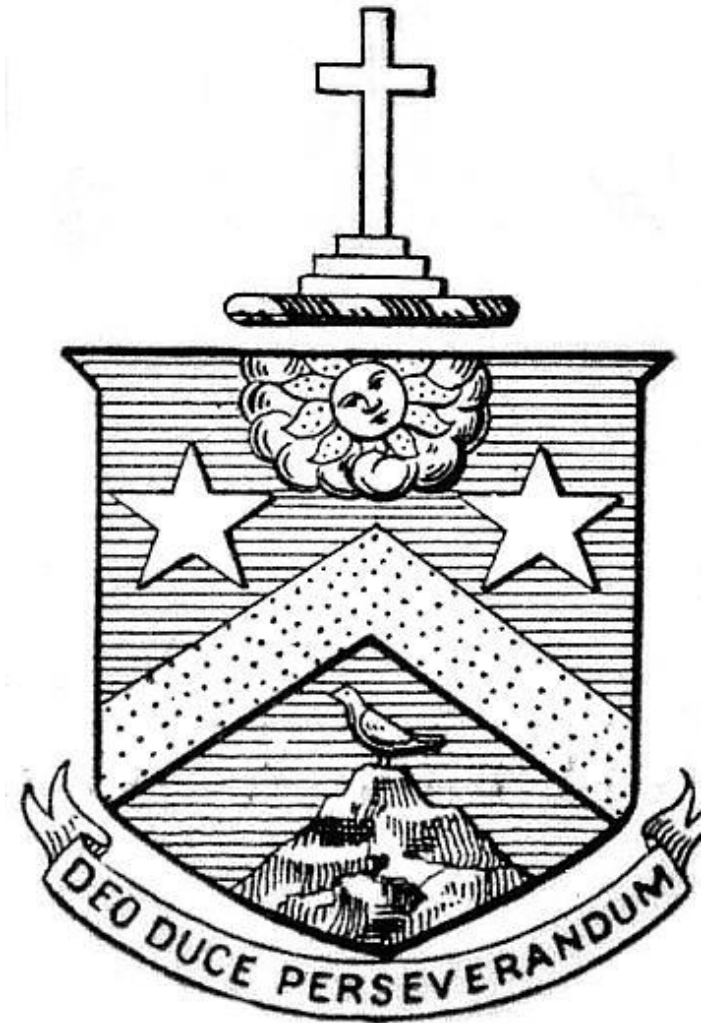


John Jay and his Huguenot Heritage





John Jay was one of America's principal Founding Fathers. He served in more political offices than any of his contemporaries and many of his ideas were used to help shape the nation.

John Jay believed strongly that individuals should have both political and religious freedom. Jay's ancestors had been French Huguenots who had spent over a hundred years being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

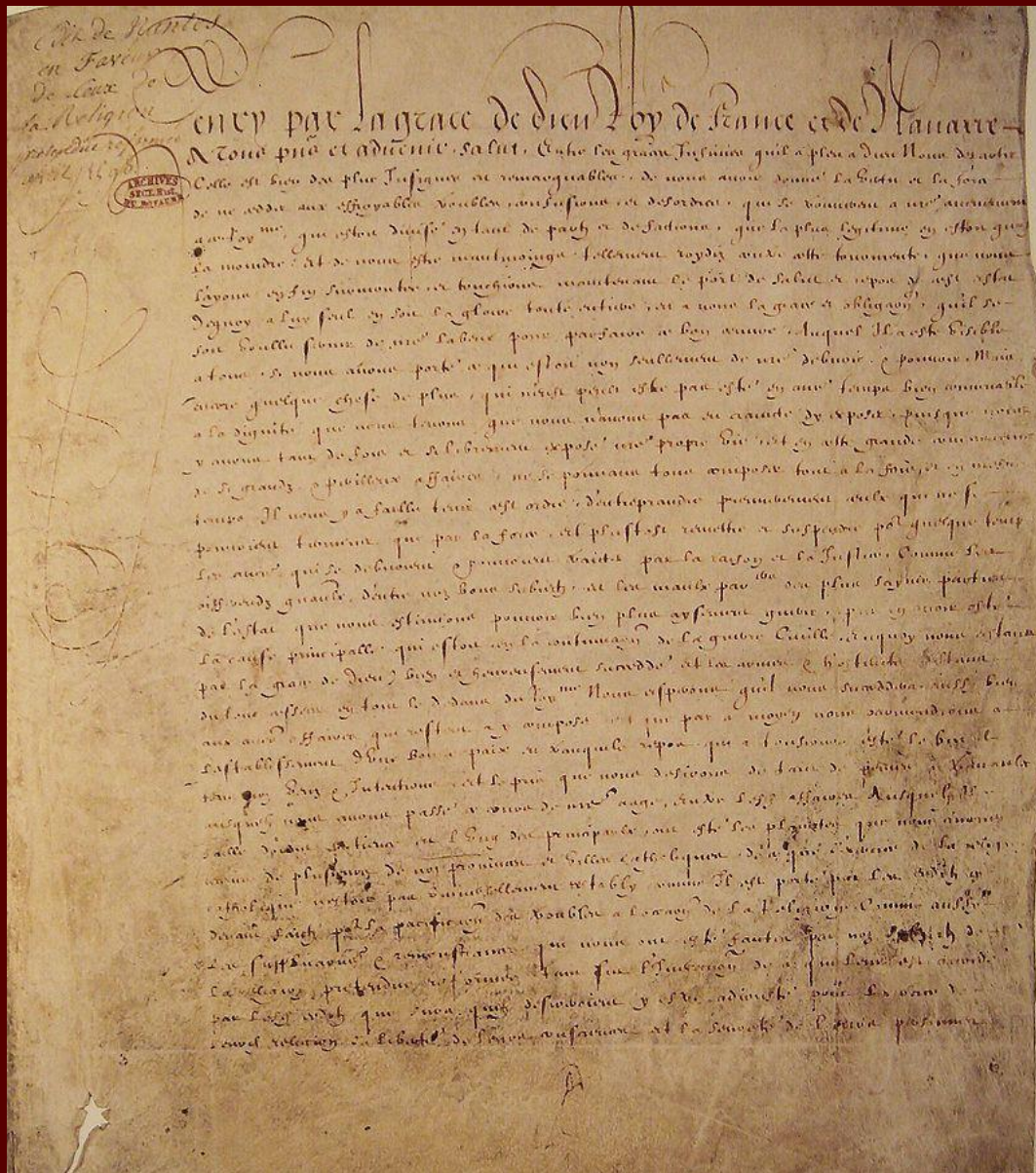


Huguenots were French Protestants who lived in France during the 16th and 17th centuries. Following the teachings of John Calvin, Huguenots were frequently forced to worship in their homes due to France being a Catholic country. A number of violent uprisings occurred, leading many Huguenot families to flee France and create settlements in other parts of the world.

The most violent of these events was the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. On August 23rd, 1572, King Charles IX of France, under the influence of his mother, Catherine de Medici, ordered the assassination of Huguenot Protestant leaders in Paris, setting off a chain reaction that results in the massacre of tens of thousands of Huguenots all across France.

Once the killing started, mobs of Catholic Parisians, began a general massacre of Huguenots. Charles issued a royal order on August 25th to halt the killings, but his pleas went unheeded as the killing spread. Mass slaughter continued into October throughout France. An estimated 3,000 French Protestants were killed in Paris, and as many as 70,000 in all of France.

The massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day marked the resumption of religious civil war in France. It also led to the first wave of Huguenots fleeing France for England, Germany and the Netherlands.



In April 1598, King Henry of France signed the Edict of Nantes. The Edict gave French Protestants the same civil rights as Catholics. The primary intention was to stop the religious war in France. While Catholicism was still the official religion in France, Huguenots were free to practice their religion and hold any job that was available to Catholic citizens.

Edict of Nantes



Teapot by Huguenot silversmith Paul de Lamerie

Peace was restored in France until October 1685 when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes with the Edict of Fontainebleau.

The Edict of Fontainebleau made Protestantism illegal in France. As a result, over 20,000 protestants fled France in a two-year period.

Upon leaving France, Huguenot craftsmen took with them knowledge of important techniques and styles in silk, plate glass, silversmithing, watchmaking, and cabinet making. This had a significant impact on industry in the regions to which they relocated.



In 1685 John Jay's great grandfather, Pierre sent his wife and two children to England from their home in La Rochelle, France. When this was discovered, Pierre was imprisoned, and his property was confiscated by the government. Catholic friends were able to get him released, and he joined his family in England.



Pierre's son, Augustus was working on a ship when his family left France. When he returned home to La Rochelle, he discovered his family was gone. Augustus decided to travel to the British colonies, settling in New York in 1686. Augustus Jay, John Jay's grandfather, was the first Jay in America.

Augustus became a prominent businessman and married Anna Maria Bayard in 1697. Like many other Huguenot refugees, he joined the Anglican Church and attended regularly.

John's great uncle Stephen Peloquin was a prominent Huguenot businessman. He left France for England in 1685 at the age of 20 and quickly established a trading firm in Bristol, England. Stephen traded in commodities in America, England and Barbados. Augustus ran the American side of the enterprise.

At the beginning of the 18th century he was one of the five wealthiest people in Britain. Upon his death he left a sizable estate to his wife and daughter.





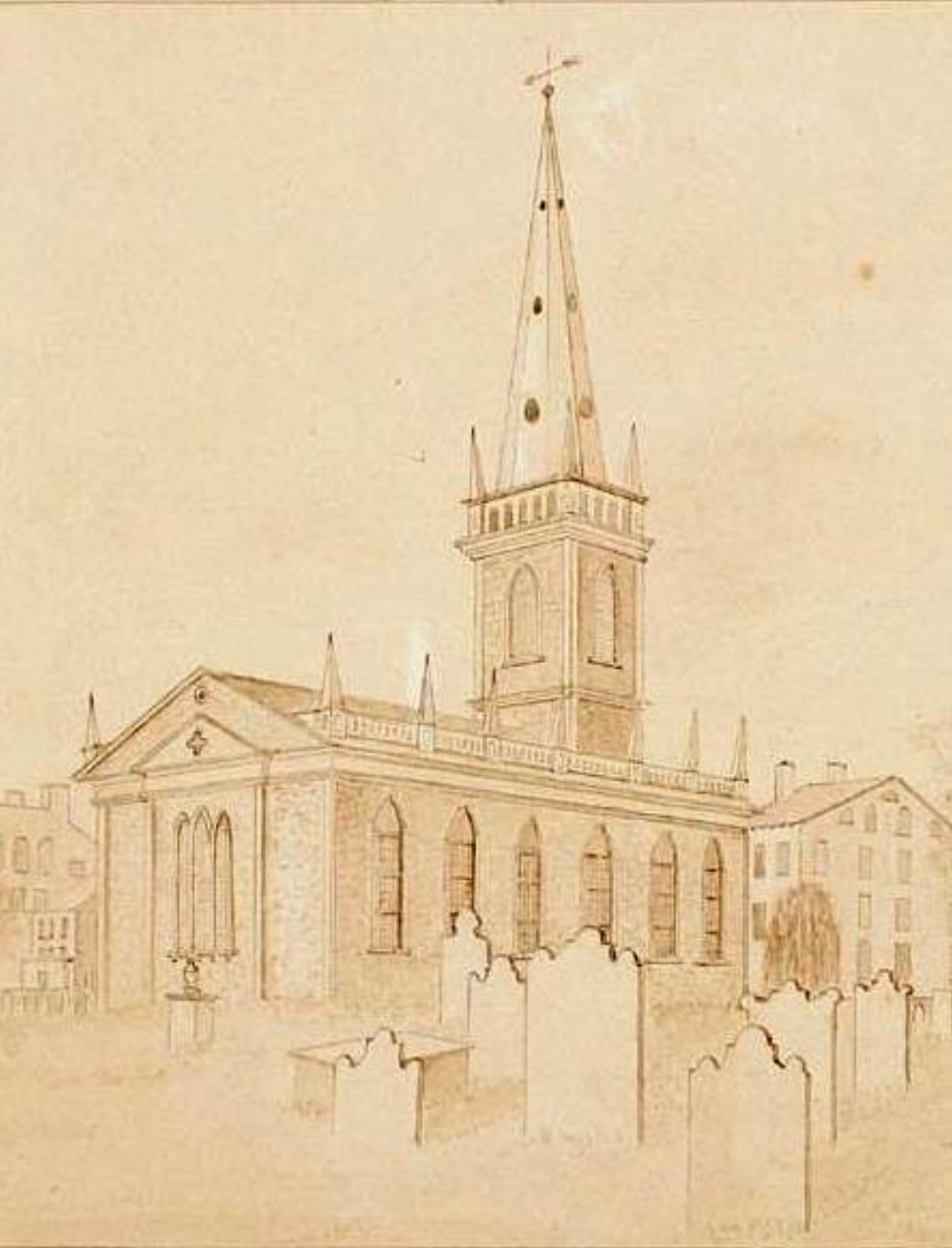
Peter Jay was born in 1704 and was the only son of Augustus and Anna Marika. Like most sons of wealthy citizens, Peter was educated by tutors. At the age of eighteen Peter was sent to Bristol, England to live with his aunt and uncle, Francoise Jay Peloquin and Stephen Peloquin.

Peter became a very successful New York businessman trading in clothing, timber, flax, wheat and furs in Europe and throughout the colonies. Peter and his wife Mary had ten children, including John Jay.



John Jay was born in New York City in 1745. Shortly after his birth his family moved to Rye, in Westchester County. Rye was located near New Rochelle, a town that had been settled by Huguenot refugees in the 1680s. The town was named after La Rochelle, the French hometown of Jay's ancestors.

At the age of eight, John was sent to the Anglican School in New Rochelle. Jay's teacher was the pastor of the local church who had previously been the leader of a Huguenot church in Charleston, South Carolina. Jay was taught in French, which was the primary language spoken in New Rochelle. Jay studied there for two years.



OLD TRINITY 1790-1859.

John Jay was devoutly religious throughout his life. Jay was an Anglican, then an Episcopalian. He attended services regularly; first at Trinity in New York City, then at St. Matthew's in Bedford.

Jay's religious beliefs and convictions were front and center when it came to his ideas for forming a new government. He believed that morality was essential for a healthy republic and that morality grew out of obedience to God. He also believed that allegiance to the country was crucial, and that religion and religious leaders should have no bearing on the decisions of government.

Jay had a number of anti-Catholic views. He likely had heard these same views from his father and school master growing up. In 1774, Britain passed the Quebec Act. The act essentially restored French Law to the British colony and guaranteed the free practice of the Catholic faith.

“Nor can we suppress our astonishment that a British Parliament should ever consent to establish in that country [Quebec] a religion [Catholicism] that has deluged your island in blood, and dispersed impiety, bigotry, persecution, murder, and rebellion through every part of the world.”

-John Jay, An Address to the People of Great Britain

Jay also had strong views about Catholics holding office. In a draft of the New York State Constitution, he attempted to include a clause that would deprive Catholics the right to own land or participate in government unless they took an oath of allegiance to the state and swore they would not be influenced by a religious leader when it came to governmental matters. The motion did not pass.



In 1782 John and his wife Sarah traveled to France. John was serving as a peace commissioner charged with negotiating an accord with Great Britain at the end of the Revolutionary War. John had never been to Europe before but was not impressed with the homeland of his ancestors. While in England in 1783 he wrote:

“Nothing has as yet exceeded my expectations, and I shall probably return to America fully persuaded that Europe collectively considered is far less estimable than America.” John Jay to Sarah Jay, November 14, 1783



John traveled to England in the fall of 1783. He visited London, Bath and Bristol. Bristol had been the home of Jay's Pelloquin ancestors.

His father's cousin Marianne had died childless in 1772 and left a substantial inheritance to Peter Jay and his children. Peter Jay had died in 1782 and John traveled to Bristol to convince the executors of Marianne's estate that Peter's heirs were entitled not only to the money Marianne had left to them directly, but also to Peter's inheritance.

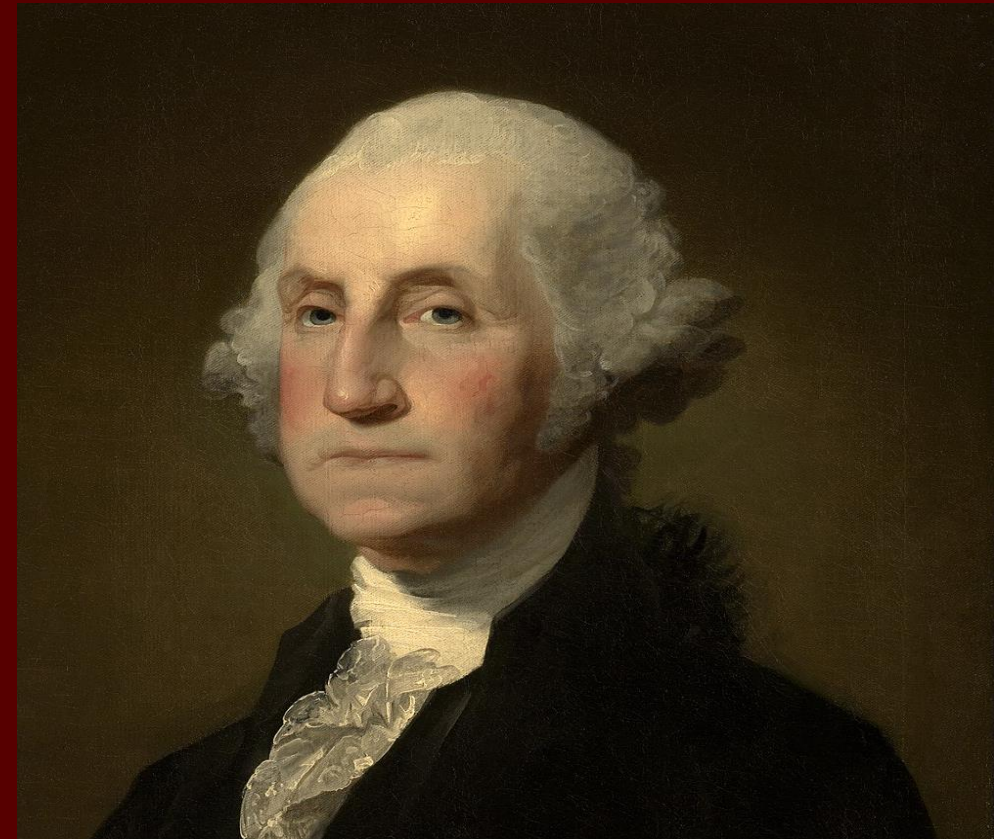
While John was in London, Sarah continued to reside in France. She and her children were frequent company for Benjamin Franklin, who was another of the American Peace Commissioners. While in Paris, both Sarah and Dr. Franklin witness the first manned hot air balloon flight.



John Jay was one of a number of notable early Americans who had Huguenot ancestry. George Washington had a Huguenot grandparent, as did Alexander Hamilton.



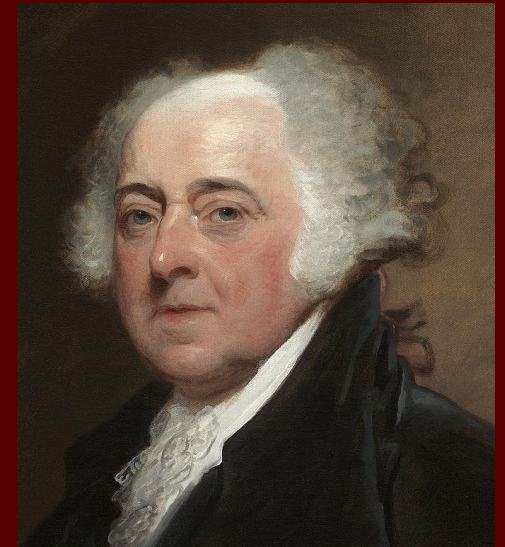
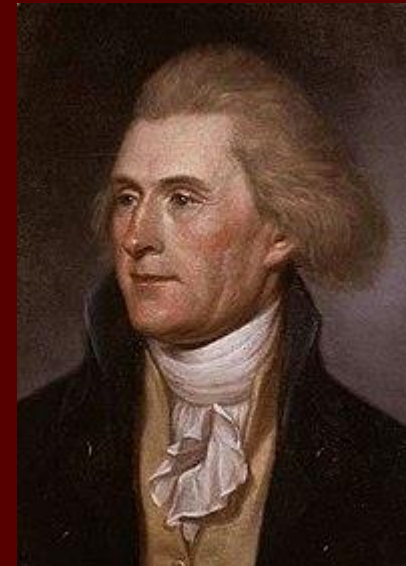
Paul Revere was the son of a Huguenot silversmith. His father fled France at the age of 13 and learned silversmithing from a Huguenot tradesman in Boston. Paul took control of the family's silver shop in 1757 and became one of the leading silversmiths of the time.



Henry Laurens came from a family of Huguenots. At least two of his grandparents and his mother had fled France. The Laurens family became a fixture in the Huguenot settlement in Charleston, South Carolina. Henry was a prominent businessman and member of the Continental Congress. While many founders had Huguenot ancestry, they all saw religious freedom as an important right, regardless of their family's religious origins.

Thomas Jefferson was raised in the Church of England but is most widely associated with Deism and the teachings of John Locke.

John Adams was a devout Christian, raised in the Congregationalist church of his Puritan ancestors. Both Jefferson and Adams along with many of the founders believed that there should be no national religion and that citizens should be able to worship as they choose.





In 1801 at the age of 56, John Jay retired and moved to Bedford. In retirement he devoted much of his time to religion and religious causes. He became a valent supporter of St. Matthew's Church, donating funds to help erect a church building. He also donated to charities that supported religious missions and discouraged vices.

Most of his correspondence focuses on religion and the importance of God. When the American Bible Society was formed in 1816, Jay served as its first vice president. When the president of the society died in 1821, Jay became its president.

“Almost all nations have peace or war at the will and pleasure of rulers whom they do not elect, and who are not always wise or virtuous. Providence has given our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as privilege and interest, of a Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

John Jay to John Murray, October 12, 1816

Subsequent generations of the Jays continued the family's religious dedication and recognition of their ancestors.

John Jay's son William was an active member of St. Matthew's Church and supported the abolishment of slavery on religious ground.

William's son, John Jay II, was a founding member of the Huguenot Society of America in 1883. The initial meeting was held in his New York City home with the intention of the organization to recognize and remember the history of Huguenots in America.

