

# Builder, Businessman and State Senator Robert Bruce Langdon 1826 – 1895

*Several Minnesota Colonial Dames descend from Robert Langdon, Minnesota businessman and builder: Eleanor Lawler Crosby Winston, Katharine Stewart Winston, Caroline Jane Winston Life, Sarah Brooks Lindahl, Lucy Sturgis Crosby Mitchell, Tammis Archambo McMillan and Elizabeth Langdon McMillan Ringer with the added possibility of Julia Washburn Morrison Palmer and Julia Hunter Palmer Wright.*

The life of Robert Bruce Langdon in Minneapolis was part of the phenomenal growth and prosperity of the young metropolis at the headwaters of the Mississippi.

Mr. Langdon was born on November 24, 1826 in Vermont, and married Sara Smith, also of New Haven, Vermont, on February 28, 1859 in new Haven, Vermont.

From 1848 until the time of his death in 1895, Mr. Langdon was engaged in the construction of railroads. From age twenty, he worked with engineers of the Rutland and Burlington Railroads being built through new Haven, Vermont. From there he was employed by a prominent railroad builder Selah Chamberlain, going west with him to complete contracts in Ohio. Later he moved to Wisconsin and Illinois employed by various railroads to fence land along the line. When he had completed his contacts and paid the workers, he was left without a dollar.

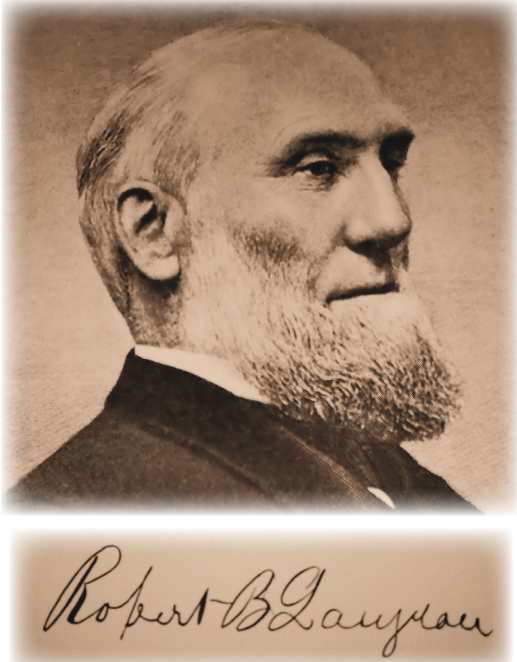


Figure 1. Robert Bruce Langdon

Always moving and meeting the right people in position of hire, he soon became a superintendent of a flour mill in Horicon, Wisconsin. After the season, he was able to pay

off what was left of his indebtedness, when he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota and arrived just as the U.S. Congress passed the railroad land grant act and opened the state to settlement.

Under the direction of Mr. Langdon, ground was broken for a railroad in Minnesota in 1858, the year Minnesota was admitted as a state. He took contracts for grading, masonry and bridge work on the Great Northern Railroad, at the time called the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. Ultimately, he moved to Mendota, formerly called St. Peter's, the oldest town in Minnesota, at the junction of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.

In 1863, he was to hired build the trestle and stone piers on the bridge across the Minnesota River from Fort Snelling to Mendota. It was here that Lieutenant Pike made the treaty with the Dakota for land for Fort Snelling.



Figure 2. Railroad bridge from Fort Snelling to Mendota

Mr. Langdon lived with his family nearly three years from 1863 to 1866 in the former home of Minnesota's first Governor, Henry Hastings Sibley.



Figure 2. Governor Sibley's house and home of the Langdon family from 1863 to 1866

During the year 1866, Mr. Langdon built the water power canal in the Mississippi river for the Minneapolis Milling Company. He built the first Washburn Flour Mill, called Washburn B Mill. The Minneapolis Milling Company and the Washburn Flour Mill would become General Mills. The limestone taken from the canal was used to build the First National Bank and other buildings.

In 1868, Mr. Langdon was first assistant chief of the Volunteer Fire Department of Minneapolis. He built bridges across the Mississippi River at Hastings, St. Paul and St. Cloud and bridged the Minnesota River at Mendota (see Figure 1) and Chaska. His business grew from small operations to an immense industry, employing thousands of men.

Mr. Langdon belonged to the Whig party until 1861, when he became connected with the Republican Party. In 1872, he was elected to the Minnesota Senate to represent the northern part of Hennepin County and a part of the city of Minneapolis. He took his seat in the Senate in 1873 and held the office for twelve years.

In 1884, the residents of the county seat of Cavalier County, North Dakota chose to name their city Langdon, after Robert Langdon.

Mr. Langdon was an active participant as a legislator and was distinguished for the close attention he paid to the interest of the community that he represented and for his sound and practical ideas. He served on the standing committees, such as elections, railroads, state prisons, and retrenchment and reform.

Mr. Langdon was connected with many other business enterprises becoming involved with the North Star Woolen Mill Company.



*Figure 3. North Star Woolen Mills historic sign still maintained*

He was president of the Minneapolis Syndicate, a corporation that build the syndicate Block that turned retail trade from Washington Avenue to Nicollet Avenue. He was a partner in the largest wholesale grocery in the state, the George R. Newell and Co.



*Figure 4. The Minneapolis Syndicate Block about 1895*

Mr. Langdon was active in his community in various offices, including director of the Twin City Stockyards of New Brighton; vice president of the City Bank; director of the Terminal Elevator Co. as well as a leading member of various social organizations. He was a delegate to the Republican Convention in Cincinnati in 1876 and again in Chicago in 1888, where he used his influence to secure the national convention for Minneapolis in June 1892.

Robert Langdon was a prominent leader of social and commercial endeavors that moved our state into competitive markets both nationwide and across Canada as well.

*Sources: Robert Bruce Langdon and His Descendants; by Caroline Langdon Brooks, Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Miller Publishing Co. 1926, New England Genealogical and Historical Register, Vol. 3 p. 153, Vol. 9 pp 89, 171. Vol 18 p. 153, Vol. 39, p. 50.*

*Burt's first Century of Springfield, Massachusetts., Vol. 1 pp 43, 191. Vol II. P 589.*

# Colonial Dames Roots

## Governor Thomas Dudley

In addition, these Langdon descendants, Eleanor Lawler Crosby Winston, Katharine Stewart Winston, Sarah Brooks Lindahl and Lucy Sturgis Crosby Mitchell share a common Colonial Dames ancestor, Massachusetts Colonial Governor Thomas Dudley.

The year is 1629. The Winthrop fleet company elects John Winthrop as their governor, but when their deputy governor decides to sail on a later ship, Thomas Dudley is chosen to be the deputy governor. The next year, 1630, the ship the Arbella arrives in the New World. As all good Colonial Dames know Winthrop's sermon regarding the "shining city on a hill," Thomas Dudley was there to hear the words spoken the very first time. The company chose to settle initially at Charlestown (first called Newtowne). Later they would cross the Charles River to build the city of Boston as their example of the shining city on a hill.

Dudley would go on to serve the Massachusetts Bay Colony as its colonial governor four times, becoming that colony's third, seventh, eleventh and fourteenth governor. As the colony's governor, it is his signature in 1650 that established Harvard College.

All was not always heavenly in the new shining city. John Winthrop was a strong force to be dealt with and Dudley did not always agree with him. They did however agree on the banishment of Anne Hutchinson from the colony. Mrs. Hutchinson might not have been the first and she definitely wasn't the last, to be banned in Boston.



Figure 5. Portrait of Anne Dudley Bradstreet (poetryfoundation.org)

Lest we think the Honorable Governor Dudley did not cotton to strong, talented women, his daughter Anne, whose married name was Anne Bradstreet, became the first published female poet in the new world. Her first volume of poetry was *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*,

published in 1650.

Sources: Dudley, Dean (1848). *The Dudley Genealogies and Family Records*. Boston, Massachusetts: self-published

Governor Thomas Dudley Family Association (1894). *The First Annual Meeting of the Governor Thomas Dudley Association, Boston, Massachusetts.*, 17 Oct. 1893. Boston, Massachusetts: self-published

## William Swayne

Langdon descendants Tammis McMillan and Elizabeth Langdon McMillan Ringer share the Colonial ancestor, William Swayne

William Swayne was born 1585 in England, was one of the six founders of Wethersfield, Connecticut.



Figure 5. Names of the founders of Wethersfield on this marker are today found along the Old Connecticut Path that was the trail from Boston to Connecticut in Colonial times.

William Swayne "gentleman," aged fifty years, came from London, 1635, in the "Elizabeth and Ann." He received a grant of sixty acres at Watertown, Massachusetts. He was made a freeman, and served as representative in Massachusetts in May, 1636. In September of the same year he held court in the new colony of Wethersfield, where he had acquired "adventure lands." He was appointed with Roger Ludlow and Andrew Ward as commissioners to govern the people until the adoption of the Constitution in 1639. He was a member of the Court that tried the first offender; enacted the first law, and declared war against the Pequots in 1637. His name appears prominently in the purchase of the plantation of Totokett, where he settled in 1644. He was successively deputy, juror and magistrate.<sup>1</sup>

During the Pequot war, while probably at work upon their father's land, and not near their dwelling house, two of Mr. Swayne's daughters were captured by the Indians and

taken to where New London is today. The oldest daughter was but sixteen. They were rescued by a Dutch trading vessel.

John Winthrop wrote in his diary, the Dutch governor sent a sloop to redeem the two English maidens, by what so ever means, though it was a breach of their peace with the Pequots. The sloop offered a large reward for their release; but nothing would be accepted. The Dutch finally redeemed the two maids by trading six Pequots that they had on board their sloop. Happily, while kept by the Pequots, no violence was offered them.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Swayne's daughter Mary married in new Haven. He held an estate of 435 acres in Branford, which he did not occupy long, as his death must have occurred in the first years of the settlement of the colony.

<sup>1</sup> *The History of New Haven to its absorption into Connecticut by Edward Elias Atwater, Lucy M. Hewitt, Bessie E. Beach published by Journal Publishing Company 1902*

<sup>2</sup> *The History of ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut : comprising the present towns of Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington, and of Glastonbury prior to its incorporation in 1693 : from date of earliest settlement until the present time, by Adams, Sherman W. (Sherman Wolcott), 1836-1898. 4n; Stiles, Henry Reed, 1832-1909. cn)*

## George Maris

*Ancestor of Julia Washburn Morrison Palmer and Julia Hunter Palmer Wright*

Imagine that it is August 25, 1883. Your family is having a reunion at the old farmstead in Pennsylvania to honor your family patriarch, George Maris. You arrive on the West Chester and Philadelphia Railroad and disembark at the Morton station.

From there, horse drawn vehicles, great and small, freighted with young and old, grave and gay, drive three miles to the north and one mile to the east and deposit their passengers midst the welcoming throng.

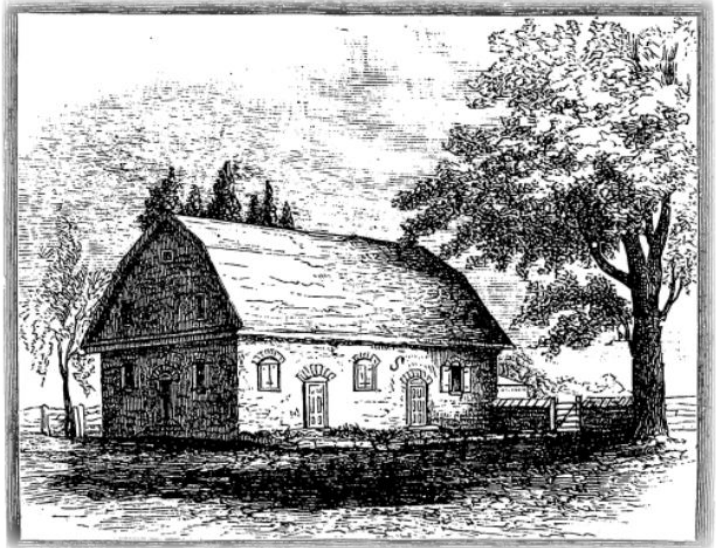
Here are some of the words spoken that day.

George Maris and his wife Alice and their six children lived in Grafton Flyford in the county of Worcester. George's life in England was oppressive, because he could not conform to the customs of the established church: for having a religious meeting at his house he was fined 20 pounds. Afterwards, he was sent to prison on the 23d of the month called July, 1670, and continued there above eight months, but never knew for what cause, he was so long imprisoned. There seemed to be no way left but to emigrate. The Colony of Pennsylvania was founded a year or two before and William Penn, whom all Friends so much admired, had already sailed. But before he left, he received the permission of the Friends meeting to which he belonged. He also purchased land in Pennsylvania from Robert Toomer. Upon arriving to this land in Pennsylvania, he began the work of

clearing the timber. But he had barely begun when he was commissioned Justice of the Peace with six others to hold the Courts of Chester. He took his seat on the bench on the first day of the fifth month in 1684 and served until 1690. Again in 1691 until 1693 he gave assiduous attention to his judicial duties. He was chosen a member of the Assembly in 1684, and continued to be elected annually until 1693, with the exception of 1689.

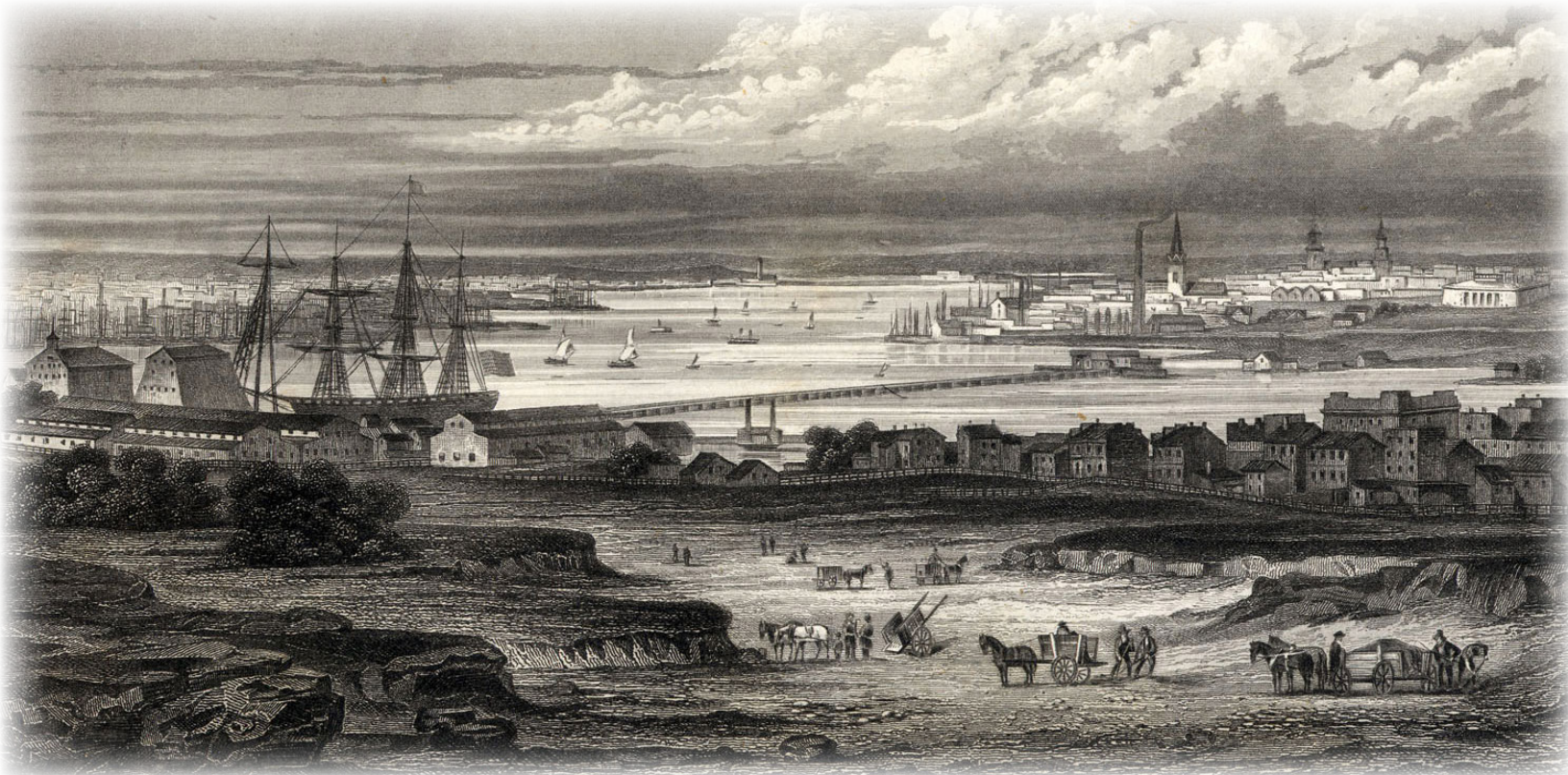
He was a minister in the Society of Friends. He was also a member of the Yearly Meeting of Ministers, which met at Burlington and Philadelphia.

George Maris lived in this country twenty two years (being over fifty years of age when he left England), during the first twelve of which he was constantly occupied with affairs of Church and State; he was not a man of many words, nor did he push himself forward into public place; he was clearly a man of gentle manners and of unswerving integrity and courage, whose purpose was "to serve the Lord and all people in love."



*Figure 6. The Springfield Pennsylvania Friend's meeting house where George Maris ministered.*

*Paraphrased from The Maris family in the United States: A record of the descendants of George and Alice Maris. 1683-1885 by Maris, George Lewis, 1842 West Chester Pennsylvania p xii - xvii*



*Figure 6. Wallabout Bay named for the Walloons, French speaking Protestants who left Holland for Breuckelen, Wallabout translates as ‘Bay of the Walloons’ and is, today, the site of the former Brooklyn Navy Yard. (1847 engraving <http://whitmans-brooklyn.org/portfolio/wallabout-bay-from-fort-greene-1847/#prettyPhoto>)*

## *Ryer Ryerson, New Jersey*

*Langdon descendant, Caroline Life, claims Ryer Ryerson as her colonial ancestor.*

Colonial ancestor Ryer Ryerson of New Jersey was the son of Marten and Annetje (Rapelje) Ryerson. He was born or baptized in 1669, and died in 1751. He resided in New York in “Breucklen” until he was about 38 years of age. Ryer Ryerson married Rebecca Van Der Scheuren in March of 1696. He is recorded as a church member in Brooklyn in 1698. In the early part of 1707, he moved to Hackensack, New Jersey. He was a freeholder in Bergen County as early as 1715, and a Justice in 1724, being successively re-appointed up to as late as 1750. He and his brothers Joris and Frans were concerned in the purchase of a tract of 600 acres of land lying at the mouth of “Mochra Brook.” In about 1715, he purchased a tract of some 600 acres of land on the north side of the Ramapo river, between Pompton and “the Ponds” (now Oakland), and settled there. The spot on which his dwelling stood was on the north side of the road leading to “the Ponds.” The stone walls of this house were still standing in 1865-70. He and his wife are recorded as members of Pompton (Plains) Church in 1738. Ryer Ryerson was buried in the old family burying ground at “Waggrow” (now Hawthorn), which became a part of the farm of Richard De Gray, Esq.

Ryer Ryerson’s father Marten came from Amsterdam in 1646, and settled on Long Island. On May 14, 1663, he married Annetje Rapelje, at the Dutch Reformed Church of Breucklen (Brooklyn). Annetje’s parents, Joris Jansen Rapelje (28 April 1604 – 21 February 1662/63) and his wife Catalina (Catalyntje) Tricot (1605–1689) were married January 21, 1624, at the Walloon Church of Amsterdam. These two were among the earliest settlers in the New Netherlands, arriving on one of the first ships sent by the West India Company. They also gave birth to the first child born of European descent in the colony, namely Annetje’s eldest sister, Sarah Rapelje, who was born at Fort Orange (now Albany, New York) on June 9, 1625.

The Rapeljes established a residence near the East River, and were among the earliest purchasers of land in Manhattan, later building two houses on Pearl Street near Wall Street. In 1637, Joris Jansen Rapalje purchased about 335 acres (1.36 km<sup>2</sup>) around Wallabout Bay in what is now Brooklyn. In 1641, Joris Jansen Rapalje was one of the Council of Twelve Men representing Manhattan, Breuckelen and Pavonia for the West India Company. From 1655 through 1660, he was a magistrate of Breuckelen, New Netherlands. Because of the number of their descendants, author Russell Shorto has called Joris and Catalina “the Adam and Eve” of New Netherlands, as the number of their descendants has been estimated at about a million.

*Sources: The Ryerson Genealogy by Albert Winslow Ryerson, Copyright, 1916 Edward L. Ryerson; History of Bergen and Passaic Counties, New Jersey, With Biological Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men, W. Woodford Clayton, 1882; The Genealogy of the Ryerson Family in America, by Louis Johnes Ryerson Copyright, 1902; The Island at the Center of the World, Russell Shorto, New York 2004.*