

This Day in History... November 27, 1746

Birth of Robert R. Livingston

Robert Robert Livingston was born on November 27, 1746, in New York City, New York.

Livingston was the oldest of 10 children of judge Robert Livingston. In 1764 he graduated from King's College, predecessor of Columbia University. Livingston married Mary Stevens in 1770 and established his own family home at Belvedere. The British later burned down this home during the Revolutionary War.

Livingston went on to work as a lawyer, practicing for a time with his college classmate John Jay. He then entered politics in 1773 when he was appointed recorder of New York City. But when he claimed he was part of the anti-colonial Whig Party, he was removed from that position.

Livingston was then made a representative for New York at the Continental Congress. At the Second Continental Congress he was selected to serve on the Committee of Five, tasked with drafting the Declaration of Independence. However, he was called back to New York before he could sign the final document.

In 1777 Livingston was made the first chancellor of New York, which was the highest judicial position in the state. He retained the nickname "The Chancellor" for the rest of his life, though he only held the position until 1801. During this time he was also made secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1781 to 1783 as part of the Articles of Confederation.

In 1789, New York City was serving as the nation's capital. As such, it was the location of America's first presidential inauguration. There was no Supreme Court or chief justice at the time, so Livingston, as New York's highest-ranking judge, gave the Oath of Office on the balcony of Federal Hall.

Stamp issued for the 150th anniversary of Washington's inauguration.



Livingston ran for governor of New York in 1798, but was defeated by his former law partner John Jay. Then in 1801 Thomas Jefferson made him US minister to France. It was in this role that Livingston was sent to Paris in 1801. Livingston had been instructed by President Jefferson to negotiate for either a port at the mouth of the Mississippi river or for permanent trading rights in New Orleans.

The following year, Jefferson also enlisted the help of Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours to assist in the negotiations. It was Nemours who introduced the idea of the much larger Louisiana Purchase to prevent future conflicts between the US and France.

By early 1803, French leader Napoleon Bonaparte realized that war with Britain was unavoidable and that his plans to build a New World Empire would not happen. Just days before James Monroe, another American negotiator, arrived in France, Bonaparte informed Livingston that he wished to sell the entire Louisiana Territory – a total of 828,800 square miles. Livingston managed to buy the entire Louisiana Purchase for 15 million dollars – that's just 3 cents an acre! Of the purchase Livingston stated, "We have lived long but this is the noblest work of our whole lives... The United States take rank this day among the first powers of the world."

Hudson's ship was sometimes called the Clermont, after Livingston's home.



While he was in France, Livingston met and befriended Robert Fulton. Together they developed the world's first successful steam boat, the *North River Steamboat*. Livingston had exclusive rights for steam navigation on the Hudson River in New York, and brought the ship there for commercial operations. Its homeport was Livingston's family home, Clermont Manor. In August 1807, Livingston took the boat out on its first voyage from New York City to Albany. The trip, which previously took nearly a week, was completed in less than 2½ days. In 1811, he was part of the Erie Canal Commission, which later oversaw the construction of New York's Erie Canal. Livingston spent his last years experimenting with agriculture and raising sheep before he died on February 26, 1813.



From the Louisiana Purchase Centennial issue



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