

[Symposium on John Dickinson, American Founder](#)

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Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

November 15, 2018

Location:

Pennsylvania, United States

Subject Fields:

American History / Studies, Human Rights, Law and Legal History, Political History / Studies

In late 2019, the John Dickinson Writings Project (JDP) will publish the first three of an estimated eight volumes of *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson* with University of Delaware Press/University of Virginia Press. A launch event is planned in Philadelphia for spring of 2020. Hosted by the American Philosophical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and Library Company of Philadelphia, the event will include a plenary address by Gary Nash and a day-long symposium of eight to ten papers on Dickinson. We anticipate that the papers will be published in the first-ever collection of essays on John Dickinson.

John Dickinson (1732-1808), America's first political celebrity, wrote more for the Founding than any other figure, including many issuances from the national congresses and conventions from 1764 to 1786. He also wrote prolifically for ordinary Americans with the intent to educate them about their rights and how to resist tyranny peacefully. In addition to being one of the foremost legal scholars of the era, he was also the only leading founder who was an abolitionist, an advocate of women's rights, and a champion of other subordinated peoples, including Indians, the poor, and prisoners. As a fellow traveler with the Quakers, though not a member of their society, he brought his religious beliefs to bear on his legal and political work with the goal of "defending the innocent & redressing the injurd."

The JDP is seeking scholars at all ranks who are interested in conducting research in this significant cache of never-before-seen Founding era documents. They will receive advance access to the documents, including the first three volumes, covering years 1751 to 1769, in digital format, and the remaining material in preparation, which extends to 1808. Most of this material has been transcribed. What has not yet been transcribed is available in high-quality digital images of the original manuscripts, organized by year. Scholars whose proposals are accepted will be given remote access to the JDP files on a university server. These files include not

only the primary source Dickinson material, but also most extant secondary source materials published on him.

For a number of reasons, including illegibility, complexity, and lack of archival identification and processing, Dickinson's papers have never before been fully accessible. These factors, combined with misperceptions about Dickinson's role in the Founding, mean there is very little extant scholarship on this central figure. Yet the Dickinson material is a rich resource on almost every aspect of 18th-century American society. Proposals need not be limited to the following topics:

Periods/Events

London/Middle Temple in the 1750s
The William Smith libel trial of 1758
The flag-of-truce trade of the 1750s-60s
Pennsylvania royal government controversy
Resistance to Britain from 1764 to 1776
Military 1775 to 1783
Resistance to 1776 Pennsylvania constitution
Peace negotiations in 1779
Presidency of Delaware, 1781-82
Presidency of Pennsylvania, 1782-85
Mutiny of 1783
Celebrations for the birth of the Dauphin
Wyoming controversy
Res Publica v. Longchamps
Res Publica v. Doan
Creation/Ratification of the Federal Constitution, 1786-1788
Delaware constitutional convention of 1792
Jay Treaty Protest of 1795

Themes

Abolitionism/slavery
Agrarianism
Books and book ownership
Democracy
Democratic Republican party politics
Celebrity
Education

Federal power v. states' rights
Foreign relations
Indian rights/diplomacy
Jurisprudence
Peace activism
Philanthropy
Political moderation
Religion—Quakerism and “nature religion”
Religious liberty
Taxation and economic policy
Westward expansion/land and property rights
Virtue and corruption in government

Because researchers may need more familiarity with the primary and secondary materials to craft a viable proposal, there will be two submission dates for proposals:

1. Preliminary proposals of ca. 250 words accompanied by a CV are due **November 15, 2018**: Scholars will submit their initial ideas and interests in a formal proposal. Proposals will be chosen based on their substance and viability considering the sources. Those scholars will then be given access to the server with the materials.

2. Final proposals of ca. 500 words due **January 15, 2019**.

Proposals should be submitted to Dr. Jane E. Calvert (jane.calvert@uky.edu). Notice of acceptance will be by March 1, 2019. Papers will be due on March 1, 2020 and presented in Philadelphia in April 2020, date TBD.

Participants in the symposium will be invited to attend a dinner after the plenary address and they will receive reimbursement for travel and lodging.

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