

11-2014

Money And Intrigue: The Nature Of The Secret Aid Prior To The Formal Alliance In 1778 During The American Revolutionary War

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School of Arts and Sciences
History and Military Studies

The thesis for the master's degree submitted by

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under the title

***Money And Intrigue: The Nature Of The Secret Aid Prior To The Formal Alliance
In 1778 During The American Revolutionary War***

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AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Charles Town, West Virginia

MONEY AND INTRIGUE: THE NATURE OF THE SECRET AID PRIOR TO THE FORMAL
ALLIANCE IN 1778 DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

MILITARY HISTORY WITH A CONCENTRATION IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

David W. Thomas

Department Approval Date:

14 July 2014

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my wife who has supported me through this long and arduous path. You were always the voice of reason telling me what I needed to hear not necessarily what I wanted to hear. Your patience, support and belief in me made all of this possible. Your confidence in me even when I lacked it in myself has been so helpful. Thank you for not making me mow the grass while I was working on this. That was a big help!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professors Young and Carpenter for their guidance and input into developing this work. Without their insights and suggestions this process would have been more difficult. I would also like to thank Dr. Richard Gildrie who first informed me of the topic and for believing in me when I did not believe in myself. I also want to thank my family for putting up with the extensive hours of work and for listening to me ramble on about the story. Without your support over the years, I would never have made it to this point.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

MONEY AND INTRIGUE: THE NATURE OF THE SECRET AID PRIOR TO THE FORMAL
ALLIANCE IN 1778 DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

By

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American Public University System, 14 July 2014

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Robert Young, Thesis Professor

This study examines the impacts and nature of the secret aid that Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais provided the American rebels in the early days of the Revolutionary War and if the American government was unjustified in withholding payment. The secret aid was a business transaction that was agreed upon by both parties that carried with it obligations to fulfill the terms of the arrangement. This study also looks to validate or invalidate the works of Elizabeth Kite who wrote one of the most extensive texts on the subject. This study concludes that the secret aid was essential to the success of the American Revolution and was a contractual business arrangement requiring compensation that the American government was unjustified in withholding. This study also concludes that Kite's interpretations were correct.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States there is a mythology surrounding the events of the War of American Independence that is culturally pervasive and accepted as fact. The average American is taught that the Americans won the Revolutionary War because they were fighting for a cause that they believed in and that Saratoga was the turning point in the war that showed the French that the American rebels had a chance and convinced them to enter into a formal alliance. What is not well known is how the French and other powers were providing clandestine support as early as 1776. The question then becomes what was the nature of this aid? Was it a business transaction with the expectation of payment, or was it a gift from the French King Louis XVI? If the secret aid was in fact a business transaction, did the United States government pay for the goods and services provided in full?

This study will examine the nature of the secret aid that the French and others provided in the early days of the War of American Independence as well as the impact of the assistance. This study will also determine if the United States government paid in full for the supplies and services rendered and if they did not, determine if they were justified in withholding any payments.

While there were many people involved in clandestine operations to supply the Americans against the British, there were a few key players that need to be identified and discussed. Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais, Silas Deane, Chevalier d'Éon, Arthur Lee and Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes were the main people involved with the secret aid to help the Americans defeat the British.

Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais is best known for being the French playwright who wrote the Figaro plays: *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Guilty Mother*. Beaumarchais was also a watchmaker, diplomat, fugitive, spy, and an arms dealer. Beaumarchais' plays give a great insight into the man's personality. Money, politics, mystery and intrigue are predominate themes in his works which suggests that he rather enjoyed and was well acquainted with those topics. A quote from the *The Marriage of Figaro* by the character Suzanne about Figaro really explains Beaumarchais pretty well "Plotting and money, you're in your element".¹

Beaumarchais was born as Pierre-Augustin Caron, the son of a watchmaker born in Paris in 1732. He came from a middle class family. Despite his modest upbringing, Beaumarchais would gain significant influence among the French royalty. Beaumarchais was married to a minor noblewoman named Madeleine-Catherine Aubertin who assisted him in obtaining employment in the royal court.²

The young Beaumarchais first came to the attention of the court at Versailles when he created a functional watch in a ring for Madam de Pompadour, the mistress of French monarch Louis XV.³ Beaumarchais eventually was appointed as the royal watchmaker as he invented a watch component that significantly improved the reliability and accuracy of watches.⁴ Over the

¹ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Act I Scene I.

² Maurice Lever, *Beaumarchais: A Biography*, trans. Susan Emanuel, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ Joel Richard Paul, *Unlikely Allies How a Merchant a Playwright and a Spy Saved the American Revolution*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 22-23.

course of several years, Beaumarchais marched up the social ladder into the ranks of the lower nobility.⁵

In 1760, Beaumarchais was introduced to a Parisian banker named Joseph Pâris Duverney, who was among other things well versed in arms trafficking. Duverney had gained considerable wealth by dealing in arms in the War of Austrian Succession.⁶ Duverney was interested in obtaining royal patronage for a military academy that he ran. He learned that Beaumarchais had a relationship with the French court and offered to become Beaumarchais' patron if he could get Louis the XV to visit the school. Beaumarchais acquiesced and the two became close friends.⁷

Over the next decade, Duverney taught Beaumarchais the ways of business and the political arena. Duverney, who was also a staunch nationalist, argued that the French needed to avenge their defeat during the Seven Years War.⁸ Duverney's teachings clearly influenced Beaumarchais and helped set the stage for his actions during the American War of Independence.

Silas Deane was the son of a blacksmith born in Connecticut in 1737. Despite his father's vocation, Deane was highly intelligent and well read, eventually earning acceptance into Yale College where he studied a variety of disciplines. Deane later went on to law school and opened up a legal practice in Connecticut.⁹ Deane eventually was married and his wife, who was a widow, gave birth to their only child. Deane closed his law practice and took over the store of

⁵ Streeter Bass, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*, (Langley: Central Intelligence Agency Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1993), accessed 25 July 2014. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol14no1/html/v14i1a01p_0001.htm.

⁶ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

his wife's late husband. Deane worked diligently and the business began to grow and expanded trade into other parts of the world.¹⁰

Deane, like many other merchants following Britain's victory and subsequent taxation and trade restrictions following the Seven Years War, vehemently opposed the actions of the British government. Deane became involved in the protests and boycotts leading up to the Revolutionary War. Deane was appointed as a regular member to the local Committee of Correspondence.¹¹

Chevalier (Chevalière) d'Éon is one of the more interesting people involved with the secret aid. There is a great deal of speculation regarding d'Éon because the evidence is speculative, conflicting, and very incomplete. What is not in dispute is he was born Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont in 1728 to a minor noble family. He was highly intelligent, an exceptional athlete and swordsman.¹² D'Éon also had an exceptional androgynous appearance.¹³

In 1755 d'Éon joined the ranks of King Louis XV spy network called *Secret du Roi* (King's Secret).¹⁴ In 1756 just before the start of the Seven Years War, d'Éon was dispatched to Russia to reestablish diplomatic ties and secure an alliance against the growing power of the British. Although accounts of what actually happened in Russia are the subject of speculation and debate, what is known is that d'Éon was in Russia and they allied with the French against the

¹⁰ Ibid., 13-13.

¹¹ Ibid., 16-17.

¹² Ibid., 33.

¹³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴ Ibid.

British. In return for his service in Russia, d'Éon was commissioned a Captain in the Royal Dragoons¹⁵

In 1761, d'Éon left to go fight in the Seven Years War. He was a capable soldier who courageously fought. He was eventually wounded at the Battle of Ultrap where he distinguished himself by attacking and capturing a numerically superior force. In 1762, d'Éon recalled to Paris and was assigned to the peace talks with Britain. Although France was in no position to make any demands of the British at the peace talks, d'Éon was successful in getting the British to concede their demand to destroy the port at Dunkirk.¹⁶ After the peace treaty was signed, d'Éon was assigned to the embassy in London. He was knighted with the title of Chevalier by Louis XV and presented France's highest award at the time the Croix de Saint Louis.¹⁷

Even before the peace treaty with Britain was signed, Louis XV was already planning to avenge the defeat by invading Britain. D'Éon resumed his position in the *Secret du Roi*. He was assigned to scout possible landing sites for the invasion.¹⁸ Louis' plan would come back to haunt him later.

In the meantime, d'Éon was assigned as the Minister Plenipotentiary to Britain pending the arrival of a new ambassador. He established and maintained a great relationship with the British royal family and other wealthy elites in London. D'Éon's lavish carousing was costing the French government a great deal of money and he was warned to be more frugal in his expenditures. D'Éon protested and did not become more economical with his allowance. When

¹⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the new ambassador arrived d'Éon was demoted to the position of secretary. He found the demotion to be humiliating and unacceptable.¹⁹

The new French ambassador arrived with a letter recalling d'Éon back to France. D'Éon refused to comply as it was not signed personally by the King. Louis XV was becoming concerned that the plans to invade Britain would be divulged by d'Éon so he ordered him captured or killed. In response to the threats against his life d'Éon published several secret diplomatic documents but withheld publishing the proof regarding the planned invasion of Britain. D'Éon used the incriminating documents as leverage against the King and to presumably save his own life.²⁰

By 1764, d'Éon's money and credit ran out, and he was afraid for his life. He sent a letter to Louis XV threatening to sell the British documents detailing Louis' plans to invade Britain which would have prompted a British declaration of war against the French that they could not afford. The King opted to negotiate instead, and offered d'Éon 12,000 livres a year if he would continue to spy on the British for him and not publish the documents. This portion of the story is important because due to his publishing of the secret documents, d'Éon was invited to many dinner parties and gained greater access to Whig party leadership.²¹

Arthur Lee, American agent in London, was the youngest of eight children born to a wealthy Virginia family in 1740. He was raised in a typically British aristocratic fashion. When Lee's father died, he left his son £1,000 and some property, but his elder brothers refused to

¹⁹ Ibid., 40-44.

²⁰ Ibid., 45-46.

²¹ Ibid., 46.

honor the will. This insult left Lee bitter and paranoid throughout his life, making it nearly impossible to form any meaningful relationships.²²

Lee attended boarding school in England at age 11. Later, Lee attended the University of Edinburgh and earned his degree in medicine. He returned to Virginia to practice medicine but did not remain there long. Lee returned to London and began studying law.²³ Lee practiced law in London between 1770 and 1776.²⁴ During his time in London, Lee began to publish articles criticizing the British Government's policies towards the thirteen American colonies.²⁵

When Benjamin Franklin was appointed as the colonial agent for Massachusetts in London, Lee was appointed as Franklin's back up in case the elder statesman could not perform his duties. Lee felt insulted at being passed over in favor of Franklin. Franklin tried repeatedly to develop a friendly relationship with Lee and even sponsored him at the Royal Society of London. Lee repaid Franklin's kindness with bitterness and contempt. Lee repeatedly and publicly attacked Franklin during their time in London²⁶

Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes served as foreign minister under King Louis XVI in 1774. By the time of his appointment, Vergennes had served thirty five years in the diplomatic service.²⁷ Vergennes was born to an aristocratic family in 1719. He started his diplomatic career

²² Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 135-136.

²³ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

²⁴ United States Congress, "Lee, Arthur, (1740-1792)", *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, accessed 4 August 2014, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=L000188>.

²⁵ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 136.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁷ Orville T. Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte De Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1982), 211.

at the age of 20.²⁸ Vergennes was a staunch nationalist and deeply wanted to avenge France's defeat in the Seven Years War.²⁹

Compared to other subjects in the War of American Independence, the secret aid is relatively ignored or understated in the historical community. The majority of the work on this topic was conducted between the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. There have been three books written about the secret aid in the twenty-first century. The recent works on the topic draw heavily upon Elizabeth Kite's work *Beaumarchais and the War of American Independence volumes 1 and 2* first published in 1918.

Kite did an exceptional job in compiling her work given the inherent limitations on access to primary source material at the time she was writing. Kite's work mostly cites secondary sources written in the nineteenth century and some American primary source material. It appears as though she did not have access to several key French primary sources, specifically the correspondence of Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais playwright, spy, watchmaker, arms dealer, financier and the key figure in the secret aid. Kite's work is generally accepted as the definitive work on the subject, but would her interpretation stand up to the addition of Beaumarchais' correspondence?

This study will determine the validity of Kite's interpretations by excluding her work from the interpretive process. The interpretation will be formulated by relying on the primary source documents, while the secondary sources excluding Kite's work will be used to provide the background information. The validity of Kite's interpretation will be covered at the end of this study. Kite interpreted the events of the secret aid as being a business transaction that the

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹ Robert Harvey, *A Few Bloody Noses: The American Revolutionary War*, (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2004), 34.

United States government wrongfully withheld payment from Beaumarchais for. She also argued that the secret aid was essential to the success of the War of American Independence.³⁰

There is a significant gap in the study of the secret aid. Very few books were written specifically on the topic, and when it is mentioned in other works, it tends to be very brief. There have only been a handful of journal articles written specifically about the secret aid. There are a few articles that touch on it but only on a superficial level. This study seeks to fill in many of the gaps in the writings and look at what has been written about it in a different way.

This study will use a unique methodology in that it will intentionally exclude a secondary source from the interpretation. This is necessary in order to validate or invalidate Kite's interpretations. Given that all of the recent works cite Kite, her work must be excluded to put the new books' interpretations to the test as well. The background information will be derived mainly from the recent sources as the historical methodology of the older sources was not as well developed.

This study seeks to answer multiple questions regarding the secret aid the French and others provided the American rebels prior to the formal alliance in 1778. Was the secret aid a business transaction requiring repayment for goods and services rendered, or was it a gift from the French king Louis XVI? If the aid was in fact a business transaction, did the United States pay for the aid in full? If the United States government did not pay in full, why did they withhold payment?

Although there are multiple authors of secondary sources on the secret aid, I will be focusing on the most recent three to provide the background information necessary to an in depth

³⁰ Elizabeth S. Kite, *Beaumarchais and the War of American Independence, volumes 1 and 2*, (Boston: Gorham Press, 1918).

understanding of the events. What is interesting about the recent works surrounding the events are the backgrounds of the authors.

Unlikely Allies How a Merchant, a Playwright, and a Spy Saved the American Revolution by Joel Richard Paul is an interesting work that provides a great deal of background information on the story of the secret aid. Paul is not a professional historian, he teaches international and constitutional law at California Hastings College of Law.³¹ Regardless of not being a historian, his study and scholarship was impeccable.

Improbable Patriot The Secret History of Monsieur de Beaumarchais the French Playwright Who Saved the American Revolution by Harlow Giles Unger is another good standard account that tells the story of the secret aid. Unger has worked primarily as a journalist but is also a historian He has over 20 books written on various Revolutionary War era topics and is very knowledgeable about the period.³²

Brian N. Morton and Donald C. Spinelli wrote *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*. Their work is the most comprehensive standard account of the secret aid written in the last twenty years. Morton was an Associate Professor of French at the University of Michigan.³³ Spinelli was a Professor and Associate Dean at Wayne State University.³⁴ Both authors have written extensively about Beaumarchais and his contributions to the War of American Independence.

³¹ Joel R. Paul, "Joel Richard Paul", accessed 6 August 2014, <http://www.joelrichardpaul.com/jpaul-bio.htm>.

³² Harlow G. Unger, "Harlow Giles Unger", accessed 6 August 2014, <http://www.harlowgilesunger.com/harlowunger.html>.

³³ University of Michigan, "Faculty History Project", accessed 6 August 2014, <http://um2017.org/faculty-history/faculty/brian-n-morton/memoir>.

³⁴ Wayne State University, "Faculty", accessed 6 August 2014, <http://wayne.edu/people/aa1690/>.

Morton and Spinelli also compiled a comprehensive collection of correspondence to and from Beaumarchais in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome I-V*. These letters provide a great deal of insight and evidence into the nature of the secret aid and the motivations of Beaumarchais himself. The collection features letters to and from all of the pertinent individuals involved in the operation.

The *Claim of de Beaumarchais' Heir [a. E. Caron de Beaumarchais] Against the United States* which was filed by Beaumarchais' daughter Amelie outlines the case that the United States government withheld payment from her father. The publication was originally compiled in 1812 by the United States Congress and shows the decision process the government used to determine payment to Beaumarchais.

In 1775 the French government had a vested interest in the deteriorating relations between the British Colonists in North America and the mother country. In April Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais was dispatched to London on a secret mission for French Foreign Minister Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes just prior to the first shots at Lexington and Concord in the War of American Independence. Beaumarchais' mission was twofold. First he needed to resolve a situation with a rogue French spy attempting to blackmail King Louis XVI. The second part of the mission was to ascertain the exact nature of the deterioration of relations between Britain and her colonies.³⁵

While in London, Beaumarchais met several Americans and formulated the idea of clandestinely providing the American rebels with arms, gunpowder, ammunition and other materiel to aid in their fight against Britain. From 1776 until the end of the war, Beaumarchais

³⁵ Streeter Bass, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*, (Langley: Central Intelligence Agency Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1993), accessed 25 July 2014. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol14no1/html/v14i1a01p_0001.htm.

shipped large amounts of supplies to the Americans. By war's end Beaumarchais did not receive the money that was owed to him.³⁶

Given the importance of the goods and services provided to the United States clandestinely, it is important to conduct a comprehensive study of the exact nature of the aid and if they United States did not pay in full for what they received. One could argue that the supplies were so critical to the outcome of the war, that had the events not happened, then the United States would not have achieved independence at that time.

The nature of the secret aid the French and others provided prior to the formal alliance in 1778 was in fact a business transaction with a private citizen with the expectation of payment for goods and services rendered. The United States government wrongfully withheld payment from Beaumarchais due to slanderous and libelous allegations as well as some creative accounting practices by certain members of the United States government.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER I: STORY OF THE SECRET AID

When Louis XVI ascended to the throne of France, had had several residual issues that needed to be resolved from his grandfather Louis XV's reign. Chevalier d'Éon, the former agent of Louis XV in Britain was threatening to expose Louis XV's plan to invade the British Isles following France's defeat in the Seven Years War. If this disclosure occurred, France would have been drawn into an unwanted war with the British Empire. Lieutenant General of Police Antoine de Sartines and foreign minister Vergennes recommended to the king that Beaumarchais be assigned to handle the d'Éon matter.³⁸

Initially, Beaumarchais was reluctant to accept the assignment as he had previously played the role of king's agent twice before and received no help when he was incarcerated on a separate matter. Vergennes, presumably aware of Beaumarchais' flair for the dramatic offered him a more interesting role to play. Vergennes was very interested in the deteriorating relations between the British government and their American colonies.³⁹

The foreign minister needed better information as the diplomat in London was only reporting on official matters. Vergennes dual purposed Beaumarchais for the mission by having him handle the d'Éon affair as well as spy on the British to get a more complete picture of the situation developing in the colonies.⁴⁰ Little did Beaumarchais know at the time, but he was about to become one of the most important people of the American Revolution. As

³⁸ Streeter Bass, *Beaumarchais and the American Revolution*, (Langley: Central Intelligence Agency Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1993), accessed 5 August 2014. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol14no1/html/v14i1a01p_0001.htm.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Beaumarchais was arriving in London, war broke out between the British and their American colonies at Lexington, MA in April 1775.⁴¹

In his previous missions for the French monarchy, Beaumarchais used an alias. Unfortunately, he was unable to do so in this instance as he had achieved a great deal of notoriety for his work as a playwright on the Figaro plays. Instead of trying to hide who he was, Beaumarchais flaunted it under the guise of going to see his plays being performed. Upon arrival in London, Beaumarchais met with a friend he had met on a trip to Spain: Lord Rochford who was Britain's Foreign Secretary. Rochford was also a close advisor to King George III.⁴²

Beaumarchais and Rochford immediately renewed their friendship and the two spent a great deal of time together. While in Spain the two friends indulged in drink and song, and Rochford was eager to do so again. Beaumarchais used his friendship to get the Foreign Secretary intoxicated in order to obtain information. Rochford disclosed that d'Éon was frequently observed entering the home of pro-American and anti-royal advocate John Wilkes.⁴³

Wilkes had good reason to hate the monarchy. At 32 years old he was elected to Parliament in 1757, and ended up incarcerated for libel by creating an anti-Tory newspaper and criticizing the king. After he was released from prison, he was again arrested and jailed again for libel. The district he represented reelected him three times and Parliament negated them. Following the battles at Lexington and Concord, Wilkes became a fierce advocate for colonial independence and assisted the Sons of Liberty.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Harlow G. Unger, *Improbable Patriot The Secret History of Monsieur de Beaumarchais, the French Playwright Who Saved the American Revolution*, (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2011), 88-89.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 89.

Beaumarchais had another friend in London who was able to introduce him to Wilkes. Wilkes then invited the playwright to dinner and d'Éon was in attendance. Beaumarchais played his role and all but ignored d'Éon. There were a couple of dissatisfied Americans also present who were discussing the war in North America and the Siege of Boston.⁴⁵

Later that evening d'Éon, who correctly determined why Beaumarchais was actually at the Wilkes house, eventually confided in the playwright that he was a woman. D'Éon, who of course was not a woman, showed Beaumarchais his scars from battle in the Seven Years War and compared himself to Joan of Arc. D'Éon's plan was to win over Beaumarchais to help with his troubles with the French monarchy. Beaumarchais agreed to meet d'Éon the following day, and then refocused his attention on the Americans who were discussing the need for arms shipments.⁴⁶

Before returning to America, Benjamin Franklin laid the groundwork for some small scale arms shipments in London. The Americans mentioned that without a large influx of materiel, their cause was hopeless. Beaumarchais, remembering the lessons of Pâris Duverney years before, saw opportunity. Beaumarchais learned that with America's very large coastline that other arms smugglers were already operating and delivering much needed materiel to the Americans.⁴⁷

After several dinner parties, d'Éon paid Beaumarchais a visit and reiterated his demands for money and added the additional condition of being able to return to France without fear of imprisonment. Beaumarchais reassured d'Éon that women were not imprisoned in France. Beaumarchais also went on to explain that should d'Éon reenter France that his apparent gender

⁴⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 92.

would prevent him from being arrested, but of course would lose certain civil rights afforded only to men.⁴⁸

The two spies eventually agreed on money to have d'Éon turn over the papers in his possession. In front of d'Éon, Beaumarchais penned a letter to the king on the rogue spy's behalf. Beaumarchais chose his wording very carefully and used the familiar form of you instead of the customary Your Majesty. Beaumarchais knew that his use of words would ensure that the king would never see it, but Vergennes would. Vergennes figured out what Beaumarchais was up to and sent a letter back instructing him to inform d'Éon not to enter France except if he wore woman's clothing and that he was prohibited from wearing his Croix de Saint Louis while dressed as such.⁴⁹

Beaumarchais briefly returned to France to obtain d'Éon's amnesty documents and money. Upon his return to London, Beaumarchais met with d'Éon for the exchange. Beaumarchais correctly assumed that d'Éon would withhold some of the documents, so Beaumarchais filled some of the stacks of currency with blank paper. Later, Beaumarchais sent d'Éon a letter explaining if he wanted the remaining amount, he would have to turn over all of the documents.⁵⁰

The two spies met again for the exchange. D'Éon turned over documents he withheld and Beaumarchais counted out the money bill by bill. However, Beaumarchais was able to pocket about 40,000 livres as he counted out the currency. D'Éon later found the shortage and attempted

⁴⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 92-93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 93.

to slander Beaumarchais in the British press and to Vergennes. Beaumarchais ignored the spy and the whole affair was done.⁵¹

Meanwhile as the affair with d'Éon was playing out like one of Beaumarchais' characters, he spent a great deal of time at the Wilkes House. During that time he met an American named Arthur Lee. Lee and Beaumarchais quickly became friends. Lee passionately championed the American cause and how it would benefit the French to help them against their mutual enemy: Britain.⁵²

Lee boasted to Beaumarchais that he was sent to London to obtain arms for the rebels. However, this was untrue as the Secret Committee did not contact Lee until months later. Lee was known to have had a tendency to exaggerate in order to impress people. Lee asked Beaumarchais if he would be able to help establish trade in much needed materiel. There has been some speculation that Lee was aware that Beaumarchais had ties to the French court and that he may have asked Wilkes to arrange the introductions.⁵³

Lee presented an offer to Beaumarchais that if France provided clandestine support to the Americans, they would honor France with a trade agreement. Lee went on to argue that if the Americans were defeated or if they reconciled with the mother country that Britain would be in a much stronger position assuring their dominance over the French. Beaumarchais was very receptive to the idea.⁵⁴ It is unclear if Beaumarchais was motivated by profit, idealism, excitement or some combination of the three. Regardless of the motivation it seems that Beaumarchais was excited about the idea.

⁵¹ Ibid., 93-94.

⁵² Ibid., 95.

⁵³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 139-140.

⁵⁴ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 95-96.

A few weeks later in late October, Lee, Beaumarchais, and a representative of the French court assigned at Vergennes' insistence named Comte de Lauraguais met in London. The trio formulated a plan to have France provide assistance to the Americans while simultaneously giving the French government plausible deniability although the specifics were not yet worked out.⁵⁵ The French government could not be caught providing instruments of war to the rebellious subjects of a sovereign power without instigating a war with the British.

By November 1775, Beaumarchais formulated the idea of establishing a fake trading company to provide a legitimate front for clandestinely smuggling war supplies to the American rebels. Beaumarchais had a clear plan of action as he learned about the arms trade from his friend Duverney years before. In addition to forming the front company, Beaumarchais proposed that the French monarch loan him money so that he could purchase supplies directly from French military arsenals and sell them to the Americans, thus hiding the origin of the materiel. This would allow the French government to be held blameless should the plot have been discovered. The terms of the agreement was that Beaumarchais would provide materiel and the Americans would pay for it in tobacco, indigo and other goods. Arthur Lee had interest in the venture as his family stood to profit from the tobacco sales which presumably would be paid for by the Continental Congress.⁵⁶

Later in November, Beaumarchais returned to Versailles triumphantly. He had ended the blackmail threat of d'Éon, and wanted to leverage his success by asking the French court for money to embark on his arms smuggling venture for the American rebels. Beaumarchais indicated that should the French monarch loan him the money, he would convert half of the

⁵⁵ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 140-141.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 142-144.

French currency into Portuguese currency to essentially launder the money. This would make the source of the money much more difficult if not completely impossible to trace. The other half of the million livres Beaumarchais asked for would be used to procure weapons and other materiel from the French military arsenals. Initially, Vergennes rejected Beaumarchais proposal. A short time later Beaumarchais wrote a passionate plea to the King Louis XVI to assist the Americans.⁵⁷

Louis XVI did not respond to Beaumarchais' letter, and the playwright wrote several more letters attempting to turn his monarch to his cause. Beaumarchais' subsequent letters were very direct and borderline disrespectful towards the king. Beaumarchais had a reputation for being blunt, so the tone of his letters was hardly surprising. Despite seemingly achieving success in the d'Éon affair, closer inspection of the documents he turned over revealed that there were several key documents missing. The king again needed Beaumarchais to go take care of the rogue spy.⁵⁸

The main issue facing Beaumarchais was that he had alienated d'Éon upon assumed conclusion the last time he was in London. The two spies traded insults publicly and privately. One of Beaumarchais' friends leaked to the British press that d'Éon was going to disclose his gender, presumably as being female. There is some speculation that Beaumarchais placed a bet upwards of £100,000. The amount is questionable, but regardless when d'Éon became aware of it; he was outraged and refused to negotiate with the playwright.⁵⁹

In early 1776 while in London as the d'Éon drama was unfolding, Beaumarchais continued to meet with Lee. Lee had misinterpreted a letter from the Secret Committee as an

⁵⁷ Ibid., 149-150.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 150-151.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 154-155.

appointment of his agency in England. The two plotted a strategy to convince Louis XVI to permit the plan to supply the Americans. They finally decided on arguing that the British government's true objective was the French colonial possessions in the Caribbean. Beaumarchais took this one step further in a letter to Vergennes that the Americans would be inclined to seize the islands if they were successful without French support in their war with Britain.⁶⁰

By March 1776, the Secret Committee commissioned Silas Deane to procure materiel for 25,000 troops. This was a dire time for the American rebels and the Revolution was in serious danger of being suppressed.⁶¹ The Continental Army was short on virtually everything but more specifically gunpowder. The colonies did not have an adequate domestic capability to produce it. Gunpowder was in such short supply the only viable option open to the Americans was to smuggle in as much as they could get.⁶² Meanwhile, French agents in America had been meeting with the Secret Committee and provided Vergennes with vastly inflated troop numbers. This went a long way in substantiating Beaumarchais' arguments in favor of helping the American rebels. Vergennes did not care about the Americans' ability to defeat the British; he was more concerned with the war going on for a long time which would weaken their ability to challenge France.⁶³

Vergennes, who was yearning to get revenge against Britain for their humiliating defeat at the end of the Seven Years War, approached the other ministers in the French cabinet to obtain support for Beaumarchais' plan. The ministers were initially unconvinced and Vergennes increased his arguments claiming that France would gain immense wealth by helping the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 155-156.

⁶¹ Ibid., 159.

⁶² Orlando W. Stephenson, "The Supply of Gunpowder in 1776", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1925): 271-281.

⁶³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 161-162.

Americans. Eventually the other ministers agreed with Vergennes and he took his proposal before the king. Louis XVI was not eager to go to war with Britain as he felt that France could not prevail. The king had reservations about violating their treaty with the British. A few weeks later Louis XVI, due to Vergennes arguing war was inevitable agreed to the plan and entrusted Beaumarchais with its execution. The king ordered that Beaumarchais be given a loan of one million livres to get the venture started.⁶⁴ The irony is that no one told Beaumarchais initially.⁶⁵ It is unclear if the French monarch actually trusted Beaumarchais or if he was simply viewed as someone expendable to keep the French government blameless. Beaumarchais received the one million livre loan on 10 June 1776.⁶⁶

In June 1776, Deane finally arrived in Bordeaux, France and the overland journey took several weeks before he arrived in Paris on 6 July 1776. Deane was concerned that British agents were keeping an eye on him. As it turned out his fears were not unfounded. He also had no idea that the Continental Congress had declared independence just days before. Deane had to ensure that he did not even hint at the possibility of independence, instead having to focus his arguments on the immorality of taxing its subjects without their consent or representation.⁶⁷

Deane was given 200,000 Continental Dollars to procure weapons, gunpowder, musket balls, and clothing for 25,000 troops and 100 cannons. Deane quickly realized that this was insufficient because the Continental Dollar was not backed by hard currency and inflation was running rampant as the Congress kept printing more money. Deane was unable to support himself with the amount that Congress gave him, and was forced to use his personal funds.

Benjamin Franklin suggested that Deane talk to Dr. Edward Bancroft whom Deane had tutored

⁶⁴ Ibid., 163-164.

⁶⁵ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 156-170.

16 years before back in Connecticut. Bancroft had worked for a friend of Arthur Lee who was then residing in London. On 8 July 1776 Dr. Bancroft visited Deane at his Paris hotel.⁶⁸

On 9 July 1776, Bancroft and Deane, armed with a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, paid a visit to his good friend Dr. Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg who had access to the higher echelons of the French government including Vergennes. Dubourg had attempted to broker an arms deal with the Congress a short time before. Due to the lack of permission by Louis XVI, the deal never matriculated. During their meeting, Dubourg insisted that he be the Americans' sole provider of materiel and stated that Vergennes could not risk being seen talking to the Americans. Deane, ever the shrewd businessman, determined that Dubourg was trying to personally capitalize on the deal. Deane insisted upon a letter of introduction to meet Vergennes.⁶⁹

11 July 1776, Bancroft, Deane and Dubourg went to Versailles to meet with Vergennes. For some unknown reason, Vergennes did not receive the letter of introduction and the visit was a complete surprise. However, Vergennes still met with the trio for two hours at a remote location away from the palace. The difficulties in negotiation became clear quickly as Vergennes did not speak English, nor did Deane speak French. Conrad Alexandre Gérard, Vergennes secretary was proficient in English and translated.⁷⁰

During the meeting Deane got right to the point and explained his purpose for the visit. He told Vergennes that he was on a secret mission to obtain French help in the war with Britain. Deane, who was not a diplomat by trade, apologized to Vergennes if he inadvertently violated

⁶⁸ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 173-174.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 174.

any diplomatic protocols. Vergennes was amused by Deane's admission and allowed him to continue.⁷¹

Vergennes explained that any assistance to the Americans would offend the British government and potentially lead to war. He went on to explain that if the colonies declared independence then discussions would need to take place in the French government to determine if or when they would provide assistance. Vergennes expressed his opinion that an American defeat in the war would not have been in France's best interests. He went on to express his best wishes from the French government and offered Deane the King's protection while in France. Vergennes warned Deane to maintain his cover as a merchant in order to keep from offending the British and dragging the French into a war. Vergennes appeared to be impressed with Deane and told him to contact Gérard if he needed to meet.⁷²

Vergennes went on a few days later in writing Deane that the 13,000 muskets Dubourg negotiated for would be delivered and that Deane should contact Beaumarchais who ran an import-export firm in Paris who could provide the Americans materiel for reasonable prices on credit up to three million livres. Dubourg warned Deane that the playwright was among other things too self indulgent (specifically in terms of drinking and women) and not a businessman and that Deane should avoid contacting him. Deane complied with the suggestion for the time being.⁷³

On 12 July 1776, Deane, Bancroft, and Dubourg met with Vergennes again to discuss the possibility of purchasing weapons, equipment and uniforms for 25,000 troops as well as 200 cannons on credit. Vergennes informed Deane that he would attempt to help him with the

⁷¹ Ibid., 174-175.

⁷² Ibid., 175.

⁷³ Ibid., 176.

uniforms, but the government could not sell them weapons of any kind because it would have violated the peace treaty with the British. Vergennes let it slip that Deane could purchase the weapons from a private business and again suggested that he contact Beaumarchais. Vergennes went on to let Deane know that French ports were available for non-military trade but if he was discreet, arms trading would not be interfered with either.⁷⁴

Despite the earlier warnings from Dubourg who was most likely acting out of self interest and Deane's own reluctance based on Dubourg's attacks on the playwright, Deane agreed to meet Beaumarchais. Gérard informed Deane that Beaumarchais would be capable of handling the American merchant's needs for materiel.⁷⁵ Little did Deane know at the time was that the French playwright was already waiting willing and able to provide the Americans with supplies through his front company that he named: *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*.⁷⁶

Sometime before the 12 July meeting, Dubourg wrote to Vergennes attempting to discredit Beaumarchais by stating the same character attacks that he expressed to Deane.⁷⁷ In his letter to Dubourg dated 16 July 1776, Beaumarchais responded to every one of the accusations that he made regarding the playwright. Beaumarchais in typical dramatic manner sarcastically addressed the character attacks. Beaumarchais discussed that he had many women in his life that included his four sisters and his niece. The playwright further went on to point out that his father and he had a successful watch making business. The letter goes on and mocks Dubourg for his statements.⁷⁸ It is unclear how Beaumarchais became aware of the doctor's personal attacks

⁷⁴ Ibid., 176-177.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁶ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

⁷⁷ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 120-121.

⁷⁸ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Dr. Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg, 16 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 225-226.

against him. There is no evidence that Deane mention what Dubourg said to him when they spoke with Vergennes.

Beaumarchais' first contact with Silas Deane was in his letter (written in French) to the New England merchant dated 18 July 1776. The playwright turned arms trafficker started off explaining that he did not speak English and that he needed to wait for someone to translate for him. He went on to tell Deane that he had been working on the plan for some time to provide to provide the Americans with the supplies they needed to wage war that could no longer be procured in England.⁷⁹ It is not clear when Beaumarchais became aware of Deane's presence or his mission. Given the content of the letter and that Dubourg would not undermine his own financial interests, Vergennes or one of his agents most likely informed Beaumarchais about Deane.

Deane did not respond to Beaumarchais' letter of the 18th until 20 July 1776. Given that he was still reluctant to the idea of meeting with Beaumarchais while in his meeting with Vergennes, Deane's letter was mostly likely written after the meeting with the minister. In Deane's letter he informed Beaumarchais that he was already aware of him and the merchant included a copy of his commission. Deane informed the playwright that he already met with Vergennes with no success.⁸⁰ Chances are Beaumarchais already was aware of the meeting. Deane went on to express his desire to procure arms, and equipment for the 25,000 troops and

⁷⁹ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Silas Deane, 18 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 228.

⁸⁰ Silas Deane letter to Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais, 20 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 229-230.

the cannons that Vergennes denied him. He went on to say that he would like to buy the materiel on credit and went on to offer tobacco and other goods within six months as payment.⁸¹

Beaumarchais confirmed in his letter to Deane 22 July 1776 that the Continental Congress would pay for the goods upon delivery. The playwright also went on to express his admiration for the American cause and how he wanted to serve them as he would France.⁸² It is not clear if Beaumarchais actually believed in the cause of American liberty or if his letter was just an attempt at good customer service.

Deane responded to Beaumarchais in his letter dated 24 July 1776. Deane agreed to Beaumarchais' terms of payment. Deane expressed concern that the weapons would have to be smuggled so great care was needed not to alert the British to their dealings. Deane admitted his language difficulties and explained that Dr. Bancroft was translating for him and that he did not want to embarrass himself. Deane being the dutiful merchant expressed that the weapons were his primary concern provided that they were good quality.⁸³

Meanwhile, as the terms of the arrangement between Deane and Beaumarchais was playing out, Dubourg was attempting to usurp Beaumarchais' position as arms trafficker to the Americans. In his letter to Vergennes dated 2 August 1776, the French playwright complained the Dubourg was attempting to get Gérard to back him and not Beaumarchais. He went on to

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Silas Deane, 22 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 230.

It should be noted that this letter is incomplete. Only Deane's response letter dated 24 July 1776 shows that he received it.

⁸³ Silas Deane letter to Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais, 24 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 231-232.

request Vergennes to intercede so his operations could go on unmolested.⁸⁴ Dubourg kept trying to discredit Beaumarchais in the eyes of the Foreign Minister. Beaumarchais responded in kind by warning the minister that Dubourg's scheming threatened to expose the whole operation. Finally, Vergennes had enough and had Gérard arrange a meeting between the doctor, the playwright and the merchant. Gérard stated in no uncertain terms that Beaumarchais was Deane's sole point of contact for their arms trafficking matter.⁸⁵

Gérard further went on that Arthur Lee disclosed too much information and that they needed to avoid dealing with him. Deane later wrote Lee stating that he was working with Beaumarchais and that Lee should discontinue his dealings in the matter. Lee felt betrayed and insulted because he brokered the initial deal with Beaumarchais.⁸⁶ It should be noted that Lee was never empowered to negotiate with let alone come to any agreement that would bind the Continental Congress financially.

Lee wrote to Deane later directing him to arrange for a place to live in France and that he would be travelling to France under an assumed name. Lee was known to be paranoid and maintained lists of several Americans that he believed were traitors. Lee even went so far as to ask Deane to write to the Congress accusing various people of being disloyal. Deane refused and Lee accused him of being a part of the disloyal conspiracy that he imagined internally.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Vergennes, 2 August 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 234-235.

⁸⁵ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 187-188.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 188-190.

Beaumarchais confirms Lee's instability in his letter to Vergennes dated 13 August 1776 where he discusses Deane being threatened by Lee.⁸⁸

Regardless of the machinations of Lee, Beaumarchais and Deane continued with their plan. On 16 August 1776, Beaumarchais wrote Vergennes to inform him that Deane had made all the arrangements for transportation of the materiel, but the ships had not yet arrived.⁸⁹ In the latter part of 1776, Beaumarchais made good on his word and acquired large amounts of the goods that Deane requested. The materiel was being collected in Le Havre and drawing attention of the British who were issuing stern warnings to the French government. Of course Vergennes downplayed it as they were sending the shipments to the French colonies.⁹⁰

By August 1776 the word reached France that the Continental Congress had declared independence. Deane had not yet received the text of the Declaration of Independence nor had he received any instructions from the Secret Committee. The same week Arthur Lee finally arrived in France. Vergennes and Deane both did not wish to meet with him. Lee returned to London embittered and started to write his brothers in the Continental Congress warning them that Deane and Beaumarchais were fraudulently charging the Congress for free supplies. Neither Deane nor Beaumarchais had any idea that Lee was spreading the lies about them. Eventually, Lee's attacks against Beaumarchais and Deane would be a divisive issue in the Congress.⁹¹

By the end of 1776, Benjamin Franklin arrived in France and immediately called on Dubourg. The doctor's hopes of starting a thriving arms trafficking business with the Americans

⁸⁸ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Vergennes, 2 August 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 235-236.

⁸⁹ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Vergennes, 16 August 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 237.

⁹⁰ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 127-128.

⁹¹ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 192-194.

were renewed. The Dubourg was also known to have been boasting publicly at the time about the prospect. Franklin brought with him a shipment of goods from America that he immediately sold for a significant profit. Franklin's instructions were virtually identical to Deane's: obtain weapons, ammunition, other materiel and money for the American rebels.⁹²

With supplies massing at La Havre, Beaumarchais' involvement in the smuggling came to the attention of the British who again voiced objections and threatened war with France. Louis XVI ordered an immediate cessation of all of Beaumarchais' operations in that regard. The king was concerned that France would be thrust into war on behalf of a people that hadn't even paid for the supplies. Deane wrote a passionate letter to Louis XVI arguing that if France supplied the Americans then there would be no reason for the rebels to vie for peace with the British government. A week later, Vergennes seemingly convinced by Deane's arguments rescinded the order and allowed the shipments to proceed.⁹³

Just prior to the order prohibiting shipments to the Americans, one of Beaumarchais' vessels the *Amphitrite* had already left port. She was carrying 52 brass cannons, 20,000 cannon balls, 9,000 grenades, 6,500 muskets, 320 blankets, 8,500 socks, 4,000 shirts and other articles. Unfortunately, one of the French officers, Major Philippe Charles Tronson du Coudray, attempted to assume command of the vessel presumably to try and profit from its valuable cargo. In response Captain Fautrelle, the commanding officer of the vessel, ordered the ship to reverse course and return to France. With Beaumarchais' other two ships stuck in port, the return of the *Amphitrite* seemed to signal the collapse of the entire venture and the American Revolution.⁹⁴

⁹² Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 126-127.

⁹³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 195-197.

⁹⁴ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 129-130.

Upon receiving word that the *Amphitrite* had returned to France, Beaumarchais dispatched his agent Jean-Baptiste Théveneau de Francy to deliver a message to the Major. In his letter to Major du Coudray dated 22 January 1777, Beaumarchais called the Major's conduct unacceptable and that Captain Fautrelle was in sole command of the *Amphitrite*. He went on to state that if the Major could not accept that, he could find another vessel to book passage on.⁹⁵ Although, Beaumarchais and Deane were able to convince Vergennes to allow the vessel to depart, Vergennes was insistent that it only sail to French territory in the West Indies. Beaumarchais issued verbal instructions to Captain Fautrelle to head to Portsmouth, NH.⁹⁶

The shipment to Portsmouth, NH was essential to the outcome of the War of American Independence. If one prescribes to the notion that the French Alliance was the deciding factor in the Revolutionary War, then the outcome of the Saratoga Campaign was the catalyst event that prompted it. The shipment was very important because the supplies were delivered to General Horatio Gates' army in the north that spring. There is no doubt that the supplies were essential to the success of Gates' army in defeating General John Burgoyne's army in October of 1777.⁹⁷ It is common knowledge that the Americans were running low on ammunition by the end of the fighting. It is logical to assume that had the shipments not arrived, the Americans would have ran out of ammunition and Burgoyne would have been victorious. Following that logic, it is clear that this particular shipment essentially saved the American Revolution.

After delivering her supplies, the *Amphitrite* was preparing to make the return voyage to France when Captain Fautrelle was confronted by John Paul Jones and a crew with orders from Congress to take command of the vessel. Jones told Fautrelle that the vessel was to be pressed

⁹⁵ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Major Philippe Charles Tronson du Coudray, 22 January 1777, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome III* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 35.

⁹⁶ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 131-132.

⁹⁷ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

into privateer service and any loot would be split three ways. One third of the spoils would go to the Congress, one third to the crew and one third to Beaumarchais as the vessel's owner. Captain Fautrelle was not about to relinquish command of his vessel to Jones and prepared to repel Jones and crew. Fortunately, the captain of one of Beaumarchais' other vessels defused the situation by offering to take Jones and crew back to France to obtain a vessel. Jones left without further incident.⁹⁸

The *Amphitrite* returned to France with no further complications; however her cargo hold was empty. When Beaumarchais learned of the vessel's return without payment he was on the brink of financial ruin. Without compensation, Beaumarchais' creditors were threatening to seize his ships. In his letter to Vergennes dated 1 July 1777, Beaumarchais complained that the Americans did not pay for the shipment and pleaded with the minister for help.⁹⁹ Vergennes authorized Beaumarchais a loan for an additional one million livres. However this loan was only a temporary measure in order to keep the shipments flowing to America.

Beaumarchais and Deane were unaware that Arthur Lee had been corresponding with Benjamin Franklin and the Congress claiming that the shipments that Beaumarchais provided through the Hortalez front company were in fact a gift from King Louis XVI. Lee was able to convince Franklin that the goods did not require repayment.¹⁰⁰ Because of Lee's and Franklin's statements that the goods were a gift, none of Beaumarchais' or Deane's letters to the Congress requesting payment for the goods already shipped were answered.¹⁰¹ As a result of the lack of

⁹⁸ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 139-140.

⁹⁹ Pierre August Caron de Beaumarchais letter to Vergennes, 22 March 1777, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome III* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 73-75.

¹⁰⁰ Georges Lemaitre, *Beaumarchais: Who Wrote The Barber of Seville & The Marriage of Figaro and Helped Finance the American Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 230-231.

¹⁰¹ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 141.

payment, Beaumarchais dispatched his aide de Francy to America to find out why he had not been paid and instructed Francy to come to an agreement to get everything back on track.¹⁰²

Deane and Franklin started to question Lee's sanity. Shortly after word had reached Paris that Beaumarchais' ships had reached New Hampshire, the British ambassador to France had a complete and accurate shipping manifest and protested to Vergennes. Lee started accusing Bancroft of being a British spy. Deane and Franklin rejected the accusations as being baseless. As it turned out, Bancroft was actually spying for the British and passing along the information via a dead drop system.¹⁰³

The British had other spies keeping tabs on the Americans. One of the spies, Captain Joseph Hynson, was a close friend of Deane's personal secretary and was hired by Deane to ship correspondence to America. The only issue was that the spy was giving the letters to the British government instead. Deane began to suspect Hynson was a spy in late 1777 and the captain was promptly fired. Deane forbade his secretary from having any further contact with him.¹⁰⁴

Lee blamed Deane for not vetting the people he interacted with properly. Lee's accusations of spying against Deane's secretary and Bancroft continued. Ironically, Lee's own personal secretary John Thornton was also a British agent. Another odd event was that Lee consistently wrote a friend of his in the Prime Minister's cabinet detailing the Americans' discussions with the French and Spanish governments.¹⁰⁵ It is unclear if Lee was a traitor or simply incompetent in his writing to a high ranking member of the British government.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 254-255

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 255-256.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 256-257.

By July 1777, the British ambassador confronted Vergennes about American privateer vessels being outfitted in France. The ambassador accused the French of violating the peace treaty and threatened to declare war on the French. Vergennes was angry over the Americans' lack of discretion in their dealings in France. Franklin and Deane wrote to Vergennes apologizing for bringing France to the brink of war with the British Empire. It is doubtful they were sincere as the entire point of their mission was to gain France's entry into the war.¹⁰⁶

Unknown to the American delegation at the time, was that Vergennes was already discussing the possibility of declaring war with Louis XVI. He argued that the French needed to either openly ally with the Americans or totally turn their back on them. It was becoming clear to the French that the Americans could not prevail on their own through arms smuggling alone, they needed help. As Louis was not very decisive in decision making, his ministers were secretly preparing for war with Britain.¹⁰⁷

As the affairs with the spying and the privateers were unfolding, Beaumarchais was still hard at work providing the Americans assistance. In addition to materiel, he was also the main point of contact for volunteer officers seeking American commissions. The playwright was gifted at filtering out those who were useful from those who were not. The Americans were inundated with unemployed European Seven Years War veterans, many of whom were demanding high ranking commissions. A former Prussian Captain named Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben came to Paris and approached Vergennes about obtaining a commission in America. Vergennes sent him to Beaumarchais.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 257.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 258.

¹⁰⁸ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

The Americans had such an influx of foreign soldiers, many of whom were problematic that they had instructed the commissioners in Paris to refuse any more troops. When Beaumarchais met von Steuben, he immediately took a liking to the Prussian. Since the Americans did not want any more foreign troops, the playwright would have to be as creative as a character in one of his plays.¹⁰⁹

Beaumarchais dressed the Prussian Captain up as a Lieutenant General and hired two actors to serve as his aides. Beaumarchais then took the Prussian around to various social events in Paris introducing him to everyone of stature that he met. After meeting Deane and Franklin they wrote to General George Washington and informed the Commander in Chief that von Steuben was coming. Beaumarchais then lent the Prussian almost 6,000 livres for the transatlantic voyage and the Prussian accompanied Francy to America.¹¹⁰ Von Steuben's contributions to the American Revolution during the harsh winter at Valley Forge in 1777 are well known in transforming the army into a professional, disciplined fighting force capable of challenging the British in formal European style battles.

In his letter to his secretary Francy, dated 20 December 1777, Beaumarchais expressed his frustration with the operation as some of the goods that were traded as payment were seized by the French government. He further went on to explain that he had more materiel ready for shipment.¹¹¹ This letter although addressed to Francy was actually directed at the Continental Congress due to Beaumarchais signing it Roderigue Hortalez et Cie. which he used extensively when corresponding with the Congress.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 141.

¹¹¹ Beaumarchais letter to Francy, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome III* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 231-235.

By November 1777, news of General John Burgoyne's surrender reached Europe. Beaumarchais in a series of letters spanning from 5 December 1777 through 19 December 1777 argued that since Burgoyne surrendered that the British would be looking for a negotiated peace which would be detrimental to French interests. He argued that if France did not recognize the United States then Britain would. Beaumarchais was pushing the minister towards an alliance with the American rebels.¹¹² As it turned out, the British were attempting a negotiated peace with the Americans. They offered the Americans the same status and home rule that they had in 1763. While the American commissioners had no interest in a negotiated reconciliation they played along overtly enough that the French spies would notice.¹¹³

On 6 February 1778, the French government signed two treaties with the United States. The first was a trade agreement and the second was a military alliance treaty. The treaty gave the United States the right to seize Canada and Bermuda, and in return France was granted the right to conquer the British West Indies. In signing the treaty, France became the first nation to recognize the United States as a sovereign and independent nation.¹¹⁴

In his letter to Beaumarchais dated 11 June 1778, Francy informed Beaumarchais that he had met with the Committee of Commerce and that they found the claim to be valid.¹¹⁵ They signed a contract that clearly outlined what goods Beaumarchais would provide and articulated

¹¹² Beaumarchais letters to Vergennes 5 December 1777- 19 December 1777, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome III* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 217-231.

¹¹³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 273-274.

¹¹⁴ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 143-144.

¹¹⁵ Francy Letter to Beaumarchais, 11 June 1778, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome IV* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 117-124.

how the Americans would make payment. Beaumarchais kept providing materiel, but the Congress never ratified the contract that the Committee had negotiated.¹¹⁶

By the end of 1777, the Congress was frustrated with Deane. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the commissions that Deane granted. The commissions combined with Arthur Lee's attacks against Deane prompted the Congress to recall him to answer for the allegations.¹¹⁷ John Adams would replace Deane in Paris. In his letter to Beaumarchais dated 29 March 1778, he informed the playwright that despite Francy being dispatched to America that he was going to attempt to get payment for the supplies upon his return.¹¹⁸

When Beaumarchais learned about Deane's recall he wrote Vergennes in an attempt to help save his friend's reputation. In his letter to Vergennes dated 13 March 1778, Beaumarchais argued that the French court should give Deane some sort of gesture to show the merchant's character and high esteem the French court held him in. Beaumarchais' letter goes on to point out that Arthur Lee's accusations and actions were the reason for Deane's recall.¹¹⁹ Vergennes agreed and provided Deane a portrait of Louis XVI along with a letter to the Congress from Vergennes.¹²⁰

In his letter to the Continental Congress dated 25 March 1778, Vergennes defended Deane's actions in France.¹²¹ Benjamin Franklin also wrote a glowing endorsement of Deane to the President of the Continental Congress. Franklin, in his letter dated 31 March 1778, discussed

¹¹⁶ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Deane letter to Beaumarchais, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome IV* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 96.

¹¹⁹ Beaumarchais letter to Vergennes, 13 March 1778, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome IV* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 77.

¹²⁰ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 144-145.

¹²¹ Vergennes to the Continental Congress, 25 March 1778, in *Silas Deane Online*, <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents.htm>.

that the allegations against Deane were false and based on deceptions and that Deane's conduct was admirable.¹²² It is clear from Franklin's letter that he was discussing Arthur Lee's personal issues. Deane was to be transported home by the French navy partially to show that he acted in the fledgling nation's best interests.¹²³

Deane returned to America in July 1778 aboard a French warship and was accompanied by the new minister plenipotentiary Gérard who had served as translator between the American delegation and Vergennes. The French also brought 4,000 ground troops with them to aid their new allies against the British. Deane sent word to the Congress about how to receive the official French delegation and there was a ceremony welcoming them.¹²⁴

Upon returning to America, Deane met with his old friend Benedict Arnold who was serving as military governor of Philadelphia at the time. This friendship would prove to be problematic for Deane as Arnold's loyalty was already being questioned by this point. Deane would not accept that his friend, the celebrated hero of Saratoga, would be disloyal to the American cause. In the meantime, Arnold allowed Deane and Gérard to stay with him until they made other arrangements.¹²⁵

After getting situated, Deane wanted to meet with Congress to address the allegations against him. However, they refused to meet with him. Given the accusations that all seemed to be vague and generalized, many members of the Continental Congress were not even sure why they had recalled Deane in the first place. Congress was far more interested in questioning Arnold's loyalty eventually culminating in the directive to court martial him which later led to

¹²² Franklin to the President of the Continental Congress, 31 March 1778 in *Silas Deane Online*, <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents.htm>.

¹²³ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 144-145.

¹²⁴ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 285-286.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 286-287.

his defection to the British. Deane's friendship with Arnold would sully his reputation even further.¹²⁶

The situation with Deane created a deep polarization in the Congress that formed two camps: the pro Deane faction and the pro Lee faction sometimes called the Lee-Adams Junto. Deane's recall was in part due to commissions that he had issued for foreign officers without authority from Congress to do so. Samuel Adams argued that Deane sent them so many officers that they did not know what to do with them all. The fact is that the one officer they objected to, was du Coudray, who Deane tried to prevent from going to America in the first place. Adams and the other delegates did not acknowledge the exceptional officers that Deane commissioned who became trusted and valued members of Washington's inner circle such as Lafayette and von Steuben.¹²⁷

The accusations against Deane appear to be a way to increase the power of the Lee-Adams faction. There seems to be indications that the Lees wanted revenge against Franklin over some development issues in the Ohio River Valley. Their goal was to eventually get Franklin himself recalled. This was a grievous error as Franklin was revered and very few people would dare speak against the elder statesman. The accusations against Franklin hurt the Lee-Adams faction and strengthened Deane's position.¹²⁸

After waiting a month, Deane was called to testify before Congress in August. Deane's testimony was postponed three times before finally being allowed to speak. For two days, Deane recounted his actions during his tenure in France. The President of the Congress Henry Laurens told Deane that Congress would not make a decision until they heard from the opposing side. His

¹²⁶ Ibid., 287.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 287-288.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 288-290.

statements were unclear as to what that meant because Deane was only being accused of commissioning too many officers.¹²⁹

In September, Arthur Lee wrote the Continental Congress and accused Deane of financial misconduct while in France. The accusations were vague with no specific instances of any wrongdoing and were all attacks against Deane's character based on speculation. Arthur Lee's brother, Richard Henry Lee, who was a delegate to the Congress, learned that Deane's secretary, Carmichael, was accusing Deane of purchasing a privateer vessel with public funds and planned to profit from the spoils. As it turned out, the allegations were false as Deane purchased the vessel with his private funds. When Carmichael testified before Congress, his testimony quickly fell apart and the members of the Lee-Adams faction accused the secretary of collaborating with Deane to conceal his alleged crimes.¹³⁰

Deane would find that defending himself against the allegations of financial misconduct would be nearly impossible. First, Deane did not know that he was being accused of financial improprieties so he did not assemble the accounting records. Second, even if he had, travelling with such incrementing documents would have been very dangerous if the British found them.¹³¹ Third, in their letter to Deane dated 3 March 1776, the Secret Committee instructed Deane to pose as a merchant and keep his business operations continuing so that his cover would remain intact.¹³² In order to follow his instructions, Deane intertwined his public and private dealings to conceal the arms smuggling he was involved in.¹³³

¹²⁹ Ibid., 290.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 290-291.

¹³¹ Ibid., 291.

¹³² Secret Committee to Silas Deane, 3 March 1776, in *Silas Deane Online*, <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents.htm>.

¹³³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 292.

Deane's financial situation in France was less than ideal which makes accusations that he was somehow stealing public funds highly unlikely. Upon his appointment to France, the Continental Congress advanced him \$200,000 in Continental Dollars in order to buy gifts for the Native Americans to help maintain Deane's cover as a merchant. However, the money was essentially worthless and the banks in France refused to accept the notes. Deane was forced to use his own funds in order to sustain himself prior to Franklin's arrival. The Secret Committee promised Deane a five percent commission on the arms sales, but was never paid. By the time of his return, Deane was in financial trouble and was in dire need of money.¹³⁴

Deane waited for five months after returning to America for the opportunity to answer the charges against him. Since the Congress was unresponsive, Deane published his defense in the *Pennsylvania Packet*. Sometimes referred to as Deane's broadside, the work articulates the work he did in France.¹³⁵ He described the animosity that Arthur Lee and his brothers had towards him and even disclosed that Arthur Lee was disclosing secrets to a high ranking member of the British government. Deane went on to describe how he was not able to make his case to the Congress because of the Lee's manipulations.¹³⁶

Deane's disclosures shook up the Continental Congress. The two camps were bitterly divided between the pro Deane Francophile faction and the Lee-Adams Anglophile faction. The birth of the Federalist and Republican parties in the early republic years can be traced to these divides in the Continental Congress. Thomas Paine, the radical who published *Common Sense*, as well as a Secretary of the Committee for Foreign Affairs launched his own counter attack against Deane. Paine even lied about Deane not having anything to do with the arms that were used at

¹³⁴ Ibid., 292-293.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 293-294.

¹³⁶ Deane to the Free and Independent Citizens of the United States of North America, December 1778, in *Silas Deane Online*.

Saratoga. Paine claimed that the materiel was a gift from King Louis XVI. Finally, Gérard interceded on Deane's behalf and clearly articulated that the French government did not provide any support prior to the treaties. President Laurens attempted to get Congress to censure Deane. The delegates did not move on the motion, so Laurens resigned. He was replaced by Deane supporter John Jay.¹³⁷

Finally, as a result of Deane's broadside, the delegates in Congress wanted to hear what Deane had to say. Deane addressed the Congress for three days carefully detailing all of his activities in Europe. He avoided the sort of character attacks that were being used against him. Deane directly discussed the allegations of financial misconduct by clearly articulating that he did not use any public money for personal gain, for if he had, he would not have been in the economic hardships that he was in at that time.¹³⁸

As the drama with Deane and the Congress was unfolding the onset of hostilities between the French and the British eliminated the need to be clandestine as the French government could openly provide materiel support in their own vessels. If they needed additional ships they requested competitive bids. Beaumarchais' firm was no longer the sole provider of materiel to the American rebels.¹³⁹ Although the Hortalez firm was no longer a monopoly, Beaumarchais kept it operating until the end of the war.

Paine's attacks on Deane did not help the Lee's case against the New England merchant. On 12 January 1777, the Continental Congress condemned Paine's statements and dismissed him from his position as Secretary of the Committee for Foreign Affairs. The Congress also acknowledged that Beaumarchais' shipments prior to the alliance in 1778 were not a gift from

¹³⁷ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 295-299.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-298.

¹³⁹ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 146-147.

King Louis XVI. Later, the Congress appointed a Committee on Peace Terms to determine what would be acceptable terms should Britain seek peace. There was a recommendation to remove all the commissioners from France including Arthur Lee. After the vote, two of the commissioners were recalled, Franklin was retained and so was Lee. The vote to recall Lee did not pass because the states were equally divided despite an overwhelming majority of delegates voting for his dismissal. Despite Deane not being found guilty of the allegations against him, he was not allowed to leave Philadelphia for eight months following his testimony.¹⁴⁰

In June, Spain joined the Franco-American alliance and declared war on the British Empire. With Spain's entry into the conflict there was a belief that Britain would finally sue for peace in being confronted by two European nations. The Congress was pressed to appoint a peace commissioner that would lead the American delegation in negotiations with Britain. The pro-Deane faction supported John Jay to lead the negotiations. The Lee-Adams faction supported John Adams as peace commissioner and Arthur Lee's appointment as minister plenipotentiary to Spain. The issue threatened to further divide the already polarized Congress.¹⁴¹

By August a compromise was reached. John Adams would be appointed as the peace commissioner for talks with Britain. Arthur Lee would be recalled, and John Jay would be appointed as minister plenipotentiary to Spain. After the compromise was reached, Deane was granted permission from Congress to return to France. Deane suggested that the Congress appoint someone to conduct a full audit of his transactions to further show he did not commit any questionable acts and to reimburse him for expenses. Congress offered to pay in Continental currency, but Deane refused.

¹⁴⁰ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 298-301.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

Deane returned to France in July and Benjamin Franklin again opened his home to the New England merchant. Deane was resentful because he was not compensated for his service to the Congress and his personal business operations were defunct. After the attacks he suffered by members of the Congress, Deane doubted that he would ever be compensated for his service. Deane's troubles over the course of the previous few years caused him to question if a republican form of government could work.¹⁴²

Deane's frustrations were voiced in several personal letters. The New England merchant voiced concerns that he was not sure if the Americans' republican government would protect rights and wondered if they were better off under the British system. Deane questioned the French alliance as the French government was not involved to do the Americans any favors but for their own purposes. Deane's letters were passed on to the British government by Bancroft. The consequences of the letters' content would be unimaginable for Deane.¹⁴³

On 24 October 1781, Deane's letters were published. The letters were of obvious interest to the British government because Deane suggested reconciling with Britain. This was appealing to the British as the war in North America seemed to have no end in sight. Accusations began to fly that Deane had intentionally passed the letters to the British. The British government had discussed using Deane prior to the letters to help convince the Americans to reconcile, however there is no evidence to suggest that Deane was actually working with the British.¹⁴⁴

At the time the letters were published, Deane was residing in Ghent on personal business. Several individuals wrote Deane condemning his statements and some went so far as to accuse him of treason. Deane was being compared to his former friend Benedict Arnold. The French

¹⁴² Ibid., 305.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 305-306.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 310-312.

government was predictably upset at Deane's statements despite their accuracy. It appears as though only Beaumarchais defended Deane.¹⁴⁵

Deane wrote a very long letter to Benjamin Franklin dated 1 February 1782 in which he defended his statements based on them being private correspondence and that his arguments had merits.¹⁴⁶ Deane wrote Franklin again on 30 March 1782 asking for the elder statesman's help in settling the accounts with Congress so the merchant could be reimbursed for his service.¹⁴⁷ Franklin responded a few weeks later in his letter dated 19 April 1782. Franklin expressed his desire that Deane be reimbursed for his services as he knew Deane's actions in France were honorable. Franklin did however go on to condemn what Deane wrote in his letters stating that he felt Deane's emotions and bitterness clouded his judgment. He ends the letter stating that he was no longer Deane's friend.¹⁴⁸

Ironically, Franklin pressed the Superintendent of Finance of the United States Robert Morris in his letter dated 30 March 1782 to settle Deane's claim and pay him what was owed. He also mentions that Deane "has lost himself entirely".¹⁴⁹ It appears that Franklin felt sorry for Deane on some level. This is further evidenced in his letter to Morris dated 14 December 1782 where Franklin tells Morris that "Settlement of Accounts and Payment of just Balances, is due

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 313.

¹⁴⁶ Deane to Franklin, 1 February 1782, in *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Deane%2C%20Silas%22%20Recipient%3A%22Franklin%2C%20Benjamin%22&s=111131113&sa=deane&r=40>.

¹⁴⁷ Deane to Franklin, 30 March 1782, in *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-37-02-0046>.

¹⁴⁸ Franklin to Deane, 19 April 1782, in *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-37-02-0122>.

¹⁴⁹ Franklin to Morris, 30 March 1782, in *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Deane%20Author%3A%22Franklin%2C%20Benjamin%22%20Recipient%3A%22Morris%2C%20Robert%22&s=121131113&sa=Franklin&r=2&sr=Morris>.

even between Enemies.”¹⁵⁰ It is clear by December 1782; Franklin viewed Deane as an enemy of the United States.

With the Treaty of Paris being signed in November 1782, Deane was living in exile in Ghent. The New England merchant was fearful of returning to France or America. He had openly criticized the French government and in the minds of many Americans, Deane was a traitor. Deane was living in destitution in Ghent, and was forced to borrow money from Bancroft just to survive.¹⁵¹

In March 1783 against John Jay’s warnings not to do so, Deane decided to visit London in an attempt to reestablish his business operations. Jay was concerned that if Deane went to London it would appear as though the allegations of the merchant’s treason were true. Deane went anyway, probably due to desperation over his dire financial state.¹⁵² It appears that Deane had little choice as he could not return to France or the newly independent United States.

On the day after his arrival, Deane had an unexpected visitor: Benedict Arnold. Deane claims that his first impulse was to slam the door in the notorious traitor’s face, but in light of the kindness Arnold extended in Philadelphia a few years before, he could not bring himself to do so. The following day Deane moved to another residence with the hopes that Arnold would not find him. He continued to receive repeated written invitations to Arnold’s home, and eventually Arnold personally came. Deane expelled the former hero and instructed him never to return.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Franklin to Morris, 14 December 1782, in *Founders Online*, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Deane%20Author%3A%22Franklin%2C%20Benjamin%22%20Recipient%3A%22Morris%2C%20Robert%22&s=1211311113&sa=Franklin&r=1&sr=Morris>.

¹⁵¹ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 318-319.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 319-320.

Deane's time in London did not improve his financial situation. Deane was repeatedly warned not to return to the United States because of the hostilities directed at him. Deane's only hope was to get compensated for his service in France. Deane attempted to call on Jay when he was on a trip to London, but was refused. Jay finally wrote to Deane telling him that as long as there was any doubt about his loyalty, the two could not interact. He further went on to mention Arnold showing up at Deane's residence. The destitute merchant could not reasonably expect to be paid for his service.¹⁵⁴ Jay's statements indicate that the Americans were keeping tabs on Deane.

Deane remained in London until 1789 when Jay gave word through an intermediary that Deane should return home to the United States. On 22 September 1789, Deane boarded a ship heading for America. Unexpectedly, he fell ill and died the same day.¹⁵⁵ Deane, who was instrumental in obtaining materiel in the early years of the Revolutionary War and a key player in establishing the French alliance died a poor man who was branded a traitor by his countrymen.

While the situation with Deane was unfolding Beaumarchais repeatedly wrote the Congress in an attempt to get them to pay their debt to him. In 1779 the matter seemed to be settled that the United States did in fact owe Beaumarchais money. In his letter dated 15 January 1779, John Jay, President of the Continental Congress, wrote Beaumarchais apologizing for the lack of payment and that the debt would be settled.¹⁵⁶ However optimistic Jay's letter was, the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 322-323.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 323-324.

The circumstances surrounding Deane's death were suspicious but is irrelevant to this study and will not be discussed.

¹⁵⁶ Jay to Beaumarchais, 15 January 1779, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome V* ed., Donald Spinelli, 3.

payment would not come to fruition as the Congress was at best dysfunctional in trying to govern by committee.

In 1787, Beaumarchais wrote the Congress reminding them of their obligation to pay for the goods and services rendered that he provided during the war. Congress appointed Arthur Lee to evaluate Beaumarchais' claim.¹⁵⁷ Arthur Lee's report to Congress dated September 1788 makes the claim that the French government provided Beaumarchais one million livres which they believed was for the procurement of materiel. Lee's report further goes on to deny that some of the shipments were ever given to the United States. Lee also went on to discount some of the goods and services as he did not believe them to be fair and equitable. The report concludes that the United States did not owe Beaumarchais anything; instead he owed them approximately 1.7 million livres.¹⁵⁸

Beaumarchais kept demanding that Congress repay their debt to him. In 1793, Alexander Hamilton was tasked to examine Beaumarchais' claim once again. Hamilton's findings showed that the United States government owed Beaumarchais 2,280,000 francs. Hamilton further concluded that the one million livre amount that Beaumarchais received on 10 July 1776 was a gift from the King of France. Hamilton in a feat of creative accounting concluded that Beaumarchais owed interest on the million livres that totaled 1,280,000 and combined with the principal brought the debt to a zero balance.¹⁵⁹

In 1795, Beaumarchais attempted one last time to collect the debt that he believed was owed to him. In his letter dated 10 April 1775 Beaumarchais wrote:

¹⁵⁷ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

¹⁵⁸ Library of Congress, *Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789 Vol. XXXIV 1788-1789*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 542-549.

¹⁵⁹ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

Americans, I have served you with indefatigable zeal and I have received, throughout my life, only bitterness as a reward for my services. I die your creditor. Allow me therefore, now that I am dying, to bequeath you my daughter, that you may endow her with a portion of what you owe me... Adopt her as a worth child of the state.... Let her be regarded as a citizen's daughter. But if after all these efforts of mine, after all I have said....if I still feared you would again reject my request...since yours is the only country where I can go and be a beggar without shame, there would be nothing left to me but to beseech heaven to restore my health for a short time so that I could go to America. Then, once in your midst, weakened in body and mind and unable to claim my rights, I should have to be carried to the door of your National Assemblies; and there, sitting on a lowly stool, holding out the liberty cap-which no man on earth helped you wear more than I-for all to see, I should have to cry out: 'Americans give alms to your friend, for all his services to you have brought him naught but this reward....'.¹⁶⁰

Beaumarchais received no reply to his pleas.¹⁶¹ Beaumarchais died in 1799 and the United States still had not paid his claim.¹⁶²

Even after Beaumarchais' death in 1799, his heirs kept up the pressure on the United States to liquidate the debt. It was not until 1835 that the United States finally paid its debt to Beaumarchais. The Congress offered the playwright's heirs the choice of accepting 800,000

¹⁶⁰ Beaumarchais to the American People, 10 April 1795, in *Beaumarchais who wrote The Barber of Seville & The Marriage of Figaro and helped finance the American Revolution*, ed. Georges Lemaitre, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 334.

¹⁶¹ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

francs or nothing. Beaumarchais' descendants accepted the offer.¹⁶³ The story that began in 1775 finally ended 60 years later and was largely forgotten.

¹⁶³ Lemaitre, *Beaumarchais*, 334.

CHAPTER 2: HOW A FRENCH PLAYWRIGHT SAVED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

It is clear and obvious that without Beaumarchais' contributions to the American Revolution, it was highly probable that the British would have prevailed in the struggle. An interesting point is that this interpretation is virtually ignored by the historical community. It is unclear as to why historians do not recognize and accept that Beaumarchais' efforts set the stage for the eventual American victory in the war.

Most historians accept that Burgoyne's surrender in the Saratoga Campaign was what triggered Louis XVI to agree to the formal alliance in February 1778. There is little doubt that the French alliance is what tipped the balance in the War of American Independence that culminated in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Beaumarchais' contributions to that specific campaign are largely ignored or forgotten.

When the war began in April 1775, the rebels faced serious supply shortages especially with gunpowder. The North American colonies were primarily agrarian based. This meant that there was only a nominal capacity in North America to produce gunpowder. The gunpowder that was in colonial magazines was left over from the Seven Years War. The colonies were virtually dependent on Britain for the majority of their gunpowder supplies prior to the war. With the onset of hostilities they had to find other sources.¹⁶⁴

The colonies lack of domestic production of gunpowder was a serious concern to the rebels in the early days of the war. In his letter dated 10 June 1775 to executive committee member of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress Moses Gill, John Adams articulated the

¹⁶⁴ Stephenson, *Gunpowder*, 271-272.

difficulties in production of gunpowder. Adams wrote “There are three Powder Mills in this Province—two in New York but no Nitre—cant the Mass. begin to prepare both?”¹⁶⁵

In his letter to his wife dated 16 June 1775, John Adams stated: “We live in continual expectation of alarms. Courage I know we have in abundance, conduct I hope we shall not want, but powder—where shall we get a sufficient supply? I wish we may not fail there.”¹⁶⁶ Adams’ candor in writing to his wife clearly shows that the rebels were fully aware of and in dire need of gunpowder. His letter confirms that there was an inadequate supply and nonexistent production capabilities in North America at the time.

Patriot General Joseph Palmer who was present at the Battle of Bunker (Breeds) Hill on 17 June 1775 also indicated that there was a shortage of gunpowder. In his letter to John Adams dated 19 June 1775, Palmer recounts the battle and explains why the Americans had to withdraw. Palmer wrote “But on Saturday last, the 17th, the Regulars attacked us upon one of the Charlestown Hills, where we had begun to entrench, and obliged us to retreat, by means of their Ships and Floating Batterys, we having no large Cannon to match theirs; the Cannon we cou’d have had, if we had had Gunpowder enough to Spare, but we had not more than sufficient for the

¹⁶⁵ John Adams to Moses Gill, 10 June 1775, in *Founders Online*, accessed 4 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=saltpetre%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=1&sr=>.

Nitre refers to Potassium Nitrate or Saltpeter one of the key ingredients in the manufacture of gunpowder.

¹⁶⁶ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 16 June 1775, in *Founders Online*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=powder%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=17&sr=>.

Field Pieces and Musquetry”.¹⁶⁷ Palmer’s account was indicative of the shortage of gunpowder and other materiel that plagued the rebels in the early days of the war.

Thomas Jefferson in his letter to Francis Epps dated 4 July 1775 also mentions gunpowder as being in short supply. He wrote: “Powder seems now to be our only difficulty, and towards getting plenty of that nothing is wanting but saltpetre.”¹⁶⁸ Jefferson’s writing is further evidence of a gunpowder shortage as well as a lack of production capability. Saltpeter otherwise known as Potassium Nitrate is one of three key ingredients in making gunpowder. Unfortunately for the rebels, Saltpeter required some refinement before it was usable in gunpowder. Jefferson’s letter appears to indicate that they lacked the expertise in obtaining Saltpeter presumably through production.

John Adams in his letter dated 5 July 1775 to General Joseph Palmer expresses his disappointment with the lack of action by the colonies in providing gunpowder. Adams goes on to say that they were setting up a facility to make saltpeter in Pennsylvania as well as exploring the possibility of creating one in Virginia. It is likely that Adams was unaware at the time of how short the supply of gunpowder really was in North America.

The Second Continental Congress was widely known to be dysfunctional and inefficient in conducting its business. One thing that they did agree on was the need to import large amounts of gunpowder. In the *Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789 Vol. II 1775*, the entry for 18 September 1775 is very telling about how important and desperate the gunpowder situation

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Palmer to John Adams, 19 June 1775, in *Founders Online*, accessed 4 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=saltpetre%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=2&sr=>

¹⁶⁸ Thomas Jefferson to Francis Epps, 4 July 1775,” in *Founders Online*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=powder%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=36&sr=>

was. They created the Secret Committee to contract for and import as much gunpowder as they could up to five hundred tons. They also resolved that if importation of complete powder was not possible then the Secret Committee should import enough sulfur and saltpeter as was needed to fill the gap to the five hundred ton limit. They also gave the Secret Committee the authority to obtain the necessary funds from the treasury.¹⁶⁹ Given the lack of money and the dysfunctional nature of the Congress, the fact that they agreed to form the Secret Committee with the authority that they granted shows the importance of gunpowder to the success of the war.

In *The Journals of Congress Volume II*, the 6 March 1776 entry mentions gunpowder supplies quite predominantly. There were orders for the secret committee to provide ten tons of gunpowder to the Continental Army. Five tons was destined for the Northern Department and the remaining five tons to the Southern Department. There was further mention of New York and Pennsylvania borrowing gunpowder from Maryland. Congress also directed the Secret Committee to send one ton of powder to Delaware and another ton to New Jersey.¹⁷⁰ The entries for this date are evidence that there was in fact a shortage of gunpowder in North America at the time. If there was not, then there would have been no need for any of the states to borrow from the others.

One telling entry from the Congress on 10 August 1776 was the ordering of eleven pounds of powder to be delivered to a Colonel Wilson for three companies to use.¹⁷¹ This entry shows that the shortage was far worse than is generally known. Eleven pounds of powder for three companies is a rather small amount. The average service load for a musket of that era was

¹⁶⁹ Second Continental Congress, *Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789 Vol. II 1775*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), 253-254.

¹⁷⁰ Second Continental Congress, *Journals of Congress Containing the Proceedings From January 1, 1776, to January 1, 1777*, (Yorktown: John Dunlap, 1778), 83.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 305.

approximately 165 grains of powder per round. At 7,000 grains per pound, one can see that this amounts to the capability to fire approximately 466 rounds. Things were dire if three companies of men only had 466 rounds to fire.

Given that domestic production of gunpowder was limited, the Congress did attempt to develop the capability. With the lack of experience in producing gunpowder there were defects in quality. On 6 August 1776, Congress appointed delegate Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania conduct an investigation into the defective powder being produced at domestic mills and to remedy the situation.¹⁷² The quality issues show that there was very little experience in producing gunpowder which compounded the shortage issue.

In another entry from the *Journals of Congress* dated 26 August 1776, they authorized payment to a supplier for \$500 for 500 pounds of gunpowder.¹⁷³ Assuming an average inflation rate of 1.38% since 1776, this put the cost of that powder shipment at \$13,171.97 in today's currency or \$26.34 per pound. In contrast, one can purchase the modern equivalent for approximately \$20 to that amount which shows how expensive powder was back in the Revolution. The price was high due to the high demand and low supply. The dire state of the American supply of gunpowder is indicative of how important the secret aid really was.

Washington's own writings at the time expressed how desperate the supply of gunpowder was. In his letter dated 14 January 1776 to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, Washington states with complete candor "we are now without any Money in our treasury—Powder in our

¹⁷² Ibid., 299.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 326.

Magazines”.¹⁷⁴ Given how sensitive Washington was to how he was perceived, his admission shows how desperate the situation was. Washington could not afford to appear weak and admitting that his army did not have enough supplies would have appeared as a sign of weakness.

In another letter dated 17 January 1776 to the Massachusetts General Court, Washington plead with them to ensure that any new recruits come with twenty rounds of powder and ball.¹⁷⁵ The typical cartridge case at the time held 30 rounds of ammunition and musket balls. It is reasonable to assume that Washington the troops to arrive with that much, but most commanders would have asked for more than they reasonably could expect. Even if it were possible, asking for 33% less powder than a troop should be carrying sends a clear message that there was a shortage.

When Deane was dispatched to France by the secret committee in 1776, his instructions directed him to acquire materiel including gunpowder to equip 20,000 soldiers.¹⁷⁶ Assuming that each soldier carried 30 rounds of ammunition and an average charge of 165 grains of gunpowder, Deane needed to procure 9.9 million pounds of gunpowder. At the beginning of the war there was only about 80,000 pounds of gunpowder in the North American colonies that the rebels were able to acquire.¹⁷⁷ Deane’s task was nearly insurmountable, but the American rebels could not prevail unless something was done. All of the ideology and determination cannot replace one inescapable fact: wars cannot be fought on spirit alone.

¹⁷⁴ Washington to Reed, 14 January 1776, in *Founders Online*, accessed 25 August 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=powder%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=252&sr=>.

¹⁷⁵ Washington to Massachusetts General Court, 17 January 1776, in *Founders Online*, accessed 25 August 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=powder%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=256&sr=>.

¹⁷⁶ Secret Committee to Silas Deane, 3 March 1776, in *Silas Deane Online*, accessed 25 August 2014, <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents/doc19.htm>.

¹⁷⁷ Stephenson, *Gunpowder*, 273.

Beaumarchais' support especially in terms of providing gunpowder in the early days of the War of American Independence was absolutely crucial in the rebellion not being suppressed. In 1776, Beaumarchais through his front company *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*, provided the Americans with 100 tons of gunpowder.¹⁷⁸ That equates to enough gunpowder to fire approximately 8.5 million rounds of ammunition.

Given the lack of gunpowder supplies, one can clearly see that 100 tons of it was essential to the Revolution's survival. Since the rebels initially only had about 80,000 pounds of gunpowder, they could only fire about 3.4 million rounds of ammunition. To put this into perspective, if one assumes there were 5,000 troops in a battle and they fired 5 rounds per soldier the total amount of ammunition expended would be 25,000 rounds. 25,000 rounds would translate to about 590 pounds of gunpowder that would have been required. In looking at this, one can see how gunpowder was badly needed by the American rebels.

While the need for gunpowder was critical throughout the Continental Army and the militia units and any supplies were important, there was one campaign that was especially important to the outcome of the war: Saratoga. Beaumarchais's actions directly contributed to and were essential to the American victory. Starting in June 1777, the British embarked on a campaign to cut New England off from the rest of the colonies. The plan consisted of the three pronged campaign that would converge on Albany, NY. General John Burgoyne was to take a contingent south from Quebec. Brevet Brigadier General Barry St. Leger was to proceed down

¹⁷⁸ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

the Mohawk River Valley towards Albany. The final prong of the campaign was General William Howe who was supposed to head north from New York City.¹⁷⁹

The campaign did not go according to plan. St. Leger's contingent met fierce resistance and was forced to turn back. Howe ordered his forces to take Philadelphia instead of linking up with Burgoyne. General Burgoyne did not retreat back to Fort Ticonderoga when his officers suggested it. While Burgoyne made the mistake of not withdrawing as he should have, that was not overly important to the impacts of Beaumarchais' supplies on the outcome. What is important is that the American army was low on ammunition by the end of the campaign and the gunpowder that they did have was furnished by Beaumarchais.¹⁸⁰

The outcome at Saratoga is generally accepted as the crucial event that triggered the French to enter into a formal alliance with the American rebels.¹⁸¹ While the French were already preparing for war with Britain before that, the outcome at Saratoga convinced them that the investment of resources was worth the risks. The British were aware that if the French entered the war, that reconciliation with the rebels would have been impossible. Upon receiving word of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga and of the Treaty of Alliance between the rebels and the French, they dispatched the Carlisle Peace Commission to attempt to end the war before France could get involved.¹⁸² It appears as though the British realized that the French entering the war could tip the balance in favor of the rebels.

In spring 1777, two of Beaumarchais' vessels, the *Amphitrite* and the *Mercure*, arrived in Portsmouth, NH with supplies for 30,000 and 15,000 soldiers respectively. Major General

¹⁷⁹ Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice 1763-1789*, (Boston, Northeastern University Press: Boston, 1971), 188-198.

¹⁸⁰ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

¹⁸¹ Edmund Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic: 1763-1789* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press , 1956),

¹⁸² Piers Mackesy, *The War for America 1775-1783*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 159-161.

William Heath in his letter to General George Washington dated 25 March 1777 discusses that the French supplies arrived and where they were going. Heath explained that a good portion of the supplies were en route to Fort Ticonderoga to completely satisfy Major General Philip Schuyler's demand for the Northern Department.¹⁸³ General Heath's letter puts the shipments that Beaumarchais sent in the hands of the Schuyler's (later Gates') army.

With the arrival of fresh supplies before the start of the Saratoga Campaign, the Northern Department was well equipped and outfitted. With his forces equipped with French muskets using French powder and musket balls, Gates' army was able to effectively resist the British offensive into northern New York. It is commonly known that by the time of the Battle of Bemis Heights, the Americans were running low on ammunition. It is clear that Beaumarchais' supplies were one of the deciding factors in the outcome at Saratoga.

Had the supplies not arrived to end up with the Northern Department, then it is highly likely that Burgoyne would have triumphed over the Americans in the campaign even without the assistance of St. Leger's or Howe's forces in support. Following that logic further, had Burgoyne not surrendered the French more than likely would not have formally allied with the Americans and the British would have been able to concentrate greater resources on the war in North America. If the British were able to mass more forces on the continent, then eventually they would have been able to engage and destroy Washington's army in a pitched battle thus negating his Fabian Strategy and ending the rebellion.

Supplies were only part of how Beaumarchais saved the American Revolution. He also facilitated the arrival of a very important Prussian officer: Friedrich Wilhelm August Heinrich

¹⁸³ William Heath to George Washington, 25 March 1777, in *Founders Online*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=Mercur%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=10&sr=>.

Ferdinand von Steuben. The army that went into Valley Forge in the winter of 1777 was only an army in name only. The Continental Army at the time was little more than a collection of militia personnel. The campaigns in New York and New Jersey showed that the Continental Army did not have the level of training and discipline to stand up to British regulars.

Professionalism, discipline, and uniformity of action were absolutely essential if the rebels were to have a chance at fighting the British in any meaningful way. The lack of training on the Americans' part came very close to costing them the war. What training they did have was widely varied among units which led to a great deal of confusion in their conduct of combat operations.

The actions during the Siege of Boston including the Battle of Bunker (Breeds) Hill were not the result of proficient soldiering but of the advantages of the terrain. This led to a belief that the American citizen soldier would prevail over the British regulars because they were fighting for what they believed in and not because they were paid. This belief however was quite flawed as evidenced by Washington's losses at New York City, the Battle of White Plains, and the Battle of Brandywine.

Like many veterans of the Seven Years War von Steuben was out of work as there was no major conflicts in Europe. He served in the Prussian Army as an infantry officer at the rank of Captain but was discharged following the war. He attempted to obtain postings in several European countries but was unable to do so. Finally, he ended up in France in the spring 1777. In his travels the Prussian befriended an influential Frenchman who arranged a meeting with

Vergennes. The foreign minister unsurprisingly sent von Steuben to see Beaumarchais. The playwright immediately took a liking to von Steuben and arranged for his lodging.¹⁸⁴

The issue facing von Steuben and Beaumarchais was that the Congress was already inundated with foreign volunteers that were generally more trouble than they were worth. Deane had granted commissions in part due to Vergennes recommending them and the New England merchant doing everything he could to stay in the French's good graces. When Beaumarchais brought von Steuben to Franklin and Deane, they stipulated that he could only be accepted if he agreed to serve as a Private for no pay. The Baron was in no position to accept an appointment under such terms and continued his job search in other European countries.¹⁸⁵

A few months later in August, the Prussian returned to Paris still looking for a commission. Beaumarchais again covered von Steuben's lodging and tried to figure out a way to get his friend a posting in America. Of course, Beaumarchais being the highly innovative and creative character he was devised an ingenious plan. The playwright acquired a Prussian Lieutenant General's uniform and dressed his friend in it. Beaumarchais then hired two individuals to act as the Prussian's aid and secretary. As the Baron was in financial troubles, the playwright covered the costs. Once the Prussian looked the part, Beaumarchais had him descend on to the French social scene.¹⁸⁶

During the course of von Steuben's 18th century equivalent of networking, Franklin and Deane finally provided a letter of introduction to Washington and recommended the Prussian for a posting in America.¹⁸⁷ Franklin only provided von Steuben with the letter and not any sort of

¹⁸⁴ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

monetary advance or compensation, so the playwright helped the Prussian again and paid approximately 6,000 livres for his passage to America along with Francy.¹⁸⁸ Despite his overinflated and misrepresented credentials, von Steuben became one of the major heroes of the Revolutionary War.

When von Steuben arrived in America, he wrote General George Washington in a letter dated 6 December 1777. The Baron introduced himself while still implying his overinflated credentials. He told Washington that if his rank was an issue he would be willing to serve under the Commander in Chief as a volunteer. The Baron even went on to flatter the General by saying that Washington was the only person other than Fredrick the Great that he wanted to be under the command of.¹⁸⁹

It appears as though Washington believed the Prussian and responded in a letter on 9 January 1778. Washington indicated that he wanted to meet the Prussian in person, but the question of his service would be decided by the Congress. Washington told von Steuben where to find them in York, PA so that he could make their introductions. It seems that the Baron's flattery was well received by Washington who wrote "I return you my thanks for the polite manner in which you express your desire of serving under me."¹⁹⁰

The Baron along with Francy and Beaumarchais' nephew who was also travelling with them arrived in York, PA on 5 February 1778 where the Continental Congress had been meeting

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 141.

¹⁸⁹ Von Steuben to Washington, 6 December 1777, in *Founders Online*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Steuben%2C%20Friedrich%20Wilhelm%20Ludolf%20Gerhard%20Augustin%2C%20Baron%20von%22&s=1111311111&sa=steuben&r=1>.

¹⁹⁰ Washington to von Steuben, 9 January 1778, in *Founders Online*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-13-02-0160>.

following the British capture of the rebel capital of Philadelphia on 6 September 1777.¹⁹¹ Von Steuben met with the Congress armed with the letter of introduction from Franklin. The interesting thing about Franklin's letter dated 4 September 1777 is the manner in which he referred to the Prussian. He wrote "The Gentleman who will have the Honour of waiting upon you with this Letter is the Baron de Steuben, lately a Lieutenant General in the King of Prussia's Service, whom he attended in all his Campaigns, being his Aide Camp, Quartermaster General."¹⁹²

Franklin's statements regarding von Steuben's position under Fredrick the Great appears to be a mistranslation. His actual title in the Prussian Army was Deputy to the Quartermaster General. Somehow when it was translated into French it became Lieutenant General Quarters Maitre and when Franklin conveyed this it became Lieutenant General.¹⁹³ Given that Beaumarchais gave von Steuben a Lieutenant General's uniform, it is pretty obvious that the mistranslation was intentional on Beaumarchais' part.

During his meeting with the Congress, von Steuben negotiated the terms of his service which included compensation for his service after the war. The amount was based on the quality of his service and his contributions. A few days later on 23 February 1778, the Baron arrived at Washington's encampment at Valley Forge. Upon arrival, von Steuben continued to play his role

¹⁹¹ Ira Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution*, (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 241.

¹⁹² Franklin to Washington, 4 September 1777, in *Founders Online*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=steuben%20Author%3A%22Franklin%2C%20Benjamin%22&s=1111311111&sa=franklin&r=1&sr=>.

¹⁹³ National Parks Service, *General von Steuben*, accessed 2 September 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/vafo/historyculture/vonsteuben.htm>.

as Beaumarchais choreographed back in Paris. One soldier stated that von Steuben was the personification of war itself.¹⁹⁴

Von Steuben was appointed as the temporary Inspector General by Washington of the Continental Army. Shortly after his appointment, the Prussian inspected the troops and their living areas and was appalled at the state of the army. During the course of his inspections, von Steuben noticed that the drill manuals that each state used were widely varied. The Baron then got to work in formulating a uniform training program for the Continental Army so that every soldier regardless of state were able to work in concert with each other.¹⁹⁵

The Baron's task was difficult from the start because he did not speak or read in English at all. He wrote the drill lessons in French as that was the most universal language at that time. A secretary then translated the lessons into English. Washington's aide de camps John Laurens and Alexander Hamilton then refined the lessons into common military terms that were easily understood. The pace that the Baron worked at was impressive even by today's standards. He was writing lessons only a few days in advance of the troops being instructed on them.¹⁹⁶

Von Steuben's methods were to teach the army in the simplest and fastest way possible in order to get the army proficient as quickly as possible. He created a model company that would demonstrate to the other soldiers how it all came together. This method is still in use by the United States Army today. The Baron also understood that a leader must adapt to the soldiers that are serving under them, so he personally worked with them as opposed to allowing the noncommissioned officers to do it. This was unorthodox as the Continental Army mirrored the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

British army by the commissioned officers not being directly involved. Von Steuben also made gratuitous use of profanity which seemed to have created a bond with the enlisted soldiers.¹⁹⁷

During the winter at Valley Forge, von Steuben transformed the Continental Army from an undisciplined rabble to a highly disciplined professional fighting force. The army proved itself during the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse by fighting the British regulars to a draw.¹⁹⁸ The Battle of Cowpens was another example of the Baron's teachings making the difference in the outcome of the war. General Daniel Morgan's rear line was made up mainly of Continental regulars and displayed their professionalism in withstanding the attack from and defeating the forces under Banastre Tarleton.¹⁹⁹

In transforming the Continental Army into a professional force, von Steuben created the foundation that led to the eventual American victory. Things would have turned out differently had Beaumarchais not saw something in the Prussian that suggested helping him would have been worthwhile. Beaumarchais even went so far to say in his letter to Francy dated 6 December 1778, that he was following von Steuben's career with pride. He even went on to state that von Steuben's successes paid for the interest on the money he lent the Prussian.²⁰⁰

Von Steuben was not the only foreign officer that Beaumarchais helped out that contributed to the American cause. The Marquis de Lafayette, one of the most celebrated heroes of the American Revolution had become indebted to American creditors at significantly inflated interest rates. Lafayette reached out to Francy to see if he could get credit at a better interest rate.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ National Parks Service, *The Battle of Cowpens*, accessed 3 September 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/cowp/historyculture/the-battle-of-cowpens.htm>.

²⁰⁰ Beaumarchais to Francy, 6 December 1778, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome IV* ed. Brian N. Morton, Donald C. Spinelli, (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1978), 284-287.

As Lafayette was rather high up on the social ladder, Francy assumed that Beaumarchais would approve the loan. On 25 April 1778, an arrangement was finalized and the Marquis was loaned the money by *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*. This was important to the success of the war, because it is possible that had Lafayette remained indebted at a higher interest rate he may not have been able to focus on war as effectively as he was. The situation with Lafayette was a symptom of a much larger problem, although the resolution proved to be the exception rather than the rule.²⁰¹

Silas Deane had offered numerous commissions to French officers and the Congress was inundated with the soldiers who were only interested in high pay and rank. Congress eventually stopped accepting them, but not before many showed up in America. The out of work volunteers generally did not speak English nor did they have much if any money. They flocked to Lafayette and Francy for help. Francy knew that Beaumarchais would not approve of providing them with any money, nor was Lafayette in a position to do so. The Marquis wrote the Congress and suggested that Count Kazimierz Michal Wladyslaw Wiktor Pulaski and Charles Armand Tuffin, marquis de la Rouërie (also known as Colonel Armand) form privately funded volunteer units to make use of the French soldiers. Congress of course approved the creation of Pulaski's and Armand's Legions. Francy acting on behalf of Beaumarchais funded the units.²⁰²

Not only did Beaumarchais provide the implements of war, personnel, assistance to the personnel that Congress initially rejected but he also provided the Americans with desperately needed money to keep the war going. The Continental Dollar was virtually worthless and backed by nothing. The Americans needed an influx of real currency in order to continue the war and

²⁰¹ Brian N. Morton, "Beaumarchais, Francy, Steuben, and Lafayette: An Unpublished Correspondence or "Feux de joye" at Valley Forge", *The French Review*, Vol. 49, No. 6 (1976): 943-959.

²⁰² Ibid.

pay their soldiers. The fiscal situation was a major issue throughout the course of the war. Beaumarchais' plan was to help the Americans by providing materiel and personnel support as well as providing them funding. No amount of zeal, patriotism or ideology would be sufficient to prevail over the British. The Americans needed money.

Beaumarchais was loaned one million livres from the French treasury to assist the American rebels on 10 June 1776. 500,000 livres were to be used to purchase the implements of war from the French arsenals. The remaining 500,000 would be part of a two million livre loan to the Americans to back their money. Beaumarchais would convert the 500,000 into Portuguese gold before passing it on to the Americans. This would make the source of the money harder to determine.²⁰³ A short time later on 11 August 1776, Beaumarchais received an additional one million livres from the Spanish monarch. Two million more livres were to be raised by selling stocks in the front company *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*.²⁰⁴ While the French government did have its hand in the plan to finance the American Revolution, it was Beaumarchais who stood to gain or lose profit. He assumed all of the risk for the entire venture.

In addition to the money that Beaumarchais provided the Americans through the *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*, his actions led the French government to provide the rebels with an additional two million livre subsidy at the end of 1777.²⁰⁵ Beaumarchais formulated the original plan; he argued for it to the French government and executed the plan. The playwright himself is clearly responsible for the Americans receiving the funding that they did.

In order to understand how important the financial support Beaumarchais provided, one must look at how desperate the situation was. With the onset of hostilities it became clear early

²⁰³ Paul, *Unlikely Allies*, 149.

²⁰⁴ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

on that the rebels did not have nearly enough money to prosecute the war effectively. They resorted to printing Continental Dollars which were virtually worthless. This is the same problem as other conflicts in which governments resort to the printing press to fund a war. The result is always the same: devaluation of the currency due to the paper money being backed by nothing.

While at his headquarters in Cambridge during the Siege of Boston in 1775, General George Washington wrote the Continental Congress explaining the situation. In his letter dated 10 July 1775, Washington wrote “I must therefore request that Money may be forwarded as soon as possible. The Want of this most necessary Article, will I fear produce great Inconveniencies if not prevented by an early Attention.”²⁰⁶ Washington’s letter goes further into the various supply shortages facing the army. The Commander in Chief’s requests show that there was a major lack of resources.

Eleven days later while still in Cambridge, General Washington reiterated his need for money. In his letter dated 21 July 1775, Washington wrote “I must also renew my Request as to Money, & the Appointment of a Paymaster: I have forbore urging Matters of this Nature from my Knowledge of the many important Concerns which engage the Attention of the Congress; but as I find my Difficulties thicken every Day, I make no Doubt suitable Regard will be paid to a Necessity of this Kind. The Inconvenience of borrowing such Sums as are constantly requisite must be too plain for me to enlarge upon, & is a Situation, from which I should be very happy to be relieved.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Washington to the Continental Congress, 10 July 1775, in *Founders Online*, accessed 3 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=money%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=47&sr=>.

²⁰⁷ Washington to Hancock, 21 July 1775, in *Founders Online*, accessed 3 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=money%20Period%3A%22Revolutionary%20War%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=56&sr=>.

While at Cambridge, Washington understood that if the revolution had any chance of succeeding, the rebels needed large amounts of money. Money was needed to procure materiel and other supplies. Funds were also needed to pay the soldiers. Paying the army was very important as the troops themselves had financial obligations that needed to be managed. By war's end, many in the Continental Army were highly indebted due to the devaluation of the Continental Dollar. This was a major problem in the *postbellum* years.

In his letter to the Continental Congress dated 18 August 1776, Beaumarchais wrote “The respectful esteem that I bear toward that brave people who so well defend their liberty under your conduct, has induced me to form a plan concurring in this great work, by establishing an extensive commercial house solely for the purpose of serving you in Europe, there to supply you with necessaries of every sort, to furnish you expeditiously and certainly with all articles, clothes, linens, powder, ammunition, muskets, cannon, or even gold for the payment of your troops, and in general everything that can be useful for the honorable war in which you are engaged.”²⁰⁸

Beaumarchais' letter shows that need for supplies, and money, was great. He offered to furnish the Americans with everything that they were looking for. The fact that Beaumarchais so clearly and precisely articulated the exact things that the Americans were short on is indicative of how widespread and well known the issues were for the rebels. Most likely Deane or Lee indicated to Beaumarchais what was actually needed. If this was the case, the need was great because they articulated it to a foreigner that they did not know nor had any reason by that point to trust with such information. Such an admission would make the Americans appear weak as

²⁰⁸ Beaumarchais to the Secret Committee, 18 August 1776, in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution Volume I*, ed. and trans. Jared Sparks (Boston: N. Hale and Gray & Bowen, 1829), 241-244.

well as been potentially fatal information for the British government to obtain and possibly exploit.

General George Washington faced manpower shortages throughout the war. In several cases his soldiers were offered bounties to enlist or bonuses to reenlist. Without the introduction of French and Spanish money into the hands of the Americans, one can reasonably assume that Washington's army would have significantly shrank in size or completely dissolved itself. The soldiers of the Continental Army did and rightfully expect to be paid for their service. Had the Congress only been able to resort to the printing press, the money would have devalued far more quickly than it did. The subsidies did not prevent the inflation or the devaluation of the Continental Dollar but it was slowed.

There can be little doubt that Beaumarchais' support was essential to the survival of the American Revolution in the early years of the war. He provided the right articles at the right time which ended up staving off disaster for the Americans. Even one of Beaumarchais' biggest critics Charles J. Stillé author of *Beaumarchais and "The Lost Million"*, states in his book that Beaumarchais' support for the Americans was essential to the eventual success in obtaining independence.²⁰⁹ As with any war, logistical support can mean the difference between victory and defeat. There are countless examples throughout history where the outcome of a conflict was decided primarily based upon logistics of lack thereof. No matter what term is used to describe Beaumarchais' contributions, he was in fact providing logistical support.

²⁰⁹ Charles J. Stillé, *Beaumarchais and "The Lost Million"*, (Philadelphia: Kessinger Publishing, 1890), 5.

CHAPTER 3: NATURE OF THE SECRET AID AND CONGRESS' NONPAYMENT

The support that Beaumarchais clandestinely provided the American rebels cannot be refuted. Was the aid a gift from the French government or was it a business transaction between the Americans and a private person? Was the United States Government justified in withholding payment from Beaumarchais? These questions will be explored in this chapter. The secret aid was in fact a business transaction requiring repayment and the American government was unjustified in withholding payment from Beaumarchais.

In order to answer the question of the secret aid being a gift or a business transaction one must start with the overall political situation between France and Britain. Following France's defeat in the Seven Years War they had a peace treaty with the British. When the War of American Independence started in April 1775 the French government especially Vergennes had a vested interest in its outcome. The French defeat in the previous war was deeply humiliating and many in the French government wanted a way to get revenge. By 1776, they found a way to undermine the British while avoiding war: secretly help the Americans. The French had no interest in the Americans' rights or grievances; they were simply interested in prolonging the war as long as possible in order to weaken the British government.

The only way that the plan to secretly aid the Americans would work is if the French government could remain blameless. They could not risk being caught supplying the Americans without the British declaring war. When Beaumarchais approached Vergennes about the idea, the foreign minister was interested in it but needed to be careful in how it was managed. The easiest way to avoid war with the British while secretly supplying the Americans was for the government to not be involved. This would give Vergennes and Louis XVI plausible deniability

against any allegations that they were helping the Americans in violation of their treaty with the British that ended the Seven Years War.

When Vergennes finally approved Beaumarchais' plan, he ensured that Beaumarchais assumed all of the risk for the venture. As with any business the risk of loss is offset by the potential to make a profit. Beaumarchais would get to keep any profits from the venture. So what happened in fact was that the French government gave Beaumarchais a loan. Beaumarchais then used the money from the loan to purchase supplies from the French government. Once the government sold the supplies, they were no longer concerned with where they went. As far as anyone was concerned they sold the equipment to one of their own citizens and that was the end of it. Beaumarchais would then sell the equipment to the Americans and with the payment he was supposed to receive repay the loan and purchase more equipment.

Was the French government supplying the Americans? The primary source material is subjective based on one's interpretation. There are numerous sources that can be used to argue both sides of the question. In order to answer this question one needs to look at the contractual relationships between the American government, Beaumarchais and the French government. The agreement to provide the secret aid was a *de facto* contract and must be analyzed in that context.

In order to prove the contractual nature of the arrangement one must look at the documentation to determine if the American representative Silas Deane did in fact have the authority to enter into a contractual agreement to purchase materiel upon his arrival in France. Second, the documentation showing Beaumarchais involvement and his instructions from the French government must be analyzed to determine that the arrangement was in fact a business transaction and not a gift from Louis XVI.

Silas Deane was in fact appointed by the Secret Committee of the Continental Congress to act as their agent to conduct various commercial and political business on their behalf. This is evidenced by the letter given to Deane and signed by the members of the committee: Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Harrison, John Dickinson, John Jay and Robert Morris dated 2 March 1776.²¹⁰ The letter of appointment unambiguously stated that Deane had the authority of the Congress to act as their agent in the matters they entrusted to him.

The next day, the Secret Committee issued instructions to Silas Deane outlining his purpose and tasks while in France. The committee instructed Deane to purchase supplies, clothing, arms and ammunition for 25,000 soldiers that the Congress would pay for directly to France or a third party if necessary. The committee's instructions further went on to mention that Deane should attempt to get France itself to provide the equipment in exchange for a favorable trading agreement but if that was not practical he was to purchase the supplies on credit.²¹¹

Between the generalized appointment letter dated 2 March 1776, and the specific instructions to Silas Deane dated 3 March 1776 by the members of the Secret Committee, it is indisputable that Deane was acting on Congressional authority and instructions to purchase supplies in France for the American Army. Given the appointment letter combined with the specific instructions Deane received, it is clear that he had full authority to enter into a contractual relationship with Beaumarchais for the purchase of supplies needed by the Continental Army.

Next Beaumarchais relationship to the French government must be explored to determine if he was their agent acting on their behalf or if he was acting independently with full authority to

²¹⁰ Secret Committee letter of appointment, 2 March 1776, in *Silas Deane Online*, accessed 9 September 2014, <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents/doc17.htm>.

²¹¹ Secret Committee to Silas Deane, 3 March 1776, in *Silas Deane Online*, accessed 9 September 2014, <http://www.silasdeaneonline.org/documents/doc19.htm>.

enter into a business arrangement with the Americans. The evidence shows that Beaumarchais was acting with permission and getting guidance from the French government but was not acting as their agent in supplying the Americans. The French government itself could not be tied to the Americans in anyway as it would violate their treaty with the British and plunge France into a war they were not ready for.

On 24 March 1776, Beaumarchais received a letter from Vergennes that discussed the particulars of the assistance that was to be provided to the Americans. Vergennes started off by stating overtly “You understand my dear fellow that neither we nor His Majesty wish to compromise ourselves in any shape or form”.²¹² Vergennes goes on to explain that the Americans could not have any indications that the French government was involved. Vergennes stated that the affair will be an entirely commercial venture. The foreign minister also went on to state that Beaumarchais would be entitled to any profits and assumed the risks and that the crown would provide him with a loan of one million livres.²¹³

If the French government were acting itself to help the Americans covertly, it would stand to reason that they would have an interest in the profits or losses of the venture. Instead, they had a vested interest in Beaumarchais helping the Americans, they did facilitate the venture by granting permission and issuing a loan to Beaumarchais as well as providing him guidance. This does not imply that the government itself was acting. In fact, the only way the venture would work as intended was if the business was self-sustaining and through that business the purchase of obsolete military equipment from their arsenals would allow them to update their military. Should the aid be discovered, Beaumarchais would take the blame and the government could honestly say that it was not them. It was the perfect cover.

²¹² René Dalséme, *Beaumarchais 1732-1799*, (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1929), 248.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

With the permission of the French court, Beaumarchais was allowed to form his *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*. As the sole head of the firm, Beaumarchais was responsible for and authorized to enter into business contracts with the Americans. In his negotiations with Silas Deane, Beaumarchais was acting in full compliance of his roles and responsibilities as the head of the *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*.

Now that the authority for both Deane and Beaumarchais to enter into business contracts has been established, the negotiations between the two men was and should have been considered binding by both parties. When Deane made the agreement with the playwright he in fact obligated the Continental Congress to those terms and conditions that were agreed upon. All other influences were and are irrelevant to that fact.

In looking at the contractual relationship one must look at the war in two phases: before the formal alliance and after the formal alliance. The situation changed drastically after the treaty of alliance in February 1778. As stated before the French government could not be caught providing aid for the American rebels without risking war with Britain. After the formal alliance the French government no longer had a reason to hide their involvement. First, the contractual relationships prior to the treaty of alliance will be discussed.

When Silas Deane, the representative of the Congress first entered into an agreement with Beaumarchais, this created a contractual arrangement with the relationships and obligations normally associated with a contract. Despite the agreement being verbal and not a formal contract, the arrangement between Beaumarchais and Deane did constitute a binding contractual agreement.

In his first letter to Silas Deane dated 18 July 1776, Beaumarchais discussed how he wanted to meet with Deane to open negotiations on providing the Americans with the articles

that they could no longer get from Britain. He also discusses entering into a treaty that is mutually beneficial.²¹⁴ Beaumarchais used the word traité that translates to treaty. In the context he was using it; the word meant an agreement between a business and a government. This shows the intent of entering into a contractual agreement.

Deane's response to Beaumarchais' letter dated 20 July 1776, clearly discusses that he intends to purchase the articles that the Americans needed. Deane goes on to offer tobacco as payment and asks for 100 cannons and weapons and clothing for 25,000 troops.²¹⁵ Deane's statements do constitute an understanding that the arrangement would in fact be a contract. Beaumarchais went on to respond to Deane in his letter dated 22 July 1776 in stating that Congress would have to pay for the goods.²¹⁶

Deane's response to Beaumarchais in his letter dated 24 July 1776 is most telling and clear evidence that the arrangement was in fact contractual in nature. Deane unambiguously agrees to Beaumarchais' terms for providing materiel in exchange for tobacco. Deane goes on to state that Beaumarchais would obtain a return on his investment. Deane explains that he expects the equipment to be good quality and that the items can arrive at their destination. It is typical to explain what is and is not acceptable as far as contractual performance goes. Deane further goes on to state that the risks and costs are essentially no object.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Beaumarchais to Deane, 18 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 228.

²¹⁵ Deane to Beaumarchais, 20 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 229.

²¹⁶ Beaumarchais to Deane, 22 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 230.

²¹⁷ Deane to Beaumarchais, 24 July 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 230-231.

In his letter to the Secret Committee dated 18 August 1776, Beaumarchais clearly articulates his expectations of payment from the Congress for the goods.²¹⁸ If there was no contractual arrangement then Beaumarchais would not have spent his own funds on the venture. The terms he outlined to the Congress were the same terms that he discussed with Silas Deane. Deane being the American representative was charged with purchasing the articles. He stated this much in his 20 July 1776 letter. This is clear evidence that the aid was contractual in nature.

As the contractual arrangement of the secret has been established it is essential to understand the roles each party played. Silas Deane was appointed by the Congress to purchase materiel on credit. He was authorized to enter into agreements to that end. He was thus acting in an official capacity for the American government and had the authority to obligate the government for money. In essence, Deane was acting as a contracting officer in his dealings in France.

Beaumarchais' role in the arrangement was that of prime vendor. This means that the Congress through Deane entered into a contractual relationship and arrangement with Beaumarchais. In this type of relationship the terms are agreed upon and carried out by the American government and the prime vendor. The prime vendor typically subcontracts to various other entities to obtain the goods and services that the government customer requires. The American government had neither direct dealings with nor any business relationship with the subcontractor to the prime vendor: the French government. The French government prior to February 1778 was in fact a subcontractor for the prime vendor Beaumarchais.

²¹⁸ Beaumarchais to the Secret Committee, 18 August 1776, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome II* ed., Brian Morton and Donald Spinelli, 241-244.

As the contract was with the prime vendor and the obligation existed for the American government to fulfill the terms of the contract regardless of any subsequent relationships they established with the French government. This is an important point because the nature of the relationship did change after the treaty of alliance in February 1778. The arrangement prior to that was contractual and with the prime vendor; Beaumarchais but afterwards, the French government became the prime vendor. Regardless of the treaty and the roles switching, Beaumarchais was a contractor for the Continental Congress up until that point, and should have been compensated as such.

The formal treaty of alliance between the French and American governments confused and continues to confuse the matter of the contractual relationship of Beaumarchais and the *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie* and the French government in their dealings with the American rebels. The confusion was in no small part due to the character attacks against Beaumarchais and Deane that Arthur Lee made to his relatives in the Congress.

In several sources, Arthur Lee is described as embellishing his own importance, misrepresenting things and even downright dishonesty. While such labels tend to lend themselves to bias there are clear examples in which Lee clearly was attempting to mislead others for his own benefit. In his initial meetings with Beaumarchais in London, Lee claimed that he was acting on behalf Secret Committee, when in fact he was not.²¹⁹ Lee went on later to claim to a colleague in Boston that his exchanges with the French ambassador in London prompted Vergennes to send an agent who was able to provide the Americans with arms and

²¹⁹ Dalséme, *Beaumarchais*, 241-242.

ammunition.²²⁰ Again this was not the case as Beaumarchais had not yet received authorization to commence business with the Americans.

The point that the one million livres was not used as a gift to purchase the supplies given to the Americans was reinforced in 1816 by French foreign minister Duc de Richelieu in his statements to the American ambassador. The minister claimed that the million livres in question were not used to purchase the materiel Beaumarchais provided.²²¹ While the minister's statements on the surface appear to be false, one must remember that the million livres were from the French government's perspective, loaned to Beaumarchais to establish the *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie*. What Beaumarchais used the money for after creating the firm was irrelevant, the government gave him the money to start the firm and after that were no longer responsible for its use. One can conclude that the secret political purpose the French government mentioned was in fact the creation of the *Hortalez* firm itself and not for the actual procurement of materiel from the French arsenals.

The question of the validity of Beaumarchais' debt had plagued the American government almost as soon as it was incurred. The first efforts to portray the assistance Beaumarchais provided as a free gift from the French government came in the form of Arthur Lee's writings to his brothers in the Congress. Lee launched all sorts of character attacks against Beaumarchais and Deane that ended resulting in Deane's recall and Beaumarchais not being paid for the goods he provided. Lee's attacks also ended up polarizing the Congress over the issue.²²²

²²⁰ Ibid., 242.

²²¹ Ibid., 39.

²²² Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

The issue of the validity of Beaumarchais' debt was taken up numerous times by various Congresses.²²³ The sheer amount of Congressional discussion on the matter seems to indicate that they were aware or at least believed that Beaumarchais' claim had merit to it. If the issue was so cut and dry, then they would have ruled against him and left it at that. However, they kept assessing and reassessing the claim coming to different results each time. Some were in favor of Beaumarchais and some not. The varied findings can be attributed to the circumstantial nature of the evidence they were using. The Americans were not provided with the name of the recipient of the 10 June 1776 payment until 1782. The Americans assumed that the recipient was Beaumarchais and also assumed that he used the money to provide the arms and munitions.²²⁴ The argument that the supplies furnished by Beaumarchais were a gift was based on assumptions and not grounded in the facts.

After the first of Beaumarchais' ships arrived in North America and returned empty, the playwright wrote the Congress repeatedly in an attempt to get his payment but due to the writings of Arthur Lee, the letters went unanswered. Beaumarchais then dispatched his secretary Francy to the Congress to deal with the matter. In 1778, the Congress agreed to sign a new contract and agreed that the debt Beaumarchais was claiming at the time was in fact valid. John Jay wrote to Beaumarchais stating this.²²⁵

In his letter to Beaumarchais dated 15 January 1779, John Jay wrote "They [Congress] lament the inconveniences you have suffered, by the great advances in support of these States. Circumstances have prevented a compliance with their wishes, but they will take the most

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

effectual measures in their power to discharge the debt due you.”²²⁶ As Jay was the President of the Congress at the time, his letter is very important in establishing the validity of Beaumarchais’ claims against the United States as in order for him to send such a letter a vote was required. One can see that Beaumarchais’ attempts to collect the debt were valid. Despite Jay’s letter and statements, the Congress never liquidated the claim.²²⁷

In 1787, the Congress attempted to reconcile Beaumarchais’ claim yet again. This time they appointed the Board of Treasury and Arthur Lee was a member.²²⁸ In the board’s report to President George Washington dated 17 August 1789, there is mention of the million livres advanced to Beaumarchais on 10 June 1776 and that no one had accountability of it.²²⁹ This fact partially led the board to conclude that Beaumarchais’ claim was irrelevant. The statements of the board fail to mention that the amount advanced to the playwright was in fact a loan that he was required to repay. Furthermore, Beaumarchais was under no obligation to tell the Americans anything regarding its use as he was not their agent.

The board’s report goes on to state “Whatever motives the Court of France might have formerly had, for concealing this aid given to America, previous to the Treaty of Paris—certain it is that they can no longer exist; since in a formal convention, entered into betwixt the Count de Vergennes and Dr Franklin at Versailles, on the 25th day of February 1783, and ratified by Congress on the 31st October following, it is expressly declared: “That three millions of Livres were given by his most Christian Majesty previous to the treaty of February 1778.” the million in question forms part of the sum above referred to.”²³⁰

²²⁶ Jay to Beaumarchais, 15 January 1779, in *Correspondance de Beaumarchais Tome V*, (2010), accessed 12 September 2014, http://clasweb.clas.wayne.edu/Multimedia/languages/files/spinelli/Beaumarchais_Volume_V.pdf.

²²⁷ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Board of Treasury to George Washington, 17 August 1789, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=1111311113&sa=&r=244&sr=>.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

The board's report shows that they believed that the agreement in February 1783 with the French government shows that Beaumarchais' claim was false. What is important to recognize is that Beaumarchais was not present at the meeting and thus any arrangements between the French government and the United States could not impact Beaumarchais' claim on the grounds of the *res inter alios acta* principle.²³¹ The fact of the matter is that starting in 1777 the contractual agreement for supplies was between Beaumarchais and the American government. The terms of the agreement could not be modified by a subsequent agreement between the French and American governments in 1783. The board's statements to the contrary are incorrect as the agreement in 1783 was independent and irrelevant to the contract in question.

The board's report further admits that Benjamin Franklin had no reason to believe that the French government provided the money for the supplies.²³² Franklin was an exceptional diplomat and very proficient at finding out the facts. His statements that the board mentions show that there was no relationship prior to the formal alliance between the Americans and the French government. The French did have a vested interest in the venture and facilitated its operations, but the fact that in order for them to maintain their ability to deny everything, they could not be actually involved in the operations to supply the Americans prior to the treaty in 1778.

The board's report goes on further to state that Deane claimed in one of his papers "That Mr Beaumarchais furnished the supplies ostensibly, but that they really came from a higher source; and also that he had procured the Indian Goods from the same quarter."²³³ The letter in question does not prove or disprove the validity of Beaumarchais' claims against the United States. The source that Beaumarchais used to obtain the goods was irrelevant as Congress' agent

²³¹ *res inter alios acta* is a legal concept that someone who is not party to a contract cannot be bound to its terms.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

Deane entered into a legally binding agreement with Beaumarchais. Regardless of where the playwright acquired the materiel from, the fact of the matter is that there was an agreement for repayment made by Deane as the American agent.

The report continues on and mentions Deane returning to France in 1781 to settle Beaumarchais' claim. They stated that Deane did not have the authority to settle anything as he was acting as a private citizen and no longer an agent of the Congress.²³⁴ They are correct that Deane did not have the authority to bind the Congress to a settlement at that time. However, this does not absolve the Americans of the debt that was agreed upon when Deane was the agent. At the time that Deane initially entered into agreement with Beaumarchais, he was legally authorized by the Congress to do so, and as such they had an obligation to honor the terms of the agreement.

The report continues on to show that Beaumarchais' prices were unreasonably high.²³⁵ This portion of the report reiterates Arthur Lee's statements previously that Beaumarchais was a war profiteer attempting to take advantage of the Americans. The board's conclusions here are wrong. Beaumarchais being a war profiteer exploiting the American cause for personal gain is irrelevant and overinflated. The prices that Beaumarchais charged the Americans were agreed upon not only by Silas Deane in 1777 but again by the Congress in 1778 when Francy went to America and signed a new contract. Also, the fact that Beaumarchais was attempting to profit from the endeavor does not invalidate the debt that the Congress owed.

The report concludes that Beaumarchais actually owed the United States 1.7 million livres based on the million livre loan (although they neglected to mention it was a loan), price

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

adjustments and the claim that he was partially paid.²³⁶ Nothing in the board's report supports this sufficiently when scrutinized. It appears as though Arthur Lee was the driving force behind the board's conclusions. The conclusions that the board gave to President Washington appear to be based on flawed assumptions, irrelevant facts and personal vindictiveness.

In 1793 the Congress asked Alexander Hamilton to look into the claim again. Hamilton's investigation showed as evidenced by his letter to Thomas Jefferson dated 10 June 1793, that the funds given by Louis XVI as a gift to the Americans totaling three million livres was paid in five installments in 1777. He mentions that there was an additional one million livre amount that was a loan from parties in France and that none of the Americans could account for the missing million.²³⁷

He clearly stated that "The most likely conjecture, in my mind, considering the period of the advance and the circumstances of that period is that the unaccounted for Million went into the hands of M. De Beaumarchais. The supplies which he furnished to the United States exceeded his own probable resources, besides the imprudence of having hazarded so much at that stage of our affairs upon our ability to pay—and there were many symptoms at the time of his having been secretly put in motion by the Government."²³⁸

Hamilton's letter shows some important factors. The fact that he uses the word conjecture shows clearly that he had no actual proof that the million Beaumarchais received was part of the gift from Louis XVI. Furthermore he goes on to discuss that Beaumarchais probably lacked the money to procure the materiel. Hamilton's point on this may be true but it is irrelevant as it has

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Hamilton to Jefferson, 10 June 1793, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=1111311113&sa=&r=247&sr=>.

²³⁸ Ibid.

no bearing on the contractual nature of the arrangement between Beaumarchais and the Americans.

Hamilton's investigation concluded that the United States did in fact owe Beaumarchais \$ 422,265 but when the million livres were factored in and the interest was calculated the balance came to zero.²³⁹ Hamilton's findings were incorrect because the million livres he deducted was a loan from Louis XVI to Beaumarchais. The fact that the initial million that Beaumarchais received was a loan seems to have eluded all of the individuals charged with reconciling the accounts. Although Hamilton's conclusions were more favorable than the previous attempt, the facts still did not support the findings.

On 6 February 1807, President Thomas Jefferson wrote Congress at the urging of the French government to settle the Beaumarchais Claim.²⁴⁰ On the 23rd of February, Jefferson asked the Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin to look into the matter.²⁴¹ The Beaumarchais matter seems to have been a major concern for the Jefferson administration. This can be attributed to Jefferson's affinity for the French and his policies about having closer ties with them. On 2 September 1807, Secretary of State James Madison asked the Attorney General Caesar Augustus Rodney to "not forget the Beaumarchais' case".²⁴² The interesting thing about this is that several cabinet level secretaries were involved in the Beaumarchais matter. This shows that it was a high priority for the Jefferson administration.

Over the course of three months, Rodney examined the Beaumarchais claim and the available documentation. In his letter dated 7 December 1807 to Madison, Rodney outlined the

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Jefferson to Congress, 6 February 1807, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=11131113&sa=&r=276&sr=>.

²⁴¹ Jefferson to Gallatin, 23 February 1807, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=11131113&sa=&r=277&sr=>.

²⁴² Madison to Rodney, 2 September 1807, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=11131113&sa=&r=278&sr=>.

facts and his legal opinion on the matter. He outlines his findings in a similar manner as a lawyer would in courtroom. He starts with the facts that are not disputed then works into his legal opinion based on the evidence.²⁴³

Rodney mentions that the United States did in fact receive in full the materiel in accordance with the contract that Beaumarchais claimed to have provided.²⁴⁴ This contradicts the earlier findings that Arthur Lee and the Board of the Treasury made when they discounted Beaumarchais' claims. The Attorney General goes on to state that Beaumarchais' claim legally still existed until paid or there was a valid legal reason to dismiss it.²⁴⁵ Rodney explicitly used the word contract to describe the arrangement of Beaumarchais providing materiel to the Americans. This is clear evidence that there was a business relationship between the playwright and the rebel government. Rodney's statements in calling the arrangement a contract established that Beaumarchais was in fact a prime contractor.

Rodney continues that the United States government never gave Beaumarchais the million livres on 10 June 1776. He stated that the United States claims that the French government gave Beaumarchais the advance as a gift for the Americans. He also stated that the case needed to be proven in order to determine what the actual status of the claim was.²⁴⁶

The Attorney General continues by mentioning the agreement between Benjamin Franklin and Vergennes on 25 February 1783 that stated prior to the alliance in 1778, the French government gave the United States three million livres as a gift. He also pointed out that the United States' records show receipt of the three million. He questioned whether or not Beaumarchais' claims would be impacted legally by an agreement he was not party to. He goes

²⁴³ Rodney to Madison, 7 December 1807, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=1111311113&sa=&r=280&sr=>.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

on to state that it was never revealed where the missing million livres was applied or to who. Rodney admitted that there was no conclusive proof that Beaumarchais was the recipient of the million livres in question. He continued by explaining the receipt to Beaumarchais that the French Republic furnished.²⁴⁷

While the receipt showing Beaumarchais receiving the million livres is compelling, Rodney explains that its wording is ambiguous. He continues by mentioning that nothing in the receipt creates any obligation by Beaumarchais to account to the United States the money. He implies that Beaumarchais was only accountable to Vergennes for its application. Rodney then rendered his opinion that the 10 June 1776 payment was in fact part of the gift as stated in the 1783 agreement between Vergennes and Franklin. He further went on to state that the belief was that the arms and other supplies came from the King of France. Rodney pointed out that upon his assignment to America after the treaty was signed, Gérard stated in 1779 that the materiel provided by Beaumarchais was out of his private accounts and the government had no interest or involvement in it.²⁴⁸

Gérard's statements to the Congress on the surface appear to be maintaining the secrecy of the French involvement before the formal alliance. This view should be discounted because the French would have had no motive to maintain the clandestine nature of the aid if it came from them. The French by 1779 were already at war with the British and it did not matter if they admitted involvement or not by that point. The fact of the matter was that in order for the French to avoid war with Britain, the venture of supplying the Americans could not in any way been tied back to them. Having Beaumarchais set up the commercial venture to aid the Americans was the best way to maintain secrecy but it also created an independent entity that

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

was not the government. As *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie* was established as a commercial entity, the government could state and be factual in stating that they were not involved.

Essentially, the French government had a political interest in Beaumarchais' commercial ventures in aiding the Americans, but was not involved in the actual operation of the firm.

The Attorney General then went on to give his legal opinion on Beaumarchais' claim. He stated that the agreement between Vergennes and Franklin in 1783 did not involve Beaumarchais. While the money was most likely distributed to the playwright, he cannot in the legal sense be discounted for the amount given that he was not party to nor did he agree to the contract between Vergennes and Franklin. He surmised that Vergennes may have included the million livre amount in the gift listing but may have been used for some secret purpose that was not handing the Americans money directly.²⁴⁹ One thing Rodney did not mention in his opinion is how they were actually defining gift. From one point of view the money the French government loaned to Beaumarchais to establish *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie* could have been considered a gift. It was still a loan that required the playwright to repay, but it could have been considered in that light as a gift.

Rodney then reemphasized that Beaumarchais did not have any obligation to account for the million livres to the United States and that the playwright was accountable only to Vergennes for its application.²⁵⁰ As Beaumarchais had no legal obligation to furnish the Americans with any accounting of the money he received, its use cannot be used as grounds to withhold payment for the services rendered. Rodney then went on to explain that the debit of the one million livre

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

amount from Beaumarchais' claim could not legally be sustained. He stated that the assumptions that were made were considered to be inadmissible as evidence.²⁵¹

Despite Rodney's findings that the United States did not have any legal grounds to withhold payment from Beaumarchais, no action was taken to reconcile the account. Again, in 1812 President James Madison under the urgings of the French government asked Attorney General William Pinkney to again evaluate the claims. In his letter to President Madison dated 22 January 1812, the Attorney General came to the same legal conclusion as his predecessor that the debit based on the million livres advanced to Beaumarchais on 10 June 1776 could not be supported legally even if in the moral sense it should be.²⁵²

The fight to settle Beaumarchais' claim as carried on by his heirs, lasted until 1835, when the Congress offered a settlement that was a take it or leave it proposition. They offered 800,000 francs to settle the claim which his heirs accepted.²⁵³ It is self evident that they accepted the lower amount because they probably believed that they would never see anything if they did not accept it. It is clear by the body of evidence that the United States government was not justified in withholding any amount owed to Beaumarchais and they were further unjustified in offering his descendents such a lower amount.

In looking at the case of the secret aid that Beaumarchais provided it is clear that the agreements were contractual commercial agreements between the American government and the private commercial entity. The agent who entered into said agreements Silas Deane was in fact legally authorized and ordered to do so. The contracts between Beaumarchais' firm and the American government were clearly a contractor-customer relationship.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Pinkney to Madison, 22 January 1812, in *Founders Online*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://founders.archives.gov/?q=beaumarchais&s=1111311113&sa=&r=286&sr=>.

²⁵³ Bass, *Beaumarchais*.

As the government through Deane and later directly entered into a contract with Beaumarchais they created a legal obligation to pay for the goods and services that he provided. The French government acted as a subcontractor and investor to Beaumarchais' firm but had no contractual relationship to the American government until February 1778. Regardless of where Beaumarchais procured the materiel from, the contract was with him as the prime contractor and the United States was indebted to him.

The agreements between Franklin and Vergennes in 1783 had and have no bearing on the financial obligations that the United States had to Beaumarchais. The French government gave no explanation to the Americans as to what the so called missing million was used for. The Americans accepted this and did not question the fact until later. Regardless of what that amount was used for, Beaumarchais was under no obligation to explain to the Americans its use. Furthermore, as Beaumarchais was not privy to nor did he agree to anything in the 1782 meeting between Vergennes and Franklin, he cannot be held legally liable for the terms of said agreement.

The American government was unjustified in withholding any payment from Beaumarchais because they lacked any legal grounds to do so. They furthermore were unjustified in offering Beaumarchais' heirs a lower amount than what was actually owed. As there was a contractual agreement between the United States and Beaumarchais, they were obligated to pay for goods and services rendered. They did not. As such Beaumarchais' claims against the government were valid and not fraudulent in nature.

The findings that Beaumarchais was charging unreasonable prices and as such discounted as the Board of the Treasury found are irrelevant. The prices were agreed upon both by Silas Deane, the legal agent for the Congress and the Commerce Committee when Francy negotiated

the contract with them. The prices were in fact higher than they would have been in peacetime, but given the level of risk that Beaumarchais assumed, the prices were not astronomical.

The reasons for withholding payments from Beaumarchais were in part due to the dismal state of the American treasury, Arthur Lee's character attacks against Deane and Beaumarchais, and general assumptions not grounded in the facts. In looking at the entire situation, one can see how a seemingly simple business transaction became a 58 year affair.

It is common knowledge that the American financial situation throughout the course of the war and early republic times was really bad. Hamilton's financial plans following the war involved ensuring that the new nation paid all of its debts. Given that premise, it is only logical that they would dismiss as many debts as they could under the guise of being invalid. This begs the question, how many other valid debts did the United States summarily dismiss in the post war years?

CONCLUSION

This study sought to determine if the support that Beaumarchais provided was a business transaction essential to the survival of the American Revolution and if the Congress was justified in withholding payment from the playwright. This study also sought to determine if the interpretations of Elizabeth Kite in her works *Beaumarchais and the war of American Independence Volumes 1 and 2* were supportable given that she had a limited body of sources to work with at the time.

Despite her lack of sources from France, Elizabeth Kite's works *Beaumarchais and the war of American Independence Volumes 1 and 2* were well supported. She was heavily dependent on American primary sources and on various secondary sources. In looking at the secret aid excluding Kite's work and including the French primary sources, her interpretations would have remained unchanged. The French sources such as the correspondence of Beaumarchais clearly reinforces Kite's arguments that the secret aid was in fact a business transaction requiring payment and the Congress was unjustified in withholding payment from Beaumarchais. Kite however did not argue that without the secret aid that the outcome of the war would have changed.

This study shows that Charles Stille's work *Beaumarchais and the Lost Million: a Chapter of the Secret History of the American Revolution* that argued that the secret aid was a gift from King Louis XVI that did not require repayment and that Beaumarchais was a war profiteer was substantially incorrect. While Beaumarchais was a war profiteer, this fact is irrelevant because his argument suffers from the *ad hominem* fallacy. It appears that Stille believed the statements of Arthur Lee. Stille's arguments in favor of the aid being a gift were

lacking due to the circumstantial and limited nature of the evidence he cited and thus cannot be fully supported.

Beaumarchais' efforts saved the American Revolution from becoming another failed rebellion and just a minor footnote in history. Only two other scholars have made the claim that Beaumarchais' efforts saved the American cause. Unger and Paul both wrote amazing works that chronicle the secret aid and state that Beaumarchais saved the American Revolution. However in both cases their level of analysis was targeted more at the popular audience and less at the academic community. Their presentations were to some degree oversimplified although they were great standard accounts of the events.

Beaumarchais' efforts to secretly aid the Americans included providing materiel support, personnel and financial resources at a time when the rebels were desperately short on everything. The aid was delivered at a critical time for the rebels and was essential to the survival of the American cause. The standard teachings in the United States show that the French alliance was what tipped the balance in favor of the rebels but the Americans needed to be able to resist the British on their own.

General John Burgoyne's surrender at the Saratoga Campaign was the deciding event that finally convinced the French government to openly support the Americans. The materiel shipments that Beaumarchais provided early in 1777 were delivered to the Northern Department of the Continental Army. It was this army, equipped with French muskets and French ammunition that went on to defeat Burgoyne at Saratoga and was low on ammunition upon the conclusion. Had the shipment not arrived, it is clear that the British would have prevailed in the campaign and the French would have never have openly allied with the Americans. It is also highly probable that they would have ordered Beaumarchais to cease operations as the British

were becoming increasingly suspicious of his activities. If the French not entered into the formal alliance the outcome of the war that culminated in the victory at Yorktown would not have occurred.

As far as personnel support, Beaumarchais assisted the rebels by finding an out of the box solution to introducing von Steuben to the Americans. He invented the Prussian's military identity to the American commissioners and funded his passage across the Atlantic. Introducing von Steuben to the Americans proved to be essential to the success of the Revolution by the Prussian transforming the Continental Army from a collection of militia to a proficient fighting force.

Beaumarchais' aid was in fact a contractual business arrangement requiring payment between Beaumarchais and the American government. The negotiations and subsequent agreements between Silas Deane and Beaumarchais did constitute a binding obligation on both parties. Beaumarchais was acting as a private merchant and the French government was not party to the agreements.

Silas Deane was formally appointed by the Congress in 1776 to be their agent in France to purchase supplies for the Continental Army. His appointment ensured that he had the legal authorizations to enter into binding agreements and contracts that obligated the Congress into fulfilling the terms of said agreements. Beaumarchais, although being granted permission and acting under the desires of his government, was a private merchant who was in charge of a private firm. As the head of the *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie* firm, Beaumarchais was authorized to enter into contracts and agreements with the American government. Deane and Beaumarchais both had the authority to enter into agreements, and as such any agreements were contractually binding to both parties.

When Deane and Beaumarchais entered into the initial agreements in 1776 and when Francy, Beaumarchais' agent entered into a contract in 1778 with the Americans the roles were defined and created. Beaumarchais' trading company *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie* was in fact the prime contractor to the American government. As the prime contractor all agreements were between that firm and the government and were binding on both parties. The French government acted as a subcontractor in allowing Beaumarchais to purchase materiel from their arsenals and when they gave him the initial one million livre loan. As a subcontractor to the prime contractor, the French government had no binding relationship with the American government until the formal alliance in February 1778.

The treaty of alliance in 1778 did not absolve the American government from its preexisting contractual obligations with Beaumarchais. The treaty was irrelevant to the terms of the previous agreements and the Congress had an obligation to fulfill its obligations. The treaty did change the subsequent relationship between the American and French governments. The French became the prime contractor and Beaumarchais became the subcontractor even though he was still subcontracting to the very entity that he was a subcontractor for. The change in relationships were irrelevant to the original agreements.

As the American government had a binding contractual relationship with Beaumarchais they were unjustified in withholding payment from him for goods and services rendered. The Congress withholding Beaumarchais' payments were the result of the personal attacks and deceptions of Arthur Lee as well as confusion (intentional or unintentional) over the nature of the loan Beaumarchais received on 10 June 1776. Critics such as Arthur Lee and Alexander Hamilton viewed this money as a gift to the Americans from King Louis XVI and not as a loan to Beaumarchais.

The 10 June 1776 payment to the playwright was in fact a loan to Beaumarchais that required repayment. In the 1783 agreements between Vergennes and Franklin, the French outlined what money was a gift. It is clear from the body of evidence that the loan given to Beaumarchais was included in this amount. However, in looking at the situation, one can see how a loan could be identified as a gift. Vergennes most likely viewed the loan and the authorization to commence trading between Beaumarchais and the Americans as a gift. The other possibility is that it was simply an error on Vergennes' part by including that amount in the gift listings. Either way, the million livre loan did not change the fact that the Americans had binding agreements with Beaumarchais and had an obligation to fulfill the terms of the terms of said agreements.

The decision by various American officials over the course of the 58 year span from the first agreements until the final settlement in 1835 to withhold payment from Beaumarchais could not be upheld in a legal sense. Beaumarchais was not involved with the 1783 agreements between Franklin and Vergennes and cannot be held to the terms of that agreement. Regardless of Vergennes' statements, the American government had an obligation to pay for the goods and services that Beaumarchais rendered.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that the secret aid that Beaumarchais provided the Americans during the Revolutionary War was in fact a contractual business arrangement that required repayment and not a gift from King Louis XVI. The goods and services provided by Beaumarchais was between him as a private individual and the American government. The Congress was unjustified in withholding any payment from Beaumarchais on the grounds that they had a binding agreement and their justification was based on assumptions and irrelevant

factors. Through Beaumarchais efforts, the American rebellion was able to survive and evolve into a revolution that changed the course of history.

This study shows that there is a seemingly large gap in the body of work on the secret aid. It is unknown if the gap is an unintentional oversight or if it is intentional because it challenges the very notions and mythology surrounding the Revolution that Americans tend to accept as fact. What is clear is that the average American has never heard of Beaumarchais or his essential contributions to the success of the American Revolution which is an indication of the lack of work on the topic. There are no statues nor paintings of the French playwright that highlight his contributions to the success of the war. Given the level of contributions that Beaumarchais made, it seems illogical that his actions have gone unrecognized by the majority of people and recognized only by a few.

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