



Traders and Gentlefolk: The Livingstons of New York, 1675-1790

Cynthia A. Kierner

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Including among their number a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the founder of an ironworks, the Livingstons were a prominent family in the political, economic, and social life of colonial New York. Drawing on a rich array of sources, Cynthia Kierner vividly recreates the history of four generations of Livingstons and sheds new light on the development of both the elite ideology they represented and of the wider culture of early America.

Although New York's colonial elite have been considered self-interested political intriguers, Kierner contends that the Livingstons idealized gentility and public-spiritedness, industry and morality. She shows how New York's most successful traders became gentlefolk without abandoning their entrepreneurial values, how they forged a distinct culture, and how the Revolution ultimately occasioned the rejection of elite political authority.

Traders and Gentlefolk focuses on the lives of four members of the family: Robert Livingston, a Scottish emigrant who, with his wife Alida Schuyler, attained substantial political influence and acquired Livingston Manor; their son Philip, whose outstanding commercial talents secured his descendants' financial security; Philip's son, William, an outspoken civic leader and energetic supporter of American independence; and Robert R. Livingston, a jurist and diplomat whose aristocratic temperament prevented him from playing a vital role in post-Revolutionary politics.

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