

The Treaty of Paris of 1783

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After the Treaty of Paris was signed, British forces evacuated New York City on November 25, 1783. This painting shows General George Washington's triumphant entry into the city. Washington is riding a white horse. Image from the Library of Congress

The Battle of Yorktown, in Virginia, was the last major battle of the American Revolutionary War. It took place more than 200 years ago. British troops faced American and French forces. The Americans lived in 13 colonies that were under British rule. They were fighting to make these colonies a separate country.

The British were badly defeated. Following this loss, Britain decided to rethink its war in North America. But this wasn't just because of the defeat at Yorktown. Britain's war had widened. Britain was now fighting France, Spain and the Dutch in various parts of the world. The Dutch live in the country called the Netherlands in Europe.

Over several months, British colonies in the Caribbean fell to enemy forces. The Caribbean is the sea between North and South America. Britain also lost the Mediterranean island of Minorca, in Europe.

Peace talks begin

Back home in Britain, the war was becoming more and more unpopular. As a result, British leader Lord North was forced to step down. He was replaced by Lord Rockingham.



Lord Rockingham soon agreed to begin peace talks with the Americans. He picked Richard Oswald to lead the British side in the talks. On the American side, the negotiators included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and John Jay. Negotiators are people who talk to reach an agreement.

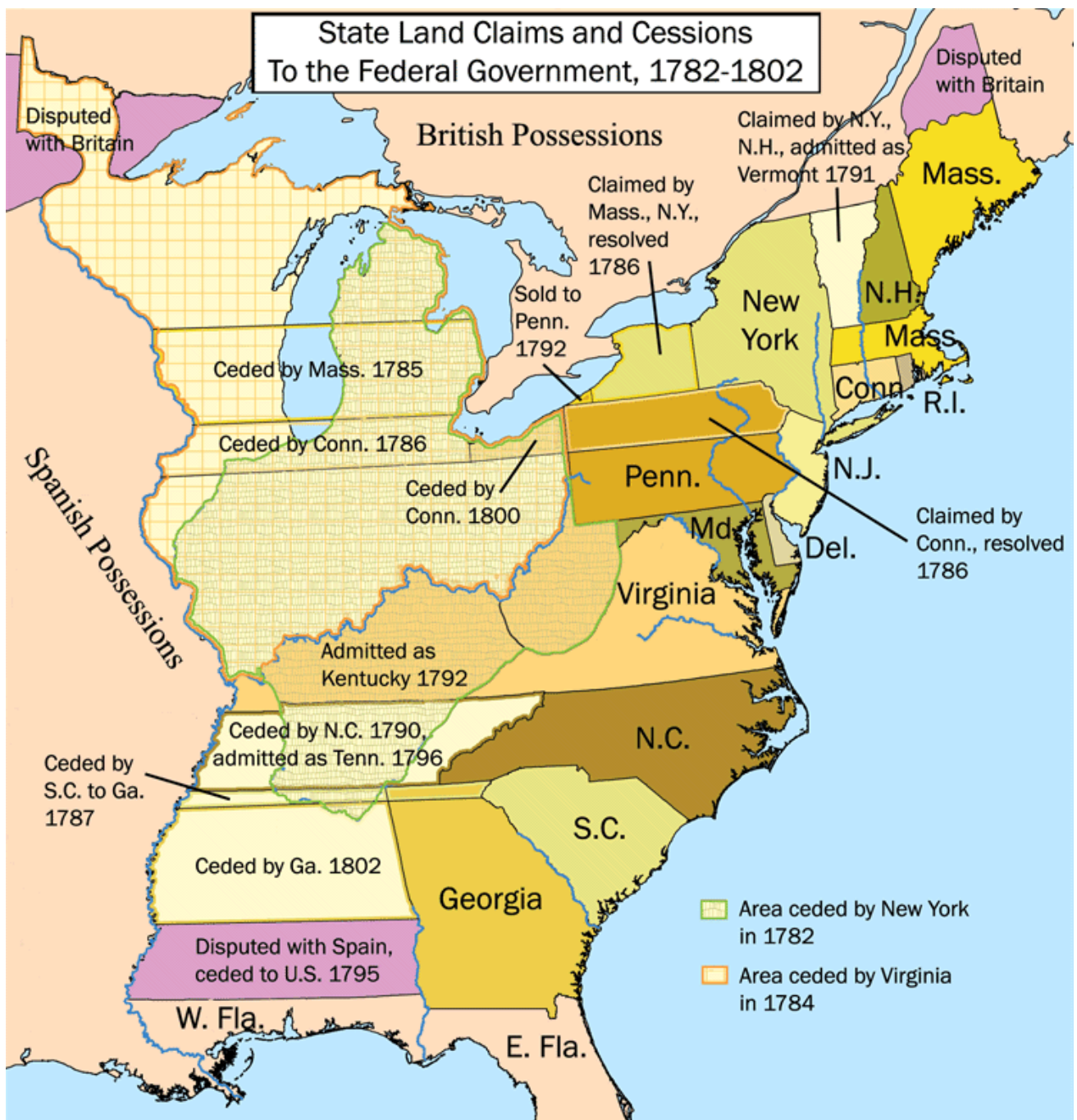
The talks did not get very far, though. The biggest problem was that the British still did not want the Americans to be independent. At the same time, the British started negotiating with the French, too. But the French were trying to hold off as long as possible. They were working with Spain to take over Gibraltar, a land in the south of Spain that is under British rule.

American independence granted

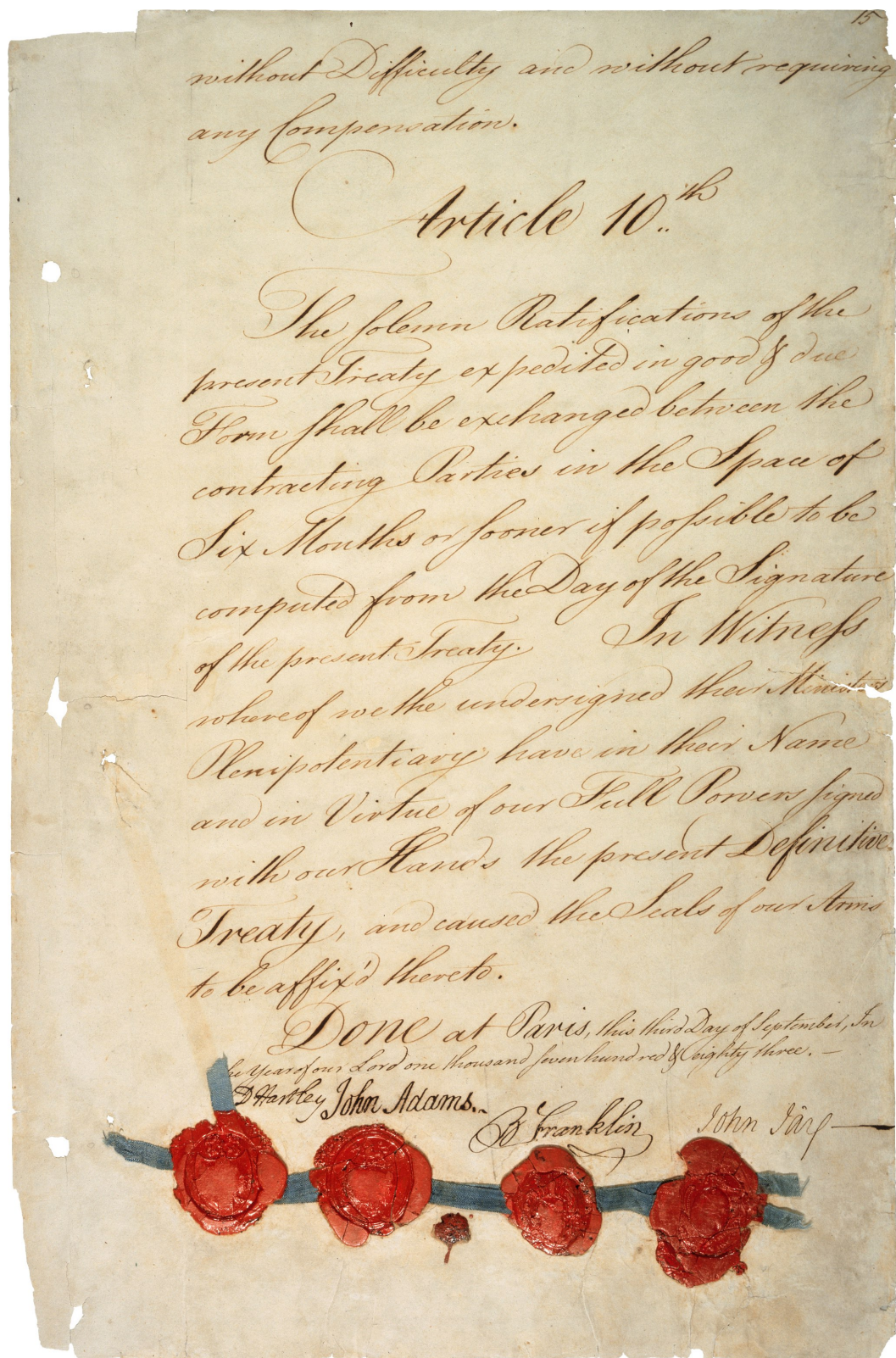
In the same year, Rockingham died. Lord Shelburne then became the head of the British government. Shelburne wrote a letter to George Washington saying that he accepted American independence. With that problem settled, peace talks began again.

The two sides agreed on some of these key points:

- Great Britain recognized the 13 colonies to be free states.
- Ten years earlier, land had been given to Quebec in Canada. This land would be given back to the United States.
- The United States would stretch west to the Mississippi River.
- Some colonists had been on the side of the British during the war. They were called Loyalists. The United States promised to protect Loyalists from having their property taken.
- All prisoners of war were to be freed.



These points were included in a treaty, which is a written agreement between countries. The Americans and Oswald signed the first version of the treaty, but this upset many people in Britain. Many in Britain were angry that so much land was being given up. The anger grew so great that Shelburne was forced quit.



Treaty of Paris signed

The new government tried to change the terms of the treaty. But the Americans insisted no changes be made. In the end, the British agreed to this. The final version of the treaty was signed on September 3, 1783. This version is known as the Treaty of Paris.

Britain's lost territory

The treaty signed between Britain and the Americans was just one of the many treaties Britain signed with other countries. Britain signed a treaty with the Dutch, French and Spanish as well. Together, these four treaties are known as the Peace of Paris.

Under the Peace of Paris, Britain kept control of Canada. It also won back the Bahamas, a group of islands in the Caribbean. But Britain lost Minorca and Florida to Spain. It also lost Senegal, in Africa, and Tobago, in the Caribbean, to France. The Dutch also lost out. They gave up the port city of Nagapattinam in India to Britain. The Dutch did get back from the British a city in Sri Lanka that they had previously controlled.