
American Newspapers Report the French Revolution, 1789

June 8 - July 31, 1989

in commemoration of

The Bicentennial of the French Revolution
1789 ~ 1989

Checklist of the Exhibition

**Dimock Gallery, Art Department
The George Washington University
Washington, D.C. 20052**

For further information or to have specific questions answered regarding the contents of this exhibit, please contact Professor Peter F. Hill, organizer of the exhibition, in the Department of History, The George Washington University (202) 994-5761.

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American Newspapers Report the French Revolution, 1789

American newspaper readers probably knew more about the events of the French Revolution than did Frenchmen. Four million Americans were served by some sixty regularly-published newspapers in 1789. Twenty-four million Frenchmen had only thirty-five. French readers, of course, learned the news sooner. Americans had to wait for transatlantic passage that ranged from five to eight weeks.

The *Gazette of the United States*, some of whose columns are reproduced here, appeared twice weekly in New York City from the time the first Federal Congress met there in April, 1789, until both Congress and the *Gazette* moved to Philadelphia in October, 1790.

During its first year of publication the *Gazette* carried nearly a hundred news items or editorial commentaries relating to the Revolution. This exhibit offers, then, only a small sampling of an astonishing news coverage.

Peter P. Hill
Department of History
The George Washington University

News Columns from the *Gazette of the United States*, 1789

1. Describes the parliamentary deadlock as to whether clergy, nobles, and commons will convene as one legislative chamber or three. (*Gazette*, August 5; dateline: London, June 3)
2. The deputies defy the king and take an oath not to let themselves be dissolved. (*Gazette*, September 2; dateline: London, June 29)
3. Calm returns and optimism prevails when clergy and nobles are ordered to join the commons in a single National Assembly. (*Gazette*, September 12; dateline: Paris, June 29)
4. The Bastille is to be torn down, and the king pays a ceremonial visit to Paris. (*Gazette*, September 26; "Extract of a letter from Paris," n.d.)
5. An American editorialist congratulates France on having overturned its "too long established system of despotism." (*Gazette*, October 3)
6. Nobles and Clerics renounce their seigneurial privileges on the memorable "Night of August 4." (*Gazette*, October 10; dateline: probably London, August 12)
7. Physical descriptions of Louis, his queen, and his brothers. (*Gazette*, October 28; dateline: London, August 12)
8. An eye-witness account of the king's acceptance of constitutional articles and a "Bill of Rights" (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen). Also recounts the National Assembly's reception of the Paris women's march on Versailles. (*Gazette*, December 12; dateline: L'Orient, October 15, translated for and reprinted from the *Massachusetts Centinel*)
9. An American writer sympathizes with the king, now a virtual prisoner of the people of Paris. (*Gazette*, November 28)
10. Another "correspondent" doubts that French revolutionaries will stay the course, and points to differences between their revolution and ours. (*Gazette*, January 13, 1790)

Illustrations of News Columns from the *Gazette of the United States*, 1789
Courtesy of Associate Professorial Lecturer in Art Scip Barnhart's Illustration Class
The George Washington University

Buttons of the French Revolutionary Era
From the Collection of Professor Stefan Schiff

Most late eighteenth century French buttons were large and ornate, designed to match the lavish clothing worn by the nobility. They adorned principally the outer garments of men, and were made of such various materials as copper, brass, silver, gold, ivory, glass, porcelain, mother-of-pearl, and enamel. Often several materials were combined in a single button. Of exquisite workmanship, most buttons were one-of-a-kind, made to order for a specific garment. The examples shown are representative. After the Revolution, buttons became less ostentatious.

- S.1 "Rebus" button made of silver alloy. The letters convey a phrase of endearment in riddle form.
- S.2 Painting on paper, mounted in a copper rim under glass, steel back. This button commemorates the first balloon experiments of the Montgolfier brothers, 1782-83. The barely visible inscription reads: "La folie du Siècle."
- S.3 Aesop's and La Fontaine's fable, "The Fox and the Crow," is depicted here in wax on a silicon background, under glass.
- S.4 Copper button dated 1771.
- S.5 The dolphin depicted here commemorates the death of Louis' seven-year-old son and heir in June 1789. Like the heir to the French throne, this aquatic mammal bears the name "dauphin." The play on words is confirmed by an eighteenth century notation, accompanying the discovery of the button, which explains that it was one of the "Boutons portés à la morte du 1e fils du Louis XVI." It was made of silver on a blue background.
- S.6 A post-revolutionary gilded copper button depicting Liberty.
- S.7 Oil painting under glass, probably painted on ivory.
- S.8 Carved ivory done in incredible detail.
- S.9 Opaline glass mounted on silver.
- S.10 "LA LIBERTÉ FAIT MA GLOIRE," one of a set of copper cloak buttons.
- S.11 Painting on ivory under glass, mounted in silver.
- S.12 Venus and Cupid, painted on textile affixed to ivory which forms the back of the button. Classic Greek and Roman motifs were commonly used on eighteenth century French buttons.
- S.13 Polychrome enamel on silver.
- S.14 Head of Vespasian, one of a set of watercolor paintings of Roman emperors done "en grisaille" on ivory.

Military Buttons of the French Revolutionary Era

- S.15 All of these buttons are of quite similar construction: the fronts are stamped sheets of metal, probably an alloy of zinc and copper, resembling gold. These are crimped over wooden or bone backs with cat-gut shanks (see example). In many cases, the legends and the motifs make it relatively easy to distinguish pre- from post-revolutionary buttons. Some of these buttons were also used on non-military garments.

Portrait Engravings

The small portrait engravings exhibited here are from the Library of Congress collection, "Leaders of the French Revolution." They are the work of a Dutch engraver named Claessens, who was a contemporary of the French Revolution.

Marie Antoinette (1755-1793)

Queen of France

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"

Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736-1793)

Prevost des Marchands

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"

Louis XVI (1754-1793)

King of France

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"

Lally-Tollendal (1751-1830)

Monarchist Leader in the National Assembly

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"

Comte de Mirabeau [Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti]

(1749-1791)

Early Spokesman of the Third Estate

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"

Jacques Necker (1732-1804)

Popular Finance Minister

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"

Duc d'Orléans (1747-1793)

Cousin of the King

(Known as "Philippe Égalité")

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"