

Rough Journal Page Documenting Ratification and Final Page of the Treaty of Paris, 1783

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The 1783 Treaty of Paris formally ended the American Revolution and established the United States as an independent and sovereign nation. In words reminiscent of those in the resolution presented by Richard Henry Lee to Congress in June 1776, and later included in the Declaration of Independence, Article I of the treaty stated that the king now acknowledged the new nation to be free.

Negotiations that led to the treaty began two years earlier, and were filled with behind-the-scenes dealings and suspicions; messages in secret code traveled across the Atlantic between the American peace commissioners and Congress. The U.S. peace commissioners included John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay. Henry Laurens would have been the fourth, but he was caught en route to Paris with instructions and subsequently imprisoned in the Tower of London. The principal British commissioner was Richard Oswald, but a change in the British government in 1783 led to his recall and replacement by David Hartley.

Despite the fact that both sides sought peace, the process was slow. In part, this was because Congress felt bound by the 1778 Treaty of Alliance with France, and initially directed the American negotiators to make no agreements without the knowledge of the king of France. Eventually, the Americans opened separate negotiations with the British, resulting in significant progress.

On November 30, 1782, preliminary articles of peace were signed. These arti-

“His Britannic Majesty acknowledges the said United States, viz., New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, to be free sovereign and independent states, that he treats with them as such, and for himself, his heirs, and successors, relinquishes all claims to the government, propriety, and territorial rights of the same and every part thereof.”

—Article I of the Treaty of Paris, 1783

cles, however, would only be effective when a similar treaty was signed between Britain and France. Fortunately, this occurred early in the next year, and on September 3, 1783, in the Hôtel de York, now 56 Rue Jacob, the formal Treaty of Paris was signed—at least three copies of it. Two of the signed “original duplicate” copies are today in the holdings of the National Archives. One contains the signatures of Adams, Franklin, Jay, and Hartley horizontally, the other contains vertical signatures, and both are 10 pages long. The National Archives also holds an exchange copy that is 12 pages long and includes a skipet. It was signed by King George III at a later date.

The Definitive Treaty of Peace was organized into three sections: a preface, 10 articles, and finally the signatures. The preface stated the treaty’s objective: both Great Britain and the United States wished “to forget all past misunderstandings and differences...” Each of the articles sought to resolve a specific issue:

Article 1: Recognized the 13 colonies as free and sovereign states;

Article 2: Established the boundaries

between the United States and British North America;

Article 3: Granted fishing rights to United States fishermen in the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland and in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence;

Article 4: Recognized the debts to be paid to creditors on either side;

Article 5: Stated that the Congress of the Confederation will “earnestly recommend” to state legislatures to recognize the rightful owners of all confiscated lands and provide restitution to British loyalists;

Article 6: Stated that the United States would prevent future confiscations of the property of Loyalists;

Article 7: Stated that prisoners of war on both sides would be released and all property left by the British army in the United States unmolested (including slaves);

Article 8: Granted both Great Britain and the United States perpetual access to the Mississippi River;

Article 9: Stated that territories captured by Americans subsequent to the treaty

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S. Carolina - W Read not

So it passed in the negative

Wednesday Jan 9. 14. 1784

Congress assembled. Present Massachusetts, Rhode-
island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware,
Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South
Carolina, W Beresford having ^{this day} taken his seat
& from the state of New Hampshire W Foster
and from New Jersey W Beatty

On the report of a com^{tee} consisting of W Jefferson
W Gerry W Ellery W Read and W Hawkins
to whom were referred the definitive treaty of peace
between the United States of America and his Britannic
Majesty and the joint letter of the 10 Sept from W Adams
W Franklin and W Jay

Resolved unanimously, nine states being present,
that the said definitive treaty be ratified by the
United States in Congress assembled

~~On the question to agree to this the yeas & nays
being required by W Howells~~

W Foster ay
W Gerry ay
W Partridge ay
W Esgood ay
W Ellery ay

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without Difficulty and without requiring
any Compensation.

Article 10.th

The solemn Ratifications of the
present Treaty, expedited in good & due
Form shall be exchanged between the
contracting Parties in the Space of
Six Months or sooner if possible to be
computed from the Day of the Signature
of the present Treaty. In Witness
whereof we the undersigned their Ministers
Plenipotentiary have in their Name
and in Virtue of our Full Powers signed
with our Names the present Definitive
Treaty, and caused the Seals of our Arms
to be affix'd thereto.

Done at Paris, this third Day of September, the
Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred & Eighty three. —

W^m Hartley John Adams

B^e Franklin

John Jay



Rough Journal of the Continental Congress Transcription:

Wednesday
January 14, 1784

Congress assembled. Present, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania [*sic*], Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina; Mr. [Richard] Beresford having this day taken his seat; and from the State of New Hampshire, Mr. [Abiel] Foster, and from New Jersey Mr. [John] Beatty.

On the report of a committee, consisting of Mr. [Thomas] Jefferson, Mr. [Elbridge] Gerry, Mr. [William] Ellery, Mr. [Jacob] Read and Mr. [Benjamin] Hawkins, to whom were referred the definitive treaty of peace between the United States of America and his Britannic Majesty, and the joint letter of the 10 September, from Mr. Adams, Mr. Franklin and Mr. Jay,

Resolved, unanimously, nine states being present, that the said definitive treaty be, [on the top of the next page] and the same is hereby ratified by the United States in Congress assembled, in the form following:

[followed immediately by a description of and the text of the Treaty.]

Transcription of the Final page of the Treaty of Paris

...without difficulty and without requiring any compensation.

Article 10th

The solemn ratifications of the present treaty expedited in good and due form shall be exchanged between the contracting parties in the space of six months or sooner, if possible, to be computed from the day of the signatures of the present treaty. In witness whereof we the undersigned, their ministers plenipotentiary, have in their name and in virtue of our full powers, signed with our hands the present definitive treaty and caused the seals of our arms to be affixed thereto.

Done at Paris, this third day of September in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-three.

D. Hartley (Seal)
John Adams (Seal)
B. Franklin (Seal)
John Jay (Seal)

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Rough Journal Page Documenting Ratification and Final Page of the Treaty of Paris, 1783

1. Distribute copies of the featured documents to pairs of students. Encourage them to read the documents together, helping each other decipher the handwriting, and inform them that the next page in the journal read "and the same is hereby ratified by the United States in Congress assembled." Lead a class discussion by posing the following questions: What types of documents are they? What are the dates of the documents? Who created them? For what purpose? What is their relationship to one another?
2. Ask students to pay close attention to the dates of the two documents. Explain to them that in 1784, a trip across the Atlantic Ocean took approximately two months. Ask them why they think Congress did not ratify the treaty until mid-January. Provide them with additional information from the background essay about the circumstances surrounding the ratification, and the difficulty in establishing a quorum in Congress. Ask them to take on the role of Thomas Mifflin, president of Congress in late December, and ask them to draft a letter to the executives of each state whose representatives in Congress were not yet present. Invite student volunteers to share their letters with the class and compare their sentiments with those expressed by Mifflin on December 23. Discuss with students what Mifflin meant by the "safety, honor and good faith of the United States."
3. Divide students into 13 groups, and assign each to represent a different one of the original 13 states. Tell them that the subsequent pages of the Journal of Congress for January 14, 1784, state that after ratifying the treaty, Congress also declared that a proclamation would be issued to the states notifying them of the ratification and requiring their observance of its terms. Provide each group with either the short description of the terms included in the background essay, or the complete text of the treaty, available online at www.ourdocuments.gov. Ask them to consider the interests of their states and discuss which, if any of the treaty's terms, would have been difficult for them to observe. Ask a representative from each group to share results with the class. Inform the class that very little restitution was made by any of the states to Loyalists.
4. Ask students to consider the aftermath of the treaty from various perspectives. Invite them to take on the role of one of the following individuals and write a 2-3 page journal entry describing the individual's reaction to news of ratification: a patriot, a Loyalist, a Native American, a citizen of Great Britain, or another individual living in 1784. Encourage volunteers to share their entries with the class.
5. Inform students that the 2008–2009 National History Day theme is "The Individual in History." Encourage students to conduct research and develop National History Day projects that focus on an individual involved with the Treaty of Paris. Possibilities include: John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Richard Oswald, David Hartley, Henry Laurens, Thomas Mifflin, and Colonel Josiah Harmar. For more information about NHD, see www.nationalhistoryday.org.

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would be returned without compensation;

Article 10: Declared that ratification of the treaty was to occur within six months from the signing.

This final article proved to be something of a challenge. One week after the signing, Adams, Franklin, and Jay prepared a 16-page letter and sent it with the treaty to Congress. It took roughly two months for it to cross the Atlantic for delivery. When it arrived, Congress was in the process of moving from Princeton, New Jersey, to Annapolis, Maryland.

When Congress finally reconvened in the Maryland State House on Saturday, December 13, 1783, Congressional President Thomas Mifflin presented the letter and the treaty to Congress, and both were read. They were referred to a committee consisting of Thomas Jefferson, Elbridge Gerry, William Ellery, Jacob Read, and Benjamin Hawkins for review. The committee reported back a few days later, recommending ratification. And the waiting began. Only seven states were present and a vote could not happen until at least nine were there.

Ten days later, Mifflin sent letters to the executives of the states not yet represented (New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Georgia) informing them that “the safety, honor and good faith of the United States require the immediate attendance” of their delegates in Congress. On that same day Congress accepted George Washington’s resignation as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

By January 1, activities recorded in the Journal of the Continental Congress

indicated real concern that meeting the six-month deadline, given the two-month Atlantic crossing, would be impossible. On the third, some representatives suggested that a letter be sent to the Plenipotentiaries of the United States in Europe explaining that “in consequence of the severity of the season (there had been heavy snow) and other circumstances seven States only have as yet assembled.” And that perhaps “the term for exchanging the Treaty should be enlarged.” Such a letter was drafted, but it was never sent, because on January 14, all of the representatives from nine states and single members from two other states were present. The Treaty of Peace was finally ratified—unanimously.

That same day Congress named Colonel Josiah Harmar, Mifflin’s private secretary, to travel to France to transmit the ratification to the peace commissioners. Congress also declared that a proclamation would be issued to the states notifying them of the ratification and requiring their observance of its terms. Charles Thompson, the secretary of Congress, wrote a letter to Benjamin Franklin announcing ratification and informing him that it had been entrusted to Harmar for delivery. Shortly after its delivery, the British Parliament approved it.

While many celebrated the peace, others cursed it. Some found the compromises unequal; others found themselves excluded from its provisions. Absent from the negotiations had been other combatants in the war—Loyalists, Native Americans (the First Nations), and African Americans.

Following ratification, the British government granted land to those who had been loyal to its cause, encouraging those who had not already left to move. Loyalist refugees resettled in the remaining British

colonies, including the West Indies, or moved back to Great Britain. Immigration to Canada was extensive—nearly 30,000 settled in Nova Scotia alone. And nearly 20,000 went to the Bahamas. At the same time, patriot refugees from Canada and Nova Scotia arrived in the United States, while other Americans moved to new homesteads—on land granted by the U.S. government, or rebuilt old ones.

During the war, both sides had promised freedom to slaves who were willing and able to fight. These offers of freedom varied greatly and were often motivated more by strategic gain than true abolitionist feeling. In many cases, the documentation of former slaves that proved manumission had been lost or destroyed in the conflict. Those who could prove their freedom after the war still had to endure prejudice and hostility throughout North America.

Before the American Revolution, an earlier agreement (the Treaty of Paris of 1763) had secured territory to the west of the 13 colonies for Native Americans, the First Nations. The new treaty officially broke this agreement but did not address what, if any, new boundaries would exist in the “Indian Territory.”

While the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Revolutionary War it also laid the foundation for two new North American countries: the United States of America and Canada. In its immediate aftermath, the business of nation building began in earnest. A little more than three years after ratification, the U.S. Constitution was drafted. In Canada, Britain established new colonies, subdivided old ones in response to the wave of Loyalist refugees, and expanded democracy through new representative assemblies. 🏰

Note about the documents:

The page from the Rough Journal of the Continental Congress for Wednesday January 14, 1784, comes from Record Group 360, Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention. The final page of the Exchange Copy of the Treaty of Paris, 1783, comes from Record Group 11, General Record of the United States. Both are in the holdings of the National Archives, Washington, D.C. All pages of the January 14, 1784 entry in the Rough Journal of the Continental Congress are available online from www.footnote.com, through a partnership with the National Archives. (They are in Volume 35, pages 447-453)

The Treaty of Paris is available online at www.ourdocuments.gov. Also available at that National Archives site are the Lee Resolution, Declaration of Independence, and 1778 Treaty of Alliance with France, mentioned in the article. The complete text of the Journals of the Continental Congresses is available online from the Library of Congress at memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwjc.html. The proclamation to the states announcing ratification was printed by John Dunlap as a broadside. A copy of it is also available from the Library of Congress. If you conduct a search on “1784” at memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/continental/bdsdcoll2.html, it will come up as the ninth item.