

Jefferson, The Botanist and The Spy

André Michaux's 1793 Expedition to the Pacific
and America's First Diplomatic Crisis



Jefferson's Eyes Turn to the West



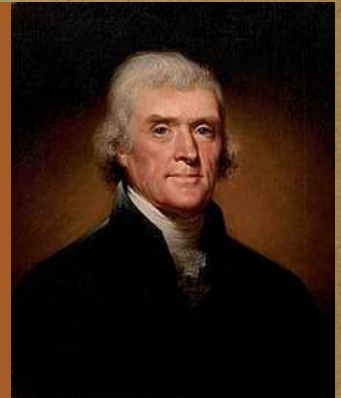
Meriwether
Lewis

William
Clark

Jefferson and Exploring the West: Natural History

“There is not a sprig of grass that shoots
uninteresting to me.”

Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, December 23, 1790



Jefferson and Exploring the West: The British are Coming

“They {the British} pretend {their interest of the West} is only to promote knowledge, (but) I am afraid they have thoughts of colonizing into that quarter.”

Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, December 4, 1783



1783: Approaching George Rogers Clark

In late 1783, Jefferson approached George Rogers Clark — William Clark's brother—
to inquire if he might be keen on leading an expedition to the West.



“Your proposition respecting a tour to the West and Northwest of the continent would be extremely agreeable to me.”

Rogers Clark to Jefferson, February 8, 1784

but

“I have late discovered,” Rogers Clark wrote his friend “that I knew nothing of the lucrative policy of the world.”

Rogers Clark to Jefferson, February 8, 1784

1792: Approaching The American Philosophical Society

In 1792, Secretary of State Jefferson was also Vice President of the American Philosophical Society and he proposed to

“...to the American Philosophical Society that we should set on foot a subscription to engage some competent person to explore that region (the West) ... by ascending the Missouri, crossing the Stony Mountains, and descending the nearest river to the Pacific.”

Jefferson to Paul Allen



BACK of the STATE HOUSE, PHILADELPHIA.

Jefferson's timing here was fortuitous.

Late 1792: Enter André Michaux

In that same year of 1792

Frenchman André Michaux, who had already spent seven years in America as the French Royal Botanist

found himself “destitute of means.”



André
Michaux

Unaware of Jefferson's proposal:

Michaux approached the American Philosophical Society about exploring the West for them.

André Michaux

In 1777, Michaux had studied with leading French botanists at the Grand Trianon Gardens at Versailles.



Grand Trianon Gardens at Versailles

In 1779, he moved to Jardin du Roi in Paris (The King's Garden).



Jardin du Roi

Persia: Michaux in the Early 1780s

In the early 1780s, Michaux approached Marie Antoinette about a botanical mission to Persia.



Marie Antoinette

Describing himself to the queen as a natural historian:

“fervently dedicated to botany,” and a young man who wanted to “augment the progress of science through botanizing in regions of the world which have not yet been visited for these purposes...”

Persia: Michaux in the Early 1780s

Michaux called upon The Queen to allow him to go to Persia, a region

“with the most beautiful trees, the best fruits and the most beautiful flowers... (so) that they can thrive in France... to enrich the beautiful garden of the Trianon.”

Michaux to Marie Antoinette



Marie Antoinette and the King's brother, Louis Stanislas Xavier sponsored the trip.

André Michaux, 1783

Royal Botanist

After returning from Persia, Michaux's star was on the rise.

On July 18, 1785, Louis XVI decreed that:

“Being informed of the deep knowledge possessed by Sieur Andre' Michaux who ... led by his love of the sciences . . . His Majesty has taken and retained the aforesaid Sieur Andre' Michaux to the title and **position of Royal Botanist** . . . to undertake useful voyages at His Majesty's expense....

The position of Royal Botanist came with an annual salary set at 2000 livres (about \$660).

Michaux's first mission was to America to study and collect plants there.

Off to the New World

On September 28, 1785, thirty-nine-year-old Michaux set sail for the fledgling United States.



On November 13, after forty-six days at sea, he and his entourage arrived in New York Harbor.



Wall Street, harbor in background

Michaux Came Prepared

Michaux's friend, The Marquis de Lafayette, wrote him a letter of introduction to George Washington:

“...a man whose genius has raised him among the scientific people...”

Lafayette to Washington, September 3, 1785

Michaux visited Washington at Mount Vernon.

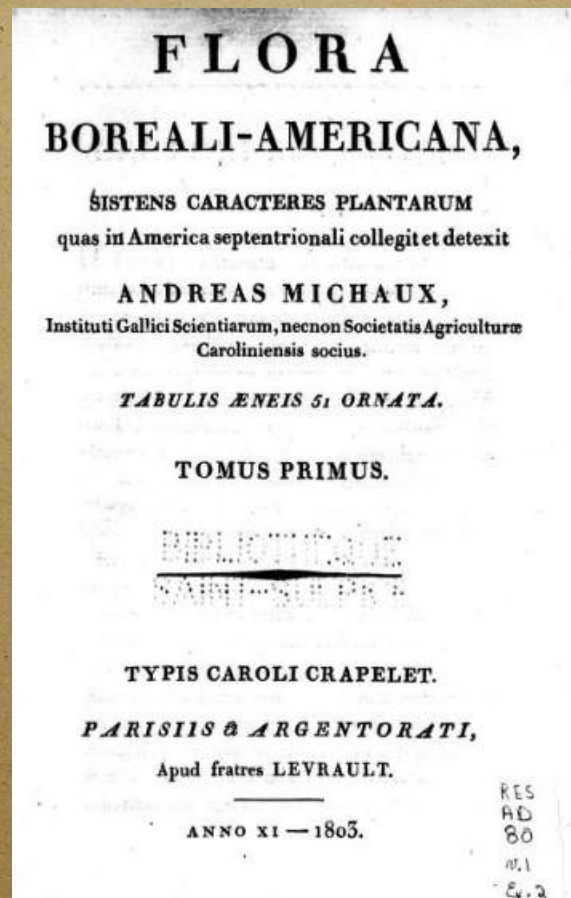
Soon he was sending the General seed samples for his gardens.



Mount Vernon

In the New World, 1785-1792

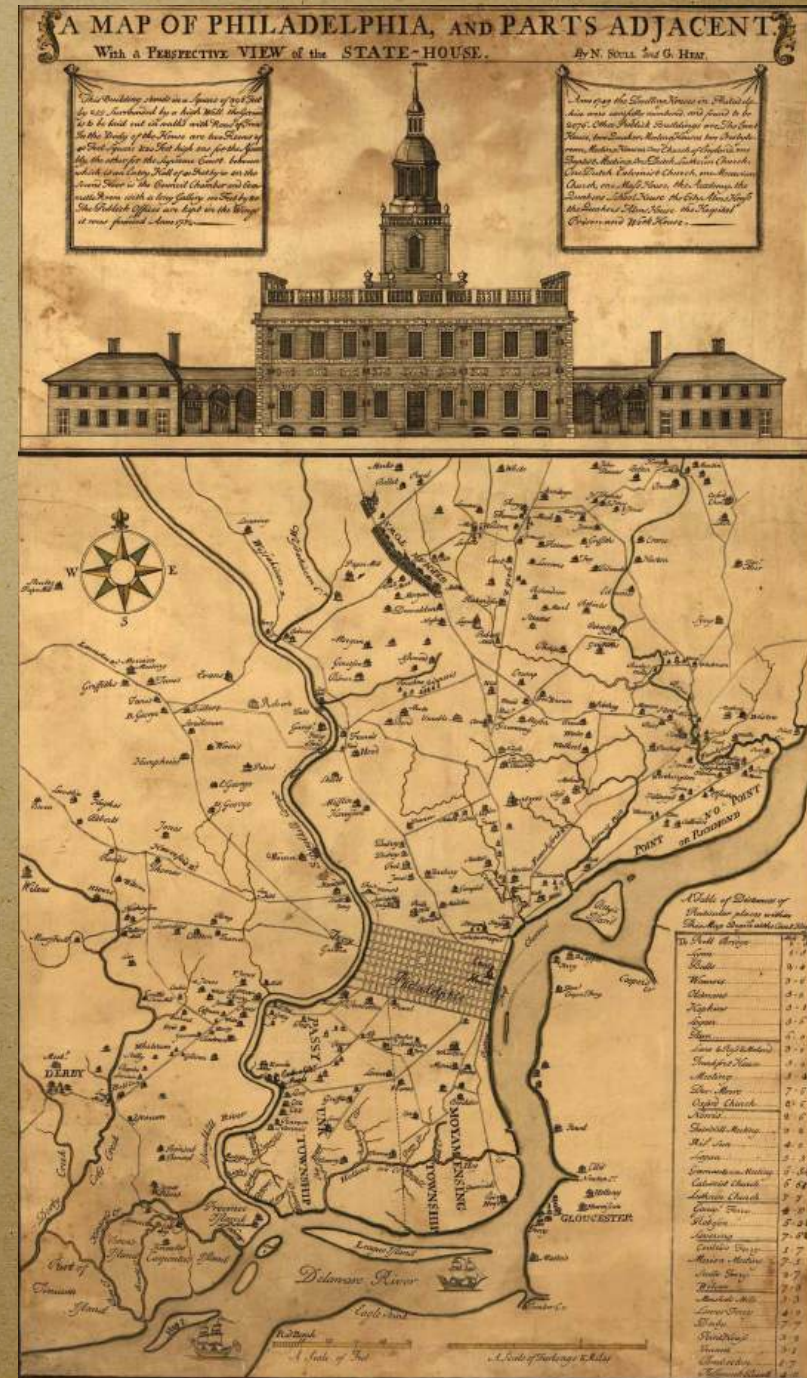
Michaux spent 1785-1792 “botanizing” around the United States and Canada, collecting tens of thousands of samples of anything and everything plant.



Philadelphia, Late 1792

Between 1785-1792 Michaux visited Philadelphia on many occasions

but he does not appear to have interacted directly with Jefferson nor the American Philosophical Society before his visit that began **December 8, 1792.**



Philadelphia, Late 1792

When Michaux rode into Philadelphia
one this visit, France was a **Republic**,
not a **monarchy**

Louis XVI was in prison awaiting trial.

Michaux was not certain whether he was still acting as a botanical minister for the New Republic.



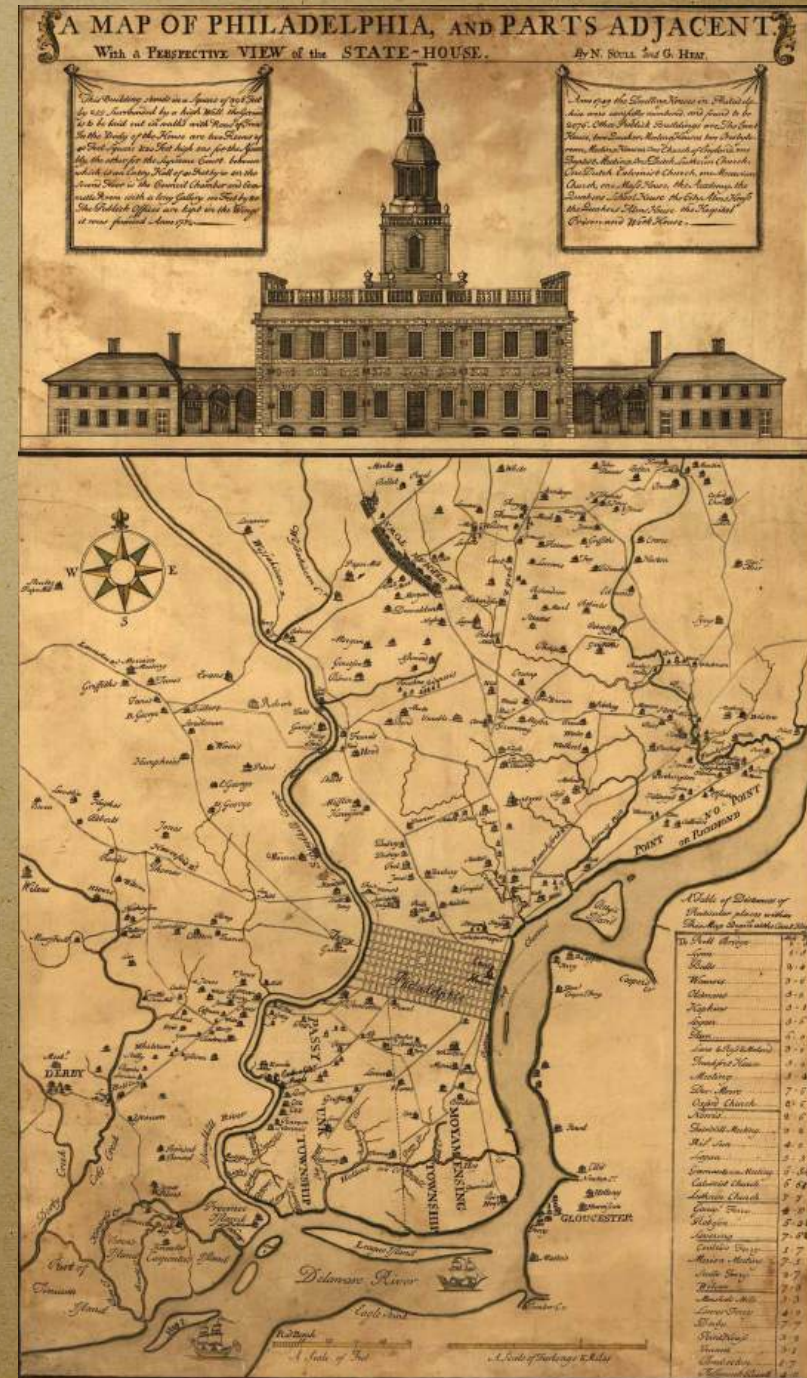
Philadelphia, Late 1792

The former French government owed Michaux 17,520 livres backpay and Michaux was deep in debt.

His solution was an expedition West for
the American Philosophical Society

designed to mitigate his economic troubles

and at the same time allow him to do
the botanizing he so loved.



Approaching the American Philosophical Society

On December 10, 1792, unaware of Jefferson's interest in exploring the West



Michaux approached members of the American Philosophical Society (APS) and

“proposed ...the advantages to the United States of having geographical information about the country west of the Mississippi and asked that they back my explorations,”

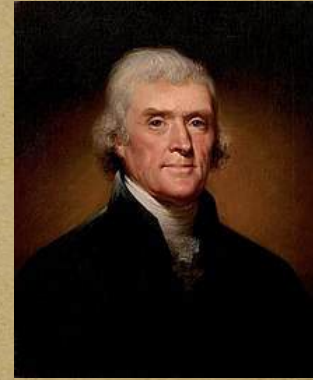
informing the APS that he was “... ready to go to the sources of the Missouri and even explore the rivers that flow into the Pacific Ocean.”

Michaux's journal

The Wheels in Motion: Jefferson, Michaux and the APS

Letters about Michaux's proposal were soon flying between:

Jefferson

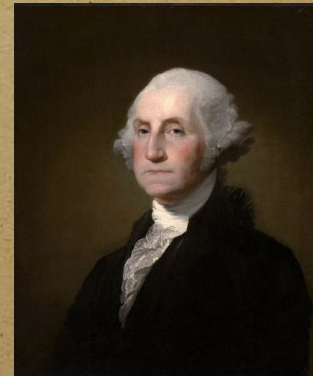


Jefferson



Michaux

Washington



Washington

David Rittenhouse (President of the APS).



Rittenhouse

In short time Jefferson became the point man handing Michaux's proposal.

The Wheels in Motion: Michaux's Conditions to APS

January 20, 1793: Michaux gave the APS a list of conditions under which he would undertake the journey:

“in order to be more free to act,”
he told the APS, he would

“undertake this journey at (his) own expense”

But he did request that the APS stand good for the debts he had incurred.

Michaux's “Observations on a Proposed Western Expedition”



The Wheels in Motion: Michaux's Conditions to APS

In his a list of conditions, Michaux specified who would get what

“All knowledge, observations, and geographical information will be communicated to the Philosophical Society

other discoveries in Natural History will be for my own immediate profit, and, afterwards, destined for the public good.”



The Wheels in Motion: Jefferson and APS Accept The Conditions

One day later

though Michaux did not know it

Louis XVI went to the guillotine.

One day after that, Jefferson told Michaux that the APS accepted his conditions, as they were:

“desirous of obtaining for ourselves relative to the land we live on, and of communicating to the world information so interesting to curiosity, to science, & to the future prospects of mankind, promise for ourselves, our heirs”

APS Subscription for Michaux's Expedition, January 22, 1793



A Diplomatic Win-Win

Michaux was still a representative of the (new) French Republic, and saw the expedition as a diplomatic win-win.

“Bound by all manner of considerations to my country... and to be useful to America... dedicated by duty and by inclination to the reciprocal benefit of the two nations, (I am) happy to fulfill this purpose to the best of my ability.”

Andre Michaux, April 29, 1793

The Wheels in Motion: Funding the Expedition

The signatures on the subscription to fund Michaux's APS expedition included:

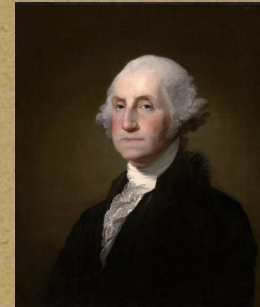
President Washington (\$100)

Secretary of State Jefferson (\$50)

Secretary of Treasury Hamilton (\$50)

Vice President Adams (\$20)

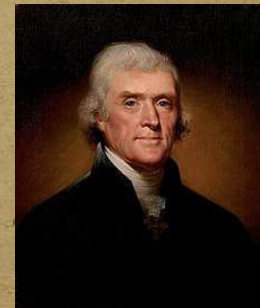
The total for all signatories = \$870



Washington



Adams



Jefferson



Hamilton

Ironing out the Details

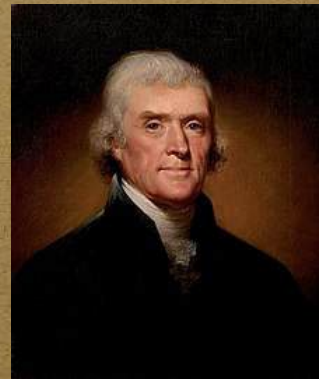
In early April (1793), after a few botanical expeditions down south, Michaux returned to Philadelphia and

requested that the APS provide him with **detailed** instructions for his expedition.

Jefferson took charge of the matter.



Michaux



Jefferson

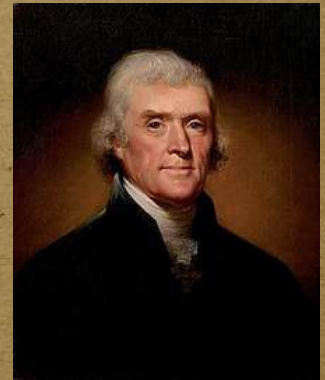
Ironing out the Details

April 30, 1793 charge from Jefferson and the APS



“The chief objects of your journey are to find the shortest & most convenient route of communication between the US. & the Pacific Ocean, within the temperate latitudes, & to learn such particulars as can be obtained of the country, through which it passes, its productions, inhabitants & other interesting circumstances....

to take notice of the country you pass through, its general face, soil, rivers, mountains, its productions animal, vegetable, & mineral so far as they may be new to us & may also be useful or very curious; the latitude of places or materials for calculating it by such simple methods as your situation may admit you to practice, the names, numbers, & dwellings of the inhabitants, and such particularities as you can learn of their history, connection with each other, languages, manners, state of society & of the arts & commerce among them.”



Instructions and Shades of What was to Come

Ten years later, **President** Jefferson's instructions to Lewis and Clark, **were remarkably similar to the APS instructions to Michaux**, with the President informing Meriwether Lewis:



“a considerable portion of (the instructions) being within the field of the Philosophical Society, which once undertook the same mission.”

Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis, 27 April 1803

Things Get Very Complicated

Everything was now in place for Michaux to head West.

Until...

Fate, in the person of Edmond Genêt
stepped in to make the situation
much more complicated.



Edmond Genêt

French Minister Plenipotentiary, “Citizen Genêt”

May 16, 1793

French Minister Plenipotentiary Edmond “Citizen” Genêt, the first official representative of the new French Republic, arrives in Philadelphia.

“... a continuous succession of public fetes and my reception at Philadelphia a triumph of liberty...the true Americans are overwhelmed with joy.”

Genêt to Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 18, 1793

Genêt's Mission

Official charge: “encourage the liberation of mankind”

Clandestine charge: “pave the way for the liberation of Spanish America... (and) deliver our brothers in **Louisiana** from the tyrannical yoke of **Spain**. ... (which) will be easy to carry out if the Americans wish it.”

Memoir to serve as Instructions to Citizen Genêt



“Citizen” Genêt

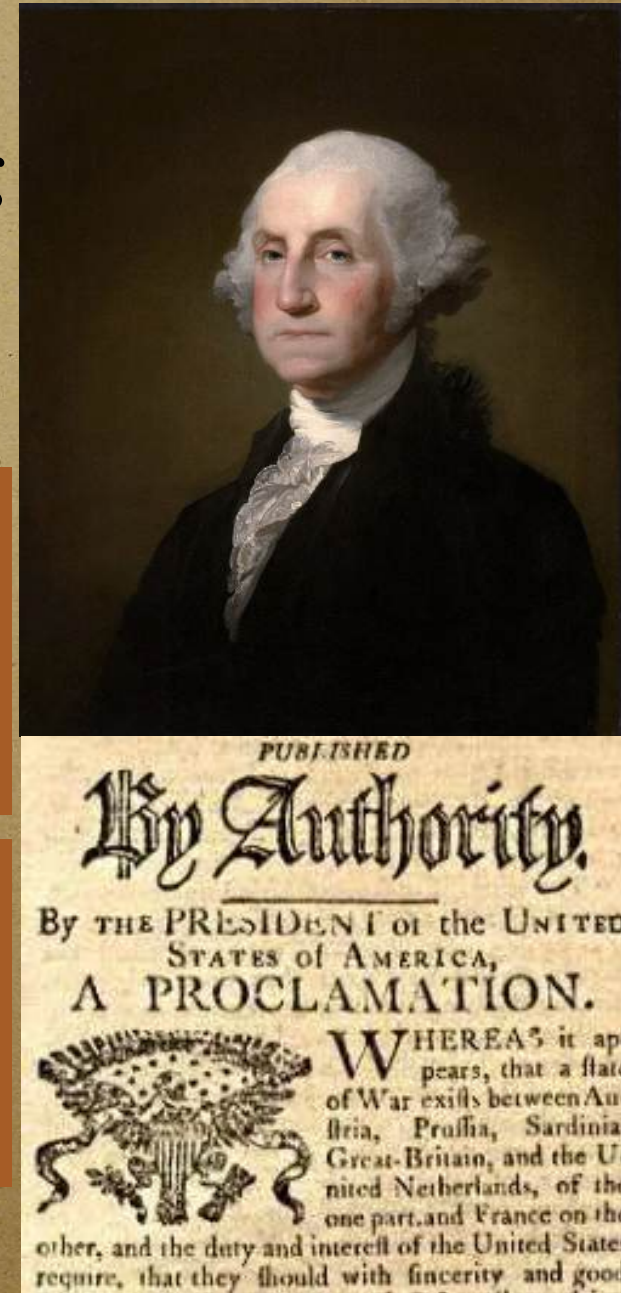
Crash Course With Washington

Just a few weeks earlier, Washington had issued a proclamation of neutrality ordering Americans to

“pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent powers.”

Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality, April 22, 1793

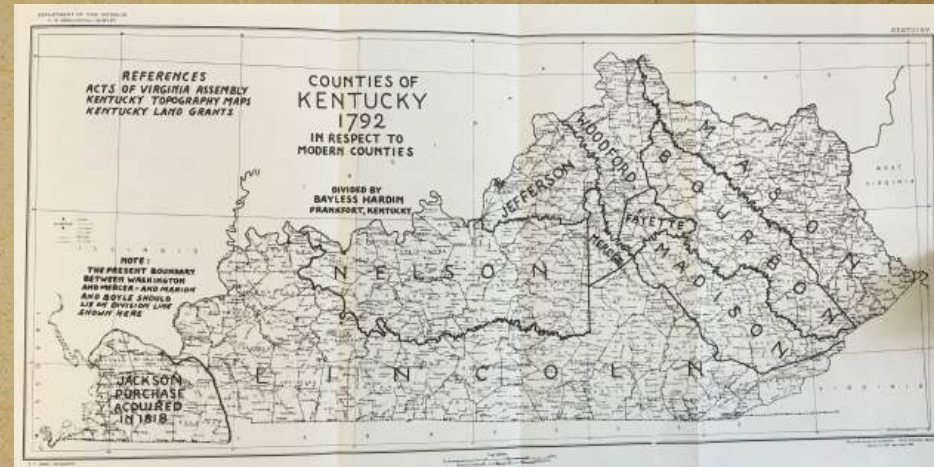
Genêt's clandestine charge flew in the face of the neutrality proclamation.



Genêt's Clandestine Mission

Genêt knew that Kentuckians had along-standing disputes with the Spanish

over navigation rights on the Mississippi.



He speculated that might endear them to join with the French to free Louisiana from Spanish rule.

This was **exactly** the sort of thing the Neutrality Act was put into place to **stop**.

Genêt's Clandestine Mission:

Who better to turn to go down to Kentucky and get the mission started than Michaux

who had traveled south in the past and who know his way through the countryside

and who Genêt described as:

“a man estimable in all respects, enjoying here a great regard... dedicated to the glory of his country...and accustomed to travel in the hinterlands of America...”

Genêt to Minister of Foreign affairs, July 25, 1793



Genêt and Michaux's Clandestine Mission

Michaux had seen his mission to the New World as a botanizer's dream come true

but never forgot that his primary assignment in the New World was to serve his country



Genêt and Michaux's Clandestine Mission

Genêt instructed Michaux to travel to Kentucky

to gauge the sentiments of the people on the question of joining with the French to put an end to Spain's control of Louisiana.



Genêt and Michaux's Clandestine Mission

Michaux was to meet with General George Rogers Clark about spearheading an assault on New Orleans.

If Rogers Clark was so inclined, Michaux was to commission him as

General in the 'Independent and Revolutionary Legion'

and provide him with commissions for those he would appoint to join the Legion.



June 1793, Michaux Prepares

Michaux put the American Philosophical Society mission to the West **temporarily on hold** and

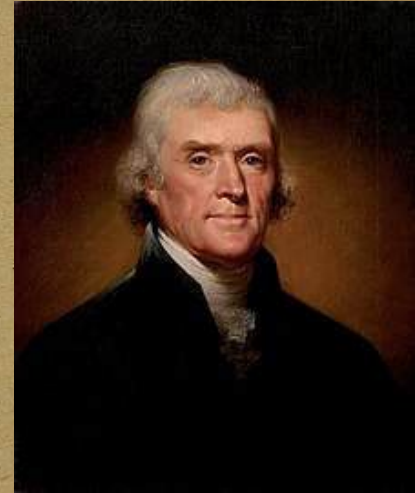
spent most of **June 1793** preparing for the journey to Kentucky.



What Jefferson Knew—and Didn't Know— about Genêt and Michaux's Plan

By June 28 (1793), Secretary of State Jefferson knew that Michaux was heading to Kentucky at the behest of Genêt, but not WHY he was

as is evidenced in a letter of introduction Jefferson wrote for Michaux to the Governor of Kentucky.



“ a man of science and merit... (who) goes to Kentucky in pursuit of objects of natural history and botany... Mr. Genêt the Minister of France here, having expressed to me his esteem for Mr. Michaux ...I take the liberty of recommending him to your notice, your counsels, and good offices. ”

Jefferson to Isaac Shelby, June 28, 1793



The Plot Thickens

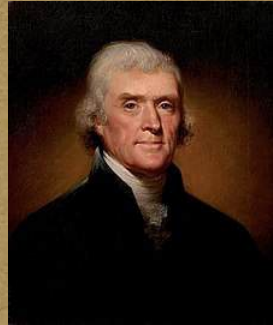
On July 5, Jefferson learned of Genêt's plans to "liberate" Louisiana and of Michaux's role in it:

"Mr. Genêt called on me and read to me very rapidly instruction he had prepared for Michaux who is going to Kentucky"

...besides encouraging those inhabitants to insurrection, he speaks of ...generals (in) Kentucky... to go and take N. Orleans ...

...to undertake the expedition against N. Orleans, and then Louisiana to be established into an independent state connected in commerce with France and the US."

Jefferson's Notes of Cabinet Meeting and Conversations with Genêt, July 5, 1793

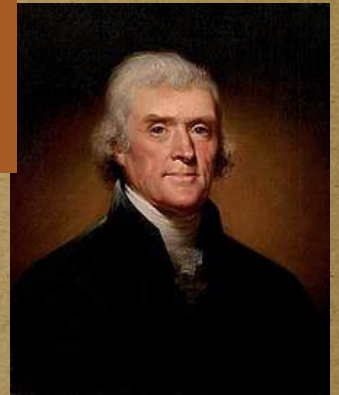


Genêt

Adding Insult to Injury

In a diplomatic slap in the face, Genêt

“communicated these things to (me), not as Secy. of State, but as Mr. Jeff.”



Secretary of State Jefferson then informed Citizen Genêt that

“enticing officers and soldiers from Kentucky to go against Spain, was really putting a halter about their necks, for that they would assuredly be hung if they command hostilities against a nation at peace with the US.”



Jefferson's Notes of Cabinet Meeting and Conversations with Genêt, July 5, 1793

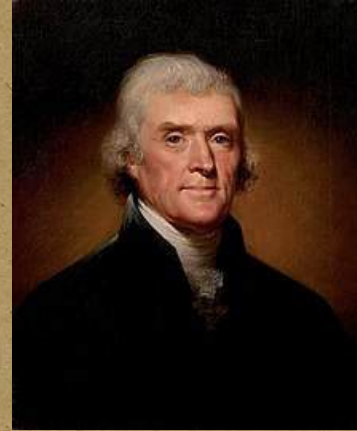
Adding Insult to Injury

But Jefferson neither stopped the mission nor informed others in the Washington administration about it.



Gauging Jefferson's Intent is Always Perilous...

One possibility is that it was a bit of calculated ambiguity on the Franc**ophile** Secretary of State's part.



The Franc**phobe** Hamiltonian Federalists, had been leery of Genêt from Day 1.

Any action against Genêt and the French might strengthen the Hamiltonians' position.

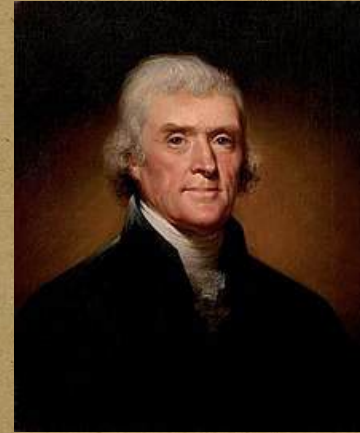
Gauging Jefferson's Intent is Always Perilous...

Jefferson's solution was to warn Genêt of the dangers

people will hang for violating neutrality

but

not go so far as to expose the plan to Washington or his cabinet, and force its termination.



What Michaux Knew

Genêt **did not inform** Michaux of Jefferson's reaction to the true nature of the Kentucky expedition.

On July 16, Michaux began the trip to Kentucky with Genet's commission in hand:

“the important mission of an Agent of the Republic of France to the inhabitants of Kentucky.... to urge them to make common cause with us to free our Louisiana brothers...who groan in the fetters of the tyrants...”

Genêt's commission to Michaux



Back in Philadelphia...

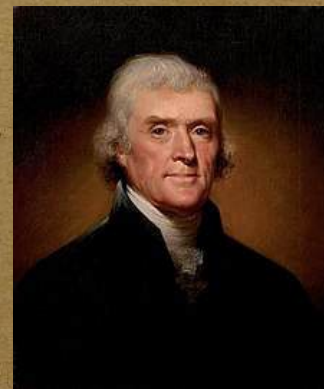
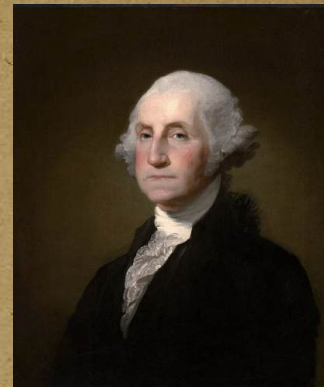
In late August, as Michaux was approaching Kentucky,

Genêt was the subject of much discussion in the political circles of Philadelphia.

Washington had learned of Genêt's plans for Louisiana.

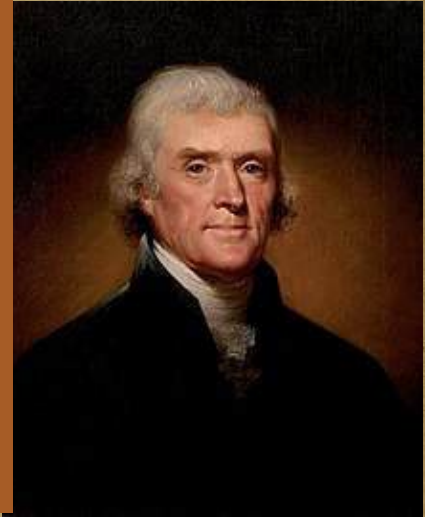
On August 23, the President sent a request to the French government to recall Genêt.

Washington had Secretary of State Jefferson write that recall request.



Recall Request

“When the [French] government forbids their citizens to arm and engage in war, he undertakes to arm and engage them. ...When they forbid an uncaded jurisdiction to be exercised within their territory by foreign agents, he undertakes to uphold that exercise, and to avow it openly.”



“...hasten ... to replace an agent, whose dispositions are such a misrepresentation of theirs...”

Jefferson to Morris to French Government August 16, 1793

More on Who Knew What

Genêt was furious when he learned of the recall request

but reasoned that the request might very well be denied

and he saw no reason to have it interfere with Michaux's mission.

There is no evidence that Genêt informed Michaux of his looming recall.



In Kentucky

Michaux arrived in Danville, Kentucky on September 10, 1793 and met with Rogers Clark numerous times.

Rogers Clark was interested in the mission.

Michaux recorded in journal that the

“...enterprise in question was dear to [Rogers Clark’s] heart,”

but “a new circumstance ... interpose(s) an obstacle””

Michaux journal entry, September 17, 1793 and Rogers Clark to Genêt, October 3, 1793



In Kentucky

Michaux visited Rogers Clark again to convince the general of the importance of the mission.

October 21— Rogers Clark informed Michaux of the nature of the “interposition” he had alluded to earlier.

He needed boats, supplies and money to achieve the goal of freeing Louisiana from the Spanish.

With those, Rogers Clark proclaimed:

“I will surmount every obstacle and pave my way to Glory which is my object”

Rogers Clark, October 3, 1793



In Kentucky

Michaux assured Rogers Clark that he would
provide him with the boats, supplies and money,
but to do that, he had

“necessity to have recourse to Philadelphia”

Michaux to Rogers Clark, October 10, 1793



Michaux —> Philadelphia

Michaux left Kentucky on November 10 and was back in Philadelphia on December 12, 1793.

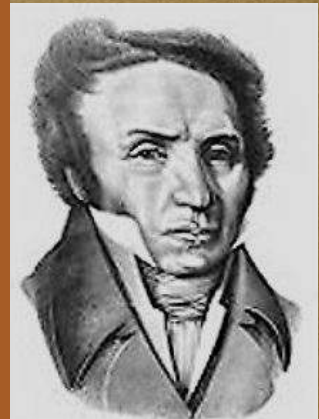
Almost exactly one year he had arrived and proposed his mission West to the APS.

After meeting with Genêt

Michaux wrote Rogers Clark that Genêt continued to fully support the Louisiana mission, **but**

“the difficulty, or rather impossibility to (effect) a diversion with the navy forces the Minister to delay the operations until next Spring.”

Michaux to Rogers Clark, December 27, 1793



Genêt's Recall

In early January 1794, a week after
Michaux's letter to Rogers Clark

Genêt learned he was no longer acting as a
representative of the French government.

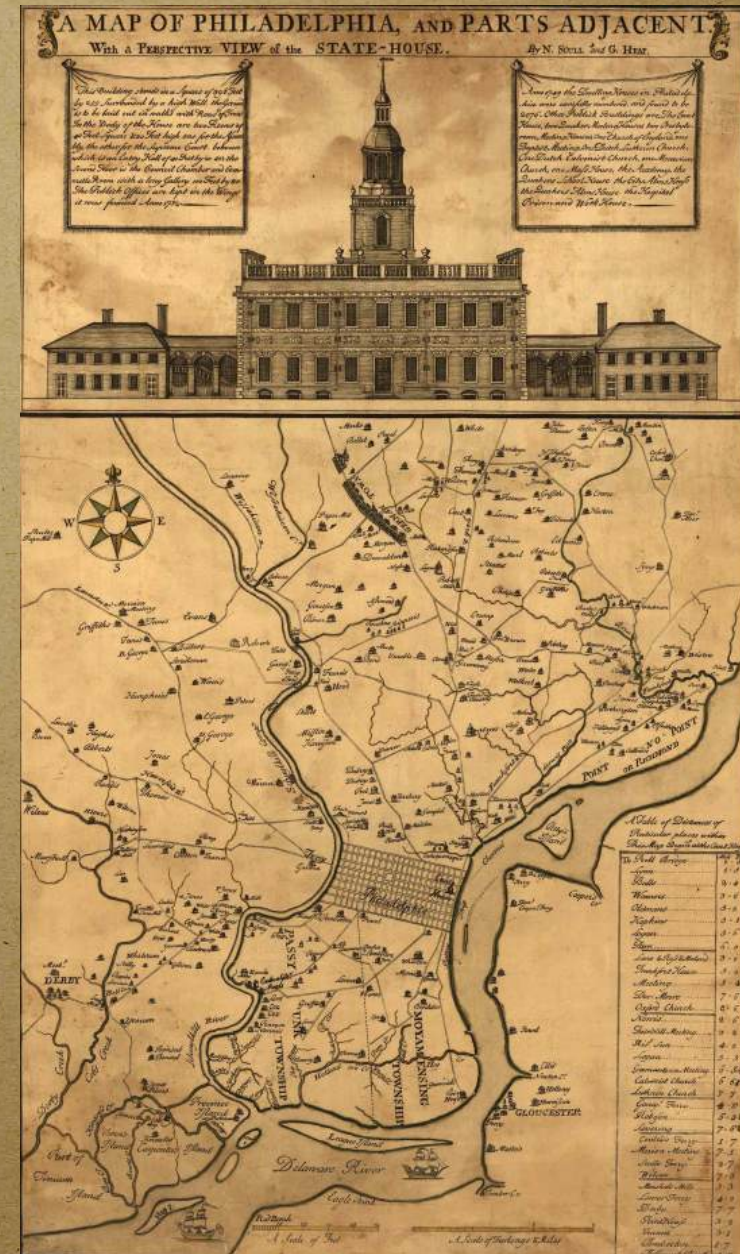


Washington's recall request had
arrived in France

The Committee of Public Safety
decided to heed his request and
recall Genêt.

The Recall

News of Genêt's recall spread through Philadelphia like wildfire in January of 1794.



The End of the Louisiana Debacle

On January 10, 1794, Michaux noted in his journal that he

“returned to Minister Genêt the warrants he had entrusted to me for General (Rogers) Clark ... I told him I wanted to use my time for research in natural history as much as possible.”

Michaux journal, January 10, 1794



Back to Botany, but not the APS Expedition

Though Michaux desired to employ his

“time for research in natural history as much as possible.”



This did **not** translate into reviving the American Philosophical Society journey to the Pacific.

There was no formal decision to scrap the project, but

once the “Genêt Affair,” had reached its dénouement, all things Genêt were politically and socially toxic

and the American Philosophical Society understood it would not be proper for Michaux to be first to explore the far west.

Back to Botany, but not the APS Expedition

Michaux too had likely had enough.

He had grown weary of others, be they the APS or Genêt, managing his life.

He wanted his freedom back so he could botanize to his heart's content

which is precisely what he did until he eventually sailed back to France two and a half years later.



Genêt Spared the Guillotine

And what of Citizen Genêt?

President Washington was of the opinion that

no matter how rank, disingenuous,
disrespectful and scandalous Genêt's
behaviors had been

it did not merit the guillotine

which would sure have been his fate upon
returning to France to face the bloodthirsty
Committee of Public Safety .



Genêt Spared the Guillotine

Washington granted Genêt asylum in the United States.

Genêt married Cornelia Clinton, daughter of New York Governor George Clinton.



Shortly thereafter the couple moves to a 325-acre farm on Long Island.

What if?

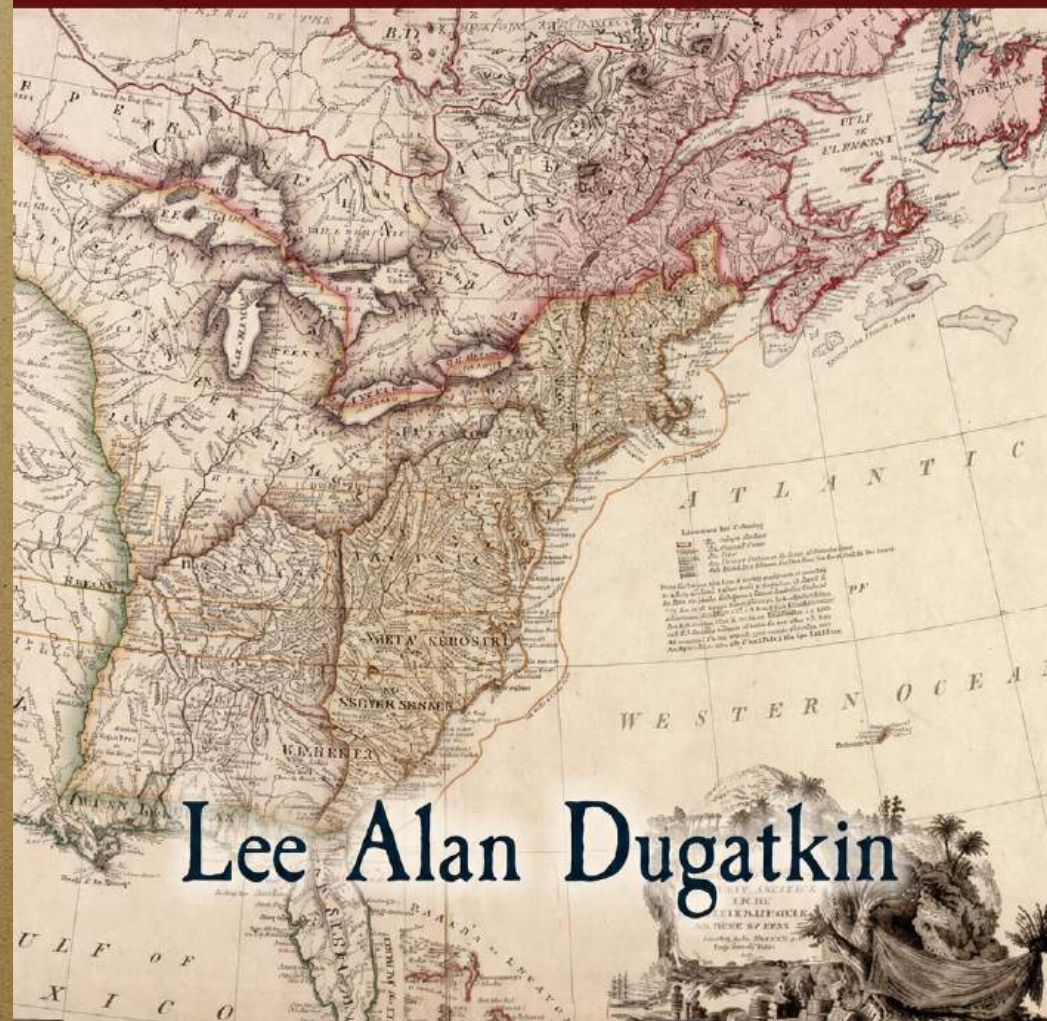


Meriwether
Lewis

William
Clark

THE BOTANIST AND CITIZEN GENET

André Michaux's 1793 Expedition to the Pacific
and America's First Diplomatic Crisis



1786: Approaching John Ledyard

During his stint as Minister to France, Jefferson met Ledyard in Paris.

Jefferson on Ledyard:

“... a man of genius, of some science, and of fearless courage, and enterprise.”

Jefferson diary, May 17, 1786



Ledyard

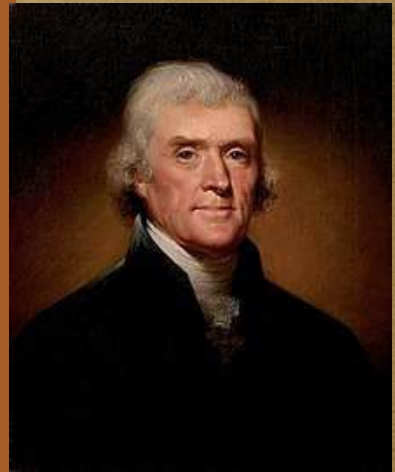
Ledyard was in Paris drumming up support for his newest business idea:

A fur company that would base itself on the unexplored west coast of the North American continent.

1786: Approaching John Ledyard

“I suggested to him the enterprise of exploring the Western part of our continent, by passing thro(ugh) St. Petersburg to Kamchatka, and procuring a passage thence in some of the Russian vessels to Nootka Sound, whence he might make his way across the continent to America.”

Jefferson diary, May 17, 1786



1786: Approaching John Ledyard

Jefferson used his diplomatic connections to try to get clearance from Catherine the Great.



Catherine would have none of it.

“ (The Empress) put (him) into a close-carriage, & conveyed day & night, without ever stopping, till they reached Poland, where he was set down, & left to himself.”

Jefferson to Paul Allen, August 18, 1813