

# HISTORIC RED HOOK

## **“Chancellor” Robert R. Livingston**

November 27, 1746 (*Julian calendar November 16*) – February 26, 1813

St. Paul’s and Trinity Parish Cemetery, Tivoli (Reinterred)

*Possibly in the Clermont Livingston vault on the eastern side of the cemetery grounds*

Robert Livingston was born in 1746, the son of Robert Robert Livingston known as “Robert the Judge” to researchers, who was a son of Robert Livingston known as “Robert of Clermont” who was (you guessed it) son of Robert Livingston of Scotland, known as “Lord of the Manor”. In 1715, the Chancellor’s great-grandfather was granted the 160,000 acre patent known as Livingston Manor and his grandfather built the first mansion known as Clermont where the Chancellor grew up.

The Chancellor had many siblings, including sister Alida who married John Armstrong, Jr. and made their family home at Rokeby about nine miles downriver from Clermont, and sister Janet (widow of Revolutionary War hero Richard Montgomery) who made her home at what we call Montgomery Place.

Chancellor Livingston was famous for his work as a government official during the Revolution and in the first decades following it. He was the “recorder” of New York City (a catch-all term with many duties including judge, leader of Board of Supervisors, the deputy mayor, bank director, and more.) but because he came out as anti-colonial he was replaced. After the New York State Constitution was drafted, he was made its first “chancellor” (a specific sort of judge—the highest in New York State). He administered the oath of office to George Washington in New York City in 1789. More than a decade later under Thomas Jefferson, Livingston went to Paris, France and negotiated the terms of the Louisiana Purchase. It was there he met Robert Fulton, whose steamboat “Clermont” (derided at the time as “Fulton’s Folly”) he helped finance and usher in a new age of transportation on the Hudson River and beyond.

Livingston married Mary Stevens and had only two children, daughters Elizabeth and Margaret who both married their Livingston cousins. In 1812, the Chancellor had a series of strokes that would ultimately claim his life the following year.

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Frequent stories of graverobbing in the nineteenth century motivated wealthy families to create secure tombs to protect the remains of their loved ones. In 1873, the Livingston vault at the Clermont estate in Columbia County was broken into. Thieves desecrated remains and stole silver handles and plates from the caskets, including those belonging to Chancellor Livingston. His grandson, Clermont Livingston offered a \$200 reward for the conviction of the thieves and later disinterred “anything that was identifiable as human remains” and moved them to Tivoli. It is not currently known exactly which vault the Chancellor’s remains (possibly along with those of his parents and grandparents) were reinterred into, but as Clermont was involved and his vault is labeled with the dates 1774 and 1871 (he lived from 1817–1895), they probably rest in his vault between many other Livingston family vaults set into the earth on the eastern side of the cemetery grounds.