

Gouverneur Morris

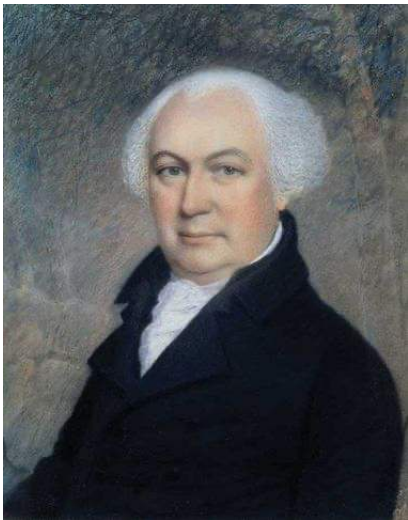
Gouverneur Morris (January 31, 1752 – November 6, 1816) was a statesman, ambassador, orator, senator, Founding Father, and the person most responsible for the graceful wording of the Constitution as the head of the Committee on Style. For his responsibility on the Committee, Morris has been called by some historians the "Penman of the Constitution."^[1] He also did more speaking at the Constitutional Convention than any other delegate.

Morris was one of the most brilliant Founders and yet is unknown to most people today. His clever writing style, such as saying that presidential nominees must receive the "advice and consent" of the Senate rather than spelling that requirement out further, resulted in the U.S. Constitution being the most elegant and concise of all constitutions.

Born in New York, Morris was educated by French Huguenots and graduated from King's College (now Columbia University). He was once defeated in an election because he was suspected of being pro-British in the 1770s. Morris helped finance the Revolutionary War, however, and he was an advocate for a strong general government afterwards, including election of a president for life. An Episcopalian, Morris had a deep faith in God and felt that He intervenes in the world.

Morris was a member of the Federalist Party and a critic of the Jefferson Administration, though Morris favored the Louisiana Purchase.

Founding Fathers



Gouverneur Morris

State	New York
Religion	<u>Episcopalian</u>
Founding Documents	<u>United States Constitution</u>

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Early life

Gouverneur Morris was born at Morrisania, near the city of New York, January 31, 1752. He is the brother of another Founding Father, Lewis Morris, as well as Staats Long Morris,^[2] a loyalist major-general in the American Revolution. He was educated at King's College, New York, where he was graduated bachelor of arts in May, 1768.^[3]

Immediately after he entered the office of William Smith (the historian of the colony), as a student of law. In 1771, he was licensed to practice law. His proficiency in all his studies was remarkable. He acquired early much reputation as a man of brilliant talents and various promise. His person, address, manners, elocution, were of a superior order. In 1775, after three years of study with William Smith, Morris was admitted to the bar. Smith was one of New York's leading legal minds as well as an ardent opponent of the British Empire's treatment of the colonies.^[4]

Entry into Politics

In May, 1775, Mr. Morris was chosen a delegate to the provincial congress of New York. In June of that year, he served on a committee with general Montgomery, to confer with General Washington respecting the manner of his introduction to the congress. He entered with zeal and efficiency into all the questions and proceedings which referred to a vigorous resistance to the pretensions of the mother country. In December, 1776, he acted as one of the committee for drafting a constitution for the state of New York, which was reported in March, and adopted in April, of that year, after repeated and very able debates, in which John Jay, Gouverneur Morris, and Robert R. Livingston were the principal speakers.

New York State Constitution

In July, 1777, he served as member of a committee from the New York congress, to repair to the headquarters of Schuyler's army, to inquire into the causes of the evacuation of Fort Ticonderoga.

Continental Congress

In October 1777, he joined the Continental Congress at York, Pennsylvania, and, in 1778, wrote the patriotic and successful pamphlet called *Observations on the American Revolution*, which he published at the beginning of 1779.

Shortly after serving in the Congress, in 1780,^[5] Morris had one of his legs amputated after a carriage accident. For the rest of his life, Morris walked with a wooden prosthetic or as some called it, a "peg-leg".^[6] Morris made light of the situation, commenting to a friend:

"My good sir, you argue the matter so handsomely, and point out so clearly the advantages of being without legs, that I am almost tempted to part with the other."^[7]

Career

In July, 1781, he accepted the post of assistant superintendent of finance, as the colleague of Robert Morris. He filled every office to which he was called with characteristic zeal and ability. After the Revolutionary War, he embarked, with Robert Morris, in mercantile enterprises. In 1785, he published an Address to the Assembly of Pennsylvania on the Abolition of the Bank of North America, in which he cogently argued against that project. In December, 1786, he purchased from his brother the fine estate of Morrisania, and made it his dwelling-place. Here he devoted himself to liberal studies.

Constitutional Convention

In 1787, he served with distinction as a member of the convention for framing the constitution of the United States. Other members of the Pennsylvania delegation to the Convention were George Clymer, Thomas Fitzsimons, Benjamin Franklin, Jared Ingersoll, Thomas Mifflin, Robert Morris, and James Wilson.

At the Convention, Morris played a prominent part in the wording and style of the convention. Because of this, Morris has been called by some historians as an "amanuensis".

At the Convention, Morris criticized "Citizens of the World" and called for constitutional restrictions on foreigners such as a ban on holding office.^[8]

Re-entry to Private Life

December 15, 1788, he sailed for France, where he was occupied in selling lands and pursuing money speculations until March, 1790, when he proceeded to London as private agent of the American government with regard to the conditions of the old treaty, and the inclination of the British cabinet to form a commercial treaty. In November, 1790, he returned to Paris, having made a tour in Germany. In the interval between this period and the beginning of the year 1791, he passed several times on public business between the British and French capitals.

Ambassador to France

February 6, 1792, he received his appointment as minister plenipotentiary to France, and was presented to the king June 3. He held this station with great idol until October, 1794. He witnessed the most interesting scenes of the French Revolution, and maintained personal intercourse with the conspicuous politicians of the several parties. The abundant memorials which he has left of his sojourn in France, and his travels on the European continent, possess the highest interest and much historical value. He made extensive journeys after he ceased to be minister plenipotentiary, of which he kept a full diary.

In his diary, he expressed disapproval over the course and Terror of the French Revolution, and also regretted the execution of Marie Antoinette.^[9]

United States Senate

In the autumn of 1798, Mr. Morris returned to the U. States, to engage in politics, with enhanced celebrity and a large additional stock of political and literary knowledge. He was universally admitted to be one of the most accomplished and prominent gentlemen of his country. In 1800, he entered the senate of the United States, where his eloquence and information made him conspicuous. The two eulogies which he pronounced - one on General Washington, and the other at the funeral of General Hamilton - are specimens of his rhetorical style. His delivery was excellent.

Later life

In 1809, to the surprise of many, Morris announced that he had married Anne Cary "Nancy" Randolph, who was his housekeeper.^[10]

At an early period, Mr. Morris gave special and sagacious attention to the project of that grand canal by which the state of New York has been so much honored and benefited. In the summer of 1810, he examined the canal route to Lake Erie. The share which he had in originating and promoting the Erie Canal, is stated in the regular history which has been published of its conception and progress. In May, 1812, he pronounced a public and impressive eulogium on the venerable George Clinton; in the same year, an oration before the New York historical society; in 1814, another on the restoration of the Bourbons in France; in 1816, a discourse before the New York historical society.

Death and Legacy

Mr. Morris died at Morrisania, November 5, 1816. Like many other Founding Fathers, Morris was ardently opposed to the institution of slavery. He spoke out against slavery several times at the Constitutional Convention.

In New York, the town^[11] and village^[12] of Gouverneur are both named after him.

During World War II, a Liberty Ship named the SS Gouverneur Morris was also named after him.^[13]

Pronunciation

There is some question as to how to pronounce his first name, 'Gouverneur'. Some places suggest *GOO-ver-NUR*^[14] while others point to *gu-var-nur*,^[15] but the most probable and correct pronunciation comes from Abigail Adams, who was known for her phonetic writings. She wrote his name as "*Governeer*".^[16] The Weider History Group also pronounces it as Abigail did.^[17]

Quotes

- "Religion is the only solid basis of good morals; therefore education should teach the precepts of religion, and the duties of man towards God." - Notes on a Form of a Constitution for France, 1791^{[18][19]}
- "There must be religion. When that ligament is torn, society is disjointed and its members perish."^[20]
- (Gouverneur Morris) was compelled to declare himself reduced to the dilemma of doing injustice to the Southern States or to human nature, and he must therefore do it to the former. For he could never agree to give such encouragement to the slave trade as would be given by allowing them a representation for their negroes, and he did not believe those States would ever confederate on terms that would deprive them of that trade.^[21]
- "The admission of slaves into the Representation when fairly explained comes to this: that the inhabitant of Georgia and South Carolina who goes to the Coast of Africa, and in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity tears away his fellow creatures from their dearest connections and damns them to the most cruel bondages, shall have more votes in a government instituted for the protection of the rights of mankind, than the Citizen of Pennsylvania or New Jersey who views with a laudable horror, so nefarious a practice."^[22]
- He ran over the privileges which emigrants would enjoy among us, though they should be deprived of that of being eligible to the great offices of Government; observing that they exceeded the privileges allowed to foreigners in any part of the world; and that as every Society from a great nation down to a club had the right of declaring the conditions on which new members should be admitted.^[23]
- "The trial of Zenger in 1735 was the germ of American freedom, the morning star of that liberty which subsequently revolutionized America."^[24]

Further reading

- William Howard Adams. *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life* (2003) 345 pages excerpt and text search (https://books.google.com/books?id=2TbC9bQsl6MC&printsec=frontcover&dq=intitle:Gouverneur+intitle:Morris&lr=&num=30&as_brr=0&ei=md3YSMTSFo3sswPSnsDeDg&sig=ACfU3U1KJcD08bSvpDPJSdFyP-oKd4WwEQ)
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- James J. Kirschke. *Gouverneur Morris: Author, Statesman, and Man of the World* (2005) 370 pages excerpt and text search (https://books.google.com/books?id=MkqBV79cVMkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=intitle:Gouverneur+intitle:Morris&lr=&num=30&as_brr=0&ei=md3YSMTSFo3sswPSnsDeDg&sig=ACfU3U0IPX6f-Y_8gkaPfEZ_nf2Z-rDjbQ)
- Theodore Roosevelt. *Gouverneur Morris* (1896), 341 pages; written before TR became president;

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1. Principled Action: Lessons from the Origins of the American Republic (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3j90mqgMf4IC&pg=PA40>)
2. The Old New York Frontier (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Old_New_York_Frontier/7PocAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA366)
3. Encyclopædia Americana: a popular dictionary of arts, sciences, literature, history, politics, and biography (<https://books.google.com/books?id=iZdRAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA51>)
4. Gouverneur (i.e. Gouverneur) Morris (<https://books.google.com/books?id=Zyra6H3Xz3YC&pg=PP4>)
5. A Place in History: Albany in the Age of Revolution, 1775-1825 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=1zG0cX3lckUC&pg=PA100>)
6. GIFT OF A PEG LEG UNCORKS ODD LORE; Gouverneur Morris' Artificial Limb Inspires Museum Talk by Expert on Subject (<https://www.nytimes.com/1954/07/28/archives/gift-of-a-peg-leg-uncorks-odd-lore-gouverneur-morris-artificial.html>)
7. The Athenaeum (<https://books.google.com/books?id=bx2it9S7kVwC&pg=PA401>), 1889
8. Madison Debates – Tuesday August 9, 1787 (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_809.asp). *The Avalon Project*. Retrieved December 8, 2018.
9. The Quarterly Review, Volume 169 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=wD7a8mx2vkUC&pg=PA89>)
0. Gouverneur Morris: Author, Statesman, and Man of the World (<https://books.google.com/books?id=MkqBV79cVMkC&pg=PA263>)
1. Town of Gouverneur (<http://www.gouverneur.ny.com/>)
2. Village of Gouverneur (<http://www.villageofgouverneur.org/>)
3. Liberty ships: the ugly ducklings of World War II (<https://books.google.com/books?id=BW58AAAAIAAJ&q=liberty+ship+gouverneur+morris&dq=liberty+ship+gouverneur+morris&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwini53o44zLAhVGWCYKHStgC6YQ6AEITAB>)
4. A most confusing name (<https://ourfriendben.wordpress.com/2008/05/28/a-most-confusing-name/>)
5. The Literary Digest, Volume 66, Part 2 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=iW1FAQAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA150>)
6. My moment of Hope. My man for chief justice. Talkin' Democrat - etc. (<https://www.nationalreview.com/article/207063/impromptus-jay-nordlinger>), National Review
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8. Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States: Developed in the Official and Historical Annals of the Republic (<https://books.google.com/books?id=9R1cAAAACAAJ&pg=PA138>)
9. The Life of Gouverneur Morris: With Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers; Detailing Events in the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and in the Political History of the United States, Volume 3 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=v04sAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA483>)
0. An Inaugural Discourse: Delivered Before the New York Historical Society, 4th September, 1816 (<https://books.google.com/books?id=HvFwAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA10>)

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1. Madison Debates, July 11, 1787 (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_711.asp)
2. Madison Debates (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_808.asp), August 8th, 1787
3. Madison Debates, August 9, 1787 (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_809.asp)
4. Harper's Popular Cyclopedia of United States History (<https://books.google.com/books?id=Uu9FAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA1559>), Benson John Lossing

External links

- [The Life of Gouverneur Morris; with selections from his correspondence and miscellaneous papers](https://archive.org/details/lifeofgouverneur01spar) (<https://archive.org/details/lifeofgouverneur01spar>), by [Jared Sparks](#)
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This page was last edited on December 12, 2019, at 23:37.

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