

Admiral Digby's Vultures

By Brian McConnell, UE*

In the Kingsbridge area of the Bronx, New York is an impressive historic home which houses the Van Cortlandt House Museum. Visiting there on May 16, 2025 I was surprised to see inside the front door two large wooden birds which I was told by one of the volunteers were a gift from Admiral Robert Digby when in New York during the American Revolution.



Van Cortlandt House

The Van Cortlandt House Museum is owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, operated by the National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York, and is a member of the Historic House Trust of New York City. Frederick Van Cortlandt had the house built in 1748 – 1749. During the American Revolution it was in a contested area and at times was held by the British as well as the Americans. General George Washington stayed there and it was also visited by Admiral Robert Digby and Prince William Henry, the future King William IV of the United Kingdom.

“In the rear of the main hall is the dining room where Generals Washington and Rochambeau dined on July 23, 1781 after having reconnoitered the woods on the rear side of Manhattan Island. Later William Henry, Duke of Clarence, afterward King William IV dined here with Admiral Robert Digby of the British Navy.” This report appeared in the New York Times Newspaper on August 8, 1897, page 13.

Another article from the New York Times Newspaper on January 18, 1903, page 2 added that Prince William Henry and Admiral Digby “were profuse in their praises of their hosts “good cheer” and so pleased were they with their entertainment that on their return to New York they sent to Augustus Van Cortlandt the huge teakwood vultures that surmounted for many years the posts of the old gateway facing the stables. These vultures, of grotesque form and truly heraldic design, have a history. They were part of the spoils taken from a Spanish privateer, during the Revolutionary War, and were considered even then in the light of curiosities.”



Inside front door of Van Cortlandt House Museum with wooden Vultures

- Brian McConnell, UE is the Secretary and Past President of the Nova Scotia Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association. He is also a Trustee of the Admiral Digby Museum, an historian, and author of 14 non – fiction books. To contact him email: brianm564@gmail.com