

# Martin Cook's Riverside Hotel



The building at 80 Main Street is one of Butler's oldest and, under Martin Cook's ownership, it became a popular gathering place. The tavern's large mahogany bar was locally famous for its beauty and Martin kept its brass railings "as shinny as a new Penny."

Martin Cook was born in West Milford, New Jersey on August 3, 1844. He was one of twelve children born to Henry Cook and Matilda Schulster. He worked on his father's farm until April 1, 1862 when, at the age of 18, he enlisted in the Union Army and was mustered into Company E of the Twenty-fifth Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers. After being sent to Washington D.C. to defend the nation's capital from a Confederate attack, he was assigned to the 103<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, 9<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Army of the Potomac. On December 13, 1862, he fought at the Battle of Fredericksburg, VA, one of the Union Army's worst defeats of the entire war. Martin was lucky to survive the battle; 120,000 northern troops were listed as killed, missing, or wounded. His enlistment expired on March 18, 1863 and, after battling a bad case of measles, he was honorably discharged.

Six months later, on September 1, 1863, Martin re-enlisted. A new regiment was being raised in Newark by Colonel George Mindil. Company D of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment New Jersey Volunteers was mostly recruited in Passaic County, so Martin served with many friends and acquaintances. Levi Brown and others from Bloomingdale, Wanaque, West Milford and Ringwood also served in Company D. The 33<sup>rd</sup> was a "Veteran Regiment," meaning most of its members, like Martin, had previous military service. They were assigned to the Army of the Cumberland and fought in the western theater of the war. After a long train ride, the 33<sup>rd</sup> saw its first major action at the battle for Chattanooga, TN. It went on to fight in more than twelve major battles including the Siege of Atlanta, GA and General Sherman's famous "March to the Sea." The 33<sup>rd</sup> earned a well-deserved reputation as one of New Jersey's most outstanding regiments. Years later, Martin would reflect proudly that even though he was often in the thick of the fighting in many battles, he never "got a scratch" (meaning he was never wounded.)

Any Civil War veteran would tell you, however, there was a much greater chance of dying in the war from getting sick than from being shot. Martin was no exception. He contracted typhoid fever at Stevenson, Alabama and was sent to Old Church Hospital in Nashville, TN to recover.

After the “Grand Review of the Army” in Washington D.C. at the end of the war, Martin and the rest of the 33<sup>rd</sup> were honorably mustered out of service at Alexandria, VA.

When Martin returned from the war, he had a number of occupations. In Newark, he tried his hand at the “wood kindling business” and, for about a year, he worked for the Midland Railroad. In 1873, he came to Butler and helped build the Pequannock Valley Paper Mill. He worked at the paper mill for seven years and in 1880 he established himself as the proprietor of the Riverside Hotel. In 1965, his grandson Martin related to a newspaper reporter that “Grandpa ran a real respectable place. He opened at five am and shut the doors at nine sharp in the evening and was closed on Sunday. The leader of the Butler chapter of the WCTU (Women’s Christian Temperance Union) said, “If every tavern was run like Grandpa’s, there wouldn’t be a drinking problem.”

On April 25, 1896, Martin married Effalena Sandford, daughter of Charles and Maria Sandford. They had four children, Arthur who died in infancy, Frank who died when he was ten years old, Harry who died in 1937 at the age of 61, and Jenny who died in 1964 at the age of 91. Effalena died on July 29, 1893 at the young age of 45.

Martin was one of the organizers and founding members of Bloomingdale’s John E. Beam Post 92 of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR, a Civil War veterans’ organization). He held many of its leadership positions, including commander, as well many state level offices. Martin was a member of the Pequannock Township Committee for three years prior to the establishment of the Borough of Butler and served as a Morris County Freeholder for seven years. It was during his tenure on the county board that Butler’s Main Street was first graded and macadamized.

When Prohibition was passed in 1920 it doomed Butler’s oldest tavern. Martin continued to run the hotel, as did his son, Harry, after his father’s death at the age of 88 on April 29, 1933. The Martin Cook family is buried in Plot 134 in the Historic Manning Avenue Cemetery.

