Inside the Vault

The Whiskey Rebellion and the United States Great Seal with Dr. Gautham Rao

Thursday, June 1, 2023

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If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature. We will be answering audience questions throughout the session. The views expressed here are those of the historian.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.
Gautham Rao is an associate professor of history at American University, where he teaches courses on historical method, early America, legal history, and political history. He is the author of *National Duties: Custom Houses and the Making of the American State* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) and is currently working on two books, a history of the legal system that governed slavery and its legacies as well as a historian's guide to the television show *The West Wing*. Rao is editor-in-chief of *Law and History Review*, the world's leading journal of legal history. He lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, and spends his time away from work worrying about his beloved sports teams, the Mets and Liverpool Football Club.
Documents relating to the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794
George Washington, [Presidential pardon of the ten ringleaders of the Whiskey Rebellion, who had been convicted of high treason], 1797. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08072)

The Great Seal of the United States
Peter Bateman and William Bateman, George III Silver Consular Seal with Ivory Turned Handle, 1808-1809. (Diplomatic Reception Rooms, RR-1983.0017)
IN Obedience to the Order of the House of Representatives, of the ninth Day of August last, requiring the Secretary of the Treasury to prepare and report, on this Day, such further Provision as may, in his Opinion, be necessary for establishing the Public Credit—the said Secretary respectfully reports,

THAT the object which appears to be most immediately essential to the further support of Public Credit, in pursuance of the plan adopted during the last session of Congress, is, the establishment of proper and sufficient funds, for paying the interest which will begin to accrue after the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one, on the amount of the debts of the several States, assumed by the United States; having regard at the same time, to the probable, or estimated deficiency in those already established, as they respect the original debt of the Union. In order to this, it is necessary, in the first place, to take a view of the funds requisite for those purposes.

The amount which has been assumed of the State debts, is $2,350,000.

The sum of annual interest upon that amount, which, according to the terms of the proposed loan, will begin to accrue after the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one, is $153,333.33.

The estimated deficiency, in the funds already established, as they respect the original debt of the United States, is $30,000.00.

Making together, $183,333.33.

For procuring which sum, the reiterated reflections of the Secretary have suggested nothing so eligible and unexceptionable, in his judgment, as a further duty on foreign distilled spirits, and a duty on spirits distilled within the United States, to be collected in the mode delineated in the plan of a bill which forms a part of his report to the House of Representatives, of the ninth day of January last. Under this impression, he begs leave, with all deference, to propose to the consideration of the House—

That the following additions be made to the duties on distilled spirits imported from foreign countries, which are specified in the act making further provision for the payment of the debts of the United States, namely,

On those of the first class, per gallon, eight cents.
On those of the second class, per gallon, eight and a half cents.
On those of the third class, per gallon, nine cents.
On those of the fourth class, per gallon, ten cents.
On those of the fifth class, per gallon, ten cents.
On those of the sixth class, per gallon, fifteen cents.
An Act relative to the compensations to certain officers employed in the collection of the Duties of import and export.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That there be two per cent. on all duties, in addition to the duties of import and export, and the said duties, and for the compensation of such officers, as follows:

1. Tax collectors of the ports of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, shall receive six hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

2. Tax collectors of the ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Charleston, shall receive five hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

3. Tax collectors of the ports of Boston, New Haven, and New York, shall receive four hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

4. Tax collectors of the ports of Newport, Providence, and Savannah, shall receive three hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

5. Tax collectors of the ports of Boston, New Bedford, and Salem, shall receive two hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

6. Tax collectors of the ports of New London, Groton, and New Haven, shall receive one hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

And be it further enacted, That there be two per cent. on all duties, in addition to the duties of import and export, and the said duties, and for the compensation of such officers, as follows:

1. Tax collectors of the ports of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, shall receive six hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

2. Tax collectors of the ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Charleston, shall receive five hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

3. Tax collectors of the ports of Boston, New Haven, and New York, shall receive four hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

4. Tax collectors of the ports of Newport, Providence, and Savannah, shall receive three hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

5. Tax collectors of the ports of Boston, New Bedford, and Salem, shall receive two hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.

6. Tax collectors of the ports of New London, Groton, and New Haven, shall receive one hundred dollars per annum for each of said ports.
Treasury Department
March 21st, 1791

Sir,

You will probably have received as this reaches you, a commission as Superintendent of the Revenue for the district of Virginia.

The compensation annexed to that office is to consist of a Salary of One thousand dollars per annum and one per cent on the product of the duties on the Spirits which shall be distilled within your district, excluding those on fires. It is pronounced however that this compensation by the true construction of the law does not commence until the first of July next.

The submission of your district into survey.

Alexander Hamilton to Edward Carrington, March 21, 1791.
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00299)
“You will probably have received ere this reaches you, a Commission as Supervisor of the Revenue for the district of Virginia. The compensation annexed to that office is to consist of a Salary of One thousand dollars per Annum and one per Cent on the product of the duties on the Spirits which shall be distilled within your district, including those on stills. ”
“The President for the sake of uniformity has directed that the Officers to be appointed by the Supervisors be denominated Collectors of the Revenue. The allowance to each Collector will be two percent on the sums by him collected from the duties on Spirits distilled from foreign materials, and four per Cent on those collected from the duties on Spirits distilled from Domestic Materials.”
Certification of Duty Payment on Rum
ca. 1791-1794

George Clymer, [Certification of duty payment on rum], ca. 1791-1794.
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00797)
“...there is a large and violent Party which can only be controuled by the application of Force...it is become the more indispensable and urgent to press forward the forces destined to act against the Insurgents with all possible activity and Energy.”

Alexander Hamilton to Thomas Mifflin, September 20, 1794.

(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07920)
Washington’s Address to Congress
November 1794

George Washington, [Sixth annual address to Congress], November 1794.
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01054)
“...it is probable that in a commotion like the present..., the purposes of mischief and revenge may not be laid aside; the stationing of a small force for a certain period in the four western counties of Pennsylvania, will be indispensable; whether we contemplate the situation of those, who are connected with the execution of the laws; or of others, who may have exposed themselves by an honorable attachment to them.”

George Washington, [Sixth annual address to Congress]. November 1794. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01054)
Washington’s Address to Congress
November 1794

“It has demonstrated, that our prosperity rests on solid foundations; by furnishing an additional proof, that my fellow citizens understand the true principles of government and liberty: that they feel their inseparable union: that notwithstanding all the devices which have been used to sway them from their interest and duty, they are now as ready to maintain the authority of the laws against licentious invasions.”

George Washington, [Sixth annual address to Congress], November 1794. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01054)
“Therefore I, George Washington, President of the United States in consideration of the premises have thought proper and by these presents do grant unto the said..., and to each of them a full free and entire pardon of the treason or treasons whereof they respectively stand indicted willing and requiring all prosecutions and judicial proceedings against them by reason thereof to be withdrawn and discharged.”

George Washington, [Presidential pardon of the ten ringleaders of the Whiskey Rebellion, who had been convicted of high treason], 1797. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08072)
The United States Great Seal
1808-1809

Peter Bateman and William Bateman, George III Silver Consular Seal with Ivory Turned Handle, 1808-1809. (Diplomatic Reception Rooms, RR-1983.0017)
Seraphim Masi, American Silver Skippet, c. 1840. (Diplomatic Reception Rooms, RR-1980.0013)


John Blatteau, Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room, 1985. (Diplomatic Reception Rooms, RR-The Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room)

Unknown, Dinner Plate from a Chinese Export Porcelain Orange Fitzhugh Eagle-Decorated Part Dinner Service, c. 1800-1820. (Diplomatic Reception Rooms, RR-1990.0016.1-.10)
Upcoming Programs

**Inside the Vault:** July 6 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)
- We will be joined by Dr. Adam Laats (Binghamton University) to discuss a 1796 civics textbook, *A Plain Political Catechism*.

**Book Breaks:** June 4 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)
- Alice Baumgartner will discuss her book, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War*.