

**ANNUAL ADDRESS  
BEFORE THE ALBANY  
INSTITUTE:  
DELIVERED MAY 25, 1871**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649230747

Annual Address Before the Albany Institute: Delivered May 25, 1871 by Orlando Meads

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**ORLANDO MEADS**

**ANNUAL ADDRESS  
BEFORE THE ALBANY  
INSTITUTE:  
DELIVERED MAY 25, 1871**



ANNUAL ADDRESS

REPORT

THE ALBANY INSTITUTE,

DELIVERED

MAY 25, 1871,

BY

ORLANDO MEADS,

MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE.

---

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

---

ALBANY:  
JOEL MUNSELL.  
1871.

# 6877352

## ANNUAL ADDRESS.

---

*Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Albany Institute :*

Coming before you this evening, by your invitation, to address you, for the second time, after an interval of more than a third of a century, I am reminded of the long career of influence and usefulness this society, now one of the oldest of the kind in the country, has had : of the array of eminent men who have been associated with it, and of the great and lasting benefits to the state and the country which have resulted from their labors. Of those who were the founders of this society or who directed its early efforts, none now remain : of those who were its members at the time of my former address, all, with but few exceptions, have also passed away ; and I have, therefore, been led to think, that it would not be unacceptable to you, as it certainly would be in harmony with my own feelings, that I should endeavor, even in a very imperfect way, to recall to your remembrance some of the leading facts in the history of our society, and to bring before you some of the more prominent persons who have been connected with it.

Eighty years have gone by since the formation of the original society from which the Institute sprung, and which still constitutes its first department. We can hardly, at this day, adequately estimate its importance to the great interests it was intended to promote. We had then just passed through the war of our independence ; our new

national and state governments had but recently been organized; our finances were disordered; a debt, very heavy in proportion to our small means and population, pressed upon us; our internal resources were undeveloped; our agriculture was rude and unscientific, and we had no journals or other means of diffusing information on the subject; we were dependent upon foreign countries for almost every article of manufacture we used; our commerce was small and mainly by way of exchange of products with some of the West India islands; Europe was separated from us by a voyage ordinarily of from sixty to ninety days—its scientific publications and the transactions of its learned societies were accessible to but few among us; the western part of our own state was but little known and still partially occupied by remnants of the Indian tribes, and all beyond was an unbroken wilderness. Between England and ourselves the resentments and alienations, growing out of the war, still burned in the breasts of both peoples, and all the more that we were of the same family; while France, to whom we had been indebted for sympathy and aid in our struggle, was herself in the midst of that revolution that broke up the very foundations both of her society and of her political institutions. Thus we stood, isolated from the rest of the civilized world, occupying only the eastern margin of the great continent, over which we were destined soon to extend our power and population, few in numbers and weak in all but our own resoluteness and energy of character. But we had great men among us—men of keen foresight and large grasp and comprehension of mind—men accustomed to grapple with difficulties and who had learned in the great training school of the revolution both the needs and the resources of the country, and who now brought to the new task of leading us up through the arts of peace, to the condition of a prosperous and self-reliant people, the same practical

wisdom that in their political action had called forth the admiration of Burke and the eloquent commendations of Chatham.

In view of this state of things, a meeting of some of the most eminent citizens of this state was held in February, 1791, in the Senate chamber in the city of New York, that being then the seat of government of the state, for the purpose of organizing a state society for the promotion of agriculture, manufactures and the arts. At this meeting Ezra L'Hommedieu, one of the most distinguished agriculturists of the state, presided, and Chancellor Livingston, Simeon DeWitt and Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill were appointed a committee to prepare and report rules and regulations for the government of the society. The scheme of organization which they reported and which was adopted, was in breadth of view worthy of the men who presented it, and of the great interests it sought to promote. It at once gave to the society a scope that embraced the three leading interests of agriculture, manufactures and the arts, and an organization coextensive with the state. It provided, among other things, and this may be not unworthy of notice, for the division of the state into districts corresponding with the several counties as they then existed, and for the election of a secretary residing in each district who should organize local meetings, oversee local work and be the medium of influence and communication between the district and the central society. Chancellor Livingston was chosen as the first president and held the office up to the time of his death in 1813. An act of incorporation was obtained in 1793, which expired by its own limitation in 1804, when it was permanently renewed, and as thus organized the society still continues and forms the first department of the Institute.

Let us pause here a moment and glance at some of the remarkable men who were among the founders of this



society. At their head stood *Robert R. Livingston*, a man, who for high and varied ability and eminent public service, had no superior in that day of great men. Descended from an ancestry distinguished in two lands for their love of liberty, their patriotism and their talents; himself the representative of one of the leading manorial families of the state—with intellectual endowments of the highest order, and with every advantage for their culture and exercise—the inheritor of ample estates and of everything that would make private life elegant and attractive, he gave himself unreservedly, from the outset to the close of his life of nearly three-score years and ten, in earnest and successful labors, in high public station, or in the not less valuable occupations of his leisure, to promote the welfare of his country and of mankind. Early in life he was recorder of New York; soon afterwards, and at the age of only thirty years, a leading member of the first congress, and one of the committee appointed to draft the declaration of independence, and an eloquent advocate of that measure; then appointed by congress as secretary of state for foreign affairs; then one of the most active and influential members of the convention that formed the first constitution of this state; then an earnest co-worker with Hamilton and Jay to secure the acceptance by this state of the constitution of the United States; then as chancellor of this state for seventeen years, and until his appointment as minister to France; then as minister to that government during the consulate, with which he negotiated the purchase of Louisiana and thus extended our domain to the shores of the Pacific. In all these, one would think there was enough to have filled up the measure of the work and the usefulness of one man; but the recreation and by-play of a great mind are oftentimes of more worth than the life-toil of ordinary men. Through all this course of engrossing public duty, he never relinquished his philo-

sophic tastes, or his interest in agriculture, natural science and the mechanic arts. Our records bear witness to the zeal and intelligence with which he labored for these objects. He maintained an active correspondence on these subjects, with men of science, in other countries; he kept himself acquainted with all the foreign publications of the time; he was unwearied in his agricultural experiments on his own farm, and the results of all these investigations were constantly communicated to the public through this society. During his four years' residence and travels in Europe, no member was more constant in contributions to our journals; nothing that could benefit the interests of agriculture or the arts at home escaped his attention — the nature, treatment and productions of various soils, the succession of crops, the peculiarities and effects of climate, the modes of tillage, the qualities of different kinds of stock — in fact, everything that could be serviceable to the agricultural or economic interests of his own country was observed, with quick and practised eye, and the results communicated to the public through our *Transactions*. To him the country owes the introduction of the merino breed of sheep; and also a treatise on sheep, which appeared in our *Transactions*, and was long a standard work on the subject. He was also the first to introduce in this state, and establish by a course of experiments, the use of gypsum as a restorative to the exhausted soils of some of the older parts of the state. He was also the founder of the old Academy of the Fine Arts in the city of New York; and through his influence, he procured from Napoleon, then first consul, an admirable collection of casts from the masterpieces of ancient sculpture, which the conqueror of Italy had brought as his trophies for the glory and adornment of Paris. I know not whether this collection be still preserved, but it was, at that day, one of great value as a means of art education in this country, and I well remember the pleasure and

interest which my visits to it gave me in my early days. Many years before leaving his own country he had become deeply interested in the subject of steam and its application to the propelling of vessels, and among his early papers in our journals will be found some suggestions for the improvement of the steam engine. His experiments on this subject were steadily prosecuted up to the time of his departure for France, and so confident was he of success, that in 1796 he procured, in advance from the legislature, certain exclusive privileges within this state in case he should succeed in constructing a boat propelled by steam at a rate of not less than four miles an hour. This caused him to be regarded, popularly, as a mere theorist and visionary, and his projected boat was referred to as the chimera. His mission to France interrupted his experiments, but while in Paris he became acquainted with Fulton, whom he associated with him in a renewed course of experiments with a boat on the Seine, and which were continued afterwards on their return to this country, and finally, after a vast outlay on the part of Livingston, resulted in complete success. On his return home he withdrew from his long career of public life, to the quiet of his ancestral estate on the banks of the Hudson. Here, with all the appointments of comfort and elegance which wealth and cultivated tastes could supply, amid scenes of natural beauty not inferior to those of Tusculum and the Alban hills, he, like the great statesmen and orators of old Rome, found the solace and happiness of his declining years, not in ignoble sloth and luxury, but in his books, in his memorials of foreign travel, in converse with chosen friends, and in those useful and elevating studies and pursuits which through all the labors of his public life had ever constituted his highest enjoyment. Here he renewed those experiments by which he sought to raise agriculture from the dead level of routine to something of the intelli-