

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Col. Johnston Livingston de Peyster

Born 1846 Died 1903

St. Paul's and Trinity Parish, Tivoli

Large, stone Livingston vault, just behind the church

Civil War Hero, Mayor of Tivoli, and NYS Assemblyman

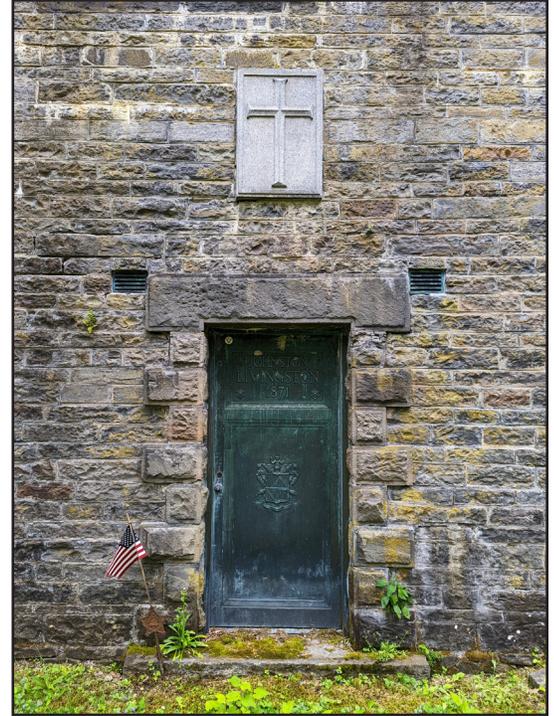
When Johnston Livingston de Peyster was 15, he left the Highland Military College in Newburgh to enlist in the Union Army during the Civil War, according to an account of the de Peyster family history written by his father Gen. John Watts de Peyster:

“He was a pretty hard colt to manage, and wanted to run away and join the army. I succeeded in keeping him at home until the summer of 1862, when he quit school, and raised a company for a regiment being organized in my district. Although I never urged a human being to go to the war, after the government twice refused me, I paid ten dollars apiece to each man who signed my son’s muster roll. After the company was raised, Johnston was cheated out of it by a fellow who afterwards disgraced himself.”

Johnston himself went on to serve in the Union Army and is credited by many for raising the “first real American flag” over the captured Confederate capital of Richmond. After the war, Johnston married, had three daughters, and was a businessman, the mayor of Tivoli, and a New York State Assemblyman. From Johnston’s birth on June 14, 1846, through his passing on May 27, 1903, his life was intertwined with his father’s until the point where Johnston, protecting his mother Estelle Livingston de Peyster from abuse by his father, became estranged from the General. Both men, who outlived all but each other, called Tivoli home and made major impacts on the village until their deaths.

By all appearances, being the son of a father who was a de Peyster and a mother who was a Livingston should be idyllic. Born the second youngest of five children, Johnston was part of a historic family renowned in society and financially affluent. His older brothers were Civil War veterans Col. John Watts (called Watts) de Peyster, Jr., who died in 1873, and Col. Frederic (shortened to Fred) de Peyster, Jr., who died in 1874. His sisters were Estelle Elizabeth de Peyster Toler who died in 1889 and Maria Livingston de Peyster, the youngest child who died just after her fifth birthday in 1857. Their mother Estelle passed away in 1898. All, including Johnston, lived through difficult and momentous events, despite their wealth.

The de Peysters lived in New York City during the winter months and resided at their estate Rose Hill



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"Hoisting first real American flag over the Capitol of the captured Rebel Capital, Richmond, Monday, 3d April, 1865, by Lt.-Col. Johnston Livingston de Peyster, A.D.C." from Local Memorials Relating to the de Peyster and Watts and Affiliated Families Connected with Red Hook Township, Dutchess Co.

in Tivoli the other half of the year. Two things negatively impacting their lives were the death of Maria and the Civil War. Following the lead of his brothers who most likely were influenced by their father's embrace of the Union cause, Johnston "enlisted 50 recruits in Co. C, 128th N. Y. Vols., and was elected captain but was not mustered in, as he was under 16 years of age," noted the Poughkeepsie Eagle of October 9, 1889. Undeterred, Johnston joined the 18th New York Volunteers in May 1864. In Tivoli: The Making of a Community, Bernard B. Tieger states, "Johnston at 17 entered the service as a lieutenant and was first assigned to an artillery regiment of black troops led by white officers, and later reassigned to the staffs of Major General Godfrey Weizel and Brigadier General George F. Shepley." Johnston was renowned for raising the American flag over the state house in Richmond after it was captured by the Union soldiers, continued the Poughkeepsie Eagle article. The result? He was honored in the newspapers of the time, and "he was brevetted colonel, and received in 1867 a vote of thanks from the city of New York," explained the piece.

Eventually Johnston returned to civilian life. He traveled the world, married Julia Ann Toler, and served overseas as a dignitary. Johnston and Julia established a home at Chateau de Tivoli on Woods Road, which had been built by Pierre Delabigarre, as described by Pieter Estersohn in *Life Along the Hudson*. Estersohn noted that the house was next door to Rose Hill, located "on land originally belonging to The Pynes," and "demolished in 1926 by Roland Livingston Redmond." Johnston was elected to the equivalent of mayor for Tivoli (defeating his father who ran against him) and then as a New York State assemblyman for the district. He was father to Esther Estelle de Peyster Hosmer, Mary Justina de Peyster Martin, and Carola Anna de Peyster Kipp. He also served as a trustee or officer of various organizations in New York City and locally. Johnston was an integral figure in the establishment of the Edgewood Club, originally known as the Tivoli Lawn Tennis Club, according to Anthony P. Musso's July 23, 2019, Poughkeepsie Journal article about the club's history. "It was de Peyster who acquired the original 14 acres for the club, built its first cement tennis court and clubhouse, and succeed [first club president Gen. H.L.] Burnett as the club's second president," explained Musso. During his term as mayor, Johnston led the establishment of a volunteer fire company in the village; it was named the Johnston Livingston de Peyster Engine Company No. 1.

Tensions between Johnston and his father came to a head. Johnston was visiting his ill mother and

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intervened when his father attacked Estelle. Johnston moved his mother to his home, and his mother sued for a legal separation due to repeated cruel treatment during their 50 years of marriage. The New York Times reported about the suit in a lengthy story in the July 10, 1891, edition as follows: “Mrs de Peyster was too ill to see anybody, and Mr. Johnston de Peyster had gone to Albany. The sympathy of the town is all with Mrs. de Peyster. Mr. Johnston de Peyster was a passenger on the north-bound train for Albany at 11 A.M. to-day. He was unwilling to talk about the matter. He said he was violently assaulted by his father in New-York last March. He expressed himself as averse to having the matters of the family trouble made public, but added: ‘If my father forces the thing we must go to the front, and all must come out. I deprecate it, and am very sorry. I don’t care to talk any more on the subject. You know he is my father, and I try hard to be as respectful as I can toward him.’” The General was worth between \$2,000,000 and \$3,000,000, estimated the paper, which noted that Estelle owned their home Rose Hill in Tivoli.

Estelle died in 1898 and Johnston in 1903. Johnston was survived by his wife, his three daughters, and his father. At Johnston’s passing, The New York Times of May 31, 1903, noted “the whole countryside thronged to the village [of Tivoli] to attend the services, and friends were present from New York, Philadelphia and Washington.” It described Gen. de Peyster as being “consistent in the course which he has followed ever since the estrangement between him and Col. De Peyster, because the latter took his mother’s part when Gen. De Peyster and his wife separated. He refused to attend the funeral.” When an attempt was made to see whether de Peyster Hall, owned by Gen. de Peyster, could be draped with funeral bunting, the General would not meet. In fact, the “only concession that Gen. De Peyster would make was to send the keys of the De Peyster vault to Col. De Peyster’s family with permission to inter his remains therein. The offer was refused.” Col. Johnston Livingston de Peyster was laid to rest in the vault of his uncle Johnston Livingston, where his mother Estelle was interred in 1898

Research and writing by Thea Burgess, 2022