

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE STORY OF  
THE GREAT REPUBLIC

Helene A. Guerber

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# The Story of the Great Republic

*by*

HELENE A. GUERBER





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## The Beginning of the United States

**T**he birth of our great republic, the United States of America, took place on July 4, 1776; but although this event was joyfully hailed by patriotic Americans, it was some time before any of the foreign nations took public notice of the fact, or sent her their congratulations.

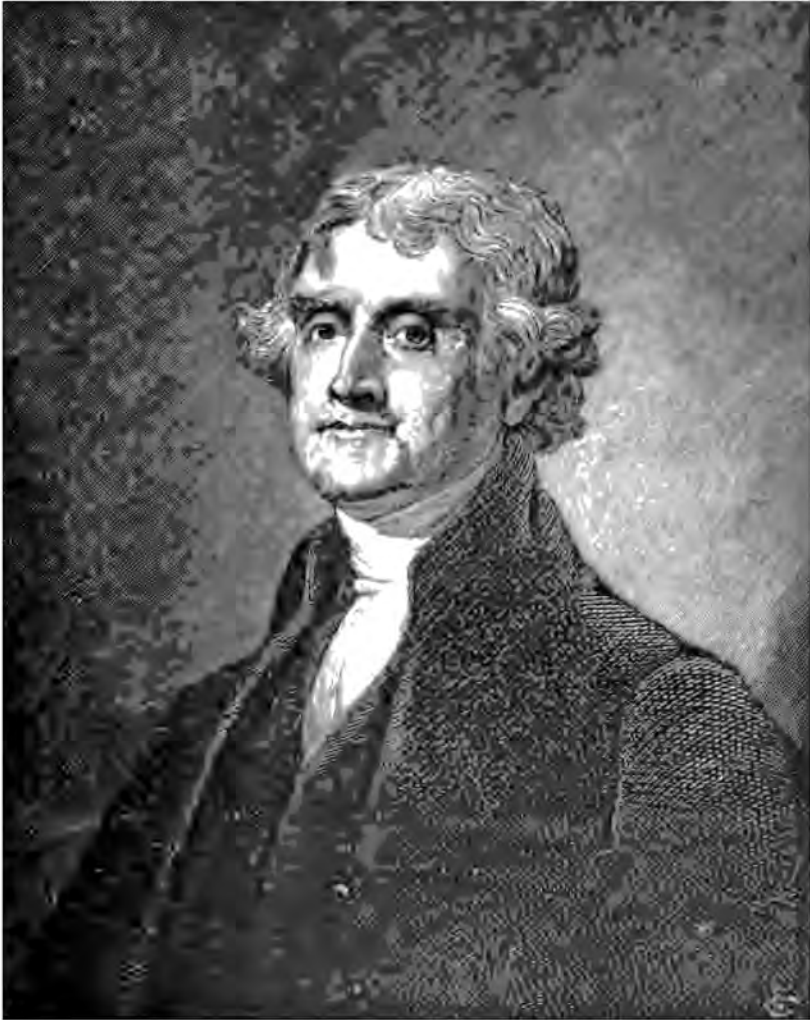
France was the first to stretch out a friendly hand to the United States, thus setting a good example which many other countries were glad to follow. These tokens of good will were gratefully received, for our poor country had a very hard time of it in the beginning, and spent the first few years of her life in constant warfare.

The mother country—also known as Britannia, or Great Britain—wanted to keep the American colonies under her harsh rule, and when they revolted, she took up arms to force them back into a state of blind obedience. It was these thirteen revolted colonies which, banded together, decided to form the new and independent nation which in poetry is often called Columbia.

Now, Miss Columbia had inherited from her mother a great love of liberty. She therefore insisted upon managing her own affairs; and when Britannia tried to prevent her from doing so, she fearlessly waged the Revolutionary War.

After about eight years of warfare, seeing that nothing else could be done with this high-spirited chip of the old block, Britannia finally consented to let her have her own way. This permission, very grudgingly granted, formed the second treaty of Paris, which was agreed to in 1783.

One of the commissioners who signed this treaty was Benjamin Franklin. He is one of our greatest men, and his name can also be



THOMAS JEFFERSON

seen on the Declaration of Independence, and on our first treaty of friendship with France.

Franklin had been working for years to secure this treaty from Great Britain, and as soon as it was concluded he begged permission to return to Philadelphia. Our Continental Congress—the body of men which had governed the United States ever since the Declaration of Independence—granted this request; but, knowing they must have another minister to represent our country in France, they sent out Thomas Jefferson.

He, too, was a patriot, and the writer, as well as one of the signers, of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson knew how dearly the French loved Dr. Franklin, and how much good this wise man had done by winning strong friends abroad for his struggling country. Therefore, when some one asked him if he had been sent to take Franklin's place, he quickly and modestly answered: "I succeed, but no one can replace him."

At the same time Congress also chose another patriot, the famous John Adams, to be our minister in England. On arriving there, he was well received by King George III., who said: "Sir, I will be very free with you. I was the last man in the kingdom to consent to the independence of America; but now it is granted, I shall be the last man in the kingdom to sanction the violation of it."

This was a fine thing for the king to say, and it showed the right spirit. Unfortunately, however, George III. had been cruel and unkind to the Americans for many years, and he soon proved rude to the very man to whom he had made this speech. At first our people naturally resented it, but they soon found out that the poor monarch was much more to be pitied than blamed.

This king, it seems, had had slight attacks of madness several times before, and he now became quite insane. The last ten years of his life were very sad, for he lost his sight as well as his reason, and used to grope his way around his palace with big tears coursing down his wrinkled cheeks.

Many persons now think that if this unhappy king had not

partly lost his mind, and been ill advised by bad ministers, he would have acted differently toward the thirteen colonies. This is very likely, for George III. was at heart a good and well-meaning man, although rather stupid and very headstrong.



## Franklin's Return

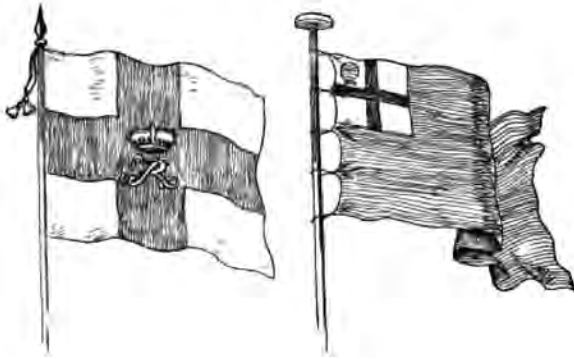
As soon as Franklin received permission from Congress to leave his post in Paris, he eagerly set out for America. There were no steamships in those days, and during the long journey passengers used to beguile the time by telling stories and playing games, much as they do now during far less tedious trips.

Although already quite old, Franklin was so merry, learned, and witty that his stories were always greatly appreciated by all who heard them. He had studied and traveled so much that his mind was like a rich store-house, and as he was kind-hearted, he probably spent his leisure hours in telling his fellow-travelers about the country toward which they were sailing as fast as they could.

While walking up and down the deck, sitting in the shade of the big sails, or in the uncomfortable cabin during the long evenings, he may have wondered aloud—as many persons do—at the boldness of Columbus in steering on and on across the Atlantic, thus showing the way to the many vessels which have crossed the ocean since then.

He may also have described the different steps whereby America—the land of the redskins, of dense forests, and broad plains—in less than three centuries had become the home of a new and thriving nation. He may have begun his account by telling how the Spaniards who followed Columbus to the New World had confined their attention mostly to the West Indies, Florida, Mexico, and South America; and how, later, the French entered the St. Lawrence and made settlements along its banks; the English planted colonies at Jamestown, in Virginia, and about Massachusetts Bay; and the Dutch took possession of the Hudson valley.

Next, Franklin may have dwelt upon the many hardships endured by the early settlers, before land could be cleared, farms and cities laid out, and the Indians driven from their hunting and fishing grounds on the coast. After explaining how the English had won from the Dutch the country around the Hudson and Delaware



FLAGS OF NEW ENGLAND  
(THE COMIES EAST OF NEW YORK)

rivers, he probably told how they had made the other settlements, until there were thirteen English colonies occupying all the coast between Nova Scotia and Florida:—namely, New Hampshire,

Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Then he probably talked of the quarrels between these English colonies and the French settlers in the St. Lawrence valley, or Canada, as it was called. Both parties claimed nearly all the interior of North America; they therefore soon came to blows, and as the Indians helped the French, these conflicts are known in history as the French and Indian wars.. The first one broke out in 1689, seven years after Franklin's father arrived in America, and good Dr. Franklin himself took an active part in the fourth and last. When it had ended in the victory of the British, he wrote a very clever pamphlet advising Great Britain to keep Canada; and when the first treaty of Paris was signed, in 1763,—twenty years before the second,—all the land north of the thirteen colonies, and west as far as the Mississippi River, was given to the British. The French at the same time gave all their lands west of that river to Spain, and withdrew entirely from our continent.

When Franklin's listeners inquired what had caused the Revolutionary War, which was just ended, he perhaps told them how, already in the thirteenth century, liberty-loving Englishmen forced their king to grant them the Great Charter. This was a new set

of laws, giving them the right to be represented in the Parliament, or congress, which fixed the taxes and made the laws. This right, which Englishmen had enjoyed for five hundred years, was also claimed by their descendants in America; and each colony elected an assembly to help make its laws and lay its taxes, though the governors of most of the colonies were Flags used in the Revolutionary War appointed by the king. When King George III. and the British Parliament insisted on imposing taxes on the colonists without the consent of their assemblies, they openly rebelled, because it was an attempt to deprive them of rights inherited from their ancestors,



As Franklin had taken part in this rebellion, had seen the king, had sat in Congress, and had spoken with most of the great men of his time on both sides of the ocean, his account of the war must have been of thrilling interest.



FLAGS USED IN THE  
REVOLUTIONARY WAR

The name of his friend George Washington, commander in chief of the Continental Army, and the savior of his country, must often have been upon his lips. Some of his heaters, coming to build new homes in America, may never have heard it before, but, as you will soon see, they were to learn much more about him.

Franklin, however, often told them funny stories, too, and perhaps he even mentioned one of his childhood which has given rise to an expression we often hear. As you may like to know just how the good man talked, here is the story as he once wrote it:

“When I was a little boy, I remember, one cold winter’s morning,

I was accosted by a smiling man with an ax on his shoulder. 'My pretty boy,' said he, 'has your father a grindstone?' 'Yes, sir,' said I. 'You are a fine little fellow,' said he; 'will you let me grind my ax on it?' Pleased with the compliment of 'fine little fellow,' 'Oh, yes, sir,' I answered; 'it is down in the shop.' 'And will you, my man,' said he, patting me on the head, 'get me a little hot water?' How could I refuse? I ran, and soon brought a kettleful. 'How old are you, and what's your name?' continued he, without waiting for a reply. 'I am sure you are one of the finest lads that I have ever seen. Will you just turn a few minutes for me?'

"Tickled with the flattery, like a little fool, I went to work; and bitterly did I rue the day. It was a new ax, and I toiled and tugged till I was almost tired to death. The school bell rang, and I could not get away; my hands were blistered, and the ax was not half ground. At length, however, it was sharpened; and the man turned to me with, 'Now, you little rascal, you've played truant; scud to school, or you'll rue it!' 'Alas!' thought I, 'it is hard enough to turn a grindstone this cold day; but now to be called a little rascal is too much.'

"It sank deep in my mind; and often have I thought of it since. When I see a merchant over polite to his customers,—begging them to take a little brandy, and throwing his goods on the counter,—thinks I, 'That man has an ax to grind.' When I see a man flattering the people, making great professions of attachment to liberty, who is in private life a tyrant, methinks, 'Look out, good people! that fellow would set you turning grindstones.'"





## Troubles after the War

On arriving in America, Dr. Franklin received a warm welcome from all his fellow-citizens, who were very proud of what he had done for them abroad. But although he had come home intending to rest, he soon found plenty of work awaiting him.

The Revolutionary War had cost the Americans a great deal; now that it was ended, one of their first duties was to find some way of repaying all the money they had borrowed.

Ever since the royal governors had fled or had been driven away in 1775 or 1776, the thirteen different states had ruled themselves. Although near neighbors, they were not always on the best of terms, but often seemed rather inclined to quarrel with one another.

When the colonies were first planted in America, some of them were granted strips of land running "from sea to sea." Of course, this was before any one knew just how broad our continent is; and although none of the colonies claimed from sea to sea in the eighteenth century, many of them still said they owned land as far as the Mississippi River.

As the charters had often been carelessly made, it happened that the same lands were granted to two or three colonies, which fact gave rise to many quarrels. But after several years of talking about the matter, New York, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Connecticut finally consented to do as Congress wished, and give up their claims to the land northwest of the Ohio River.

This region was then called the Northwest Territory. It was given up, on condition that Congress should sell part of it to pay the interest on the national debt, and divide the rest among the soldiers instead of giving them money. Besides, it was afterwards arranged that this territory should finally be cut up into three or five new states, each of which could join the Union as soon as it had sixty thousand inhabitants.

Until that time, the Northwest Territory was to be ruled by one governor and several judges, all chosen by Congress. This body

now began to give land to such soldiers as were willing to accept it instead of money, and before long many emigrants were on their way to Ohio, where they founded Marietta, in 1788, and Cincinnati soon after. Many large tracts of land in the South were distributed in the same way; and thus it came to pass that, at the end of the Revolutionary War, the famous general Nathanael Greene received a large plantation from the state of Georgia.

As you can see from the map on page 12, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia once owned western lands too; but one by one these tracts were given up to Congress, to form territories like the Northwest Territory.

In 1781, several years before Congress took possession of the western lands, the states had all signed "Articles of Confederation," a system of federal government proposed in 1776. But as this system did not give Congress power to impose taxes, make trade laws, secure money enough to pay government expenses, or make people obey the laws, it did not work well. For several years, therefore, different experiments were tried, but in spite of all efforts things went on from bad to worse.

Congress had promised at the treaty of Paris that all debts should be paid, and that all the Tories, or friends of the king, in America should be protected. But the British soon complained that they could not collect their money, and it was plain that the Tories were badly treated, for in two years more than a hundred thousand left our country to settle in Canada, Florida, or Bermuda.

The British, who had left New York two months after the treaty was signed, kept possession of Oswego, Detroit, and Mackinaw in the Northwest until the promises made should be kept. Their presence there made the people restless and unhappy, for they secretly urged the Indians to rise up against the Americans. Besides, there were money troubles everywhere, for the states were so deeply in debt that they were obliged to lay heavy taxes on the people. These taxes were such a burden that in some places the people actually rebelled and made riots.



SHAYS' REBELLION

The most serious of all these outbreaks was in Massachusetts, where Shays, an old Revolutionary soldier, led a force of about two thousand men against Worcester and Springfield. Although this revolt—known in history as Shays' Rebellion—was put down in 1787, it helped to show the necessity for better laws. These had to be made soon, if the thirteen states were to remain united, and not form thirteen small republics, which would be sure to quarrel.

In 1786, five of the states suggested that a meeting or convention of all the confederacy be held, to change the Articles of Confederation in such a way as to suit everybody and secure a better government. Congress agreed to this plan, and each state was asked to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention.



# The Constitution

The Constitutional Convention met in Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, in 1787. All the states sent delegates except Rhode Island, and among these, one man; the beloved Washington, was chosen by every one present to act as president. As it seemed best that the public should hear only the final result of the meetings, the convention held secret sessions. It was soon found impossible to revise the Articles of Confederation in a satisfactory way, so it was decided to make a new constitution, or set of general laws. They were to be laws which all the states should obey, but which would still leave them the right to settle minor matters to suit themselves.

Although all the members wished to do their best, opinions were so very different that for four months there was a great deal of quarreling in the convention. Indeed, it often seemed as if the members never would agree; and, seeing how heated some of the delegates became, the aged Franklin once suggested that it would be well to begin every session with a prayer for wisdom and divine guidance.

Washington, too, often tried to pour oil on the troubled waters; but sometimes even he grew frightened, and once he said: "It is too probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another conflict is to be sustained. If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the event is in the hand of God."

After four months' discussion, and after all parties had given up some of their ideas and wishes to please the rest, the present Constitution of the United States was drawn up. It was called the "new roof," because it was to serve as a shelter in time of storm for all the states who chose to take refuge under it.

This Constitution provided that the lawmaking part of the government should be carried on by a new Congress, consisting

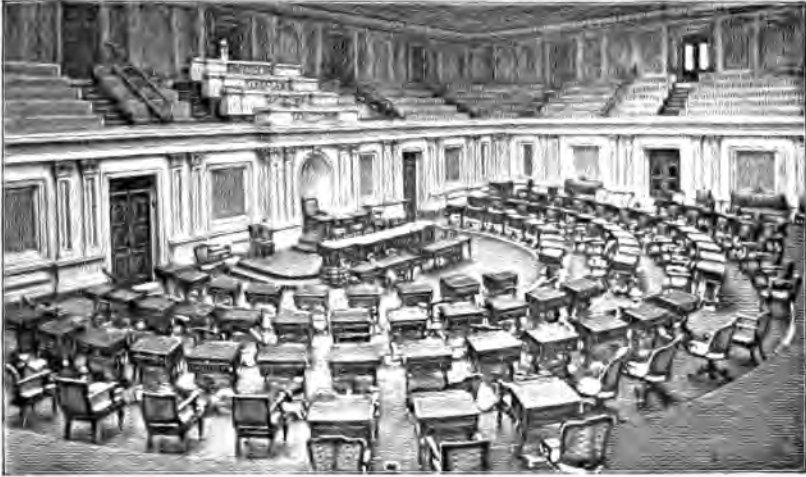


THE PRESENT HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

of two houses. One was to be called the House of Representatives. The men forming it were to be elected by the people, who at first had a representative for every thirty thousand inhabitants, though they now have only one for about six times as many people. But it was then agreed that as there were many slaves in the South who could not vote, the Southerners should consider five slaves equal to three white men in taking the census, or counting the population. At the same time, to please the men of the South, the North agreed that Congress should not forbid the importing of slaves until 1808.

The other house of Congress was called the Senate, where each state, large or small, was to send two members, called senators.

After a new law had been talked over and voted for in both houses, it was to be sent to the President for him to sign. If the President did not wish to sign the Law he was not obliged to do so, and if he vetoed it,—that is, if he said, “I forbid it,”—the law was to be sent back to Congress. There it was to be talked over



THE PRESENT STATE CHAMBER.

again, the votes of the houses taken once more, and if, on counting, it was found that two thirds of each house still thought the law was best for the country, it was to be put in force without the President's consent.

As Congress thus had the right to make the laws, it was to be called the lawmaking or legislative part of the government. Now you know it is not enough to make laws: you must have somebody to see that they are obeyed, or to execute them. The Constitution said that this part of the work was to be done by another part of the government, to be called the executive.

Several persons cannot well give orders at once, so it was thought best that one man should be the executive. This man was to be called the President. He was to be chosen every four years by electors, each state having as many electors as it had senators and representatives in Congress. The duty of the President was to see that the laws made by Congress were properly carried out, and to call out the soldiers in case of war. A Vice President was also to be chosen in the same way as the President. His duty was to be head or president of the Senate, and to take the President's place if the latter died.

The makers of the Constitution knew that there would surely be disputes between states, which ordinary state courts could not settle; so they further decided that there should be a third part to the government. This was to be the judiciary, or justice-dealing part, composed of judges chosen by the President. These United States judges were to form a Supreme Court, where all such cases could be tried, and they were also to settle all disputes concerning the laws of the nation.

Each state was still to govern itself in home matters, but treaties with other countries, questions of trade, war, etc., were to be settled by the United States government. Thus, you see, it had the right to coin money, keep the post office, tax the people, and see that the nation was ruled in the very best way.

The Constitution thus made did not quite suit everybody; but most of the members of the Constitutional Convention felt like Washington, who once said that it was the best Constitution which could be obtained at that epoch; and all knew that unless it was accepted the thirteen states would fall apart. That, you see, would have been very bad; for while they could hold their own when they were united, they were too small and weak to stand alone.

James Madison had taken a large share in all this work. He had made many speeches, taken notes, tried to coax the members to agree, and had labored so hard to suit everybody that he is generally called the "Father of the Constitution." This important paper, the "title deed of American liberty," begins with the words: "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The Constitution having been drawn up, read, and signed by the members of the convention, it was sent to the Continental Congress at New York, which forwarded copies to each state. It



THE ROOM WHERE THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION MET.

was provided that when nine or more states approved of it, the new Constitution should go into effect for those states.

The disputes had been so bitter in the Constitutional Convention that it had often seemed as if no agreement would ever be reached. So when Franklin came forward to sign the Constitution, he quaintly said, pointing to the back of Washington's chair, upon which was carved a sun: "In the vicissitudes [changes] of hope and fear, I was root able to tell whether it was rising or setting. Now I know that it is the rising sun." Franklin was right. The sun was rising for our dear country, and we hope it will go on growing brighter and brighter for many a year yet to come.

All the delegates present, except three, signed the Constitution, which was accepted by Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, and Maryland just as it stood. Massachusetts, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, and New York accepted it, but at the same time proposed a few additions called



“amendments.” Thus, in August, 1788, all the states had adopted it except Rhode Island and North Carolina, which, however, joined the Union soon after.

When so many states agreed to the Constitution, there were great rejoicings everywhere. Bonfires, illuminations, and processions were seen in all large cities, and many fine speeches were made. In one procession there was a big float, representing the Constitution as the “Ship of State.” It rested upon a platform where Alexander Hamilton’s name was written in huge letters, for he too had had a great share in making it, and in persuading the people of his state to accept it.

