? The answer lies with Gallatin's Mary Allendorf Case.

Name of person deceased.	Age.	Sex.	"B"
<i>Nancy Bradford</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>B</i>
1865 Bradford death notice: "B" = Black			



[CLICK HERE FOR PHOTOGRAPHS](#)

INDIAN OCCUPATION OF GALLATIN RECALLED AT HISTORICAL MEETING

Herman Case Recounts Episode of His Mother "Captured" by
Indian Chief and Carried to School.

The Chief Crow Story Emerges As Milan's African American Community Recedes

Jacob Lyle was a resident of the town of NorthEast when in 1818 he found himself in the newly-created town of Milan. The new town's population of 1,846 included 65 who were "colored" (~3.5%) — 18 slaves (slavery existed in NY until 1827) and 47 "free colored" persons. "Colored" would have covered any "non-white:" Native American, African American, mixed race.

Notice the past tense in this 1908 passage in Howard Morse's *Historic Old Rhinebeck*, "The colored people of Rhinebeck, *in the old times* [my emphasis], cut something of a figure...most were house servants, some had trades [blacksmith, fish peddler, wash-woman, coachman, stableman, driver] Jennie Pierce was the popular stewardess on the old barge *Milan*. A portion of the cemetery is set apart for the colored people."

Northern Dutchess County there had been an enormous migration and the rural African American population had largely disappeared. By the depression of the 1930's, the population of Milan had shrunk to only 622 people, 1/3rd its prior size, with just one African American family, the Fraziers. This depletion of community gave room for stories like "Chief Crow" to evolve.

Ironically the 1935 roadside marker stems from the 1925 Regents Program *created to recognize the 150th Anniversary of the American Revolution*. And yet this marker fails to mention that a Revolutionary War veteran rests right there.



Mary Allendorf Case
1835-1911
Source of "Chief Crow" story;
Headstone | Gallatin, NY.

Clip from Bobbie Thompson's original research

June 1973

Butternuts and Indians

The legends and lore that embellish our concepts of history are as bountiful as the fruit from the white walnut trees and just about as trying. After all the gathering comes the sticky task of unpeeling layers of husk to get at the tidbits of sweet butternut inside.

Stories reminiscent of the Indian occupation of what is now Gallatin, featured a historical meeting held at Locust Ledge, home of Mrs. C. V. Harrison, town historian for Gallatin, last week.

Among those who attended and gave, from family legend and records, much interesting information concerning the Indians, locally were William Warenfeld, Herman Case and A. J. Kilmer.

One incident cited was that of the little girl on her way to school who passed the Chief's wigwam each day. One day this Chief gave a big "war-whoop" as the little girl passed near him. She was frightened and commenced to cry. The chief then told her "me no hurt little white gal." Then he grabbed her in his arms and ran all the way to the school house with her and placed her on the steps, saying, "See, chief not hurt little white gal."

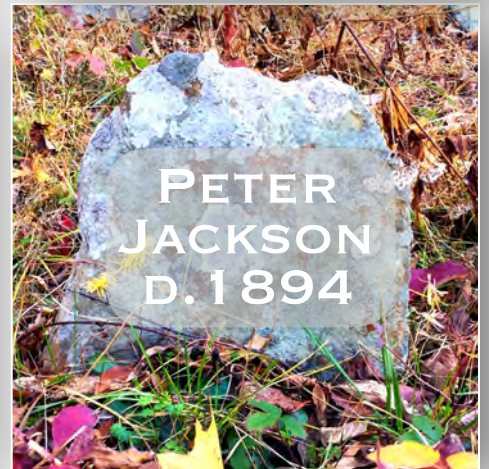
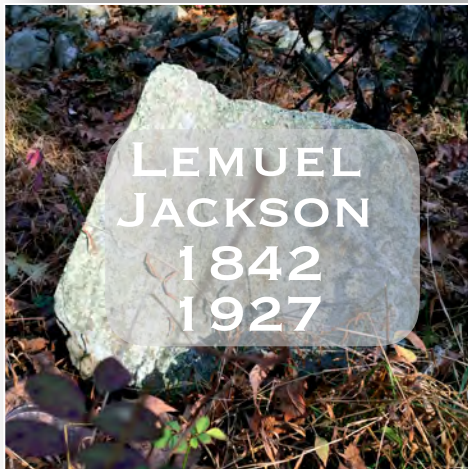
She grew up, married, raised a family and has many relatives in the section today. She was fond of telling the story about the chief, and said that she never saw anybody run as swiftly as that chief did when he carried her in his arms to the schoolhouse. The little girl was the mother of Herman Case; she was Mary Allendorf and lived on the farm that is yet known as the Allendorf farm.

The Indian chief Crow lived on what is now known as the Warenfeld place. He and his wife, Nancy, and 13 year old granddaughter are buried in in the Indian cemetery at Jackson Corners. When he sold the land to the whites, they allowed him the use of a log cabin where he and his family completed their lives.

SOURCES:

Barbara Thompson. See "Out to Milan," 2006. A republished compendium of articles of the Milan Community Association 1969 to 1975 including a wealth of detailed, sourced, well-researched information including the discrepancies between the Chief Crow's sign claims and the underlying land ownership history. **The late Lorraine Roberts**, Chair of the Black History Committee of the Dutchess County Historical Society, who I consulted early on. **The Strange Career of Jim Crow** by Comer Vann Woodward, 1955. **Jim Crow Museum**, Ferris State University. **US Census** records. **Revolutionary War Pension Applications:** 38 pages of sworn affidavits related to Jacob Lyle.

We have begun to learn who rests on Turkey Hill



The Pine Plains Register

AND HERALD

er 18.

Established April 7, 1882

PINE PLAINS, N. Y., THURSDAY, JULY 7, 1927.

\$2.00 a Year in Advance

Obituary

JULY 7, 1927.

Lemuel Jackson died at Vassar Bros. hospital, Poughkeepsie, at an early hour on Tuesday morning, where he had been taken a few days previous. The main cause of death was undoubtedly due to his advanced age, he having been born in the town of Milan, August 20th, 1842. He lived for many years in the tenant house at the farm of the late William Hedges and now owned by Nathaniel Hedges. At the retirement of Mr.

Hedges he moved later to Mount Ross where he lived alone. Funeral services will be conducted at the Jackson Corner church at 11 o'clock this morning, conducted by the Rev. George F. Langdon, rector of the Church of the Regeneration of this village. Burial will be in a private cemetery for colored people, at Turkey Hill. Funeral arrangements are in charge of Frank S. Roberts & Sons. The deceased was married three times and several children survive him, beside one sister, who lives at Chatham.

The Rhinebeck Gazette

JULY 14, 1917

RED HOOK

Ellsworth Jackson, who passed away last Thursday at his home in this village was laid at rest Sunday last in the Turkey Hill cemetery. Mr. Jackson was eighty-four years of age and spent practically his entire life here where he was well known and respected by all. He is survived by a widow and two sons, Luther, of Poughkeepsie, and Herbert, of this village.

Recollections of Cokertown

No. 6

"Judge" Peter Jackson, the colored orator, was a picturesque character. He lived in a hut on Turkey Hill. It was in a sheltered spot, away off from the road, reached only by a footpath. The original house had burned down some years before, and this one was set partly in the side of a knoll like a thatched roof. His people had lived there for I don't know how long. Originally they were slaves to the Martins of Red Hook, and I have been told that Judge and Edward Martin were rocked in the same cradle. At any rate Martin was always kind to Judge, and he had a standing invitation to come down whenever he was in need and Martin would load him up. Many years ago small-pox swept through the family and only Judge and his sister, Sarah, were left. The others were laid to rest in the little family burying-ground nearby. Sarah used to work out, helping the neighbor women clean house, etc. Judge would plant the potatoes and take care of the garden and work out some, too. After a while Sarah died, and I think Judge must have been very lonely there, with only the memories of the past to cherish. He went around the countryside, visiting us occasionalyy, and doing quite a little shopping for the people of his neighborhood. The nearest store was at Cokertown or Upper Red Hook, and as huckleberries grew in great abundance through all the region, the women of the neighborhood would pick the berries and send Judge to the store with them to exchange for groceries. He was entirely illiterate, but like many others of that class he had a good memory; and being absolutely honest, he could be trusted to do the job right. This made him quite a useful citizen. I think he was happy in the knowlege that he could be trusted, but the moment of his supreme joy was when he was asked to make a speech at a Sunday school picnic.

I said he was a picturesque character. Ordinarily he wore any old garments that were given him and from the changes that he made I think he must have had quite a wardrobe. His clothes always befitted his circumstances, but they did not always befit his person. He

usually wore old artics on his feet, unless, forsooth, he was going to a picnic, when he would put on his boots, well blacked and shiny. Then he would wear his Prince Albert coat and beaver hat. Of course, it was a great event when the picnic dinner was over and Judge was called upon to make a speech. I can see him now as he came forward under the locust tree near the corner of our house, and taking off his beaver, laid it down on the grass beside him, and straightening up to his full height he began to speak.

The colored man naturally has the oratorical temperament and Judge was no exception to this rule. I never could understand all that he said, but you could not help but be impressed with the tone of his voice, the steady flow of language, the flash of his eye, hte occasional gesture, and the evident enthusiasm which he felt. At the end of his speech he would politely thank us all for the opportunity of speaking to us. The contribution for his services would be a market basket full of whatever might be left over from dinner. Probably one of the proudest moments of Judge's life was when he made a political speech before Capt. George W. Horton, of Troy. The Captain was staying at Fultonia, the home of John P. Fulton, whose cousin he married, when Judge came along and was asked to make a speech. It was during Cleveland's administration. I did not hear the speech, but I have been told that it was truly wonderful, sparkling with wit and clever political allusions. The Captain gave him a dollar for it.

I have wondered what an education might have done for this man. Who knows but what here was another Frederick Douglass or Booker Washington in embryo? Judge, doubtless did the best he could under the circumstances, and that is all that mankind ought to ask of any man. He has been dead now these many years, but some who read these words will still remember him as he went from house to house with his market basket, always radiating the news of the day, yet never mentioning a word of scandal or hurtful stories about people; always friendly, trusty, and ready to be useful.

Burton Coon.

**THE PINE PLAINS REGISTER,
FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 1894.**

Peter Jackson, familiarly known as Judge, visited our school on Washington's birthday, and being called upon to participate in the exercises, did so. His address was largely historical, giving dates and events well in keeping with the day.

Red Hook Journal.

Red Hook, N. Y.

FRIDAY, MAY 4, 1894.

The death of Peter Jackson, better known as "Judge" Jackson, of Milan, occurred on Thursday last, aged 83 years.

The Republican.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 16, 1894.

JACKSON CORNER.

Peter Jackson's remains were brought from Red Hook and interred in the colored people's burying ground on Turkey Hill last Sunday afternoon.

Where did the name *Chief Crow* come from?

We can not be certain. But the small lot was once owned by Nancy Bradford, who is shown as “Black” in the 1865 census, and who we believe is buried in the lot with original owners Jacob and Betsy Lyle (also persons of color). Shortly after Nancy Bradford’s death the reference to the lot in the legal title, the deeds, starting describing the lot as “Nancy Crow Lot or Place,” which remains in the deeds to this day. According to the Jim Crow Museum, the reference “Jim Crow” was first used as a racial epithet targeting African Americans, shortly after the New York Jim Crow musical became an international hit. And that the use in describing “Jim Crow laws” was actually a later use, later in the 19th century.

and one-half (1/2), being the same more or less, and being the same parcel of land commonly called and known as the "Nancy Crow" place or lot and being the same premises conveyed to Charles Bathrick now deceased by

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Jim Crow Era

Thomas Dartmouth Rice, a struggling white actor, became famous by performing in blackface makeup as "Jim Crow," an exaggerated, highly stereotypical black character. By 1838, the term "Jim Crow" was being used as a collective racial epithet for blacks, not as offensive as [redacted] but as offensive as [redacted] or [redacted]. The popularity of minstrel shows aided the spread of Jim Crow as a racial slur. By the end of the 19th century, Jim Crow was being used to describe laws and customs that oppressed blacks.

Jim Crow

modifier

: *Jim Crow laws*

noun phrase

1. A black man; African-American (1828+)
2. Segregation and discrimination against black people, and the laws and practices that accompany them : *My first experience with Jim Crow/ Jim Crow killed Bessie Smith (1940s+)*

The Dictionary of American Slang, Fourth Edition by Barbara Ann Kipfer, PhD, and Robert L. Chapman, Ph.D.

According to the prolific and detailed writer, Burton Coon, the Jacksons referenced in the obituaries as buried in the Turkey Hill Cemetery were the slaves of the Martin family. Statistics show that in 1820, the last of the Federal Census before slavery was abolished in NY State, that Red Hook still had many slaves.

