



Before Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence, America's Continental Congress created a secret committee. Its members were authorized to seek help from sympathetic European countries who could aid the cause of American Independence from Britain.

The Committee was formed in November of 1775.

As it happened, France was interested in helping the Colonies. Among other things, aiding the Americans was a way for France to pay-back Britain for using American Colonials (like George Washington) to defeat French claims to North-American territory during the Seven-Year ("French and Indian") War.

In the early fall of 1776—when Benjamin Franklin was still the most well-known American in the world—the Second Continental Congress tapped him to negotiate with France. The now-aging Franklin was especially popular in France where his groundbreaking ideas about lightning and electricity had been tested by Frenchmen.

Franklin traveled to France with his two grandsons, 17-year-old William Temple Franklin and 17-year-old Benjamin Franklin Bache. It would ultimately prove to be an eventful trip.

Although France was already helping the American cause, Franklin asked for more. He met with Charles Gravier—the French Foreign Minister who was also known as Comte de Vergennes—on the 28th of December, 1776. Franklin wanted a Treaty, between France and America, but France was initially reluctant.

Would a treaty put France in a difficult situation with Britain? After all, why wouldn't King George III and Parliament view a French agreement with America as a direct confrontation by France against Britain?

And ... what if America lost the war for independence? An American victory, by December of 1776, was far from certain. Among other issues, General Washington had lost the Battle of Long Island. If America lost the war, would that bankrupt a helping French government?

As Franklin continued to keep the American cause of independence alive, as a topic of French conversation, two years passed. Arthur Lee traveled to France to help Franklin and another American—Silas Deane—plead the cause for France's help.

Things changed, in favor of a French-American treaty, after the Patriots defeated the Redcoats at the Battle of Saratoga (in New York). The negotiators signed the Treaty of Alliance on February 6, 1778. King Louis XVI—whose approval was needed for the Treaty to become effective—agreed to the terms the following month.

The Treaty of Alliance with France—officially known as the "Treaty of Alliance between the United States of America and His Most Christian Majesty"—included a term of mutual defense in the event that Britain attacked either France or America. Another term prevented either country from seeking a separate peace agreement with Britain.

On that last point, the timing of the Treaty might also have been aided when Paul Wentworth, a British agent, approached Dr. Franklin with a proposal for reconciliation (after the loss at Saratoga). Instead of favorably considering that proposal, however, Franklin got the deal he'd been seeking with France for two years.

The image, at the top of this page, depicts the first page of the French-American Treaty. The Library of Congress tells us [more about it](#):

The Treaty of Alliance with France was signed on February 6, 1778, creating a military alliance between the United States and France against Great Britain.

Negotiated by the American diplomats Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee, the Treaty of Alliance required that neither France nor the United States agree to a separate peace with Great Britain, and that American independence be a condition of any future peace agreement.

In addition to the Treaty of Alliance, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France was signed on February 6, 1778, promoting trade and commercial ties between the two countries.

Although Ben Franklin made many significant contributions to his new country, one of the most-important was

negotiating this Treaty of Alliance. France was a military power and her resources were invaluable during the final years of America's Revolutionary War.

Many historians—and contemporary Frenchmen, as shown through their art work—believe that America may not have won the Battle of Yorktown—the final battle in the long war for independence—without French help.

Credits:

Image of the Treaty of Alliance with France, signed by French and American diplomats on 6 February 1778, online via the U.S. National Archives.

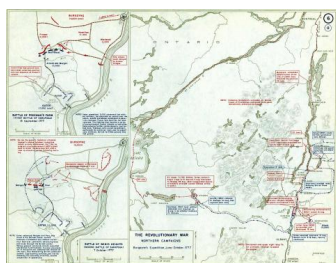
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Treaty-of-Alliance-with-France-February-6-1778>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Treaty-of-Alliance-with-France-February-6-1778>

Media Stream



Battles of Saratoga, 1776 - Annotated Maps from USMA

Annotated map, courtesy United States Military Academy.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battles-of-Saratoga-1776-Annotated-Maps-from-USMA>



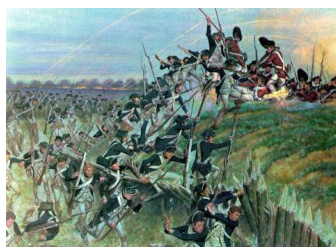
Surrender at Yorktown -With French Assistance

Reddition de l'Armée Angloises Commandée par Mylord Comte de Cornwallis aux Armées Combinées des états unis de l'Amérique et de France. . . Paris: Mondhare, 1781.

Image, quote and information from the Library of Congress: *John Bull and Uncle Sam, Four Centuries of British-American Relations*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Surrender-at-Yorktown-With-French-Assistance>



Patriots Storm the Redcoats at Yorktown - Decisive Battle

Storming Redoubt No 10, painting by H. Charles McBarron for *Soldiers of the American Revolution*.

Image, information and quote from U.S. Army Center for Military History web site.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Patriots-Storm-the-Redcoats-at-Yorktown-Decisive-Battle>



Discovering Electricity - Lightning in a Bottle

Clip from "History of Electricity," a 2011 production by the BBC and Open University, online via BBC's Channel at YouTube. Copyright BBC, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the production.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Discovering-Electricity-Lightning-in-a-Bottle>