FEDERALIST

Chancellor Robert R. Livingston

New York City and County

Party Leader

Born: November 27, 1746

You are Robert Livingston, the leader of the Federalist party gathered in Poughkeepsie at the New York State Ratifying Convention. Your single purpose is to ensure New York's ratification of the Constitution drafted in Philadelphia the previous summer.

Born November 27, 1746, you are the first son of Judge Robert Livingston and Margaret Beekman Livingston. You have nine (surviving) siblings.

The Livingstons are among the most powerful and established families in New York, with ancestors tracing back three generations to Robert Livingston the Elder (1654–1728), who arrived in Albany, New York, in 1674; succeeded in business and politics; and, with the assistance of the royal governor, received from King George I a land grant of 160,000 acres in Columbia and Dutchess counties. This grant became the site of Livingston Manor. Robert bequeathed the estate to Philip, his firstborn son, but to his second-born son, Robert, your grandfather, he bequeathed 13,000 acres in southwestern Columbia County. In 1730 your grandfather built there Clermont Manor. This you inherited on your father's death in 1775, and this the British burned down in 1777, as they burned down Belvedere, the nearby home you built for your wife, Mary.

The family fortune derives from land (measured now in square miles, not acres), commerce, moneylending, and retail sales. You have a town house in the city that survived the widespread destruction.

You were educated at King's College (renamed Columbia after the war), graduating in 1765, and you read law under noted attorney William Smith and were admitted to the bar in 1768. Two years later you were a member of the exclusive legal society The Moot. Your first office was recorder of New York City in 1773—a royal post later taken from you because of your patriot sympathies.

About that: Your father was a member of the Stamp Act Congress (1765) and of the committee of correspondence that organized resistance to the hated stamp tax (despite seeking British assistance in putting down a tenant revolt the following year). You were yourself a member of the Provincial Convention that succeeded the colonial assembly and of the Provincial Congress that succeeded the Provincial Convention. You were elected a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and once there elected to the committee of five that drafted the Declaration of Independence (though you made no real contribution and were not on hand to sign the historic document because you were called back to the state; your elder cousin Philip signed on behalf of the family). With John Jay (your law partner briefly) and Gouverneur Morris (your fellow land magnate), you wrote the New York State Constitution in 1777. That same year you became the first chancellor of New York, the state's highest judicial post (court of equity and appeal), and ever since you have been known as "The Chancellor." In late 1779, you replaced Jay in the Continental Congress when he was appointed minister to Spain. Your one great blunder while in Congress was to have proposed General Benedict Arnold for the post of commandant of West Point. His treachery almost cost America the war and cost you your Clermont estate, protected by the fort at West Point. Though you swore never to serve again in Congress, you accepted election to the office of secretary of foreign affairs in October 1781, just days before the victory at Yorktown—an auspicious time to begin as secretary. From afar, you looked on—more than you actually helped—as Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay negotiated the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War. You looked on because in fact the trio generally ignored their instructions from you and the Congress. You resigned as secretary in May 1783, several months before the treaty was signed in September.

Back in New York, you returned to the business of the chancery court and to repairs and improvements to the Clermont estate. You had the reputation of being an amateur scientist, experimenting with new crops and new breeds of stock and inventing sundry gadgets and novelties. Your management of the estate, however, was more feudal than modern, as your tenants were (and

are) all leaseholders, not freeholders, paying in annual rent twenty-five bushels of wheat and four "fat hens" from the returns on their, mostly, seventy-acre farms.

In the 1780s political leadership of the Livingston clan passed from its senior branch, located at Livingston Manor, to the Livingstons of Clermont Manor, owing chiefly to your standing in the state. Further proof of that came in 1784, when the Grand Lodge of New York, an association of Freemasons, appointed you its first grand master and when the New York Society of the Cincinnati, a confraternity of former war officers, named you an honorary member.

Also in 1784, you were elected again to the Continental Congress. Service in the Congress and as foreign secretary had made you a nationalist (now called a Federalist), and the weakness of the Confederation and your own state's refusal to strengthen it frightened and appalled you. Unable to pay its debts or finance its operations, Congress tried levying a modest impost tax of 5 percent. New York's long-serving governor, George Clinton, opposed it and effectively killed it.

Because of a recent and unprecedented election law that enfranchised non-freeholding males, you judged it prudent to run on the Federalist ticket in New York City rather than Columbia County where you "reign" as manor lord. Those troublesome leaseholders, casting secret ballots, could not be trusted, you suspected; and, indeed, they returned an entirely Antifederalist slate.

Special role: If the instructor rates the Constitution as Antifederalist in character after all debate, Livingston is directed to threaten the secession of New York, Richmond, Kings, and Westchester counties from the state.