

RHS: Summer 2020

The back of this newsletter contains our tentative Fall program schedule. A more detail schedule will follow in the August newsletter.

Presidents Message

The past few months have been perhaps one of the most trying times of my entire life. COVID-19 has changed life as we once knew it on so many levels. Newspapers and magazines have stories about the coronavirus pandemic, television programs have back-to-back coverage on the latest death tolls, and medical experts trying to educate us on how to stay safe. I cannot recall ever being so obsessed with and fear of a disease. Nor can I remember being the jealous type, but this disease has changed me. I have become jealous of my wife's hero-worship of Dr. Anthony Fauci. He is the name my wife throws around whenever I want to go grocery shopping or go for a run. He is the one who has turned her into my warden, allowing me and my mask, to go outside to run three times a week. Well enough about me and my "house arrest." I hope all of you are faring well and holding up under whatever type of "house arrest" you are undergoing.

Being a historian, I look at both the past and the future; the past to see what has happened before and how we as a people have dealt with issues affecting our lives. Looking to the future, my historian side wonders how COVID-19 will impact Rhinebeck. Living in the Village and all that it entails amounts to a community and being able to interact in that community is part of the experience of village life. As I take my morning runs through the Village, passing almost no one and many empty stores, I cannot help but wonder how life will change for those of us who live here.

Quite often I hear comparisons being made between COVID-19 and the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, which killed more than 50 million people - roughly 3 percent of the earth's population. Just like a century ago, people today are looking for answers in the face of a pandemic. The 1918 pandemic was the worst in modern times in terms of its speed, spread, and toll. Scientists are still trying to figure out COVID-19 and have yet to know its ultimate impact. I will leave all that to the experts. With my historian cap back on, I have a simple question, one that will determine our history: can we, as a people, as a village, as a town, as a nation, as a world look at the similarities and differences between these two pandemics and learn some vital lessons that will help to save human life, save our ways of living, save our ways of making a living without substantially changing who we are as a people, as a village, as a town, as a

nation, as a world? Do we have it within ourselves to endure whatever our leaders ask of us as a nation, as a world to avoid an even greater catastrophe later because millions of lives are at risk.

Stay safe, stay strong, wear your masks, practice social distancing, and look forward to the sunshine of Summer!

David Miller, President

**Margaret Beekman Livingston
(1724-1800)**

By Jack Conklin

March was Women's History Month, and according to their web site, its purpose is to "highlight the contributions of women to events in history." I can think of no better candidate to celebrate this event than one of the Hudson Valley's women who contributed to so much to our country's early history.

The accomplishments of her ten children have filled the history books of this young nation. The contributions of her four sons and six daughters include three Generals of the Revolutionary War, a Governor of New York State, a distinguished Statesman who helped write the Declaration of Independence, three Foreign Ministers to France, a successful lawyer who wrote the Legal Code for Louisiana, a Secretary of State under President Andrew Jackson, and a businessmen who brought the steam engine to the Hudson Valley, and offspring who built water-powered mills that helped Rhinebeck prosper.

The year was 1775, and Margaret Beekman Livingston's husband and father died, leaving her in control of a large inheritance, containing thousands of acres of land. She was the wealthiest and most influential person in Colonial America. How she handled her fortune and empowered her children is the reason she should be celebrated.



Margaret was the only offspring of Henry Beekman, who's grandfather came to New Netherland with Peter Stuyvesant in the employ of the Dutch West India Company. He prospered when the English took over New York in 1664, and as Judge in Kingston, NY, he acquired large landholdings in Rhinebeck and southern Dutchess County. Margaret's father married Gertrude Van Cortland after the death of his first wife Janet Livingston and added to his landholdings.

Margaret married Robert R Livingston, the owner of vast estates in Columbia County and the Adirondacks and the so-called "Lord of the Manor" at Clermont. The Livingston was a proud dynasty, tracing its lineage to the early Dutch settlement in Albany. This inheritance, along with the Beekman lands, were the source of Margaret's wealth in 1775.

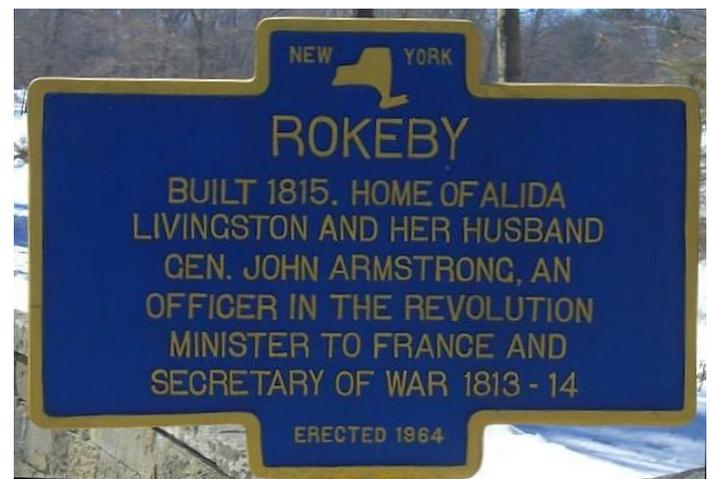
Rather than wait for her death to distribute her inheritance, she decided that daughters, as well as sons, should benefit from the distribution. A radical decision in the 1700s as it was the custom that most wealth passed to the eldest son. She divided the properties, had her daughters draw straws for the choice of the pick, and saw that all her children were provided for. This unusual decision influenced the history of the Hudson Valley for generations. Her daughters maneuvered to find property overlooking the

Hudson River and, along with their husbands, created estates that would influence the character of the Valley for hundreds of years.

Her oldest daughter, Janet, married an English military officer, who served here in the French and Indian Wars, gave up his commission, and returned to New York. Married to Janet, in 1773, they lived in Rhinebeck, built a grist mill on the Landsman Kill, and started the construction of the Grassmere Estate. When the Revolutionary War broke out, General Washington recruited him to join the Revolution, and promoted him to General. He led the ill-fated American invasion of Canada. General Richard Montgomery died December 31, 1775, storming the fortress at Quebec City. A very accomplished military man he was honored throughout the new United States. Janet never remarried and built an estate she named "Montgomery Place" in Barrytown.

Margaret Livingston married Thomas Tillotson in 1779. They built a river view estate named "Linwood", on Mill Road, now occupied by the "Sisters of Ursula." Tillotson was the Surgeon general of Washington's Northern Army and served in that capacity until the end of the war. He had a successful political career as a member of the New York Senate, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and became New York's Secretary of State.

Alida Livingston married John Armstrong in 1789. He was a General in the Revolutionary War, and like his brother-in-law, he became active in politics. He was elected to the U.S. Senate from New York and appointed Minister to France by President Thomas Jefferson. He was named Secretary of War by President Madison. Their estate was named "Rokeby," and their only daughter married an Astor, bringing that family to Rhinebeck.



Gertrude Livingston married Morgan Lewis in 1779. He was Quartermaster General for the Northern Army during the Revolutionary War and a Major General in the

War of 1812. As a politician, he was a member of the New York State Assembly, Chief Justice of the New York Supreme Court and elected the fourth Governor of the State of New York. The Lewis estate was located at the present site of the Mills Mansion. Their only daughter married a Livingston cousin and built "Ellerslie," the estate that Vice President Levi P Morton occupied.

Catharine Livingston married Freeborn Garrettson, a Methodist preacher, and built an estate called "Wildercliff" south of Rhinecliff. The Garrettsons sold the north pasture to the Suckleys, who made "Wilderstein," Daisy Suckley's last home and now a "not -for -profit" Queen Ann restoration. The Garrettsons had one daughter, Mary, who donated land for the Rhinebeck Cemetery and property for the Methodist Church in Rhinecliff.

Joanna Livingston married a cousin, Peter R Livingston, and took over the "Grassmere" estate from her sister Janet. They assumed ownership of the two grist mills on the Landsman Kill and controlled them until Peter's death in 1847.

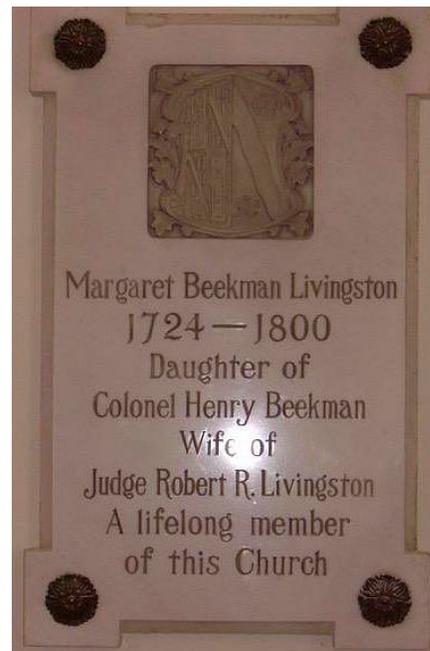
Margaret Beekman Livingston had four sons. Robert R., born on November 27, 1746, inherited the Manor at Clermont. He graduated from Kings College – now Columbia – as a lawyer and in 1777 became Chancellor of the State of New York, a position he held for 24 years. As a politician, he was a member of the Second Continental Congress, and along with Adams, Franklin, Jefferson, and Sherman drafted the Declaration of Independence. He administered the oath of office to George Washington in New York City. In 1801 he was appointed by President Jefferson as Minister to France and negotiated the Louisiana Purchase. While in Paris, he met Robert Fulton, an American inventor, experimenting with steam engines for ships. In 1807, Fulton returned to the United States and, with financial backing by Livingston, built the first commercially successful steamboat. In 1808, Robert Fulton married Harriet Livingston, a niece of Robert.

Henry Beekman Livingston was born on November 9, 1750. He was referred to as Harry and had a difficult personality. He was considered "the black sheep" of the Livingston clan, and in later life was shunned by his siblings. Henry was a good soldier, volunteering to assemble a regiment in Rhinebeck, he participated in the 1776 Battle of Brooklyn, was at Saratoga in 1777, and with Washington at Valley Forge. During the Battle of Monmouth in 1778, Henry commanded a "rearguard action" that allowed Washington to claim a significant victory. His Regiment lost a third of its men but saved the day. He was acquainted with Baron Von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette. The Rhinebeck VFW is named in his honor.

John R Livingston was born on Feb 13, 1755. His inherited land was in Barrytown and, in 1796, built the "Massena" mansion. An admirer of Napoleon, he named the estate after one of his Marshals. After his death in 1851, John Aspinwall, a prosperous merchant from New York, purchased the property. Livingston was heavily involved as a merchant during the war years, supplying the army. He took over his father's gun powder mill and built a second to provide powder for Washington's army.

Edward Livingston was born on May 28, 1764. He graduated from the College of New Jersey – now Princeton – and studied law in Albany, NY. He was admitted to the bar in 1785. He was elected to Congress in 1795, became a U.S. District Attorney in 1801, and served as Mayor of New York City until 1803. Edward moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1804, and wrote the Legal Code for the city. He was aide-de-camp to Andrew Jackson during the Battle of New Orleans. As a politician, he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1829, served as Secretary of State under President Andrew Jackson and Minister to France in 1833. In 1835, he retired to "Montgomery Place," which he inherited from his sister Janet, and died there in 1836.

Margaret's wisdom in allowing her children to get their inheritance early in life, changed the course of history, not only for the Hudson Valley but for the entire country. Her portrait, a copy of Gilbert Stuart's 1793 original, hangs in the dining room of the Beekman Arms, and a memorial plaque hangs on the wall of the Rhinebeck Dutch Reformed Church.



She was a remarkable woman who deserves to be recognized for her contribution to women's history.

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The RHS is looking for volunteers to help in the local history room at the

Starr Library. The room is open to the public on Thursdays from 10 am to 4 pm. Scholars and researchers come in looking for help with their work, and others send in research requests via email. Volunteers could either assist them directly or do so indirectly by working with the collections in our archives. No prior research skills are necessary. However, attention to detail, interest in history, delight in working with other people, and joy at solving puzzles are all most desirable. It is a great opportunity to learn about our town while helping others. For information call Mike Frazier at 845.876.7462 or e-mail michaelfrazier@earthlink.net.

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We are open Thursdays 10-4 in the Local History Room
the lower level of the Starr Library in Rhinebeck
Please call or e-mail to let us know you are coming:

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Local History Room also open Tuesdays 10-3; for more info or to make an appointment, email Town Historian Nancy Kelly at kinship@hvc.rr.com

Visit us on the web @ Rhinebeckhistoricalsociety.org

THE RHINEBECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY - UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Tentative Fall 2020 Program Schedule

Friday, September 25, 7:00 pm at the Starr Library, David Turner – Forgotten Hamlets of Dutchess County,

A pictorial tour with vintage postcards of Dutchess County's forgotten hamlets. Learn about the hamlets of Chelsea on Hudson and Dutchess Junction, whose tide changed with the rise and fall of industry on the river. Or the railroad hamlets of Dover Furnace, Billings, and Mount Ross that disappeared along with the rail traffic. Hear about the fascinating history of Amenia Union that lies on both sides of the New York/Connecticut border and was once part of a land swap between the two states. Included in the talk will be dozens of turn-of-the-century images of little known hamlets that are no more than cross roads today, such as Brinkerhoff, Barrytown, Smithfield, Schultzville, Clinton Hollow, Clove, Glenham, Akert Hook, Bulls Head, Frost Mills and many more. Refreshments will be served.

Friday, October 30, 7:00 pm at the Starr Library, Connie Lown - Gravestone Cleaning in Rhinebeck Cemetery

Hear about some of the oldest gravestones in Rhinebeck Cemetery that have recently been cleaned and repaired. Learn about the proper methods of gravestone cleaning without damaging the stone and how to reset small stones. Through the Friends of Rhinebeck Cemetery, Connie attended an Association for Gravestone Studies conservation workshop at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn and their annual conference in Danbury, CT to learn about the safe cleaning of historic and fragile gravestones before assisting with a Gravestone Restoration & Preservation Workshop and later Gravestone Cleaning Day at Rhinebeck Cemetery last year.

Refreshment will be served.

SAVE THESE DATES