

IX WAR AND PEACE

12 Residents of Princeton Celebrate the End of the War

[*New-Jersey Gazette*, April 23, 1783.]

In June 1781 Congress fortuitously appointed Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, and Henry Laurens as commissioners to assist John Adams in conducting negotiations with the British. Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown in October was the final blow for a nation already reeling under the pressures of social upheaval, political dissension, economic crisis, and acute war-weariness. In February 1782 the House of Commons voted to discontinue efforts to suppress the rebellion and on March 5 passed a bill authorizing the crown to sue for peace. Thereupon Lord North, chief minister since 1770, resigned and was replaced by Lord Rockingham, who, as in 1765, faced the task of accommodating the Americans. On April 12 peace talks began between Richard Oswald and Franklin, the only American in Paris. (Franklin and Jay, who arrived from Madrid in June, handled virtually all the negotiations; Adams was in the Netherlands until late October 1782 securing an economic treaty and financial assistance; Laurens was captured by the British in October 1780 and temporarily imprisoned; Jefferson remained at home because of his wife's illness.) Deliberately ignoring the terms of the Franco-American treaty of 1778, the commissioners did not consult with the French but instead entered into secret negotiations with the British. The result was the preliminary articles of peace signed on November 30. Parliament ratified the terms on January 20, 1783, and on February 4 proclaimed a cessation of hostilities; Congress declared an end to military action on April 11 and ratified the articles four days later. The final treaty which ended the war and recognized the independence of the United States was signed in Paris on September 3, 1783; it became operative officially with the exchange of ratifications on May 12, 1784. When word that peace had been achieved reached New Jersey in early April 1783, Governor William Livingston on the fourteenth issued a proclamation heralding the joyous news. Communities throughout the state held public celebrations. The war was over; Jerseymen had peace at last.

Princeton, April 21, 1783

The gentlemen of this town and neighbourhood having fixed on the 19th of April (as being the memorable Aera of the commencement of hostilities in America in 1775)¹ to celebrate the peace so happily concluded; His Excellency the Governor,² a great number of the inhabitants of this town and neighbourhood, together with several gentlemen of the adjacent villages, met about 12 o'clock on Saturday last at the flag-staff (on which the American flag was beautifully displayed) where the Governor's proclamation, declaring a cessation of hostilities, was publicly read, which was succeeded by the discharge of 13 cannon and the acclamations of the people.

NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

At 1 o'clock the company met in the College Hall,³ where an excellent discourse, suitable to the occasion, was delivered by the Rev. Dr. Witherspoon,⁴ to a very numerous audience. Entertainments having been provided at the houses of Mr. Hyer⁵ and Mr. Beekman,⁶ at 3 o'clock, the company divided and repaired to each house; where, after dinner, the following toasts were drank, severally accompanied by the discharge of cannon.

TOASTS for 19th April, 1783.

1. The auspicious 3d of February, 1783.⁷ May the peace, which occasions this meeting, be as permanent as it is honourable.

2. The United States of America. May virtue, patriotism and publick honour, the sure basis of free governments, ever be the cement and support of the American union.

3. His Most Christian Majesty,⁸ by whose generous assistance this peace has been obtained; and all other powers friendly to America.

4. General Washington—the officers and privates of the American army. May their persevering and distinguished services in the field meet with a generous reward in the cabinet.

5. General Greene and the southern army.⁹ May their unwearied labours and brilliant successes be ever impressed on the minds of a grateful country.

6. The American commissioners at Paris.

7. The Marquis de la Fayette.¹⁰

8. The memory of the brave, who have fallen in defence of our liberties, or have lost their lives by the cruelties of Great-Britain.

9. An increase of arts, agriculture, manufactures and commerce, in America; and may republican virtue and frugality take place of monarchical luxury and extravagance.

10. The state of New-Jersey. May her rulers always possess that wisdom, and preserve that dignity, publick spirit and integrity, necessary to govern so patriotick a republick.

11. Nassau Hall. May she again flourish and continue the nursery of statesmen, as she has been of warriors.

12. All whigs and distinguished patriots. May they ever enjoy that freedom which we have acquired by the revolution.

13. May the recollection of the 19th April, 1775; the 4th July, 1776; and the 3d Feb. 1783, prove a terror to tyranny and oppression throughout the world.

At 7 o'clock in the evening the houses in the town were splendidly illuminated, and in many great taste was displayed in the arrangement of the lights.

At 8 o'clock the infantry company of the town fired 13 platoons, with great regularity and exactness; after which the company retired, having spend the day with that festivity, decency and good order, which we hope will ever characterize a free and virtuous people.

1. The battles of Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775.
2. William Livingston.
3. Nassau Hall.

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4. John Witherspoon, president of the college, member of Congress, and signer of the Declaration of Independence.
5. Jacob Hyer's Hudibras Tavern.
6. Christopher Beekman's tavern.
7. The date should be February 4, when Great Britain issued a proclamation declaring an end to hostilities in America.
8. Louis XVI, king of France.
9. General Nathanael Greene, who assumed command of the Southern Army in October 1780; his leadership breathed new life into a previously demoralized and disorganized American campaign in the south.
10. Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, young French nobleman who volunteered his services to the American cause; a favorite of Washington, he contributed much both as a general in the Continental army and as a symbol of the spirit of the new republican order.

13 William Peartree Smith to Elias Boudinot

[*PNJHS*, 4 (1849), pp. 122-24.]

Although welcoming the end of hostilities, politically sensitive Jerseymen like William Peartree Smith realized that the war had solved only the problem of independence. It was, after all, one thing to achieve national sovereignty and quite another to maintain it in the face of a host of unresolved domestic problems. Among the more pressing problems were an unstable economy, lack of effective political leadership, and the ineffectiveness of the Articles of Confederation as a national constitution. As Smith pointed out with utter candor to his old friend, Elias Boudinot, the future of the republic was by no means clear. Smith's words must have had special meaning to Boudinot, who had been named president of the Congress in November 1782 and in that capacity had signed the Treaty of Paris as well as numerous peace proclamations. Not only did Smith acknowledge the pressing problems that confronted the nation, but he also advocated the solution to national problems most feared by republicans—the advent of oligarchical or monarchical rule.

Newark, April [?] 1783

My Dear Sir,

The glorious work is completed! I salute and congratulate you on the opening of this, I hope, auspicious day—a day which, with the name of my Friend, will be recorded in the page of History, when his Spirit and mine, I trust in God, will be celebrating a Jubilee of eternal Peace and Harmony.