

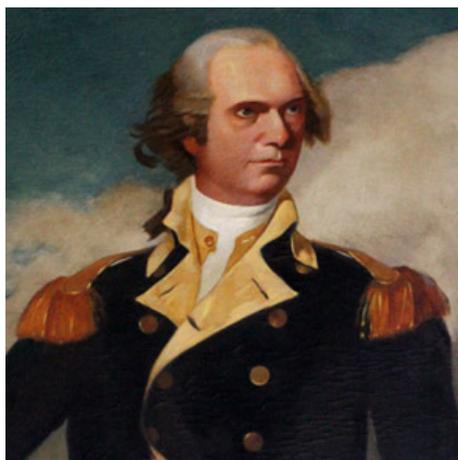
KINGSTON TIMES

News of Uptown, Midtown, the Strand & beyond

Old Dutch the center of Friday's Clinton commemoration

by HUGH REYNOLDS on Apr 16, 2012 • 5:17 pm

No Comments



A detail from Clinton's City Hall portrait. (Photo by Phyllis McCabe)

Rifles will salute, bands will blare, and orators will emote at the 200th anniversary commemoration of the death of George Clinton, New York's first governor and two-time vice president at his gravesite in the Old Dutch Church cemetery on Main Street next Friday, April 20.

Clinton, born in Little Britain (then part of Ulster County) in 1739, was elected to the first of seven three-year terms as governor in 1777. He first took the oath of office at the Ulster County Courthouse, only a few hundred feet from where he is buried.

Clinton, 72, died as James Monroe's vice president in Washington on April 20, 1812 and was buried in what was then called Congressional Cemetery. He had also served as Thomas Jefferson's vice president from 1805 to 1809.

Clinton's reburial in Kingston in May of 1908 was like his more than 50 years in public life — a product of political controversy.

According to Kingston historian Edwin Ford, whose collection of Clinton memorabilia is extensive, local poo-bahs Judge Alfonso Clearwater and Ben Brink were miffed that Kingston was not being properly recognized by planners for the 1909 tricentennial of Henry Hudson's voyage of discovery. They determined to "do something" in 1908, the 350th anniversary of Kingston's founding and thereby steal a march on the Hudson celebration. Just how they arranged to have Clinton disinterred and moved to Kingston after 96 years of repose has not been detailed but records indicate the governor's four surviving great-grandsons were avid supporters.

Clinton's three-ton monument in Washington was disassembled, carefully crated and re-erected at the Old Dutch site. Clinton, a Presbyterian, was not a congregant of the Old Dutch, but his in-laws, the Dutch Tappens, had long been established therein.

Cornelia Tappen Clinton, who died in 1800, is buried in New York City.

Where's George?

Disassembling the Indiana limestone Clinton monument, according to Ford, was no problem. Finding the former vice president took a while.

"There was no trace of the coffin," Ford read from old records. "Workmen probed the ground with pikes. They found the coffin. It wasn't close."

Committed to confirming the identity of the man in the triple coffin — mahogany enclosed in copper enclosed in lead — exhumers hauled the remains off to a nearby naval hospital for an autopsy. A measurement of the skull and other evidence in the casket established it was indeed George Clinton, dressed in the remnants of his Revolutionary War brigadier general's uniform. Records indicate the body was preserved to the extent that doctors were able to determine that Clinton had died of pneumonia.

The journey of Clinton's remains from Washington to Kingston in May of 1908 was an event. Records show the entire Congress stood in respect on the steps of the capital as Clinton's cortège passed on its way to Union Station. The casket crossed the Hudson from New Jersey to New York City where it lay in state at City Hall for two days. More than 40,000 people paid their respects.

Clinton's coffin was taken by Navy warship up the Hudson to Kingston where at "every town" cannons boomed the 19-gun salute accorded a vice president and flag-waving citizens by the thousands gathered.

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Tags: Gov. George Clinton, Old Dutch Church Kingston