

Bio: Cadwallader Colden
by Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2016

Cadwallader Colden was born in 1688, son of a Scottish clergyman Alexander Colden and his wife Janet Hughes. He was educated at the University of Edinburgh, and as a young man, spent time in his aunt's household in Philadelphia. Returning from America to Scotland he was married about 1715 to Alice Christie. Not long after, the young couple made their home in New York.

Colden had both scholarly and practical experience in the fields of botany, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Throughout his life he studied, experimented, and exchanged ideas with prominent men such as Carolus Linnaeus, and Benjamin Franklin. He was an active member of the American Philosophical Society, and held a prolific correspondence with several other members. His most noted literary contribution was his book, "A History of the Five Indian Nations . . .", published in 1727. In late life he took time to write a number of agricultural and philosophic treatises.

Public service was an integral part of Cadwallader Colden's life. Among many offices, he held the positions of Surveyor General, member and president of the Governor's Council, and Lt Governor of New York. He was also a lifelong "servant" of the Church of England.

Cadwallader Colden and his wife Alice Christie established their home farm, Coldenham, in Ulster (later Orange) county New York. They were the parents of eight children, born between 1716 and 1733, who lived into adulthood – Alexander "Sandie" Colden (m. Elizabeth Nichols); Elizabeth "Bettie" Colden (m. Peter DeLancey); Cadwallader "Caddie" Colden jr (m. Elizabeth Ellison); Jane "Jenny" Colden, noted botanist (m. Dr William Farquhar); Alice "Aly" Colden (m. Col William Willet); Anne or Sarah Colden (m. Thomas Colden, her cousin); John "Johnny" Colden (died unmarried); and David Colden (m. Anne Willet). Alice Christie Colden died in 1762.

In the later years of his life Cadwallader Colden purchased and improved a farm property near Flushing on Long Island. He called it Spring Hill. As the revolutionary war years approached Colden stood firm with England and his King. His support of the Stamp Act in 1765 caused him to be "publicly hung in effigy". He lived at Spring Hill, in semi-retirement, until his death in 1776, at the age of eighty-eight years.

Vincent Mathews (my 7xgreatgrandfather) was a close neighbor and friend to the Colden family. He features regularly in the "Colden Letters". Also, John Markham (6xgreatgrandfather) receives mention in several letters between 1739 – 1749. Markham's Orange county farm, purchased in 1737, adjoined the Colden property. The tone of the Colden Letters suggests that both the Mathews and Markham families were enjoyed and respected friends.

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Cadwallader Colden in the database](#)

[Sketch: John Markham meets Catherine - Friends in the Neighborhood](#)

[Sketch: John Markham moves on to Virginia - Where is the Evidence?](#)

Further Reading:

For interesting and detailed biographies of Cadwallader Colden and Daniel Horsmanden, see *Patriot Improvers*, by Whitfield Jenks Bell; American Philosophical Society, 1997. Available online through googlebooks.

Don't miss the website of the [Coldenham Preservation & Historical Society](#); and this great article on the [Coldenham home](#), from the New York History Blog.