

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Estelle Livingston de Peyster

Born 1819 Died 1898

St. Paul's and Trinity Parish, Tivoli

The large, stone vault of Johnston Livingston just behind the church

The marriage of Estelle Livingston to John Watts de Peyster, who preferred to be known by his honorific “the General,” looked good on paper, uniting two founding colonial families of New York. Thus, when Estelle petitioned to separate from her husband of over 50 years, claiming cruel treatment that was confirmed by family members, the papers swooped in. Rather than focusing on the dissolving of her marriage, people should consider the legacy she left as the mother of five children and as a woman of resolve who decided she no longer wanted to live under same roof, albeit a beautiful one at Rose Hill in Tivoli, with a husband from whom she had endured abusive treatment for decades. Her estranged husband may have gained possession of Rose Hill, but she gained her freedom.

The daughter of John Swift Livingston and Anna Maria Martina Thompson, Estelle married John Watts de Peyster in 1841. The difficult end to their marriage would have been a surprise to Marian Campbell Gouverneur who recounted the happy day in her memoir *As I Remember: Recollections of American Society During the Nineteenth Century* (1911), although given that she had the wrong year of the wedding, perhaps her memory may not be totally accurate. “In 1844, accompanied by my father, I attended the wedding of Estelle Livingston, daughter of John Swift Livingston, to John Watts de Peyster,” she writes:

“At the time of this marriage, Mr. de Peyster was considered the finest parti in the city; while, apart from his great wealth he was so unusually talented that it was generally believed a brilliant future awaited him. It was a home wedding, and the drawing-room was well filled with the large family connection and other invited guests. At this time Mr. Livingston was a widower, but his sister Maria, Mrs. John C. Stevens of Hoboken, did the honors of the occasion for her brother. The young bride presented a charming appearance in all her finery, and at the beautiful collation following the ceremony, champagne flowed freely. This, however, was no unusual thing, as that beverage was generally seen at every entertainment in those good old days.”



HISTORIC RED HOOK



Rose Hill

Call number HABS NY,14-TIV.V,1- Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

The hopeful life continued early in the de Peyster marriage. For example, Estelle hand wrote a recipe book, dated August 11, 1841, which is in the possession of the Adriance Library in Poughkeepsie. A sketch of a knife, fork, and spoon hover over a drawing of a steaming cauldron atop a fire. Recipes include instructions for Snowdon Pudding, Minute Pudding, and Brandy Peaches, with a picture of a pansy underneath the last recipe. Estelle and her husband resided in New York City and in Tivoli. Their household expanded with the births of five children from 1841—the first soon after she wrote her recipe book—through 1852.

Sadly, the too early deaths of their offspring followed. The de Peysters were the parents of Civil War veterans Col. John Watts (nicknamed Watts) de Peyster, Jr., who died in 1873; Col. Frederic (called Fred) de Peyster, Jr., who died in 1874; and Col. Johnston Livingston de Peyster. All three sons volunteered for the Union side when they were in their teens. Watts and Fred died just over a decade after their return home from the war, due to illnesses they experienced during their service. The de Peysters also had two daughters—Estelle Elizabeth and Maria. The two oldest boys were born in New York City; Estelle Elizabeth and Johnston were born in the ‘Lodge’ at ‘Snake Point’ with the youngest of all, Maria, was born in

HISTORIC RED HOOK

“the main Mansion, Snake Point, Tivoli, Red Hook, Dutchess County,” according to John Watts de Peyster, Volume 1 by Frank Allaben.

Tragically, their youngest child Maria Livingston de Peyster died just after her fifth birthday in 1857. Her father recorded in his Bible that “She was a precious child, a peace-maker, the light of our household, the apple of her parents’ eyes,” reports Allaben. The de Peysters also were predeceased by their oldest daughter, Estelle Elizabeth de Peyster Toler, who passed away in 1889, with her husband James Boorman Toler dying days later, both of pneumonia.

The only child who outlived Estelle was her son Johnston, who died in 1903. Their father, the general, outlived them all, except four grandchildren: his grandson John Watts de Peyster Toler who died in 1911. Upon Gen. John Watts de Peyster’s death in 1907, he left the majority of his estate to his granddaughters Esther Estelle de Peyster Hosmer, Mary Justina de Peyster Martin, and Carola Anna de Peyster Kipp. Ironically, the inheritors were the daughters of Johnston, his estranged son, who predeceased him.

The breach between father and son occurred after many disagreements, but the abusive treatment his mother Estelle received by her husband was a major one. Johnston advocated for his mother when she decided to separate from Gen. John Watts de Peyster. Johnston had witnessed his father’s aggressive nature in an incident at his father’s home in New York City, and Johnston, too, was physically assaulted by his father when attempting to intervene, as attested by a physician attending the ill Estelle.

As part of the subsequent legal separation agreement, it was determined that Estelle would be reimbursed for Rose Hill, the family’s Tivoli estate that was described as “one of the loveliest villas on the Hudson” in Estelle’s 1898 obituary printed in The Semi-Weekly New Era of Lancaster, PA. Estelle received a settlement when she moved from Rose Hill because the money used to construct the estate came from her inheritance. Initially, after the split, Estelle moved to her brother Louis Livingston’s home, The Pynes, which their father had left to Louis. Eventually, she moved into her son Johnston’s home; she passed away in 1898, with Johnston her only child to survive her.

Due to the estrangement with her husband, Estelle was laid to rest in the vault of her brother Johnston Livingston. Three years later, her son Johnston would be laid to rest there as well. General John Watts de Peyster was interred in the de Peyster family vault in the same cemetery.

Research and writing by Thea Burgess, 2022