

Scarlet and Black Marker Confronts Legacy of William Livingston and His Family

A plaque installed in 2021 on the Livingston campus confronts the legacy of William Livingston, namesake of the campus and the former Livingston College, and his family, as people who enslaved other human beings.



Photos courtesy of Stephen Yanick

The two-sided marker has been placed on a prominent walkway on campus, between the Lynton North and South Towers residence halls and the Livingston Student Center.


The plaque reads:

"Livingston Campus (site of former Livingston College) was named after William Livingston, the first governor of the state of New Jersey, whose family made a fortune trafficking human beings in the transatlantic slave trade. The campus opened in 1969 as an experimental, social-justice oriented campus at the site of Camp Kilmer, a World War II-era military camp. The Livingston family collectively enslaved hundreds of people and Williams' brothers, Philip and Robert, two of Rutgers' founding trustees, bought and sold hundreds more. When William Livingston moved to New Jersey, he enslaved at least two people, a woman named Bell and her son Lambert. Though he later advocated for gradual abolition, he continued to represent the legal interests of his slave-trading family's wealth throughout his career. This marker honors Bell, Lambert, and the other women, men, and children enslaved and sold by the Livingston family."

About William Livingston

Livingston: A Governor, a College, and the Long Echoes of Slavery at Rutgers online program held Jan. 18, 2022: More info or view the video.

(Information on this page is condensed from text from Rutgers' Scarlet & Black Digital Archive.)

Livingston Campus was named after **William Livingston**, the first governor of the state of New Jersey after the American Revolution. 

The Livingston family was connected with Rutgers from the college's earliest days. William Livingston's brothers Philip and Robert Livingston were two of the original founding trustees of the school.

The Livingston family's wealth in the 18th century came largely from their roles as merchants and slave traders operating out of New York City. Founding trustee **Philip Livingston** traded slaves from Jamaica and Antigua and owned plantations in Jamaica. He also held black people in bondage in New York.

William Livingston, on the other hand, was torn between his family's slave trading and his belief that slavery was incompatible with the young American nation's ideals of freedom.

William Livingston called slavery "an indelible blot" upon humanity. As governor of New Jersey, he opposed the slave trade and hoped to pass a gradual abolition program after the Revolution. He won a ban on the Atlantic slave trade in New Jersey in 1786 (22 years before the Atlantic slave trade became illegal nationwide). But he was not able to achieve abolition during his tenure as governor, because slaveholders who opposed Livingston's views held too much power in the New Jersey legislature.

William Livingston at one time enslaved at least two people, a woman named Bell and her son, Lambert, as noted on a plaque installed on the Livingston campus in 2021.

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Additional information and resources:

Programs Celebrating Livingston College's 50th Anniversary and Beyond

Information and links to documents and photos related to the 50-year anniversary of Livingston College.

Livingston Legacy Lectures (2009-2010)

Alumni Talks (Since 2021)

The Livingston Alumni Association (LAA), in association with our partners within Rutgers University, has held multiple events and embarked on projects to celebrate and commemorate the 50+ years since Livingston College opened in 1969. These include events specifically related to the college's history.



Livi at 50: A Celebration of Livingston College's 50th Anniversary kicked off with a keystone event at the James Dickson Carr Library on Livingston campus on October 25, 2019. The event was co-presented by Rutgers University–New Brunswick Libraries and the LAA.

It featured a panel discussion of prominent Livingston alumni, a presentation of the Riki Jacobs Livingston Pride Award, and an exhibition from the University Archives of materials including yearbooks, photographs, and other artifacts that captured Livingston's evolution from its beginnings as the military base Camp Kilmer in the 1950s through the present day.

A panel discussion reflected this diversity, with alumni Noah Hart Jr. LC'73, GSED'88, Staci Berger LC'94, EJB/GSNB'04, and Robert W. Snyder, LC'77 all speaking about their formative years at Livingston and the impact the college had on them. In addition to the panel discussion and audience Q&A, student Eshan Kaul, SEBS'19, RWJMS'22, was named recipient of the 2019 Riki Jacobs Livingston Pride Award.

Pictured: Hart, Snyder, and Berger.

Livi at 50: A Remembrance of Livingston College: Latino Studies and the Livingston Panthers Sports Teams



Livingston College Panthers cheerleaders, circa 1970. Courtesy of Rutgers University Libraries.

Our April 22, 2021, “Livi at 50” online event celebrated the formation of the Latino Studies program and the history of the Livingston Panthers sports teams. Iris Martinez Campbell LC’75, SSW’81, moderated a discussion about the Latino Studies program with Margie Rivera LC’72 and Grizel Ubarry LC’74. LAA President Jeff Armus led a discussion about the Livingston Panthers with Lucille Lo Sapio LC’76, Bernadette Session LC’75, Dwight Williams, defensive coordinator of the Panthers, and Rick Williams LC’74, a member of the team. Watch a replay (58 minutes).

Livingston: A Governor, a College, and the Long Echoes of Slavery at Rutgers

A historical marker on the Livingston campus, placed in 2021, explains its namesake William Livingston’s deep involvement in slavery and his halting efforts to abolish slavery as New Jersey’s first governor.

Video from ***Livingston: A Governor, a College, and the Long Echoes of Slavery at Rutgers*** (58 minutes)

In a virtual presentation held Jan. 18, 2022, Robert Snyder LC’77, a professor emeritus of journalism and American studies at Rutgers–Newark, talked with Jesse Bayker SGS’19, digital archivist for the Scarlet and Black Project at Rutgers–New Brunswick, who discussed Livingston’s life.

Brooke A. Thomas, an African American history doctoral candidate at Rutgers–New Brunswick, shared the importance of Livingston College to Rutgers, why it was created, and how activism was one of its important contributions to Rutgers. Thomas is also a co-author of the chapter “We the People: Student Activism at Rutgers and Livingston College, 1960–1985” in *Scarlet and Black, Volume 3*.

Livingston College graduates Snyder and Debra O’Neal LC’87 shared their experiences of educational innovation and campus activism from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. The discussion ended with a question-and-answer forum.

This event was sponsored by the RUAA, the LAA, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the Rutgers Alumni Association.