

JOHN JAY & JOHN ADAMS



John Jay was born in 1745 to a family of New York merchants. His political career began in 1774, at the age of 28, when he was elected to the Continental Congress.

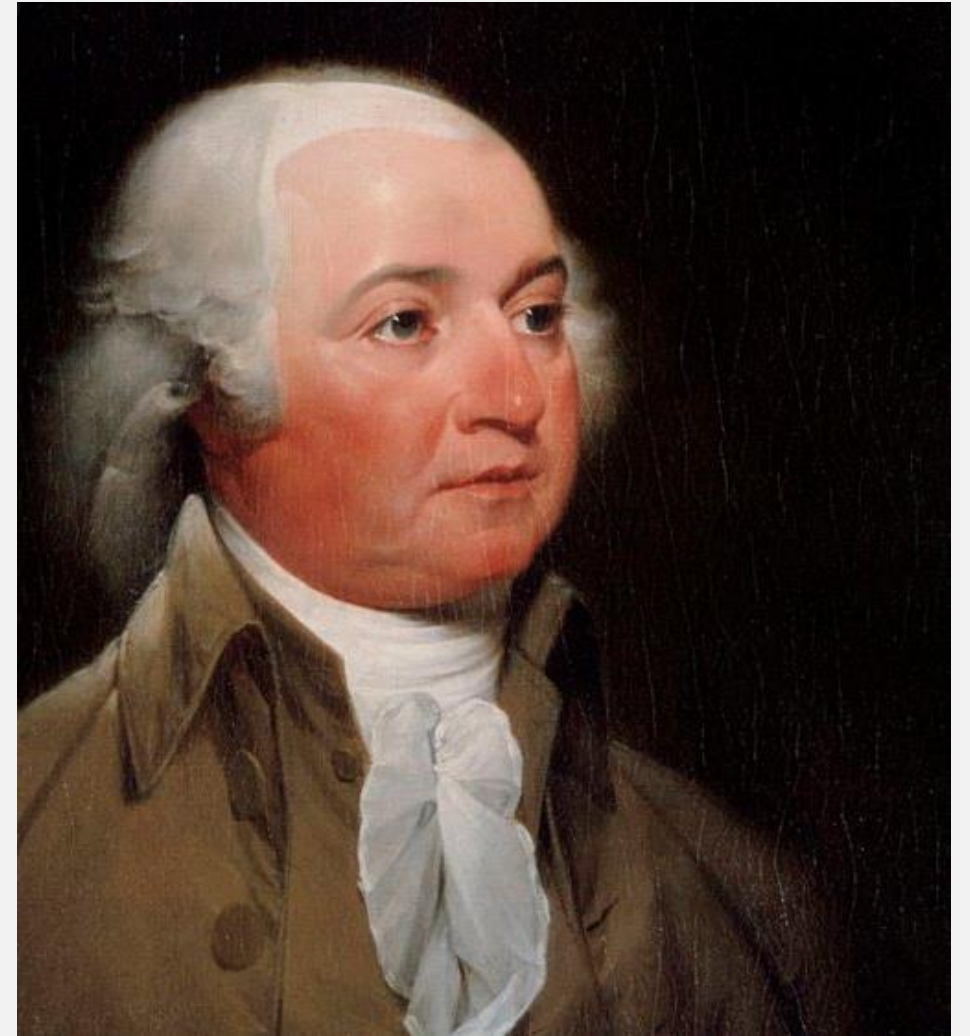
He went on to have a lengthy political career which included negotiating and signing the Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolution, serving as Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in 1789 he was appointed the First Chief Justice of the United States by George Washington and was twice elected governor of New York.

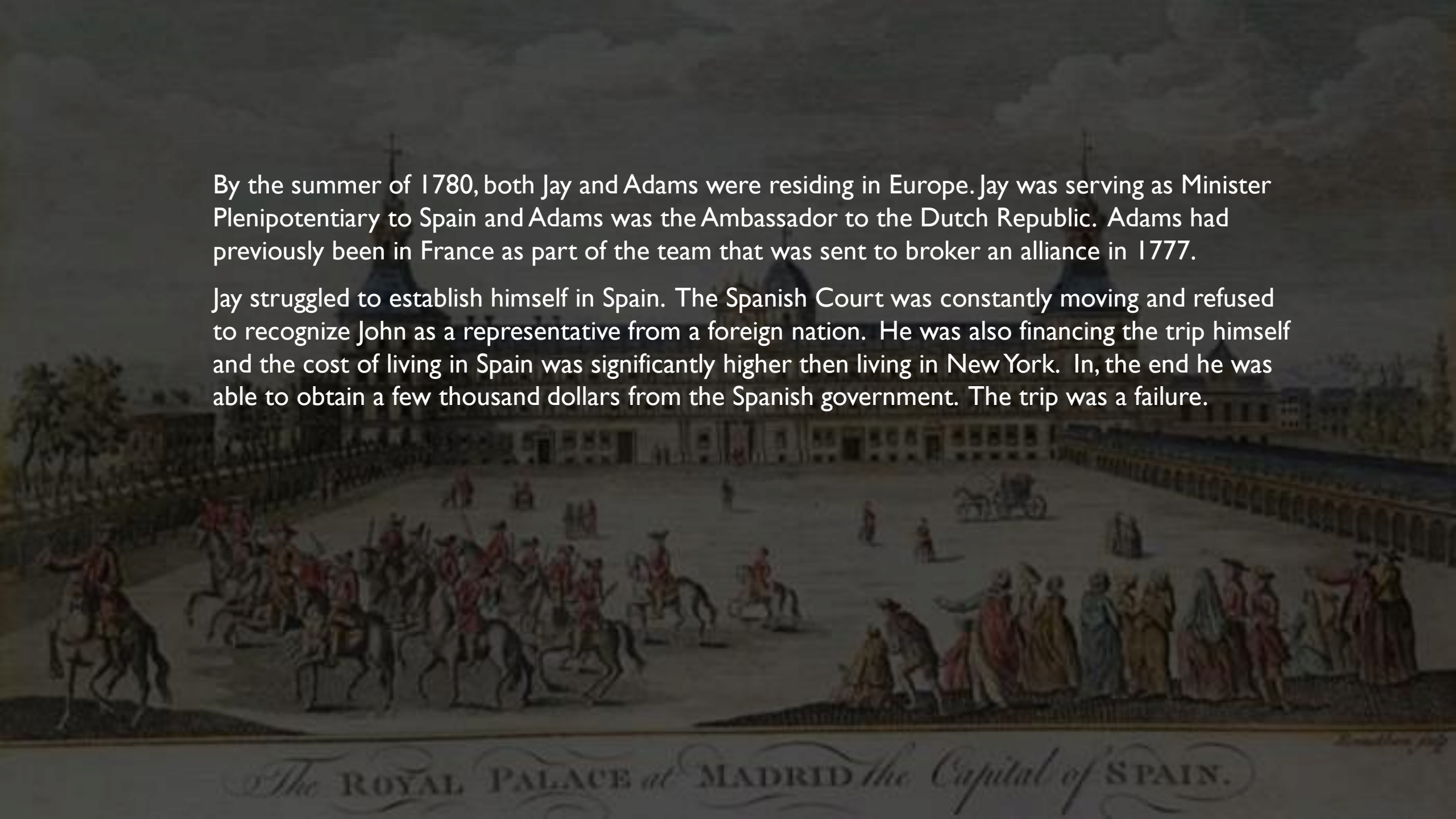
John Adams was born in Massachusetts. Education and public service were impressed upon him from an early age.

Adams first made a name for himself in 1771 defending the British soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre.

His political career began in 1774 when he was on the Continental Congress and ended in 1801 when his term as president ended.

While both Jay and Adams served together in the congress, their views were very different when it came to dealing with Britain. Jay hoped that peace could be accomplished, Adams was adamant that separation was the only option.





By the summer of 1780, both Jay and Adams were residing in Europe. Jay was serving as Minister Plenipotentiary to Spain and Adams was the Ambassador to the Dutch Republic. Adams had previously been in France as part of the team that was sent to broker an alliance in 1777.

Jay struggled to establish himself in Spain. The Spanish Court was constantly moving and refused to recognize John as a representative from a foreign nation. He was also financing the trip himself and the cost of living in Spain was significantly higher than living in New York. In the end he was able to obtain a few thousand dollars from the Spanish government. The trip was a failure.

The ROYAL PALACE at MADRID the Capital of SPAIN.

Adams was also struggling. Fearing retaliation from Britain, the Dutch government would not recognize John as an ambassador. However, when news of the victory at Yorktown reached Amsterdam, John capitalized on the new found American support to push the government to recognize America as its own country.

On April 19, 1782, the States General in The Hague formally recognized American independence and acknowledged Adams as ambassador. He was able to secure a loan for five million guilders before heading to Paris for the Peace Treaty.

Jay and Adams had both been appointed Peace Commissioners by the Congress. Along with Franklin and Henry Laurens, they were responsible for negotiating a peace agreement with England.

Although the two men had not agreed in Congress, their views were aligned when it came to the treaty negotiations.

Both men felt that the United States should negotiate solely with Britain and not include France. They knew that France would be most interested in what would benefit them, which could be detrimental to America. Benjamin Franklin, the long serving Minister to France and fellow negotiator, disagreed.

After months of negotiations, the Preliminary Articles of Peace were signed on November 30, 1782. The actual treaty wasn't signed until September of the following year. During the time in between, Jay and Adams forged a friendship.



*“MR. JAY HAS BEEN MY ONLY
CONSOLATION. IN HIM I
HAVE FOUND A FRIEND TO
HIS COUNTRY, WITHOUT
ALLOY. I SHALL NEVER
FORGET HIM, NOR CEASE TO
LOVE HIM, WHILE I LIVE.”*

JOHN ADAMS TO
ABIGAIL ADAMS
APRIL 16, 1783

After the war and the treaty negotiations, Jay and Adams both accepted positions dealing with America's relationships abroad. Jay was the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the principal diplomat for the country.

Jay was able to accomplish very little. Every decision he made had to be approved by the Congress and often there was not the required quorum to act on Jay's reports. It was exceptionally frustrating. Jay spent a large amount of time writing to the ministers abroad about the situation:



“A CONSIDERABLE TIME HAD ELAPSED,
DURING WHICH, A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF
STATES TO PROCEED ON BUSINESS WERE
NOT REPRESENTED. IN THIS INTERVAL I
HAD THE PLEASURE OF RECEIVING YOUR
LETTER OF 25TH, 28TH, 29TH, 30TH AND
31ST OF AUGUST AND 2ND, 3RD, 6TH,
15TH SEPTEMBER LAST, TOGETHER WITH
THE RATIFICATIONS OF THE TREATY AND
CONVENTION BETWEEN THE UNITED
STATES AND THE UNITED NETHERLANDS.”

JOHN JAY TO JOHN ADAMS,
NOVEMBER 26, 1785



Meanwhile, Adams was serving as the first Minister to Great Britain. The relationship between the two nations was cool, at best. Neither country would agree to follow their obligations that were agreed to in the Treaty of Paris. This included American's paying their debts to British creditors and British troops evacuating their forts in the Western Territories.

Adams also struggled with the interpersonal relationships that are required when one is serving in a diplomatic post.

*“HIS ABILITIES ARE
UNDOUBTEDLY EQUAL TO THE
MECHANICAL PARTS OF HIS
BUSINESS AS AMBASSADOR; BUT
THIS IS NOT ENOUGH.
HE CANNOT DANCE, DRINK,
GAME, FLATTER, PROMISE,
DRESS, SWEAR WITH THE
GENTLEMEN, AND SMALL TALK
AND FLIRT WITH THE LADIES; IN
SHORT, HE HAS NONE OF
THOSE ESSENTIAL ARTS OR
ORNAMENTS WHICH
CONSTITUTE A COURTIER.”*

*JONATHAN SEWELL ABOUT
JOHN ADAMS*

In the end, Jay was only able to negotiate two treaties and Adams was not able to make much headway with Britain.

Both Johns were trained lawyers. John Adams went to Harvard, graduating in 1758; Jay went to King's College (now Columbia), and earned his diploma in 1764.

Once they became involved in the government, neither man returned to practicing the law.





When George Washington was elected president in 1789, he offered Jay any job he wanted in the new government. Jay choose to be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He believed a strong judiciary was important and that it would allow him to oversee the enforcement of treaties.

One of the things Jay hated most about the court was riding the circuit. He spent many months on the road hearing circuit court cases. This kept him away from his family and overall was an unpleasant experience.

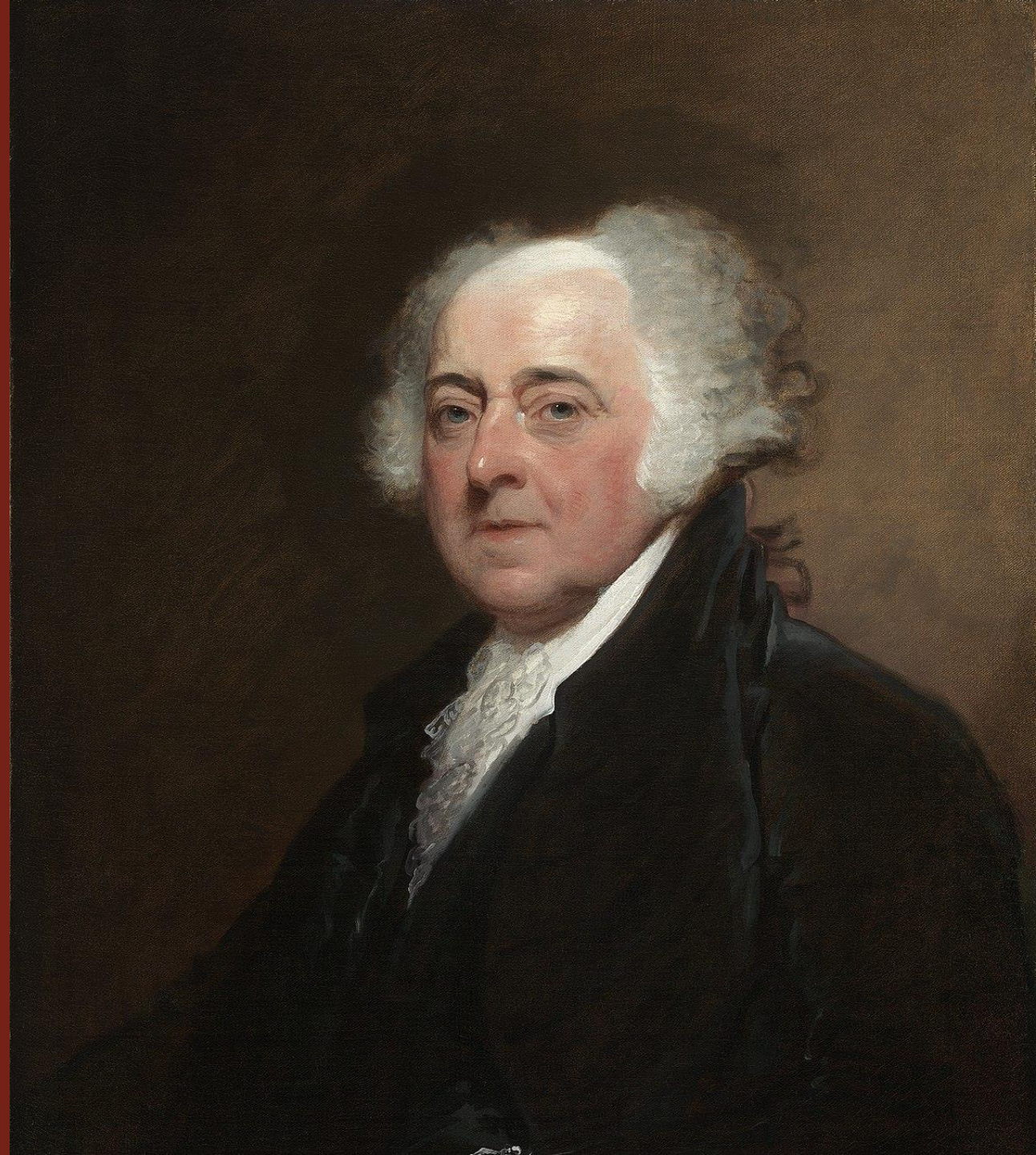
Jay resigned from the court in 1795 to serve two terms as governor of New York.

In 1801, both Jay and Adams were at the end of their political careers. Adams had lost the presidential election of 1800 to Thomas Jefferson and Jay was preparing to retire to Bedford.

Before Jefferson took office, Adams attempted to fill the court with Federalists. Without notifying him, Adams nominates Jay to be Chief Justice again and the Senate quickly approved the nomination.

Jay declined the position, using his health as the main reason he turned down the appointment.

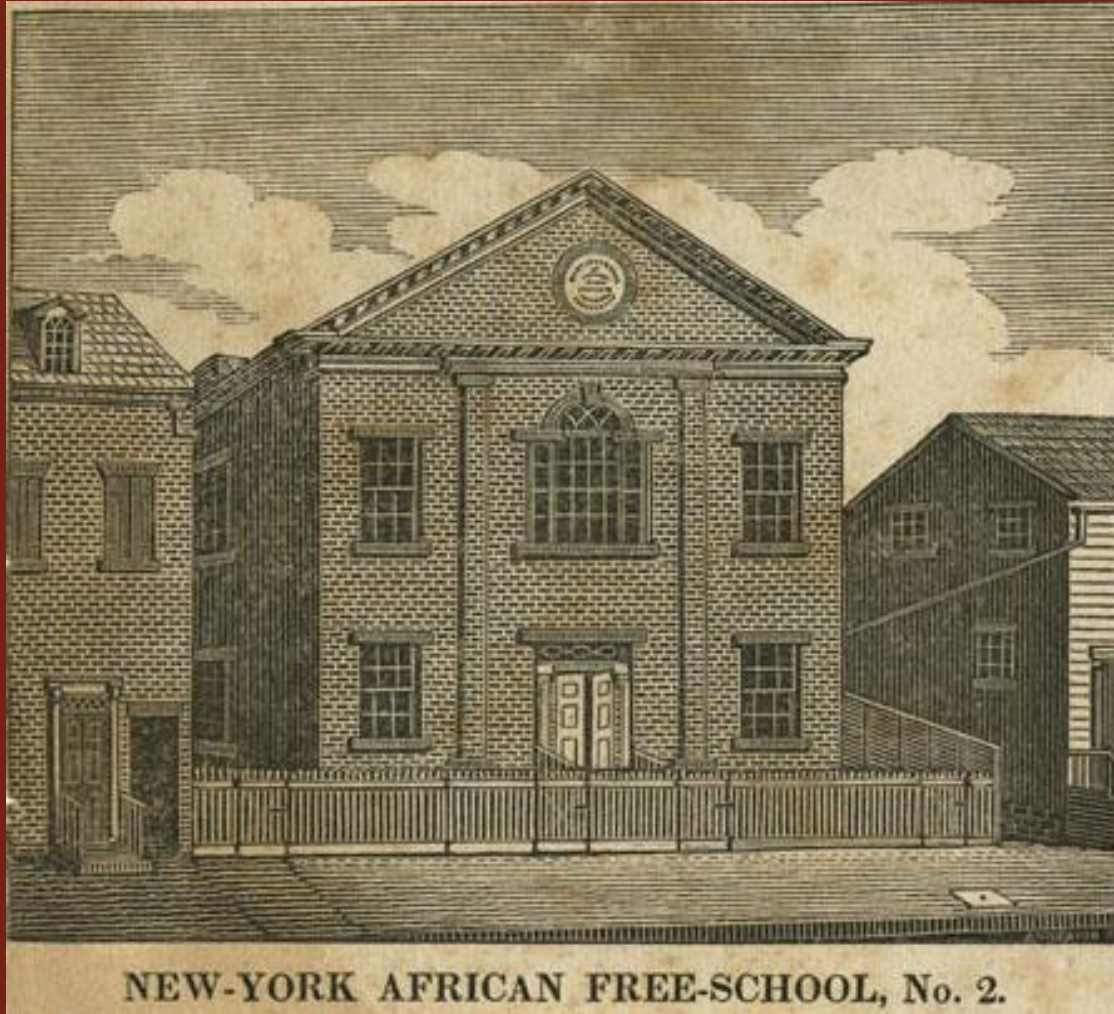
Jay's declination led to the appointment of John Marshall.



John Jay and John Adams grew up with very different views of slavery.

Jay grew up in a slave holding household and was an enslaver as an adult. John Adams was morally opposed to slavery.





Jay was a founding member of the New York Manumission Society which advocated for the manumission of slaves. The organization fought to get laws past that prohibited the export of slaves that were purchased in New York.

However John Jay was an enslaver until 1817.

Adams felt that slavery should be kept out of national politics. During the revolution and the years following, he believed that national unity was the most important issue for the government to focus on.

Personally, he called slavery “*an abhorrence*” and included a provision in the Massachusetts Constitution that made slavery illegal.



Both John Jay and John Adams were devoted to their families. John Jay married Sarah Livingston in 1774. They had 5 children who lived to adulthood, two sons and three daughters. Sarah traveled to Europe with John in 1779 and gave birth to three daughters while abroad (One daughter, Susan, died in infancy).

Sarah was an integral part of John's success in France, but also while he was serving as Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Sarah and John spent many years apart, due to his various positions. They moved here together in 1801. Sadly, Sarah died in May of 1802 at the age of 46. John lived another 27 years.

John Adams married Abigail Smith in 1764. They had 4 children that lived to adulthood, 2 who died in infancy.

Due to his various diplomatic posts, John Adams spent over a decade serving his country in Europe. By the time Abigail joined him there in 1785, they had spent more than half their marriage apart.

Abigail was a frequent sounding board for her husband and provided her opinion on a number of matters. After the presidency, the Adams's returned to Quincy, Massachusetts. Abigail died in 1818 and John in 1826.



Due to the separation both couple endured, they wrote each other often. Many of those letters still survive.

Over 1200 letters between John and Abigail have been digitized by the Massachusetts Historical Society. Letters between John and Sarah have been turned into a book.



After the death of Jay and Adams, their sons continued the legacy of public service established by their fathers.

William Jay, John Jay's younger son, was an abolitionist and a leader in the American Anti-Slavery Society. He spoke out about colonization and was a frequent contributor to a variety of anti-slavery publications. He served as County judge in Westchester from 1820-1843, when he was ousted because of his political beliefs.

John Quincy Adams had a long political career. In addition to being the 8th president, he served as a European ambassador, Secretary of State, Senator and Congressman.



There are a few letters between William Jay and John Quincy Adams. They discuss slavery and the relationship and admirations that their fathers had for each other.

“In a former letter you alluded to the friendship of Mr. Adams for my father. I can bear witness that it was sincerely reciprocated. He seems always to have felt and cherished his obligation to Mr. Adams for the manly and generous support he gave him in '82—and in his old age still spoke of it with warmth and gratitude.”

William Jay to John Quincy Adams, October 27, 1832