

THE PRESIDENTS OF CONGRESS

The First Continental Congress, which convened in the Fall of 1774, was an outgrowth of the colonies' Committees of Correspondence. Initially, Congress did little more than catalog grievances against the Crown, but hostilities began in the Spring of 1775. In July, 1776, Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence. In November, 1777 Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation, an attempt to formalize a national government. The Articles were ratified by the states in March, 1781, but proved unsatisfactory. A new Constitution, and a new form of government, took effect in April, 1789. The days of the Continental Congress, its Presidents, and the Articles of Confederation were over.

This exhibit is a thematic look at the men who held the office of President of Congress prior to the adoption of the Constitution. It may be argued that these men were little more than presiding officers or first among equals, rather than chief executives, but at the time they functioned the new nation had no other leaders.

The key items in the exhibit are the free franks of seven of the men who served as President, including John Hancock.



PLAN OF THE EXHIBIT

Title and Plan	p. 1	Thomas McKean	p. 9
Peyton Randolph	2	John Hanson	10
Henry Middleton	2	Elias Boudinot	11
John Hancock	3-4	Thomas Mifflin	12-13
Henry Laurens	5-6	Richard Henry Lee	14
John Jay	7	Nathaniel Gorham	15
Samuel Huntington	8-9	Arthur StClair	15-16

SYNOPSIS

THE PRESIDENTS OF CONGRESS

The exhibit is a thematic look at the men who held the post of President of the Continental Congress. As a thematic, it includes such associated material as references to the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, other Delegates to Congress, events which occurred during a President's tenure, and other activities for which the man is known.

The Title Page offers a brief historical background of the Continental Congress and its evolution.

All of the town cancels, etc., which appear to have been named for a person were in fact named for the individual shown.

The key items in the exhibit are the free franks of seven Presidents, including John Hancock and Richard Henry Lee; 1869 issue proofs (pp 1 and 14), and a late usage of a 'PAID 3' handstamp in 1864 (p. 8).

The first action taken by the First Continental Congress in September, 1774 was the unanimous election of Virginia's PEYTON RANDOLPH as President. He resigned seven weeks later. Re-elected in May, 1775, he served two weeks before resigning. Cohatco, Massachusetts was re-named in his honor.



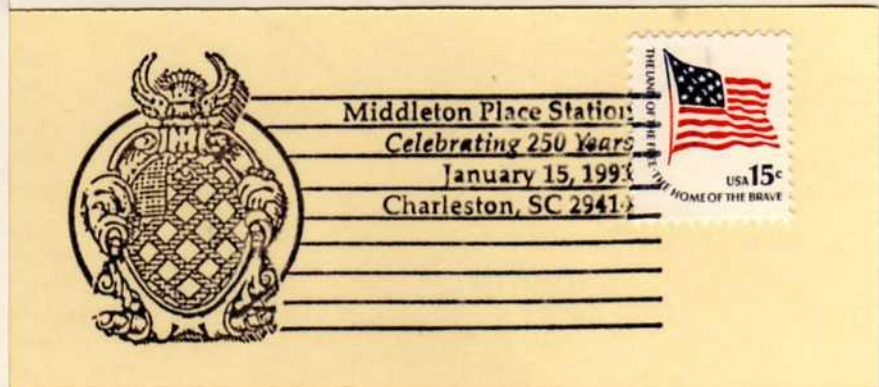
A meter imprint dated April 3 was corrected by hand to June 3; the latter date was verified by a hand cancel and also a sprayed-on marking.



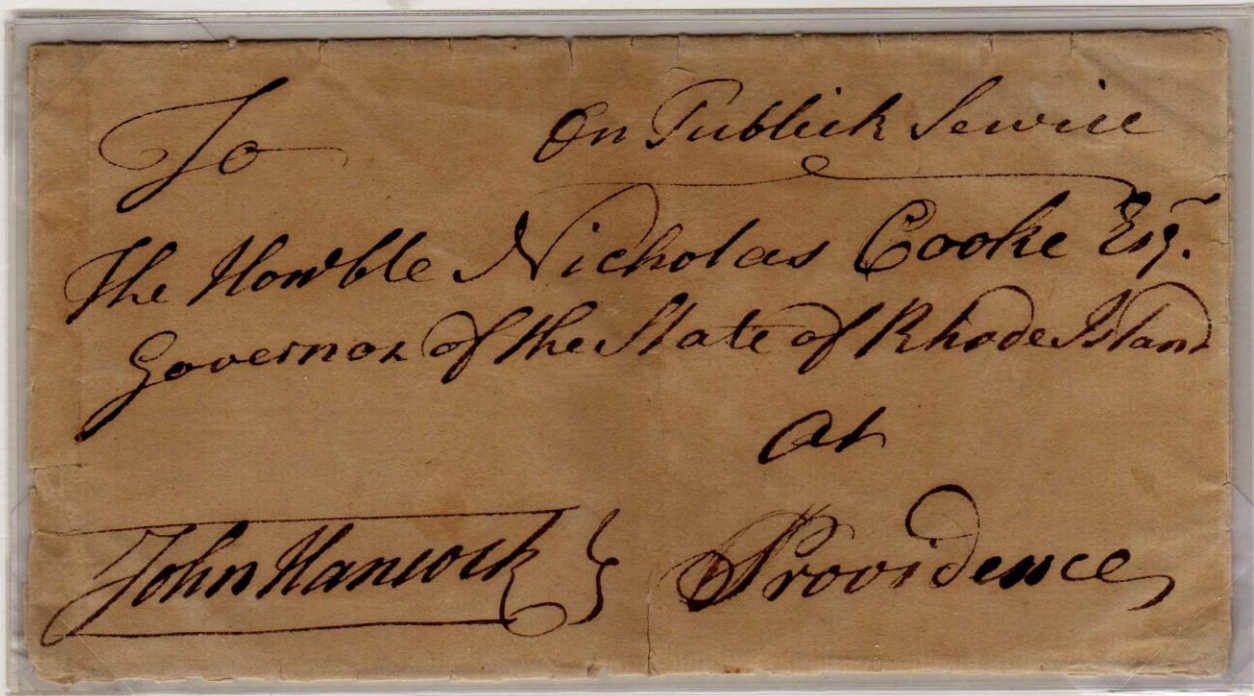
When Randolph died in October, 1775 Delegate George Washington called him the "Father of our country." His seat in Congress was taken by Thomas Jefferson.



South Carolina planter and military and political leader HENRY MIDDLETON was elected President on October 22, 1774. Congress recessed on October 26. As late as 1780, Middleton openly professed his support for the King.



As President of the Continental Congress when the Declaration of Independence was signed, Massachusetts' JOHN HANCOCK may be considered the first President of the new nation. He was also the first head of any independent nation to use the title of President.



To On Publick Service
The Honble Nicholas Cooke Esq.
Governour of the State of Rhode Island
at
John Hancock & Providence

Docketing indicates "President Hancock Sept 14th 1777," three days after the colonials' defeat at Brandywine and four days before Congress fled Philadelphia to escape the advancing British.



Surrender at Saratoga 1777 by Trumbull
US Bicentennial 13cents

The battle of Saratoga occurred during Hancock's tenure. He was elected President of Congress in 1785, but illness prevented him from serving.



JULY 4, 1776 JULY 4, 1776

Return to A. KEERY CHEMICAL CO.,
HANCOCK, Delaware Co., N. Y.,
If not delivered within 10 days.



*Manhattan Spt Co,
Binghamton,
N.Y.*

Hancock, New York is one of many places named for John Hancock.



AMMONOOSUC INN & C. C.

John Hancock
MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
BOSTON 17, MASSACHUSETTS

John Hancock
still makes
INDEPENDENCE
possible



1976

South Carolina merchant, military leader, and slave trader HENRY LAURENS was President of the Continental Congress for 13 months in 1777 and 1778.

On Publick's service
Henry Laurens
His Excellency
Richard Calwell Esq
Governor of S. Carolina
W. R. L.
New York

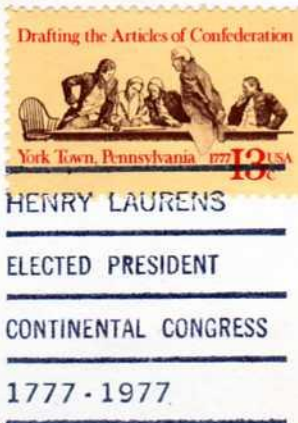
A letter from the Hon.
Henry Laurens Esq. or
enclosing a Resolution of Congress
for prohibiting the exportation
of Brass and C.

Dated the 13th of Feb. 1778

Laurens' free frank as President of Congress, February 13, 1778, from York, Pennsylvania.



Two towns in South Carolina were named for Laurens. Congress approved the Articles of Confederation in 1777 during Laurens' tenure and functioned according to them (though ratification only came four years later). Laurens helped negotiate the Treaty of Paris, but was edited out of the picture on which the stamp is based.



Treaty of Paris Bicentennial
Ending American Revolution
Sept. 3, 1783-Sept. 3, 1983



*Benjamin West's Unfinished Treaty Portrait.
British Signers Refused To Pose.*



Treaty of Paris 1783
US Bicentennial 20 cents

JOHN JAY of New York was elected President of Congress in December, 1778. He negotiated and signed the Treaty of Paris in 1783, and was a co-author of the Federalist Papers. In 1789 he became the first Chief Justice of the United States. Many places have been named for him, and he was recently named Columbia University's greatest graduate.



The Federalist Papers, 1787-88



Old Glory
 JAY HISTORICAL SOC
 OPEN HOUSE STATION
 04239
 AUGUST 12, 1995



SAMUEL HUNTINGTON of Connecticut signed the Declaration of Independence, and served as President of Congress from 1779 to 1781.



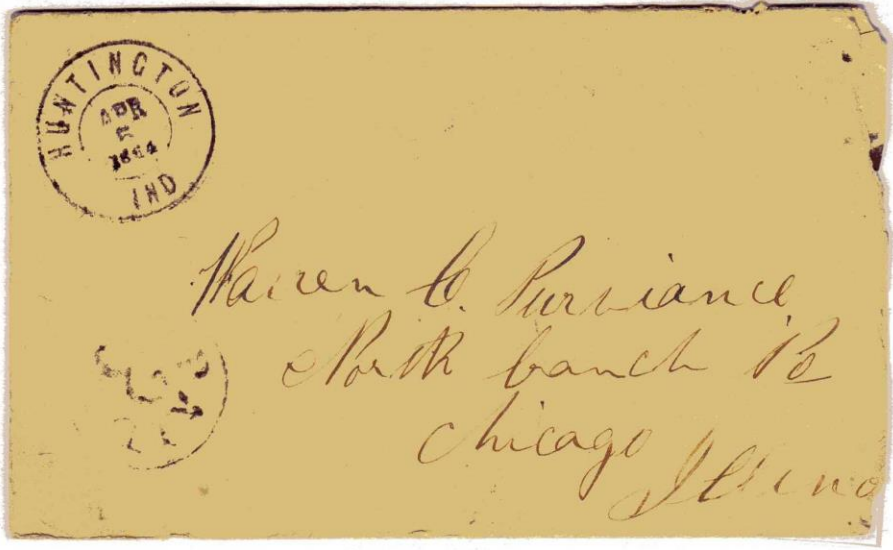
public service

His Excellency The Governor

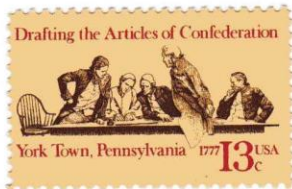
S. Huntington

*New Jersey
at Mount Holly*

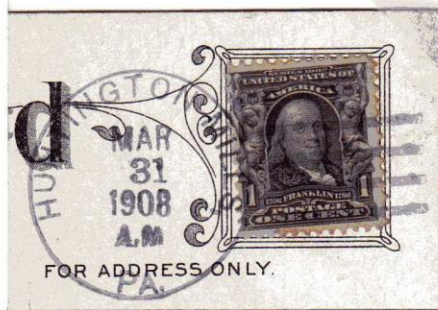
Docketed "letter from President Huntington 11 Dec 1779."



Improper usage of a "PAID 3" handstamp in 1864. Usage of adhesive postage stamps had become compulsory in 1855, but the local post office probably ran out of adhesives.



During Huntington's tenure, in March of 1781, the states ratified the Articles of Confederation. Huntington Mills in Pennsylvania was named for him.



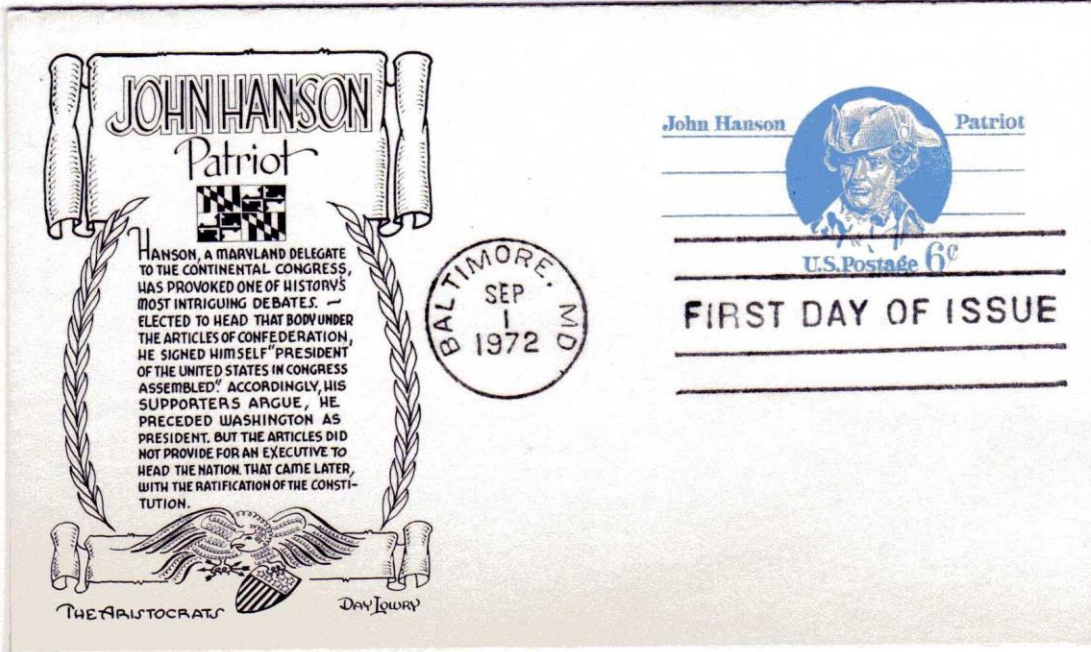
THOMAS MCKEAN of Pennsylvania served a total of nine years in Congress, including a few months as President in 1781. He was the last man to sign the Declaration. While he was President the surrender at Yorktown ended the fighting in the Revolution.



McKean, Pennsylvania was named for Thomas McKean. Shown here is a last day of post office cancel.



Maryland farmer and politician JOHN HANSON was elected President of Congress in November, 1781 and held the post for one year. He is the most obscure of the Presidents.



The John Hanson postal card of 1972 was printed on both smooth stock (above) and coarse stock (below).

ELIAS BOUDINOT represented New Jersey in Congress from 1778 to 1783 and served as President for one term, 1782 to 1783.

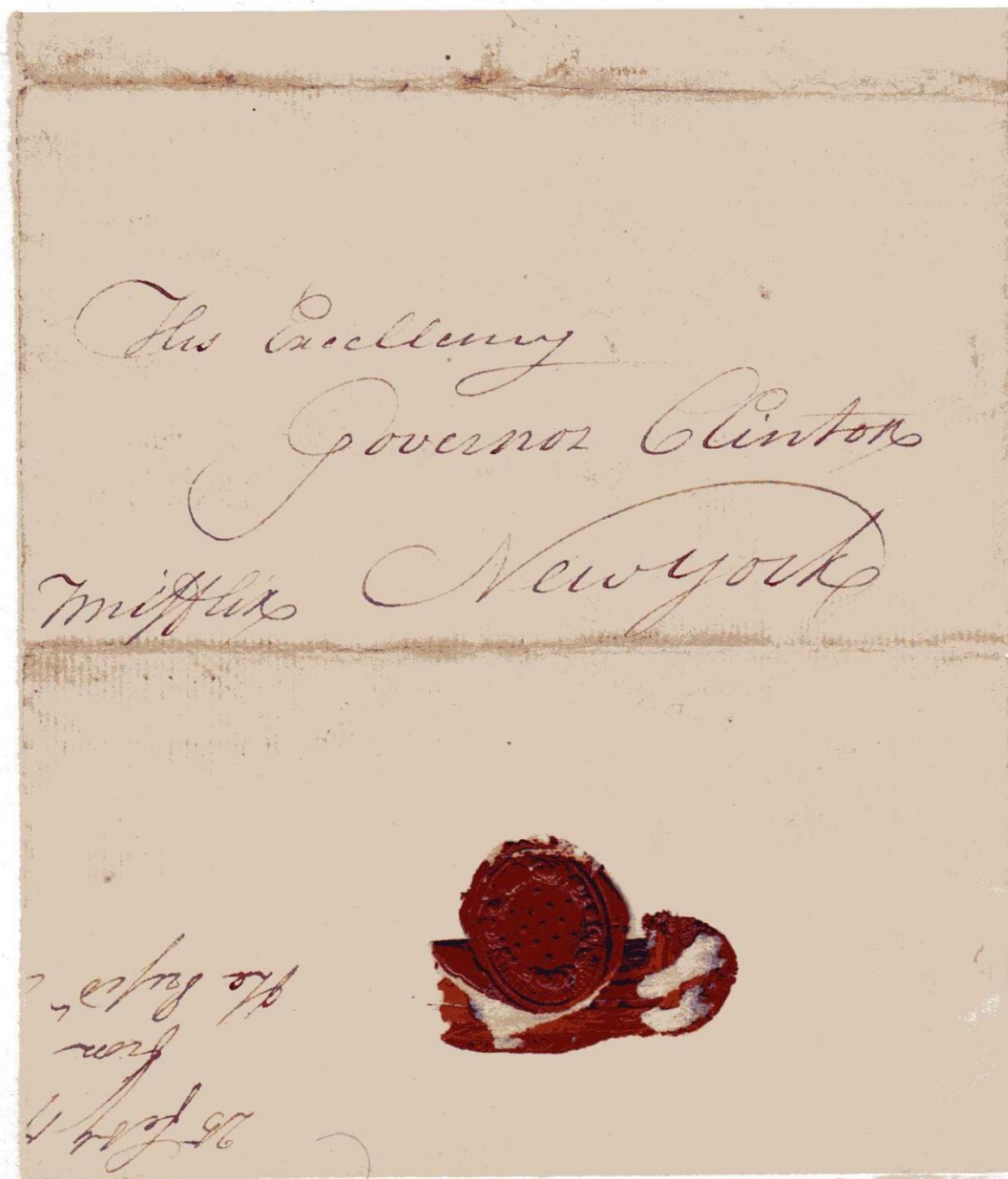


Boudinot's free frank, 1782.

For four months during Boudinot's Presidency Congress met in Nassau Hall in Princeton. Boudinot was a trustee of the school for 49 years, the first Director of the U.S. Mint, and the first President of the American Bible Society. He regarded this last position as the greatest honor in his life.



THOMAS MIFFLIN represented Pennsylvania in Congress. From 1783 to 1784 he served one term as President. As a result of his military and political activities, he was renounced by his fellow Quakers.



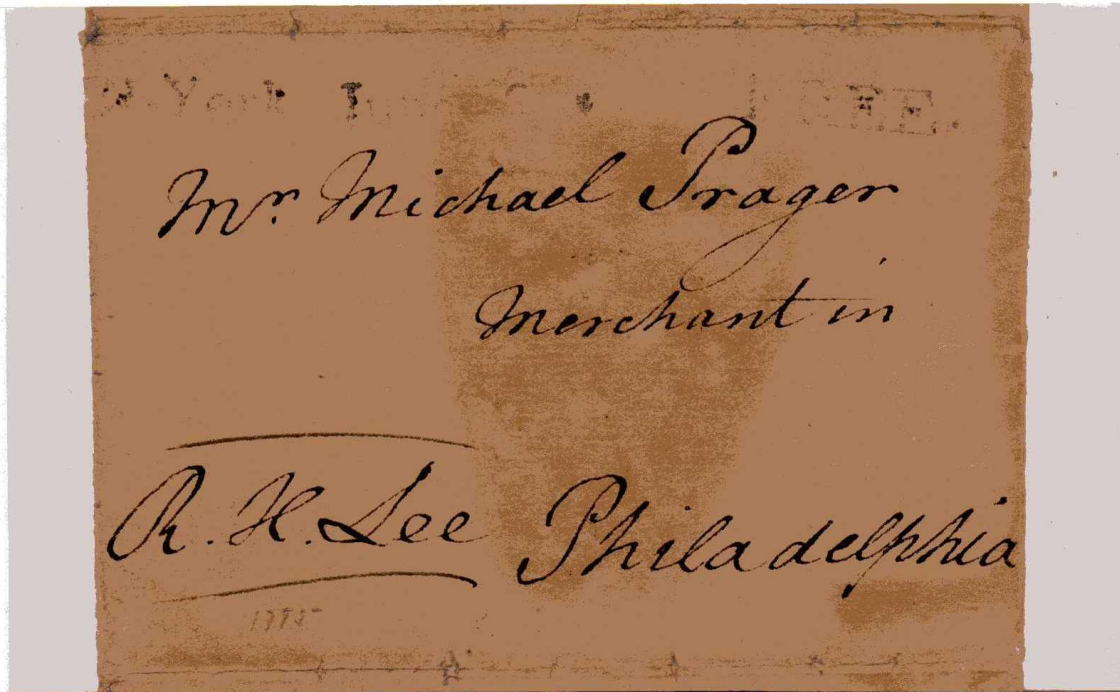
Mifflin's free frank, docketed "25 Feb 1784 from the Presedt. Congress." Note the 13-star embossed wax seal reading E PLURIBUS UNUM.

A number of places, especially in Pennsylvania, were named for Mifflin, who was President of the state (1788-1790) and the Governor (1790-1799).



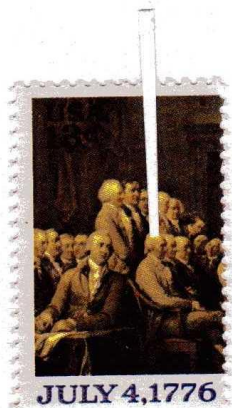
In 1787
Mifflin
signed the
Constitution

RICHARD HENRY LEE of Virginia was elected President of Congress in 1784 and held the post for over a year, through two sessions of Congress.

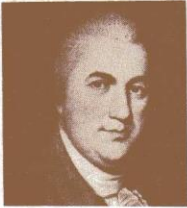


Lee's free frank as President of Congress, June of 1785, from New York.

Lee made the motion calling for independence in 1776, signed the Declaration, and played a major role in drafting the Northwest Ordinance in 1787.



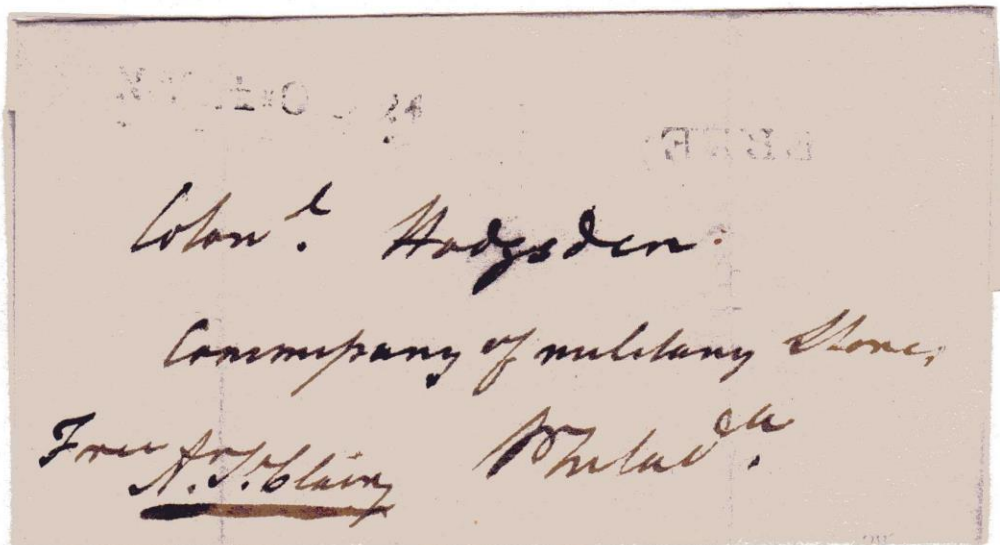
NATHANIEL GORHAM was elected President in June of 1786, largely because he represented Massachusetts, the same state as his predecessor, who had resigned the post. Gorham later presided over some sessions of the Constitutional Convention, and signed the document.



NATHANIEL GORHAM
12th President
of the Continental Congress
Elected June 6, 1786



After serving barely a year in Congress, ARTHUR StCLAIR of Pennsylvania was elected President in 1787 and held the job for a year.



StClair's free frank as President, from New York, October 24, 1787.

