

Bicentennial Moment #2: the Naming of Livingston County, New York



Livingston County was named in honor of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston (1746-1813), a man who never resided Livingston County, but who was among the Founding Fathers of the United States of America. Livingston was the eldest son of Judge Robert Livingston (1718–1775) and Margaret (née Beekman) Livingston, uniting two wealthy Hudson River Valley families. Among his many contributions, Livingston was a member of the Second Continental Congress, co-author of the Declaration of Independence, and in 1789 he administered the oath of office to President George Washington.

As a member of the Committee of Five that drafted the Declaration of Independence, Livingston worked alongside Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Roger Sherman. A regional and national luminary, Livingston served as Chancellor of the Supreme Court of New York (1777 to 1801). As the United States Minister to France from 1801 to

1804, he was one of the key figures in negotiating the Louisiana Purchase with Napoleon Bonaparte, a sale that marked a turning point in the relationship between the two nations. During his time as U.S. Minister to France, Livingston met Robert Fulton, with whom he developed the first viable steamboat, the North River Steamboat, whose home port was at the Livingston family home of Clermont Manor in Clermont, New York.

In addition to the naming of Livingston County in his honor, Robert R. Livingston's legacy lives on in numerous ways including a statue commissioned by the State of New York and placed in the National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol building, his inclusion on the Jefferson Memorial pediment sculpture which honors the Committee of Five, and in the famous painting by John Trumbull of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.



Chancellor Livingston died on February 25, 1813, and is buried in Tivoli, New York. Livingston County was formed almost exactly eight years after his death, a fitting tribute to a man who played a central role in American history.

Declaration of Independence. By John Trumbull, 1818. The Committee of Five stands at the center. Thomas Jefferson is depicted presenting the draft Declaration to the Second Continental Congress with Benjamin Franklin at his side, and just behind them are, left to right, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston.