

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

“Chancellor Livingston, I Presume”

In November of 1871, “New York Herald” correspondent Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) found David Livingstone at Ujiji near Lake Tanganyika in present-day Tanzania. It was there that he would utter (at least according to his journal) these simple words: “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” For his explorations and service to the British Empire in Africa, he became *Sir* Henry Morton Stanley upon being made a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath in 1899.

But in New Orleans in 1858, the words of a seventeen-year-old boy were quite different. The Welsh born illegitimate son of John Rowlands and Elisabeth Parry blurted out “Do you want a boy, sir?”

Henry Hope Stanley was a merchant in the cotton business. He is listed in the 1855 New Orleans City Directory as being with the firm of Barnes, Stanley & Co. and working with the Mississippi Cotton Press on Tchoupitoulas Street. Stanley was reading his newspaper that day in front of his establishment when he looked up to view a needy but eager youth looking for a job.

Young John Rowlands had a rough childhood and did not get along with his stepfather, so he shipped off for America. Arriving in New Orleans, he was given that job by Mr. Stanley. His diligence and hard worked prompted Mr. and Mrs. Stanley to take the boy into their home, and they adopted him. Henry Morton Stanley took the name of his benefactor and (before traveling the globe and making his name in history) lived with his new parents at 904 Orange Street in the Crescent City.

But in the annals of New Orleans and Louisiana, it would not be presumptuous to find other significant Livingstons.

Most are familiar with Robert L. (Bob) Livingston IV, who served as Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and almost became Newt Gingrich’s successor as Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Born in Colorado but raised in New Orleans, he is today a Washington, D. C.-based lobbyist. But another Robert Livingston came before him.

Robert R. Livingston of New York (1746-1813) was a delegate to the New York State constitutional convention and a member of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence. He’s in that famous painting by John Trumbull of the Committee of Five presenting the draft Declaration to the Second Continental Congress. The other four are Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Roger Sherman.

Among many accomplishments, the state of Louisiana owes Livingston a debt of gratitude for his accomplishments as U. S. Minister to France from 1801 to 1804. In that capacity he negotiated the Louisiana Purchase.

Prior to that he was the first Chancellor (Chief Justice of the Chancery Court) of New York. As such he administered the oath of office to George Washington as first President of the United States at Federal Hall in New York City. New York was at that time the nation’s capital.

“The Chancellor” became the title for which Robert R. Livingston was widely known, even after having left that office.

While serving as Minister to France, he met the American inventor Robert Fulton who had arrived in the French First Republic in 1797. Fulton had experimented with submarines and torpedoes and designed the first practical submarine (commissioned by none other than First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte), which was tested successfully in 1800.

It was called the *Nautilus*. And you thought it was all Jules Verne’s idea.

Livingston met Fulton that same year and decided to build a steamboat to try out on the River Seine. The first trial sank but they didn’t give up their creative partnership. In 1807 they built the first viable commercial steamboat, the *Clermont*, which carried passengers between Albany, New York, and New

York City. It was named for the Livingston family home, Clermont Manor, in Clermont, New York.

Later commercial successes followed as reported in the January 14, 1812, edition of the *Moniteur de la Louisiane de la Nouvelle-Orléans*.

The French language newspaper reported that "*Le bateau à vapeurs New Orleans*" (Steamboat *New Orleans*) "took no more than 259 hours to descend from" Pittsburgh to New Orleans. The journey was made at "about eight miles per hour." The article further states that "success will answer to what is proposed by the entrepreneurs Messrs. Livingston and Fulton of New York, who have obtained a patent to this effect." Named for its destination city, the *New Orleans* was the first Mississippi River steamboat of many more to come. And with them came great wealth to the City of New Orleans.

Chancellor Livingston was the eldest son of Judge Robert Livingston and Margaret Beekman. He had nine brothers and sisters who wed and made their home for a time on the Hudson River near the family's Clermont Manor. One brother, Edward Livingston, was Mayor of New York and an aide to General Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. He came to New Orleans to practice law, and at one time owned 14,500 acres (or most) of what is today Pass Christian, Mississippi. But that is a story for another time.

Today Livingston Parish in Louisiana is named for "The Chancellor", and there is a Fulton Street in the Warehouse District named for the steamboat's famous pioneer. None of their many successes and innovations could have occurred without the acumen of Robert R. Livingston, I presume.

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