

# Lewis Morris, Bronx Signer of Declaration, Honored at Sesquicentennial Ceremony



Photo from "Home News"

REV. E. C. RUSSELL

base of a pylon inscribed with the names of William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, and Lewis Morris, the four men from this State who signed the Declaration. Mr. George W. Ochs Oakes, Editor of Current History Magazine, presided at the exercises.

United States Senator Royal S. Copeland eulogized the life of William Floyd; Dr. John H. Finley spoke on the life of Philip Livingston; Charles Burlingham made the address on Francis Lewis; and the Rev. Edward Charles Russell, Pastor of St. Ann's Church, The Bronx, spoke on Lewis Morris.

The bodies of Lewis Morris and other patriots are interred in the churchyard of St. Ann's Church, and due to this fact the church is known as the "Church of the Patriots."

Lewis Morris was the *only* Signer of the Declaration of Independence from what is now New York City, and the Manor of Morrisania, his birthplace, being in the lower part of what is now the great and fast-growing Borough of The Bronx, this Borough was officially represented at the exercises by a Special Committee from The Bronx Board of Trade, consisting of George Price, Chairman; Hon. Albert H. Liebenau; Hon. Josiah Briggs, John T. Hannigan, and Rev. Daniel C. Cunnion. Miss Harriet Hale, Chairman of the History Department at Morris High School, also joined our delegation at Philadelphia.

The Bronx Board of Trade Committee escorted the Rev. Dr. Russell to Philadelphia and was given a position of honor during the exercises.

The text of Rev. Dr. Russell's address on Lewis Morris, in part, follows:

"My particular duty is to present to you, in brief review, the story of LEWIS MORRIS, one of New York's Signers of the Declaration of Independence,—and the *only* 'Signer' from the City of New York.

Tribute was paid to the New York State Signers of the Declaration of Independence on Monday September 20th, at the Sesquicentennial Exposition, at Philadelphia, with impressive ceremonies which took place at Federal Hall, the New York State Building, which is a reproduction of the old building in Wall Street in which the inauguration of Washington took place.

A delegation of approximately five hundred New Yorkers witnessed the placing of a floral tribute at the

"That we may get a proper setting of the life of this patriot, it is necessary to go back through the years, and review the history of the Morris Family.

"William Morris, of Tintern Parva, England, was the scion of the ancient Welsh Family of Morris, who trace their descent from Maur Rhys Fitzgerald, a Cambria chieftain, who invaded Ireland, in the Reign of Henry II. He was given a large domain in Wales as a reward for his services, and dropped the name of Fitzgerald. The compound name of "Maur Rhys" was later corrupted into "Maurice", and finally into "Morris."

"The said William Morris left four sons, the eldest being Lewis Morris, who inherited the paternal estate of Tintern. In the reign of Charles I of England, Lewis Morris, animated by the spirit of democracy and a deep attachment to the Parliamentary Party, assisted the forces of Oliver Cromwell in the contest between the King and the people. In the varying fortunes of war, King Charles, at the head of the Royalists, captured Chepstow Castle, on the estate of Tintern, and burned the same to punish the so-called disloyalty of Morris to the British Crown.

"In the period of the Commonwealth which followed the Reign of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell bestowed honors upon Lewis Morris and gave to him lands, in recognition of his brave services as one of his distinguished officers in the contest for democracy. From these circumstances, the Morris Family assumed, as their crest, a Castle in flames, of which the motto is "Tandem Vincitur"—('At last he is conquered').

"We now turn from the romantic fortunes of the Morris Family in England, and find that Captain Richard Morris, a brother of Lewis Morris, who fought with Cromwell, was the founder of the Morris Family in America. On the restoration of Charles II, after the death of Oliver Cromwell, Richard Morris decided to reside outside of England, and he, like many another brave Englishman, turned his eyes to America as a fitting place to emigrate to.

"On reaching the New World, Morris sought a home in the Barbadoes, where he married Sarah Pole. From thence he came to New Amsterdam, which had just been conquered by the British, and whose name had been changed to New York. Here he purchased a large tract of land on the banks of the Harlem River, some time owned by Jonas Bronck. On this delightful tract of land, later called the Manor of Morrisania, he built a mansion. He had an only son, Lewis Morris, who was grandfather of the 'Signer' and who later became Chief Justice of the Province of New York, and FIRST GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY.

"This gentleman was the first Lord of the Manor of Morrisania, and was married to Isabelle Graham, daughter of the Attorney-General of the Province of New York. Their union was blessed with a son, Lewis Morris, who was second Lord of the Manor of Morrisania and father of LEWIS MORRIS, third and last Lord of the Manor of Morrisania and a gentleman con-



N. Y. "Times" Wide-World Photo

## THE BRONX BOARD OF TRADE DELEGATION AT LEWIS MORRIS EXERCISES

*Left to Right: Rev. Daniel C. Cunnion, Hon. Albert H. Liebenau, Mr. John T. Hannigan, Miss Harriet Hale, Rev. Edward Charles Russell, Mr. George Price, Hon. Josiah A. Briggs*

cerning whom it can truly be said that he was a brave patriot, a noted legislator, and SIGNER OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

"LEWIS MORRIS, the subject of this address, was born on April 8, 1726, at the old homestead of the Manor House of Morrisania, within a stone's throw of St. Ann's Episcopal Church, (now situated at 140th Street and St. Ann's Avenue), a church rightly called 'The Church of the Patriots', and a 'Shrine' that all The Bronx is justly proud of from a patriotic point of view.

"MORRIS was a tall, handsome, chivalrous gentleman, fond of good company, determined, and fired with the spirit of Cromwellian blood that marked him as a man dedicated to the cause of the people and to that splendid democracy which has been the inspiration and the power behind the greatness of America. MORRIS was sent to YALE COLLEGE when sixteen years old, and graduated from that historic Institution of Learning in the year 1746. For twenty years he devoted his energies to the cultivation of his immense estate, which covered an area of three thousand acres. In the meantime he married Mary Walton, a charming young lady of large fortune, and their union was blessed with six sons and four daughters.

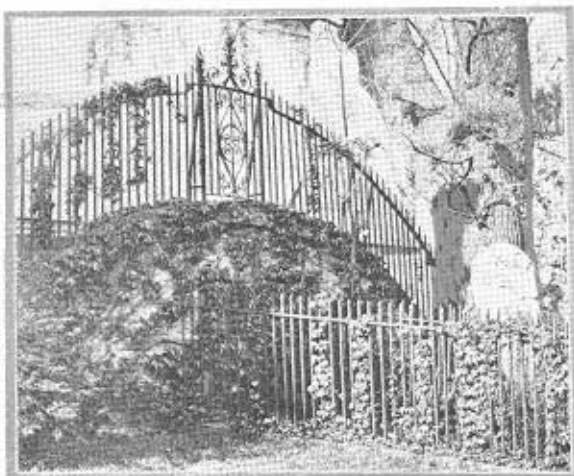


Photo by "Home News"

MORRIS FAMILY VAULT IN  
ST. ANN'S CHURCHYARD

"As a monument to Mary Walton, the wife of the 'Signer', there is today facing the grounds of St. Ann's Church, Walton High School for Girls, where thousands of young women receive their training and inspiration for American motherhood. In the crypt of St. Ann's lies the body of Mary Walton, and on the front of the Church is a tablet, placed by the Daughters of the Revolution, in honor of the Mother of Patriots.

"The MORRIS home was a home of supreme domestic felicity, and if one could go back through the years to pre-Revolutionary days, he would have been inspired by the delightful hospitality and spirit of the Manor of Morrisania.

"In 1765, when the British promulgated the infamous Stamp Act, (contrary to the advice of some of the most distinguished members of the British Parliament), all America was stirred, and emphatic protests were made on all sides. The newspapers published editions in black borders, to symbolize the death of liberty. With everything to gain, except the consolation of his conscience, LEWIS MORRIS—whose wealth and social standing might well have tempted a mercenary man to ally himself with the Royalists, of whom there were many in the colony—forgot self-interest, and arrayed himself upon the patriotic side of the controversy.

"Acts of oppression, such as the colonists had forced upon them, led them into a cohesive combination of resistance, and in the aggregate, forced the calling of the first Continental Congress, in 1774. Its resolutions of protest were spurned. This cavalier treatment of the first Continental Congress drove the patriots to more determined preparation for the next. The Provincial Congresses in the different States, at the sessions, passed resolutions endorsing the stand of the Continental Congress and elected a full representation to participate in the sessions of 1775. The New York Convention of Deputies met at White Plains on April 22, 1775, a few days after the Battle of Lexington, and chose LEWIS MORRIS of Morrisania as Delegate to the Continental Congress.

"When the Continental Congress met in 1775, Morris was placed on the Committee, (of which George Washington was Chairman), to provide military stores and ammunition for the rapidly forming Continental Army. In the following Fall and Winter, he was among the foremost in shaping and perfecting the preparations for what he saw was to be a long military struggle. To him was assigned the delicate task of detaching the Indians in the Western part of the State from the British interest, and early in 1776 he reassumed his seat in Congress.

"During the ensuing year his fine estate, now comprising a valuable part of New York City, was laid waste by the British and this noble gentleman and his family suffered much for the cause of patriotism.

"In 1776, when the draft of the Declaration of Independence came up for consideration, he became wholeheartedly interested in American liberty, and his signature to the Immortal Document is indeed significant of the patriotism and integrity of his noble character.

"LEWIS MORRIS was always distinguished by his modesty, his honesty, and absolute disinterestedness where Parliamentary matters were concerned. It is not generally known that he declined to run for a second term in the Continental Congress, but relinquished his rights in favor of his younger half-brother, Gouverneur Morris, the distinguished patriot.

"LEWIS MORRIS was not an orator. He was a plain, loyal-hearted man of great sincerity. MORRIS did not leave an autobiography recording the thrilling episodes of his life, telling of his successes and sacrifices for the cause of the Republic, and therefore has been sadly neglected by historians. (I can assign no other reason).

"LEWIS MORRIS passed from a Parliamentary career into the sphere of military action, for which he was so well fitted. He assumed his connection with the State Militia, attaining the rank of Major-General and participating in many skirmishes which ensued during the British occupation of New York. He also served in the State Legislature, where he was distinguished for his patriotic zeal and rare sagacity. To the glory of this noble gentleman it is to be recorded that three of his sons bore an active part in the Revolutionary Army. Their mortal remains are interred within the sacred precincts of the historic 'Shrine' of St. Ann's Church.

"The tense struggle for independence over, LEWIS MORRIS returned to his ravished and ruined estate and devoted his declining years to rebuilding it to its former magnificence. He was content to live in quiet retirement, and passed peacefully out of this life on the 22nd day of January, 1798, at the honorable age of seventy-two years.

"In St. Ann's Church, built by the Morris Family near the old Manor House of Morrisania, on rising ground which overlooked a clear and rapid stream known as Mill Brook, lie the mortal remains of LEWIS MORRIS. Originally, St. Ann's was called 'St. Ann's in the Fields,' because the two acres of land which were deeded with it comprised part of the meadow of the Morris Estate fronting on Cherry Tree Lane.

"St. Ann's Church, with its beautiful grounds, is indeed a lovely vernal spot in the midst of a densely populated community. Hedged in today on all sides by apartment houses, this old Church, the resting place of LEWIS MORRIS, breathes the spirit of peace and quiet, which is a reminder of all the better things in life. No more beautiful example of a Colonial Church can be imagined than St. Ann's, standing at 140th Street and St. Ann's Avenue, amid its dignified Churchyard, with its ivy-clad walls, where willow trees droop over the graves of its honored dead, where rest pioneers, statesmen, jurists, soldiers and sailors. Truly, this place may well be called 'The Shrine of Patriots', a sacred spot that ought to be dear to the hearts of every New Yorker".

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