

SARAH LIVINGSTONE JAY, 1756-1802: DYNAMICS OF DOMESTICITY, PATRIOTISM AND  
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

By

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Sarah Livingston Jay was a politically astute woman whose contributions to the success of the American Revolution and reconstruction of post-war society have long been underestimated. She understood the complex dynamics that underlay the decision to declare independence from Great Britain and the fragile subtleties that formed personal and international alliances necessary for success. Intelligent, educated and socially skilled, she used her personal gifts, her elite position and her familial connections to exert an influence on the course of events that would benefit her fledgling country. Jay was a dedicated patriot during and after the American Revolution. She used her social graces to take part in the male-dominated political world, while working within the domestic realm. A study of Sarah Livingston Jay reveals that more research should be conducted in the ways in which elite women used to great effect the space available to them. Further, Sarah Jay may represent how women, particularly elite women, chose to participate in the American Revolution from within the domestic realm.

Sarah Jay did not expound feminist views, write books or pamphlets, or speak publicly as did her male counterparts. Throughout the war and after, Mrs. Jay embraced her domestic role. Rather than rejecting her responsibilities as wife and mother, she performed them while taking on new spheres. Expressions of her patriotism can be found in the numerous private sacrifices she made during the American Revolution, as did many of her female peers. These women chose to risk their lives, personal security, and the well being of their children and family for their ideals. She acquired a great deal of practical political power, made possible because of the American Revolution and its

resultant social upheaval. She was an unrecognized diplomat without a portfolio. Jay was an elite woman whose role was bound by the limits of culture and convention, yet exerted her influence during and after the American Revolution within the realm of politics and social power.<sup>1</sup>

The American Revolution was a period of constant social change and Sarah Livingston Jay, as well as other elite American women, faced new challenges that dictated the redefinition or shifting of assigned gender roles found within the colonies. A significant part of the process was the development of a political consciousness among women that would continue long after the war's end.<sup>2</sup> Politically important positions once closed to them materialized, for the American Revolution created ambiguity regarding civilian roles.<sup>3</sup>

The actions of Sarah Livingston Jay, throughout the war and after, helps to further discredit the assumption among historians prior to the 1980s that for the duration of the American Revolution the political identity of elite women was solely defined by their fathers, husbands and

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Spirit of '76: The Growth of American Patriotism Before Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck. "Introduction" In *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, edited by Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 13-17. Past historical works that centered on women, as well as many today, tend to concentrate on three key areas identified by Cott and Pleck. The first of these areas is institutional histories of women's organizations, which implied that women deserved recognition only when they took on typically male roles. The second is biographies of women that highlight their accomplishments while failing to connect their greater influence on society and confining them to their immediate surroundings, identifying them as unusual. The third category is when historians mistake perception for reality, such as culturally designated female roles, either within the family or society. One example of this can be seen in Elizabeth Evan's *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), which portrayed eleven women, yet failed to connect them to their influence upon society. A second example is Melissa Lukeman Bohrer's *Glory, Passion, and Principle: The Story of Eight Remarkable Women at the Core of the American Revolution* (New York: Atria Books, 2003), who only described women that were she considered "unusual". Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 1-8; John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggles to Create the American Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). The current historical body of knowledge on the revolution often ignores women's revolutionary experiences as unique, identifiable, and different from their male counterparts. Using the male experience as universal is problematic for women's perceptions as a group vary greatly due to culturally constructed gender differences, as well as physical, morphological, and anatomical differences. Women and their actions are often only mentioned in conjunction with men, such as fathers and husbands.;

<sup>2</sup> Evans, E., 2-4; Sarah M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1989), 46; Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 105; Alfred Young, "The Women of Boston: "Persons of Consequence" in the Making of the American Revolution, 1765-1776," in *Women and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution*", Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 181-218.

<sup>3</sup> Evans, E., 2-4; Evans, S., 46.

brothers.<sup>4</sup> Like Jay, many privileged women who created a political identity during the revolution did so without abandoning their domestic roles and responsibilities. Women who attempted to enter the public sphere were ultimately unsuccessful since they lacked the franchise, had minimal access to the defined political forums considered essential to the formation of political attitudes, and had a lower literacy rate, which prevented them from reading the many pamphlets and newspaper articles considered crucial to the decimation of revolutionary ideas. Jay and others were successful because they worked *within* the domestic sphere and never challenged their roles.<sup>5</sup>

The Revolution affected every aspect of American life, including attitudes and values regarding gender. For example, prior to the American Revolution few petitions were written or signed by women. The first recorded political act by a group of women in the pre-revolutionary era was a petition written and signed in 1774 to uphold the non-consumption codes for the “publick good.” They saw it as their duty because it affected their “near and dear relations and connections.”<sup>6</sup> In the colonies and in England, the petition was scorned as “unladylike.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the censure they experienced women in pre-Revolutionary America were beginning to form a distinct political identity within their appointed realm.<sup>8</sup> This newly formed political identity took many forms within the domestic realm, particularly among the elite.

Sarah Jay did not write pamphlets or participate in the war through public actions, but the changing attitudes towards gender in the colonies during the war allowed her to expand her political consciousness without repercussions within the realm of domesticity. Her approach was more consistent with the conservative gender script assigned to her. A number of women crossed gender lines to step into roles culturally designated as being exclusively male, and in doing so, publicly

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<sup>4</sup> Kerber 34-8.

<sup>5</sup> Evans, E., 2-4; Evans, S., 46; Kerber, 35-6, 105. The institutions they were barred from were the meeting house, the town meeting hall, the public schools and the militia. Only the church was open to them. Young, 181-218.

<sup>6</sup> Alice M. Earle, *Colonial Dames and Good Wives* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1895), 240-41. As quoted in Earle, 253-54; Kerber, 38-41.

<sup>7</sup> Earle, 241; Evans, S., 49-50; Kerber, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Young, 181-218.

usurped traditional male prerogatives or embraced views inconsistent with their domestic roles. Jay, on the other hand, worked within its confines.<sup>9</sup>

Sarah Jay was a contributor to the revolutionary war on par with her male counterparts, who exemplifies a previously dim cadre of elite women. These women participated in the American Revolution, the political arena, and the shaping of post-war America, even as they remained within the realm of domesticity, and used the restrictions placed upon them by society to their advantage. The dynamics of power, prestige and influence had a greater effect upon women of this time period than once believed. Even a brief survey of her life provides new and unique perspective on influential women's involvement in the political life of an emerging nation.

By 1750 metropolitan New York was the cultural heart of the new colonial aristocracy. Great wealth created demands for women to meet societal expectations, not just as a wife and mother, but also as the perfect "gentlewomen," a role requiring a level of sophistication and knowledge only gained through education.<sup>10</sup> Sarah Livingston was born into one of the wealthy and powerful families of New York that valued education and believed intelligent females contributed to the formation and continuation of good moral values in society. Many educated and intelligent women emerged as politically conscious and enthusiastic Patriots and Loyalists as the war approached. Throughout the Revolution these women exerted a growing presence, recognizing in themselves a mounting political consciousness despite the strong cultural inhibitions that defined their roles in the domestic, rather than the political sphere.<sup>11</sup>

Sarah's childhood and adolescence were designed to educate and prepare her for the social and political roles she played during and after the war. Born to the influential and socially elite Livingston family of New York on August 2, 1756, her education was informal, but rigorous. Sarah

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Cynthia A. Kierner, "From Entrepreneurs to Ornaments: The Livingston Women, 1679-1790" in *The Livingston Legacy: Three Centuries of American History*, ed. Richard T. Wiles (Taconic Region: Bard College, 1987), 337, 340, 347.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

also received an impromptu political education from simply living in the Livingston household: her father, William, was a well-known lawyer and a politically active Whig who despised the injunctions and restrictions placed upon the colonies by Parliament.<sup>12</sup>

On April 28, 1774 Sarah Livingston married John Jay, a lawyer from a New York mercantile family. Birmingham, author of *America's Secret Aristocracy*, writes the Jay marriage “was probably as happy as that of any ambitious and successful couple who find themselves in the public spotlight and enjoying it. The only rule of marriage in the American eighteenth century was that a wife was to be absolutely obedient to her husband.”<sup>13</sup> It is true a number of letters between John and Sarah were formal in content, but for the most part they reveal a partnership forged of emotions and understanding, not ambition, and Sarah frequently acted independently of him in her business and personal decisions.<sup>14</sup>

While John spent most of his time attempting to reconcile the growing chasm between the colonies and the British crown as a representative to the First and Second Continental Congresses, Sarah remained with her family at Liberty Hall in New Jersey, or at the Jay family home in Rye, New

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Birmingham, *America's Secret Aristocracy* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1987), 17, 38-41; Sally Smith Booth, *The Women of '76* (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 215-16, 299-300; Landa M. Freeman, Louise V. North, and Janet M. Wedge, eds., *Selected Letters of John Jay and Sarah Livingston Jay: Correspondence by or to the First Chief Justice of the United States and His Wife* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 291; Claire McCurdy, “Sarah Van Brugh Livingston Jay, 1756-1802” in *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women*, ed. Joan N. Burstyn (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990), 24-26; William Livingston’s popularity did not decline when he left New York politics. He instead chose to leave after the DeLancey family seized control of the assembly. From the outbreak of the Revolution until 1790 he served as Governor of New Jersey; Richard B. Morris, ed., *John Jay: The Making of a Revolutionary, Unpublished Papers 1745-1780*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 123. Primarily educated by her parents, she learned reading, writing, dancing, proper etiquette, sewing, knitting, and household management.

<sup>13</sup> Birmingham, 56. Birmingham believes that John Jay married Sarah Livingston to further his own goals and ambitions and that Sarah was a domineering and controlling woman, which resulted in a marriage based on partnership and not love. I believe that this author misquoted the letters he cited, completely ignoring the letters that speak of their deep attachment.

<sup>14</sup> Freeman, 16-18; John Jay to Sarah Livingston Jay, 14 November 1783, 150-51 and SLJ to JJ, 18 November 1783, 151. Almost all of the correspondence between John and Sarah Jay begin with “My dear Mr. Jay” or “My dear Sally”. To see further evidence of this see: SLJ to JJ, 18 November 1794, 242-43; JJ to SLJ, 21 November 1794, 245; SLJ to JJ, 5 December 1794, 245-46. *Note:* Strict adherence to formality was typical of their exchanges in writing, but should not be mistaken for emotional reticence. The phraseology and linguistic organization of the words may be formal, but the content of the passages express sentiment, care, worry, love, etc...that shows the depth of their relationship.

York, states among the hardest hit during the war.<sup>15</sup> The couple constantly wrote to one another and Sarah's letters suggest she understood and accepted the reasons for his lengthy absences. Her letters were always supportive and affectionate.<sup>16</sup>

Birmingham asserts John's letters to Sarah were "usually little more than lists of instructions concerning duties he wished her to perform."<sup>17</sup> While this was true, almost all were also filled with inquiries about her health, descriptions of his sadness at their separation and petulant reminders for her to write more often.<sup>18</sup> John missed his young wife and wrote, "it is not good for a man to be alone" and "I find my present situation condemned, not only by my own feelings but by divine authority." These letters cast light on the relationship between the two and provide insights on John's willingness to share political activities and insights with his wife. He strongly believed he could always "speak and write to you [Sarah] without that Circumspection which Prudence dictates in our common Converse with Mankind."<sup>19</sup> She commonly wrote of the war and ending the "Tyrants Power."<sup>20</sup>

The many letters exchanged between family relations, including the women, were filled with political discussions. These exchanges brought ideas and speculations into a more public arena, although they were still confined within the domestic realm of the families. It is in these familial communications written prior to the Jay's mission to Spain in 1779 that Sarah's patriotism first emerges.<sup>21</sup> In a letter to her brother, Henry Brockholst Livingston, she remarks on being constantly

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<sup>15</sup> McCurdy, 25; Cokie Roberts, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 106, 162. John Jay was elected President of the Continental Congress on December 28, 1777.

<sup>16</sup> McCurdy, 25; Roberts, 162; Richard B. Morris, ed., *John Jay: The Winning of the Peace, Unpublished Papers, 1780-1784*, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), SLJ to JJ, 23-4 March 1777, 379-81.

<sup>17</sup> Birmingham, 57.

<sup>18</sup> JJ to Catherine W. Livingston with Post Script from SLJ, 8 November 1776, in *Unpublished Papers*, Vol. 1, 320-21; for examples of his letters in which he misses and inquires about the health of SLJ see: JJ to SLJ, 24 May 1775, 146; JJ to SLJ, 4 December 1775, 187, in Morris, Vol. 1. For gentle reminders when he has not received a recent letter from her and on the joy they bring him, see: JJ to SLJ, 29 July 1776, 305; JJ to SLJ, 21 July 1775, 305, in Morris, Vol. 1.

<sup>19</sup> JJ to SLJ, 18 September 1775, in Morris, Vol. 1, 166-67.

<sup>20</sup> JJ to SLJ, 21 July 1776, in Morris, Vol. 1, 306.

<sup>21</sup> Kerber, 76, 85; Marylynn Salmon, "The Limits of Independence: 1760-1800," in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84-85, 109-178.

shuffled about from town to town due to the ebb and flow of British occupation: “It is not a mortification to us who disclaim the tyranny of the King of England, that even the most interesting actions of our lives are controlled by his minions.”<sup>22</sup> It is important to note she includes herself when she denounces the English throne in this letter, using the term “us” instead of “patriots”; she views herself not as existing on the periphery but as being at the heart of the revolution.

These letters portray her enthusiastic participation in the political discourse of the era, even as she fulfilled her obligations in the domestic realm. The letters to her family provide evidence of how Sarah stepped beyond the passive role assigned to eighteenth-century women of privilege and actively participated in the Revolution from within the domestic realm. Much of her influence was subtle and expressed in private actions and correspondence, both appropriate during a time of war. Sarah developed a political consciousness and patriotism that continued to burgeon after she and her husband traveled abroad to Spain and France.

The Jays’ European adventure began in 1779, when the couple sailed for Spain after John resigned the presidency of Congress to become ambassador to Spain.<sup>23</sup> Sarah, then twenty-three, was the only wife of an American ambassador to accompany her husband abroad during the war. She left behind her home, family and three year old son Peter Augustus. Her family, although surprised and saddened by Sarah’s departure, expressed pride in her decision and in her unflinching support of her husband and the patriotic cause.<sup>24</sup> Her brother, William, Jr., wrote of her decision to accompany John to Spain as “...reflecting the brightest Honor on your Family and Country”<sup>25</sup> and

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<sup>22</sup> SLJ to Henry Brockholst Livingston, 18 August 1777, in Morris, Vol. 1, 437-8. Henry Brockholst Livingston is more commonly referred to as simply “Brockholst” in correspondence.

<sup>23</sup> Roberts, 162; Carl E. Prince, Dennis P. Ryan, Brenda Parnes, and Mary Lou Lustig, ed., *The Papers of William Livingston: January 1779 – June 1780*, Vol. 3 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 172. Jay’s mission in Spain was three pronged: to persuade Spain to join the alliance of France and America against England; to obtain navigation rights for the Mississippi River; and to convince the Spanish monarch to loan America over five million dollars.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Mary Alsop, *Yankee’s at the Court: The First American in Paris* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1982), 192-93, 195; McCurdy, 25; Roberts, 163. For evidence at the sorrow of her departure see: William Livingston to SLJ, 7 October 1779, 675-76 and Susannah French Livingston to SLJ, October 9 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 676.

<sup>25</sup> William Livingston, Jr. to SLJ, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 676-77.

her mother, Susannah French Livingston wrote she understood it was Sarah's "duty" to accompany "her best Friend."<sup>26</sup> While abroad Sarah would survive a disastrous voyage, the death of her baby, sickness and difficult separations from her husband.

The American delegation to Spain was comprised of John and Sarah Jay, Henry Brockholst Livingston, Sarah's brother, who served as John's private secretary, and William Carmichael, who was John's official secretary of legation.<sup>27</sup> Sarah, with a lock of General George Washington's hair and his parting letter wishing her and the entire group "prosperous gales, unruffled Sea, and every thing pleasing and desirable," set sail aboard the *Confederacy* on October 20, 1779.<sup>28</sup> His parting words did not prove prophetic.

The journey was disastrous, with little wind for the first five days and then the ship was caught in a terrible gale, which tore the ship apart and left it at the mercy of the waves.<sup>29</sup> Sarah was courageous in the face of possible death, writing she "gave fear to the winds and cheerfully resigned myself to the dispensations of the Almighty." The next morning they were battered by high winds and the rudder gave way to the tremendous stress.<sup>30</sup> Captain Seth Harding of the *Confederacy* was faced with two choices: continue on to Cadiz at great risk to the ship and those aboard or sail to Martinique for repairs. Harding favored Martinique, a scant two hundred miles away, and Jay agreed with his assessment. However, another passenger, the French minister to America, Conrad Alexandre Gerard, wanted to return home as quickly as possible. Carmichael, who should have deferred to Jay, surprisingly supported Gerard. Carmichael's betrayal distressed both John and Sarah.<sup>31</sup> The animosity created between John Jay and William Carmichael increased throughout the

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<sup>26</sup> SFL to SLJ, 9 October 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 676.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, 192-93.

<sup>28</sup> George Washington to JJ, 7 October 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 656.

<sup>29</sup> Alsop, 197-98; HBL to SFL, 25 October 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 678-79.

<sup>30</sup> SLJ to SFL, 12-26 December 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 680-84.

<sup>31</sup> Alsop, 192; Frank Monaghan, *John Jay: Defender of Liberty* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1935), 125-27; SLJ to SFL, 12-26 December 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 680-84. *Note:* Gerard wanted to clear his name with the French government after he was involved in factional disputes between various Congressmen.

journey and was transformed into full-blown loathing before the mission to Spain was completed.<sup>32</sup>

Although the journey to Martinique was uncomfortable and terrifying, Sarah never had “a moment’s complaint,” a small miracle considering she was then pregnant with her second child.<sup>33</sup>

In December 1779 the beleaguered *Confederacy* made port in St. Pierre, Martinique.<sup>34</sup> The party set out once again on December 28, 1779 upon the French frigate *Aurora*. Just before reaching Cadiz Bay the American contingent experienced yet another frightening occurrence when the *Aurora* was chased by an English frigate and Sarah “went upon deck and staid there till the chase was over.”<sup>35</sup> Fortunately, the *Aurora* was able to outrun its English pursuers and reached harbor safely. The experiences of the voyage solidified Jay’s dedication to the cause of independence and wrote King George III was a “once haughty foe” that now “finds himself depriv’d of [a] great part of his Empire, dignity & the confidence of many of his subjects.”<sup>36</sup>

The voyage reinforced for Sarah her pride in America. In one of her letters home, perhaps concerned her mother and sister would doubt her patriotism because of her long absence and many favorable remarks of Martinique, Sarah wrote:

Do you think, girls, that distance diminishes my affection for Americans, or my concern for their interest? Oh! No; it increases my attachment even to enthusiasm. Where is the country (Switzerland excepted) where Justice is so impartially administered, industry encouraged, health and Smiling plenty so bounteous to all as in our much favored Country? And are not those blessings each of them resulting from, or matures by freedom, worth contending for?... But...What have I to do with politicks? Am I not myself a woman, and writing to Ladies?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> HBL to SFL, 25 October 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 678-680. *Note:* The entire journey was not spent unpleasantly. Sarah worked to learn and perfect her French on the off chance she would be presented at the Court of Versailles. Her brother, Brockholst commented she was “...a very apt scholar...” and noted that “Seriously, I believe she will soon speak French, and with fluency.” Another example of Jay’s intellect; SLJ to SFL, 12-26 December 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 680-84. Sarah planned a shipboard party for Mrs. Gerard to celebrate her birthday, which did much to assuage Gerard’s ego.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 77.

<sup>34</sup> McCurdy, 25; SLJ to SFL, 12-26 December 1779, in Morris, Vol. 1, 680-84.

<sup>35</sup> SLJ to CWL and SFL, 4 March 1780, in Prince, Vol. 3, 285-288.

<sup>36</sup> SLJ to WL, 31 January 1782, in Freeman, 117.

<sup>37</sup> SLJ to CWL and SFL, in Morris, Vol. 1, 692-93.

Despite her disclaimer, Sarah was an ardent revolutionary whose conviction was based on sound political philosophy. In the letter she recognizes the necessity of fighting for rights and privileges. Even as she expounds on these themes of independence she apologizes, because even though the letter is to a family member, the possibility of others reading the letter existed.

In one letter to her father, William, Mrs. Jay wrote of Americans that “the sun shines not on a more worthy people, even in their errors virtue is conspicuous.”<sup>38</sup> This quotation reveals not only her loyalty, but also an ethnocentric belief Americans were pristine in their societal and political mores, that there was an innate or natural quality in Americans that inclined them to freedom and justice. She went on to write, “certain I am that victory will one day give to the Americans that liberty they have had the virtue to defend.”<sup>39</sup> This is a constant theme in Sarah’s letters, one that reinforces her earlier letter to her mother and sister. She believed the cause of independence to be virtuous and moral, both concerns of the domestic realm.

After spending five weeks in Cadiz the American party set out over land for Madrid, the capital of Spain.<sup>40</sup> After six harrowing months at sea and on the back roads of Spain, the American ambassadorial party finally reached Madrid on April 4, 1780, whereupon the American delegation faced numerous problems. John was not recognized as an official ambassador from America because Spain did not recognize America’s independence from Britain. This rendered his diplomatic credentials and mission an exercise in futility. To complicate matters further, the Spanish monarch regularly moved the court to royal palaces throughout the Spanish countryside. John was often forced to pack his bags at the last moment and trail after the royal entourage, leaving his very pregnant wife alone in a foreign capital.

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<sup>38</sup> SLJ to WL, 14 March 1781, in Morris, Vol. 2, 177-80.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> SLJ to SFL, 28 August 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 704-12. *Note:* The journey from Cadiz to Madrid was miserable for Jay, who was several months pregnant at the time. During the cross-country trek she suffered from a bronchial infection, witnessed crosses marking the graves of murdered travelers and sleeping accommodations infested with vermin and lice.

Sarah bore the burden of isolation in a foreign land with grace and dignity, even though she found herself extremely lonely at times because she did not speak the language. Spain's reluctance to grant America diplomatic recognition prevented Sarah from socializing with the wives of other foreign diplomats. Sarah and John Jay were guests without status, and as such, were precluded from the traditional welcomes accorded foreign diplomats. To her sister, Catharine W. Livingston, Sarah wrote there was little amusement in Madrid.<sup>41</sup> Although few public entertainments were open to Jay, she took great pleasure in the "...very beautiful walks and publick gardens"<sup>42</sup> and the magnificent sculptures of the city.<sup>43</sup>

Despite her isolation Sarah remained strong and devoted to the patriot cause. She was reluctant to cause her relations to worry and carefully avoided references in her letters home that might have revealed the full extent of her frustrations or fears.<sup>44</sup> Sarah Jay wrote regularly of the war, specifically about the soldiers involved in the struggle, her letters always betraying her pride and sympathy. She viewed herself as intrinsically linked to the "noble efforts" of the war, not as a separate, nonparticipating entity because of her gender. She never questioned the necessity of the war and requested her relatives include "in every letter some of their Actions" and "nothing delights me more than the praises of my Countrymen."<sup>45</sup> She yearned for peace so the soldiers could "long enjoy the liberty for which they have so nobly struggled" and hoped God would grant them "liberty and crown their council and their arms with success."<sup>46</sup> Sarah Jay never apologized for her patriotic

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<sup>41</sup> Alsop, 208, 213. There were five principle palaces in Spain: the main palace in Madrid which the King rarely visited, El Prado located about ten miles from Madrid, Aranjuez that was almost thirty miles away, Escorial was located far to the North, and the palace of San Ildefonso that lay nestled in the mountains near Segovia; SLJ to SFL, 13 May 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 694-96 Morris May 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 696-98; Jay, Vol. 2, 77-78. This discusses the financial situations of the Jay's and the lack of funding provided by Congress for the mission.

<sup>42</sup> SLJ to CWL, 14 May, 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 696-98.

<sup>43</sup> SLJ to WL, 14 March 1781, in Morris, Vol. 2, 177-80; SLJ to Mary White Morris, 17 September 1781, in Freeman, 115.

<sup>44</sup> SLJ to CWL, 1 December 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 170-72.

<sup>45</sup> SLJ to SFL, 28 August 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 704-09.

<sup>46</sup> SLJ to CWL, 14 May 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 694-96.

letters. Her patriotism was voiced during a time of war and within private correspondence, so her political statements did not cross the bounds of propriety.

When her sister, Catharine, sent her a broadside entitled “*The Sentiments of an American Woman*.” Sarah wrote it was an “...agreeable and honorable a representation of my lovely country-women. I am quite charmed with them, and indeed everything truly American.”<sup>47</sup> The acceptance of this pamphlet demonstrates the social changes taking place, for just a few years before it would have been ridiculed.<sup>48</sup> Sarah Jay was aware of the change in what was considered proper feminine pursuits and took full advantage of the shifting paradigms.

On July 9, 1780, shortly after Sarah expounded on the virtues of her female co-patriots, she gave birth to Susan, without the typical eighteenth-century familial support of her mother and sisters.<sup>49</sup> The birth of a child meant relief from the loneliness and isolation Mrs. Jay experienced in a society devoid of “intimate friends” and in a country whose “customs, language, and religion are the very reverse of our own.”<sup>50</sup> The happy interim did not last, for Susan developed a fever and died scarcely a month later. Sarah Jay was devastated by the death of her daughter, compounded by the lack of family support, isolation in Madrid, and the constant absences of her husband. Still, she carried on: she barely mentioned her despair, except in one heartbreaking letter to her mother, where she apologized for her remorse.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> SLJ to CWL, 1 December 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 170-72.

<sup>48</sup> Earle, 240-1, 253-54. As quoted in Earle, 253-4; Evans, S., 49-50; Kerber, 38-41, 167; One of the first political act by women was the publishing of the *Broadside of the Ladies of Trenton*, which appeared in the *New Jersey Gazette* on July 12, 1780. The *Broadside* claimed that women were “born for liberty, distaining to bear the irons of a tyrannic Government” and that they would better serve their country if “opinion and manners did not forbid [them] to march to glory by the same paths as the men.” Six years earlier, for women to publish a pamphlet had been considered scandalous.

<sup>49</sup> JJ to Benjamin Franklin, 17 July 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 793-95; JJ to John Adams, 17 July 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 792-93; JJ to WL, 14 July 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 703-04; It should be noted that Norton, in *Liberty's Daughter*, mentions the lack of attachment that parents held for their children upon their birth due to the high mortality rates of the babes in the first few months. Although John Jay does refer to Susan as the “little Stranger” upon her birth, it appears that this was due more to a debate occurring in regard to her name, rather than any parental detachment; SLJ to SFL, 28 August 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 709-712.

<sup>50</sup> SLJ to SFL, 28 August 1780, in Morris, Vol. 1, 709-712.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Sarah had little family support from her brother, Brockholst, who quickly grew bored with the tasks John assigned him and the lack of court social life.<sup>52</sup> As he became more and more disillusioned, he blamed John Jay and voiced his frustrations to William Carmichael.<sup>53</sup> Brockholst and John quarreled frequently about the slightest issues, with Sarah often acting as mediator. One major incident occurred at a formal dinner attended by several foreign guests when Brockholst commented that the newly formed American Congress was nothing but a bunch of drunkards, worse than any monarchy. Sarah tried to cover the undiplomatic remarks when she said “Oh Congress are like other men & the custom of getting drunk after dinner is general.”<sup>54</sup>

Sarah thought Brockholst’s statements against Congress were “imprudent,” especially when he was a “servant of that Assembly.”<sup>55</sup> Sarah’s rebuke of her brother’s remarks was a comment that may be construed as outside the realm of behavior permitted to women of the time, but I do not believe she crossed the line of propriety. Despite the fact she criticized a male family member to whom society dictated she technically owed deference, he was, after all, her younger brother and sibling rivalry upon occasion resulted in harsh remarks.

Another encounter between Brockholst and John is recorded in a letter from Sarah Jay to her father, William Livingston. It occurred when John reminded Brockholst that Congress should be spared the censure of Americans. In response Brockholst called the members of Congress “great rascals.”<sup>56</sup> Of the situation, Sarah said “that in America no ill could arise from scrutinizing their conduct, but that here as the independence of America had not been publicly acknowledged, we should be careful not to lessen the respectability of the representatives of our Country.”<sup>57</sup> This demonstrated her political and diplomatic awareness. Brockholst became infuriated and departed

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<sup>52</sup> SLJ to WL, 24 June 1781, in Morris, Vol. 2, 188-94.

<sup>53</sup> Alsop, 222.

<sup>54</sup> Carl E. Prince and Mary Lou Lustig, ed., *The Papers of William Livingston: July 1780-April 1783*, Vol. 4 (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), SLJ to WL, 24 June 1781, 225-233.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

for Carmichael's house. When Brockholst returned to the Jay home, he said he would rather return to America than be treated like a "slave."<sup>58</sup>

The slight against the Jays was scurrilous, for they had tried to make Brockholst comfortable in Spain, even paying him a tidy allowance. The Jays blamed Carmichael for Brockholst's behavior, for he was jealous of John's diplomatic abilities and position; by the end of the Spanish debacle John Jay and William Carmichael came to despise one another so much that Jay concluded Carmichael was a spy. Sarah Jay detested him only slightly less and wrote "Had I been in Mr. Jay's place I never could have observ'd such moderation & civility."<sup>59</sup> This is a remarkable statement, but by applying the action to her husband she remained proper.

Brockholst departed shortly thereafter for America and Sarah wrote to her father, detailing everything that occurred with Brockholst and Carmichael. The letter was delivered to Sarah's sister, Catharine, with an injunction to send it to their father if Brockholst misrepresented the situation. Sarah was a logical, insightful and prepared, although the need never arose to deliver the letter.<sup>60</sup> Sarah Jay's defense of Congress and of her husband's position revealed a politically conscious patriot. Some contemporaries believed Sarah Jay was the dominant partner in her marriage, to the point where the Spaniard Diego de Gardoqui wrote, "This woman, whom he loves blindly, dominates him and nothing is done without her consent, so that her opinion prevails."<sup>61</sup> Even if she were the dominant figure in the marriage, she did not step out of her assigned role. She was a determined woman who knew exactly what she wanted and how to get it, but always within a core

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> SLJ to WL, 24 June 1781, in Prince, Vol. 4, 225-233. *Note:* Sarah worried that Brockholst would slander John once he arrived in America, both to their father and publicly.

<sup>61</sup> Roberts, 165.

of integrity that looked to the good, and not to the selfish or self-serving. By writing to her sister Sarah once again remained within the boundaries of society.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the Jays' best efforts, their diplomatic mission to Spain was a complete disaster. Spain never recognized American independence and refused to agree to any of the terms. At the urging of longtime friend Benjamin Franklin the couple left Carmichael behind to carry on as temporary charge d'affaires in Madrid and set out for Paris, taking with them their few possessions and a new baby, Maria, born on February 20, 1782.<sup>63</sup> The couple joined Franklin in France later in the year and settled at the Hotel de Chine, whereupon John presented his credentials at the Palais Royal. Sarah Jay was enchanted with the young Queen Marie Antoinette and wrote there were "many traits in her character worthy of imitation, even by Republicans."<sup>64</sup> Sarah was impressed by her use of fashion for power and her insistence on educating her daughter.

The Jays' stay in France proved to be eminently more successful, due to the French court's diplomatic recognition of John as an American representative and Sarah's fluency in French. She had another child to care for, which helped to dull the ache of Susan's death and the constant separations from her husband. Mrs. Jay enjoyed the "gaiety and industry" of the inhabitants and remarked how nearly everyone was of a cheerful disposition.<sup>65</sup> The couple summered at Benjamin Franklin's home, where the Jays' second surviving daughter, Nancy, was born August 13, 1783.<sup>66</sup> There was also a significant American presence in Paris, a welcome change from the isolation Sarah experienced in Spain. While in France the Jays were part of diplomatic society and constantly besieged with invitations and frequent visits from scores of friends, such as Franklin and the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> SLJ to CWL, 14 August 1782, in Morris, Vol. 2, 460-62, 770. Sarah once again fell ill on the journey, as did the baby, but both recovered. Again, Sarah offered no complaint.

<sup>64</sup> Birmingham, 52.

<sup>65</sup> SLJ to SFL, 28, August 1782, in Morris, Vol. 2, 464-66.

<sup>66</sup> Also, 226; Birmingham, 52-55; Freeman, 22; Roberts, 171.

Marquis de Lafayette. This was a welcome change from the Jays' previous role as social pariahs in Spain.<sup>67</sup>

Sarah Jay took full advantage of the cultural opportunities open to her as the wife of a recognized diplomat. She attended a number of plays where she regularly saw Queen Marie Antoinette. She also met a number of well-known intellectual men, including the social reformer Francois de La Rochefoucauld and the controversial metaphysicist Franz Anton Mesmer. These experiences broadened and expanded Sarah's perceptions of the world.

During this era, French culture set the world's standard. Sarah concentrated on the roles assigned to her gender and studied the mannerisms of the sophisticated and elegant French, including courtly etiquette and cultural standards, such as fashion and haute cuisine, in preparation for her return to America. Sarah took full advantage of the latest styles, so much so she was mistaken for the Queen at a Paris theater, where the audience rose upon her entrance. Sarah also learned how to expand her role as wife and socialite through opulent entertaining. This was a new way to perceive an old role that Sarah embraced.<sup>68</sup>

Ladies' fashion in France changed almost weekly and represented the capriciousness of the French. Clothes, accessories, hairstyles, and shoes were visible symbols of power and wealth in late eighteenth-century France. Women found clothing provided an avenue for gaining power. There was "so great a variety" of styles, materials and colors used Sarah Jay found it "impossible to describe them".<sup>69</sup> Sarah used her connections in France and obtained many brilliant and fashionable creations. Many of the dresses and accessories she purchased were forwarded home to America for

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<sup>67</sup> Morris, Vol. 2, 455-56. *Note:* Sarah Jay also enjoyed the hospitality of the Comte d'Estaing, the Comte de Rochambeau, the Comte de Sarsfield, and Chevalier de Chastellux.

<sup>68</sup> Birmingham, 51-53; Mrs. <?> Ellet, *Queens of American Society* (New York: Charles Scribner & Company, 1867), 65. This section contains quotes from letters written by Sarah Jay; SLJ to JJ, 17 January 1783, in Morris, Vol. 2, 596-97.

<sup>69</sup> SLJ to MWM, 14 November 1782, in Morris, Vol. 2, 475-76.

her use when she returned.<sup>70</sup> While John was regularly absent from home negotiating the Treaty of Paris, Sarah kept busy caring for their two young daughters, overseeing the household and extensive entertaining, as expected of one of her social station.<sup>71</sup>

When the preliminary articles of peace with England were signed in January of 1783 Sarah called her husband a “deliverer of our country.”<sup>72</sup> Benjamin Franklin, John Jay and John Adams signed the definitive Treaty of Paris in September. She was proud of her husband’s accomplishments and ecstatic at the prospect of finally returning home to her beloved America, her family and son.<sup>73</sup> To celebrate independence from Great Britain Sarah planned a ball held in Paris the summer of 1783. Sarah, however, was unable to attend, having recently given birth to Nancy,<sup>74</sup> so in her stead she sent a toast to be read by her husband:

“A Toast to America and Her Friends”

1. The United States of America, may they be perpetual
2. The Congress
3. The King and Nation of France
4. General Washington and the American Army
5. The United Netherlands and all other free States in the world
6. His Catholic Majesty and all other Princes and Powers who have manifested Friendship to America
7. The Memory of the Patriots who have fallen for their Country-May kindness be shown to the Widows and Children
8. The French Officers and Army who served in America
9. Gratitude to our Friends and Moderation to our Enemies
10. May all our Citizens be Soldiers, and all our Soldiers Citizens
11. Concord, Wisdom and Firmness to all American Councils
12. May our Country always be prepared for War, but disposed to Peace
13. Liberty and Happiness to all Mankind<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Alice De Lancey Izard to SLJ, 2 July 1782 in Morris, Vol. 2, 457; Ellet, 60; SLJ to MWM, 14 November 1782, in Morris, Vol. 2, 475-76; Rufus W. Griswold, *The Republican Court: American Society in the Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854), 91-92.

<sup>71</sup> SLJ to WL, 18 July 1783, in Morris, Vol. 2, 610-12; JJ to SLJ, 20 October 1783, in Morris, Vol. 2, 624-25; SLJ to JJ, 6 November 1783, in Morris, Vol. 2, 634-36; JJ to SLJ, 23 November 1783, in Morris, Vol. 2, 647; SLJ to JJ, 30 November 1783, in Morris, Vol. 2, 655-56.

<sup>72</sup> McCurdy, 25; SLJ to JJ, 21 January 1783, in *The Papers of John Jay, 1745-1829*, Jean Ashton, ed. Columbia University; available from <<http://www.Columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/archives/jay/>> Accessed on: November 24, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> SLJ to SFL, 28 August 1782, in Morris, Vol. 2, 464-66.

<sup>74</sup> Alsop, 272; Roberts, 170-71.

<sup>75</sup> Morris, Vol. 2, 581. A copy of the toast is reproduced here.

This toast encapsulates Sarah Jay's core beliefs. First and foremost is pride her country. The order of the toast demonstrates Sarah's political awareness and understanding of the male dominated public-political sphere of *realpolitik*s. But this is no empty toast, since it serves as a warning to potential enemies of the liberated colonies: all citizens are soldiers, all soldiers citizens. While she hopes for a lasting peace, she also warns the country will always be war-ready. Although Sarah was not able to deliver the toast, it is the content that is important. Throughout the war Sarah remained a steadfast patriot, never doubting the course of the war. Mrs. Jay exhibited a *moral* heroism from the strictures of her place in society while abroad through her personal sacrifices. This toast was a reaffirmation of her steadfast devotion and loyalty to her country, but also confirmation her own sacrifices were not in vain.

Sarah hoped to return to America soon after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, but the settling of political and business matters took John many more months. Sarah was concerned they might have to return to Spain to fulfill financial and political obligations. She did not want to see Carmichael, who was still in Spain, nor did she want to return to where she had been so unhappy. She believed Carmichael was the “only American who is capable of enjoying himself there” and “for all my country-men I know not his equal for duplicity of soul, or one who can so readily smile upon & court the man he hates or despises, or fawn upon the man who treats him with contempt.”<sup>76</sup> Carmichael's duplicitous nature made his character a perfect match for the Spanish court.<sup>77</sup> John continued to believe Carmichael was a spy for the British and Sarah blamed her estrangement from Brockholst on him. No hard evidence prevented John from charging him with treason.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> SLJ to CWL, 16 July 1783, in Freeman, 136-38.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Morris, Vol. 2, 769-770; JJ to William Carmichael, 27 June 1780, in Morris, Vol. 2, 777-780. It was not till 1794, that Carmichael was recalled to America under suspicion of treason, but died before he left Madrid.

Mrs. Jay continued her scathing recriminations of Carmichael and Spain. It is noteworthy that what seems to offend her most was the lack of integrity and character she observed, not necessarily a difference in viewpoint. She wrote Carmichael and others like him were able to “indulge any of their propensities unobserv’d by their more virtuous country-men”<sup>79</sup> in Spain. Jay was glad these gentlemen could now find positions abroad for if they remained at home in America they could only defame “true patriots.”<sup>80</sup> This letter touches the borders of the public realm by acidly disparaging Carmichael, personally and politically, and by drawing political conclusions. At the end of the letter she apologizes and writes “I’ve transgress’d the line I propos’d to observe in my correspondence by dipping into politicks...”<sup>81</sup> Although she apologized for writing of politics her excuse is her “country & my friends possess so entirely my thoughts that you must not wonder if my pen runs beyond the dictates of prudence when engaged by those subjects.”<sup>82</sup> Jay was motivated by her loyalty to her country and to her friends. Both are virtues that pertain to the domestic realm and are acceptable during wartime.

The Jays arrived in New York on July 24, 1784, Sarah fully armed with the valuable lessons garnered in France on politics and culture, which would prove crucial to her drive to advance her husband’s career and make the Jays the uncontested leaders of New York society.<sup>83</sup> They were prepared to face the challenges that accompanied the building of a new nation. While in Europe the Jays sacrificed much to achieve the ambitious goal of liberating the United States from monarchical rule and nation building proved no less challenging. Displacing a perceived tyrant brought liberty, but also created a cultural and political vacuum. Strong foundations were required to support the new political and social institutions needed not only to govern the new nation, but also withstand

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Birmingham, 53; Ellet, 63; JA to Abigail Adams, 4 February 1783, in *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784*, ed. L.H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, and Mary-Jo Kline (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1975), 340-41.

unforeseen threats to stability and unification. If the Republic was to be stable and resilient the country needed a new political, cultural and national identity.<sup>84</sup>

Sarah was instrumental in creating a new social context among the powerful and elite that became an informal policy conduit. She creatively applied the lessons learned in Europe to the coalescing American political and social scene to insure the Jays' place as power brokers and persons of influence. She also oversaw the children, the daily affairs of the household and family finances, and kept her absentee husband apprised of pertinent political information.<sup>85</sup>

During the next decade and a half John Jay occupied a variety of positions.<sup>86</sup> Sarah helped her husband achieve his ends, in many traditional ways. Her propriety was never challenged and she established her family's place in society by entertaining dignitaries. Sarah's entertaining was an effective way to secure political allies and raise the status of the fledgling country in the eyes of foreign diplomats. She did not challenge her assigned gender role, but instead worked within its bounds to expand her family's position within society and further her husband's political and diplomatic career.<sup>87</sup>

When John traveled Sarah often remained home, but there were key differences between these separations and those experienced abroad. In New York, she was supported by the extensive Livingston family network and was able to enjoy her children. Even with John gone, Sarah was fully occupied with the day-to-day operation of the household and was responsible for a wide range of entertaining. Her demanding responsibilities did not make the separation from her beloved

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<sup>84</sup> Birmingham, 53.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Freeman, 21-23.

<sup>87</sup> Ellet, 63-75; Roberts, 233-234.

husband any easier emotionally and once again she exhibited the moral heroism she exuded while abroad by facing and overcoming many obstacles.<sup>88</sup>

The Jays were part of a broad and complex network that encompassed the social and political elite of the new nation. Much of the work required to maintain the vigorous pace of the Jays' day-to-day private and public lives fell to Sarah, who used socializing as a means to diplomacy. Mrs. Jay entertained political allies and enemies, as well as foreign dignitaries. The house, the invitation lists, the food, the dinner parties and even the dress codes were specifically tailored to cater to the wealthy, impress the doubtful, and remind those who also sought power where it was to be found. Upon their return from Europe the Jays took up residence at number eight Broadway in New York City, at a house ideal for entertaining. There they entertained politicians, foreign diplomats, friends and family on a grand scale. Every room stood in silent testimony to the wealth, power and sophistication of the Jays.<sup>89</sup>

John and Sarah understood the most effective way to persuade a valuable political ally was to cultivate their trust in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Sarah Jay planned every detail of their social affairs, especially her famous dinner parties, with a keen awareness of the political milieu of the day. The parties allowed politicians to heal old injuries inflicted by the bitter rivalries of the previous decade and to rehabilitate reputations damaged during the course of the war. Such social events helped bridge certain societal chasms and factional lines that existed in the upper echelons of society. The dinners preserved the political alliances forged by the necessities of war that threatened to dissolve in the relative tranquility of peace. This was vital during a time when the fledgling nation

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<sup>88</sup> Freeman, 227; On building of the residence and handling of expenses see SLJ to JJ, 7 July 1794, 227-28 and SLJ to JJ, 2 August 1794, 229-30 and SLJ to JJ, 27 September 1794 and SLJ to JJ, 25 October 1794, 235-38, in Freeman.

<sup>89</sup> Birmingham, 54. The Jay house had two dining rooms (one formal and informal), two parlors (formal and informal), a ballroom and a number of themed rooms.

was most vulnerable to the stresses created by independence and the absence of a predictable and reliable international presence.<sup>90</sup>

Sarah's *Invitations to Dinner and Supper*, published in 1787 and read avidly by the public, shows she entertained men and women from a broad range of constituencies. The names comprising *Invitations* belonged to some of the wealthiest, influential and intelligent members of late eighteenth-century America. The list crossed ethnic lines, including the Dutch, Spanish, English, and American families, as well as religious boundaries by including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Quakers, and members of the Dutch Reformed Church. The dinners brought together Whigs and Tories in a congenial and relaxed setting. Wise in the art of intrigue and political manipulation, she invited family members to help promote an affable and agreeable environment. Such a relaxed atmosphere helped keep tempers in check and propriety foremost in the minds of the more aggressive guests.<sup>91</sup> These dinners permitted notables to mingle and encouraged the free exchange of ideas in a safe and supportive atmosphere. Alliances were formed and opinions swayed. As debates raged over the ratification of the Constitution both the Jays and the Hamiltons successfully used dinner parties to shamelessly lobby New York convention delegates who held the future of the nation in their sometimes less than competent hands.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Birmingham, 61; Roberts, 233-34.

<sup>91</sup> Birmingham, 54, 61; Ellet, 73-75. The list of distinguished guests included John Alsop, the diehard anti-revolutionist who refused to sign the Declaration of Independence, and British officers, such as Jacob Schieffelin. Sarah regularly included doctors and clergymen on her invitation list, who were rarely invited to such distinguished functions in late 18<sup>th</sup> c. America. Cleveland Armory, *Who Killed Society?* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 115; Freeman, 122, 179. *Note:* Her party on January 10, 1788 was representative of a typical Jay party. Some of those who attended included: members of the Continental Congress such as Secretary Charles Thomson and representatives Daniel Huger, James Madison and Cyrus Griffin; the Spanish ambassador Don Diego de Gardoqui, NY Bishop Samuel Provoost and Minister Pieter Johan van Berekel, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison of *The Federalist Papers*, Robert R. Livingston and Aaron Burr. While Sarah was organizing important social affairs, John Jay served as secretary of foreign affairs, as delegate to Congress, the first Chief Justice, vice chancellor of the University of the state of New York, established the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves and served as a member of the New York convention to decide whether or not to ratify the Constitution of the United States.

<sup>92</sup> Freeman, 22; Reginald Horsman, *The Diplomacy of the New Republic, 1776-1815* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1985), 39, 58, 71; Roberts, 223-25.

Foreign diplomats and travelers of import, used to strict protocols and lavish receptions in their host countries, often found themselves at a loss in the newly united states. Jay's dinner parties and receptions were the exception and filled the pressing need for the unofficial but lavish social interactions that allowed an exchange of propositions and ideas not otherwise possible in a more formal setting. Her dinner parties allowed distinguished guests to be received and treated in a fashion similar to the royal courts abroad, yet were a reminder the new country was a democracy.<sup>93</sup> To help ensure her dinners exuded the expected degree of elegance and sophistication guests found in France, Jay employed a gifted French chef, an extravagance almost unheard of luxury in post-war America. The menus for her famous dinners boasted tempting dishes created from domestic, rare and exotic foods. The food was exquisite and so well prepared the French Minister, the Count de Moustier, notorious for bringing his own chefs with him to prepare his food when calling, left them at home when dining with the Jays.<sup>94</sup>

Sarah was always exquisitely dressed and benefited from the fashion expertise she gleaned in France, where she was introduced to the finest milliners and dressmakers. She called upon them to create fantastic dresses and accessories, which she then forwarded on to America in preparation for social functions. These fine clothes amazed those at home, for many were reduced to plain broadcloth or homespun by the war.<sup>95</sup> Most were impressed, some were jealous, but none questioned the influence and power of the Jays. By the 1790's many New York hostesses gave lavish parties and entertainment became almost a competitive art form. It symbolized social standing and power within the new country. Sarah Jay helped to create a new social context through

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<sup>93</sup> JJ to Don Diego Gardoqui, 4 October 1785, 172 and JJ to DDG, 1 March 1786, 173-74, in Freeman. Sarah and John's entertaining was done in an official capacity and viewed by Congress as such. For example, they were regularly presented with presents from their guests, yet refused to accept any of them unless it was previously approved by Congress.

<sup>94</sup> Birmingham, 55-56. Every dinner included multiple courses of sumptuous offerings of fresh lobster, beef, mutton, lamb, veal, fowl with truffles, pies, puddings, custards, ice creams, jellies, domestic fruits and exotic fruits like bananas and pineapples, pastries, éclairs, candies of all kinds, petit fours, cruellers, and pound cake.

<sup>95</sup> Birmingham, 53. An example of the clothing was a ball gown made from Chinese silk with real woven peacock feathers.

entertaining that was adopted by the elite. Many of the nation's foremost wives—including Abigail Adams, Lucy Knox, and Martha Washington—held weekly receptions and dinners. Entertaining became a premiere political tool, one the wives of politicians and would-be men of influence could master.<sup>96</sup>

Sarah's political consciousness continued to grow after the revolution and did not halt because the war was over. She did not need to be redirected into the domestic realm, for like most elite women of the era, she had never challenged her role in society. After the war she used her position to keep her absentee husband informed of political information. During John's absences Sarah remained at home to oversee the household, the children and the finances. She made decisions regarding the children's education, most notably when she enrolled Maria in the Moravian Academy in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Men were the masters of families and usually made all major decisions, but John was not home and so Sarah became responsible.<sup>97</sup> She also oversaw the work on the family's new residence in Bedford and kept her husband apprised of pertinent financial information, for in her husbands' absence she had full autonomy to make financial decisions.<sup>98</sup> Sarah continued to actively entertain and support her husband's career until she suffered from what appeared to be a slight stroke in 1800 and the couple retired to their Bedford farm. Although Sarah's speech improved and she regained the use of her right hand and arm, she never fully recovered from her stroke. On May 28, 1802 Sarah Livingston Jay died, depriving the world of the

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<sup>96</sup> Freeman, 162-164; Carl Holliday, *Woman's Life in Colonial Days* (Boston: The Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922), 311; JJ to GW, 6 October 1789, in Freeman, 188; Monaghan, 21-23. As Sarah established herself as the premier hostess and social leader, John Jay continued to advance his career. For the rest of her husband's career Sarah was often left alone while John traveled his circuit, but she was kept busy overseeing the daily running of the household, the family's finances, entertaining, and the welcomed birth of two more children, Sarah Louisa and William.

<sup>97</sup> Kerber, 119-201, 235, 269, 283-87. Nancy Jay also became a student at the Moravian Academy; Evans, E., 2; Evans, S., 57, 65. Goes on to write about the awesome responsibility mother's held in educating their children and how children were no longer looked upon as full of sin and willfulness, but as comprised of reason and possible perfection. Schools for girls did not appear in great number until after the 1780's demonstrates how the war helped to change present viewpoints of what domesticity was. SLJ to JJ, 11 October 1794, in Freeman, 233-34; JJ to Nancy Jay, 8 June 1796, in Freeman, 254-55.

<sup>98</sup> Freeman, 227; On building of residence and handling of expenses see SLJ to JJ, 7 July 1794, 227-28 and SLJ to JJ, 2 August 1794, 229-30; SLJ to JJ, 27 September 1794; SLJ to JJ, 25 October 1794, 235-38, in Freeman.

“uncommon merits of the woman-the amiableness of the friend....and the elegant accomplishments of the Lady.”<sup>99</sup>

Sarah Jay’s contributions to American history cannot be overlooked. Her patriotism brings to light factors that may be applied to other privileged women’s political involvement in the war and provides a deeper understanding of the social dynamics of the Revolution. Mrs. Jay’s sacrifices during the American Revolution display her patriotism and belief in the cause for independence. After the war Sarah Jay’s hospitality influenced American culture and politics, and showed more women of wealth than previously believed participated in the American Revolution without rejecting traditional female roles. Jay still honored the duties assigned to her because of her gender, but instead of working against it she used it to her advantage.

The many personal sacrifices made on behalf of the American Revolution, combined with sentiments expressed within her correspondence, suggest she possessed a keen political mind that evolved during the revolution and allowed her to exert an influence on the course of American political events. She neither sought nor required recognition for her actions, something true of most privileged women of the era. Jay was not typical of women during this period, her birth and education placing her in the top echelons of colonial society, but it is possible women of all ranks understood the issues and implications of the war participated in the American Revolution from within the domestic realm.

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<sup>99</sup> Ellet, 82-3; Freeman, 272. A copy of her obituary is reprinted on page 282 of *Selected Letters* and appeared in the *New York Herald* on Wednesday, June 2, 1802; JJ to Peter Augustus Jay, 8 December 1800, 272-73 and JJ to SLJ, 17 May 1801, 273 and SLJ to JJ, 27 May 1801, 273-74, in Freeman.