

ROKEBY

Named La Bergerie when it was built beginning in 1811, the house at Rokeby started as a rectangular, two-storey, six bedroom dwelling of stuccoed fieldstone and featuring a false Palladian window and a hipped roof topped by a pyramidal monitor, among other elements. The architect is unknown, but the plans may have been brought from France. During construction the property's owners, General John and Alida Livingston Armstrong, appended a two-storey service addition, also of stuccoed fieldstone. Daughter of Judge Robert R. Livingston and the former Margaret Beekman (who was herself the sole heir to the vast Henry Beekman landed estate), Alida was the great-granddaughter of Robert Livingston, first Lord of Livingston Manor, a major land grant that lay north of Rokeby. Livingston had emigrated in 1673; the Armstrongs' property, on the other hand, formed part of a large tract that was granted by King James II to another forebear of Alida's, Colonel Pieter Schuyler.

John Armstrong, a native of Pennsylvania, was a student at Princeton College when the Revolutionary War began. Enlisting in Washington's army, he eventually became aide-de-camp to Horatio Gates, the general credited with the turning-point victory at Saratoga. Armstrong later served as a U.S. Senator from New York, Minister to France and Secretary of War during the War of 1812. After overseeing the building of the house, Armstrong, who was committed to the improvement of agriculture, developed La Bergerie as a model farm centered on a flock of Merino sheep presented to him by Napoleon.

In 1818 the Armstrongs' only daughter, Margaret, married William B. Astor, the son and principal heir of John Jacob Astor, forever linking the "old-money" Livingstons with the "new-money" Astors. In 1836 Astor purchased from his father-in-law the 728 acres of La Bergerie. It was

Margaret who renamed the property because she fancied a similarity between a glen on the property with one described in Sir Walter Scott's poem "Rokeby." Soon the Astors enlarged the house to its current 35 rooms, adding a polygonal tower on the west side, a service wing to the north (both additions of brick but stuccoed to be uniform with the earlier house), a mansarded third storey with servants' quarters, and an 80-foot long porch to the south.

The Astors' oldest child, Emily, married Samuel Ward, Jr., brother of Julia Ward Howe (later a celebrated reformer and author of the Battle Hymn of the Republic). Emily died after giving birth to their only child, Margaret Astor Ward, who thereafter lived with her Astor grandparents in New York and at Rokeby. Later marrying Congressman John Winthrop Chanler, she gave birth to eleven children who were to inherit Rokeby and grow up there as orphans following the deaths of the Astors and of their parents in the 1870's. From the time of their arrival at Rokeby, ranging in age from 2 to 14, the children were raised under the supervision of an elderly cousin, tutors and governesses, and a remote board of guardians. One of these Chanlers was to be elected to the post of Lt-Governor of New York; another grew up to be a decorative artist examples of whose work can be seen in the house; and another an early explorer in East Africa.

Yet another of the orphans, Margaret Livingston Chanler, was an activist in the women's suffrage movement, in the precursor of the League of Women Voters, and in the Red Cross, earning the sobriquet "Angel of Puerto Rico" in the press during the Spanish-American War and helping establish in law the Women's Army Nursing Corps. In 1899 she obtained from her siblings sole ownership of Rokeby (by then reduced to its present size of 425 acres), and for the next sixty years operated a dairy farm there. In 1906 she married Richard Aldrich, music critic on

the New York Times, and with him raised their two children at Rokeby and in New York City.

At her death in 1963 she left Rokeby to her son's children Richard, John Winthrop and Rosalind Fish Aldrich – the managing partners of what is now Rokeby L.P., who with their children are the stewards in the tenth and eleventh generations of family ownership of this land. In 1975 Rokeby was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and it became an anchor property (one of only two still owned by descendants of the 17th century grantees) in the large Hudson River National Historic Landmark District designated by the Secretary of the Interior in 1990.

The house at Rokeby underwent further alterations in 1894 under the direction of family friend Stanford White, who expanded and renovated the drawing room and made numerous other changes to the interior. The architectural firm of Delano & Aldrich later modified the exterior appearance of the house. Today Rokeby boasts beautiful fin-de-siecle formal front rooms including an octagonal gothic-revival library and a reception room displaying original wallpaper and a bust of Julia Ward Howe.

Rokeby's landscape setting, too, has experienced change since its original agricultural character was formed by emigrant Palatine German tenant families in the 18th century. In the spirit of Andrew Jackson Downing's romantic era counsel, improvements in the 1840's included a gatehouse, curving driveway and paths, specimen trees and rustic benches from which to enjoy enhanced views of the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains; further improvements were made in 1911, at the hands of Olmsted Brothers. Today, outbuildings include a brick carriage house designed by McKim, Mead & White; Armstrong-era clapboarded farm buildings, the remains of a river dock, the gate house and other cottages now occupied by an eclectic blend of tenants. The partners

conduct an organic market garden on Rokeby's grounds as well as a puppetry and processional arts design and fabrication enterprise in one of the barns. A conservation easement protects the integrity of the land in perpetuity.