



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK
P.O. Box 397 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

SPRING 2007

The President's Letter by Patrick Higgins

Egbert Benson Historical Society's Annual Dinner on May 15.

This year the guest speaker at the Historical Society's annual Dinner will be Mary Howell. Mary is the Columbia County Historian and has devoted a large part of her life in the study of the Livingstons. She was the speaker at our January meeting when she gave a fascinating history of the Burden Mines and Iron Mountain. Anyone who heard her lecture in January will not want to miss hearing her account on the history of the Livingston families. The Livingstons were the first patent holders in Hudson Valley and their impact is still in evidence today.

Robert Livingston, the founder of the manor, was born in Scotland in 1654. His father, a prominent leader in the Church of Scotland, fled with him to Rotterdam to escape the religious upheaval that followed the Stewart restoration to power.

Rotterdam was one of the major business capitals in Europe and young Livingston was educated in the world of business. More important, he learned languages becoming fluent in English, Dutch and French. He sailed for Boston in 1673; after several months he went west to Albany. He immediately set about establishing himself as an intermediary among the Duke of York's agents, Indians and Dutch burghers. He got himself appointed secretary of the colony's Board of Indian Commissioners, clerk of the Albany General Court and Albany Tax Collector for which he received a 4% commission on revenues he brought in. Through his various enterprises was able to accumulate substantial capital.

In 1683 he purchased 2,000 acres of land along the Hudson River from the local Indians. Two years later, in 1675, he purchased "about Two or 3 hund: acres lying upon ye same Kill called by the Indians Tachkanick." This second purchase is at the base of the Berkshire Mountains. In 1686 Governor Thomas Dongan issued a royal patent combining these two properties into one as if they were contiguous and named them the Manor of Livingston. Since the two parcels were 20 miles apart, this instantly transformed Livingston's 2,600 acres into over 160,000 acres.

Robert Livingston and his son Philip vigorously pursued land development and promotional schemes. They were probably the most aggressive in attracting tenants to develop their land.

Many historians are not very kind in remembering the Livingstons; they are often singled out as examples of agrarian villainy. They were very active in public affairs and their exploits have been well documented by friends and foes alike. The Livingstons were well educated and considered the most literate of Colonial landlords; they left numerous records, letters, account books, tax lists and rent ledgers of their business exploits.

Mary Howell will discuss the first four generation of the Livingston families and their impact on society.

Annual Dinner Meeting reservation forms and information are located on page 3. We hope you will join us on Tuesday evening, May 15th.

Notes from the Archive Room

Barbara Bielenberg

It's spring once again! In many households this is a time to sort, clean and discard – in others (like mine) the files fill, piles grow, bookshelves overflow – postponing the inevitable dispersal “for the children to face someday”! But children don't necessarily have the time (or interest) to recognize the historic value of some of the clutter!

George Michael and his sister Barbara knew that their Dad's years of service to the Red Hook School Board might be of interest to someone so they boxed up his files, photographs and scrapbooks and donated them to the Historical Society. Recently we were trying to date the aerial photographs donated by Arnold Colburn and turned to the Michael's box to find out when the High School construction shown in one of the photos took place – and there was our answer!

A Yale student has contacted us about the story of historic preservation in Red Hook for a senior thesis she is working on. We were able to tell her we had a whole box of material about the Red Hook Hotel which was destroyed to make room for a gas station when fire damaged the landmark structure that had dominated the Red Hook four corners for more than two hundred years. Bob Rockefeller had carefully saved the collection given to him by the Inn's former owners who were his once his employers and remained long time friends.

We still grieve over the loss of Fred and Mary Briggs' invaluable collection of Red Hook postcards and memorabilia. It has apparently left the community. We hope the collection is still intact for it represents the lifetime interest of two of Red Hook's most revered citizens.

The Smithsonian Institution has been called “the nation's attic” – a nickname your Historical Society would happily share!



A postcard view of Westmore Cottage which stood on South Broadway where NAPA Auto Supply is now located. Old postcards preserve visions of the past and remind us of changes that are occurring in the Village and countryside. Please share with us your memories of Westmore Cottage by phoning 758-2923.