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THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST



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From the Editors

As scholars continue to ask new and more nuanced questions about slavery in New York, Debra Bruno examines the journal of Alexander Coventry (1765–1831). Entries recorded by this young immigrant doctor and aspiring enslaver offer revealing insight into the situational and evolving dynamics of one person’s involvement in the institution of slavery in the state between 1785 and 1831. Today, the Catskills are regarded as a wild haven, just as they were often portrayed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, that image ignores the region’s significant extractive and industrial history. Samantha Misa examines this oft-ignored aspect of the Catskills’ history as the epicenter of the leather tanning industry throughout the Civil War and how it led to today’s Catskill Park. Have you ever wondered how much history you could tease out of an old painting? Bruce Weber traces the story of Saugerties — from its early development to its twenty-first century renaissance — by studying the details of a nineteenth-century canvas hanging in its Village Hall.

The Regional History Forums in this issue focus on two very different Hudson River estates. Leonardo Carini presents the life and legacy of Robert R. Livingston Jr. — “The Chancellor” — at Clermont in Columbia County. Born into the colonial aristocracy, he helped establish a new nation through his political, diplomatic, and entrepreneurial endeavors. Grace Naccarato illustrates how Franklin Delano Roosevelt began to formulate his twin passions for conservation and preservation — essential aspects of the New Deal programs initiated by the future president — at his family’s Springwood estate downriver in Hyde Park. Together, the articles reveal that despite the centuries and miles that separated these two visionary shapers of our nation’s history, they shared a lifelong love for the region they called home.

From the Publisher:

The Hudson River Valley lost a great friend and supporter with the passing in June of W. Barnabas (Barney) McHenry. A founding Advisory Board member and longtime board vice-chair of the Hudson River Valley Institute, Barney was a tireless champion of the history, culture, art, and scenic beauty of the region. His leadership of organizations such as the Hudson River Valley Greenway, Boscobel House and Gardens, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, and Open Space Institute advanced efforts in conservation and preservation that have become common practice in historic interpretation.

A graduate of Princeton University, Barney also served in Korea as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Artillery before attending Columbia Law School and serving as general counsel at *Reader’s Digest*. His lifelong love of reading and unwavering intellectual curiosity made him a steadfast supporter of this publication, for which he authored a two-part history of the Hudson River Valley Greenway in 2017–18.

Since 2007, the Open Space Institute’s Barnabas McHenry Hudson River Valley Awards have funded student research and scholarship. In 2015, Barney generously supported the creation of the endowed McHenry Scholar in Residence at Marist University, which is awarded to distinguished scholars undertaking original research on the region while maintaining a post at the Hudson River Valley Institute. Through these and countless other contributions, Barney’s positive impact on the region will continue for generations to come.



On the cover: A detail from William Hart’s, *A Tannery in the Catskills*, c. 1850s, oil on canvas, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth: Purchased through gifts from the Class of 1955 in honor of their sixtieth reunion, Accession Number: 2015.25

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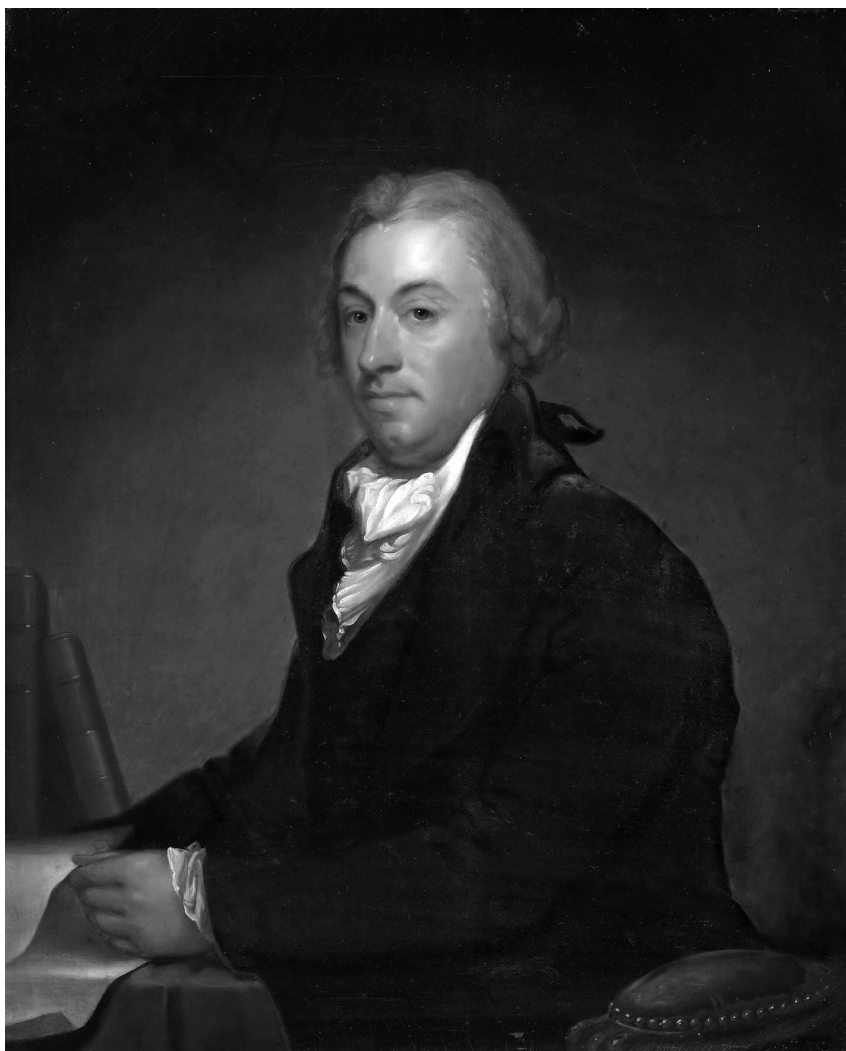
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Robert R. Livingston Jr., the “Chancellor,” at Clermont Manor

Leonardo Carini



Portrait of “The Chancellor” Robert R. Livingston attributed to Gilbert Stuart.
Image courtesy of WikiMedia, in the United States Public Domain

Robert R. Livingston Jr. (1746–1813) may not be the first person who comes to mind if one is asked to name a Founding Father. However, his contributions to his native New York State, the fledgling United States of America, and the world at large merit him a place in the collective memory of our nation. A highly educated and intelligent man, his personal library of 5,000 books was second largest in the country at the time, surpassed only by Thomas Jefferson's. Livingston's formidable intellectual abilities propelled his achievements in politics, diplomacy, and business, yet also served to feed an arrogance and elitism that often led to an abruptness with his peers — consistently making him his own worst enemy. Just as his intellectual pursuits reflected what was expected of a gentleman in his time, so did his more refined and sensitive nature. Livingston's letters and reflective responses to tragedy highlight his emotionality. Whenever his political or personal life became unstable, he would seek refuge at Clermont, his family estate. He was a contradictory figure — an advocate for liberty and a slaveholder, a revolutionary still very much tied to an aristocratic way of life — but separate from all of his flaws and virtues, perhaps the trait for which Livingston most deserves to be remembered is his desire to better the nation.

The Myriad Roberts of the Livingston Family

No matter what he is remembered for, Robert R. Livingston Jr. must first be understood by examining the generations that came before him and the place he called home. Before we can address the past generations, a small note on the Livingstons' naming conventions is necessary. All of Robert R. Livingston Jr.'s paternal ancestors were inconveniently also named Robert. To avoid confusion, they will be identified by their historical monikers.

The first Robert Livingston to come to the colony of New York, known as "Robert the Elder," was the son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister and had spent part of his childhood in the Netherlands. He began his career in trade, seeking to achieve financial security and land. The New World offered the opportunity for both and in the mid-1670s he entered Albany society, aiming to profit from the fur trade. Robert the Elder's fluency in English and Dutch soon proved very useful. Coupled with ambition, he quickly attained for himself the positions of Secretary of Rensselaerswyck, Secretary of the Town of Albany, and Secretary of the Board of Indian Commissioners. However, what truly cemented his status in the colony was his marriage in 1679 to Alida Schuyler van Rensselaer, widow of Nicholas van Rensselaer, which made him a member of one of the colony's most powerful families. Robert the Elder now was in a prime position to make his petition for a patent, which he pursued and achieved in 1686, attaining 160,000 acres on the east bank of the Hudson River.¹

1 Clare Brandt, *An American Aristocracy* (Doubleday Books, 1986), 12–14, 20–21, 25.

In his will, Robert the Elder bequeathed 13,000 acres in the southern portion of his holdings to his second son, known as “Robert of Clermont.” It was he, the grandfather of Robert R. Livingston Jr., who built Clermont on this land in 1730. In addition, between 1740 and 1743 he was successful in purchasing half a million acres across the river in the Catskill Mountains as part of the Hardenbergh patent. Another addition to the family’s holdings came through the marriage of Robert of Clermont’s son, named Robert R. Livingston and known as “the Judge,” to Margaret Beekman, heiress to 240,000 acres south of Clermont in Dutchess County. Their son, Robert R. Livingston Jr., the eventual Founding Father known by his title “the Chancellor,” is the subject of this article.²

In 1770, the Chancellor married Mary Stevens and built a house, called Belvedere, just south of Clermont.³ The homes’ proximity highlighted his attachment to both the estate and his family. He had been raised in a loving family environment, by loving parents, and his nearness to them and the love he showed them would be reflected in his subsequent actions and letters.



Detail of a map of the provinces of New-York and New-Yersey, with a part of Pennsylvania and the Province of Quebec by Claude Joseph Sauthier and Matthäus Albrecht Lotter, 1741-1810. Augsburg, 1777.
Library of Congress, <https://lccn.loc.gov/74692644>

2 Brandt, 70, 75-76, 81-82.
3 Brandt, 105-106.

Tenancy in the Hudson River Valley

Robert R. Livingston Jr. the Chancellor, was born into a lifestyle heavily influenced by a quasi-feudal arrangement between proprietors and their tenants. The wealth they had accumulated combined with the income received from tenants allowed the Livingstons to live as aristocrats. In the winters, his family resided in their house in New York City. During the summers, they moved north to stay with the Chancellor's grandfather, Robert of Clermont.⁴ The Livingstons had both enslaved persons and hired servants in their household. During the Chancellor's lifetime, he had around a dozen enslaved people who tended to the family's kitchen, gardens, personal farm, and other menial household tasks. The hired servants most likely came from the Livingstons' tenant population. They were "upper servants," those in more frequent proximity to the family.⁵

The Livingstons' aristocratic lifestyle was a product of the patroon or manor system. Beginning with the Dutch colony, large patents of land were given to wealthy individuals, called patroons, with the obligation to settle the land with tenants from the Old World. This practice was continued in the early years of England's control of New York, when Robert the Elder gained his patent.⁶ Under the English, the term patroon became manor lord, but the arrangement stayed the same.

The relationship between the manor lord and his tenants was an unequal but symbiotic one. Tenants owed manor lords roughly a tenth of their yearly produce as rent. For example, Robert R. Livingston Jr.'s great uncle (also named Robert) reported that he had leased a farm of seventy-five acres to a tenant for the annual rent of "4 fatt hens" and after three years "25 stipple of wheat" and the "fruit of 10 choice apple trees."⁷ While paying an annual rent was certainly not preferable to owning your own land, far more burdensome were the alienation fees attached to the renewal of leases. The practice of alienation fees meant that if a tenant wished to sell his farm or pass it on to his son at death, a fourth or third of the property's value had to be paid to the manor lord.⁸ In addition, the manor lord required tenants to use his mill and claimed the right of first refusal to purchase their wheat before it could be sold on the market.⁹ Lastly, tenants owed one to three "days' riding" to the manor lord, which meant they were required to devote three days annually to maintaining roads and fences on the manor property. (It is worth noting that some neighboring towns had the same practice and would demand three to six "days' riding" from residents.)¹⁰

4 Brandt, 92.

5 Edwin Brockholst Livingston, *The Livingstons of Livingston Manor* (State University of New York, 2023), 443.

6 Brandt, 18.

7 Patricia Bonomi, *A Factious People* (Columbia University Press, 1971), 192.

8 Bonomi, 193.

9 Bonomi, 194.

10 Bonomi, 191.

While the tenants' obligations were certainly demanding and restricted them economically, they also received benefits. In the early colonial years, tenants expected the manor lord to maintain order on the manor property and settle disputes. In addition, there was an understanding that the manor lord would be lenient with rent during bad harvest years.¹¹ However, the largest advantage of being a tenant was the opportunity it afforded those of lower means to work a farm in order to sustain themselves and their family. The manor lord would provide new tenants with the required provisions and tools needed to make the land profitable, and would only begin collecting rent a few years later.¹² While many tenants stayed on the manor for generations, some became successful enough to sell their lease and purchase their own land. An example of such an entrepreneurial tenant was Thomas Chambers, who leased a farm from the Van Rensselaers from 1647 to 1654 before selling it and moving to Esopus, where he bought acreage.¹³ This indicates that although the manor lord system is often viewed as a disadvantageous agreement that kept tenants in a state of economic dependency, for some it was the means of economic mobility. Others were content to remain as tenants and were able to acquire greater wealth and relatively comfortable lifestyles for themselves.¹⁴ In fact, during the Chancellor's lifetime, many of his tenants could afford the purchase and upkeep of an enslaved person to help run their farms.¹⁵

It seems that the relationship between the Livingstons and their tenants was far from stable or uniform across the board. While many tenants were content with their arrangement, or at least ambivalent, others felt a hostility to the manor lord and the tenancy system to the point of periodic rebellion. Many descendants of Dutch and German immigrants had been long-term tenants of the manor lords and seemed relatively satisfied, rarely joining in rebellions through the eighteenth century. However, over the years, settlers from New England fled the poor farmland of their region and began squatting on the relatively uninhabited eastern portions of the manor lords' patents. Authors such as Patricia Bonomi have argued that it was these newcomers who were responsible for outbreaks of rebellion, evidenced by the lack of riots on patents that did not border New England.¹⁶

Rebellions on the Livingstons' lands did not stop with the American Revolution, and in May of 1777 riots came to a crescendo. Eager to restore order, the Livingstons accused their tenants of Loyalism and requested aid from local militias and town

11 Bonomi, 189, 214.

12 Bonomi, 196.

13 Bonomi, 199.

14 Cynthia Kierner, "Landlord and Tenant in Revolutionary New York: The Case of Livingston Manor," *New York History* 70, no. 2 (1989): 149.

15 Geoff Benton (Site Manager at Clermont), interview by author, April 3rd, 2025.

16 Bonomi, 201–203.

governments to put down the revolt.¹⁷ That same month, in the Battle of Egremont, fought around Copake Lake, militia from Egremont, Massachusetts, and Germantown came out the better against tenant forces. In the aftermath, the militias captured some of the rioters, including a British Lieutenant (whose role it can be surmised was to stir up revolt in the region).¹⁸ Although it would seem that the Livingstons' accusation against their tenants was correct, it is unlikely that they were ideological Loyalists. Rather, they hoped that the British would look favorably on their claims and redistribute the land of their Patriot proprietor. Unfortunately for those who revolted, it became clear that the British would not be in a position anytime soon to even *consider* giving tenants their land.¹⁹ In the summer following the Battle of Egremont, witch hunts for Loyalists occurred throughout the Hudson Valley; during militia call-ups in June of 1777, many tenants decided to enroll in order to stave off accusations of Loyalism. These militias were sent north and partook in the Battles of Saratoga, which ironically explains their absence when the British burned Clermont.²⁰

The Livingstons' broad accusation of Loyalism against their tenants would soon come back to bite them. To support the war effort, the New York State Assembly imposed heavy taxes, most especially on the Livingstons and their tenants. The Chancellor wrote to Governor George Clinton, complaining that "No part of the state has suffered half so much by the oppressions of quartermasters and commissaries." He claimed that contractors were forcing tenants to sell wheat at a lower price than was legally allowed by government regulations.²¹ His appeals seemingly fell on deaf ears — neither the Assembly nor the governor were overly concerned about the welfare of the Livingstons' tenants, whose lands were reported to be a hotbed of Loyalism.²²

For their part, the Livingstons were concerned for the well-being of their tenants, as evidenced by the Chancellor's appeals, as well as letters written by his mother, Margaret Beekman Livingston. During the winter of 1780, she warned her son that a bad harvest year added to the high government taxes could lead to famine among their tenants.²³ Of course, the concern shown by the Livingstons for their tenants was motivated by an enlightened self-interest: Any improvement of their tenants' situation would benefit the family as well. Complicating this was the Livingstons' fraught relationship with their tenants, something shared by many other manor lords, who at times were protective of them and at other times felt threatened by

¹⁷ Kierner, 134.

¹⁸ Benton, interview.

¹⁹ Kierner, 135, 137.

²⁰ Benton, interview.

²¹ Kierner, 148.

²² Kierner, 143, 149.

²³ Kierner, 148.

them. As much as Margaret Beekman Livingston was concerned for the tenants in 1780, she had been equally terrified that they would murder her and her family during the revolt in 1777.²⁴ Although the state Assembly's harsh taxation served to unite the manor lord and tenants momentarily, this harmony was short-lived. After the Revolution came to an end and taxes were lifted, certain tenants resumed agitating for their own land, this time by petitioning the State of New York. During the Chancellor's lifetime, this attempt also failed.²⁵

The legacy of the manor lord or tenant system can still be seen today in the Hudson River Valley. Many farms, such as the Heermance Farm in Dutchess County, have their roots in the original tenant farms, and towns such as Copake and Ancram were created around Livingston industrial projects such as mines and forges. Other towns in the valley bear the names Clermont and Livingston. In these ways and many more, the legacy of tenancy can still be felt throughout the valley.

Robert R. Livingston Jr. and The American Revolution

In the past, authors have described the Chancellor as a reluctant revolutionary. In some ways, this is not inaccurate. In fact, the history behind the Livingston family finding themselves on the Revolutionary side bears witness to it. Traditionally, the Livingstons were seen as the conservative faction in New York, while their rivals, the DeLanceys, were more liberal and took populist stances that appealed to the lower classes. In 1769, the royal governor died and the new governor, Cadwallader Colden, took a hostile approach to New York's manor lords by backing the DeLancey faction. Hoping to retain the royal governor's favor, the DeLanceys enacted measures that were unpopular with their base. This allowed the Livingstons to exploit the populist vote to gain political power. Thus, in a twist of fate, the Livingstons found themselves on the opposite end of politics and eventually in the Patriot camp.²⁶

Though Robert R. Livingston Jr. leaned toward the Patriot cause, members of his extended family occupied every position on the political spectrum. That being said, his own father, Robert the Judge, took a more moderate stance; he hoped the conflict between England and the colonies could be resolved without war. Meanwhile, the Chancellor's grandfather, Robert of Clermont, was much more radical. He advocated for American independence long before his own son.²⁷

Robert R. Livingston Jr. found himself among the more conservative members of the Revolutionary movement. He had inherited the opinion of his father that it was in the interest of all classes of society to be run by a qualified elite. As a result, he struggled to work with the more radical delegates and members of the

²⁴ Benton, interview.

²⁵ Kierner, 151–152.

²⁶ Brandt, 101–102.

²⁷ Brandt, 103, 111.

movement, often looking down on their low and rough upbringing.²⁸ Listening to instructions from his father, and following his own opinions, Robert R. Livingston Jr. found himself in the camp of delegates to the Continental Congress who hoped that Parliament and the King would listen to the demands of the colonists and war would be averted. This position made sense — many colonists who fought against Parliament's measures still felt loyalty to the Crown and saw themselves as subjects whose rights had been violated. However, the Livingstons were pragmatic: While they hoped for peace, they began constructing a gunpowder mill at Clermont.²⁹

At first, it would seem that the Livingstons, as part of a quasi-aristocracy, had a lot more to lose from a war than their unlanded political allies. However, their resistance to Britain may not be as contrary to their way of life as it would first appear. When Robert R. Livingston Jr. was elected to Congress in 1775, he wrote to his father-in-law that he wouldn't hold his property at the will of others. At this time, the Livingstons had to pay taxes in cash to the British, and as they often relied on a system of credit, this meant running the risk of being forced to sell property in order to pay the taxes. For a family who prided themselves so much on the land they owned, this was a huge threat to their identity.³⁰

However, tragedy would soon strike the Livingstons, altering Robert R. Livingston Jr.'s responsibilities. In June of 1775, he suffered the loss of his paternal grandfather, with whom he had spent childhood summers. The following winter, his father and maternal grandfather also passed away in quick succession.³¹ These unexpected tragedies left Robert at the head of his family and the owner of close to a million acres of land, a property exceeding the size of Rhode Island.³² The sudden loss deeply affected him. In a letter to his old friend, John Jay, he wrote: "I should apologize for this, but my sorrows are poured into the bosom of a friend who has long known and will excuse my weakness.... O'John you can hardly conceive how much my grieve is aggravated by the necessity I am under in concealing it from my mother, sisters, and even from my wife..."³³ Thus required to hide his sorrow from his family, an inwardly grieving Robert spent the winter at Clermont, away from the politics of Philadelphia and New York City.³⁴

Eventually, with the healing passage of time and John Jay's encouragement, Robert made a return to politics with a new energy. The Livingstons' previous pragmatism had proved well-founded: War with Great Britain had become unavoidable and

28 Brandt, 116, 120.

29 Brandt, 117.

30 Benton, interview.

31 Geoff Benton, "A Connection of This Kind: The Romantic Friendship of Robert R. Livingston and John Jay," *The Hudson River Valley Review* 41, no. 2 (2025): 13.

32 Benton, interview.

33 Benton, "A Connection of This Kind," 13.

34 Benton, interview.

independence a necessity. The Continental Congress had determined to declare independence from Britain and a five-man committee was established to draft a document to that effect. Robert R. Livingston Jr. was assigned to this committee, perhaps in order to sway a hesitant New York into ratifying independence.³⁵ Unfortunately for Robert, most of the writing was done by Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. His sole contribution was making minor revisions to the document, which must have frustrated such a talented writer.³⁶



Clermont in spring. Copyright NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation/J. Rozell.
Courtesy of Clermont State Historic Site, NYSOPRHP

Equally frustrating must have been the lack of orders from New York whether or not its delegates should sign the Declaration of Independence. Robert decided to leave Philadelphia for New York in hopes of convincing the state Assembly to ratify independence, something which they accomplished while he was traveling northward. As a result, Philip Livingston, Robert's cousin and another delegate in Philadelphia, received the go-ahead from the Assembly to sign the Declaration of Independence on New York's behalf. Thus, Robert missed out on the historic honor of adding his name to the document and his cousin became known as "Philip the Signer."³⁷

³⁵ Livingston, 196.

³⁶ Brandt, 117.

³⁷ Brandt, 117. Benton, interview.

Robert's political activity during the early years of the war was not limited to the Continental Congress. In fact, he exercised more influence in his home state. During the drafting of the New York State Constitution with John Jay, Robert enjoyed much more involvement than he had with the Declaration of Independence.³⁸ While writing the document, he advocated for granting the right of suffrage to Catholics and Quakers. Although Jay initially disagreed, Livingston won out.³⁹ Alongside the ratification of this document in 1777, Robert was elected as Chancellor of New York, the second highest legal position in the state. He was immensely proud of this role and continued using the title "Chancellor" long after his resignation from the post in 1801.⁴⁰

The Burning of Clermont

Unfortunately for the Chancellor, new tragedies would destabilize the family and deeply grieve him. In October of 1777, a British flotilla made its way up the Hudson River in hopes of joining British forces invading the state from Canada. This force captured Patriot forts and burned Kingston, where the fleeing state Legislature once sat. They continued north as far as Clermont, where the commander of this force, General John Vaughn, received news that the invading British army from Canada had been defeated at the Battles of Saratoga. Before returning south, the British force looted Patriot property and burned both houses at Clermont.⁴¹

Sufficiently warned by the burning of Kingston, Margaret Beekman Livingston had time to transport her family, enslaved people, and many of their belongings to Connecticut, where they stayed at a house belonging to the Livingstons of Livingston Manor. Thus, by the time the British reached Belvedere and Clermont, burning them to the ground, the family was long gone. For his part, the Chancellor initially stayed in the surrounding area with a group of ten militiamen, the rest being at Saratoga. After loitering for a few days near Clermont, the British reboarded their ships and retreated south to New York City.⁴²

Margaret Beekman was quick to return to Clermont. In 1778, at winter's end, she had a "hovel" built near the site of Clermont for her to live in. By the end of that year, she sent letters to Governor Clinton requesting that men be exempt from militia duty to work on the rebuilding of her house. Robert was not so proactive. In fact, after the burning of Clermont and Belvedere, he momentarily put the land up for sale.⁴³ One can only imagine the psychological effect this destruction must have had on the young statesman, who had so recently lost both his father and

38 Brandt, 120.

39 Benton, interview.

40 Brandt, 120.

41 Brandt, 121–122.

42 Brandt, 121–122.

43 Brandt, 122.

grandfather, and whose ancestors were buried on the property. Robert grieved the loss of Belvedere by planting a weeping willow over its ruins.⁴⁴ It wouldn't be until 1793 that he began construction on Belvedere's replacement, which was eventually known as Arryl House.⁴⁵

Noting how the British had discriminated their destruction of property between Patriots and Loyalists, and bitter at the loss of his own home, the Chancellor proposed retaliatory measures. He suggested that an assessment be made in each county of the damage done by the British, as well as a census of all the Loyalist property, and that a tax be imposed on the Loyalists to repay the incurred losses. The state Legislature concurred that some sort of retribution was in order, but its more radical elements took matters to the level of revenge. The Confiscation Act was proposed, its purpose to take the property of Loyalist New Yorkers. Livingston saw this measure as flying in the face of the Constitution and justice, and actively opposed it. He rallied the Council of Revision to veto the bill when it was first passed, but upon its second ratification his legal recourse was exhausted. For men like Livingston, the Act of Confiscation was a disgrace.⁴⁶

In 1779, the Chancellor returned to Philadelphia to serve as a delegate to Congress. During this time, the characteristically flirtatious Robert began visiting Peggy Shippen, the wife of Benedict Arnold. This relationship may have influenced the Chancellor's letter of recommendation to Washington to appoint Arnold commander of the new fort at West Point. Of course, Washington had received other such letters and Arnold was qualified for the position, yet it is worth noting that his appointment came soon after the Chancellor's letter. Unfortunately for Robert, in 1780 Arnold's plan to surrender West Point to the British was revealed. The news of Arnold's betrayal shocked the nation, and the search for potential co-conspirators began. Afraid that he would be accused and even imprisoned due to his connections to Peggy Shippen and her husband, Livingston soon left Philadelphia for Clermont.⁴⁷ There he would remain for the ensuing year to focus on his role as the Chancellor of New York State.⁴⁸

Robert the Diplomat

In 1781, under the Articles of Confederation, the Chancellor was invited to assume the role of Secretary of Foreign Affairs, acting as a nexus for American diplomats.⁴⁹ His time in office served to highlight the dislike that Founding Fathers of more humble origins had for him. For instance, John Adams, the son of a farmer and a diplomat

⁴⁴ Benton, interview.

⁴⁵ Brandt, 143.

⁴⁶ Livingston, 254–255, 257–259.

⁴⁷ Benton, interview.

⁴⁸ Brandt, 127–129.

⁴⁹ Brandt, 129.

at the time, went six months without writing to the new secretary.⁵⁰ Eventually, questions of whether Robert was able to fully serve in his role as Chancellor of New York while working as secretary convinced him to resign the latter position and return to his home state in 1783.⁵¹

Despite swearing in President George Washington in 1789, an honored role afforded the Chancellor of New York, and his earnest letter inquiring about a position in the federal government, Livingston was not selected as one of Washington's cabinet members. He had been expecting and coveting the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; much to his chagrin, it was given to John Jay.⁵² Later, in 1794, Washington selected the Chancellor to be his minister to France. In his letter declining the offer, Robert included a transcript of the recent proceedings of the Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts and Manufactures, over which he presided. In response, Washington thanked him and, being a gentleman farmer himself, sent with his letter a pamphlet on the scientific cultivation of potatoes.⁵³

As a reaction to being snubbed a role in Washington's administration, the Chancellor responded by leading Jefferson's Anti-Federalist Party in New York. For the governorship, he backed the Anti-Federalist candidate, George Clinton, against his one-time friend John Jay. It is worth noting that Clinton was the son of a farmer, the very type of politician Livingston looked down upon. A scathing article that he wrote against Jay was not enough to prevent his now-rival from winning. To make matters worse, during the following gubernatorial election he ran against Jay and lost by a wide margin.⁵⁴

However, the Chancellor's break soon came. In 1800, after Thomas Jefferson's election as President, he was appointed Minister to France, while many of his relatives also received lower but important political positions. In 1801, Robert resigned as Chancellor and moved to Paris with his family. His assignment was to negotiate the purchase of West Florida and the port of New Orleans. Although Robert proved to be quite skilled as a diplomat, the negotiations stalled. In 1803, perhaps impatient with Livingston's progress, Jefferson sent James Monroe to assist him. However, the day Monroe reached France, Livingston received an offer by Napoleon to sell the entire Louisiana Territory for one and a half times the price the Chancellor had been prepared to pay solely for New Orleans. Shocked by the offer, Livingston accepted and set to work negotiating the finer details of the 530-million-acre deal. Monroe arrived in Paris just in time to sign the treaty along with the Chancellor.⁵⁵ Afterward, Livingston famously said, "We have lived long, but this is the noblest

⁵⁰ Benton, interview.

⁵¹ Brandt, 130.

⁵² Brandt, 134–135.

⁵³ Brandt, 143–144.

⁵⁴ Brandt, 135, 154.

⁵⁵ Brandt, 154–156. Benton, interview.

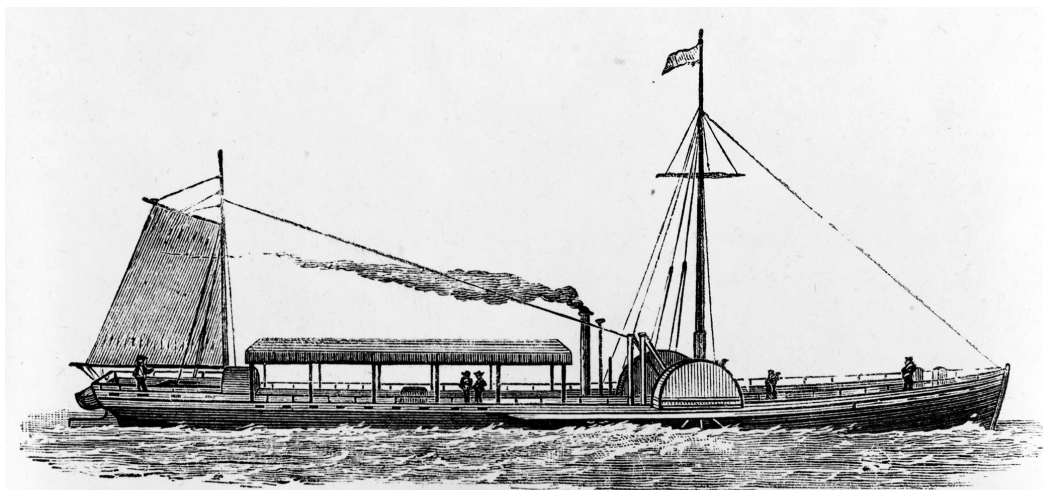


FIG. 49.—THE “CLERMONT,” 1807.

Broadside image of *The Clermont* (originally the *North River Steam Boat*) reproduced in *The Steam Engine and Its Inventors; a Historical Sketch* by Robert L. Galloway, mining engineer. London: MacMillan and Co., 1881, p. 237, fig. 49. Library of Congress Washington, D.C. Prints and Photographs Division. <https://lccn.loc.gov/2006691758>

work of our whole lives.... From this day the United States take their place among the powers of the first rank.”⁵⁶

Although Livingston would have been afforded much of the credit for the deal and Napoleon’s offer had nothing to do with Monroe’s arrival, the Chancellor’s pride would ruin this political victory. The intrusion of Monroe as a reinforcement had wounded his ego, and in a self-destructive attempt to secure recognition, Livingston altered the dates in his official records book to place the offer of the Louisiana Territory the morning *before* Monroe’s arrival in France. He then followed this by leaking a “secret” memorandum to the New York press to this effect in hopes of receiving all the credit for the deal. The government in Washington quickly refuted these claims, and the lie badly damaged the Chancellor’s reputation. He subsequently lost his position, and his imminent accession as New York’s next governor was squashed. This political misstep, driven by the Chancellor’s ego, marked the end of his public life and the beginning of a flourishing private one.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jesse Spencer and Emmanuel Leutze, *History of the United States: from the earliest period to the administration of President Johnson* (New York: Johnson, Fry and Co., 1866), 39.

⁵⁷ Brandt, 156.

Robert the Inventor

Like other gentlemen of his day, the Chancellor took an acute interest in agricultural innovation and scientific invention and was an avid experimenter, particularly in agriculture. Some of his projects included a failed attempt to domesticate elk and fertilizing fields with gypsum. This latter experiment was successful; he observed that the fields with gypsum produced more grass and that the cows who grazed on them ended up beefier than those that had not.⁵⁸

Invention, Robert claimed, was his “hobby horse.” In the past, he had engaged in funding research and obtaining patents for projects such as turning a river weed into paper or diminishing the friction of spindles on millstones. These projects failed but that did not deter him from his goal of being acclaimed as a national benefactor through his inventions and (of course) making money in the process.⁵⁹ His next project would be to find an alternative to wind or oars to propel boats. He initially experimented with using horses, but was dissuaded by his brother-in-law, John Stevens, who recommended steam instead. Others had tried and failed to use steam for transportation, and most scientists of the time, along with the public, ridiculed the idea. Experienced in the law and an intelligent businessman, Robert obtained a monopoly from the New York Legislature for twenty years provided he launch a steamboat within a year.⁶⁰ He then entered into a partnership with Stevens and Nicholas Roosevelt, owner of the best foundry in America. Unfortunately, their endeavor got off to a bad start and their first two experiments at making a boat failed. However, since Robert was being called to Paris as Minister to France, he was anxious to secure their partnership and so signed a twenty-year contract with them before departing.⁶¹

Ironically, it was in France that the Chancellor found the solution to his steamboat problems. There he met a fellow American, Robert Fulton, who had already achieved success with his work at creating submarines and a panorama. The Chancellor recognized that Fulton had more talent than Stevens and Roosevelt.⁶² Fulton for his part loved the challenge of the steamboat and was free of other projects. The designs that Livingston had worked on in the 1790s contributed to Fulton’s work. Soon after meeting the Chancellor, Fulton began experimenting and running tests with a small model and claimed that he could replicate the results on a full-sized boat.⁶³

After a few months of negotiating, the Chancellor and Fulton signed a contract, with Robert paying for the project upfront and making Fulton an equal partner for

⁵⁸ Benton, interview.

⁵⁹ Cynthia Philip, “Robert R. Livingston: Enthusiastic Inventor, Prudent Entrepreneur,” in *The Livingston Legacy: Three Centuries of American History*, ed. Richard T. Wiles (Bard College, 1987), 273.

⁶⁰ Philip, 274.

⁶¹ Philip, 275.

⁶² Philip, 275.

⁶³ Philip, 276. Benton, interview.

the duration of the New York monopoly. In return, Fulton would be paid a salary for the supervision of the project, but in the event it failed he would be forced to pay half of the costs. Their agreement also ensured that they would not lose control of the project to outsiders. If either partner died, an heir holding twenty shares would be considered an equal partner. However, if there were two heirs, the surviving partner would be given two votes to balance them out. This agreement made sense as the Chancellor had two sons-in-law, while Fulton was still a bachelor and childless. The contract was advanced for its time, containing elements of a corporation and planning for future contingencies, such as death, which reflected the Chancellor's skill as a lawyer.⁶⁴

The Chancellor's monopoly had lapsed by this point, so he wrote to Thomas Tillotson, his brother-in-law in New York, asking him to obtain an extension of the monopoly fulfillment clause in his and Fulton's names. After this, Livingston took a step back from the project, not even attending the unveiling of the prototype boat Fulton made on the Seine. In 1805, before leaving Europe he ensured the exportation of an engine from a British company to New York, but was otherwise content to wait for Fulton to invent. In fact, he was so content to wait that he was not bothered when Fulton spent the following three years developing submarine weapons for Britain.⁶⁵

After arriving in New York in 1806, Fulton set to work building their steamboat. He argued that it would be better to begin on the Mississippi River due to the opportunities afforded by westward expansion; the Chancellor rightly valued the New York monopoly and Fulton acquiesced. On August 18, 1807, the first vessel was complete, and the *North River Steam Boat* (later renamed the *Clermont*) set out from New York City to Albany. A crowd gathered ready to mock the 146-foot-long and twelve-foot-wide ship. However, the steamboat took off successfully and twenty-four hours later the Chancellor watched his boat pull into Clermont for her only stop before travelling another eight hours to Albany.⁶⁶ Ironically, even though Robert thirsted for the quiet contemplative life at Clermont, his invention of the steamboat would bring noise, people, goods, and a faster pace of life to the Hudson River Valley.⁶⁷

Fulton and Livingston's business rapidly expanded. Fulton supervised the building of larger and more luxurious boats for the Hudson, while simultaneously setting up shops in Pittsburgh to build boats for the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Meanwhile, the Chancellor obtained an extension on their monopoly for five years, with an additional five years for each new boat they built, capped at thirty years. Any steamboat operating on the Hudson without a license from the Chancellor

64 Philip, 276–277.

65 Philip, 277.

66 Philip, 278. Brandt, 160–161.

67 Brandt, 161.

and Fulton would have to be forfeited to them. In 1811, this law became even more favorable, allowing them to take possession of an unlicensed boat the moment it began running.⁶⁸

These laws were necessary to maintain the monopoly as competitors soon appeared. Their first rival was John Stevens, Livingston's one-time business partner, who built a boat in New Jersey and decided to launch from there and run it to Albany under a federal boating license. Livingston threatened him with lawsuits and Stevens was forced to capitulate as his boat could not run reliably. An even bolder group of Albany speculators blatantly copied Fulton's patent and began running two boats on the same schedule as Livingston and Fulton's. In response, Livingston rallied support from his political connections and in the end James Kent, New York's chief justice, supported the state's right to create monopolies, forcing the Albany investors to back down.⁶⁹ In the meantime, Livingston and Fulton continued to expand, operating a new boat on the Mississippi in 1812, while more boats for the Hudson, Ohio, Potomac, and Mississippi rivers, as well as Long Island Sound, were being constructed.

The pair had gone from a chance encounter in France to a business partnership to a friendship, until finally in 1808 they became family when Fulton married Livingston's cousin.⁷⁰ The two men's abilities complemented each other well — Fulton needed Livingston's initial funding and his legal expertise to navigate the law and Livingston needed Fulton's inventive mind and his ability to oversee operations. Their success was real, but was not destined to last long.

In the summer of 1812, Livingston suffered a series of strokes. When he died the following February, Fulton was psychologically devastated. He had depended on the Chancellor for his legal acumen and the common vision they had pursued. In contrast, the Chancellor's heirs were greedy for profits but refused to make any positive contributions to the enterprise. They busied themselves in arguing — with each other and with Fulton — and would not even bother to help him defend the monopoly from increasingly determined challengers.⁷¹

In February of 1815, Fulton also died when he caught pneumonia on his way back from New Jersey, where he had narrowly won another legal case. Concerned only with the company's profits, Livingston's heirs lacked the understanding and the desire to participate in America's growth.⁷²

It was this desire to contribute to America's growth, to its independence, and to the revolutionary ideals it would adopt that shaped the Chancellor's legacy. Though many of his achievements were bound up in his own pride and a desire for securing

68 Philip, 278–279.

69 Philip, 279–280.

70 Philip, 280.

71 Philip, 281.

72 Philip, 281.

this legacy, it cannot be denied that his involvement in revolutionary politics, the Louisiana Purchase, and inventing the steamboat reflected his true love for his country. That goodwill was not wasted, and although he is not widely known, the impact Robert R. Livingston Jr. had on his nation and state deserves to be remembered.

Clermont Today



Public programming on Clermont's west lawn.
Courtesy of Clermont State Historic Site, NYSOPRHP

After the Chancellor's death, Clermont would pass through several Livingston generations before it was transferred to New York State. These generations had made many changes to the home, including the addition of a north wing in 1814 and a south wing in 1831, and the building of a third floor under a slate roof in 1874 and 1893.⁷³ The two generations before the sale were John Henry Livingston and his wife Alice Delafield Clarkson Livingston, and their daughters Honoria and Janet Livingston.⁷⁴ In the mid-1920s, the couple redecorated the house in the Colonial Revival style, reflecting their idea of how it looked during the Chancellor's lifetime. In 1962, Alice Livingston transferred Clermont to the state in a combination gift and sale, ensuring its preservation. Honoria, made subsequent gifts of property

73 *The Great Estates Region of the Hudson River Valley*, edited by Mckelden Smith (Historic Hudson Valley Press, 1998), 14, 16.

74 Pieter Estersohn, *Life Along the Hudson* (Rizzoli, 2018), 27, 28.

and possessions.⁷⁵ Clermont appears today much as it did in the late 1920s, with its woodland trails and carriage roads still in use.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, only ruins of the Chancellor's Arryl House remain. The house burned down in 1909.⁷⁷

One program of note offered by Clermont State Historic Site is called "Harvesting History." The staff plant all sorts of vegetables that are recorded to have been grown by Clermont Livingston (1817–1895), a descendant of the Chancellor. Most of the food from this garden goes to the Germantown Foodbank and the Hudson Town Salvation Army. In addition, during the summers, children's camps are welcome to come and learn both about the history of the site and the garden before taking home some of its produce.⁷⁸

Tours of the mansion are available Thursday through Sunday and on Monday holidays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the hour. The visitor center is open on the same days from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Clermont's trails and gardens are open year-round from 8:30 a.m. to dusk. One also can hold a wedding reception or other private event at Clermont.

Leonardo Carini, Marist University '25

⁷⁵ Smith, 16.

⁷⁶ Smith, 14, 16.

⁷⁷ Estersohn, 27.

⁷⁸ During the tour in April 2025, the author was fortunate enough to see the exhibit "Redefining The Family: The Livingstons and the Institution of Slavery in Early America," which won a Museum Association of New York 2025 Award of Distinction.

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FDR at Hyde Park: Through the Lens of Conservation

Grace Naccarato



Franklin Delano Roosevelt being served a meal during his visit
to a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp at
Shenandoah National Park, August 1933.
Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was born on January 30, 1882, in the master bedroom of the Springwood house on his parents' estate in Hyde Park. At the time, FDR's father, James Roosevelt, and his neighbors, Frederick W. Vanderbilt and Colonel Archibald Rogers, owned estates that occupied much of Hyde Park's Hudson River shoreline. James expanded the Roosevelt estate by making multiple additions to the property between 1867 and 1871. After marrying Sara Delano in

1878, James Roosevelt made one final land purchase, the Kirchner property, four years after FDR's birth.

Throughout his lifetime, FDR would acquire additional property, more than doubling the acreage of the Springwood estate and protecting its land as one of his first steps in conservation. FDR's main residence was always Springwood. Following his marriage to Eleanor Roosevelt in 1905, she moved into the home. Even during his time as President, he made more than 200 visits, with the estate becoming something of a political headquarters. The couple's growing family, combined with their rising political careers, made it necessary to expand the house. FDR, who considered himself an amateur architect, designed additions to accommodate his children and guests.

The renovations were completed in 1915, and the house became the modest mansion it remains today. The "big house," as the Roosevelts referred to it, essentially doubled in size. Improvements included making the entrance hall more spacious, as well as adding a living room, second-floor suites for family and guests, and a new third floor with a playroom and children's bedrooms. The house was used for hosting countless political figures, including King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain in 1939.

FDR lived in Springwood from his birth until his death. He shared it with his mother Sara, who had been left the home when her husband died in 1900. Sara, FDR, and Eleanor would reside in the house together for more than forty years. After living there for half that time, Eleanor decided she needed her own private escape. This led to the construction of the nearby Val-Kill Cottage.

Also not far from Springwood there was a property featuring what FDR referred to as "the nicest hill in Dutchess County." In 1937, he purchased this land and designed Top Cottage as a hilltop retreat where he could relax surrounded by nature in a building that accommodated his disability. It was constructed in the Dutch Colonial style found throughout the Hudson Valley and equipped with technology that allowed FDR independence.

Conserving nature was of utmost importance to FDR, but it was not simply a matter of implementing policies or ideas — it was a part of him that grew from his love of Dutchess County. His childhood was spent surrounded by nature. As an adult, he continued to develop the estate by accumulating acreage and planting trees. He turned his ideas regarding conservation into legislation as Governor of New York and President of the United States.

Along with preserving nature, FDR also had an interest in conserving history. He began building numerous collections as a child that would grow to include 14,000 books, 2,000 naval paintings, 200 model ships, 1.2 million stamps, 300 mounted bird specimens, and thousands of coins, campaign buttons, and medallions. This interest in collecting and preserving artifacts manifested itself in many ways. However, its most important outcome can be seen with the construction of the Presidential

Library on the Roosevelt estate in 1939. This established Springwood as not only a home but a historic landmark.

In 1941, FDR donated all of his papers to the National Archives to be stored in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum. Then in 1943, he donated the entirety of the Springwood estate, with the exception of Val-Kill, to the National Park Service to be made into a historic site for the public. In 2003, the National Park Service in collaboration with the non-profit Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute made the first significant addition to the site since 1941 — the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center.



Franklin Delano Roosevelt with his parents on the grounds of Springwood.
Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service

Conservation of Nature

Spanning more than 600 acres and largely wooded, the Springwood estate served as both a playground and laboratory for Franklin Roosevelt during his youth. He spent his days learning about animals, plants, topography, the Hudson River, and more. Springwood played a key role in fostering his love for nature and the environment, and was very influential in the development of his concern for conservation.

While FDR grew up with many privileges, he was an only child and rather isolated from other children in the area. He spent much of his time with his mother or learning from his father, who was his first inspiration. FDR would accompany James on his rounds of their property, which showed him how much effort it took

to preserve nature. This was one of the first steps in building the foundation of FDR's appreciation for conservation.

FDR's fifth cousin, Theodore Roosevelt (TR), whom FDR idolized, also played a role in shaping his growing interest in conservation. Known by many as "the conservation president," in part because of his considerable impact on the National Park System, TR was President from 1901 to 1909, a pivotal time for conservation in the United States. He was responsible for creating the United States Forest Service and in 1906 established the American Antiquities Act, which gave the President the power to place historic landmarks or areas of scientific interest under the ownership and protection of the federal government. This law allowed TR to permanently safeguard some 230 million acres of land by establishing 150 national forests, fifty-one federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, five national parks, and eighteen national monuments. The law also made it possible for future Presidents to do the same, leading to the continued growth of the National Park Service over the last century.



"A nation that destroys its soils, destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land,
purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people."

— FDR visits a national park. Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service

FDR continued to expand upon the Roosevelt legacy in Hyde Park in 1911 when he established an amateur forestry project at Springwood. That same year, he was elected to the New York State Senate and became chair of the state Forest, Fish and Game Commission. In this position, he introduced eight bills addressing conservation, including the Roosevelt-Jones Bill to regulate timber harvests on private land. As Governor of New York, he supported the 1931 Hewitt Reforestation Amendment to the New York State Constitution. It led to the planting of trees on abandoned farmland suffering from significant erosion and depleted soils.

In 1932, amid the Great Depression, FDR won the election for U.S. President and immediately implemented his New Deal. It led to the creation of dozens of programs and agencies that addressed an extensive range of issues — from economic stabilization and promoting art and culture to adoption of the Soil Conservation Act and Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act. One of the most impactful New Deal programs was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), enacted in 1933. It allowed men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five to participate in various work programs that improved the country's public lands, national parks, and forests. The men were provided with food and housing, and many could also further their education or earn leadership positions that merited a pay raise. The CCC made significant strides in conservation and raised awareness about the importance of preserving the country's natural resources.

A passion for nature can be seen throughout all phases of FDR's journey. His work planting trees lasted from 1911 up until his death in 1945 and resulted in more than 500,000 trees being planted in Hyde Park. During his presidency, he employed the same ideas on a larger scale with the Prairie States Forestry Project, commenced in 1935. A solution for preventing the wind-caused soil erosion responsible for the Dust Bowl, it created more than 18,000 miles of windbreaks — and led to the protection of thousands of acres of farmland — by planting almost 220 million trees.

Val-Kill Cottage

As FDR continued to expand the acreage of the Roosevelt estate, one of his most influential purchases was the land surrounding the future site of Val-kill Cottage. Although on the same estate as the rest of Springwood, the property is approximately two miles from the main house. Construction of the cottage began in 1925; once complete, it quickly became a sanctuary for Eleanor Roosevelt. She decorated it in her own style and used it to relax and spend time with her friends and political allies. Val-Kill began as an escape from the “big house,” but it quickly became an important component of Eleanor's role in adding to the family's environmental legacy.

During the early years of Franklin's political career, Eleanor also had a growing political presence. She joined the Women's Division of the Democratic State Committee in 1922. Following this, she wanted to enact social change and eventually



FDR and Eleanor on Springwood's south lawn.
Photo by Lorena Hickock. Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt
Presidential Library and Museum

became the facilitator of many of FDR's environmental ideas. An example of this was Val-Kill Industries, which was housed in a factory beside the cottage. Its rationale was to supplement the incomes of struggling area farmers by teaching them how to create handicrafts and furniture. When Val-Kill Industries shut down in 1936, Eleanor converted the factory into her personal retreat with two living rooms, a dining room, seven bedrooms, gardens, stables, and an outdoor pool. She continued to use the cottage as a place to host family events and entertain foreign dignitaries once Springwood opened to tourists.

When Springwood was turned over to the National Park Service upon FDR's death, Eleanor purchased Val-Kill and made it her permanent residence until her passing in 1962. Local efforts to protect the property from development led to the establishment in 1977 of the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site at Val-Kill. To this day, it is the only National Historic Site dedicated to a First Lady.

Top Cottage

In response to his many stressful years in public office, and with consideration of his disability, FDR prioritized building a place where he could go to relax after his



Top Cottage.
Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service: Bill Urbin.

presidency. Throughout his life, FDR had relied on restful locations such as his houses in Warm Springs, Georgia, and Campobello Island, Canada. With Springwood no longer a retreat after the 1941 opening of his adjacent Presidential Library, he craved a getaway hidden from the public eye that would allow him to connect with nature. Therefore, he proceeded to build Top Cottage in 1937, once again applying his architectural interest and influence throughout the building process. He made all the initial sketches before handing them off to architect Henry Toombs. The house was designed to fit the many needs of Franklin's disability, with everything on one floor and accessible from his wheelchair.

FDR planned for Top Cottage to be his residence after his presidency, but when elected for an unexpected third term, it doubled as a place to host a few political guests, including King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Their visit was the first to the United States by a British monarch. (FDR famously served them hot dogs during a picnic on the lawn at Top Cottage.) However, the home was used mainly as a retreat for FDR, his close friends, and family. It was a place where he could be comfortable with his disability. Many of the photographs of FDR in his wheelchair were taken on the patio at Top Cottage.

Preservation of History

Evidence of FDR's role as a historical conservationist can be seen throughout his adult life. His journey of conserving history began in Dutchess County before he held any public office. The Roosevelt name had already been established thanks to his cousin Theodore, who inspired FDR. Both Roosevelts served as state senators, governors, assistant secretaries of the Navy, and U.S. Presidents. This family history provided Franklin with the opportunity to improve and expand upon the Roosevelt



The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.
Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service: Abbie Rowe

legacy. In 1914, at the age of thirty-two, he became one of the founding members of the Dutchess County Historical Society and later was appointed historian of the Town of Hyde Park, a role he maintained even during his presidency.

One of FDR's many pursuits as President was the concept of "open government." He believed that the people of the United States should have the right to view the workings of the government, especially within the executive branch. FDR's famous "fireside chats" are one example of this ideal. He spoke directly with everyday Americans, revolutionizing the way in which the public could feel connected to the President. His use of the new radio technology allowed for more transparency and openness than any other President before him.

While Franklin was still in office, he always looked ahead to consider the preservation of his story. He recorded all of his fireside chats and created a new, innovative approach to document preservation. Presidents prior to him had no central location for their respective papers, resulting in many of them being dispersed or discarded. This made it difficult to grasp the legacies of previous leaders and their administrations. However, FDR believed these papers were integral to the nation's heritage. He guaranteed public access to his personal and presidential papers by donating them to the federal government. Every single document holds importance because each is a part of a story that will continue to enlighten future generations.

FDR was a leader during several of the greatest crises of the twentieth century. He was Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War I, Governor of New York during the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and President during the Great Depression and World War II. During his time as governor, he created programs that would be expanded on a national scale as part of his New Deal. Later, as commander in chief during World War II, he used his experience as assistant secretary to the Navy

during the World War I. Just as FDR learned from his past and used it as a tool, he knew that future governments would benefit from information gleaned during his time in office.

In accordance with this idea, FDR signed legislation to create the National Archives in 1934. This made it possible to build a repository wholly dedicated to preserving the nation's history. To accomplish this, FDR asked the National Archives to take custody of his personal and presidential papers and organize the nation's first presidential library. He set a precedent — every President since has donated their presidential papers and constructed their own presidential libraries. This revolutionary idea was codified after FDR's death via the 1978 Presidential Record Act.

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library was not only the first of its kind, but the only one to date used by a sitting President. Also designed in the Dutch Colonial style, the building is constructed of Dutchess County fieldstone, truly representing how important the area was in the formation of FDR's legacy. Completed in 1941, two wings were added in 1972 to accommodate the addition of Eleanor Roosevelt's papers, storage for the research room, and an exhibit gallery.

One of FDR's most significant — and largely unknown — contributions to archival preservation was the creation of his version of Hollinger boxes, designed to protect documents from light, humidity, and other forms of potential damage. Each of the 22,000 Hollinger boxes in his Presidential Library contain between 800 to 1,000 pages of documents that vary in size from small cards to full-size maps from the D-Day invasion.

FDR's biggest motivator for historical conservation was protecting the accuracy of stories. He donated every part of his legacy, the good and the bad, to allow historians a more holistic and accurate view. Every item in the archives is kept in its original condition and in their original order. This is a key aspect of archival science and preservation. The library has the busiest research room in the presidential library system. Its research librarians know the entire collection and present the information exactly as it exists, offering no speculation or interpretation.

A significant amount of FDR's presidency was in some way connected to Springwood. Not only was the house used to host political figures, but the addition of the Presidential Library furthered its position as a center of operations. FDR's expansion of the National Park Service to include national cemeteries, national memorials, and national military parks in 1933 allowed for the establishment of Springwood as a national park in 1944, just prior to FDR's death.



Springwood, Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site.
Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service

Visiting the site

The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site and adjacent FDR Presidential Library and Museum successfully showcase the lasting impact of FDR's various accomplishments. They hold the entire history of his life.

The house at Springwood seems frozen in time, with all of its components — from books in the library to the clothes hanging in the closet — remaining as FDR used them. The presence of FDR and his ideas can be seen throughout the house, beginning in the entryway. The walls are covered in naval photos and political cartoons that create a personal art gallery curated by FDR to highlight his interests. Additionally, part of the bird collection he began in childhood is on display. Moving further into the house, visitors enter FDR's library, which holds 2,000 of the books in his 14,000-volume collection.

Evidence of FDR's paralysis is present in many aspects of Springwood's design. Visitors enter the library on a raised glass platform through which they can see FDR's original ramp over the stairs. The ramp has hinges that allowed it to be folded up and hidden when guests came to the house. Upon their arrival, FDR would already be seated with papers on his lap, which explained why he did not stand up to greet his guests. The bottoms of his shoes were scuffed to create the appearance of walking. Also in the house is the elevator used by FDR to move between floors.

From the entrance hall, visitors can see both the Dresden room and the dining room. The former was completely redecorated by Sara Roosevelt in preparation for the 1939 visit of the King and Queen of England. Above the piano are photographs



One of FDR's custom wheelchairs in his bedroom.
 Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service:
 Al Nowak/On Location Studios

of the myriad political figures who visited Springwood. In the dining room, countless state dinners were held. FDR welcomed many politicians, allowing them to see his disability as a way of disarming them and establishing a personal connection.

As Sara was Springwood's actual owner, her influence can be found throughout the house. The majority of the decor was selected by her, and much of the artwork upstairs is from her personal collection. In the "snuggery," which was Sara's office, sits the television gifted to FDR while he was President. At the top of the stairs is FDR's bedroom, which he used from his time as a boy until his marriage. Next to it is the original master bedroom that belonged to his parents, site of FDR's birth in 1882. This room was repurposed once FDR expanded the house in 1915 and Sara's bedroom was moved. However, prior to her death in 1941, she requested that the furniture be moved back into its original space so people could see the room exactly as it was on the day FDR was born.

Years before his death, FDR knew he was going to turn Springwood over to the National Park Service and he prepared for that day. He hand-selected clothes to be displayed in his closet; these included his inaugural top hat, a purple smoking jacket, and a campaign hat. He meticulously chose all the decor and every aspect of the house that would be seen by visitors. An inventory of every item in the house was taken when it was first turned over to prepare for the transition from home to

historic site. The house is presented so it truly represents the daily functions of FDR's life. Tour guides, who are encouraged to conduct their own research, do not rely on a uniform script. They share information they find most interesting, allowing for an authentic, informative, and unique experience for all visitors.

At the FDR Presidential Library and Museum artifacts from both Franklin and Eleanor's lives are preserved and displayed. Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by a large, inviting photo of FDR surrounded by some of the 5,000 letters a day he received during his presidency. (In contrast, Herbert Hoover, FDR's predecessor in the White House, received 5,000 letters per *week*.) FDR was a comfort to many people across the United States because he was seen as a common man doing common things.



Bird's-eye view of the park, including the Springwood estate and several outbuildings, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, and the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center.

Courtesy of the U.S. National Park Service,
Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site

The museum covers all the events of FDR's life. Special interactive features, audiovisual theaters, and rarely seen artifacts allow visitors to be immersed in his story. The exhibit places focus on the several historical crises through which FDR governed, beginning with the Great Depression. On view are infographics, charts, and tables that help put into perspective the impact of FDR's New Deal programs on revitalizing the economy. Moving along, exhibits focusing on World War II tell the story of the D-Day invasion and several other important battles. Even aspects of FDR's presidency that have been criticized, such as the Japanese internment camps,

are on display. In order to preserve the artifacts' pristine condition, they are displayed, on average, one out of every ten years. As a result, some exhibits change over time.

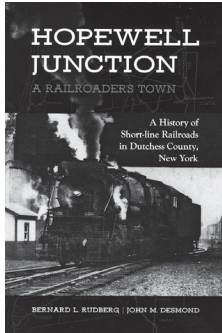
Visitors reaching the end of the exhibits enter the archives. As well as all of FDR's personal and presidential papers, they contain several other important artifacts, such as the car with modified hand controls that allowed him to drive. The library employs visible storage so things like FDR's art and model ship collections can be seen by visitors while being preserved.

What started as Springwood estate has grown to include the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, the burial place of FDR and his wife, and various hiking trails leading to Val-Kill Cottage and Top Cottage. Across these sites, the National Park Service has preserved the image FDR wanted to present and expanded on it to showcase all aspects of his life. FDR began his journey as a student of history in Hyde Park and later graduated to Governor of New York and then President of the United States. He was a pioneer in both environmental and historical conservation, and his work in these fields all originated at his Hyde Park home.

Grace Naccarato, Marist University '26

I would like to express my thanks for the time so graciously given to me by
Jeff Urbin and Kevin Oldenburg. I am exceptionally grateful.

Book Reviews



***Hopewell Junction: A Railroader's Town:
A History of Short-Line Railroads in
Dutchess County, New York***

By Bernard L. Rudberg and John M. Desmond
(Albany: SUNY Press Excelsior Editions, 2022),
159 pp. \$29.95 (paperback).

Every place has a history. Across the Northeast, many such histories took form in the crucible of the nineteenth century's intersecting revolutions in manufacturing, finance, and transportation. This is especially true in the Empire State, where this maelstrom of economic and demographic upheaval spun out new communities along a rapidly emerging infrastructure network that swiftly connected farm to factory, mine to foundry, hinterland to marketplace. Much of this history would later be obscured by equally drastic changes in technology, corporate practices, and the very nature of the U.S. economy — meaning that grounding some contemporary communities in a sense of place can require a process of rediscovery demanding sensitive investigation of complex local stories.

Such is the case at Hopewell Junction in East Fishkill, Dutchess County, where “younger residents born and raised in the hamlet and surrounding towns often wonder why the hamlet is called Hopewell Junction — until they happen upon Railroad Avenue, ride down this street, park in the rail-trail parking lots, and discover the restored depot sitting there” (140). This work of rediscovery, and therefore of restoration of place and history, is one of the great contributions of *Hopewell Junction: A Railroader's Town*.

Co-author Bernard L. Rudberg dedicated much of his life to such work in Dutchess County, spearheading restoration efforts at Hopewell Depot and publishing three books chronicling the county's short-haul railroads. Mr. Rudberg, who passed away in 2016, therefore furnished a wealth of materials for John M. Desmond, Professor Emeritus of English at Dutchess Community College, who has consolidated and expanded upon Rudberg's earlier works to create this “single history of the Hopewell Junction Depot, of the railroads that ran by it, and of the hamlet that grew up around it” (xv). The result is a sort of *magnum opus* by proxy: a one-volume treasury of Rudberg's key contributions, refracted through Desmond's assiduous editorial efforts. The book considers “four interrelated topics”: the Dutchess County short-line railroads, the Hopewell Junction depot, the hamlet surrounding the depot, and the decades-long struggle to recover this history within the community through a

successful drive to restore the depot, establish it as a museum, and achieve recognition on both the New York State and national historic registers (1).

While all four topics are compellingly presented, the story of the railroads themselves is especially fascinating. Partly this is because the development of the short-line railroads reflects so many other important trends and patterns from their moment in time, allowing a fascinating glimpse into the patterns of life in Dutchess County and around the Hudson Valley in the second half of the nineteenth century. The impetus for developing these railroads was clearly rooted in the broader economic dynamism of the region. Indeed, the success of the north-south New York and Harlem Railroad (NY&HRR), which entered Dutchess County on New Year's Eve 1848, and of the Hudson River Railroad (HRR), which reached Poughkeepsie one year later, demonstrated the transformative potential of railroads (6–7; 8–9).

From the national or even regional perspective, the arrival of the NY&HRR and the HRR was fundamentally transformative, connecting Dutchess County farmers and merchants more efficiently to major markets in Albany and New York City (10), and thus integrating the local and the national in well-known ways. Yet for Dutchess County, this was only the surface of the story, and that revelation makes *Hopewell Junction* particularly insightful. The north-south lines had awakened local producers to the possibilities of interconnection, but most still found themselves on the periphery, unable to capitalize on their *potential* integration into the rail network. As the authors note, “transporting goods and produce to one of the two north-south, long-haul railroads and/or to the river took time, especially from the factories, farms, mills, mines, and wineries located in the middle of the county. . . . [W]hat would speed up this transportation was an interior railroad — or railroads — running east-west rather than north-south with several stations located in hamlets, towns, and villages throughout the middle of the county” (12). So, in the case of Dutchess County, the arrival of the famous north-south lines was not *the* transportation revolution so much as the *catalyst* for a nuanced, regional railroad bonanza that would respond in diverse ways to the aspirations of unique producers and consumers.

The authors skillfully detail how specific commodities, producers, entrepreneurs, and geographic quirks inspired sundry short-haul railroads around Dutchess County. In this, the trailblazer was anthracite coal, which had inspired the Newburgh Branch of the Erie Railroad, named for its Hudson Valley terminus, from which coal was ferried across the river to Plum Point (later Dutchess Junction). The next step in this coal-fired construction drive was the first east-west short-haul railroad in Dutchess County, the Dutchess and Columbia, chartered in 1866 and intended to connect the Pennsylvania anthracite fields to New England (13–18). That line changed hands several times in a short period (the authors do a nice job of capturing the swashbuckling nature of Gilded Age railroad acquisitions) and began running from

Plum Point to Millbrook in 1869 (19). It was acquired by the longer-lived Newburgh, Dutchess and Connecticut Railroad (ND&CRR) in 1877 (30).

Coal was not the only commodity transported on Dutchess County's east-west lines. The short-lived Poughkeepsie and Eastern Railroad transported wood from vessels on the Hudson to charcoal furnaces in Columbia County (53–54). The ND&CRR also ran “milk cars” across the county, some of them picking up milk cans at platforms built along the line on dairy farms (49). Another short-haul line, the Clove Branch Railroad, specialized in iron ore, as well as deliveries of charcoal to the iron furnace in Clove Valley (59). A rival coal line, the Rhinebeck and Connecticut, was established to the north. It transported anthracite that had traveled along the D&H Canal and was ferried across the Hudson from Kingston to Rhinecliff (63–65).

In the midst of these developments, the transformative influence of the railroads is captured poignantly. For example, describing the depots' impact on daily life, the authors write: “the center of ‘Old’ Hopewell shifted from the Dutch Reformed Church to the depot itself, from the congregational center to the commercial center” (22). On the other hand, there was also continuity, including design elements incorporating Dutch Colonial architecture to reflect regional aesthetics (26).

The book makes clear that dynamism was constant on the railroads; while their arrival did usher in a new, phlegmatic normalcy, conditions were constantly evolving. Infrastructure is a good example. As old lines saw increased business, tracks wore out, necessitating substantial repairs (78). As locomotives improved, their speed and weight became too much for older bridges, requiring new construction, reinforcements, and speed limits (44–46). Meanwhile, a much grander bridge, the Poughkeepsie-Highland Bridge, was already undermining the cross-Hudson ferries that fed coal to the short-haul lines in the 1890s. By 1904, the Fishkill Landing ferry docks were closed (72) and by 1907 Dutchess Junction had been largely abandoned (86).

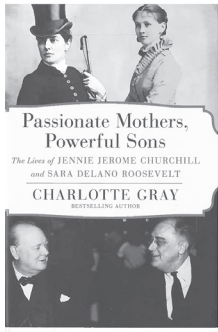
The dynamism — or at least the instability — of the railroad age is also conveyed by the financial struggles of many of these lines. The Poughkeepsie and Eastern is a telling example. It went into receivership in 1874, in the wake of the Panic of '73. Its successor firm, the Poughkeepsie, Hartford, and Boston Railroad, failed in 1884 — the year of the next major panic. *Its* successor, the New York and Massachusetts Railway, failed in the next panic year, 1893 (57). On and on it went into the twentieth century, when the Poughkeepsie and Eastern's namesake great-grandchild was acquired and rebranded in the panic year 1907 by the New York, New Haven, and Hartford. All of this reflects another key trend: the consolidating tendencies of Gilded Age business practices. As the authors note: “By 1892, nine different railroads made their separate ways through Dutchess County, owned by eight different corporations. After 1892, the same railroads eventually became owned through an assortment of boardroom mergers by just one railroad: the NYNH&HRR” (86).

In these and countless other ways, *Hopewell Junction* connects this local history to big national stories and paints a fascinating picture of the ways that Dutchess County experienced these historical patterns. Many readers will be even more compelled by the portions that delve into the creation of Hopewell Junction itself and chronicle life there. Hopewell *became* a junction on December 8, 1881, when the New York and New England (NY&NERR) installed a switch there, connecting to the ND&CRR and making this spot in East Fishkill the hub of much of the county's burgeoning railroad traffic (70). As the junction grew in prominence, the ND&CRR constructed a two-story signal tower with a "commanding view of all the rail approaches into Hopewell Junction" (84). Chapters five through eight explore Hopewell Junction, life there in the twentieth century, and life working on the railroads, while chapter nine deals with the loss of many structures and the decline of the region's rails. Chapter ten takes the story in a new direction, focusing on successful efforts to recover this history and restore railroad structures.

The research methodology of the book is unique. All records from the ND&CRR were destroyed in a station fire at Dutchess Junction in 1876, so newspapers, maps, and even telegraphed paint orders were used to determine the location, dates, and appearance of the Hopewell Depot (25–26). To capture glimpses of life along the ND&CRR, the authors scoured forty-eight volumes of Letter Books cataloguing correspondences between 1879 and 1904. This source offers "an immediate and vivid picture" of railroad lives, "both extraordinary and commonplace," and allows "glimpses into a by-gone railroad world" (32). Meanwhile, chapter ten relies heavily on oral histories with many of the figures who worked to restore the depot and achieve its historic designations. This final chapter will appeal especially to those interested in local history or associated with preservation efforts more broadly.

History is often about place, but it is also often a matter of perspective. The lines so caringly reconstructed in this volume are the sort dismissed by tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt as "railroads from nowhere to nowhere" and condemned even by some rail historians to "the junk pile of history" (27). Yet the authors take pride that their "book sorts through that 'junk pile'" to restore "a genuine and justifiable legacy," for this is very much a story of *somewhere* "to the residents of Dutchess County...in 1873 or today" (27). Readers will be grateful to Rudberg and Desmond for their strenuous labors to make this once-lost history accessible and these local legacies knowable, and for their skill not only in recovering the history of this place, but also in using the place to tell history: "The depot is a railroad relic that survived dilapidation and near destruction, and now, restored, it reminds its visitors of the vision, the ambition, the technology, the government permission, the legal framework, the initial finances, and the labor needed to build a railroad" (141).

Robert Chiles is a Senior Lecturer, Department of History, University of Maryland



***Passionate Mothers, Powerful Sons:
The Lives of Jennie Jerome Churchill
and Sara Delano Roosevelt***

By Charlotte Gray
(Simon & Schuster, 2023),
403 pp. \$29.99 (hardcover)

Charlotte Gray focuses on the mothers of two of the most powerful men of their era to illustrate how women of a certain status — wealthy, white, and married — could exert influence in a period when females (even those possessing these privileges) were often heavily restricted from doing so in the public sphere. Gray states that her reason for writing the book was due to a fascination “by the way that, whatever the restrictions on their lives, women have made choices and shape the space available to their own purposes” (xxi).

Jennie Jerome Churchill (1854–1921) and Sara Delano Roosevelt (1854–1941) never met and had vastly dissimilar personalities. However, their circumstances — a gilded childhood and early widowhood — permitted them to have particularly involved relationships with their sons. These close relationships significantly influenced the decisions and careers of Winston Churchill (1874–1965) and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) as leaders of their respective countries. Nevertheless, these mother-son relationships are only a small facet of their stories: Both women led remarkable lives independent of their children.

The author takes a chronological approach, dividing the text into five sections (“Gilded Start,” “Courtship and Marriage,” “Maternal Bonds,” “Making Their Own Choices,” and “The Final Years”) organized by parallel chapters on each person. By placing the women’s stories in concert, Gray illustrates how they had much more agency than modern audiences may believe. Both became early widows, allowing for greater control over their own lives and the lives of their children. In 1848, the New York State Legislature passed the Married Women’s Property Act, which granted married women the legal right to own property. Both Churchill and Roosevelt were molded by this ability to take steps to secure their futures. Sara had the means to prepare for widowhood by taking over the family’s finances when her husband became ill, while Jennie saw her mother become financially independent and safe from the erratic spending of her father.

While many scholars have portrayed the women unflatteringly, Gray excels at crafting a balanced view of them by relying heavily on their own words and approaching both within their perspectives. “I wanted to find the living, breathing human beings under the layers of criticism that historians have lacquered on,” she writes (xxiii). Churchill was considered *nouveau riche*, non-traditional, and

reliant on her charisma to overcome adversity. Roosevelt was part of the early American elite: wealthy, traditional, someone who “understood life in terms of duty” (XXI). She solved problems by retaining control over her fortune. Churchill was “shoehorned into a wicked seductress stereotype — too colorful, too promiscuous, and too spendthrift,” and Roosevelt into the “iconic mother figure who had upheld standards and values that were fast dissolving” (352–3). Misogynist tropes followed both women after their deaths, though in opposite directions.

Jennie Jerome Churchill is often seen by younger generations as nothing but a shallow socialite. She disappeared from popular consciousness, and as recent biographer Anna Sebba noted, was often only looked at through the lens of her son. What a sharp contrast to the Jennie in Gray’s book, a woman who “wielded influence discreetly behind the scenes,” was a royal favorite, had a “disdain for rules and taboos, and had an insistence on making her own choices despite Victorian values and the British class system” (353). Furthermore, initiatives like her literary magazine, hospital ship, and authorship of a well-reviewed play (*Borrowed Plumes*) were often understated by biographers and historians. Gray brings these significant achievements to the foreground though not *entirely* elevating past her marital challenges and her relationship with Churchill. There is also very little mention of Winston Churchill’s younger brother Jack (1880–1947), so any evaluation of Jennie’s ability as a mother is still reflected primarily through her relationship with her famous son.

Jennie provided Winston with a social network that offered opportunities for him to enhance his political aspirations. Sara’s precise and stable manner helped develop Franklin’s perseverance. Both mothers believed in impressive destinies for their sons. As a result, Franklin and Winston were instilled with unmatched confidence. Gray explores these details (how Sara and Jennie used their talents to support their families) where other biographers have focused on Sara Roosevelt’s complicated relationship with her daughter-in-law, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Jennie Churchill’s marital scandals.

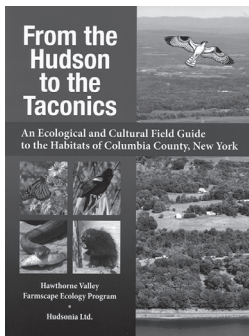
After Sara Roosevelt’s death, much of the narrative about her was driven by Eleanor. In writings, Eleanor often described her mother-in-law as domineering and controlling, using her devotion to her grandchildren as a means of keeping her son close. Gray instead focuses on Sara as a caring grandmother of children whose parents were often absent. The inclusion of reminiscences from the Roosevelt grandchildren only further portray a woman who acted in a maternal role when circumstances pulled FDR and Eleanor away from family life.

Furthermore, Gray contends that Sara Roosevelt mainly intervened in her son’s personal matters when she knew harm or ruin would come to him or when she simply thought she knew a better way. For instance, she situated herself into the Lucy Mercer affair because she knew her son could not leave Eleanor even if he wanted to. However, Sara Roosevelt left Eleanor to take care of Franklin days after he was

first diagnosed with polio for fear “she was in Eleanor’s way” (317). Though Sara was not fond of her son continuing his political career after contracting polio, she went on supplementing his salary, allowing him to maintain the life he was accustomed to. Still, she flourished as mother of the President and hosted an annual Mother’s Day broadcast, kept space open on FDR’s calendar for anyone she thought he should see, and argued in opposition of her son for anti-lynching legislation. Additionally, Sara championed causes separate from her son’s career, such as sponsoring the development of the Hyde Park public library.

Obviously, neither woman was perfect. As Gray writes: “Maybe Sara was imperious. Perhaps Jennie was flirtatious. But is that the only way to remember two women who, despite the suffocating constraints, took charge of their own lives and worked hard to help their sons?... They were far more complicated and interesting than that” (355–6). Nevertheless, the book often gives the impression of being a Jennie Churchill biography. Not only are slightly more chapters devoted to her life (even though she died twenty years before Sara Roosevelt), but they are more detailed, reflective, and weightier. Still, *Passionate Mothers, Powerful Sons* is a well-written and compelling take on two of the most influential women of their time.

Tisha Dunstan, Marist University



***From the Hudson to the Taconics:
An Ecological and Cultural Field Guide
to the Habitats of Columbia County***

By Anna Duhon, Gretchen Stevens,
Claudia Knab-Vispo, and Conrad Vispo
(Black Dome Press, 2024) 432 pp. \$35 (paperback)

According to its subtitle, *From the Hudson to the Taconics* is a field guide. Readers expecting a compact volume that can be slipped into a large pocket — something along the lines of Roger Tory Peterson’s classic *Field Guide to the Birds* and its more contemporary iterations — might be taken aback at its size and weight. Portability is not its strong point, but that shouldn’t put off those interested in Columbia County’s ecology and natural history. This extensively researched, clearly written, and usefully organized book offers a wealth of information enhanced by more than 750 full-color photographs, maps, graphs, tables, and charts.

Delineation and description of thirty-six habitat types found within the county’s borders is the book’s centerpiece. The authors do not define habitat “in relationship to a particular species — for example, what is the habitat of a Great Horned Owl?” Rather, they use the term to refer to “an entire ecological community as defined by

its interacting physical (such as soils, altitude) and biological components.” (page xvii) Along with basic physical characteristics (aquatic or terrestrial, geology, etc.) they differentiate habitats according to their plant communities as vegetation sums up the impacts of abiotic factors and greatly influences what else lives in a given habitat.

From the Hudson to the Taconics points out that there are many habitat classification systems and few standardized terms and definitions common to all of them. That said, most of the delineated habitats would be expected and recognized by those familiar with regional ecology: northern hardwood forest, hemlock forest, old field, and vernal pool, for instance. A few are more surprising — black locust forest, for example. It’s enlightening to read the rationale for such categorizations. Most out of the box is inclusion of lawns and utility corridors as unique habitat types, as well as descriptions of two “ghost” habitats that have disappeared from the county — American chestnut forest and pine barrens.

The habitat descriptions are consistently organized. A “First Glimpse” section provides a subjective “feel” for the community. This is followed by general information on locations where a given habitat can be found, accompanied by a map indicating its occurrence in areas of the county open to the public. More technical content comes next, with emphasis on characteristic plants and diversity within their ranks. Vertebrate animals that frequent each habitat get briefer mention, as do a limited array of insect taxa. And like most field guides, the book offers ways of differentiating each habitat from similar ones, while acknowledging that habitats blend with each other and variation within each type can complicate identification.

Unlike most field guides, but in fulfillment of the mention of culture in the subtitle, the descriptions go on to account how people have intentionally and unintentionally shaped each habitat. This discussion includes both historical background and suggestions about how land stewards might best weigh a habitat’s unique attributes in making management decisions.

The authors have spent decades studying Columbia County’s landscapes and ecological communities — Anna Duhon, Claudia Knab-Vispo, and Conrad Vispo. They note that their research for *From the Hudson to the Taconics* is “rooted in western academic approaches to knowledge-making centered in observation, though in different disciplines — wildlife ecology, biology, botany, and anthropology.... Our perspectives are thus situated and always partial” (xxi).

That self-assessment led them to seek other viewpoints through cultural research involving over a thousand people who participated in interviews, community drawing and mapping exercises, photo documentation of landscape, and guided sensory experiences at dozens of locations throughout the county. The projects were intended to “better understand some of the different ways that people perceive and interact with habitats in the landscape” (xvi).

The authors incorporated the results of this research in a “Perspectives” section near the end of the habitat descriptions. It recounts the reactions of these participants — sometimes many, sometimes only one or two; some with in-depth knowledge of the land, some lacking it. Readers looking to *From the Hudson to the Taconics* for its ecological and natural history content — traditional field guide topics — may be inclined to skip over this section, but it is a distinctive and unique aspect of this guide. It might be interesting to share the book with a subset of the cultural study participants that includes a range of natural history expertise, and after reading it have them redo the exercises and analyze how their perspectives might have changed as a result.

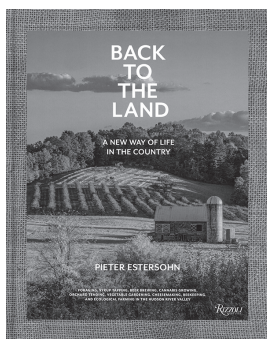
Most of the habitat descriptions end with an “Interact” section that “invites readers to experience the habitat through a sensory or hands-on interaction with it” (xx). The activities range from butterfly and tree identification exercises to soil tasting (no, this does not literally require putting a sample on one’s tongue).

While the habitat chapters described above form the meat of *From the Hudson to the Taconics*, there is additional valuable content that will appeal to both general readers and those interested in natural history details. For the former, introductory chapters titled “The Groundwork” and “The Human Overlay” review the county’s geology, soils, land cover, and settlement history in concise and engaging prose. For the latter, appendices include an extensive species list, bibliography, and comparison of this work’s habitat classifications with those of other natural resources inventories.

The clear and consistent design of the book’s tables and charts greatly aids comprehension of the points made in the habitat descriptions, and the many color photographs — the full-page images that open each habitat description, for example — enhance its visual appeal.

Anyone curious about the natural features of Columbia County’s diverse landscape will find *From the Hudson to the Taconics* an invaluable guide to understanding its ecological underpinnings. It should fulfill its authors’ hope that it be “a jumping-off point that invites more listening and learning from the people, places, relationships, and living beings that inhabit and shape this landscape” (xxi).

Steve Stanne has taught about the Hudson River for 40 years and is the principal author of The Hudson: An Illustrated Guide to the Living River. He is on the board of directors of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater.



***Back to the Land — A New Way of Life in the Country:
Foraging, Syrup Tapping, Beer Brewing, Cannabis
Growing, Orchard Tending, Vegetable Tending,
Cheesemaking, Beekeeping and Ecological Farming
in the Hudson River Valley***

By Pieter Estersohn

(Rizzoli International Publications, 2024)

256 pp. \$55 (hardcover)

The irresistible photograph on the cover of this book is a promise of what is inside, and one cannot help but open it. Pieter Estersohn's photos of landscapes, farms, and farmers in the Hudson Valley present a visually rich, compelling picture of what life on a Hudson Valley farm can be. On first glance, the beautiful images convey a romantic view of what it takes to farm, but Estersohn takes us deeper into the topic.

While the photos alone would make this a beautiful coffee table book, the subtitle alludes to the detailed essays about the farmers he has chosen to profile — people who are pursuing highly varied, regenerative, and artisanal farming. The farmers and the thirty-five farms showcased represent a new wave in the Hudson Valley agricultural scene and the book provides a kaleidoscopic look within this agricultural sector.

Many of the farms featured in the book are in Columbia County and northern Dutchess County. Some reflect regional history — once owned by the eighteenth-century aristocratic Livingston family, these boast stately homes as well as arable acres. Stewardship of these historic homes adds another dimension to the demands of maintaining a working farm. The aesthetics of these elegant, historic farmsteads and barns understandably drew Estersohn's artistic attention and experience as a renowned photographer of architecture.

In his introduction, Estersohn sketches out the long history of agriculture in the Hudson Valley, which still contributes significantly to today's cultural landscape. The Indigenous Lenape had sophisticated food-growing practices that relied heavily on the "Three Sisters" of corn, beans, and squash. Dutch and English settlers subsequently made their marks on the landscape and carved out vast tracts of land for agricultural use, growing grain and corn for animals. Eventually, the development of the Erie Canal meant that cheaper grain from western New York and beyond dominated the market, causing another shift in the agricultural practices of the Hudson Valley. Orchards and vineyards sprang up, taking advantage of the region's hilly microclimates and the ability to ship fresh fruit downriver. Then, produce from Florida, California, and the Northwest started arriving via refrigerator cars and cargo planes. By 1989, more than eighty-five percent of food eaten in the Hudson Valley was coming from somewhere else.

Today, there are fewer, smaller farms in the Hudson Valley than in the past. However, on the doorstep of metropolitan New York City, the demand for fresh, perishable food has grown and the region is a leader in the “Farm the Table” movement. Estersohn details the work of recently deceased Saugerties resident Barry Benepe. He created the first New York City Greenmarket in 1976, providing an outlet for Hudson Valley farmers and a source for city chefs that barely existed before his brainchild. Today, city residents wait eagerly for the weekly Greenmarkets in their neighborhoods that bring the scents, colors, flavors, tenderness, and personality of the country to their doorsteps. For farmers, it can mean early hours and a long drive home at the end of the day, but also a vitally important profit margin.

Demand for farm-fresh food and products has grown in the Hudson Valley as well, and specialty food availability has expanded and accelerated with the influx of new urban residents who arrived during the pandemic. Sophisticated tastes and ready pocketbooks support the flourishing culinary opportunities that abound across the valley. Changes in regulations regarding wine and beer production as farm products have encouraged the use of local ingredients and bolstered farm production. Today, cideries, breweries, and wineries dot the map on both sides of the Hudson River and are important to the region’s tourism economy.

Despite the abundance, another less visible trend in the Hudson Valley foodshed is food insecurity for a surprisingly considerable number of residents. It exists when people do not have, or cannot get, enough decent food to eat. The regional food rescue and harvesting network FeedHV estimates that one in ten valley residents are food insecure, with one-third of the region’s children eligible for free or reduced lunches. The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the local food system: The Hudson Valley Food Pantry saw a forty percent increase in demand for its services. Many farmers, including ones featured in Estersohn’s book, are engaged in helping to close this gap and ensuring that local people have access to fresh, healthy food.

Farming is a demanding business that requires diligence and steady attention to nature’s rhythms and its increasingly mercurial shifts. To be successful, says the owner of Davoren Farm in Garrison (Putnam County), “farming requires being present with the conditions, the soil, microclimate, and the prevailing food culture.” There is no template and being comfortable with daily challenges is a requirement, according to Amy Hepworth, a seventh-generation farmer in Ulster County.

The farmer profiles introduce the reader to a varied group of people pursuing extremely focused approaches to small-scale farming. The reader meets some long-time farmers, but also former writers, artists, and businesspeople who have pivoted to become farmers. Some own their land, some lease, while others belong to the next generation returning to the family farm. Profits margins vary, but clearly everyone profiled has invested resources, time, labor, creativity, and love in their farms and

the communities they serve. In every case, they have taken a deep dive into the art and science of farming and are hyper-present in their work.

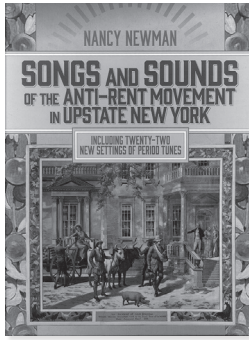
Estersohn shares his fascination with the details and science of brewing, beekeeping, regenerative farm practices, cannabis extraction, foraging, rice growing, cheese making, and maple syruping, giving the reader a window into the complexity of these practices. Also included are mission-driven farms with strong community and educational components.

As varied as these ventures are, common threads run through the book. All of the farmers are worldly people who bring new sensibilities to the ancient practices of farming and food production. Sweat, science, art, and education are all in the mix. With their different stories, approaches, and resources, they represent part of an agricultural continuum that embraces old and new, nature and technology, and challenges and solutions. Respectful, regenerative stewardship of the soil, the animals, and the rhythms of their farms and communities are held in common, and Estersohn's interviews draw out these threads.

As innovators and community builders these farmers are experimenting and sharing new, successful business models of their own designs to meet demands of the day. They recognize the vital importance of connecting people with food and nature. In every case, they have built expertise around their specific farms, skills, and interests. However, three rules seem to apply throughout: 1) know thy self; 2) know thy soil; and 3) know thy market. And yes, shop local!

By gathering these memorable images and stories, Pieter Estersohn gives us a beautifully illustrated window into the rich agricultural mosaic found in the Hudson Valley. In addition to sharing his enormous talent as a photographer, he pursued and distilled the motivations, joys, and challenges of nearly three dozen diverse farming enterprises, giving us greater appreciation and understanding of what small-scale farming requires in our region today.

Cara Lee has enjoyed a forty-year conservation career in the Hudson Valley, serving as Environmental Director for Scenic Hudson and as a Community Conservation Program director for The Nature Conservancy with a focus on the Shawangunk Mountains. She holds a Masters degree from the Yale School of the Environment.



Songs and Sounds of the Anti-Rent Movement in Upstate New York

By Nancy Newman

(Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2025)

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The Anti-Rent Movement, the subject of this book, may already be familiar to readers steeped in Hudson Valley history. Periodically throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this movement challenged the feudal conditions of land leases as they had endured from the earliest period of colonial settlement on enormous land holdings given to wealthy Dutch manor lords known as “patroons.” The “down-renters” pursued an end to the manor system through legal challenges to contract and property law, electoral campaigns, and public protests that sometimes erupted into sharp outbursts of violence directed at “up-renters” and law enforcement authorities tasked with collecting rents.

Songs and Sounds illuminates the Anti-Rent Movement in new ways through its focus on its expressive culture, making a distant era feel newly palpable. Newman’s work extends previous scholarship on New York in the antebellum period, particularly that of Reeve Huston and Charles McCurdy (11). She adopts the idea of the “anti-rent imaginary” (9) from literary scholar Roger Hecht to describe the poetry, theater, novels, essays, visual art, and (of course) music that circulated in this period. She also draws on the tradition of folk song collection and preservation found in works such as *Folk Songs of the Catskills* (Norman Cazden, Herbert Haufrecht, and Norman Studer, 1982) and the scholarship of Ruth Crawford Seeger, a pioneer in documenting and analyzing aural culture whose stepson, Pete Seeger, performed and recorded songs of the Anti-Rent Movement in the twentieth century.

Professor of music at the State University of New York at Albany, Newman’s particular focus is the body of songs sung at anti-rent rallies and gatherings. *Songs and Sounds* contains focused musical analyses as well as insight into the lyrics’ meaning, cultural resonance, and political context. It will hold interest both for music scholars and a wider community of readers interested in the cultural world of the Anti-Rent Movement because the songs present both interesting methodological and historiographic knots to untangle. As Newman explains, most of these songs arose from a musical practice that has largely died out: the creation of new lyrics intended for singing to the tune of a popular, pre-existing melody. This practice was both efficient and effective, since lyrics could be published cheaply and disseminated widely in the popular press, while the use of well-known tunes made for a quick musical setting that increased the memorability and power of the words’ message.

Despite being widespread, Newman points out that this practice, and the new songs that resulted, were never recognized as being musically unique or worth preserving by the down-renters themselves (9). Additionally, because words and tunes appeared separately in different publications and at different time periods, it can be difficult to grasp how the songs may actually have sounded. Finally, Newman notes that musicologists have been slow to formalize their understanding of this widespread practice or to adopt a standardized term and treatment of the phenomenon (2–3). She employs the term *contrafacta*, often used in discussing liturgical music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, to denote the setting of a pre-existing tune with new words. Her efforts to elevate this music and examine it more thoroughly are well worth the effort, and *Songs and Sounds at the Anti-Rent Movement* makes a persuasive case for why *contrafacta* deserve more sustained attention in musicological studies.

The book is in two parts. The first part, “Critical Perspectives,” is a narrative and analytical examination of the songs and sounds of the Anti-Rent Movement, while part two contains reproductions of contemporaneously published lyrics and music. These reproductions of the sheet music used for source tunes convey the look and feel of nineteenth-century life. Alongside these appear Newman’s own reconstructions of twenty-two anti-rent *contrafacta*, assembled from the source materials to demonstrate how lyrics and tunes, published separately, were combined by the down-renters into new songs.

Part one contains four chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the political events and social issues that shaped the Anti-Rent Movement. The feudal rent system originated with the land claims of Dutch patroons but continued when control of the colony passed to the English and survived even amidst the republican aspirations of the newly-created American nation. Tenant leases on the manors could last for multiple generations and exacted heavy rents on agricultural products and labor while reserving timber, water, and mineral resources to the patroons. It preserved ultimate ownership of the land to the patroon, who received a quarter of the sale price whenever a lease was transferred between tenants. The Van Rensselaers typified the manor families and the system that sustained them, and they receive particular treatment in Newman’s account. The death of Stephen Van Rensselaer III and subsequent attempts by his heirs to clear his debts through collection of back rents from tenant farmers instigated the outburst of legal protests, title challenges, and unrest in the period’s most intense phase from 1839 to 1846.

Following this overview, chapters two and three retell the story of the Anti-Rent Movement, this time as it emerges from song and sound. Here, the strength of Newman’s approach is evident: the anti-rent imaginary as heard in these songs brings to life the hurlyburly of the movement, with frequent doses of humor and oddball moments alongside sobering episodes of violence, misinformation, and injustice. In addition to vocal tunes sung at gatherings, Newman includes instrumental

compositions like the “Halderbarak Quick Step,” a piece for piano that mimics the sound of tin horns frequently used by down-renters.

These chapters contain the most technical discussion of music analysis as Newman delves into harmony, cadences, and phrase structure. (Readers not versed in music theory can easily skip forward in the discussion.) Newman uses the technical analysis to ask why particular source tunes may have been chosen as the basis for new lyrics in the creation of contrafacta. As an expressive medium, music plays powerfully on the emotions and Newman shows how the musical features of these tunes may have helped shape the affective experience of anti-rent gatherings. Newman’s discussion of “We Are True Anti-Renters” is typical. She traces the origins of “True Anti-Renters” through a labyrinthine set of precursors from the Temperance movement, showing how multiple social movements overlapped during a boisterous period of social change. She then examines the “infectious” harmony and phrasing, noting how they “invite participation.” An unusual, unresolved cadence seems to leave the tune to “‘sound through the land’ forever,” something she ties to Ruth Crawford Seeger’s idea of “keep-going-ness”: cyclical forms of song that served as “rallying cries meant to lift participants’ spirits and create solidarity in the face of unresolved conflict” (42). Source tunes also brought with them their own lyric connotations and associations. For instance, Newman ponders how the issues of gender politics and female subjectivity portrayed in the widely-sung “Blue Eyed Mary” would have nuanced understanding of the contrafacta “Downfall of Feudalism,” which repurposed the tune with new lyrics (52).

Newman also draws on the field of historical sound studies, using eyewitness accounts to bring sonic elements of the anti-rent era to life. Ephemeral as it is, sonic experience can be difficult to reconstruct at a historical remove, but what does remain brings with it the palpable feel of lived experience. She discusses the tin horn, the sound of which was used to signal gatherings and disrupt rent collections and distress sales at which tenants’ possessions were sold at auction for unpaid rent. Tin horns became synonymous with the movement and influenced subsequent cultural depictions (as in the “Halderbarak Quick Step”). Sound is also important to the theme of concealment traced throughout Newman’s narrative. Bands of down-renters would dress as “Calico Indians,” an homage to the Boston Tea Party, to avoid identification while participating in anti-rent activities (30–32). Newman recreates the mock-indigenous war whoops and the shouting and commotion of civic unrest. Sound sometimes also thwarted concealment: though perpetually camouflaged as Big Thunder, the anti-rent orator Smith Boughton was ultimately arrested and jailed when an informant was able to identify him by his distinctive voice at a rally (47).

In chapter four, Newman turns to the “living memory and legacy” of the movement, tracing its traditions forward to centennial celebrations in the 1940s and

on into the twenty-first century. With time, the cultural record becomes more diffuse, but Newman shows how personal and communal memories of the down-renters resonate in moments like the performance of the contrafacta “Big Bill Snyder” in a folksong-inspired play at Camp Woodland in the Catskills in 1958 (86–87). This chapter poses its own interesting historiographic narrative as it examines how living experience becomes memory and how history is produced, recorded, and commemorated through the efforts of amateur and professional historians, educational initiatives, and community celebrations (87–88).

Songs and Sounds of the Anti-Rent Movement can be appreciated at multiple levels. Musicologists and folklorists will enjoy its astute analyses and find its approach to contrafacta worthwhile for adoption in other studies. Non-musicians will find their understanding of an important period of history enlivened by an appreciation of the emotional, intellectual, and historical dimensions of the cultural artifacts it produced. Though some anti-rent songs have been performed and recorded, a small downside is that readers who want to hear the music Newman describes so compellingly cannot easily do so unless they sing them or pick them out at the piano — though in this, they are certainly no worse off than the original nineteenth-century audiences of these songs! *Songs and Sounds* could easily serve as the focus for projects of public musicology featuring live or recorded performances of the songs discussed, further expanding the reach of this valuable work. In the meantime, Newman has given us a focused and clearly-written account of an underexamined but important body of expressive culture.

Joshua Groffman is associate professor and chair of the Department of Music at Southern Connecticut State University.

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