



**Robert Clark Morris**  
1869 - 1938

Founder of the  
Robert Clark Morris and  
Aline Brothier Morris Fund in

The New York Community Trust  
909 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

*In 1939, the will of Robert Clark Morris established the Robert Clark Morris and Aline Brothier Morris Fund, to be administered by the New York Community Trust for charitable purposes.*

"Truly we as a community had reason to remember the father. Now as a town we have reason to remember the son, and proud are we indeed of the name we bear."

These words, written by the town clerk of Morris, Connecticut, in 1859, were addressed to Dwight Morris, the son of James Morris for whom the town was named, in thanks for a gift of books. Three-quarters of a century later the town had reason to remember the grandson as well, when Dwight Morris's son, Robert Clark Morris, presented the town with a museum in honor of his ancestor and a reading room in memory of his wife. It was a gesture typical of a man who was proud of his heritage yet modest about his own spectacular career.

Robert Clark Morris was born on November 19, 1869, at "Lindencroft," the family home in Bridgeport, Connecticut, the descendant of many generations of New England ancestors. It is probable that from them he inherited the character, intellectual power, and sense of responsibility that marked both his public and his private life.

The Morris family originated in Wales and first set foot in the New World in Boston in 1637. A later branch was established in New Haven and a son of that line, James Morris, moved early in the eighteenth century to the western part of Connecticut, settling in a section of Litchfield then known as the "Ecclesiastical Society of South Farms."

James Morris had a son, also known as James, who was born and grew up in South Farms. Intending to become a minister, he studied privately, then attended Yale and was graduated in 1775. Somehow he was sidetracked from his original purpose and taught school until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. Commissioned a captain, James Morris fought in battles in Long Island, White Plains, and Germantown. While he was serving with Washington's troops in Pennsylvania, he was taken prisoner and held, according to the detailed documentation of his own memoirs, "three years and three months, lacking one



*James Morris*

day." Freed during a prisoner exchange, Captain Morris rushed back to South Farms to visit his parents and also to marry his sweetheart.

The Revolution over, civilian James Morris went back to teaching. He had an extensive library which he opened freely to intellectually curious boys and girls of his town. His generosity aroused the vociferous disapproval of some citizens who brought charges against Morris for "disturbing the peace of the church," because they believed such exposure to book learning could only result in "blowing up the pride" of the young and making them "feel themselves above their mates and feel above labor." The charges were later dropped when cooler heads prevailed. And by 1803 the townspeople had undergone so complete a change of heart that they cheerfully built an academy for Morris. It drew students not only from local areas but from surrounding states and abroad as well. Because the curricula of Morris Academy were equivalent to what most colleges were offering at the time — and because these colleges did not admit women — Robert Morris later described Morris Academy as "the first co-educational institution of higher learning in the United States."

Though he was sixty-one years old when the War of 1812 began, Morris was such a patriot that he was soon back in uniform with the rank of colonel. When the war was over, he returned for a few last years as

an educator. By now a widower, he remarried and at the age of 66 produced a son, Dwight Morris, who was to be the father of Robert Clark Morris. James Morris died in 1820, when Dwight was 2½ years old.

In 1859, descendants of the people who had once accused James Morris of breach of the peace decided to break away from the town of Litchfield. The center of that town, where meetings and elections were held, was more than four miles away — much too far to travel in those days. Besides, their taxes were being spent to maintain roads and bridges they claimed never to use. So they organized a new town and named it "Morris" after the academy and the man that had brought fame to their area.

Meantime, Dwight Morris had grown up to become a prosperous Bridgeport lawyer who gave his share of public service. A colonel in the Civil War, he later declined President Lincoln's offer of appointment as Federal Judge for the Territory of Idaho, but served in the U.S. Consular Service in France and was the Secretary of State of Connecticut. Contemporaries apparently found him impressive: One who knew him said, "His personal appearance was striking, his figure erect, and he carried himself with a military bearing. He was courtly, dignified, yet genial and well beloved by his friends and companions." Another said, "There is a charm in his old-time affability and courtesy that cannot be described. But few public men in the state possess more fascinating ways."

Now in 1869, ten years after the town of Morris came into being, Robert Clark Morris was born to Dwight Morris and his second wife, Elizabeth Clark



*Dwight Morris*

Morris, 27 years his junior. It is not surprising that Robert Clark Morris combined many of the characteristics of his father and grandfather. Like his grandfather, he had a high regard for education, and combined teaching with his law career. Like his father, he became a talented lawyer who evidently preferred to appear before the bench rather than on it, for he, too, declined two judgeships. Like them both, he had a strong sense of patriotism, but he showed his talents as a penman, rather than as a military man.

Robert Morris graduated from Yale with a Bachelor of Laws degree in 1890 and was admitted to the Connecticut Bar the same year. Before going into practice, he continued his studies on both sides of the Atlantic. Then, with two additional degrees and a period of study in Europe behind him, he established an office in New York. After practicing privately for several years, he joined Swayne, Swayne, Morris & Fay, and soon after became senior partner in a succession of firms bearing his name. When Morris, Plante & Saxe was dissolved in 1937, he became associated with Delafield, Marsh, Porter & Hope until his death.

Over nearly half a century in which he was with these firms, Morris handled a variety of interesting legal assignments. In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him to represent the United States before the U.S. and Venezuelan Claims Commission in Caracas, a delicate diplomatic situation in which the U. S. acted to bring about an amicable settlement of claims pressed by various European powers against the financially unstable Venezuelan government. After World War I, President Warren G. Harding assigned him to a similar position before the Mixed Claims Commission of the United States and Germany. It was his responsibility to present claims of the United States and its citizens against Germany for satisfaction of her financial obligations under the Peace Treaty. In his two years of service he surveyed, classified, and initiated formal action on 12,416 separate claims aggregating close to a billion and a half dollars.

At another time Morris was involved in the case of Bolo Pasha, a notorious French traitor of World War I. Bolo had persuaded Germany to hand over to him millions of dollars to be used to influence the French press in favor of a German peace. In the spring of 1916 Bolo stayed in New York while he made secret connections with the German Ambassador in

Washington. When the French government became aware of Bolo's activities, it appealed to the governor of New York for evidence. Ten days of intensive work by the New York State attorney general, to whom Morris was called to serve as counsel, turned up sensational disclosures of Bolo's treachery that led to his arrest and execution in Paris.

Other assignments were perhaps less exciting but showed Morris's versatility. Banking authorities asked him to study a series of private bank failures. The State of Missouri retained him to go before the U. S. Supreme Court to challenge the authority of national banks to conduct branch banking. And he was named to a commission to establish a New York City subway route. Morris was also politically active. As president of the Republican Committee of New York in his younger days, he led the fusion ticket that overthrew formidable Tammany Hall opposition and swept city offices.

Throughout Robert Morris's busy career, he carefully reserved time for teaching and writing. For nine years he lectured at Yale Law School on the subject of French law. For eight more years, his subject was international arbitration and procedure, on which he published a text book. Later he took government and citizenship as his theme for two more years of lecturing. Altogether, he taught at Yale for 19 years.

As time went on, he was able to devote more time to writing, and he published a number of books and pamphlets. One, "The Pursuit of Happiness," was a discussion of the powers and opportunities people can exercise in their government in order to maintain stability in private business. Others expressed the author's support for the position of the U. S. government in World War I.

In 1931, when Robert Morris was 62 years old, he married a beautiful, vivacious French woman of 44 (his first marriage had ended in divorce). Born in France, convent-educated in the manner of the day yet dissatisfied with the limited perspective of such schooling, quick-minded Aline Brothier read avidly and traveled widely in a successful effort to broaden her own education. After World War I, during which she had worked in a hospital in Paris treating tetanus victims, she came to the United States. Fascinated by American history and government, she continued her informal studies. Eventually she became a U.S. citizen,



*Aline Brothier Morris*

observing along the way the "very decided tendency" on the part of native-born citizens to relegate naturalized citizens to second class status. This was wrong, she insisted — naturalized and native-born must feel equal and be treated as equals.

She was called by her friend Robert Norwood, the rector of St. Bartholomew's Church in New York, "my little fighter." Others described her as having "a way of bringing those to whom she was speaking to a fair consideration of her point of view and was usually successful in winning them over to her way of thinking." It is not at all surprising that she managed to persuade a major political party to establish a bureau of its national committee in a presidential campaign to carry on her fight against bias toward naturalized citizens as a political project — or that the *other* major political party immediately followed suit. The efforts of Aline Brothier Morris, later continued by Morris himself, did, in fact, a great deal to improve the status of naturalized citizens.

What must have seemed to their friends a brilliant match was destined not to last long. On October 6, 1932, only seventeen months after their marriage, Aline Brothier Morris died. Six years later almost to the day, Robert Morris died, a month short of his sixty-ninth birthday, on October 13, 1938. There were no children.

During his last six years, Morris must have been impressed many times by his place in a chain of human

events. In January of 1935, he traveled to the quiet little town of Morris, Connecticut, where his own roots lay deepest. There he dedicated the James Morris Museum and the Aline Brothier Morris Reading Room, filled with family heirlooms and personal books. A newspaper reporter who recorded the ceremonies seems to have been aware of the coincidences when, referring to James Morris and Aline Brothier Morris, she wrote, "And so two lives, more than a century apart, are united, not only in family relationships, but through their impact upon, among other things, the bigotry of who will or will not be educated and who is or who is not qualified as a whole American . . ."

A colleague wrote of him, "The two interests closest to the heart of Robert C. Morris were his profession and his country and where his heart was interested he was always ready to bear his share, and more than his share of responsibility. This characteristic united with his remarkable vigor, his ability and his character in bringing to him positions of high honor and service, which he filled with distinction."

It might be added that awareness of his heritage and pride in the name he bore also helped to mold Robert Clark Morris into the man that he was.



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