

THE  
HUDSON  
RIVER  
VALLEY  
REVIEW

*A Journal of Regional Studies*

**MARIST**

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## From the Editors

The historical net in this issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review* has been cast especially wide, spanning from the early eighteenth century right up to the twenty-first. The range of topics—from linguistics and engineering to urban geography—is also unusually broad. Taken together, these articles comprise a fascinating tapestry that truly represents the diversity of thought and activity that has always been a distinguishing characteristic of life in the Hudson Valley. Such diversity is what continues to make the region a center for creativity and makes *The Hudson River Valley Review* so much fun to edit—and, we hope, fun and informative to read.

*Reed Sparling*

*Christopher Pryslopsi*

## Letter To the Editors

One note regarding Christopher Pryslopsi's intriguing article on the Orange County Government Center. The description of Goshen's main street as "...an historic island in a growing sea of suburban sprawl with endless stretches of red lights, turning lanes, and big-box retail centers" is quite simply well-over-the-top hyperbole—and not justifiable by any real review of the full Goshen area landscape. As a leading anti-sprawl advocate, I know it when I see it. This hyperbole blemishes the article, regurgitates popular PR/media terminology, and certainly is not based on research or analysis.

Back to Rudolph's design: for now I will stay out of the debate on the merits of this example of modernist architecture or its functional use as a public facility. It is unique, but many of us have our own practical frustrations with the building. Its one element that particularly frustrates me, and many others, is that most of the stairwells were not designed or built wide enough to accommodate two people side-by-side. So when someone goes up or down the stairs, they typically have to wait, or go flat against the wall, to allow another person to go down or up. This just isn't practical in a heavily used public building.

*David Church, Commissioner*

*Orange County Planning Department, Goshen*

## Call for Essays

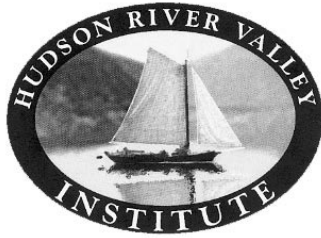
*The Hudson River Valley Review* is anxious to consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself.

### Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as two double-spaced typescripts, generally no more than thirty pages long, along with a computer disk with a clear indication of the operating system, the name and version of the word-processing program, and the names of documents on the disk. Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Otherwise, the submission of visual materials should be cleared with the editors beforehand. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. No materials will be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. No responsibility is assumed for their loss. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

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Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.



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**On the cover:** *West Point Looking South* by George Catlin; circa 1828  
Courtesy of West Point Museum Art Collection, United States Military Academy

for the 14 <sup>th</sup> March		the 8 <sup>th</sup> invited for the 15 <sup>th</sup> of April	
Tucker	1	Mr. & Mrs. Parsons	2
Baldwin	1	French Brewsters	4
Upson	1	Mr. & Lady Ann. Beatts	2 1
Mr. Kemsen	1	Mr. & Mrs. B. Beatts	2
Mr. Howard	1	Mr. John & Lady Temple	2
Mr. Hobcock	1	Mr. Mrs. White & Miss Conkard	3
invited for the 14 <sup>th</sup> March		The President of Congress	1
Mr. & Mrs. Bradford	2	Mr. Garrison	1
Mr. & Mrs. King	2	Gen. Armstrong	1
Mr. & Mrs. Lewis	2	Mr. S. Lee	1
Mrs. Montgomery	1		19
Mr. Jones	1	invited for the 15 <sup>th</sup>	2
Mr. Edward Lee	1	Mrs. John B. M. Phillips	1
Mr. President	1	Phil. Livingston	1
Major Seneca	1	T. J. Stone, Cook, Clarke	4-1
Mr. & Lady M. Water	2	Mitchell, Clonara, Dayton	3-1
Mr. & Lady C. Dyer	2	Wain - Bishop - Rogers	3
Miss Knowles	1	Wain - Huger - Parham	3
Phil Livingston	1	Wain - Chief Justice	2
Gen. Clarkson	1	Wain	1
Miss Bruce	1	Wain White	1
Mr. Madison	1	Major & Major North	2 1
Mr. Armstrong	1		42
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Page from Dinner List 1787-1788 Manuscript by Sarah Livingston Jay, April 1788.  
Ink on paper. John Jay Homestead State Historic Site.  
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation



# Sarah Jay's Invitations to Dinner/Supper, 1787-1788

Louise V. North

At the John Jay Homestead State Historic Site in Katonah there is a small, unprepossessing sheaf of papers sewn together in the center with white thread. Measuring  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches by  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches, the pages on the right side contain dates, lists of names, and the number of people invited; the pages on the left side are uncut and blank. On the first page, in a small, neat hand, is written *Invitations to Dinner/Supper 1787-1788*.<sup>1</sup> The handwriting is that of Sarah Livingston Jay, and the little sheaf of papers one of the most famous guest lists of the young United States. During the nineteenth century, it was touted as an early version of *The Blue Book* of New York's high society and was reproduced in such works as Rufus Griswold's *Republican Court; or, American Society in the Days of Washington* (1855) as an example of the brilliant social circle found in New York after the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup> A careful study of the lists, however, reveals that, far from being the social Who's Who of 1787-8, the invited guests were the foremost politicians, the movers and shakers, of the time. Although Sarah and her husband, John Jay, were indeed related to prominent families—e.g., the Van Cortlandts and the Livingstons—these lists demonstrate their lively participation in the political life of New York. The Jays were clearly getting people of different points of view together to talk with one another over a good dinner.

Sarah Livingston Jay (1756-1802) was the well-educated daughter of New Jersey Governor William Livingston and Susannah French. Raised in a politically active household, she married lawyer John Jay (1745-1829) in 1774, when she was seventeen and he twenty-eight. This was a love match rivaled only by that of John and Abigail Adams. The newlyweds were almost immediately caught up in the political tug of war between Great Britain and its American colony. When King George III slammed the door on any negotiations between the two, John Jay threw his unwavering support to the Americans. In the ensuing years, he devoted himself to serving his country, in more capacities than any other Founding Father: delegate to and president of the Continental Congress; one of the framers of New York's first Constitution as well as its first Chief Justice; minister plenipotentiary to Spain; peace commissioner for the Treaty of Paris, which ended



John Jay. Engraving after  
Pierre E. Simitière, 1779

the Revolutionary War;<sup>3</sup> Secretary for Foreign Affairs for the government under the Articles of Confederation; one of the authors of *The Federalist*; first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court; negotiator for the “Jay Treaty;” and two-term governor of New York State. Jay believed that America’s strength and greatness would come in the unity of its citizens under a strong central government, not in a loose confederation of states. His patriotism and integrity were never doubted, even when some of his actions were disparaged. Throughout, Sarah supported him; entertained family, friends, and both national and international political figures; and furthered his political career. Her intel-

ligence, keen powers of observation, and skillful management of the household made her a valuable helpmeet. Totally devoted to her husband, she was a true partner in their life together.

In the 1780s, dissatisfaction with the Articles of Confederation had been increasing. Impeded by the power of the individual states, Congress was unable to raise funds, either by direct taxation or import duties to regulate commerce; pay its creditors; make the states comply with the terms of the Peace Treaty of 1783; safeguard American merchant ships and sailors from impressments by antagonistic nations; or negotiate creditably with foreign ministers. An economic depression, local uprisings (Shays’ Rebellion in Massachusetts), and threats of secession (New York) confirmed that the future of the new republic was in danger. Influential leaders called for a convention, to be attended by all of the states, to make “the federal government adequate to the exigencies of the Union.”

It is in this context that we should view Sarah Jay’s guest lists. During 1787, there were twenty-five parties (eleven were all-male) at the Jay house on lower Broadway in Manhattan. These gatherings were planned a couple of days in advance; most likely, Sarah wrote each guest a short note, which was then delivered by one of her servants. As Secretary for Foreign Affairs, it was incumbent upon Jay to entertain dignitaries, whether they came from Virginia or France. Louis-Guillaume Otto, the French chargé d’affaires, put it succinctly: “it is only after having toasted well that one succeeds here in inviting a confidential

conversation and inspiring good dispositions.”<sup>4</sup> Some of the frequent guests, the Spanish Encargado de Negocios Don Diego de Gardoqui, the Dutch Minister Plenipotentiary Pieter J. van Berckel, and the British (but American-born) Consul-General Sir John Temple and his wife, Lady Elizabeth Bowdoin Temple, lived nearby.

To get a flavor of these gatherings, a look at some specific lists may be useful. On Friday, January 5, 1787, twenty-one guests (all male) were invited. Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, has a small x next to his name, so perhaps he was unable to attend. However, other members of Congress did come: Samuel Meredith

from Pennsylvania; Dr. William Samuel Johnson from Connecticut (also president of Columbia College); Jay’s old friend, Rufus King from Massachusetts; John Kean from South Carolina; John Lawrence and Melancton Smith from New York.<sup>5</sup> Secretary of War General Henry Knox; New York City’s Recorder, Col. Richard Varick; King’s father-in-law, John Alsop; and members of the Board of the Treasury—William Duer, Arthur Lee, Walter Livingston, and Samuel Osgood—completed the American contingent.<sup>6</sup> Foreign interests were represented by Dutch minister van Berckel and his son, Franco; the French Vice-Consul, Antoine de la Forêt; and Louis-Guillaume Otto. What was discussed over dinner? Trade? The American debt? The Franco-American Consular Convention? One can only guess. Shortly after this gathering, Otto complained to his superior, Comte de Vergennes, that some members of Congress—as well as Jay himself—distrusted France. Pieter van Berckel had had a long, distinguished career in Holland when the Dutch Estates General appointed him minister in 1783. Anxious to see the credit of the United States established, he was probably delighted to be at the table with members of the Treasury Board. Congress had not met since mid-November 1786 for lack of a quorum, so business was transacted at the Jays. Would Sarah Jay herself have been present? Since there were no other ladies, it is doubtful.

In contrast to this political fare, a party three days later, on Monday, January 8, was devoted to family and friends, though even some of them had political interests and aspirations. Among the twenty-six guests were merchants Henry



JOHN JAY HOMESTEAD SHS (NYSOPRHP)

Sarah Livingston Jay.  
Engraving after Daniel Huntington

Cruger; James Abraham DePeyster (John's cousin) and his wife and a daughter; Loyalist Daniel Ludlow and his family;<sup>7</sup> John's brother, Frederick, with his wife, Margaret Barclay; and Dr. Benjamin Kissam Jr., professor of medicine at Columbia College and son of Benjamin Kissam, with whom John had studied law. The Livingstons were also well represented: Sarah's older sister, Susan; cousin Walter with his wife, Cornelia, and daughter, Maria; cousins Philip Peter, Elizabeth (who would soon marry Louis-Guillaume Otto), and Susan L. Kean (with her husband, John).

The next list has no date, only the notation "to sup" but, given its placement in the booklet, most likely it took place before January 18, 1787. Among the guests are again politicians, diplomats, and influential family members, one of whom was John Jay's oldest friend, Robert R. Livingston. The Chancellor of New York State, he had been Jay's law partner (1768-1771), a member of the Continental Congress, had worked with Jay on the first New York State Constitution, and had been the first Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Moreover, he was godfather to Jay's daughter, Maria. (Jay reciprocated for Livingston's daughter, Margaret.) Livingston was accompanied by his wife, Mary Stevens; his brothers, John and Edward (the latter known as Beau Ned); his widowed sister, Janet Montgomery; and another sister, Gertrude Lewis, with her husband, Morgan. Also in attendance was New York Mayor James Duane, whose wife, Maria, was a Livingston.

Several members of Congress were present: Col. William Few of Georgia; William Grayson and his wife, Eleanor Smallwood, of Virginia; William Hindman of Maryland; Samuel Meredith of Pennsylvania; and William L. Pierce and his wife, Charlotte Fenwick, of Georgia. So, too, was Baron Friederich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, the Prussian military officer who, using French and German mixed with some English "goddams," had reorganized the American troops to good effect during the Revolution. He was now an American citizen. His aide-de-camp, Major William North, was also invited; he was not only von Steuben's adopted son but also Mayor Duane's son-in-law. Nor should we fail to mention General Henry Knox and his wife, Lucy Flucker Knox, a renowned hostess in her own right.

At the table also sat the English-educated Spanish diplomat, Don Diego de Gardoqui. He and Jay had been in protracted negotiations—without coming to any satisfactory conclusion—about navigation rights on the Mississippi River and the territorial limits of Spain and the United States. To avoid war and disgrace, Jay had sought accommodation between the two countries, even suggesting a treaty that would close the Mississippi to American navigation for twenty-five to thirty years. The outcry, especially from the Southern states, forced Jay to retract

this idea. At the moment, the negotiations were at a standstill. Gardoqui saw his host as a self-centered man, “blindly in love with his wife.” He described Sarah Jay as a “vain” woman who dominated her husband: “nothing is done without her consent.”<sup>8</sup> Gardoqui was talking of returning to Spain, but he, like Otto, felt that to “give dinners and above all to entertain with good wine” was to Spain’s benefit. No doubt that’s why he accepted John and Sarah’s hospitality so frequently.

The invitations continued to be written: for January 18 (twenty people) and 28 (seven gentlemen); February 22 (twenty-eight people) and 23 (twenty-two men); and March 5 (seventeen guests, mostly family). In the meantime, Congress passed a resolution on February 21 calling for a convention at Philadelphia for the “sole and express purpose of revising” the Articles of Confederation. Jay wrote to John Adams in England on that day that he was unsure what changes should be made but he did feel it would be better “to distribute the federal Sovereignty into its three proper Departments of executive, legislative and judicial...”<sup>9</sup> Having thought and corresponded about how the Articles could be improved, Jay would have been an ideal candidate to send as a New York delegate to the convention. Anti-Federalist Governor George Clinton thought otherwise, appointing instead two of his confederates, Robert Yates and John Lansing, as well as Alexander Hamilton.

There are no party lists for the next four months; nonetheless, life remained hectic for the Jays. John continued to deal with matters that came to his office at Fraunces Tavern. Sarah went to visit her parents. In the middle of May, John may have gone to Fishkill for health reasons, and then to Rye to visit his brother, Peter. On May 27, Sarah wrote to him to say that he “would not be able to do any business in the official way these five or six weeks” because so many members of Congress were also delegates to the Convention at Philadelphia.

On May 25, 1787, the Constitutional Convention presided over by George Washington opened in Philadelphia. The convention immediately adopted (on May 30) a resolution “that a national Government ought to be established consisting of a supreme Legislative, Executive and Judiciary,” thereby abandoning the Articles of Confederation under which the United States had been operating. As George Mason from Virginia explained: “Under the existing confederacy, Congress represent the States not the people of the States; their acts operate on the States, not the individuals.”<sup>10</sup> For the next months, all eyes were on Philadelphia.

The parties began again on July 5. Sarah’s list has eighteen guests, mostly foreigners: van Berckel and his son, Franco, and daughter, Jacoba; de Gardoqui; Antoine de la Forêt, newly wed to Catherine Beaumanoir, who had just arrived

in New York; Louis-Guillaume Otto and his bride, Elizabeth Livingston; Sir John and Lady Elizabeth Temple. Pierce and Mary Butler, John and Susan Kean, and William and Charlotte Pierce rounded out the group. Although there may have been conversation about Madame de la Forêt's trip and marriage, surely the discussion centered on the deliberations at the convention. Gardoqui had been to Philadelphia to see what he might learn.

Sunday, July 15, found many gathered at the Jays, the guest of honor being naval hero John Paul Jones. The brash and restless Jones had traveled from France with Mademoiselle Beaumanoir, the Marquis de Lotbinière, and French Consul Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. At this welcoming party were the ever-present de Gardoqui; Alexander Hamilton (who had left the Convention in disgust) and his wife, Elizabeth Schuyler; the Butler family; John and Dorothy Quincy Hancock of Massachusetts; Sarah's father, mother, and sister, Susan; cousin Henry White with his family; as well as friends General Matthew Clarkson and William Bingham, the Philadelphia merchant who had been the Jays' host in Martinique in 1779.

The Constitutional Convention recessed for ten days on July 27, 1787, and some of the delegates took the opportunity to visit New York. On August 2, they were invited to dine at the Jays. Among them were Arthur St. Clair of Pennsylvania, president of Congress; Hugh Williamson of North Carolina; Richard Henry Lee and his brother, Arthur; George Mason and his son, George Junior (whom the Jays had met in Paris); and Alexander Hamilton. No doubt the other guests—Jones, General Knox, and de Gardoqui—would have listened with interest to news from the convention.

Soon afterward, Sarah Jay fell ill and went to Elizabethtown, New Jersey; thanks to her mother's care, she had "a reprieve from the silent Tomb." Beginning on September 10, the Jays hosted eleven parties (six all-male) in quick succession. The guests were mostly Convention delegates. There seemed to be a sense of urgency to get people together. Governor George Clinton; his brother, James, with his son, "young" DeWitt; the Lees; the President of Congress; Mayor Duane; Elbridge Gerry; Gouverneur Morris; Gov. John Rutledge; and Robert R. Livingston came to dine and talk.

Indeed, there was urgency, for on September 17, delegates at the convention had agreed to a new Constitution that required ratification by nine out of the thirteen states. Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey quickly ratified, but this early enthusiastic support was soon followed by strong opposition. On October 22, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton dined with other politicians at the Jays. No ladies being present, the conversation probably concerned the Constitution. To counter Anti-Federalist attacks, Hamilton, Jay, and Madison joined together

to write the eighty-five letters known as *The Federalist*, a work of advocacy to persuade New Yorkers to ratify. The first, written by Hamilton, appeared on October 27, 1787. The next four were written by Jay.

At this point, Jay became seriously ill, and then Sarah (whose health was always a bit fragile) collapsed from taking care of him. There were no parties at the house on Broadway until the following year.

For 1788, there are eighteen guest lists (this time only four are all-male), though two have a large X through them, indicating that the planned parties did not take place. Again, there are both family and political parties. Thursday, January 10, found Colonel Aaron Burr, a member of the New York Assembly,<sup>11</sup> among the guests, in addition to Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Chancellor Livingston, and several members of Congress. Tuesday, February 12, seems to have been a welcoming dinner for the newly arrived French minister, the Marquis Eléonore François Elie de Moustier and his sister-in-law, the Marchioness de Bréhan. Thomas Jefferson had written privately to Jay: "I think it impossible to find a better woman, more amiable, more modest, more simple in her manners, dress, and way of thinking. She will deserve the friendship of Mrs. Jay, & the way to obtain hers is to receive her and treat her without the shadow of etiquette."<sup>12</sup> Mme. de Bréhan was a gifted amateur artist, but spoke little English. James Madison was delighted with her, going so far as to acquire a young slave in Virginia for her. However, New York ladies were less taken with her; she was in fact de Moustier's mistress, an illicit connection that was, as Madison put it, "universally known and offensive to American manners."

There were other members of the French delegation at the Jays that evening: Victor M. DuPont, son of economist Pierre S. DuPont de Nemours; Mr. and Mrs. de la Forêt; Mr. Otto (now a widower, his young wife having died in childbirth in December); and French Consul J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur with his daughter, América-Francès (known as Fanny). The well-educated de Crèvecoeur had chronicled his experiences of living and traveling in America in the best-seller *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). Fanny was a striking beauty, with auburn hair and dark blue eyes.<sup>13</sup> That this was an official reception is further indicated by the presence of the Dutch van Berckel, the Spanish de Gardoqui, the British



COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

**Pieter John van Berckel (1725-1800).**  
Engraving by Reiner Vinkeles

Sir John and Lady Temple, Chancellor Livingston, and the President of Congress (now Cyrus Griffin of Virginia) with his wife, Christiana, a Scottish woman of noble birth known as “Lady Griffin.”

There were only four dinners in February and March 1788, attended mostly by members of Congress and influential politicians. On April 8, Sarah Jay drew up a list for April 15 and another list on the 11th for the 17th, but both dinners had to be cancelled. On April 13, an angry mob gathered at New York Hospital on Broadway and Pearl Street, accusing the medical students of “body-snatching.” The arrival of Mayor Duane and other citizens defused the tension, but the students were taken to jail “for safe-keeping.” By the next morning, continuing rumors of grave robbing had risen to such a fever pitch that, despite assurances by the mayor and Governor Clinton that there would be an investigation into the accusations, the mob went to the jail, demanding that the students be given up to them. Sarah wrote to her mother:

“...just as were going to tea, Genl. Clarkson call’d in to know if we could lend him a sword, for says he the rioters are proceeding to the Jail & are determined to open the doors & liberate the prisoners as well as to tear in pieces the Doctors who are confin’d there...Mr. Jay ran up the stairs & handing Clarkson one sword, to my great concern arm’d himself with another, & went towards the Jail..Just as he was going up the steps of the jail, a stone thrown by one of the mob (for it was too dark to discern which) took him in the forehead & stunn’d him so that he fell...”<sup>14</sup>

Jay received two large holes in his forehead, and though initially there was great concern for his life, his injuries were limited to black eyes and pain in his neck and shoulders. Baron von Steuben was also wounded. The mob fled after the arrival of the militia, which fired into the crowd, killing several people. The situation remained tense, and the medical students were “hurried off into the country” until the uproar died away.<sup>15</sup>

A month passed before there was another party at the Jays. Abigail “Nabby” Smith, recently returned from Europe and settling in New York City, wrote her mother, Abigail Adams, about the occasion: “we dined at Mrs. Jay’s, in company with the whole *corps diplomatique*. Mr. Jay is a most pleasing man, plain in his manners, but kind, affectionate, and attentive; benevolence is stamped in every feature. Mrs. Jay dresses showily, but is very pleasing on a first acquaintance. The dinner was *à la Française*,<sup>16</sup> and exhibited more of European taste than I expected to find.” The diplomatic contingent that evening included van Berckel and his daughter, Jacoba; the Comte de Moustier; Mme. de Bréhan and her son, Louis;



Mr. Otto; Sir John and Lady Temple; and the ever-present de Gardoqui.

Some days later, the party was all-male—mostly members of Congress. The 10th of June saw family and friends dining together before Jay traveled to Poughkeepsie as a delegate to New York’s Constitutional Convention. Prior to his injury, Jay had written an *Address to the People of the State of New York*, published April 15, 1788, in which he urged New Yorkers to ratify the Constitution. He compared the Articles of Confederation with the proposed Constitution, which, though not perfect, had



BY PERMISSION OF JAY J. SMITH

Alexander Hamilton

been created by the careful deliberation and compromise of the delegates, and which promised to serve the people better than the Articles had. However, it was far from clear whether New York would ratify. The Federalists, such as Robert R. Livingston, Alexander Hamilton, James Duane, Isaac Roosevelt, as well as Jay, faced formidable opposition from Anti-Federalists Governor Clinton, Robert Yates, John Lansing, and Melancton Smith. On July 26, 1788, New York voted thirty to twenty-seven to ratify the Constitution unconditionally. “This happy result, so little anticipated a few weeks before, was no doubt owing in part to the accession of New-Hampshire and Virginia.”<sup>17</sup>

In September 1788, there were three parties. On Tuesday the third, the usual mix of delegates, diplomats, and friends was joined by Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, a French journalist working as an agent for a French syndicate speculating in American lands and debts. He would describe his experiences during his six-month stay in the United States in *Nouveau Voyage dans les Etats-Unis* (1791), calling Jay “a republican remarkable for his firmness and sang-froid and a writer distinguished for his pure style and close reasoning.”<sup>18</sup> Brissot was also a militant abolitionist and a founder of the Société des Amis des Noirs, thus it is especially interesting to note that Theodore Sedgwick was also present. This Massachusetts legislator and jurist had defended runaway slave Elizabeth “Mumbet” Freeman in 1783, successfully arguing that Massachusetts’ 1780 Bill of Rights had declared all men to be “born free and equal.” Jay, a founder and first president of the New York Manumission Society as well as the African Free School, viewed slavery as inconsistent with the principles upon which the new nation was founded. Yet he was a slave owner and lived in the largest slave-owning state north of Maryland. Did the conversation this evening focus on slavery and the slave trade?

Still operating under the Articles of Confederation, Congress was barely able to conduct business, though it did set New York City as the site for the new government and March 4, 1789, for the first meeting of the new Congress. On October 10, 1788, Congress was able to muster enough delegates to transact some business before fading away. That was also the date of Sarah's last list.

The astute reader will have noticed the absence on these lists of several prominent patriots of the young republic: John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington.<sup>19</sup> There is a Mr. Franklin on the dinner list of September 13, 1787, but it was not Benjamin, whose poor health kept him in Philadelphia. Rather it was Samuel Franklin, a Quaker and founder of the New York Manumission Society. John and Abigail Adams returned to Massachusetts from Europe in mid-1788; Mrs. Adams came to stay with the Jays early in 1789. She was a sympathetic guest, for Sarah was pregnant and suffering from morning sickness. General Washington did not come to New York until late April 1789, having remained at Mount Vernon except to preside at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup> Later that year, President Washington, now a neighbor, invited the Jays to join him at the theater (an amusement Washington greatly enjoyed) and, on another occasion, asked for a ride to church, his harness being damaged.

One question needs to be asked: Why did Sarah Jay make the lists only in these politically exciting years? Is it coincidence that there are no lists for other years, or were they destroyed? Jay himself, and later his two sons, carefully culled his voluminous collection of papers. Or perhaps John Jay's career changes from Secretary for Foreign Affairs to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and then to New York's Governor made the lists unnecessary. Whatever the answer, the Jays continued to entertain. Mrs. Jay, like Martha Washington and Lucy Knox, had weekly "At Homes." Even when her husband, riding circuit as Chief Justice, was absent from home, she extended invitations, writing to him, "My endeavor has been to show my affection to you by attention to your friends."<sup>21</sup>

There is no doubt that the guests on the lists of 1787-1788 represented the complete spectrum of political thought and influence. They reflected the symbiotic relationship of politics and society. As van Berckel put it when he wrote (in the third person) to Congress: "He has been a Witness to the Efforts made by this Assembly, to establish the Government confided to them on a solid and permanent Basis." He and all of Sarah Jay's guests were indeed "Witnesses at the Creation."<sup>22</sup>

*I gratefully acknowledge the comments and suggestions received from Landa M. Freeman, Janet M. Wedge, Walter B. Stahr, and most of all, James H. North. Any errors, however, are my sole responsibility.*

## Notes

1. A later hand has added in pencil—incorrectly—1789. Random purple check marks were also added.
2. Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Queens of American Society* (Philadelphia, 1867) and Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration 1607-1937* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp.199-204, contain many erroneous identifications. The recent *Encyclopedia of Women in American History*, Joyce Appleby editor (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2002), vol. I, mistakenly asserts that Sarah's dinner lists were a list of 160 families "considered particularly deserving of social notice."
3. John Adams wrote in his diary: "The French call me 'Le Washington de la Negociation', a very flattering compliment indeed, to which I have no right, but sincerely think it belongs to mr. Jay."
4. Otto to French Foreign Minister Comte de Vergennes, Nov. 28, 1785, in Mary A. Giunta, (editor), *The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780-1789* (National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1996), vol. III, p. 57.
5. Melancthon Smith (as Sarah Jay spelled it) had been a trustee for John Jay's father's estate.
6. William Duer's wife, John Kean's wife, and Walter Livingston were Sarah Jay's cousins.
7. The Jays, by and large, did not ostracize loyalists as long as they had not actively obstructed the American cause.
8. Quoted in Richard B. Morris, *Witnesses at the Creation: Hamilton, Madison, Jay, and the Constitution* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985), p.152.
9. Giunta, III, 430.
10. Leonard W. Levy and Dennis J. Mahoney, editors. *The Framing and Ratification of the Constitution* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1987), p.12.
11. Upon their return from Europe, Jay had placed his nephew, Peter Jay Munro, in Burr's office to study law.
12. Letter from Paris by Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, [1786?], Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
13. Fanny married Louis-Guillaume Otto in April 1790, and the family returned to France for good. Surviving the turmoil of the French Revolution, Otto served his country with distinction.
14. Sarah L. Jay to her mother, Susannah French Livingston, 17 April 1788, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
15. J.T. Headley, *The Great Riots of New York 1712-1873* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1873), pp. 55-65.
16. All the dishes were placed on the table instead of being served in courses.
17. William Jay, *The Life of John Jay* (New York: J&J. Harper, 1833), vol. I, p. 270.
18. J-P. Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States of America 1788*, translated by Mara Soceaunu Vamos and Durand Echeverria (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 124-5.
19. Earlier sources have mistakenly identified Benjamin Franklin and Washington as being among the guests.
20. It was in the summer of 1789 that Washington, now President of the United States, and Jay, as Acting Secretary for Foreign Affairs, met frequently to discuss foreign policy.
21. Letter, Sarah L. Jay to John Jay, Oct. 23, 1790, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
22. Aug. 25, 1788, Giunta, III, pp. 828-9. Many years later, Richard B. Morris used the same word for the title of his excellent account of this time period, *Witnesses at the Creation: Hamilton, Madison, Jay, and the Constitution*.

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