

Introducing André Michaux and His Times

In the middle of the summer of 1785, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) extended his last farewells to his French friends and departed Paris for home. This long-time, esteemed resident of Philadelphia had completed his mission. He had been in Paris since the spring of 1782, serving as an American delegate to the peace negotiations between Great Britain and the United States. Later that year, John Adams (1735–1826) and John Jay (1745–1829) had joined Franklin in the negotiations (Hicks 1957). The surrender of British General Charles Cornwallis (1738–1805) on October 19, 1781, at Yorktown had terminated the Revolutionary War, but the final treaty (Treaty of Versailles) between Great Britain and the United States was not signed until September 3, 1783, in Paris.

For the French people, Franklin's departure was not a happy event; they hated to see their beloved patron saint leave them. Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), Franklin's successor as minister to France, had already arrived in Paris in August 1784, having embarked on the *Ceres* from Boston on July 5 (Lisitzky 1933). Earlier, Jefferson had been scheduled by Congress to go to France as minister to assist Jay and Franklin in concluding the Treaty of Versailles, but because of difficulties encountered, the mission was aborted.

Jefferson brought with him his newly written, Congress-approved, "Instructions" for American ambassadors located abroad at all foreign capitals. He joined John Adams and Franklin as commissioner to negotiate a trade treaty with Europe. Franklin and Jefferson had nearly a year together in Paris before the former returned to Philadelphia.

During his five-year stay in France, Jefferson had contacted André Thouin (1747–1824) with the goal of exchanging seeds and plants between

America and France (Ewan 1969). Thouin was head gardener of the Jardin du Roi (Jardin des Plantes after the birth of the Republic in 1792) in Paris, professor of horticulture at the museum in 1793, student of Bernard de Jussieu (1699–1777), and foremost authority on naturalization of foreign plants. A long-lasting relationship developed between Thouin and Jefferson (Savage and Savage 1986). Jefferson also met the great French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788). The nearly eighty-year-old author of the famed forty-four-volume *Histoire Naturelle* was still writing his classic work. Jefferson witnessed the beginning of the French Revolution, and on July 17, 1789, he inspected the Bastille, which recently had been taken by the people of Paris. In October of that year Jefferson sailed home for Virginia, only to find that President George Washington (1732–1799) had appointed him secretary of state (Lisitzky 1933). Jefferson formally accepted the position in February 1790.

In late September of 1785 four Frenchmen left Port l’Orient, Lorient of today, in Brittany on the western coast of France, for New York. These men were not political delegates like Franklin and Jefferson, but represented the French monarchy under King Louis XVI (1754–1793). The prime figure of the group was André Michaux (1746–1803), a man with much less visibility, familiarity, and esteem than either Franklin or Jefferson. Both men, however, would become acquainted with Michaux in the days ahead. In an unpublished letter, dated August 9, 1785, located in the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Benjamin Franklin was informed by Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes (1719–1787), minister of foreign affairs under Louis XVI, of Michaux’s visit to America (appendix 2-3). The letter of introduction, which Michaux was to present to Franklin, informed the patriot of his assignment and requested Franklin’s assistance. Franklin was told that Michaux represented the King of France.

Benjamin Franklin returned to Philadelphia, the future capital of the American colonies and hub of political activities. Here the foundations of American government would be constructed and honed with the opening of the Constitutional Convention on May 25, 1787. Philadelphia also became the initial center for the development of North American botany, in part because of the accomplishments of John Bartram (1699–1777) and his son, William (1739–1823), and the 1731 founding of the renowned Bartram Garden, the first of its kind. Another contributing factor was the appointment to the University of Pennsylvania in 1789 of Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton (1766–1815), physician-naturalist-professor, whose extensive library, herbarium, and expertise in materia medica and natural his-



Photo 3. Home of John and William Bartram located west of Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River. The famous Bartram Garden surrounds the home.

tory attracted many students interested in the native American flora and medicine (Reveal and Pringle 1993).

John Bartram had been dead for eight years, but Benjamin Franklin, aged 79, continued to visit the Bartram home and Garden located west of Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River (photo 3). Both men were among the nine original members of the American Philosophical Society, a prestigious organization that still exists, modeled on the Royal Society of London (Reveal 1992).

Most of Bartram's generation of pioneer-naturalists and close associates who lived in America were now deceased. Cadwallader Colden (1688–1776), a wealthy politician, physician, and naturalist, had come to America from England in the early 1700s. He settled in New York where he became surveyor general and governor. Colden's large estate, Coldenham, flourished with impressive gardens. His friend, John Clayton (1686–1773), also of England, had settled on a productive plantation in Virginia around 1715. Clayton was clerk of court for Gloucester County, collected plants for forty years, and compiled a catalog of plants of that area that became the basic material for *Flora Virginica* (first volume published in 1739; second volume in 1743, Leiden), authored by the Leiden physician and botanist Joannes Fredericus Gronovius (1690–1762). Gronovius used Clayton's