

## Notes for Burt

John R. Livingston, 6<sup>th</sup> child of Margaret Beekman and Robert "the Judge" Livingston inherited the Massena property after the Revolution from his mother, who had divided the vast Henry Beekman lands that she had inherited among nine of her 10 children. Clermont and surrounding Livingston estate in Columbia County had already been passed down to her oldest son, the Chancellor. He deferred to his mother the inheritance of his grandfather's lands.

John R. built Massena in 1795. He lived in the gatehouse, which he had built first, until the house was finished, with his second wife, Eliza McVickar. Brunel(?) designed the house in the style of the chateau de Beaumarchais in France., which John names Massena after Napoleon's Marshal Massen whose military exploits he admired.

John R. was a major in the Revolutionary War, but resigned his commission to become a manufacturer and supplier of gun powder to the Rev. Army. He was suspected of supplying goods to Benedict Arnold, but pleaded ignorance of the famous traitor's plans and was later cleared of involvement. He made a lot of money by buying and selling real estate in New York City, buying up Loyalists properties during the war, then subdividing and selling them as hundreds of city lots.

The first Massena was apparently an exceptionally beautiful place, considered a showplace. This made up a little for John R.'s somewhat shaky reputation within the family. "your uncle John R. need only be remembered because the house that he built was more beautiful than any other," wrote a Livingston family member. (Margaret Livingston Chanler, "Memoirs of Rokeby" publ 1900)

In 1820, John R. gave his daughter Margaret, and her husband, Lowndes Brown of Charleston, South Carolina, the southern portion of Massena - 250 acres. They built a neo-classical mansion at the shore, calling it Sylvania.

The Browns lived there happily until 1851, when Captain Lowndes Brown died. The same year John R. of Massena, his father-in-law also died at age 96. Life had been made miserable for Mrs. Brown, now both a grieving widow and daughter, ever since the Hudson Valley Railroad had begun construction of the new tracks, running scarcely 50 feet from her back door. "Mrs. Lowndes Brown was so angry at having the railroad tracks laid that she said she would never live in America again," wrote Margaret Chanler Aldrich in "Recollections of the Donaldson's"

Robert Donaldson, a retired cotton broker from New York City, bought the place in 1853, selling his country home, Blithewood, to John Bard, founder of Bard College. The move took him only a few miles south to his new home, which his wife called "Edgewater."

Donaldson engaged his old friend A.J. Davis with plans for his new estate. "I should like you to come up this week," he wrote, "to confer about designs for a lodge (at upper gate) - and some simple cottages (for plain People) and about gates and villas" He had plans to lease Edgewater and have Davis design a big house on the hill, however he changed his mind. He wrote Davis, "you will be surprised (perhaps grieved) to learn that I have given up all purposes of Building a Villa upon the Heights & intend to live & die in this Greek Temple!" He engaged Davis to design the octagonal library addition at Edgewater, along with the two gatehouses on the Station Road (one in bracketed style,

the other Italianate), and the Sylvania Chapel (Alan Porter's house) on Dock Road. Donaldson offered it to the Presbyterian Church for services but never deeded it to the Presbytery. According to Margaret Aldrich, services were held there every Sunday afternoon and attended by neighbors as well as the Donaldson family.

*Done*