



JOHN JAY AND THE TREATY OF PARIS

A Tangle of Wars

The American Revolution was one of four simultaneous wars against England that gripped the world in the late 1770s and early 1780s.

France became America's principal ally. Its ultimate goal, however, was to hurt Britain, its longtime enemy. After the French provided money, troops, and armaments to aid the American rebels, France and Britain formally went to war with each other.

France also became allied with Spain, when Spain fought to recover Gibraltar from British rule. France encouraged the Netherlands to break a trade agreement with England. After Britain declared war on the Dutch, it provided them with French naval assistance.

While the United States fought Britain to gain its independence, France, Spain, and the Netherlands fought to weaken England and change the balance of power in Europe.

John Jay

This engraving is the earliest known portrait of John Jay. It was executed in 1783, when he became famous as one of the negotiators of the Treaty of Paris.



John Jay's Coat and Waistcoat

An oral tradition among John Jay's descendants is that Jay wore these garments when Benjamin Franklin introduced him to the Count of Vergennes on June 24, 1782.





Sarah Livingston Jay

Jay's beloved wife, the former Sarah Livingston, accompanied him to Europe in spite of the dangers of traveling for women in wartime. According to family legend, this miniature portrait of her was executed in Paris in 1784 by Alexandre Roslin.

Benjamin Franklin

Franklin had been U.S. Minister to France since 1776, and was one of the most popular figures in France. He obtained vital French monetary and military aid for the Continental Army throughout the War for Independence.



The Negotiation

Congress appointed John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and Henry Laurens to be America's peace commissioners in 1781. Congress ordered them to follow the direction of the French foreign ministry, because America was dependent on French foreign aid.

In 1782, a new British Prime Minister wanted to forge a peace. At first, Franklin and Jay were the only American diplomats who could be in Paris, where the talks were to be held. Franklin became ill in late August. From then through October, Jay was the only active American peace commissioner.

Jay insisted that Britain recognize the independence of the United States as the first step in the talks. He disobeyed Congress's order to follow French leadership, after discovering that France opposed important American objectives. By keeping independent of foreign authority, Jay put America on a stronger diplomatic footing.

Jay was joined by Franklin and Adams in late October. The three negotiated hard, and succeeded in getting unexpectedly generous terms from Britain. The U.S. signed its Preliminary Articles of Peace with Britain on November 30, 1782.



The American Peace Commissioners in Paris, November 1782

This painting is an old copy of Benjamin West's unfinished picture of the signing of the Preliminary Articles of Peace between Britain and the U.S. These articles would, in 1783, become part of the final terms of the Peace of Paris, which ended Great Britain's wars with the United States, France, and Spain. The portion of the larger treaty that dealt only with the United States is usually called the Treaty of Paris.

Standing at the left is John Jay, pointing to the document. Seated next to him are John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Henry Laurens stands behind; next is William Temple Franklin, Ben's grandson, who acted as secretary for the American commissioners. The area on the right is blank because the British peace commissioner, Richard Oswald, and his secretary, Caleb Whitefoord, refused to pose for the picture.

The original painting hangs at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware

Charles Gravier, Count of Vergennes

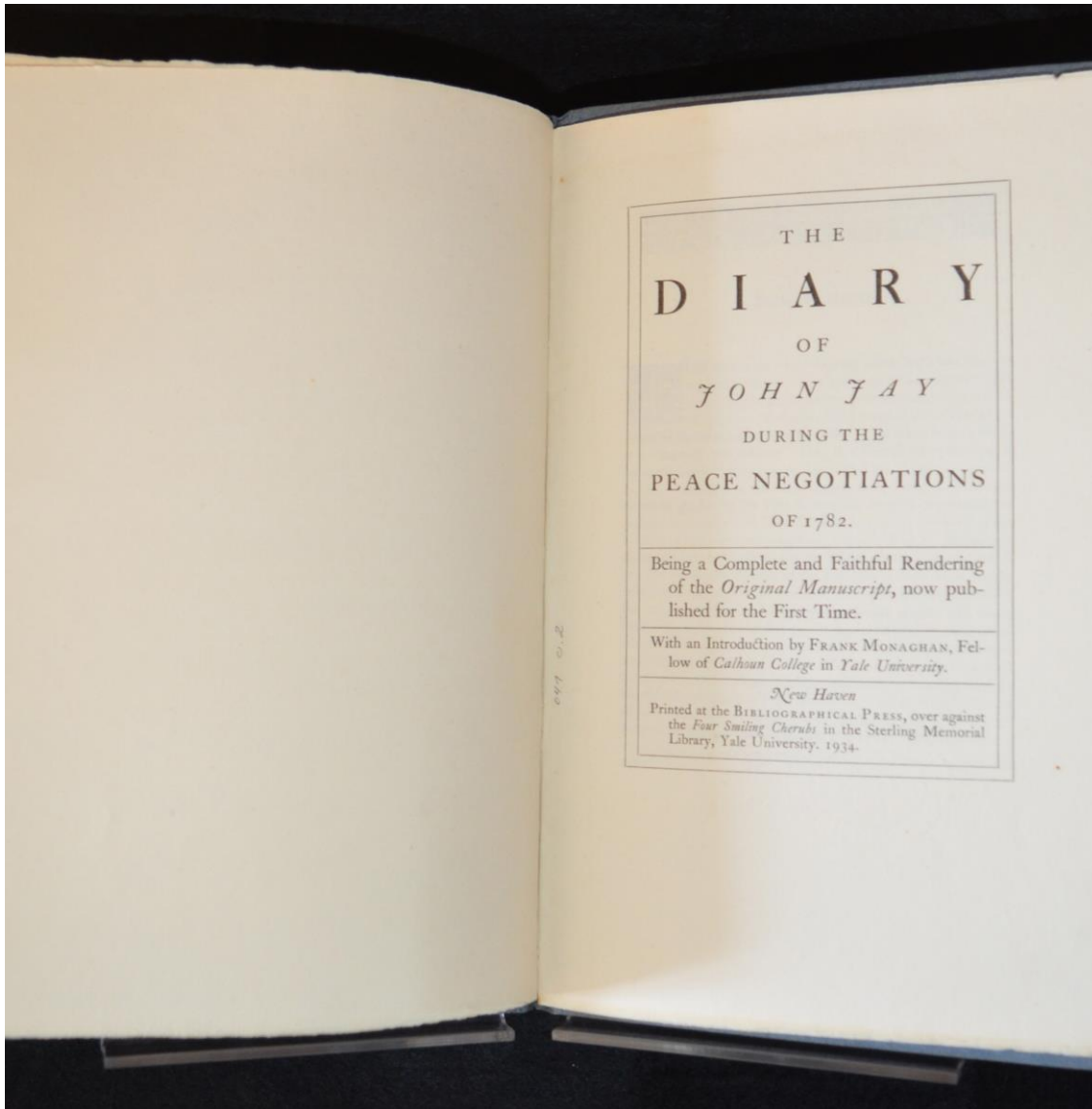
Vergennes was the Foreign Minister of King Louis XVI of France. He brought France into the Revolutionary War. He also channeled French assistance to Spain and the Netherlands in their wars against Great Britain. As a consequence, the British had to spread their military over so many fronts that it became impossible for them to retain their hold on the thirteen American colonies.



John Jay's 1782 Diary

The original diary Jay kept during the negotiations is in the manuscript collection of the Butler Library at Columbia University. This book is a limited edition transcription of it, published in 1934.

Jay's entries are generally short, and lack details of the substance of the talks. Spies were everywhere in Paris in 1782, and Jay, ever-careful, kept critical details out of his notes.





Red Line Map

This is a reduced-size, photographic reproduction of one of six maps used during the treaty negotiations to determine the official boundaries of the United States. The boundaries seen here are not the final ones agreed upon. The annotations saying "Mr. Oswald's Line" are in John Jay's handwriting. The original map was given to the New-York Historical Society by the Jay family in 1843.

Concluding the Peace

Because of the terms of the American alliance with France, and of France's alliance with Spain, the Americans could not sign a final peace treaty with Britain until France and Spain were also ready to.

The Peace of Paris settled all of Britain's wars at once. It was signed on September 3, 1783. The American portion of the treaty, now known as the Treaty of Paris, gave the U.S. its final independence from Britain, doubled the size of the country by extending its western boundary from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River, and gave America important commercial benefits.

The Americans won a diplomatic triumph that amazed the world. John Adams wrote in his diary that the French, if they had known the full story of the talks, "would very justly give the title with which they have inconsiderately decorated me, that of *Le Washington de la Négotiation*, ...to Mr. Jay."