

# WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF 1787

When the idea of publishing the *Liberty Gazette* occurred to us, it seemed both simple and logical: print a newspaper reporting on the most important five months in American history: that time when those Gentlemen in Philadelphia created the United States Constitution. Obviously in a country where the two things which separate us from all other nations in the World, our Constitution and our Free Press, this had been done before, right?

Wrong.

## The 1770s

Our research into American journalism bracketing 1787 uncovered a void. In the 1770s the dominant issue was the bitter argument involving British-American Relations, ending in the American Revolution. Two major themes were evident: pro-British sentiment (Tory), and pro-American (Patriot). Each side had its journalistic agitators. The printer Isaiah Thomas violently championed the Patriot view in *The Massachusetts Spy*.

Thomas gives us the first eyewitness reporting of "the shot heard round the world," the first battle of the Revolution at Lexington. Not surprisingly, Thomas credits the British for starting the whole thing.

The printer James Rivington in the *New York Gazetteer*, took his life in his hands espousing the Tory position, which was to support "our country" (England). The American Mob harassed Rivington so meanly, he was forced to flee to England, his Country.

## The 1790s

The next great journalistic debate was domestic and occurred in the 1790s between Alexander Hamilton's Federalists and Thomas Jefferson's Anti-Federalists.

Newspapers joined either queue to proclaim its hero's righteousness to the public. *The Gazette of the United States*, edited by John Fenno waived the Federalist flag, while Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* held the line for the Jefferson Anti-Federalists. Personal slander and diabolical rhetoric were enjoyed by both sides.

## What Happened to the 1780s?

Two significant events occurred: Shays' Rebellion, and the creation of what is arguably the most important document of the past two hundred years, the United States Constitution.

Even though Captain Shay and his Regulators were confined to Western Massachusetts, their violent message, and the bitterness separating inland farmers from coastal businessmen and bankers all the way to the Georgia frontier, was obvious to the citizenry. Economic and social upheaval sparking confrontation was the order of the day. One could loosely compare it to the anti-war protests of the 1960s, only with a vengeance.

The dominant politicians, including Washington, Jefferson, and Henry of Virginia, and Adams, Bowdoin and Hancock of Massachusetts, all had something to say about the Insurrection. It is fair to state that Shays' Rebellion was a prime mover in deciding the Confederation Congress' timing in calling for a convention to be held in Philadelphia to remedy the defects inherent in the Articles of Confederation in May 1787.

The second event, the creation of our Constitution, is easier to explain.

The most dominant figure in 1787, as well as the most dominant figure in American history, His Excellency Gen. G. Washington, pronounced, with the consent of the Convention's Rules Committee, that the affairs of the Convention would be conducted in the greatest secrecy. This was strictly adhered to by the Gentlemen.

One may imagine it was either fear, respect, intimidation, logic, or a Gentleman's code of Honour—a vanished trait in American society—which kept the chatterboxes (Doctor Franklin of Pennsylvania), buffoons (Gunning Bedford, Jr. of Delaware), and drunks (Luther Martin of Maryland) from leaking news to the press.

Even though there were some ninety newspapers throughout the United States, and seventeen around Philadelphia alone—including America's first daily: Dunlap and Claypoole's *Pennsylvania Packet*, none carried news stories on the Convention.

There were rumors and speculations on what was taking place behind the closed doors of the Pennsylvania State House. And one can visualize strolling couples on Chestnut Street gawking at the closed windows and doors of the unfinished State House, trying to catch a glimpse of the Greatest Man in the World, and being denied by imposed silence.

No great editors or newspapers came forth during the decade to challenge or champion the issues surrounding Shays' Rebellion, nor was the journalistic anathema of secrecy at the Grand Convention debated in any significant way. The 1780s were not the best of times in American journalism.

## The Liberty Gazette (What If?)

What if we had a "depththroat" source at the Grand Convention? And, what if we shed our historian's cloak and covered ourselves with the emotions and reporting talents of a 1787 intelligencer, carefully ignoring our knowledge of the future? What if . . . ?

These postulates were put before our writers, all of whom are professional historians. The results are in our *Gazette* for your pleasure and edification.

For any American who is interested in the evolution of American character, society, culture, and our country's place among the world's nations, no better educational and informational tool exists than journalism. You are there, in time, understanding weaknesses and strengths, deciding whether you personally like and respect the characters and situations which were reported on.

No true time machine exists except our imagination, which can transport us through the most important nineteen weeks in America's development.

## Setting Up The Liberty Gazette

There were concessions made for a twentieth century audience: a modern version of Caslon type was used. Caslon typeface was introduced to America by Benjamin Franklin, and used to print the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. It was a popular typeface in eighteenth century newspapers. It transports the Learned Reader into the time period.

A four column paper was popular in 1787. We took liberties in adding contrasting headlines and shortening stories to cater to a modern attention span.

*Gazette* editorial policy was nationalistic, anti-European, moderately democratic, and pro-Constitution, even though we recommend *against* ratification in our Tombstone Edition. We allowed differing opinions to be printed—something not normally done in 1780's newspapers.

The *Gazette* printer, who at a modern newspaper would be either the publisher or editor, was imagined as a wounded Revolutionary War veteran, and as a radical member of America's growing middle class.

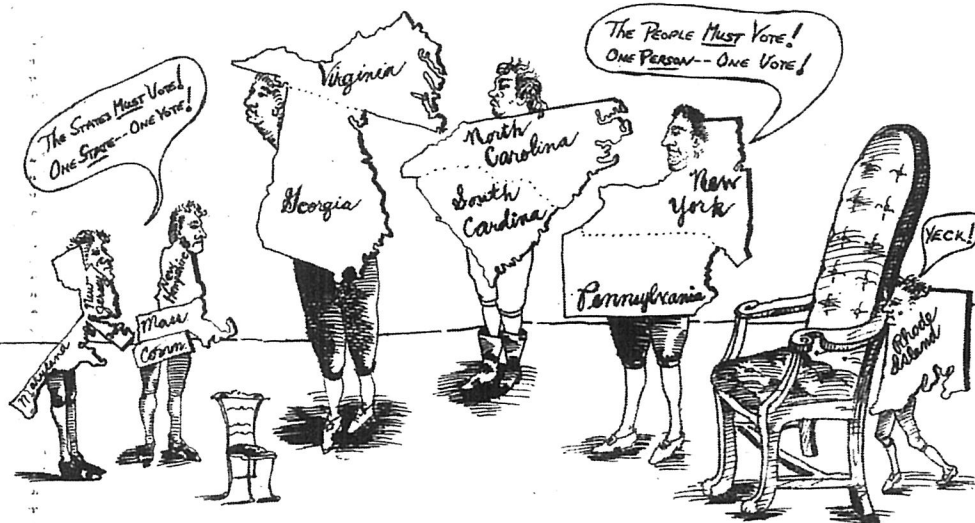
Unlike the Vietnam era, where the vast majority of citizens have never seen a Vietnamese, and their opinions have been molded by media, the 1787 American very probably had come into contact with the British military, and had developed a strong opinion of Europeans based upon direct experience. The Learned Reader will understand that everyone over ten years old living in this small seacoast country had experienced war: the sights, sounds, smells, and morbid excitement of pending doom, daily reinforced. It was a dramatically different society than we now suffer.

Most pro-British (Tory) sympathizers had fled the country northward to settle in Canada or Nova Scotia, but there was still a prevalent feeling that European culture, technology, and manners were superior to American. Objectively this may have been true but there was a vocal minority who clamored, "Buy American!" Our printer was generally in favor with that group.

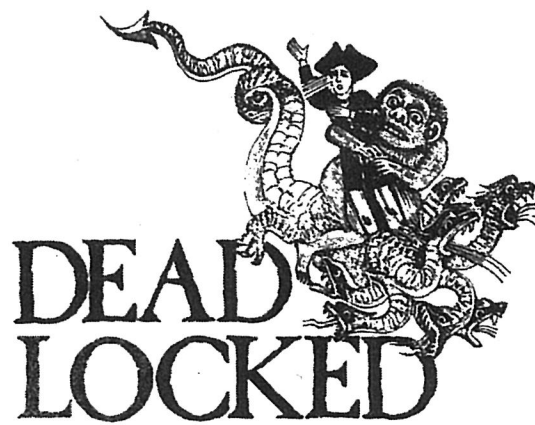
The *Liberty Gazette* is not a facsimile; it is an original newspaper marrying twentieth century technology to eighteenth century social, economic and political values. As far as we can discover, the *Gazette* is the first newspaper in the United States to report in time on the Grand Convention, America, and the World of 1787.

Come, join us in our adventure.

Gary Cook Mahan, Ph.D.  
Publisher and Editor-in-Chief  
Farmington, New Mexico



Is this the beginning of the end for this Grand Convention?



Roger Sherman of Connecticut  
Why not do both?

The Liberty Gazette® staff recognizes the following people and organizations for their persistence and faith in supporting the development of the first newspaper in the United States to report in time on the most important nineteen weeks in American history. It is an incomplete list.

- William "Buzz" Apostol, Manager, Compugraphics Corp., Wilmington, MA
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