

# *Women of the Jay Family*



Bedford House is interpreted for the 1820s. By that time several Jay women were living here, most notably John Jay's daughters and his daughter-in-law. That generation of women also left the most enduring mark on Bedford House.



*Wm. G. Mearns sculp. New York*

*Maria Jay Banyer*  
(1782-1856)



One of Maria's paintings photographed in black and white

Maria Jay was born in Spain in 1782 while her father John Jay was serving as a diplomat.

As a young girl she was educated at home but was eager to further her education. She frequently pleaded with her mother to be able to attend the Moravian Young Ladies Seminary located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Maria attend the school for two year, showing both a gift and passion for art.

In a letter from England her father wrote:

*"Mama informs me that you had sollicitd, and obtained her consent, to pass some months at Bethlehem, from an Expectation that you would there have better means of Improvement than at New York. Your motive certainly was laudable, and I sincerely wish your Expectations may be realized."*

-John Jay to Maria Jay December 9, 1794



In 1801 at the age of 19 she married Goldborough Banyer and became a recognizable woman among the Albany elite. However, by the age of thirty, Maria had lost both her children and her husband to various disease outbreaks.

She remained in Albany for a few years before returning to Bedford to help care for her younger siblings and to be in the company of family. By 1818 Bedford House was her primary residence.



A page from Maria's pressed flower book



*Nancy Jay*  
(1783-1856)



Nancy Jay was born in France in 1783. Educated in the same manner as her older sister, she also attended the Moravian Seminary. Nancy seemed to have an interest in horticulture and the natural sciences. Her letters and journals are meticulously scientific when it comes to plant and flower identification.

In 1802 after the death of her mother, Nancy became the female head of the household.

At nineteen, Nancy was responsible for supervising the care of her younger siblings, ordering supplies, overseeing the staff and the interior upkeep of the home. Dedicated to her family and her faith, Nancy took her role very seriously and stayed at the Homestead until John's death in 1829.



Ferret drawn by Nancy Jay, 1825



*Sarah Louisa Jay*  
(1792-1818)



Only ten years old when her mother died, Sarah Louisa was looked after by her two older sisters. As a teen she spent the majority of her time living in Albany with her sister Maria. She would also winter with her brother Peter Augustus who resided in New York City.

Family correspondence indicates that she was plagued with numerous health problems throughout her life. Sarah Louisa Jay died in 1818 at the age of 26.



Ladies coin purse inscribed, "Miss Jay"



Sarah Louisa Jay c. 1808

Sarah Louisa had a particularly close relationship with her brother William, who was just two and a half years older. The letters between the two of them are full of love and playfulness that can be found between siblings.

In 1812 when William was courting his future wife Augusta McVickar, Sarah Louisa wrote:

*"Should you meet with Augusta McVickar, & can sufficiently divest yourself of- of—you know what, remember me kindly to her."*

- Sarah Louisa Jay to William Jay, March 2nd, 1812



*Augusta  
McVickar Jay  
(1790-1857)*



Augusta McVickar married William Jay in the fall of 1812. They resided at Bedford House for the entirety of their marriage. Augusta was devoutly religious, which made her a good match for the always pious William.

Augusta and William had six children that lived to adulthood, and while John Jay was alive Augusta's primary role was to care for and educate them, since her sister-in-law Nancy was running the household.



Bust of Augusta Jay c. 1850



*Sarah Livingston Jay*  
(1756-1802)

While the most indelible mark on Bedford House was left by the generation of Jay daughters, many strong, intelligent women came before them.

Sarah Jay was born into the Livingston family in 1756. Originally from New Jersey, her father was the first post-colonial governor of the state. She married John Jay in 1774 and was a consummate supporter of his political career.

In 1780, Sarah traveled to Europe with John on his diplomatic missions during the American Revolution. While she struggled in Madrid, Sarah was in her element in Paris. She enjoyed the culture, the fashion and being in the company of other American





In 1785, John Jay was appointed Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The position made him the chief diplomat for the young country and required him to host a number of diplomatic functions out of his New York City home.

As the lady of the house, Sarah oversaw all of the arrangements necessary for these weekly dinners and also had the ear of some of the most important people in early America.

Abigail Adams wrote:

*"When I left your Hospitable mansion, I did not design So many days should have elapsed, before I had express'd to you the pleasing Sense I entertain'd of your kindness and Friendship. They had left a durable impression upon my mind, and an ardent desire to cultivate them in the future."*

Abigail Adams to Sarah Jay February 20th, 1789

Left Page	Right Page
22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1789 for the 23 <sup>rd</sup> Duane - 1	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1789 for the 23 <sup>rd</sup> Duane - 1
Gov. Rutledge - 1	Gov. Rutledge - 1
Duane - 1	Duane - 1
Hamilton - 1	Hamilton - 1
Bingham - 1	Bingham - 1
aboot - 1	aboot - 1
Thompson - 1	Thompson - 1
Mathews - 1	Mathews - 1
for 26 <sup>th</sup> Sept. Gov. Rutledge - 1 x	for 26 <sup>th</sup> Sept. Gov. Rutledge - 1 x
Bingham - 1	Bingham - 1
Curtis Jones - 1	Curtis Jones - 1
Gardner - 1	Gardner - 1
Dane - 1	Dane - 1
Gerry - 1	Gerry - 1
Gorham - 1	Gorham - 1
Thorne - 1	Thorne - 1
Berce - 1	Berce - 1
Blount - 1	Blount - 1
Carrington - 1	Carrington - 1
President - 1	President - 1
Holton - 1	Holton - 1
22	25

Sarah Jay's Dinner Invitation List, 1787-1788



*Anna Marika  
Bayard Jay  
(1670-1756)*

Sarah was not the first Jay woman to leave her mark on New York City. The two generations of women before her, solidified the Jays place as one of New York's prominent early American families.

Anna Marika Bayard was born in 1670, the daughter of Balthazar Bayard. Balthazar was a merchant and brewer who was related to many of the prominent families in Dutch New York. Anna was also the great niece of Dutch colonial governor, Peter Stuyvesant and also had Van Cortlandt family connections.

It was due to "marrying up" that John Jay's grandfather, Augustus Jay was able to prosper as a merchant. John Jay wrote that it was through marriage that his grandfather "enriched his circle" and was able to promote his "interests as a merchant."

Anna Marika had two children that lived to adulthood. One of them was John Jay's father Peter.



*Mary  
VanCortlandt Jay  
(1705-1777)*

Peter Jay married Mary Van Cortlandt in 1732. Mary came from a prosperous land-owning family. Her father, Jacobus Van Cortlandt was a major landowner in Westchester County and the Bronx.

Very little is known about Mary Van Cortlandt Jay. No letters from or images of her survive. Mary had ten children; her eighth was John Jay.

The property that John built his Westchester farm on had once belonged to his grandfather Jacobus and was bequeathed to him by his mother.

After the death of Sarah Jay in 1802, her daughters and daughters in law continued to effectively run the household and raise the future generations of the family.

Maria, Nancy and Augusta were all very involved in the education of the younger children. Nancy and Maria first supervised their siblings schooling, and then the three women educated William and Augusta's children. Family letters often mention the women teaching the children writing, spelling, sewing and music.



Forte Piano c.1821-1836



Nancy, Maria, and Augusta were all members of the Missionary Society at Saint Matthew's Church.

They often made articles of clothing and sold them to raise money for the missions. Socks, purses, lace collars and needle cases would have been made at sewing tables in the parlor.



Sewing table c.1780



*Mary Clarkson Jay*  
(1786-1838)

The family of John Jay's eldest son, Peter Augustus, frequently visited Bedford House, and his wife Mary Clarkson Jay was a welcomed visitor. Mary is mentioned as being at Bedford House often and appears to have fit right in with the other women.

*"Give my love to Papa & tell him I shall be fearful to play chess with him as I have practiced so little, he will easily obtain the victory- I presume you have grown quite expert at it. Maria in her last letter to your brother says William is teaching her the game."*

- Mary Clarkson Jay to Nancy Jay, January 7th, 1808

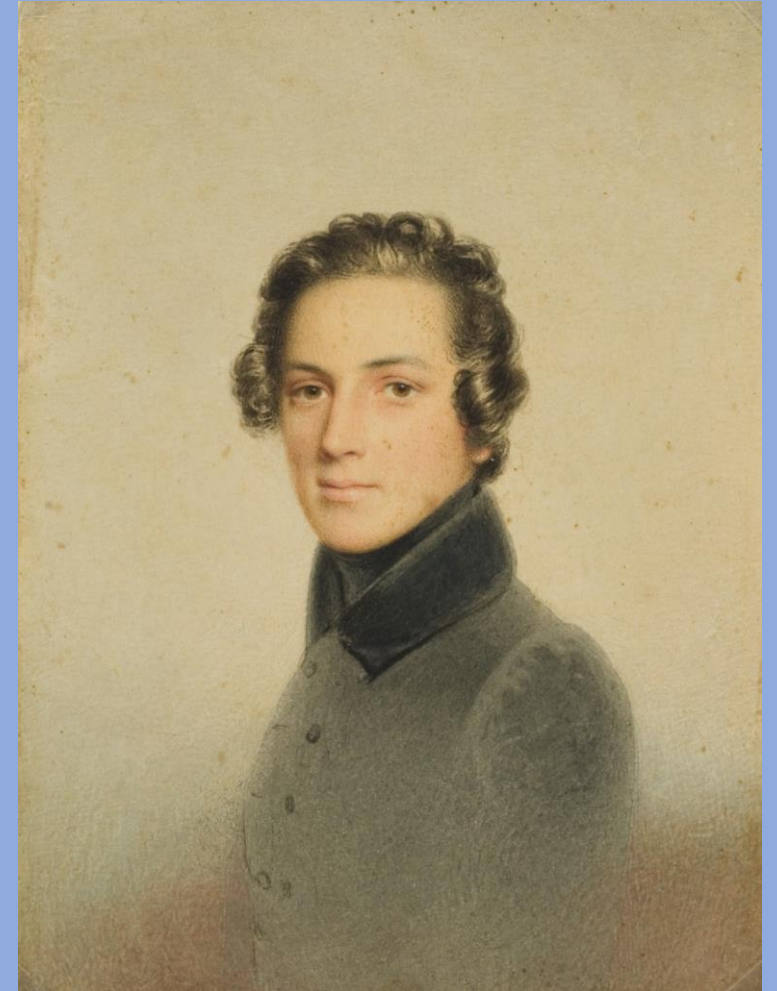


John Jay's chess set c. early 19<sup>th</sup> century



When John Jay died in 1829, Maria and Nancy Jay moved out and Augusta took over the running of the home.

Augusta McVickar continued to dedicate her life to her religion and her family. Her only surviving son, John Jay II married Eleanor Kingsland Field at Bedford House in June of 1837.



John Jay II in 1836; aged 19



*Eleanor Kingsland  
Field Jay  
(1819-1909)*



Eleanor Kingsland Field Jay came from a well established New York family. When William Jay died in 1858, John Jay II inherited the house and Eleanor turned it into a Victorian Estate.

John Jay II and his family primarily resided in New York City, and treated Bedford House as a country retreat. Eleanor wanted to make Bedford House hers and made a number of changes to match her design aesthetic. She had the exterior painted yellow with brown trim and had the entire roofline changed to match the “Victorian style.”



Bedford House 1868



Eleanor was known for her unwavering, unyielding attitude.

Her granddaughter once said that she:

*“followed her own ideas and inclinations. She cared not what the fashion of the day might be, nor for public opinion. She was completely consistent and unaffected...”*



Eleanor Field Jay c. 1880



*Lucie Oelrichs Jay*  
(1854-1931)



Lucie Oelrichs married the only son of John Jay II and Eleanor Field Jay, William Jay II, in 1878. The family would reside in New York City, but visit Bedford House in the spring and autumn.

Once her husband inherited the farm, Lucie developed a clear vision as Lady of the House, this included returning the exterior of the house to the white and black color scheme. Lucy had three daughters. Tragically, two of Lucie's daughters died before adulthood. Only her daughter Eleanor survived.



Bedford House 1903





*Eleanor Jay Iselin*  
(1882-1953)

In 1915, Eleanor Jay Iselin took over the property. An avid golfer and horsewoman, Eleanor loved living in the country. She and her husband Arthur had four children.

Eleanor Iselin was responsible for the largest addition to the house since its construction. Concerned about the risk of fire, Eleanor had the wing made out of masonry construction and moved many of the family valuables into the Big Room.

Always aware of the significance of the house and her family lineage, Eleanor had hoped it would be open to the public in some way.



Big Room c.1930





*Eleanor Iselin Wade*  
(1910-2003)



Eleanor Iselin Wade was the daughter of Eleanor and Arthur Iselin. Starting at a very young age she showed promise as an artist. Her primary subject matter was horses.



She became a well-known sculptor of race horses, like Gallant Fox. She also illustrated a number of books, including the second edition of *My Friend Flicka*.

In the 1940s she moved out west and in the 1950s she married a range detective named Cactus Wade. She continued to sculpt until her death in 2003 at the age of 92.