

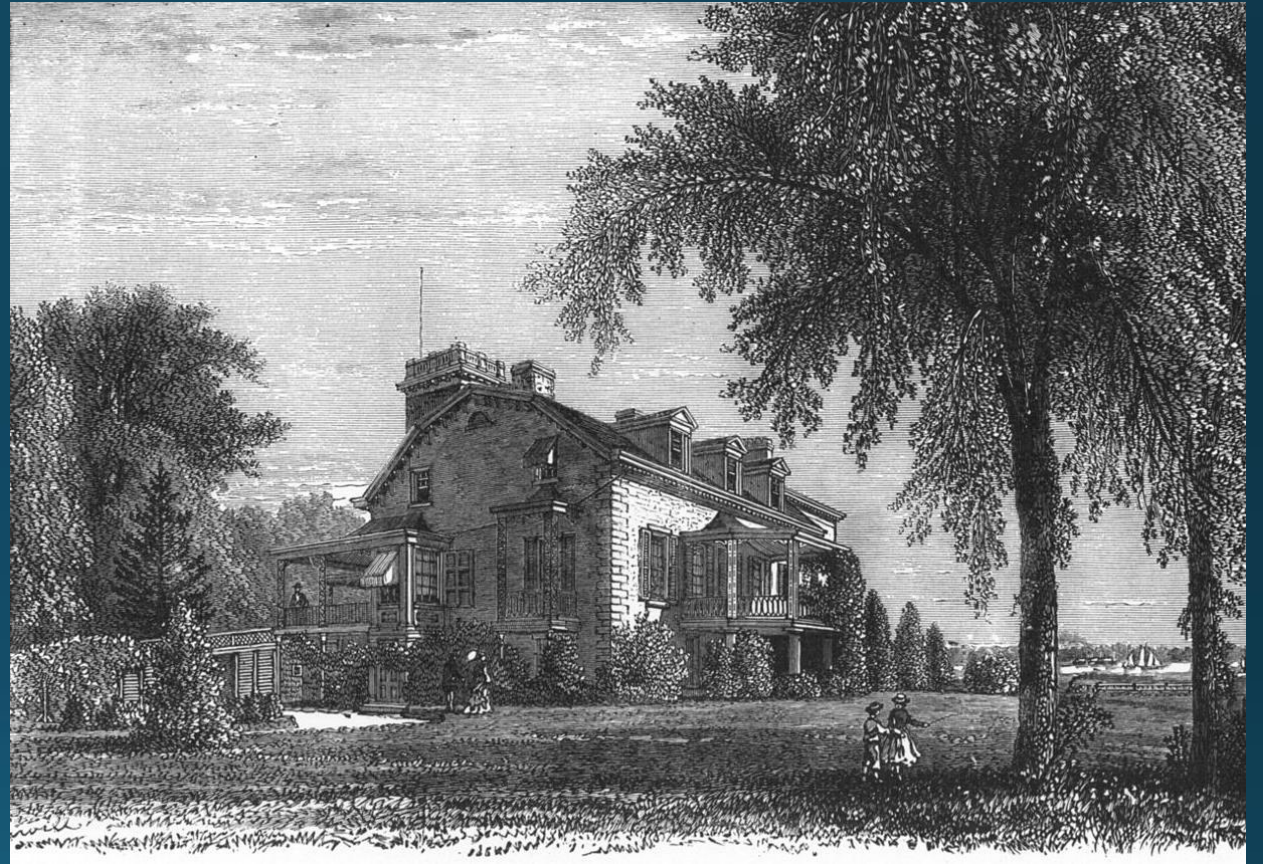
John Jay
and
Gouverneur Morris

Gouverneur Morris was born in New York City at his family's estate, Morrisania in 1752. The only child of his father and mother, he was named Gouverneur, which was his mother's maiden name.

The pronunciation of his name is often questioned. Many pronounce it "Governor", like the head of a state. Our best historical resource on the issue is Abigail Adams, who spelled phonetically, and wrote his name down as "Governeer."



Morris's father was a wealthy landowner which gave Gouverneur access to the finest education of the time. In 1764 at the age of 12 he entered King's College, which today is Columbia University. He graduated in 1768 and received a master's degree in 1771. He studied law with Judge William Smith and attained admission to the bar in 1775.



Morrisania



Morris's path during his early years is almost identical to that of his friend and fellow New Yorker, John Jay.

Born in 1745, Jay came from a wealthy, landowning family who had established themselves among New York's elite.

Jay, who was one of ten children, was privately educated by tutors and entered King's College in 1760 at the age of 14.

Upon graduating in 1764, he became a law clerk for Benjamin Kissam and was admitted to the bar in 1768.

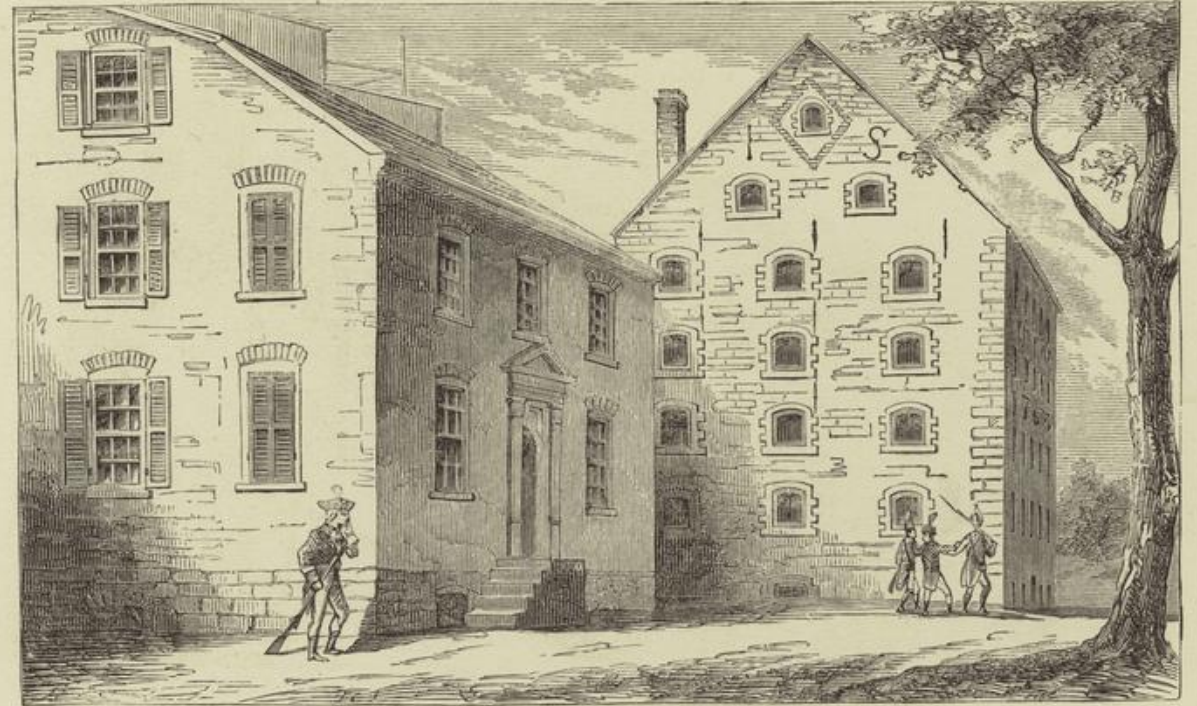
Both men became involved in politics early in the fight for independence. Morris was on the First Provincial Congress in New York in 1775.

In 1774 Jay had been elected to the New York Committee of Correspondence.

While Jay held more moderate political views than Morris, both men supported separation from Britain after attempts at reconciliation had failed.

Jay and Morris both served in the New York Provincial Congress and on several committees during the Revolutionary War. The congress established the Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies, a top-secret team of civilians with a mission to gather information to thwart the enemy's intelligence operations. Jay was appointed the head of the committee with Morris as his second.

The committee worked to discover loyalist supporters and interrogate them. In a two-week period during June 1776, the committee questioned over twenty men, including Morris's mentor and his half-brother.



Rhinelanders' Sugar house, used as a prison during the Revolution.

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One of the most well-known men that Jay and Morris convicted was Thomas Hickey. Hickey was a soldier who had been assigned to protect George Washington. Apparently, a plot to sabotage the continental army had been devised by New York's royal governor, William Tryon and by David Mathews, the loyalist mayor of New York City. The plan involved blowing up bridges, stealing cannons and even kidnapping and possibly assassinating George Washington. The two men recruited four members of Washington's guard to enact the plot, including Thomas Hickey.



Hickey was arrested for passing counterfeit money and while in prison bragged about the plot to other prisoners. One of them alerted the authorities and Hickey was quickly court-martialed. One of his coconspirators testified against him and Hickey was quickly convicted and hanged.

Over 20,000 people attended the hanging. None of the other soldiers were ever tried.



Morris



Jay



Livingston

In August 1776, Jay and Morris were both appointed to a commission to draft the New York State Constitution. The committee was made up of fourteen men, many of them young. Jay was thirty-one, Morris, twenty-five and the other key member Robert R. Livingston, was thirty. Many of the men were attending to other governmental duties, leaving the majority of the writing to Jay and Morris. Both men favored a strong executive branch and supported a strong judiciary.

There are two men who are regarded as being Fathers of the Constitution. One is James Madison; the other is Gouverneur Morris.

When the Constitutional Convention met in 1787, Morris had been living in Philadelphia for nine years; first as a congressman and assistant superintendent of finance for the federal government, then as a lawyer and businessman.

He was chosen to serve as a delegate from Pennsylvania rather than his native New York. While the appointment took him by surprise, he whole heartedly embraced it.

Morris saw himself as a nationalist. He was neither a New Yorker nor Pennsylvanian, he was an American.



Morris spoke more times at the convention than any other delegate, delivering 173 speeches. Many of the speeches had to do with either decrying slavery or promoting nationalism.

In September 1787, Morris was named to the Committee of Style -- a committee of five delegates formed to decide on the Constitution's final wording. Morris was the primary writer, with few contributions from the others. The preamble, however, was altogether Morris's own. The draft supplied by the Committee of Detail simply began: "We the people of the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts . . ." and so on, through Georgia. Morris transformed this into what some argue is the most well-known phrase in American history, "We the People of the United States." In doing this the authority is given by the people of one whole nation, not a collection of states.

“The finish given to the style and arrangement of the Constitution fairly belongs to the pen of Mr. Morris. A better choice could not have been made.”

-James Madison

Morris had mixed feelings about the final draft of the Constitution, but he did believe in the need for one, centralized government. In 1803 he wrote:

"In adopting a republican form of government, I not only took it as man does his wife, for better, for worse, but what few men do with their wives, I took it knowing all its bad qualities."

Gouverneur Morris is often remembered as a “ladies man.” One of the reasons that Morris did so well with women was because he enjoyed their company; both platonically and intimately. He was a stunning conversationalist and found women to be easier to converse with than men.

As a young man Morris courted Kitty Livingston, John Jay’s sister-in-law, which did not result in marriage. After that there are many mentions of Morris’s “taste for pleasure”, but no mention of other serious relationships.



Morris has not forgotten you. He is busy; and daily employed in making oblations to Venus."

- John Jay to Robert Livingston February 16, 1779

The following year Morris was in a carriage accident that resulted in his leg being amputated below the knee. Learning of this while in Spain, Jay wrote:

"News of Gouverneur's leg has been a tax on my heart. I am almost tempted to wish he had lost something else."

-John Jay to Robert Morris, September 16, 1780

Morris traveled to France on personal business in 1789. He then served as Minister Plenipotentiary to France from 1792-1794. In total, he would stay in Europe for almost a decade; keeping a very detailed diary during this time.

It is in that diary that he documents his many love affairs. It appears Morris preferred lovers were married women with “dull or vicious husbands”.

He is known to have had affairs with American poet and novelist Sarah Apthorp Morton and German socialite Henriette von Crayen among others.



Sarah Apthorp Morton



His most well documented relationship was with French novelist Comtesse Adelaide de Flahaut. Her husband was a count, 30 years her senior. As a result of his job in the royal court, the count had two apartments in the Louvre, one for him and one for Adelaide and her many visitors.

“Go to the Louvre... we take the Chance of Interruption and celebrate in the Passage while [Mademoiselle] is at the Harpsichord in the Drawing Room. The husband is below. Visitors are hourly expected. The Doors are all open.”

-Gouverneur Morris's Diary

Notes for context: Mademoiselle is Adelaide's daughter. “Celebrate” is Morris's euphemism for intercourse.

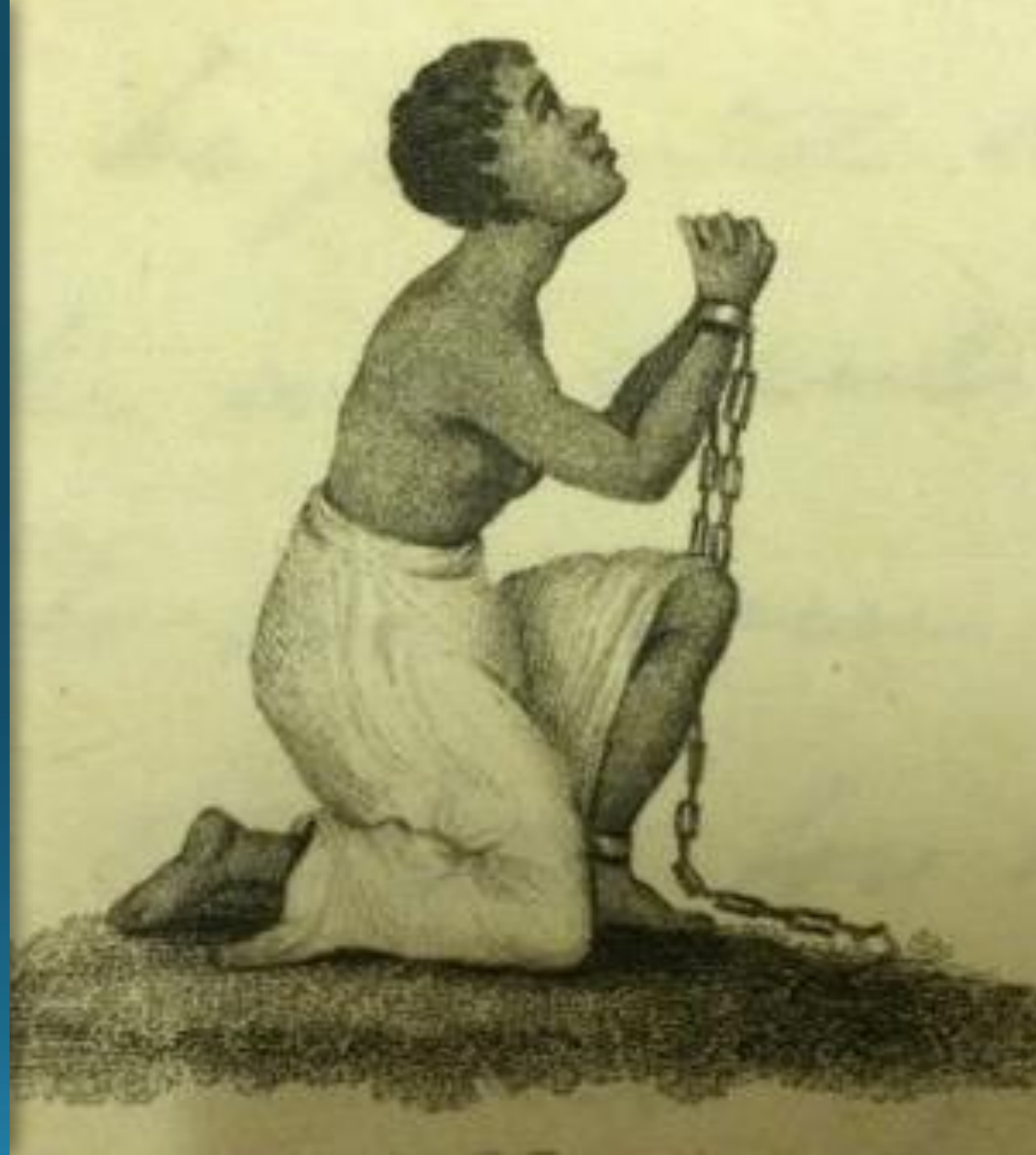
In October of 1794, Morris left Paris. He traveled throughout Europe for four years visiting various friends and acquaintances. One of his last diary entries before he departs for New York in October 1798, tells of one last European tryst,

"On my Return call on Madame Ishlaer and tho' I make but a short Visit, she is extremely well pleased with it. I gave her indeed three Times a good Reason to be satisfied."

Gouverneur Morris held strong antislavery views his whole life. He never was a slave holder and found the institution abhorrent.

In 1777 he and Jay attempted to include a clause in the New York State Constitution that would gradually abolish slavery.

Morris thought that freeing slaves during war times could be dangerous, thus supporting a gradual abolishment. The motion was not adopted at the State Constitutional Convention.



In 1787 at the Federal Constitutional Convention, Morris was more direct and unrelenting when it came to his views on slavery. When it came to the enslaved being represented in the congress he said:

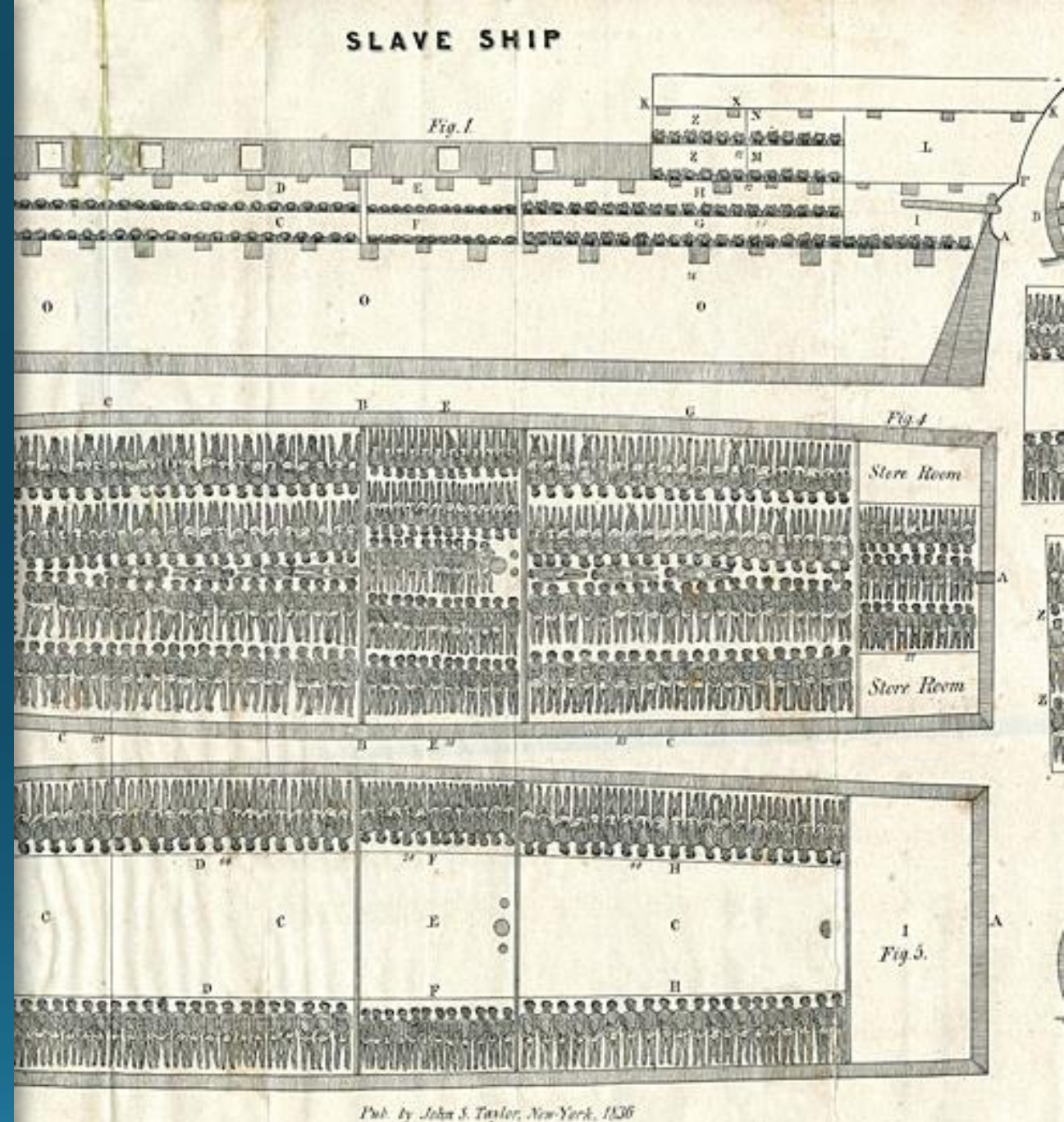
“Upon what principle is it that the slaves shall be computed in the representation? Are they men? Then make them Citizens & let them vote. Are they property? Why then is no other property included? The Houses in this city (Phila.) are worth more than all the wretched slaves which cover the rice swamps of South Carolina.

The admission of slaves into the Representation when fairly explained comes to this: that the inhabitant of Georgia and South Carolina who goes to the Coast of Africa, and in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity tears away his fellow creatures from their dearest connections & damns them to the most cruel bondages, shall have more votes in a Govt. instituted for protection of the rights of mankind, than the Citizen of Pa. or N[ew] Jersey who views with a laudable horror, so nefarious a practice.”

After Morris returned from Europe in late 1798, he purchased two slaves. His practice in regard to slavery was to immediately manumit them but bind them to indentures for a period of time. He paid them wages, which appear in his account books. He also periodically hired free black men to work on the Morrisania farm.

John Jay grew up in a slave holding household; his father Peter owned at least a dozen slaves at a time and was an investor in slave ships.

The largest number of enslaved people we know that John owned at one time was six. Based on New York standards, this would have made him a large slave holder.



At multiple times throughout his life, Jay advocated for the abolishment of slavery.

Jay and Morris were founding members of the New York Manumission Society which advocated for the manumission of slaves. Manumission is the freedom of slaves using terms that have been decided upon by the owner. The organization fought to get laws passed that prohibited the export of slaves purchased in New York. When Jay was governor of New York in 1799 he signed into law the Gradual Emancipation Act that he and Morris had proposed over twenty years earlier.

It is important to note that Jay advocated for all this legislation while he continued to own slaves. His last slave was freed in 1817.



NEW-YORK AFRICAN FREE-SCHOOL, No. 2.

Engraved from a drawing taken by P. Reason, a pupil, aged 13 years

John Jay married Sarah Livingston in 1774. The daughter of William Livingston, the first post-colonial governor of New Jersey, John and Sarah were well matched. They had five children who lived to adulthood, two sons and three daughters. A fourth daughter died in infancy.

Sarah traveled often with John in the early years of his diplomatic career, but eventually settled in New York City to raise their growing family. When John retired in 1801, he was 56, Sarah was 45.

Less than a year after moving to Bedford, Sarah died at the age of 46. John never remarried.





Many people, Jay included, thought that Morris would remain a bachelor for the entirety of his life.

However, on Christmas Day 1809, Morris married Nancy Randolph. At the time Gouverneur was 57, Nancy 35. Like many of the events of Morris's life, this one was also surrounded by scandal.

In 1793, Nancy lived near Farmville, Virginia, with her sister Judith and Judith's husband Richard Randolph on a plantation called *Bizarre*. In April, Richard Randolph and Nancy were accused of murdering a newborn baby which was said to be the product of an affair between the two.

Richard stood trial and was an acquittal. Three years later in 1796 Richard Randolph died suddenly.

Both Nancy and Judith were suspected of murder, but nothing was ever proven. Nancy remained at *Bizarre* after her brother-in-law's death but was asked to leave by Judith in 1805.

Nancy traveled north and lived in Connecticut before agreeing in 1809 to work as a housekeeper for Morris, whom she had known in her youth.



The marriage between Gouverneur and Nancy shocked many. Gouverneur's nieces and nephews were livid; they had been counting on him having no heirs and inheriting his fortune.

Even Morris's old friend John Jay was surprised. He wrote:

"I had supposed that Mr. Morris intended to remain single, and was surprised to hear of his Marriage. His uniform friendly Disposition towards me, forbid me to pass over this Event with Neglect and Silence." John Jay to Peter Augustus Jay, January 10, 1810

In 1812 Nancy gave birth to a son, Gouverneur Morris Jr. Jay was asked to be his godfather but declined due to his age.

There is no question that Gouverneur Morris was an interesting figure. One of the greatest areas of interest pertains to his wooden leg and the myth that surrounds its origin.

In early May 1780, Morris was injured in a carriage accident. While either mounting or driving his phaeton (a small, four wheeled carriage drawn by a pair of horses), Morris was thrown, and his left leg was caught in the spoke of a wheel. Several bones were broken and the physician who attended to him advised amputation. Morris had his leg removed below the knee and was fitted with a wooden leg which he used for the rest of his life.

However, a popular myth has perpetuated over the years that Morris lost his leg escaping the angry husband of one of his lovers.



In 1791 an Englishman wrote that he had met:

"Mr. Morris, an American, a gentleman-like sensible man, who lost a leg in consequence of jumping from a window in an affair of gallantry."

The greatest perpetrator of the myth about Morris's leg appear to be Gouverneur Morris himself, and in many places the myth is accepted as fact.

Morris did not allow his wooden leg to slow him down; he continued to ride horses, climb church steeples, shoot river rapids and dance. Nor did it diminish his trysts with women, many of who were fascinated by the charming man with the wooden leg.



When John Jay retired in 1801, he removed himself from public life. He kept in touch with a handful of friends, among them was Gouverneur Morris.

Morris continued to flourish professionally. From 1800-1803 he served as a United State Senator from New York.

In 1807, Morris was appointed to a three-man commission tasked with planning for the growth of New York City, which was rapidly becoming the largest city in the United States. The commission devised Manhattan's iconic street grid system with 12 parallel avenues intersected by 155 streets.





The two men maintained their friendship until the end of their lives, with records of both visiting and staying at the home of the other.



Morris wrote to Jay : *"be assured that no Event which can, justly, give you Pleasure or Pain will ever be viewed with Indifference by your old and true Friend."* October 23, 1804



In conclusion, both John Jay and Gouverneur Morris died like they had lived.

Jay died peacefully at home at the age of 83. Ever pious, his last words are recorded as being "*the Lord is good*" and "*the Lord is better than we deserve.*"

Morris had suffered from gout since his time in France in the 1790s. By the fall of 1816, his gout was crippling.

Suffering from a urinary tract blockage as a result of gout, Morris attempted to provide himself with relief. Using a whalebone, likely from one of his wife's corsets, he tried to self-catheterize to relieve the blockage. The insertion of the whale bone resulted in internal damage that could not be repaired.

Morris died several days later at the age of 64, likely of an infection.



Humpback Whale Baleen