

# CABINET OF

THE

## George Washington

*First Administration: 30 April 1789 – 3 March 1793*

- Essay on the Cabinet . . . . . 3

### Cabinet Member Biographies

- Secretary of State
  - John Jay . . . . . 5
  - Thomas Jefferson . . . . . 8
- Secretary of the Treasury
  - Alexander Hamilton . . . . . 14
- Secretary of War
  - Henry Knox . . . . . 19
- Attorney General
  - Edmund J. Randolph . . . . . 21
- Postmaster General
  - Samuel Osgood . . . . . 23
  - Timothy Pickering . . . . . 26

# ESSAY ON THE CABINET

When General George Washington became the first President of the United States, unlike all Presidents who would serve after him, there was no US government to speak of. When the first session of the First Federal Congress convened in New York City in 1789, some of their first legislative actions provided for the establishment of federal departments, with three being named: State, War, and Treasury. This brought about great debate, as there were no notices in the US Constitution on such cabinet-level agencies or heads of them. Rep. Egbert Benson of New York noted, “Without a confidence in the executive department, its operation would be subject to perpetual discord.” Rep. Fisher Ames of Massachusetts echoed his concerns, stating that “the only bond between him [the President] and those he employs is the confidence he has in their integrity and talents; when that confidence ceases, the principal ought to have power to remove those whom he can no longer trust with safety.” Elbridge Gerry, who would later serve as Vice President, said, “These officers, bearing the titles of minister at war, minister of state, minister for the finances, minister of foreign affairs, and how many more ministers I cannot say, will be made necessary to the President.” In a debate on the formation of the Department of the Treasury, Gerry told the House, “We are now called upon, Mr. Speaker, to deliberate, whether we shall place this all-important department in the hands of a single individual, or in a Board



*George Washington*

of Commissioners. I presume the gentleman, who has brought forward this strong of propositions, means, that this officer shall have the power to examine into the state of public debt and expenses, to receive and disburse the revenue, to devise plans for its improvement and expansion, and, in short, to superintend and direct the receipts and expenditure, and govern the finances of the United States; having under him officers to do the subordinate business of registering and recording his transactions, and a Comptroller to control his operations with respect to the accounts and vouchers." In the end, the Congress acceded and established these three cabinet departments.

In September 1789, Washington named Thomas Jefferson as the first Secretary of State, Alexander Hamilton as the first Secretary of the Treasury, and Henry Knox as the first Secretary of War. There was no "department" for a judicial advisor to the President, but he named Edmund Randolph as the first Attorney General. (The Department of Justice was not officially formed until 1870; prior to that time, the Office of the Attorney General was its official name.) Like the cabinet offices of Great Britain, these men were more advisors than true leaders; for their first months in office, they spent more time assembling their departments than carrying out real policy. According to historian George Gibbs, who collected and edited the papers of Oliver Wolcott, who later served as Secretary of the Treasury under Washington and his successor, John Adams, "It was not until November that the business of the Treasury was entered upon in earnest."

The trials and tribulations of these first cabinet members overwhelmed them, as they would have anyone at the time. Washington had named a small team of those he felt were the finest in their areas of expertise, fit and ready to combat the enormous challenges presented to the newly-formed government. Secretary Hamilton worked to end the huge debt incurred by the colonies during the war against England; at the same time, he worked with Secretary Jefferson to get Southern approval for the federal government to assume state debts in exchange for support for allowing a new federal capital to be built carved out of land from Virginia. Jefferson himself had to initiate a foreign policy of a nation that just a few years earlier had existed only as a batch of colonies; in doing so, he worked in a position that he had, when he first heard of his being named to it, desired to decline. He had worked hard to get the Declaration of Independence done in 1776, in the years since had worked as a writer and diplomat in the service of his country. Now home, he desired to take time off. His friend James Madison visited him at his estate, "Monticello," and convinced that his country needed him more than ever. At the end of March 1790, after

long deliberations, he traveled to New York, where he took up the duties of Secretary of State with a small office and one aide. Secretary Knox literally had to put together a military that had basically dissolved after the war against England had been won. Knox himself had served as Secretary at War (not of War as the new title was called) under the Articles of Confederation, and his selection for the position under the new Constitution was almost a given. When Edmund Randolph accepted the Attorney Generalship, he did so with much reluctance, as his own personal accounts were in disarray and he was loathe to accept a low-paying position, even it is was serving his country. At the same time, he was working on a revision of all of the laws of Virginia, and he did not wish to take time off from that task.

In a letter to the Count de Moustier, penned from New York on 25 May 1789, Washington wrote about the men who were serving in his cabinet, whom he saw more as assistants than advisors or counsellors: "The impossibility that one man should be able to perform all the great business of the state, I take to have been the reason for instituting the great departments, and appointing officers therein, to assist the supreme magistrare in discharging the duties of his trust. And perhaps I may be allowed to say of myself, that the supreme magistrare of no state can have a greater variety of important business to perform in person, than I have at this moment."

In an 1844 oration delivered in Philadelphia on the life of Washington, William B. Reed spoke of the men who served in Washington's cabinet:

"And by whose agency did he administer the government? Who were the counsellors whom Washington called to assistance? Hamilton and Knox, Jefferson and Randolph, the statesmen and soldiers whom the Revolution knew, the leader of the Revolution now selected. He chose them for their well-trying patriotism and merit, without a thought of personal aggrandizement or political advancement. He selected them for the public service they could render."

**References:** Speeches of Benson, Ames, and Gerry in "The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States; With an Appendix, Containing Important State Papers and Public Documents, and all the Laws of a Public Nature; with a Copious Index" (Washington: Printed and Published by Gales and Seaton, 1834), 400, 403, 492-93, 527; Gibbs, George, "Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury" (New York: Printed for the Subscribers; two volumes, 1846), II:18; Jackson, Donald; and Dorothy Twohig, eds., "The Diaries of George Washington" (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia; six volumes, 1976-79), V:455; Washington to Count de Moustier, 25 May 1789, in Washington Chauncy Ford, ed., "The Writings of George Washington" (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 14 volumes, 1889-93), XI:397-98; Reed, William B., "'The Model Administration': An Oration, Delivered Before the Whig Citizens of Philadelphia, on the Twenty-Second of Federal, 1844" (Philadelphia: J. Crissy, Printer, 1845), 13-14.

## John Jay (1745 – 1829)

### Secretary of State

30 April 1789 – 21 March 1790

Although perhaps one of the most important members of the US and New York governments in the last two decades of the 18th century, John Jay and his numerous accomplishments have been nearly forgotten to historians. A member of the Continental Congress (he served as the fifth President of that body, a sort of “Speaker” who had extremely limited powers), he also served as the first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court (1789-95) and the second Governor of New York (1795-1801). His short tenure as the first Secretary of State, from 30 April to 26 September 1789, has slipped into obscurity as well.

### Early Years

The scion of famed family, Jay was born on 12 December 1745 in what is now New York City, the sixth son of Peter Jay, a merchant, and Mary (née van Cortlandt) Jay. According to his son, William Jay, who penned a two-volume biography of his father in 1833, John Jay sat down in his last years and wrote down his reminiscences of his family history. He explained, “I have been informed that our family is of Poictou, in France, and that the branch of it to which we belong removed from thence to Rochelle. Of our ancestors anterior to Pierre Jay, who left France on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, I know nothing that is certain. Pierre Jay was an active and opulent merchant, extensively and profitably engaged in commerce...Mr. Jay seemed to have been solicitous to have one of his sons educated in England. He first sent his eldest son, but he unfortunately died on the passage...” Despite this background, most historians of John Jay write that he was of Dutch extraction. According to Jay’s genealogy, only one of his ancestors traveled to Amsterdam, and this for a short time before he emigrated to the American colonies in 1692. As for Mary Van Cortlandt, according to Jay, her mother was one of many who fled Bohemia due to “popish persecution” and took refuge in Holland, after which she came to New York.

John Jay received private tutoring, after which he entered King’s College (now Columbia University) in New York City, earning a Bachelor’s degree in 1764. He then began the study of the law in offices of one Benjamin Kissam. Admitted to the New York bar, Jay began a private legal practice in New York City in 1768.

In 1774, Jay married Sarah van (also spelled Vail) Brugh Livingston, the daughter of a member of one of New York’s great early families (which included Brockholst Livingston, who also served on the US Su-

preme Court, as well as Philip Livingston, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, William Livingston, who signed the US Constitution), whose descendants include Eleanor Roosevelt, George H.W. Bush, the 41st President of the United States, as well as his son, George W. Bush, the 43rd President of the United States, and New York Governor Hamilton Fish (1808-1893), who served as Secretary of State (1869-77) under President Ulysses S Grant. Never involved in the controversies of the time, most notably the agitation of revolutionary fervor against the British crown in the colonies, Jay was influenced by Sarah’s brother, Robert Livingston, as well as several other noted speakers including Gouverneur Morris and Philip Schuyler, and he lent his name—and his pen—to the cause of American independence.

When the British began their initial moves to stop this burgeoning independence movement, which came after the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, Jay joined the Committee of Correspondence in New York and was elected as one of New York’s five delegates to the First Continental Congress. When war broke out in April 1775, Jay was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he served as President (10 December 1778-28 September 1779), succeeding Henry Laurens. In fact, the election that replaced Laurens with Jay was



John Jay

a contentious one, leading a number of states to move from Laurens to Jay and setting off the controversial election. As President of the Continental Congress, Jay was in fact the *de facto* leader of the colonial government, or in effect a President of the American Colonies. The position was not like the American presidency, and its powers were extremely limited. In 1777, Jay was a major force behind the writing of New York's state constitution; for his work, he was named as Chief Justice of the state, holding both offices and serving in the latter position until 1779.

On 28 September 1779, Jay resigned as President of the Continental Congress when he was named as the Colonial Minister to Spain. With the war against Britain still raging, Jay was one of a number of American delegates sent to various European capitals to raise funds for the beleaguered colonial army while also gaining diplomatic recognition of the fledgling American government. When he arrived on 22 January 1780, Spain refused to officially receive Jay as the Minister, believing that its colonial holdings in Florida were in danger if war spread; however, Jay was able to gain a loan of \$170,000 for the colonies. Jay found the Spanish Foreign Minister, José Moñino y Rodondo, Conde de Floridablanca, to be an arrogant man who dismissed the goals of American independence. Jay remained in Spain in an attempt to gain official recognition, but, unable to break the Spanish government's will, he left on 20 May 1782 and returned to America.

### Named to the Cabinet

When the colonists won the crucial victory over the British at Yorktown on 19 October 1781, the end of the war was in sight. Benjamin Franklin, the American Minister to Paris, realized that a peace treaty would have to be signed and he reached out to several men, including Jay, to participate in the peace talks with the British. Jay left for France and arrived in Paris on 23 June 1782, becoming one of three men on the negotiating committee along with Franklin and John Adams. Under their leadership, a treaty which was highly favorable to the Americans was ironed out, and Jay returned to the United States in triumph, landing on 24 July 1784. When he arrived, he found that he had been elected as Secretary for Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation, the loosely-held together "constitution" that was the first blueprint for the new American government. Thus, in effect, Jay was the first Secretary of State of the infant United States, although his role in this position is little discussed and was extremely weak as compared to his successors. During his tenure, which lasted until 22 March 1790, Jay tried to negotiate the payment of debts owed to European nations for loans that had sustained the colonial fight

against the British during the entire war for independence. At the same time, without a Secretary of Commerce or any government entity of that type, Jay was left alone to try to coax open foreign markets for American goods. Because of his service in Spain, Jay held extensive negotiations with Don Diego de Gardoqui Arriquibar, the Spanish Finance Minister who served as the first Spanish Ambassador to the United States, but these went nowhere and nothing was accomplished during Jay's tenure. The weak federal government hampered any chance Jay had of getting strong backing for any initiative he wished to carry out. This led to his joining the movement backing a strong central government to be established by a new constitution. Under the Articles of Confederation, the states dominated; Jay joined with Alexander Hamilton and James Madison in writing a series of articles under the *nom de guerre* "Publius" which appeared in "The Federalist," arguing for the establishment of a new government with powers centered in three distinct branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Of the 85 essays which were written, Jay wrote five which dealt with foreign affairs.

Jay did not participate in the Constitutional Convention held in 1787 in Philadelphia, nor did he take part in its ratification movement, instead merely acting as a man behind the scenes. In 1789, the new government was established, with General George Washington elected as the first President of the United States, and Jay was retained in his position, this time named as Secretary of State. This time was short, however, as Jay was tired from years of fighting for the interests of the nation and achieving little. On 22 March 1790, he resigned when Washington nominated him as the first Chief Justice of the new Supreme Court and he was confirmed by the US Senate. (Histories of Jay's life, and of the US Supreme Court, use the date of 26 September 1789 when Jay first went on the court, but in fact he remained at the State Department until his nomination was confirmed.) Jay was on the court until his resignation on 29 June 1795. Many of the court's decisions were groundbreaking, laying the foundation of precedents in the law for a new nation. Perhaps the most important decision during Jay's tenure was *Chisholm v. Georgia* (2 Dallas 419 [1793]), which held that citizens of one state could sue the government of another state. While there was no identified author who wrote the court's opinion (the four justices in the majority wrote without an author being identified, while Justice James Iredell dissented), the case did set a precedent that was overruled by the passage of the Eleventh Amendment to the US Constitution in 1798.

### After Leaving Office

But Jay apparently tired quickly of the court—in those days, in addition to their court duties, justices had to ride “circuit” and go to local courts in their jurisdiction, a tiring characteristic of the court before the establishment of the appeals court system that left many justices weary and broken. In 1792, desiring to leave the court, Jay put himself up for Governor of New York, but he was defeated by the Democratic-Republican candidate, George Clinton. Instead, on 19 April 1794, Washington appointed him as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain.

By 1794, relations between the United States and Britain were near the breaking point, and it appeared that war would come between the two nations. While British exports were allowed into the United States, British ships blocked all American products from landing in Europe, and British ships impressed, or kidnapped, American sailors on ships they stopped on the seas. While many demanded war, Washington instead sent Jay to London to iron out a new treaty. In March 1795, Jay returned with what was officially called “A Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation Between his Britannic Majesty and the United States of America,” but which is known better as “Jay’s Treaty.” The British agreed to stop blocking American products from European markets as well as end British control over forts in what is now the American northwest. The agreement did not address the impressment question, making it highly controversial. Nevertheless, Washington signed it, and the Senate, acting in its treaty-confirming mode, approved it by a vote of 20-10 on 24 June 1795. The treaty was highly unpopular with the American public, but it deferred the threat of war with England for nearly 20 years.

Jay had remained as Chief Justice while serving in Britain; however, in May 1795, he was once again put up as the Federalist candidate for Governor of New York, this time defeating Governor Clinton. On 29 June 1795 (Jay’s congressional biography uses the date of 8 April 1795), Jay resigned from the US Supreme Court and went to work as the second Governor of New York. He served two terms (1795-1801), which had few events remembered by historians.

A strong opponent of slavery, John Jay freed any slave who was sold to him or came to him through marriage or business; in 1777, when writing New York’s constitution, he tried to insert a provision calling for the emancipation of all slaves held in the state. In November 1800, after having refused to run for a third term, Jay also declined an offer from President John Adams, with whom he had served on the peace commission in 1783, to once again serve as Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. Instead, John Marshall received

the appointment, going on to become one of the most important chiefs of that vaunted court in American history.

Soon after leaving office in 1801, Jay’s wife Sarah, with whom he had 10 children (seven of whom lived to adulthood, including his son William, and his eldest son, Peter Augustus Jay, who served as his father’s secretary), died, and he spent the last three decades of his life as a widower. Although he could have reinserted himself into the politics and questions of the time, Jay instead purchased a small farm at Bedford, near Westchester north of New York City, living quietly and leaving public life behind him. In his last years he suffered from a palsy, perhaps Parkinson’s disease, which led to his death on 17 May 1829 at the age of 83. He was laid to rest in what is now called John Jay Cemetery, in Rye, New York. The cemetery is closed to the public, and is only viewable by appointment.

In a major biography of Jay, historian Walter Stahr wrote of Jay’s contributions to the United States. He compares him with Adams, Jefferson, and others. These other men highlighted their accomplishments, Stahr notes, but he realizes that Jay never did despite what he did for his country. “He was the principal author of the first constitution of New York State, the most balanced of the early state constitutions. He drafted and negotiated the extensive American boundaries secured by the Paris Peace Treaty. He played a critical role in forming the federal Constitution and securing its ratification. He negotiated the treaty which bears his name, Jay’s Treaty, which avoided a disastrous war with Britain.” Stahr adds, “He made several contributions which are more elusive but also important. He was not as gifted an author as Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine...His year as President of the Continental Congress was not a good year for the Congress, but perhaps his act prevented even more damage. During his five years as Secretary for Foreign Affairs, he provided crucial continuity and solidity to the confederation government. His prominent anti-slavery stance helped not only to end slavery in New York but also to establish the moral foundation for its end throughout America. He did not make the Supreme Court the power it would become under John Marshall, but he helped define what federal courts could do, such as review statutes for constitutionality, and what they could not do, such as decide abstract questions.” Much of the earliest history of America should include the name of John Jay, but it does not, despite his contributions to its creation and establishment.

References: Jay, William, *The Life of John Jay: With Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers* (New York: Printed and Published by J. & J. Harper; two volumes, 1833), I:3-20; Morris, Richard B., “John Jay: The Making of a Revolutionary: Unpublished Papers, 1745-1780” (New York: HarperCollins, 1975); Monaghan,

Frank, *John Jay: Defender of Liberty against Kings & Peoples, Author of the Constitution & Governor of New York, President of the Continental Congress, Co-Author of the Federalist, Negotiator of the Peace of 1783 & the Jay Treaty of 1794, First Chief Justice of the United States* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1935); Morris, Richard, *Witnesses at the Creation: Hamilton, Madison, Jay and the Constitution* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985); Bemis, Samuel Flagg, "Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923); Combs, Jerald A., "The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Stahr, Walter, *John Jay: Founding Father* (New York: Hambledon, 2005), 386-87.

## Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826)

### Secretary of State

21 March 1790 – 3 March 1793

Few if any persons have had the impact on the formation of government and culture in American society during its more than two centuries of existence as has Thomas Jefferson. From the educational enrichment of his stately mansion, "Monticello" ("hillock" or "little mountain" in Italian), in Virginia, to his authorship of the Declaration of Independence and two terms as President of the United States, he changed the landscape of America in ways that are still being measured today. Yet his tenure as the second Secretary of State remains one of the few periods of his life seldom explored or examined. Indeed, some historians consider him the first, because John Jay served but a short time as Secretary, and started off as the Secretary for Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation.

### Early Years

Jefferson, born on 2 April 1743 (by the Julian calendar; other sources use the Gregorian calendar date of 13 April) at his father's estate, "Shadwell," in Goochland (now Albemarle) county, about three miles east of Charlottesville, Virginia, was the third child and eldest son of Peter Jefferson, a planter and surveyor, and his wife Jane (née Randolph) Jefferson. Peter Jefferson, who died when his son Thomas was 14, was descended from a long line of Jeffersons who originally immigrated to England from Mount Snowden, Wales, and then came to America as some of the first settlers of Virginia. Jane Randolph Jefferson was born in London in 1720, and had married Peter Jefferson when she was 19. Shortly after his son Thomas was born, Peter Jefferson was appointed as one of the Justices of the Peace for the area of Albemarle. His home, at Shadwell, was a fine estate, but the home burnt down in 1770. In the 1990s, archaeologists excavated the site, and a historical marker was raised in 2002. Thomas Jefferson attended a preparatory school, then at William and Mary's Col-

lege (now the College of William and Mary) in Williamsburg, Virginia, but left in 1762 without taking a degree. He studied the law under George Wythe, and, after being appointed to two of his father's posts, Justice of the Peace and vestryman, he was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1767 and engaged in a practice that same year. His father's death in 1757 had left him with an inheritance of the estate and 1,000 slaves.

On 11 May 1769, Jefferson was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, and was re-elected six times until 1775. The same year he took his seat he began construction on perhaps one of the most famous homes in America, Monticello. He formally moved into the home three miles from Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1770, and soon turned it into a center of learning and agricultural pursuits unparalleled in American history. Having married Martha Wayles Skelton in 1772, the death of his father-in-law, John Wayles, in 1772, left him with another tract of land of some 40,000 acres and an additional 135 slaves, doubling his estate.

Prior to 1774, Thomas Jefferson was merely a small time Virginia politician. That year, however, he wrote a series of instructions to the delegates of the First Continental Congress regarding their arguments for the independence of the United States; it was published that year as *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (and reprinted in England in 1774 under the same title), establishing him as a noted speaker on the rights of colonists. That same year, Jefferson was elected to Virginia's first provincial convention. The following year, he was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he served until 1776. On 11 June 1776, he was appointed to a five-man committee established to draw up a document which called for the independence of the colonies from England. Jefferson wrote the first draft, a four-page document which was then altered and improved by the other committee members, which included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman. Jefferson's initial draft included the famed phrase, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation." On 2 July 1776, this document was accepted by the Continental Congress, and proclaimed that same day as the Declaration of Independence. (It was not until a German printer in Philadelphia printed it, on 4 July, that it was made public; this date, rather than 2 July, is the celebratory date of American independence.) On 2 September Jefferson resigned from the

Continental Congress, but on 7 October was elected a second time to the Virginia House of Burgesses. That same year, he assisted in the drafting of Virginia's first constitution.

The day after he was elected to the House of Burgesses, Jefferson was notified that he was elected by the Continental Congress as America's first Commissioner to France, to serve with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, but on 11 October he declined the honor. In 1777, he authored "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom," which was enacted by the Virginia Assembly in 1786. In it, he wrote, "Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens...are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion...No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. I know but one code of morality for men whether acting singly or collectively." In January 1779, he was elected by the House of Burgesses as the Governor of Virginia, to succeed the patriot Patrick Henry. After he took office that June, he was instrumental in moving the state capital to Richmond. That same year, he also founded the first professorship of law at William and Mary's College, his alma mater. He was re-elected in 1780, but declined a third term in 1781. In his two years as governor, he was forced to flee the capital four times because of the approach of British troops who threatened to invade. After he left the governor's mansion, he was elected a third time to the House of Burgesses.

On 13 November 1782, Jefferson was once again appointed by Congress as a commissioner to France, along with Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, to negotiate a treaty of peace, but he was stuck on a ship because of ice, and on 1 April 1783 his orders and appointment were canceled. On 6 June 1783, he was elected for a second time to Congress, and took his seat that November as the chairman of the committee on currency. On 7 May 1784, he was elected, for the third time, as a commissioner to France, with Franklin and Adams, this time with the goal of negotiating treaties of amity and commerce with the European powers. Jefferson accepted the commission and sailed to Europe on 5 July 1784. He arrived in Paris in August 1784, and, on 2 May 1785, he was appointed as Minister to Paris, to replace Franklin. In his *Autobiography*, Jefferson wrote:

*Mr. Adams being appointed Min. Plen. of the U. S. to London, left us in June, and in July 1785, Dr. Franklin returned to America, and I was appointed his successor at Paris. In Feb. 1786, Mr.*

*Adams wrote to me pressing to join him in London immediately, as he thought he discovered there some symptoms of better disposition towards us. Colo. Smith, his Secretary of legation, was the bearer of his urgencies for my immediate attendance. I accordingly left Paris on the 1st. of March, and on my arrival in London we agreed on a very summary form of treaty, proposing an exchange of citizenship for our citizens, our ships, and our productions generally, except as to office. On my presentation as usual to the King and Queen at their levees, it was impossible for anything to be more ungracious than their notice of Mr. Adams & myself. I saw at once that the ulcerations in the narrow mind of that mulish being left nothing to be expected on the subject of my attendance; and on the first conference with the Marquis of Caermarthen, his Minister of foreign affairs, the distance and disinclination which he betrayed in his conversation, the vagueness & evasions of his answers to us, confirmed me in the belief of their aversion to have anything to do with us.*

Jefferson remained at his post until 1789. During his time in France, Jefferson spent much time observing European mannerisms and culture, especially governmental institutions. It was during this period that he penned *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which was published in Paris in 1785, in which he wrote, "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever. Commerce between master and slave is despotism. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate that these people are to be free. Establish the law for educating the common people. This it is the business of the state to effect and on a general plan." Considered even by the French as a leading spokesman on religious and political freedom, they requested that he serve as an advisor to the French Assembly, but because of his diplomatic obligations he was forced to decline. Near the end of his tenure, he reported home in numerous letters the unfolding revolution which would sweep through France and result in the end for a time of the monarchy. A study of his letters at the time show that he came to detest the excesses of the revolution, and despised it more once Napoleon Bonaparte had taken command of the country.

#### Named to the Cabinet

After working non-stop for four years, Jefferson was granted a six month's leave of absence, and he left France on 22 October 1789, landing in the United States

on 23 November. When he arrived, he received a letter from President George Washington, dated 13 October, asking him to join his cabinet to serve as the Secretary of State. In the missive, Washington penned, "In the selection of Characters to fill the important offices of Government in the United States I was naturally led to contemplate the talents and disposition which I knew you to possess and entertain for the Service of your Country. And without being able to consult your inclination, or to derive any knowledge of your intentions from your letters either to myself or to any other of your friends, I was determined, as well by motives of private regard as a conviction of public propriety, to nominate you for the Department of State, which, under its present organization, involves many of the most interesting objects of the Executive Authority. But grateful as your acceptance of this Commission would be to me, I am at the same time desirous to accommodate to your wishes, and I have therefore forbore to nominate your successor at the Court of Versailles until I should be informed of your determination." Jefferson himself wrote, "On my way home...I received a letter from the President, General Washington, by express, covering an appointment to be Secretary of State. I received it with real regret. My wish had been to return to Paris...and to send of the revolution, which I then thought would be certainly and happily closed in less than a year. I then meant to return home, to withdraw from public life, into which I had been impressed by the circumstances of the times, to sink into the bosom of my family and friends, and to devote myself to studies more congenial to my mind..." Jefferson accepted the post, and moved into quarters in New York City, then the administrative capital of the United States. Abigail Adams, wife of the then-Vice President (and later President) John Adams, wrote to her sister, "Mr. Jefferson is here, and adds much to the social circle." She called him "one of the choicest ones on Earth." On 16 June 1789, President Washington had sent to the Senate his first letter of nomination, naming William Short to replace Jefferson in Paris.

Almost from the moment that he accepted the State portfolio, Jefferson was mired in the work of moving the department from New York City to the new government home in Philadelphia. Once the move was underway, he wrote to William Temple Franklin, son of Benjamin, to acquire for him and the department in Philadelphia the quarters and offices which he wanted: "On further reflection it appears to me that the houses you mentioned of Mrs. Buddin', would suit me so perfectly that I must beg the favor of you to insure me the refusal of two of them adjoining to each other, on the best terms that you can...My object in taking two houses is to assign the lower floor of both to my public

offices, and the first floor and both gardens entirely to my own use. Perhaps the third floor of one of them might also be necessary for dead office papers, machines, &c. I should wish for such a gallery on the back of the building as I erected here...A good neighbor is a very desirable thing. Mr. Randolph the Attorney Genl. is probably now in Philadelphia, & I think would like the same part of the town. I wish the 3d. house (my two being secured) could be proposed to him."

On 24 May 1790, Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania met Jefferson for the first time, and described the Secretary of State in his *Journal*:

*Jefferson is a slender Man; has rather the Air of Stiffness in his manner; his cloaths [sic] seem too small for him; he sits in a lounging Manner on one hip, commonly, and with one of his shoulders elevated much above the other. His face has a scrumpy [sic; possibly scrawny] aspect. His Whole figures has a loose shackling Air. He had a rambling Vacant look & nothing of that firm collected deportment which I expected would dignify the presence of a Secretary or Minister. I looked for gravity, but a laxity of Manner seemed shed about him. He spoke almost without ceasing. But even his discourse partook of his personal demeanor. It was lax & rambling and Yet he scattered information wherever he went, and some even brilliant sentiments sparkled from him. The information which he Us respecting foreign Ministers & ca. Was all high Spiced. He had been long enough abroad to catch the tone of European folly.*

During his tenure as Secretary of State, a period which lasted from 22 March 1790 until he left office on 31 December 1793, Jefferson was plagued with migraine headaches and fought the influence of Alexander Hamilton in the cabinet. Historian Margaret Christman wrote, "Patent applications, rather than foreign affairs, occupied the greatest share of his time. Under the law enacted in 1790, a three-man board composed of the secretaries of state and wars, together with the attorney general, examined all inventions. To Jefferson fell the task of determining whether or not a patent was justified. 'Many of them indeed are trifling,' Jefferson wrote on 27 June 1790, 'but there are some of great consequence which have been proved by practice, and others which if they stand the same proof will produce great effect.'" As per his mandate instructed from Congress, Jefferson submitted a report to the House of Representatives for a uniform system of weights and measures to be used nationwide, but his plan was never adopted. However, perhaps one of the early Republic's greatest documents was a state paper composed by Jefferson on the matter of the recognition of the Republic of France. In a letter to Gouverneur Morris, who was

-serving at the time as the United States Minister to France in Jefferson's place, Jefferson wrote, "We surely cannot deny to any nation that right whereon our own government is founded—that everyone may govern itself according to whatever form it pleases and change these forms at its own will; and that it may transact its business with foreign nations through whatever organ it thinks proper, whether king, convention, assembly, committee, president, or anything it may choose. The will of the nation is the only thing essential to be regarded." In a report to Congress, dated 16 December 1793, shortly before he left office, he laid out a plan of "Commercial Privileges and Restrictions."

Historian Graham Stuart wrote of Jefferson's tenure as Secretary of State, "It was well that Jefferson was a natural administrator, because the Department of State was the catchall of duties which were definitely not assigned elsewhere. In fact, Jefferson himself described the Department of State as embracing the whole domestic administration (war and finance excepted). President Washington deposited official letters, even those concerning other departments, in the State Department; and all applications for office were turned over to it. When civil appointments were made by the President, he used the Secretary of State as the agency for the transmission of the commissions of appointment. Originally, Jefferson expected the postal service to be under his jurisdiction, and with Postmaster General Pickering worked out a scheme to accelerate the mail service; but Washington preferred the post office to be under the Treasury Department. On the other hand, the mint, which seemingly was closer to the Treasury Department, was definitely assigned to the Department of State." Stuart concludes, "In evaluating Jefferson's work as the 'first' Secretary of State, despite his being official considered as the second man to hold that office, it must be conceded that he does not perhaps rate a position as one of the greatest who has held the office." Nonetheless, historian David S. Patterson explained, "Jefferson deserves high marks for his thoughtful and innovative administration of the Department of State, but he was less successful as a diplomat. In part, Jefferson was eclipsed by President Washington, who often served as his own Secretary of State. The President also consulted Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton on foreign policy. Hamilton's strong preference for an Anglophile, aristocratic, mercantile elite increasingly clashed with Jefferson's Francophile sentiments and identification with the democratic, agrarian masses." Jefferson's fame rests on other parts of his life, both public and private.

What marked the end of Jefferson's cabinet service was his constant feud with Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton considered Jefferson to

be a radical demagogue; Jefferson, on the other hand, thought of Hamilton as a threat to democratic government. The two argued vociferously in an attempt to sway Washington's foreign and domestic policies. Finally, angered by the unceasing quarrels over policy with Hamilton, who left the cabinet before Jefferson did, Jefferson formally resigned by sending a letter to Washington on 31 December 1793. In his reply, the president wrote, "I cannot suffer you to leave your station, without assuring you, that the opinion which I had formed of your integrity and talents, and which dictated your original nomination, has been confirmed by the fullest experience; and that both have been eminently displayed in the discharge of your duties." Washington selected Attorney General Edmund Randolph to succeed Jefferson.

### After Leaving Office

As for the first Secretary of State, he retired to his home at Monticello for three years, remodeling his spacious home and experimenting with numerous agricultural pursuits, including a winery. "Architecture is my delight," he wrote to a friend of his work, "and putting up and pulling down, one of my favorite amusements." But he remained constantly involved in local and national politics, writing to numerous friends and exchanging ideas. His concern over the impressment of American soldiers by British ships led him to write on 2 June 1794 to George Hammond, the British minister to the United States, "the impressions cannot be counteracted too soon...But let these facts be as they may...ought they ultimately produce a state of war?"

In 1796, Jefferson was selected as a candidate for President to succeed Washington; in the House of Representatives, he received the second highest number of electoral votes, and because at that time there were no "tickets" with presidential and vice presidential candidates, electoral competitors stood on their own. Vice President John Adams came in first with 71 electoral votes, and was elected President, while Jefferson was a close second with 68. Thus Thomas Jefferson, who had resigned from the cabinet three short years earlier and had gone into retirement at his home in Virginia, was elected as the second Vice President of the United States. During his single four-year term in the position, Jefferson disagreed with Adams over numerous issues. When Adams' Federalist Party enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 to stifle dissent, Jefferson, working with James Madison, drafted the so-called Kentucky and Virginia resolutions, in which they asserted that states could nullify certain federal laws if they were clearly unconstitutional. Because of the unpopularity of the acts Adams was defeated for reelection in 1800, with Jefferson tied with Aaron Burr for the office

of President with 73 electoral votes apiece, necessitating a vote in the House of Representatives in which Jefferson was selected as president and Burr as vice president. Thomas Jefferson thus took office as the third president of the United States on 4 March 1801, the first president to be sworn into office in Washington, D.C. In his inaugural address, he said, "Friends and Fellow-Citizens: Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow-citizens which is here assembled to express my grateful thanks for the favor with which they have been pleased to look toward me, to declare a sincere consciousness that the task is above my talents, and that I approach it with those anxious and awful presentiments which the greatness of the charge and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire. A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye—when I contemplate these transcendent objects, and see the honor, the happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue, and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation, and humble myself before the magnitude of the undertaking. Utterly, indeed, should I despair did not the presence of many whom I here see remind me that in the other high authorities provided by our Constitution I shall find resources of wisdom, of virtue, and of zeal on which to rely under all difficulties. To you, then, gentlemen, who are charged with the sovereign functions of legislation, and to those associated with you, I look with encouragement for that guidance and support which may enable us to steer with safety the vessel in which we are all embarked amidst the conflicting elements of a troubled world."

Jefferson was reelected in 1804, and served as president until he left office on 4 March 1809. A discussion of his presidency would show that while he was not one of the most successful presidents in American history, several important events occurred. Perhaps the most significant was Jefferson's acquisition in 1803, from Napoleonic France, of the Louisiana Territory in a deal for \$15 million dollars (about 3 cents an acre for the 512 million acres involved), ending French influence in America and doubling the size of the nation as a whole. In 1804, he sent explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore and investigate the areas which today are part of the northwestern United States. Working closely with an eminent cabinet, including Secretary of State James Madison and Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin, he slashed expenditures for the army and navy, and did away with a tax on whiskey

which had led to internal discontent. By the conclusion of his first term, the national deficit had been cut by a third. He ran for a second term to vindicate his first, concentrating more in the second four years on foreign affairs. In 1805, he helped conclude a peace in the Tripolitan War (1801-05), in which the United States Navy had been used for the first time. Vice President Aaron Burr, who had killed former Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804, was later tried (but acquitted) for treasonously attempting to establish an independent republic inside the borders of the United States. Jefferson dealt swiftly with the Chesapeake Affair (1807), in which a British ship, the *Leopard*, attacked an American ship, the *Chesapeake*. However, Jefferson closed his administration by passing the Embargo Act in December 1807, in which all British and French exports were prohibited from American ports in an effort to get those two nations to recognize American rights on the sea. The act backfired on Jefferson, and led to the resurgence of the moribund Federalist party. Jefferson signed into law the decree repealing the Embargo Act just prior to his leaving office; in the short term, the action crippled the economy of the United States and contributed to the bad feelings which led to the War of 1812 with Britain. The act's long-term consequences, however, led to a spirit of independence amongst American industries, leading to the Industrial Revolution just a few years later. Jefferson came to hate the presidency, as its minuscule salary cost him more than \$11,000 during his terms in office. As he left office, he wrote, "Never did a prisoner released from his chains feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power." He offered his large library of books to the nation after the British invaded and burned down the Capitol; this collection became the foundation of the Library of Congress.

In what became the last two decades of his life, Jefferson remained at Monticello, and helped to establish the University of Virginia at Charlottesville in 1819, with his design and conceptions, and he assisted in the construction and the hiring of faculty for the school. He also made peace with Adams, and their correspondence to each other in the last years of both men's lives is one of the most important in our nation's history. In a letter to one Samuel Kercheval on 12 July 1826, Jefferson wrote, "I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy

as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”

In January 1826, at the age of 82, Jefferson found himself broke. Although he was at one time one of the largest land owners in Virginia, he lived extravagantly, and spent more money than he ever made. The money which Congress paid him for his library—\$23,950—was quickly spent. Eventually he was in debt for more than \$107,000. He then came up with an idea for a national lottery, run by his grandson, Jefferson Randolph. Two of Jefferson’s political enemies, John Randolph and John Marshall, purchased batches of tickets; because, Randolph wrote, “Out of pity that the author of Declaration of Independence has suffered public humiliation.” The lottery—called the “Jefferson Lottery”—was a bust, and brought in only half of the needed \$107,000. Jefferson died on 4 July 1826—the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration—still in debt. His home was sold at auction, and it took the machinations of one Uriah Levy to purchase the home and donate it to the nation as a gift. It is now a major tourist attraction.

Jefferson was buried on the grounds of his beloved Monticello. His epitaph, which he desired should neglect to mention that he ever served as President of the United States, reads:

AUTHOR OF THE  
DECLARATION  
OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

OF THE  
STATUTE OF VIRGINIA  
FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

AND FATHER OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

*The Daily National Intelligencer* was but one of the numerous American newspapers to lament the death of the third president. The paper editorialized, “Thomas Jefferson is no more! His weary sun hath made a golden set, leaving a bright tract of undying fame.” Secretary of War James Barbour wrote, “This dispensation of Divine Providence, afflicting us to us, but the consummation of glory to him, occurred on the fourth of the present month—on the Fiftieth Anniversary of that Independence, the Declaration of which, emanating from his mind, at once proclaimed the birth of a free nation, and offered motives of hope and consolation to the whole family of man. Sharing in the grief which every heart must feel for so heavy and afflicting a public loss, and desirous to express his high sense of the vast debt of gratitude which is due to the virtues, talents,

and ever memorable services of the illustrious deceased, the President directs that Funeral Honors be paid to him at all the Military Stations, and that the officers of the Army wear crape on the left arm, by way of mourning, for six months.”

Thomas Jefferson has been memorialized in two of the more prominent monuments in the United States. In 1934, Congress authorized the creation of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, which was dedicated in 1943 and remains one of the most popular monuments in Washington, D.C., with its imposing statue of Jefferson surrounded by granite walls with quotes from some of his most famous speeches and writings. And between 1927 and 1941, sculptor Gutzon Borglum sculpted the faces of George Washington, Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt into the granite of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota.

In 1998, DNA tests on relatives of one of Jefferson’s slaves, Sally Hemings, confirmed that DNA belonging to Jefferson’s family was connected to Hemings’ descendants. Rumors had long circulated that Jefferson had had children with her. The accusation first appeared in print as early as 1802, when journalist and political pamphleteer James Callender wrote, “It is well known that the man, whom it delighteth the people to honor, keeps and for many years past has kept, as his concubine, one of his slaves. Her name is Sally.” Jefferson’s grandson, however, had once confided to a historian that Hemings’ children had been fathered by a different relative, Jefferson’s nephew. In part because this reckoning was conveyed in confidence, and in part, no doubt because of prejudice, most historians believed it until it was shown, to the satisfaction of most historians, to be otherwise. In 2018, the museum at Monticello unveiled a permanent exhibition devoted to Sally Hemings, who is presented as Jefferson’s concubine. That relationship went as far back as 1789-91 when Hemings was in France. France abolished slavery in 1789, and she was thus paid a wage during her time there. She also learned French, and she could have petitioned for permanent freedom in France. Instead, according to Hemings family lore, she negotiated with Jefferson to return to the United States, but only on condition of “extraordinary privileges” including emancipation for any children. Hemings and Jefferson eventually had four children together—Beverly, Harriet, Madison, and Eston.

**References:** Randall, Henry S., *The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Derby & Jackson; three volumes, 1858), I:6-13; Clotworthy, William, G., ed., “Presidential Sites: A Directory of Places Associated with Presidents of the United States” (Blacksburg, Virginia: McDonald & Woodward, 1995), 74; Carpenter, Stephen Cullen, “Memoirs of the Hon. Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, Vice President, and President of the United States of America—Containing a Concise History of Those States from the Acknowledgement

of Their Independence: With a View of the Rise of French Influence and French Principles in That Country" (New York: For the Purchaser; two volumes, 1809); Jefferson, Thomas, "Autobiography" (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959); Washington to Jefferson, 13 October 1789, in Julian P. Boyd, ed., "The Papers of Thomas Jefferson" (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; 27 volumes, 1950-), 15:519; Jefferson's response on learning of Secretary of State appointment in Frank Donovan, "The Thomas Jefferson Papers" (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963), 120; Christman, Margaret C.S., "The First Federal Congress, 1789-1791" (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 141-42; Thomas Jefferson to William Temple Franklin, 16 July 1790, in Thomas Jefferson (Paul Leicester Ford, ed.), "The Works of Thomas Jefferson" (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 12 volumes, 1904-05), VI:105-06—also Jefferson to Gouverneur Morris, IV:199; "The Secretaries of State: Portraits and Biographical Sketches," Department of State Publication 8921 (November 1978), 5; Kaplan, Lawrence S., "Thomas Jefferson" in Frank J. Merli and Theodore Wilson, eds., "Makers of American Diplomacy: From Benjamin Franklin to Henry Kissinger" (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 53-79; Maclay, William (Edgar Stanton Maclay, ed.), "Journal of William Maclay, United States Senator from Pennsylvania, 1789-1791" (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1890), 272; "Commercial Privileges and Restrictions," Report No. 68, 3rd Congress, 1st Session (1793), and "Great Britain: Committee on Aggressions Committed within Our Ports by Foreign Armed Vessels. Attack of the Leopard on the Chesapeake," Document No. 205, 10th Congress, 1st Session (17 November 1807), in Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., "American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, From the First Session of the First to the Third Session of the Thirteenth Congress, Inclusive: Commencing March 3, 1789, and Ending March 3, 1815" (Washington, D.C.: Published by Gales and Seaton; 38 volumes, 1832-1861), Foreign Affairs [Class I], I:300, 464-66, III:6; Stuart, Graham H., "The Department of State: A History of Its Organization, Procedure, and Personnel" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 20-21; Patterson, David S., "The Department of State: The Formative Years, 1775-1800," *Prologue*, 2:4 (Winter 1989), 325; Bowers, Claude Gernade, "Jefferson in Power" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1936); Perkins, Bradford, "Prologue to War: England and the United States 1805-1812" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 272; Perkins, Bradford, "A Question of National Honor," in Thomas G. Patterson, ed., "Major Problems in American Foreign Policy" (Toronto: Heath and Company, 1989), 158; "[Obituary: Thomas Jefferson]," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 7 July 1826, 3; "[Notes on the Death of Thomas Jefferson]," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 8 July 1826, 2, and "[Letter from Secretary of War Barbour on Jefferson's Death, 7 July 1826]," *Daily National Intelligencer*, 8 July 1826, 3; Bryan, John H., "Orations on the Death of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Delivered at the Request of the Citizens of Newbern, on the 17th and 24th July 1826. By the Hon. John H. Bryan and the Hon. John Stanley" (Newbern, North Carolina: Watson and Machen, 1826); Smith, Leaf, "Tests Link Jefferson, Slave's Son," *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1998, A1.

## Alexander Hamilton (1755 – 1804)

### Secretary of the Treasury

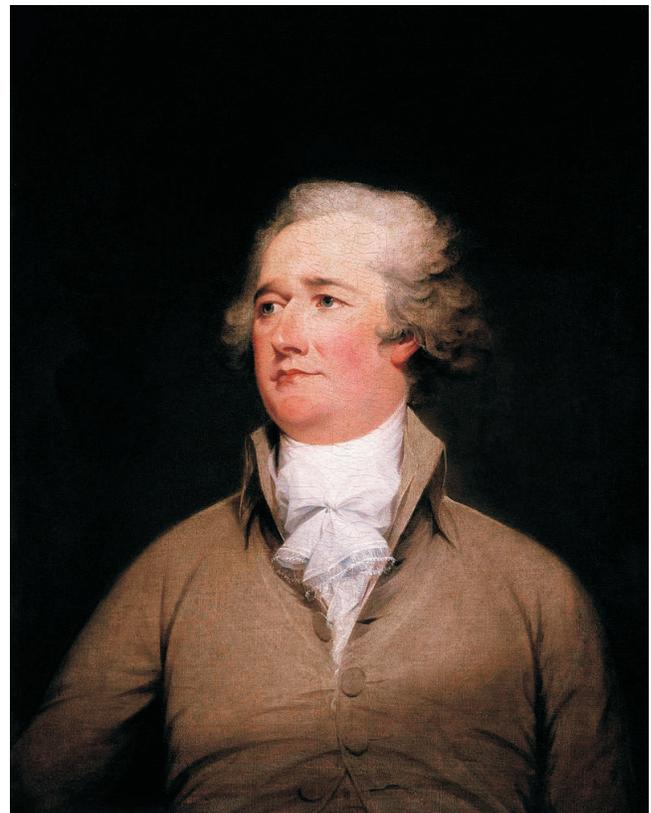
11 September 1789 – 3 March 1793

Few historians remember the work which Alexander Hamilton did in his storied career; history has instead captured the image of the man who died at the hands of the Vice President of the United States, Aaron Burr,

during a duel, or that face on the \$20 bill. Yet Hamilton was much more than that. In 1999, when Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin resigned, he was called "the best Treasury Secretary since Alexander Hamilton." The tenure of Hamilton, the first man to serve in the new federal government's action to put the infant American nation on a firm financial footing, is considered one of the finest in the history of the United States.

### Early Years

There is much controversy about Hamilton's date of birth and its circumstances. According to family sources, he was born on the West Indies island of Nevis sometime in 1755, not on 11 January 1757 as many sources assert. Further, while his mother's name, Rachel Fawcett, is correct, her husband, Danish land owner John Michel Levine, was not Hamilton's father; he was apparently Scottish merchant James Hamilton, and while Rachel and Levine divorced four years later, a local court refused to allow Rachel to marry James Hamilton. She lived with him, and they were considered man and wife. However, James Hamilton's business soon evaporated, and the two separated, and remained so until Rachel's death in 1768. Apparently, John C. Hamilton, Alexander's son, made a complete



Alexander Hamilton

search of his family when writing his father's biography, which appeared in 1840. He wrote that his father's lineage "may be traced in 'the Memoirs of the House of Hamilton,' through the Cambuskeith branch of that House to a remote and renowned ancestry...his grandfather, 'Alexander Hamilton of Grange' (the family seat situate in Ayrshire), about the year 1730, married Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Sir Robert Pollock, and had a numerous issue, of whom James, his fourth son, was the father of the subject of this memoir." However, in his researches, John Hamilton discovered that his grandmother's name was spelled "Faucette" instead of "Fawcett" as most historians give it. Alexander Hamilton was raised by his mother on St. Croix until her death, and at that time was orphaned, even though his father lived until 1799. He learned to speak French fluently, and at age 12 went to work in a general store in the village of Christianstadt. In 1772, some of his mother's sisters gave him money, and he sailed for New York, where he received an education at Francis Barber's grammar school in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. He then enrolled in King's College (now Columbia University), but left before he could earn a degree.

In 1774, Hamilton began to agitate for the side of rebels who opposed the British government and wanted independence for the American colonies. He quickly gained notoriety by advocating the colonial cause as both an orator and a writer. In the former fashion, he spoke at a meeting in "the Fields" (now City Hall Park) on 6 July 1774, against British measures against the colonists; toward the latter manner, he wrote two pamphlets, *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress from the Calumnies of Their Enemies* (1774) and *The Farmer Refuted; or, a More Comprehensive and Impartial View of the Disputes Between Great Britain and the Colonies* (1775), as well as penning columns in the *New York Journal, or General Advertiser*. When the Revolutionary War began, he worked to drill soldiers, and General Nathanael Greene was said to be so impressed with him that he wrote to General George Washington to commission him a captain. Thus commissioned, Hamilton participated in several battles around New York City, but his reputation was made at Princeton, where he forced British troops who had sought refuge in a building to surrender. And although he also saw action and showed himself to be a heroic figure, particularly at Monmouth and Yorktown, perhaps his most important service was as an aide-de-camp for Washington, serving from 1 March 1777 until 16 February 1781. He also served as Washington's confidential secretary, penning under his own hand many of the general's private military correspondence. On 14 December 1780, Hamilton married Elizabeth Schuyler, the daughter of General Philip Schuyler.

Following the end of the war, Hamilton was elected to a seat in the Continental Congress in November 1782, and served through 1783; afterwards, he returned to New York and opened a law practice in New York City. He also spoke out and wrote on the subject of the weaknesses of the federal government under the Articles of Confederation. To this end, he called for the assembly of a Constitutional Convention to convene and design a new system of government. In late 1786, he was named to the New York membership sent to the Annapolis Convention, which was the forerunner of the convention held in Philadelphia the following year. Hamilton was the key member of this earlier convention to call for a national assembly of learned men to form a new government with a strong central government and less powerful state governments. Named to the Philadelphia meeting with anti-Federalist politicians Robert Yates and John Lansing, Hamilton was busy conducting business in New York for most of 1787 and did not attend most of the convention. Because each state voted as a unit, Yates and Lansing were able to block all of Hamilton's proposals. Hamilton's most important service, however, came in the fight for the ratification of the Constitution. Soon after the convention ended, articles signed "Brutus" began to appear in New York newspapers denouncing the document. Hamilton believed that Yates was the writer, and he felt answers to the anti-Federalist argument needed to be aired. With John Jay and James Madison, the three men penned articles in *The Independent Journal: Or, The General Advertiser* calling attention to their reasons for ratification. Hamilton's first article appeared on 27 October 1787 under the named "Publius." He wrote, "To the People of the State of New York: After an unequivocal experience of the inefficacy of the subsisting Federal Government, you are called upon to deliberate on a new Constitution for the United States of America. The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences nothing less than the existence of the UNION, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire in many respects the most interesting in the world. It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis at which we are arrived may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made; and a wrong election of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind...This

idea will add the inducements of philanthropy to those of patriotism, to heighten the solicitude which all considerate and good men must feel for the event. Happy will it be if our choice should be directed by a judicious estimate of our true interests, unperplexed and unbiased by considerations not connected with the public good. But this is a thing more ardently to be wished than seriously to be expected. The plan offered to our deliberations affects too many particular interests, innovates upon too many local institutions, not to involve in its discussion a variety of objects foreign to its merits, and of views, passions and prejudices little favorable to the discovery of truth.” In 1787, Hamilton was once again elected to the Continental Congress, where he continued to support the ratification of the Constitution until it was completed in 1789.

### Named to the Cabinet

After helping to ratify the Constitution in New York State, Hamilton studied the law, and was admitted to the bar in 1789. Soon after, however, he was summoned to speak with General Washington, who had just been elected as the first President of the United States under the Constitution. The Congress was formulating departments to help advise the President on numerous government matters, including that of financial affairs to be designated the Department of the Treasury. Many modern historians believe that Hamilton was Washington’s sole choice to be the first man to head this department; in fact, Washington had intended for Robert Morris to serve in that position, and turned to Hamilton only when Morris refused. There is no letter or other record of Washington’s asking Hamilton to serve as the first Secretary of the Treasury. An explanation may be found by historian Robert Hendrickson: “When Washington had asked Robert Morris for suggestions for a man to occupy the great office, Morris replied, ‘There is but one man in the United States’: Alexander Hamilton. He added, ‘I am glad you have given me this opportunity to declare to you, the extent of the obligations I am under to him.’ Robert Troup recalled that Washington, immediately after his inauguration, ‘called on Hamilton, and told him it was his intention to nominate him to the charge of the financial department’ as soon as it should be organized. The next day, Hamilton asked Troup to take over his law practice if he should be appointed. Willing to oblige, Troup duly pointed out the financial sacrifice it would mean for Hamilton’s family. Hamilton readily admitted this, but said he could not refuse an assignment in which he ‘could essentially promote the welfare of the country.’” On 11 September 1789, Washington sent the name of Hamilton to the Senate, along with those of Nicholas Everleigh for Comptroller, Samuel Meredith as Treas-

urer, Oliver Wolcott, Jr., for Auditor, and Joseph Nourse for Register, for confirmation. Hamilton was confirmed unanimously that same day, and he took office as the 1st Secretary of the Treasury.

During his tenure, which lasted until his resignation on 31 January 1795, Hamilton worked to resolve the crisis over debts from the federal government lasting from the pre-constitutional government, and to stabilize the currency. In 1792, Hamilton wrote a friend, Col. Edward Carrington, that “most of the important measures of every government are connected with the treasury.”

As part of a circle of ministers around the President called the cabinet, Hamilton was a close advisor on all matters, even foreign policy concerns. Historian Forrest McDonald explains, “Hamilton preferred an executive branch modeled after that of Great Britain, where the ministers (including heads of departments), acting in the name of the Crown, in fact constituted ‘the Government.’ Such a ministry would not only implement policy, as defined by Congress, but would initiate policy as well, both by exercising an independent administrative power and by drafting legislation and guiding it through Congress. Hamilton’s position ran counter to the ideas of both Washington and Madison, and decisions made before Hamilton took office prevented him from fully implementing his ideas. Nonetheless, the nature of Hamilton’s responsibilities, carried out in the context of the administrative system that Washington chose to put into force, partially permitted Hamilton to have his way.” In his 1791 “Report on Manufactures,” Hamilton wrote that he wanted a strong industrial economy to complement the agrarian economy which Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson felt would dominate the infant United States in the future. Hamilton’s view—that the more industrial Northern states would purchase raw materials from the Southern states, make them into finished products, and sell them back to the South, thus completing the circle of a self-sufficient economy—was the key to his thinking. His idea of establishing a seagoing branch of the American military was taken up by Congress and made into the Revenue Marine, with ten cutters, and is now called the U.S. Coast Guard. Hamilton also called for the creation of a Department of the Navy, which was enacted in 1798, three years after he left office. But Hamilton was most important in the financial matters of the newborn nation, even though he had no background in dealing with the management of finances. In 1790, he told Congress in a report that the new financial system should be based on the British system as it had been developed up until the time of William Pitt the Elder. His ideas on national credit, and the formation of a national bank, were revolutionary in their scope. This document, *The*

*Report on Public Credit*, is the basis of what some historians call “Hamiltonianism.” This system which he envisioned established an order which allowed for the government to be financed, while at the same time all state and pre-constitutional debts would be assumed by the new federal government. Although Jefferson strongly opposed this measure, the Secretary of State agreed to it in exchange for Hamilton’s agreement to move the national capital to a site on the Potomac River. In his second annual message to Congress, delivered on 8 December 1790, Washington followed Hamilton’s advice by borrowing some money from overseas to shore up the American economy. He wrote, “In conformity to the powers vested in me by acts of the last session, a loan of 3,000,000 florins, toward which some provisional measures had previously taken place, has been completed in Holland. As well the celerity with which it has been filled as the nature of the terms (considering the more than ordinary demand for borrowing created by the situation of Europe) give a reasonable hope that the further execution of those powers may proceed with advantage and success. The Secretary of the Treasury has my directions to communicate such further particulars as may be requisite for more precise information.” On 23 February 1791, Hamilton delivered perhaps his most famous report, his “Opinion on the Constitutionality of an Act to Establish a National Bank.” In 1781, the man who was supposed to be the first Secretary of the Treasury, Robert Morris, was serving as the national superintendent of finance under the Articles of Confederation, and had addressed this very issue. Hamilton revisited it. He wrote, “The Secretary of the Treasury, having perused with attention the papers containing the opinions of the Secretary of State and Attorney General concerning the constitutionality of the bill for establishing a National Bank proceeds according to the order of the President to submit the reasons which have induced him to entertain a different opinion...In entering upon the argument it ought to be premised, that the objections of the Secretary of State and Attorney General are founded on a general denial of the authority of the United States to erect corporations. The latter indeed expressly admits, that if there be any thing in the bill which is not warranted by the constitution, it is the clause of incorporation...Now it appears to the Secretary of the Treasury, that this general principle is inherent in the very definition of Government and essential to every step of the progress to be made by that of the United States; namely—that every power vested in a Government is in its nature sovereign, and includes by force of the term, a right to employ all the means requisite, and fairly applicable to the attainment of the ends of such power; and which are not precluded by restrictions & exceptions specified

in the constitution; or not immoral, or not contrary to the essential ends of political society.”

Hamilton was a key member of the administration. Biographer Michael Lind wrote of him, “He was Washington’s right-hand man, an abrasive genius and ruthless political infighter. As America’s first secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton worked hard to implement his vision of government, economy, and foreign policy—a vision that merits renewed attention in these uncertain times.” In fact, reported *The Wall Street Journal*, during the first year of the administration, while Washington was away at Mount Vernon and Vice President John Adams was at his home in Quincy, Massachusetts, Hamilton was in fact the “de facto prime minister of the first federal government.” When John Jay resigned as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Washington urged Hamilton to take the post, but Hamilton refused. On 2 July 1795, shortly before his own death, Attorney General William Bradford, Jr., wrote to Hamilton regarding the Jay vacancy. “Your squabbles in New York have take our Chief Justice from us,” he penned. “Ought you not to find us another? I am afraid that department ‘as it relates neither to War, finance not Negotiation [sic],’ has no charms for you: & yet when one considers how immensely important it is where they have the power of paralyzing [sic] the measures of the government by declaring a law unconstitutional, it is not to be trusted to men who are to be scared by popular clamor or warped by feeble-minded prejudices...I wish to heaven you would permit me to name you...If not, what do you think of [Secretary of State] Randolph?”

On 31 January 1795, Hamilton resigned. Some historians claim that this occurred because Hamilton had such intense disagreements with Jefferson, and could not remain in the cabinet with him. But Jefferson had left office on 31 December 1793, and the likely reason for Hamilton’s departure is that the salary from his position (\$3,500 annually) was not enough for him. He left the cabinet in good stead, even helping Washington to write the president’s Farewell Address in 1796.

#### After Leaving Office

Hamilton continued to work on his law practice, and did not hold public office again. But he was involved in the body politic. When John Jay returned from Great Britain with “A Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, Between His Britannic Majesty and The United States of America, Conditionally Ratified By the Senate of the United States, at Philadelphia, June 24, 1795,” Hamilton supported it wholeheartedly, and to assure its ratification wrote several articles under the name “Camillus” and “Philo-Camillus.” During the threat of potential war with France in 1798, he was appointed as

an inspector-general, and helped to organize a force of some 50,000 men which ultimately did not see battle.

Although Hamilton was a political enemy of Thomas Jefferson, he sided with Jefferson when the former Secretary of State ran for President in 1800 over Jefferson's opponent, Aaron Burr. Although Hamilton had long regarded Jefferson with suspicion, he felt that Burr, a New Yorker, was a dangerous man, and urged his friends to vote for Jefferson and against Burr when the election was thrown into the House of Representatives. In 1804, when Burr sought the governorship of New York, Hamilton campaigned on behalf of his opponent, Morgan Lewis, who was elected. Burr, angered at twice being denied office, challenged Hamilton to a duel. Hamilton, who was too proud to resist such a dare, accepted, and met Burr at the village of Weehawken, on the shore of the Hudson River in New Jersey, on 11 July 1804. Hamilton purposefully missed his first shot, but Burr aimed his, and wounded the former Secretary of the Treasury mortally. Hamilton was carried to the home of William Bayard in Manhattan, and died there, in horrific agony, the following day, aged 49. He was laid to rest in the Trinity Churchyard in lower Manhattan, near Wall Street. On his gravestone reads:

“The PATRIOT of Incorruptible INTEGRITY.  
The SOLDIER of approved VALOUR.  
The STATESMAN of consummate WISDOM.  
Whose TALENTS and VIRTUES will be admired  
by GRATEFUL POSTERITY  
Long after this marble shall have mouldered into DUST.”

*The Farmers' Museum, or Literary Gazette* of Walpole, New Hampshire, reported, “Deep Lamentation. Died, at New-York, on the afternoon of Thursday, last week, General ALEXANDER HAMILTON, of a wound which he received on the morning of the preceding day, in a dual with Col. BURR. Never was a death more sincerely and justly lamented; and his loss will be sensibly felt throughout the U. States. In him were united the most splendid talents and the strictest political integrity. There was no man more universally beloved by those who knew him, and in whom such unbounded confidence was placed.” The paper then added an ominous warning: “Be it REMEMBERED, that on Wednesday the eleventh day of July, one thousand eight hundred and four, Gen. ALEXANDER HAMILTON, the most honorable and most beloved citizen of America, was MURDERED by AARON BURR. ‘Whose sheddeth man's blood (saith the Scripture) by man shall his blood be shed.’” On 10 March 1831, at a dinner, Daniel Webster said of Hamilton, “He smote the rock of the national resources, and abundant streams of rev-

enue gushed forth. He touched the dead corpse of Public Credit, and it sprang upon its feet.”

Today an imposing statue of Hamilton stands in front of the Department of the Treasury building in Washington, D.C., a monument to the first man to run that agency.

**References:** Wingo, Walter, “They Forgive and Don't Forget: The Hamiltons Treasure an Ancestor,” *The Washington Daily News*, 11 January 1957, 5; Hamilton, John Church, “The Life of Alexander Hamilton” (Boston: D. Appleton & Company; three volumes, 1840), I:1; letter and other biographical material in Hamilton biographical file, Department of the Treasury Library, Washington, D.C.; Hamilton, Allan McLane, “The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton, based Chiefly upon Original Family Letters and Other Documents, Many of which have Never Been Published, by Allan McLane Hamilton. With Illustrations and Fac-similes” (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910); Hamilton, Alexander (John C. Hamilton, ed.), “The Works of Alexander Hamilton: Comprising his Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military. Published from the Original Manuscripts Deposited in the Department of State, by order of the Joint Library Committee of Congress” (New York: C. S. Francis & Company; seven volumes, 1851), I:210-40; “Publius” in “The Federalist No. 1,” *The Independent Journal: Or, The General Advertiser* (New York), 27 October 1787, 3; see also “The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favor of the New Constitution, Agreed Upon By the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787” (New York: Printed and Sold by J. and A. McLean; two volumes, 1788); “Hamilton, Alexander” in John N. Ingham, “Biographical Dictionary of American Business Leaders” (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press; five volumes, 1983), II:529-33; Hendrickson, Robert, “Hamilton I (1757-1789)” (New York: Mason/Charter, 1976), 548; Hamilton to Carrington, 26 May 1792, in Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., “The Works of Alexander Hamilton” (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 26 volumes, 1904), IX:531; McDonald, Forrest, “The Presidency of George Washington” (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1974), 39; Hamilton's nomination and confirmation in “The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States; With An Appendix, Containing Important State Papers and Public Documents, and All the Laws of a Public Nature; With a Copious Index. Volume I, Comprising (with Volume II) the Period From March 3, 1789, to March 3, 1791, Inclusive. Compiled From Authentic Materials” (Washington, D.C.: Printed and Published by Gales and Seaton, 1834), 77; Mugridge, Ian, “Alexander Hamilton” in Frank J. Merli and Theodore Wilson, eds., “Makers of American Diplomacy: From Benjamin Franklin to Henry Kissinger” (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 27-51; Morris, Robert, “To the Public. On the 17th day of May, 1781, the Following Plan was Submitted to the Consideration of the United States in Congress Assembled: [A] Plan for Establishing a National Bank, for the United States” (Philadelphia: privately published, 1781); “Opinion on the Constitutionality of an Act to Establish a National Bank” in Morton J. Frisch, ed., “Selected Writings and Speeches of Alexander Hamilton” (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1985), 248-76; Bradford, Jr., to Hamilton, 2 July 1795, in Maeva Marcus and James R. Perry, eds., “The Documentary History of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1789-1800” (New York: Columbia University Press; eight volumes, 1985-), I:760; Van Ness, William Peter, “A Correct Statement of the Late Melancholy Affair of Honor Between General Hamilton and Col. Burr, in which the Former unfortunately Fell, July 11, 1804: Containing the Whole of the Correspondence between the Parties and the Seconds, the Particulars of the Interview, the death of Gen. Hamilton, his Will, and an Account of the Funeral Honors paid to his Memory, &c.: To Which is Added, A Candid Examination of the Whole Affair, in a Letter to a Friend. By Lysander” (New

York: Printed and Published for the Author by G. & R. Waite, 1804); Coleman, William, "A Collection of the Facts and Documents Relative to the Death of Major-General Alexander Hamilton. With comments: Together with the Various Orations, Sermons, and Eulogies, that have been Published or Written on his Life and Character. By the Editor of the Evening Post" (New York: Printed by Hopkins and Seymour, for I. Riley and Co. Booksellers, 1804); "Deep Lamentation," *Farmers' Museum, or Literary Gazette* (Walpole, New Hampshire), 21 July 1804, 2; Lind, Michael, "Hamilton's Legacy," *Wilson Quarterly*, 18:3 (Summer 1994), 40; Hendrickson, Robert A., "A Monument for Hamilton...Finally," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 November 1990, A14.

## Henry Knox (1750 – 1806)

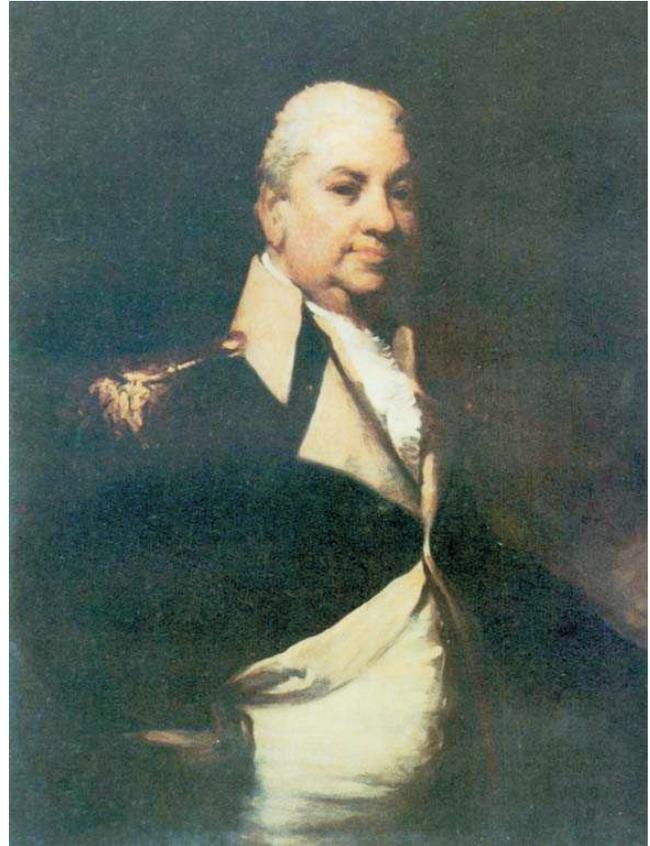
### Secretary of War

12 September 1789 – 3 March 1793

His official title when he first served in the Cabinet under the Articles of Confederation was "Secretary at War." When the new Constitution was implemented, his title was changed to "Secretary of War," the first man to hold that post, in which he oversaw, before the establishment of the Department of the Navy, the beginnings of the construction of the first six ships of the U.S. Navy.

### Early Years

Knox, the son of Irish immigrants William and Mary (née Campbell) Knox, was born in Boston on 25 July 1750, the seventh of ten children, all sons, four of whom would reach adulthood. According to Francis S. Drake, who in 1873 penned the first substantial biography of Knox based exclusively on some 56 volumes of personal papers that Knox left behind, the family of this famed general came from what is now Scotland. "The paternal ancestors of Knox were from the Lowlands of Scotland, a place bearing that name being found on the southern border of the Clyde, within the barony of Renfrew," Drake explained. "John Knox, the great reformer, was a native of the neighboring district of East Lothian, where the name is still numerous and respectable." Religious difficulties forced many Scottish Presbyterians to flee to what is now Northern Ireland, where William Knox, father of Henry, was born. Drake found William in Belfast, after which he moved to the New World, settling in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, and marrying Mary Campbell, daughter of Robert Campbell, a shipmaster. William Knox, a ship's captain, plied the West Indies for trade, but he endlessly suffered from financial difficulties and stress, which led to his early death on 25 March 1762 at age 50, when his son Henry was 12. Of William Knox's other sons, his two eldest, John and Benjamin, went to sea and were never heard from again. The youngest, William, served as a US consul to Ireland, afterwards as a clerk in the



Henry Knox

War Department when his brother was Secretary, but he went insane and died from the same in 1797. Henry Knox left school to support his large family by working in a bookstore in Boston, Wharton & Bowes, where he took an interest in military history. Six years later, at age 18, he joined a local military company. Later, he joined the Boston Grenadier Corps, and, in July 1773, while firing his musket, lost two small fingers on his left hand in an accident, a physical disability he concealed for the remainder of his life by holding his hand inside a handkerchief or a scarf.

After marrying, Knox resumed his military career, joining colonial troops to defend the nation against the British at the start of the Revolutionary War. He saw action at the battle of Bunker Hill, and was in charge of troops around Boston. When General George Washington came to Boston to survey the situation, he consulted with Knox, who was versed in military strategy and advised the general to place cannon from Fort Ticonderoga, which had been taken from the British, around Boston. Washington agreed, had the cannon moved to Boston by ship, promoted Knox to chief of artillery with the rank of Captain, and placed him in charge of the fifty artillery pieces. It was also the beginning of a friendship between Washington and Knox

which would last for the next quarter century. The strategy paid off when British General Lord William Howe, surrounded at Dorchester Heights near Boston, withdrew his troops to Canada with the threat of cannon fire hanging over him and his men. Knox moved his operations to New York, but was forced to flee when British landings overwhelmed the American positions. Knox did assist Washington in helping to move American troops into Trenton, where they captured nearly 1,000 Hessian troops, service which earned him a further promotion to brigadier general.

Washington saw in Knox the man who could help to supply the materiel-starved American forces, and he sent him to Massachusetts to construct an arsenal factory at Springfield. From this storehouse came the guns and other weapons the Continental Army used to obtain complete victory against the British in 1781. Washington wrote to Congress that “the resources of his genius supplied the deficit of means.” For his service, in 1782 Knox was named as the commander of the post at West Point, later to become the military academy located there. He was later assigned the task of disbanding the forces that made up the American army.

### Named to the Cabinet

The end of the war forced the men who had fought for independence to sit down and establish a government. A weak central government, constituted under the Articles of Confederation, gave Congress the power to create certain departments to handle executive matters. One of these was a Department *at War*, not of War, and, in 1785, Congress named Knox as the second Secretary at War to succeed General Benjamin Lincoln. Knox wrote from Boston to Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, “Sir, I have had the pleasure to receive your favor of the 9th instant, informing [me] of the honor conferred on me by the United States in Congress assembled, in electing me Secretary..I have the most grateful sentiments to Congress for this distinguishing mark of their confidence; and I shall, according to the best of my abilities, attempt to execute the duties of the office. I shall have a perfect reliance upon a candid interpretation of my actions, and I shall hope that application to business and propriety of intention may, in a degree, excuse a deficiency of talents.” To General Washington he wrote on 24 March 1785, “You may probably have heard that Congress have been pleased to appoint me Secretary at War. I have accepted the appointment, and shall expect to be in New York about the 15th of next month. From the habits imbibed during the war, and from the opinion of my friends that I should make but an indifferent trader, I thought, upon mature consideration, that it was well to accept it, although the salary would be but a slender support.”

He closed, “Congress have rendered the powers and duties of the office respectable; and the circumstances of my appointment, without solicitation on my part, were flattering, nine States out of eleven voting for me.” Washington wrote back to him that “without a compliment, I think a better choice could not have been made.” Knox responded, “My jealousy for your fame is so high, that I should prefer seeing You, Cincinnatus [referring to Washington being the head of the Society of the Cincinnati], like following your plow, rather than accept the least pecuniary reward whatever..” In his four years as Secretary at War, Knox remained at his small and cramped offices in New York City, first lodged at Fraunces Tavern (which is still in existence), where he shared space with the Foreign Office, and, after 1788, in a small structure on lower Broadway.

The enactment of the Constitution in 1787, and the establishment of the Federal Government two years later with George Washington as the nation’s first president, allowed for the formation of a more central and stronger federal government, with executive departments to advise the president on several matters. One of these, created by Congress on 9 August 1789, was the Department of War, with the head of the department called the Secretary of War. Washington, a close friend of the man already holding the position, named Knox as the first official Secretary of War. Knox led the department into a transition into a more modern agency, all with the aid of three clerks, one of whom was his brother, William Knox. Washington continually turned to his War Secretary on matters other than the military. In one letter he explained, “The enclosed papers relative to a treaty with the Cherokee Indians were put into my hands. I understand that matters of this kind have hitherto been considered as belonging to the Department of War to examine and report thereupon.” A steady stream of reports to the president advised on military maneuvers of the small number of troops still in the employé of the government, particularly on the western frontier, where conflict with the Indians was a growing problem. This one area of the department constituted most if not all of Knox’s time as secretary. Because there was no Department of the Navy (which did not exist until 1798), Knox oversaw the construction of the first of the new nation’s warships, including the famed U.S.S. *Constitution*. However, historian Mary Hinsdale, in a 1911 thesis on the president’s cabinet, wrote that “when consultations are recorded in written opinions only [such as annual reports and official letters to the President and staff], the Secretary of War and Attorney-General are not strongly in evidence. General Knox’ inferior ability in the writing of state papers probably explains the case so far as he is concerned.”

### After Leaving Office

On 28 December 1794, after nearly nine years as both the Secretary at War and Secretary of War, Knox wrote to Washington that he was tired and desired to retire. He penned, "After having served my country nearly twenty years, the greatest portion of which under your immediate auspices, it is with extreme reluctance, that I find myself constrained to withdraw from so honorable a situation. But the indispensable claims of a wife and a growing and numerous family of children, whose sole hopes of comfortable competence rest upon my life and exertions, will not longer permit me to neglect duties so sacred...But, in whatever situation I shall be, I shall recollect your confidence and kindness with all the fervor and purity of affection of which a grateful heart can be susceptible." Accepting the resignation with regret, Washington wrote, "I cannot suffer you, however, to close your public service without uniting, with the satisfaction which must arise in your own mind of a conscientious rectitude, my most perfect persuasion that you have deserved well of your country. My personal knowledge of your exertions, while it authorizes me to hold this language, justifies the sincere friendship which I have ever borne for you, and which will accompany you in every situation of life."

Knox moved with his wife and children to an estate, called "Montpelier" and located near Thomaston, Maine, in 1796, where he kept himself busy through various commercial pursuits. It was there that Knox died, on 21 October 1806, at the age of 56, and he was buried in the Elm Grove Cemetery in Thomaston. Knox counties in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas are all named for him. As well, Fort Knox in Hardin County, Kentucky, was named in his honor.

**References:** Brooks, Noah, "Henry Knox, a Soldier of the Revolution; Major-General in the Continental Army, Washington's Chief of Artillery, First Secretary of War Under the Constitution, Founder of the Society of the Cincinnati, 1750-1806" (New York: Putnam, 1900), 3-15; Drake, Francis S., "Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox, Major-General in the American Revolutionary Army" (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1873), 88-89, 109; Starrett, Lewis Frederick, "General Henry Knox: His Family, His Manor, His Manor House, and His Guests: A Paper Read Before the 12Mo Club, Rockland, Maine, March 3, 1902, by Lewis Frederick Starrett" (Rockland, Maine: Published by Huston's Bookstore, 1902); see also Washington to Knox, 2 November 1790, in Sparks, Jared, "The Writings Of George Washington; Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private, Selected and Published from the Official Manuscripts; With a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations" (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers; 11 volumes, 1847), X:119; Ingersoll, Lurton D., "A History of the War Department of the United States, With Biographical Sketches of the Secretaries" (Washington, D.C.: Francis B. Mohun, 1879), 389-408; Ward, Harry M., "The Department of War, 1781-1795" (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962); Crackel, Theodore J., "The Common Defence: The Department of War, 1789-1794," *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives*, XX:3 (Winter 1989), 330-43; Hinsdale, Mary L., "A History of the President's Cabinet" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr, 1911), 9.

## Edmund Jenings Randolph (1753 – 1813)

### Attorney General

26 September 1789 – 3 March 1793

He was born into privilege and wealth, but for most of his life, Edmund Randolph served his nation, including as an aide-de-camp to General George Washington during the American Revolutionary War, as the first state Attorney General of the state of Virginia, and, from 1789 to 1794, as the nation's first Attorney General in the cabinet of President George Washington.

### Early Years

The son of John Randolph, a noted Virginia lawyer, and Ariana (née Jenings or Jennings) Randolph, Edmund Jenings<sup>1</sup> Randolph was born at his father's estate, "Tazewell Hall," in Williamsburg, Virginia, on 10 August 1753. Edmund Randolph was a grandson of Sir John Randolph, a noted King's attorney in England, as well as a nephew of Peyton Randolph (1721-1775), delegate to the Continental Congress (1774) from Virginia, and a distant cousin of Thomas Jefferson; on his mother's side, he was a grandson of Edmund Jenings, who himself served as King's attorney in the colony of Maryland. Edmund Randolph attended the College of William and Mary, and afterwards studied the law under his father. His father was a staunch Tory; and when the machinations of the American Revolution began to occur, John Randolph took his wife and all of his children save Edmund and sailed for England, where he died in 1784, although his body was returned to America and buried in Williamsburg next to his father and brother in the church vault of the College of William and Mary chapel. (Ariana Randolph died in England in 1801 and was buried there.) Edmund, as well as his cousin Peyton Randolph (who served as the president of the Continental Congress shortly before his death in 1775), lent their lives to the colonial cause. During the war, he served as an aide-de-camp to General George Washington, and became for the general a loyal and trusted confidante.

Prior to his war service, Edmund studied the law, presumably under his illustrious father. In 1774, his cousin Thomas Jefferson retired from the practice of law, and asked Edmund to take over his office. Later that year, Edmund was named as the clerk of the Committee on Courts and Justice for the House of Burgesses, the seated legislature of the Virginia colony. When the war finally did break out, he was appointed by the Continental Congress itself as Deputy Muster Master General of the Continental Army for the Southern District, serving from 1775 until 1776. During that period, he served as Washington's aide. In the latter

year, however, Randolph resigned his military post when he was elected to the fifth Virginia Convention, representing Williamsburg.

At the age of only 23, Randolph served in the convention, which drew up a state constitution for Virginia. Under this code, Randolph was named as the state's first Attorney General, positioned to carry out its laws and legal functions. In this post, he served until 1786. During this same period, he was elected as a delegate to the Continental Congress from Virginia (1779-86). It was in this position that he was elected Governor of Virginia in 1786 over Richard Henry Lee and Theodorick Bland. It was in this capacity that he was sent to Philadelphia as a member of the Virginia delegation (among whose other members were Jacob McClurg, George Mason, and George Washington) to the Constitutional Convention. Four days after the opening of the Convention, on 29 May 1787, Randolph presented the so-called "Virginia Plan," which laid out a broad outline for a strong federal government composed of three branches—executive, judicial, and legislative—which held sway over all of the states and could enact and carry out laws. This blueprint, which was argued over for months, eventually became the foundation for the Constitution which was signed that September and was the cornerstone of our nation's government. Unfortunately, Randolph, along with fellow Virginian George Mason, did not sign the document on 17 September; in a letter, he said that the document was "the foetus of monarchy" and was "a unity in the Executive magistracy." He demanded that a bill of rights be included, and published a *Letter...on the Federal Constitution* (1787) denouncing the document. Nonetheless, when time came for state ratification, Randolph asked the state legislature to approve the scheme.

### Named to the Cabinet

With the formation of the federal government and the election of George Washington as the first president, a cabinet of advisors was needed. To fill the position of Attorney General, Washington asked John Marshall, considered one of the leading judicial luminaries in the young nation, but Marshall refused the honor. The president then reached out to the man whose abilities he knew well: Edmund Randolph. He served as Attorney General from 26 September 1789 to 27 January 1794. In this capacity, he issued only eight official opinions. His first annual report, issued on 31 December 1790, is one page long. In the tome, Randolph wrote, "The order of the House of Representatives, requiring me to report on the JUDICIARY SYSTEM of the United States, has proscribed a task of no common difficulty. I doubt whether any one man could answer for

the accuracy of such a work; and even for more than one, a greater portion of time would be necessary, to ensure precision, than the interval between the last and present session."

There is evidence that Randolph despised the position which he served; the lack of cabinet rank, and the pittance of a salary—a mere \$1,500 a year—which forced him to work both a private practice and the government position, drove him to despair. (It was not increased to \$3,000 by Congress until 1799.) In a work on his life, historian Moncure Conway quotes Randolph in a letter that as Attorney General he regarded himself as "a sort of mongrel between the State and U.S.; called an officer of some rank under the latter, and yet thrust out to get a livelihood in the former." Randolph saw the position as a mere legal advisor to the president, at his beck and call. And because Washington was such an independent figure, he knew that he would be called upon few times if any. On 27 January 1794, Randolph resigned as the first Attorney General and became the second Secretary of State, succeeding Thomas Jefferson. According to a history of that department, "As Secretary, he directed the negotiation of the treaty of 1795 with Spain [the treaty of San Lorenzo]." Yet it was the negotiations over another treaty which cost Randolph his office. This treaty, known as the Jay Treaty after its negotiator, John Jay, was officially entitled, "Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, Between His Britannic Majesty and The United States of America, Conditionally Ratified By the Senate of the United States, at Philadelphia, June 24, 1795." In the years since the founding of the republic, the United States had had numerous differences with Great Britain over the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1783, which had ended the American Revolution. Randolph demonstrated these problems in a report to Congress entitled "Foreign Aggressions of America Commerce," in which he explained, "On my succession to the Department of State, I found a large volume of complaints, which the notification had collected, against severities on our trade, various in their kind and degree. Having reason to presume, as the fact has proved, that every day would increase the catalogue, I have waited to digest the mass, until time should have been allowed for exhibiting the diversified forms in which our commerce has hourly suffered. Every information is at length obtained which may be expected...The sensations excited by the embarrassments, danger, and even ruin, which threaten our trade, cannot be better expressed, than in the words of the committee in Philadelphia: 'On these cases, which are accompanied by the legal proofs, the committee think it unnecessary to enlarge, as the inferences will, of course, occur to the Secretary; but they beg leave to be permitted to state other circumstances,

which, though not in legal proof, are either of such public notoriety as to render legal proof unnecessary, or so vouched to the committee as to leave them in no doubt of the truth of them.” At first, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton was chosen to negotiate an end to the differences with the British; upon Randolph’s disagreement, Jay, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was selected in his stead. Randolph had taken the position that, because Jay sat on the high court, he should resign if he wanted such a diplomatic mission. The resulting treaty was met with bitterness by the French, who saw in it an age of more intimate relations between England and America. To calm the French, Randolph secretly held talks with the French minister plenipotentiary, Joseph Fauchet. These dispatches came into the hands of George Hammond, the British minister plenipotentiary to the United States. On 20 August 1795, Washington confronted Randolph with the messages, which implied that he could be bribed with French funds: the letters apparently alluded to “some thousands of dollars.” Randolph, shocked at the display, went home and offered his resignation. In his resignation letter to the President, he explained that the situation was not as it seemed, and that he would submit his bank account figures for examination. Fauchet, embarrassed, immediately apologized, declaring that he had not meant to impugn Randolph’s honor; Randolph, to counter his critics, composed “A Vindication of Mr. Randolph’s Resignation,” which was published in leaflet form. It was republished in 1855 as “Mr. Randolph’s Vindication.” Despite the lack of clear evidence that he had done anything wrong, Randolph was destroyed politically. His career, at least as a member of the government, was over.

### After Leaving Office

After his retirement, Randolph returned to the practice of law, becoming once again a leading Virginia attorney. During these final years, he drafted a history of his native state. In 1807, he acted as senior counsel for Aaron Burr in his treason trial, obtaining for the former Vice President an acquittal. On 12 September 1813, at 60 years of age and suffering from various maladies, Randolph visited his friend Nathaniel Burwell at a nearby residence, Carter Hall, near Millwood, Virginia. It was there that he collapsed and died. His obituary, in the Richmond *Enquirer*, said, “The world is acquainted with the political life of this Gentleman and the elevated offices which he has sustained. His history is blended with that of his country—in private life, he displayed those domestic charities which distinguish the mind of sensibility.” Randolph’s remains were laid to rest in the Old Chapel Cemetery in Millwood. His gravestone states his dates of birth and death and the

places that they occurred, but there is no mention of his service as both the first Attorney General and the second Secretary of State. His grandson, Edmund Randolph (1819-1861), was a noted attorney in California.

<sup>1</sup>Although many sources on Randolph spell his middle name as “Jenings,” some do not, but for practical purposes it is spelled here as most sources list it.

**References:** Reardon, John J., “Edmund Randolph: A Biography” (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974); Anderson, Dice R., “Randolph, Edmund” in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, et al., eds., “Dictionary of American Biography” (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons; X volumes and 10 supplements, 1930-95), VIII:353-55; Farrand, Max, ed., “The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787” (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press; three volumes, 1911), I:20-22, 66; Conway, Moncure Daniel, “Omitted Chapters of History, Disclosed in the Life and Papers of Edmund Randolph, Governor of Virginia; first Attorney-General of the United States, Secretary of State” (New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1888), 135; “The Attorney Generals of the United States, 1789-1985” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1985), 2; Hall, Benjamin F., et al., comps., “Official Opinions of the Attorneys General of the United States, Advising the President and Heads of Departments, in Relation to Their Official Duties; And Expounding the Constitution, Subsisting Treaties With Foreign Governments and With Indian Tribes, and the Public Laws of the Country” (Washington, D.C.: Published by Robert Farnham; 43 volumes, plus annual updates, 1852-1996), I:2-38; “The Secretaries of State: Portraits and Biographical Sketches,” Department of State Publication 8921 (November 1978), 7; “Foreign Aggressions on American Commerce,” Report No. 83, 3rd Congress, 1st Session (1794), in Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., “American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, From the First Session of the First to the Third Session of the Thirteenth Congress, Inclusive: Commencing March 3, 1789, and Ending March 3, 1815” (Washington, D.C.: Published by Gales and Seaton; 38 volumes, 1832-1861), Foreign Affairs [Class I], I:423-24; “A Vindication of Mr. Randolph’s Resignation” (Philadelphia: Printed by Samuel H. Smith, No. 188 Walnut Street, MDCCXCV [1795]); obituary of Randolph in *The Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia), 17 September 1813, 3.

## Samuel Osgood (1747/8 – 1813)

### Postmaster General

26 September 1789 – 19 August 1791

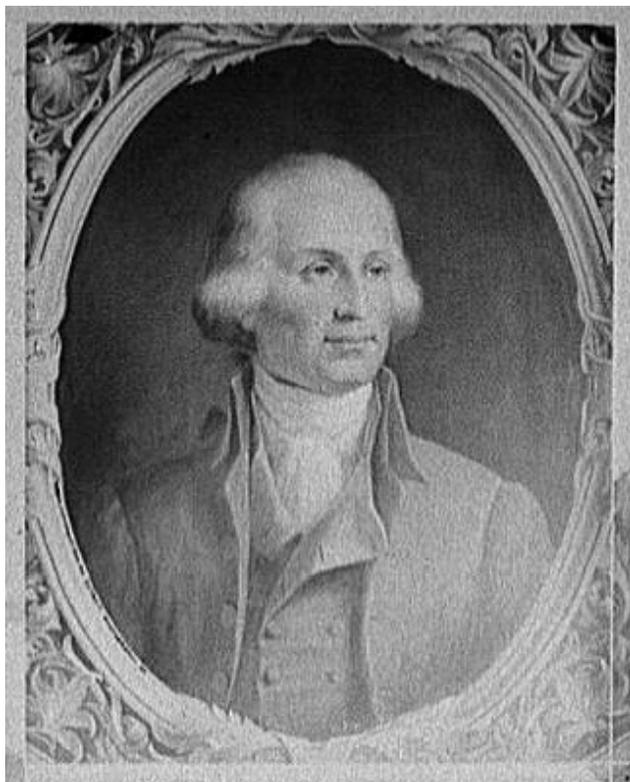
The man who served as the first Postmaster General under the Constitution was a Revolutionary war veteran and little-known Massachusetts state politician when selected in 1789. His tenure lasted only two years, and his impact on the office which he held is debated by the few historians who discuss the administration of George Washington.

### Early Years

Samuel Osgood was born in Andover, in Essex County, Massachusetts, on either 3 February 1747 or 3 February 1748 (sources on Osgood’s life list either date, with his

official congressional biography listing the 1748 date), the third son of Captain Peter Osgood and his wife Sarah (née Johnson) Osgood. Little is known of the Osgood family; a genealogical register published by a family member in 1894 details that Captain John Osgood, Samuel Osgood's great-great-great grandfather, emigrated from the village of Andover, England, sometime between 1630 and 1638 and, settling in 1645 in what is now Massachusetts, he named the new village Andover. An undated (but extremely old) document in the Samuel Osgood Papers in the Library of Congress states: "John Osgood...[was] the first representative of the town [of Andover] in the General Court in 1657. He was a brother of Jonah Osgood, who was for many years clerk of the courts in Essex County." Of Samuel Osgood, what is known of him is that he attended local schools in Andover, and graduated from Harvard College (now Harvard University) in 1770. He initially studied theology in order to enter the priesthood, but ill health forced him to earn a living and he became involved in mercantile pursuits with his elder brother, Peter.

Almost from the start, Osgood was involved in political matters. In 1774, he served as a delegate to the Essex County Convention, and was a member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. However, when the American Revolution broke out two years later, Osgood volunteered for service in the Continental army and



*Samuel Osgood*

was made a captain of a company of Minute Men, eventually being promoted to the rank of major and serving for most of the war as an aide-de-camp to General Artemas Ward. He left the army with the rank of colonel, his last service being that of assistant quartermaster. In 1780, Osgood served for a single term in the Massachusetts state Senate. In February 1781, he was elected to a seat in the Continental Congress, where he served from 1781 to 1784, being forced to resign because of a clause in the Articles of Confederation which term-limited all representatives to three one-year terms. While in Congress, he was named by Congress as the director of the Bank of North America. In 1784, he served a single one-year term in the Massachusetts state House of Representatives.

Prior to the formation of the U.S. government under the U.S. Constitution (signed in 1787), the federal system was controlled loosely by the Articles of Confederation. Initially, following the Revolutionary War, the treasury was run by Robert Morris, a British-born state assemblyman from Pennsylvania who served as the Superintendent of Finance. In 1785, however, he quit, and the Continental Congress replaced him with a three man board, which included Arthur Lee, Walter Livingston, and Osgood. In a letter to a John Lowell of Boston, dated 28 February 1785, Osgood explained, "I have this Day been honored with your favor of the 14<sup>th</sup> instant enclosing an Act of Congress of the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1784—the Doings of Congress on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1785 by which it appears that they have appointed me one of the Commissioners of the Board of Treasury; & also a Resolution of Congress of the 3d Inst. I do not recollect at present any Instance wherein Congress have bound up their Officers with Oaths, & Bond to so large an amount as it appears the Commissioners of the Treasury Board are to give previous to their entering upon the Duties of their Office—An Oath of Fidelity, an Oath for the faithful Discharge of the Trust reposed—and Bonds for the same purpose, in all to the Amount of six hundred thousand Dollars; I cannot suppose at present that there is any Probability, that these will in the Course of the ensuing [sic] year, be that Amount carried into the Treasury of the United States." Together, the three men attempted to deal with the enormous debt wracked up from the war, facing huge obstacles such as some states' refusal to pay down the debt. The three man board considered taking the government in bankruptcy. By 1787, the men were doing the best job they could. But Osgood did not want a change in governing; a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, mulling over the formation of a new government, would bring just such a change. Osgood wrote to friends that he found the plan for a strong central government to be "most obnoxious." Nonetheless,

he did not actively oppose the plan, and worked right up until his position was dissolved and replaced in 1789 by a single Secretary of the Treasury.

### Named to the Cabinet

While Osgood detested the idea of a strong central government, he did not hate it so much as to not want to be part of it. When General George Washington, elected as the first President under the Constitution, began to form his cabinet, Osgood pushed to be named to an office. His work in helping to solve some of the infant nation's financial difficulties convinced Washington of the need to reward Osgood, and the Massachusetts politician was named as the first Postmaster General. (Because the Post Office Department was not initially considered a cabinet-level post, there is no firm date of Osgood's selection.) Osgood was confirmed on 26 September 1789. When he took office, there was a struggle inside the cabinet for control of the agency—Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wanted the General Post Office (it was not called the Post Office Department officially until 1825) folded inside of his because he felt the revenues from the sale of postage should be used for foreign expenses. The Congress disagreed, and placed the Post Office, rather loosely, inside the Department of Treasury, presided over by Jefferson's political foe, Alexander Hamilton. Historian Daniel Leech wrote in a work which was updated in 1879, "At this time [that Osgood took over] there were but 75 postmasters in the Union, and less than 2,000 miles of post roads, consisting of one long route connecting the different large towns along the [Atlantic] sea-board, from Wiscasset, Maine to Savannah, Georgia, and half a score of connecting cross routes, the entire annual cost of mail conveyance thereon amounting to \$22,274." In his annual report for 1790, Osgood was able to explain how the small department he was in charge of was operating. "The revenue of the Post Office, at present, arises principally from letters passing from one seaport to another; and this source will be constantly increasing," he penned. But, he cautioned, "Unless a more energetic system is established than the present one, there will be no surplus revenue that will worth calculating...The great extent of territory over which three millions of people are settled, occasions a great expense in transporting the mail; and it will be found impracticable to accommodate all that wish to be accommodated, unless a great proportion of the revenue be given up for this object." In a letter that President Washington's personal secretary, Tobias Lear, wrote to Osgood, "The President of the United States having only noticed the letter from the Postmaster General of the 16th instant with the contracts for carrying the mail, and remarks accompanying the same, ob-

serves with pleasure from the general views of the subject that is there exhibited, the improvement made in the Contracts for conveying the Mail; & has no doubt but a judicious discretion has been exercised in regard to the parts of them..." Osgood asked that rates of postage be reduced so as to have more letters sent, and thus more money. However, as historian Gerald Cullinan wrote in 1968, "These were sensible suggestions, but they fell on deaf ears. Hamilton, his superior, looked upon the Post Office as a revenue-producing agency that could help him reduce the national debt. Congress was too busy debating constitutional matters to take more than passing interest in the development of the postal system. Indeed, the constitutionality of even having a national postal system was debated in Congress. There were those who felt the posts should be operated by the individual states or by private patent." Osgood became disgusted at this and other Congressional dithering in regard to postal matters, especially when a fight arose between the two houses over whom should be allowed to establish post roads. When the U.S. Government began its move from New York City to Philadelphia, in August 1791 (the exact date remains unclear), Osgood resigned and remained in New York City, leaving behind an office which was growing faster every day in the new nation but which was slowly being torn apart by politics and indecision.

### After Leaving Office

Osgood's second wife was a relation to George and DeWitt Clinton by marriage, and Osgood was able to hitch his political career to these two men who dominated New York politics in the first years of the 19th century, although for a decade after leaving the cabinet he was involved in theological studies. In 1800, he was elected to the New York state Assembly, and was elected speaker of that body. That same year, former Secretary of State Jefferson was elected as the third President, and Osgood, who while working under Hamilton had remained close to Jefferson, wrote his friend and asked for a commission in the new administration. Jefferson appointed the former Postmaster General as the supervisor of internal revenue for the district of New York. On 10 May 1803, Jefferson promoted him to naval officer of the port of New York, a post in which he served until his death.

Samuel Osgood died in New York City on 12 August 1813, almost exactly 22 years to the day after he left the cabinet. He was either 55 or 56. His remains were buried in the Brick Presbyterian Cemetery, which is now located on Fifth Avenue and Thirty-Seventh Street in New York City. Osgood was the author of numerous works, including "Remarks on the Book of Daniel, and on the Revelations"; "Commencement of the Millennium;

Resurrection of the Just, and Restitution of all Things” (New-York: Printed at Greenleaf’s Press, 1794), and “Three Letters on Different Subjects” (New York: Samuel Whiting & Co., 1811).

**References:** “Samuel Osgood,” a biographical statement prepared by “George B. Loring” in the Samuel Osgood Miscellaneous Papers, Library of Congress; Burnett, Edmund C., “Osgood, Samuel” in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, et al., eds., “Dictionary of American Biography” (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons; X volumes and 10 supplements, 1930-95), VII:81-82; “Osgood, Samuel” in “The National Cyclopædia of American Biography” (New York: James T. White & Company; 57 volumes and supplements A-J, 1897-1974), I:18; Osgood to John Lowell, Esq.,” 28 February 1785, in Osgood Misc. Papers, Library of Congress; Leech, Daniel D. Tompkins, “The Post Office Department of the United States of America; Its History, Organization, and Working, From the Inauguration of the Federal Government, 1789, to the Close of the Administration of President Andrew Johnson. From Official Records. Continued to October 1st, 1879, With Tables For Reference, Including Tables of Distances, by W.L. Nicholson” (Washington, D.C.: Judd & Detweiler, Publishers, 1879), 11-12; Osgood 1790 annual report in “Postmaster General’s Report,” in “The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States; With An Appendix, Containing Important State Papers and Public Documents, and All the Laws of a Public Nature; With a Copious Index. Volume II, Comprising (with Volume I) the Period From March 3, 1789, to March 3, 1791, Inclusive. Compiled From Authentic Materials” (Washington, D.C.: Printed and Published by Gales and Seaton, 1834), 2107-14; Tobias Lear to Osgood, 22 December 1790, The Papers of George Washington, Series 2 [Letterbooks] (Letterbook 23), 36, Library of Congress; Cullinan, Gerald, “The United States Postal Service” (New York: Praeger, 1973), 37.

## Timothy Pickering (1745 – 1829)

### Postmaster General

19 August 1791 – 3 March 1793

The man who served as the second Postmaster General was also the first man to hold three disparate cabinet positions, later serving as Secretary of War (1795) and Secretary of State (1795-1800) in the second administration of President George Washington. Timothy Pickering, despite this incredible service at a time when cabinet secretaries served but a short period but who is now almost completely forgotten by history, was also a fundamental actor on the political stage during the earliest years of the Republic. Professor Edward H. Phillips, a Pickering biographer, observed in 1966, “Timothy Pickering’s long life spanned a most formative period in American history. Born during King George’s War, he did not pass from the scene until the eve of triumphant Jacksonian Democracy. His long life was filled with controversies and important services to his country. Revolutionist, soldier, pioneer, Indian emissary, administrator, Cabinet member, Senator, Congressman, agriculturalist, and, not the least important, husband and father, Pickering touched many vital

events in the course of a career covering a half-century of American history.”

### Early Years

Born in Salem, Massachusetts, on 6 July [O.S.] [17 July, N.S.] 1745, he was the son and eighth of nine children of Timothy Pickering, Sr., a farmer, and Mary (née Wingate) Pickering. As Octavius Pickering, the son of Timothy Pickering, wrote in 1867, “He was a lineal descendant of John Pickering (one of the early colonists), who emigrated from Great Britain to America in the reign of King Charles the First [who was executed in January 1649], and who was admitted, according to the colonial laws of that period, to be an inhabitant, by a vote passed at a public meeting of the town (of Salem), on the 7th day of the 12th month, corresponding to February 7th, 1637.” The émigré John Pickering, a carpenter, had two sons, one whom, John, was the father of Timothy Pickering, Sr. Timothy Pickering, who was never known as “Junior,” attended the grammar school in Salem before entering Harvard College (now Harvard University) and graduating in 1763. Taking a position as the register of deeds for Salem, he studied the law, and was admitted to the Massachusetts state bar in 1768, and opened a practice in Salem.

As *The National Cyclopædia of American Biography* stated, “He did not obtain much reputation as a lawyer, but is described as having been more interested in studying the art of war.” In 1766, Pickering joined the Massachusetts colonial militia. In 1772, he was elected as a selectman and assessor for Essex County, of which Salem was a part; a revolutionary who desired the American colonies be free from England, he became a member of the Committee on the State of Rights of Colonists in 1773. The following year he joined the Committee of Correspondence and Safety, where he served until 1775. That year, he rejoined the militia, where during the battle of Lexington it is alleged that he, with the rank of colonel, marched with his men to the town of Medford to intercept the British, but missed them. In September 1775 he was appointed as a judge on the court of common pleas for Essex, and for the maritime court which encompassed Essex County and Boston. That year he published a small work on “An Easy Plan of Discipline for the Militia,” in which he laid out his strategy to defeat the British. Elected to the Massachusetts legislature in 1776, Pickering left office when he was assigned to assist in the defense of the Massachusetts coastline. However, when the Americans needed additional troops, Pickering marched his men to join General George Washington, seeing action in New York and New Jersey during the winter of 1776-77, and remaining at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, during the brutal winter when American troops barely survived

the inclement weather. On 7 May 1777, Washington offered Pickering the post of adjutant-general of the Continental Army, where he served until January 1788. He was participating in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown when the Continental Congress established the Board of War, designed to be a central governing body to handle war matters. In November 1777 Pickering was named to serve as a member of the board. In August 1780, he remained on the board while succeeding General Nathanael Greene as the army's Quartermaster General. Pickering remained in this latter position until 1785.

### Named to the Cabinet

Following the end of the conflict, Pickering moved with his family first to Philadelphia, and then to the Wyoming valley of Pennsylvania, where he invested in land purchases. Called upon by the state government of Pennsylvania to establish Luzerne County, Pickering did so and later represented the county in the state convention which ratified the U.S. Constitution in 1787; he also performed the same service in the ratifying of the Pennsylvania constitution in 1790. That same year, when Postmaster General Samuel Osgood gave indications that he wished to leave his post, Pickering wrote to President George Washington asking to be named as Osgood's replacement. Instead, Washington sent Pickering on a sensitive mission as Commissioner to treat, or negotiate, a treaty with the Seneca Indians. Pickering's mild nature, and sense of purpose towards the Indian people, made for a smooth negotiation, and gave the former war officer great standing amongst his peers. Following Postmaster General Osgood's resignation, Washington named Pickering as his successor on 12 August 1791.

During his tenure as the second Postmaster General, Pickering expanded the number of post roads and made sure contractors assigned to deliver the mails had an impeccable reputation. In 1794, Pickering wrote to a potential contractor in North Carolina: "Convenient saddle bags or portmanteaus will be wanted for the mails on these roads. On account of the size of the packets and rolls I suppose that portmanteaus will be best. How large they should be you can judge from your knowledge of the bulk of the mails of letters and newspapers which come from your own office, making allowance for the probable increase. The links of the chain must be large enough to admit the ring of the portmanteau lock such as is now used for the mail. Staples should be placed so near together that a small hand cannot be thrust in between them. Perhaps a leathern [sic] strap may suffice in place of the chain, for if any person would cut the strap to get at the mail with equal ease he would open the portmanteau."

When Pickering first started work in the Postmaster General's office, he found that he needed both space for his family and for the official business of his department, at that time located in Philadelphia. In a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, he explained his situation: "After much inquiry, I have found a house which would accommodate my numerous family, and at the same time give me office room. The *greatly extended* [Pickering's emphasis] business of the department, I think, may be accomplished with the *same help* [Pickering's emphasis] which has been used since the time of Mr. Osgood's appointment; to wit, an assistant and a clerk. For these, with their necessary writing-desk, table, boxes, cases, and shelves, for a considerable bulk of books and papers, would sufficiently occupy one room; and another room would be convenient for myself." Although Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson asked that the post office be in the State Department instead of the mint, Washington decided against him. He wrote to Jefferson on 20 October 1792, "The post office (as a branch of Revenue) was annexed to the Treasury in the time of Mr. [Samuel] Osgood; & when Col<sup>o</sup> Pickering was appointed thereto, he was informed, as appear by my letter to him dated the 29 day of August 1791, that he was to consider it in that light. If from relationship, or usage in similar cases (for I have made no inquiry into the matter, having been closely employed since you mentioned the thing to me in reading papers from the War Office) the mint does not appertain to the Department of the Treasury, I am more inclined to add it to that of state, than to multiply the duties of the other."

### After Leaving Office

Upon the resignation of the first Secretary of War, Henry Knox, on 28 December 1794, Washington named Pickering to succeed him on 2 January 1795. However, Pickering was in this position only a few months—so little time that some histories of the War Department mention him not at all. He did recommend in a letter to establish military academies to train future soldiers, a proposal which was later taken up and used to establish the academies at West Point and Annapolis, among others. What ended Pickering's tenure at the War Department was the exit of Secretary of State Edmund Randolph on 20 August 1795. Historian Mary Hinsdale reports that after Randolph's resignation, Washington sought to replace him with Edmund Pendleton of Virginia, but that Pendleton was seen as "leaning too close to the political doctrines of Jefferson and Madison," known political enemies of the president. The office was then offered in succession to Judge Thomas Johnson of Maryland (who was later elevated to the U.S. Supreme Court), General Charles

Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, Associate Justice William Paterson of the Supreme Court, and Patrick Henry, but that in the end Washington turned to Pickering as the best candidate. Washington quickly named Pickering as Randolph's successor, making for a smooth transition into a highly important office. There has always been some dispute as to the dates of Pickering's service: a study by the author of various manuscripts and other documents indicates that he was serving as Secretary of War as late as 1 February 1796, and was serving as Secretary of State as early as 12 August 1796.

During his tenure, which lasted throughout the remainder of Washington's second term and almost all of John Adams', one of Pickering's chief difficulties was with depredations committed on American shipping by "armed vessels of Spain, Great Britain and France." In a letter to President Adams, dated 21 June 1797, Pickering explained, "Sir, I have the honour to lay before you a report respecting the depredations committed on the commerce of the United States, since the first of October, 1796, as far as conformable to the resolve of the House of Representatives of the 10<sup>th</sup> instant, as the materials in my possession would admit. The number of captures will give a tolerably correct idea of the extent of our losses, and the documents will show the nature of the depredations, and the causes and pretenses for which they have been committed." However, because the United States at the time did not have the wherewithal to combat these actions with military force, he ordered legations overseas to use "prudent language" when demanding an apology. He wrote to the London embassy, "When in the correspondence from this office, the feelings and resentments of the people of the United States are expressed in warm and indignant terms, it is by no means intended that the language of such letters should be used in addressing a foreign court. The prudence and discretion of the minister or agent is relied on to express those feelings and resentments...for while this passion repels whatever wears the semblance of reproach, it often yields to mild language, and firm but respectful representations; and always, where peace and friendship are the objects of pursuit, words as well as actions must be conciliatory." Pickering also dealt with internal pressures: in a letter to New York Governor John Jay, he wrote, "I duly received your letter of the 1<sup>st</sup> instant, and laud the same before the President of the United States. With a strong desire to enable the State of New-York finally to extinguish the remaining claims of the Mohawks to lands within that State, a doubt existed of the President's power to appoint, in the recess of the Senate, a Commissioner to hold a treaty for the purpose. Last year, Mr. Robert Morris desired a similar appointment might

be made, to give him an opportunity to purchase lands of the Senecas. The opinion of the Attorney General was taken; which was against the appointment, without the advice & consent of the Senate; and the measure was postponed until the late session of Congress. For this reason I very much regretted that your letter did not arrive before the adjournment of the Senate...But I mentioned to the President these facts." State Department Graham Stuart explained, "Secretary of State Pickering neither enhanced his own reputation nor did he improve the position of the State Department during his incumbency; nevertheless, he carried on the duties of the Department effectively and fearlessly...Pickering was much more at home as Secretary of War than as Secretary of State, and he could work with Washington more satisfactorily than Adams. The Department never had more than eight or nine clerks and other employees while Pickering was Secretary, and he did a vast amount of clerical work himself." Pickering worked out of a small office in Philadelphia (the department did not move to Washington until after he left office); however, during a yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in November 1798, Pickering moved his offices to the state house in Trenton, New Jersey. Historian W. Allan Wilbur summed up Pickering's career at the State Department, "Timothy Pickering as Secretary of State was Alexander Hamilton's lieutenant opposed to President Adams' efforts to effect a peaceful termination of the quasi-war with France. An ardent Francophile, Pickering's pro-British views equated national honor (and interest) with the objectives of the commercial maritime merchant elite engaged in trade with Britain. President Adams, convinced of Pickering's complicity with Hamilton on the French question and of the Secretary's opposition to Adams' re-election, dismissed the subordinate New Englander in May 1800."

Pickering remained in Philadelphia until 1802, when he returned to Massachusetts. That same year, he was an unsuccessful candidate for election to the U.S. House of Representatives. Appointed instead as chief justice of the state court of common pleas and general sessions of the peace, he was, in 1803, elected to the United States Senate as a Federalist, to fill a vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator Dwight Foster. Elected a few weeks later to a full term, he ultimately served from 4 March 1803 until 3 March 1811, having been defeated in 1810. On 2 January 1811, shortly before he left office, Pickering was censured by his colleagues in the Senate by a vote of 20-7 for apparently disclosing certain confidential documents and breach of confidence; Pickering thus became the first of nine senators in the history of that body to be censured. His defeat for a second term was caused by his support for Great Britain over France when England and France at-

tacked American shipping. Nonetheless, he returned to Massachusetts and served as a member of the executive council of the state from 1812 to 1813. In that latter year, he was elected as a Federalist to a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served three terms, from 4 March 1813 until 3 March 1817, in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Declining to run for re-election in 1816, he retired to his farm near Wenham, Massachusetts, where he continued to speak out on various political issues of the day.

Timothy Pickering, the first man to hold two full and one partial cabinet positions, died in Salem, Massachusetts, on 29 January 1829 at the age of 83, and he was buried in the Broad Street Cemetery in that city next to his wife, Rebecca White Pickering, in a huge family vault that merely reads, "Pickering." His grandson, Charles Pickering (1805-1878), was a famed zoologist and botanist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His great-grandson, astronomer William Henry Pickering (1858-1938), discovered Phoebe, the ninth moon of Saturn, took some of the earliest pictures of the planet Mars, and noted the existence in 1919 of a tenth planet, which in 1930 was found to be Pluto.

In June 1878, Henry Cabot Lodge, later a United States Senator from Massachusetts, wrote of Timothy Pickering in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

"He was a man of the most reckless courage, physical as well as moral, and there was nothing which so strongly moved his contempt as wavering or hesitation...Hardly less remarkable was his confidence in himself, his principles, and his beliefs. The idea that he might be in the wrong never finds the slightest acknowledgment in his letters or speeches. On one or two occasions he was not without misgivings as to his ability to perform some trying duty, or fill some high office, but no shadow of doubt ever fell upon him as to his opinions when they had once been formed. When he had settled in his own mind what was right, he pursued it undeviatingly and without the slightest trace of hesitation...To Pickering everything resolved itself into the strife between good and evil. As champion of the former, he felt it to be his duty, as he said to Lowell, 'in this wicked world, though he could not restore it to innocence, to strive to prevent its growing worse;' and he had no patience with the good-humored criticism of his friend George Cabot, when the latter said, 'Why can't you and I let the world ruin itself in its own way?'"

**References:** Phillips, Edward H., "A Biographical Essay on Timothy Pickering," Reel 69, Timothy Pickering Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Pickering, Octavius, "The Life of Timothy Pickering" (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company; four volumes, 1867-73), 2-3; "Pickering, Timothy" in "The National Cyclopædia of American Biography" (New York: James T. White & Company; 57 volumes and supplements A-J, 1897-1974), I:12-13; Pickering to Hamilton, 9 March 1792, in Pickering, "The Life of Timothy Pickering," III:3;

Washington to Jefferson, 20 October 1792, in Copybooks of George Washington's Correspondence With Secretaries of State, 1789-1796, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, National Archives; Pickering report to the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 28 February 1797, cited in Dudley W. Knox, ed., "Naval Documents Relating to the Quasi-War Between the United States and France" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office; seven volumes, 1935-38), I:1-4; Clarfield, Gerard H., "Timothy Pickering and American Diplomacy, 1795-1800" (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969); Hinsdale, Mary Louise, "A History of the President's Cabinet" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Ware, 1911), 26; Clarfield, Gerard H., "Timothy Pickering and the American Republic" (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980); Communication of Secretary of State Pickering to President Adams, and Pickering account, "Report of the Secretary of State, Respecting the Depredations Committed on the Commerce of the United States, Since the First of October, 1796" in "Message From the President of the United States to the House of Representatives, June 22, 1797," and "[Report] From Mr. Pickering, Secretary of State, to Mr. Pinckney, Plenipotentiary of the United States at Paris, Department of State, Jan. 16, 1797," both in "State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States, From the Accession of George Washington to the Presidency, Exhibiting a Complete View of Our Foreign Relations Since That Time, Including Confidential Documents, First Published in the Second Edition of This Work" (Boston: Printed and Published by Thomas B. Wait; 10 volumes, 1817-19), III:169-70, II:114-21; Ford, Henry Jones, "Timothy Pickering" in Samuel Flagg Bemis, ed., "The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy" (New York: Pageant Book Company; 20 volumes, 1958-85), II:186; Pickering to "His Excellency Governor Jay," 11 March 1797, in Folder "1778-1819," Pickering Papers, Library of Congress; Stuart, Graham H., "The Department of State: A History of Its Organization, Procedure, and Personnel" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 33; Wilbur, W. Allan, "Timothy Pickering, Federalist Politician: An Historiographical Perspective," *The Historian*, XXXIV:2 (February 1972), 278-92; "A Letter From the Hon. Timothy Pickering, a Senator of the United States from the state of Massachusetts, exhibiting to his Constituents a View of the Imminent Danger of an Unnecessary and Ruinous War. Addressed to His Excellency James Sullivan, Governor of said State. To which is added, Governor Sullivan's Answer" (Hartford, Connecticut: Printed by Lincoln and Gleason, 1808); Pickering, Timothy, "Political Essays. A Series of Letters Addressed to the People of the United States" (Canandaigua, New York: J.D. Bemis, 1812).