FRONTIER DIPLOMACY:
The State of Franklin and Its Quest for Independence

By Blake W. Jones*

After the Treaty of Paris of 1783, the territory of the United States extended to the Mississippi River, well beyond the colonial border of the Appalachian Mountains. As additional settlers moved into this frontier territory, they sought to create governments of their own and join the young nation as new states. These movements were often motivated by the inability or unwillingness of the parent states to provide government services to frontier settlements, either because of the natural barrier of the Appalachians or the disdain of the coastal elites for the people who lived in those settlements. Of all the new state movements in the Old Southwest, such as those in Kentucky and southwest Virginia, the State of Franklin was the only one that established a functioning de facto government separate from that of its parent state. Once their government was established in the northeastern corner of what is now Tennessee, the Franklinites (or Franks), an assorted group of aspiring land speculators and ordinary frontier settlers, assumed that they would soon join the nation and thus provide for themselves the necessary government services (such as protection from neighboring Indian tribes) that the parent state of North Carolina had been reluctant to provide.

To achieve this goal of statehood, the Franklinites needed supporters and allies to legitimize their new government and support their bid for statehood, and they engaged in several diplomatic initiatives in an effort to gain that support. In this quest, Franklin was breaking new ground and setting a precedent for how new states were formed. No separate state movement had yet succeeded although the timing of the Franklin movement coincided with the movements in Vermont, Maine, Kentucky, and southwestern Virginia. The leaders of the Franklin government looked first to North Carolina then to the Confederation Congress, Georgia, Virginia, the Cherokee, and even to Spanish authorities in Louisiana and Florida. The diplomacy and business conducted by Fran-

* The author is a graduate student in History at Arizona State University.

1 For the purposes of this paper, the State of Franklin consists of Washington, Sullivan, and Greene counties in what is now Tennessee. There has been some debate about whether the name of the frontier state in East Tennessee was Franklin or Frankland. According to William Martin and Stephen Cocke, sons of two prominent North Carolina and Franklin officials, Joseph Martin and William Cocke, the state was named Franklin because it is equivalent to Free-land.” Lyman Draper to William Martin, February 18, 1843, in Tennessee Papers, 3XX14, Lyman Draper Collection, Microfilm at Kentucky Library, Bowling Green, Kentucky, originals at Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. Despite this letter, historian J. T. McGill calls the state led by John Sevier the State of Franklin while he defines Frankland as the greater state proposed by Colonel Arthur Campbell of Virginia. J. T. McGill, "Frankland and Frankland: Names and Boundaries," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 8 (January 1923): 248.
John Sevier by Charles Wilson Peale, 1790. As governor of the State of Franklin, John Sevier assumed most of the responsibility for negotiations with neighboring governments. Courtesy of the Tennessee Historical Society Collection, Tennessee State Museum.

The birth of the State occurred by the former colonists in the early American lawmaking the national government to take hold of the Appalachian Mountains. The states would reject legislation that the lands would remain in ceded territory, its act of cession, laying the groundwork for North Carolina as a county in the ceded territory. The town of Jonesborough was a printing press west of the state, which by the attacks of North Carolina by Franklin officials forced officials themselves to prove the state of North Carolina.


3 An act ceding the Congress organizing the Delegates from this State Province Papers, Box 4, Folder 10. referred to as TSLA), Nashville.

klin with these governments on issues of trade, Indian affairs, boundary disputes, and statehood demonstrate Franklin’s de facto autonomy and legitimacy as an independent government separate from North Carolina, despite the Franklinites’ failure to attain official statehood or independence from North Carolina.

The birth of the State of Franklin can be traced to the enormous debt that was incurred by the former colonies during the American Revolution. To pay off these debts, the early American lawmakers proposed that the larger states cede their western lands to the national government to sell to prospective settlers in order to raise sufficient revenue. After repeated requests for land cessions, North Carolina finally ceded its territory west of the Appalachian Mountains to the Confederation Congress in 1784 with the provision that the lands would revert back to control of North Carolina if the cession was not accepted by Congress within one year. The North Carolina General Assembly also recognized that the ceded territory would be organized into a state or states in the future within its act of cession, laying the groundwork for the Franklinites’ argument for statehood.

Following North Carolina’s act of cession, representatives from the militia of each county in the ceded territory gathered and decided to hold a convention in August in the town of Jonesborough to consider the possibility of forming a new state because the ceded lands had no government. Unfortunately, their decision to form a new state and the subsequent history of the State of Franklin has been hard to document by historians because very few of the public records of Franklin are extant. This is due to the lack of a printing press west of the Appalachian Mountains, the destruction of court records by the attacks of North Carolina partisans, the natural destruction of documents hidden by Franklin officials for safekeeping, and the destruction of documents by Franklin officials themselves to prevent incrimination in potential future treason cases pursued by the state of North Carolina. However, the existing sources point to the continuing

---


2 An act ceding to the Congress of the United States certain Western Lands therein described, and authorizing the Delegates from this State in Congress to execute a Deed or Deeds for the same: 1784, in William A. Proctor’s Papers, Box 4, Folder 10, Microfilm and Originals at Tennessee State Library and Archives (hereafter referred to as TSLA), Nashville.


search by the officials of Franklin for potential allies to support its legitimacy as an independent state and a potential member of the Confederation. The sources also reveal aspects of the business conducted by the Franklinites that were typical of any normal government.

The extant sources have also produced a historiography that is primarily local and regional in nature. There have been very few attempts to place Franklin in a larger national context. William Brewster's *The Fourteenth Commonwealth: Vermont and the States That Failed*, published in 1960, has been one of the few attempts to place Franklin in a larger context by comparing it with separate state movements in Vermont, Westmoreland, and Transylvania. However, Brewster's dated work merely provides four mini-historical accounts of each movement with a very brief introduction that does not adequately compare and link the different separate state movements.6

Scholarship about the State of Franklin has also resided largely within the domain of Tennessee state history. However, this interesting episode in the state's history offers some exciting new possibilities for other historical fields such as diplomatic history. William Earl Weeks notes that the historiography of early American foreign relations is a "scholarly backwater" because many of the events have been already chronicled by previous historians. Nevertheless, Weeks suggests that diplomatic historians should "examine old issues in a new light." Emily Rosenberg takes this point even further by contending that there is substantial scholarship on early American foreign relations, but it is not considered diplomatic history; it is, in other words, "a problem of packaging and labeling." Moreover, Bradford Perkins argues that diplomatic historians have largely neglected early American relations with Spanish authorities and Native American tribes in the borderlands and that these topics provide fertile ground for future study in the era (which can be cultivated with the study of Franklin).7

The narrative of Franklin's quest for independence should be incorporated into the historiography of early American foreign relations during the Articles of Confederation period because of its complex tangle of diplomatic relationships with the Confederation Congress and other individual states, as well as with Spain and the Cherokee. The Franklin experience provides an interesting example of how diplomacy was conducted by states (de facto or not) in the period of the weak national government under the Articles of Confederation. Furthermore, the limited foreign policy efforts of the national government encouraged the Franklinites desire for independence. The Franklinites took special interest, for example, in the Treaty of Hopewell with the Cherokee, which ignored the State of Franklin entirely and actually granted the

---

6 See Brewster, *The Fourteenth Commonwealth.*

Cherokees land claimed by the Franklinites, and the Jay-Gardoqui Treaty with Spain which (although never ratified) would have given Spain exclusive navigation rights on the Mississippi River—a commercial route that was vital to the Franklinites—in exchange for trade concessions that benefited the Eastern elites. These treaties, which were instrumental in creating the internal support necessary for launching and maintaining a separate state movement, fall into Frederick Marks’s argument that “national defense, foreign trade, and overseas reputation” were more important than Shay’s Rebellion in creating an urgent need to write a new Constitution. The question of if and how new states should be admitted to the Union, an issue raised by Franklin and other separate state movements, also pressed the need for a new Constitution. These examples of Confederation diplomacy with the Cherokee and the Spanish demonstrate the profound effect of foreign policy on shaping domestic affairs, in this case, the continued Franklinites desire for independence. The diplomacy of the State of Franklin also affected the domestic policies of the larger Confederation to some degree, and even influenced the new Constitution. In short, the impact of the State of Franklin is important not only to the history of Tennessee, but also the larger history of the United States and its relations with other powers in Europe and in North America.

After deciding to form a state of their own, the Franklinites naturally looked first to their parent state of North Carolina to recognize the legitimacy of their new government and support its bid to join the Confederation. Although Franklin and North Carolina’s relationship involved a host of issues, the matter of Franklin’s statehood dominated their relationship. The people of Franklin thought that North Carolina would readily support its independence, in part because many North Carolinians did not really want the frontier settlers as part of their state. During the debate on the cession act, some members of the North Carolina General Assembly had referred to the people of the Western County as “the offscourings of the earth, fugitives from justice.” Support was also expected because, as William Cage stated in a letter to North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin, the territory ceded by the state did not enjoy the benefits of government services. Unprotected by the state militia and without ready access to state courts, Cage claimed that the “Western Country found themselves taxed to support the Government, while they were deprived of all the blessings of it.” Furthermore, the Franklinites cited legal precedent for their separation in the Declaration of Independence that preceded their own Constitution, recalling that the 1776 North Carolina Constitution “declares it justifiable to erect new states whenever the consent of the Legislature shall countenance it, and this consent

---


is implied...in the cession act.” In other words, the founders of Franklin assumed that because North Carolina was willing to cede its territory to the Congress, it was giving its consent for the formation of new states.

The structure of Franklin’s government was also organized to pay homage to North Carolina in order to gain its favor for Franklinite independence. During the constitutional convention, a group of Presbyterian ministers under the influence of Virginian Colonel Arthur Campbell prepared a radically democratic constitution for a greater state of Franklin that included universal manhood suffrage and strict personal moral codes for government officials. However, this radical constitution was rejected in favor of adopting a temporary constitution very similar to the North Carolina constitution. The Campbell constitution appealed mainly to the clergy present at the convention and others who sought to construct a more experimental state. However, the more pragmatic delegates who were more concerned with achieving statehood and who did not necessarily subscribe to Campbell’s strict morals rejected his constitution in favor of a constitution that would not deviate much from what they had been accustomed to in North Carolina. The newly appointed governor of Franklin, John Sevier, the Revolutionary War hero of King’s Mountain and a land speculator, wrote of his satisfaction with the North Carolina form of government while still reaffirming his belief that Franklin should be independent, “Your Constitution and Laws we Revere, and consider ourselves Happy that we have had it in our power to get the same established in the State of Franklin.” While the new constitution was being drafted, the county offices in Franklin were typically transferred to the same people who had held those offices under North Carolina to facilitate a smooth change and not upset North Carolina any more than what was necessary for independence. Historian James William Hagy explains that the similarity of the Franklin government and constitution to that of North Carolina demonstrates that the Franklinites realized the potential for failure. This similarity would allow for a smoother transition back into North Carolina’s government if Franklin failed.

In establishing their government, the Franklinites pursued a variety of symbolic actions to gain North Carolina as an ally. Sevier began a series of correspondence with North Carolina officials that was flattering and expressive of his reverence for


13 John Sevier to Governor Richard Caswell, October 28, 1786, in Cora Bales Sevier and Nancy Sevier Madden, Sevier family history with collected letters of General John Sevier, first Governor of Tennessee, and 28 collateral family lineages (Washington, 1961), 68-70.

14 Ramsey, Annals of Tennessee, 300.


that State. In October 1786, Caswell, the governor of North Carolina, sent an interest in whatever proposals included the naming of the Franklin state. Caswell and William Blount were both backcountry Carolinians, Martin Akard was set up by the Franklinians with symbolic actions to demonstrate Franklinite independence of North Carolina in order to form a new state.

Despite the efforts of the Franklinite leadership, the officials of North Carolina refused to consider the North Carolina legislature the Assembly of a new state.

14 John Sevier to Richard Caswell, April 13, 1786, in Sevier and Madden, Sevier family history, 185.


The founders of Franklin assumed the Territory to the Congress, it was
organized to pay homage to its parent independence. During the
few months that assembly sat, there were many orders for
the passing of a new democratic constitution for
the Territory. The theme of neighborhood suffrage and
strict personal liberty in its radical constitution was
repeatedly referred to as being similar to the North
Carolina example. It was mainly to the clergy present
that Caswell advocated a more experimental state.

The Virginians were concerned with achieving the
same liberty as was expressed in Campbell’s strict morals rejected
the idea of silk hats, better dressed than what was
traded in the region. The newly appointed governor of
North Carolina, a King’s Mountain and a land
speculator from North Carolina, seems to have
been independent, “Your Constitution is
a happy one. We are happy that we have had it in
Franklin.” While the new constitution
of Franklin was received with enthusiasm by North Carolina to facilitate a
bargain with the Virginians, the constitution that was
necessary for Franklin was not necessary for the
North Carolina Constitution. Franklin demonstrates that
the similarity of the
North Carolina Constitution
of 1776. Franklin’s independence would allow for a
better form of government if Franklin failed.

Sevier pursued a variety of symbolic actions in Franklin’s name, including the
use of a series of correspondence with members of the state that was
dominantly expressed in the latter stages of Franklin’s independence.

that State. In October 1785, Sevier wrote his friend and
fellow land speculator Richard Caswell, the governor of North Carolina from 1786-1787, that “the citizens of this State
registered to the North Carolina with particular affection, and will never cease to feel
interest in whatever may concern her honor and safety.” Other symbolic actions
included the naming of newly created Franklin counties after North Carolina officials
Caswell and William Blount. The first institution of higher education west of the
Appalachians, Martin Academy, named in honor of North Carolina hero Josiah Martin,
was set up by the Franklin constitution. Sevier and the Franklin Assembly used all these
symbolic actions to demonstrate that there was no ill will between their new state and
North Carolina in order to gain their parent state’s support for Franklin’s independence.

Despite the efforts of Franklin to woo North Carolina to support its independence,
the officials of North Carolina repealed its act of cession and began resisting
Franklinite independence. Earlier in 1783, the North Carolina Assembly had passed
the North Carolina Land Act which created huge land grants out of western
territory that the Assembly assumed was forfeited by the Cherokee because they had

15 John Sevier to Richard Caswell, October 17, 1785, in Sevier and Madden, Sevier family history, 65-66.
16 A. P. Whitaker, “The Muscle Shoals Speculation, 1783-1789,” The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 13
(December 1926): 374.
(April 1944): 171-172.
supported the British in the Revolutionary War. Many of the state legislators secured land grants for themselves, claiming over 4 million acres of western lands in what became known as the “Great Land Grab.” The subsequent 1784 cession act included a provision where all previous titles would be recognized by the national government. Recognizing the greed of their legislators and in opposition to the cession act in general, the North Carolina electorate voted out the land speculators and those who had supported the cession act and elected a slate of legislators rabidly opposed to the western cession and Franklin’s ambitions of independence. Once the new legislature convened in October 1784, it moved quickly to repeal the earlier cession act.¹⁹

North Carolina began pursuing a variety of means to reconcile the Western settlers with their parent state. The first step taken was to form the Washington District out of the formerly ceded territory. This district would have its own superior court and militia brigade, two wishes of the frontier settlers. Sevier was appointed to command the district’s militia with the rank of brigadier general while David Campbell was chosen to be judge of the new superior court. Although the formation of the Washington District seemed to appease Sevier and other Franklinites at first, Sevier and Campbell continued to support the new state movement to gain even more power and influence in the area. North Carolina’s attempt to meet the demands of the Western settlers with the creation of the Washington District might have persuaded some of the less committed Franklinites to remain loyal to their parent state because it had tried to provide some additional services while granting some more autonomy to the district.²⁰

In response to the failure of the Washington District to completely appease the majority of the Western settlers and the first legislative session of the Franklin Assembly in March 1785, Governor Alexander Martin wrote to members of the Council of State and the General Assembly to convene as quickly as possible to address the revolt of the counties of Washington, Sullivan, and Greene west of the Appalachians.²¹ After hearing the advice of the Council of State and while waiting on the General Assembly to convene, Martin issued a manifesto to the residents of the new State of Franklin, condemning their actions as a revolt and demanding that “they return to their duty and allegiance, and forbear paying any obedience to any self-created power and authority unknown to the Constitution of this State, and not sanctioned by the Legislature.”²²

Sevier responded to the calls for obedience and loyalty.

Sevier’s proclamation in the land speculation war seemed to create an allegiance that was soon to restore the Franklinites to a more friendly toward the new statehood movement. They didn’t see any further action from the new general assembly, which was convinced for its new and temporary state, that the new state as long as the Assembly was not in session passed legislation to the benefit of the state. Colonial Judge Sevier, led the efforts to reconcile the North Carolinians to the state of Franklin on the floor.

The outcome of the North Carolina General Assembly’s government that divided the state into three counties, preventing them from becoming allies. Hoping to emulate the state of Franklin’s General Assembly, the


²¹ John Sevier to Daniel Kennedy, January 2, 1785, in Sevier and Madison, Sevier family history, 59.

²² Governor Alexander Martin to the Members of the Council of State, April 7, 1785, in Clark, 17:435-436, and Governor Alexander Martin to the Members of the North Carolina General Assembly, April 25, 1785, in ibid, 439-440.

Sevier responded to Martin's manifesto with a proclamation of his own, requiring the obedience and loyalty of Western settlers to the laws of the State of Franklin.23 Sevier's proclamation and the election of Richard Caswell (a partner with Sevier in the land speculation around Muscle Shoals) as North Carolina's new governor seemed to create an atmosphere of obedience to the laws of Franklin. This newfound allegiance was soon shattered by laws passed in North Carolina that were meant to restore the Franklin counties to the State of North Carolina. Although generally more friendly toward the prospective new state, Caswell knew he must oppose the new statehood movement in the interests of North Carolina, but he did not want to take any further action against the new state until the North Carolina Assembly convened for its new session to address the matter. In fact, Caswell was in favor of the new state as long as it gained the approval of the General Assembly.24 However, the Assembly was not as sympathetic to the new State of Franklin as Caswell. They passed legislation to pardon those who had revolted against the government of North Carolina and to permit the election of representatives from the Franklin counties to the General Assembly provided there were three honest citizen-inspectors to monitor the elections, a loosening of past electoral regulations.25 This law resulted in two elections being held on the same day in August 1786, one for Franklin and one for North Carolina. Colonel John Tipton, a North Carolina partisan and bitter rival of John Sevier, led the effort to re-incorporate Franklin into North Carolina and was elected to the North Carolina state senate where he argued consistently against the State of Franklin on the floor of the legislature.26

The outcome of the dual elections and additional legislation passed by the North Carolina General Assembly to offer incentives for allegiance to their state was a dual government that divided the Franklinites and plunged them and their state into chaos, preventing them from effectively lobbying for statehood among other potential allies. Hoping to entice more Franklinites to avail themselves of a pardon, North Carolina's General Assembly passed a law to exempt the Franklinites from taxes that

25 An Act to empower the freeholders and freemen of the counties of Washington, Sullivan, and Greene to return their representatives otherwise than is hereinafter directed, 1785, in Clark, 24:765-766.
26 John B. Finger, Tennessee Frontier: Three Regions in Transition (Bloomington, IN, 2001), 122. and Williams, History of Lost State of Franklin, 103-105. The rivalry between Sevier and Tipton even resulted in a physical struggle between the two: "Public meetings of Franklinites and anti-Franklinites often degenerated into wrestling or boxing matches, in which it was not unknown for an eye to be gouged out or an ear biten off. The otherwise able leaders of the respective movements were not above such behavior, as Sevier and Tipton proved one day in Jonesborough. Upon meeting one another, they exchanged, as was their habit, harsh words, until, unable to bear the provocation given him, Governor Sevier struck Colonel Tipton with his cane. Tipton, himself a famous boxer, dove at Sevier with his fists clenched, and the two struggled until they were separated by their friends." In Sayers, "Disunited States," 36-37.
were unpaid since 1784 because they had received no government services during that time. Many of the less committed Franklinites chose to take advantage of the offer. Realizing the divisive and devious intent of electoral and tax exemption laws passed by North Carolina, the Franklin Assembly in 1787 passed a poll tax of one shilling and a property tax of six pence per hundred acres and upon payment of these taxes in the first year, the citizen would be exempt from taxes for the next three years. However, the tax exemptions passed by the State of Franklin could not prevent the devastation of morale when David Campbell switched his allegiance from Franklin to North Carolina to reassume his old position as superior court judge for the Washington District. Campbell's defection also crippled the courts which made it seem as if the entire Franklin government was crippled because the courts were the government institution with which the people interacted most. John Tipton led raids against the Franklin courts and destroyed or stole their records as another way of interfering with this vital link between the people and their government and strengthening the position of the North Carolina advocates at the same time. (Unfortunately, these raids also deprived future historians of valuable sources about the State of Franklin.)

Despite his sympathies with Sevier and the Franklinites, Governor Caswell, along with the North Carolina General Assembly, effectively undermined the State of Franklin with new policies and legislation in order to restore it to North Carolina. Even though his policies had caused great division among the people of Franklin, Caswell insisted that "a new government will be shortly established if the people would unite, submit to their former government, and petition for a separation." The Franklinites were quite unsuccessful in their diplomatic efforts courting North Carolina as an ally to support their statehood because North Carolina was determined to reincorporate Franklin into the union.

While attempts by the state and Congress to gain recognition, and make the appeal directly to Congress, the majority of its members were not sympathetic to Congress' efforts to pass legislation to implement the majority of its power to provide an allowance for the deep desire in the people of Franklin. The Franklin Assembly was dissatisfied and decided that it had no other option but to ask for its repeal but refused to recognize Congress. Although Congress condemned the act of North Carolina, it proceeded in gaining the support of the people who have paved the road to nationhood short of the required act.

The efforts of the Franklinites soon led to the election of delegates in the Congress.
Franklin into the state and gain more favorable concessions from Congress before ceding the western territory again. Furthermore, prominent North Carolina officials previously engaged in land speculation in 1783 wanted to reassert their land claims that had faced potential challenges from the Franklin movement.

While attempting to court North Carolina's favor, the Franklin Assembly also tried to gain recognition as an independent state and gain admission into the Confederation through direct diplomatic appeals to the Confederation Congress. William Cocke was sent to New York to represent Franklin in the Confederation Congress and make the appeal for her admission into the union. Governor Sevier sent a letter to Congress introducing himself as the governor of the new state and asserting that the majority of its inhabitants desired separation from North Carolina and independence. Sevier also pledged in his letter that Franklin would "contribute everything in its power to promote the interest and honor of the United States," demonstrating the deep desire in which the Franklinites wanted to join the Union.36

The Franklin statehood movement required Congress to reevaluate its western land ordinances and "to take immediate Care of their Western Territory." Congress decided that it had the legal right to accept North Carolina's original cession despite its repeal but refused to do so for fear of North Carolina's withdrawal from the Union. Although Cocke's lobbying did not succeed in gaining admission for Franklin, Congress condemned the repeal of the cession act and recommended that North Carolina pass a second act of cession after the committee report was acted upon without any notice given to the North Carolina delegation, much to the dismay of North Carolina delegate Richard Dobbs Spaight.37 However, Cocke almost succeeded in gaining recognition of the 1784 North Carolina Cession Act which would have paved the road for independent statehood, but the final vote of seven to two was short of the required two-thirds majority.38

The efforts of Cocke and Sevier presented many dilemmas and challenges for the delegates in the Confederation Congress and other national politicians to confront

35 State of Franklin Assembly Order, March 12, 1785, in William A. Provine Papers, Box 4, Folder 10, TSLA; Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (Washington, 1906), 34:14; and John Sevier to the President of the Continental Congress, November 2, 1787, in Sevier and Madden, Sevier family history, 85.


in considering future separate state movements and the process whereby new states were to be created and admitted to the Confederation. Virginia delegate William Grayson worried that endorsing the Franklin movement would lead to a slippery slope in which "if the right [to form a new state from an existing state] exists in the first instance it may be carried so far as to reduce a State to the size of a county or parish."\(^3\) In his efforts to secure national support, Governor Sevier wrote Benjamin Franklin (for whom the state was named) on several occasions to ask for his "patronage" and to express his grievances about the election laws passed by North Carolina that allowed dual elections in Franklin. In his response, the elder statesman expressed his wish that the Franklinites reconcile with North Carolina to avoid a general Indian war that the land grabbing of the Franklinites might provoke.\(^4\) Despite the state's rejection by the Confederation Congress, there was no ill will between the Franklinites and the Congress as historian George Henry Alden noted that, "no official Franklin document and no letter written by a Franklin citizen...breathed the slightest complaint against the Federal Government."\(^5\)

While Benjamin Franklin and other delegates feared the impact of the State of Franklin on the unity of the existing states, some viewed Franklin's creation and entreaties of friendship as very appealing. Colonel Arthur Campbell wrote James Madison about the enormous benefits of the new state to the nation in terms of commerce between the East and Spanish America, of security as a buffer between the US and Spain and her Indian allies, and of its democratic success embodied in the Frankland constitution (which would soon be rejected by the constitutional convention). Campbell's involvement in helping write the Frankland constitution fueled his enthusiasm for the new state when he remarked to Madison that, "it would

---

\(^3\) William Grayson to Beverly Randolph, June 12, 1787, in Smith, 2:327-328.

\(^4\) John Sevier to Benjamin Franklin, April 9, 1787, in Sevier and Madden, Sevier family history, 74-75; John Sevier to Benjamin Franklin, November 2, 1787, in ibid, 85-86; and Benjamin Franklin to John Sevier, June 30, 1787, in ibid, 78-79.


perhaps surprise the world.\(^6\) The Federal Constitution Congress produced a Form, as much a benefit to Georgia."

The Franklin movement was a part of a larger question of how new western states could maintain influence on the Constitution. Franklin saw the Union as its largest threat to mean isolation from the world and a means of reducing the tension between the states.\(^7\)

Finding no success in his efforts, Franklin moved back to North Carolina.\(^8\) In his absence, John Sevier appealed to the Federal Congress on several occasions for support of the Franklinites.\(^9\) The Federal Congress were a result of the efforts of the revolutionary officials, including George Washington, Patrick Henry, and King's Mountain, and the restlessness of the region of Virginia as the state's constitutional officials ran so deep that the convention of the Society of the Cincinnati was formed and General George Elhollet became adjutant general of Virginia.\(^10\) Jim Child assumed the assignment as the Georgia government's agent. He decided to reframe the proposal as a petition for the Frankland Constitution.

\(^6\) Arthur Campbell to James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison*

\(^7\) Sayers, "Disunion States," in *Hanson, The American Nation*, June 28, 1788, in Register, Articles IV, Section 3 of the United States Constitution, as revised by the Federal Congress, and approved by the Constitutional Convention.\(^11\)


\(^9\) From Governor to Territory, *Quarterly 97* (Autumn 1928).
perhaps surprise the world, if Franklin, those wild half civilized People, would produce a Form, as much superior to it [the Virginia constitution], as Massachusetts is to Georgia." The Franklinites may not have found an ally for independence in the Confederation Congress, but they had a tremendous influence upon it and the 1787 Constitutional Convention, especially with regard to Article IV, Section 3 and the question of how new states would be represented in the new Congress. Franklin's influence on the Convention also signaled an end to its hope to gain admission into the Union as its largely Federalist population perceived that independence would mean isolation from the rest of the Union because North Carolina was unlikely at that point to consent to the formation of the state under the guidelines of Article IV, Section 3 of the new Constitution.

Finding no success with North Carolina or the Confederation Congress, the Franklinites turned next to the individual states of Georgia and Virginia for support. John Sevier appealed to the Georgia Assembly and the governor on a number of occasions for support of Franklinite statehood. The close ties between Franklin and Georgia were a result of many personal connections between Sevier and Georgia officials, including Georgia hero Colonel Elijah Clark, who fought alongside Sevier at King's Mountain, and former Governor George Matthews, who grew up in the same region of Virginia as did Sevier. Indeed, Sevier's personal connections with Georgia officials ran so deep that he was given honorary membership in the Georgia chapter of the Society of the Cincinnati. During the Revolution, Sevier had also served with General George Ellholm, a Danish soldier who had joined the American cause and became adjutant general of the Georgia militia after the war. After completing his assignment as the Georgia envoy to Franklin, Ellholm joined the Franklin militia as drill master. He decided to stay in Franklin because he received a land grant and had great affection for the Franklin cause. Ellholm became a strong advocate for supporting


65 Sayers, "Disunited States," 55-56, and New York Ratifying Convention Remarks (Francis Childs's Version), June 20, 1788, in Harold C. Syrett, ed., The Papers of Alexander Hamilton (New York, 1962), 5:16-26. Article IV, Section 3 of the US Constitution states, "New States may be admitted by the Congress into the union; but no new State shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the Junction of two or more States, or parts of States, without the Consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress." In his New York Convention Ratifying Remarks, Francis Child assumed that the Franklin statehood movement would succeed when he stated, "Vermont, Kentucky, and Franklin will probably soon become independent."

66 Walter Law Cannon, "Four Interpretations of the History of the State of Franklin," The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications 22 (1950): 7-8. The Franklinites' federalism was rooted in their deep desire to join the Union and the belief that Congress had the power to accept North Carolina's cession act despite the act's repeal. According to Peter Onuf, the Franklinites and other state separatists "defined statehood as an inferior, derivative status" in comparison to the national government. Peter S. Onuf, "From Colony to Territory: Changing Concepts of Statehood in Revolutionary America," Political Science Quarterly 97 (Autumn 1982): 455.

53
Franklinite statehood and wrote the Georgia General Assembly to request their assistance for that end. The bond between the common people of Franklin and Georgia was also strong because most of the common people of both states were backwoods-men, and these people had little in common with the coastal elites of their own states and less in common with the people of the Middle States and New England. Georgia had also voted for accepting the North Carolinacession act when the matter was brought before the Confederation Congress earlier in 1785.19

The close relationship between Franklin and Georgia manifested itself in two ways: through the land speculation around Muscle Shoals and the common enemy of nearby Indian tribes. Through these items of negotiation and business between the two governments, the Franklinites hoped to secure continued Georgian support for Franklin's statehood. Sevier, one of the principal speculators of Muscle Shoals, knew that he needed Georgia's consent because the land was considered part of Georgia as well. He also needed Georgian settlers to buy the property so he could make a profit. He wrote to Governor Edward Telfair that "the success of the Muscle Shoals enterprise greatly depends on the number that will go down to that place" and then wrote to the General Assembly that the Muscle Shoals settlement "would be of infinite advantage to your state" and promised Franklin's protection for the settlers from hostile Indian tribes.20 By establishing a close relationship with Georgia through the Muscle Shoals speculation, Sevier sought not only profit for himself, but also support for Franklin's statehood in the Confederation Congress.

In April 1786, the outbreak of a war between Georgia and the Creek Indians increased the closeness of the relationship between Franklin and Georgia that Sevier hoped would lead to eventual statehood for Franklin. Seeking military support, Georgia asked Franklin for militia to fight the Creeks in return for land grants around Muscle Shoals. After an act of the Franklin Assembly, the new frontier state responded by raising a force of 1,500 men to assist the Georgia militia in defeating the Creeks. A peace treaty was eventually concluded before the Franklinite militia joined the Georgians against the Creeks.21 After Georgia's 1786 scare of a war with the Creeks, Sevier warned Georgia's governor and assembly of impending Creek attacks a year later in 1787 through information provided by a rival Choctaw chief. Sevier also reminded the Georgians that Franklin was willing and able to come to Georgia's aid like it had in 1786. Through a letter to the Georgia Assembly, Sevier asked the Assembly to remember Franklin's willingness to fight alongside their state against the Creeks and

---

19 Pat Alderman, _Overmountain Men: Early Tennessee History_ (Johnson City, TN, 1970), 219-220; Williams, _History of Lost State of Franklin_, 172-173; and George Elborn to Governor Edward Telfair, September 30, 1786, in John Sevier Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Microfilm and Originals at TSLA.

20 John Sevier to Governor Edward Telfair, May 14, 1786, in Sevier and Madden, _Sevier family history_, 67; and John Sevier to the Speaker of the Georgia Assembly, June 24, 1787, in ibid., 78.

21 Wharfiled, "The Muscle Shoals Speculation," 375, and John Sevier to Governor Edward Telfair, September 28, 1786, in Sevier and Madden, _Sevier family history_, 68.
Number 79

The Journal of East Tennessee History

their consideration of "promoting the interest of our infant republic, and reconciling matters between us and the parent state."

By creating a close bond between Franklin and Georgia, Sevier and other Franklin officials hoped that Georgia would continue their support for Franklin's admission to the Union in Congress and mediate the new state's disputatious relationship with its parent state so that North Carolina would consent to Franklin's independence and admission. Through cultivating a significant and genuine relationship between the governments of their two states, the Franklinites hoped that they could gain legitimacy with the other states that had voted against or abstained from the congressional resolution accepting North Carolina's cession. Despite her close relationship to the nascent state, Georgia's status as the weakest state in the Confederation prevented her from providing the substantial support for Franklinite statehood that Sevier so desired.

Governor Sevier also sought to establish a close bond between the State of Franklin and the powerful State of Virginia. Many of the settlers in Franklin, including Sevier himself, were former Virginia residents so they felt a great affinity toward their former state. Virginia had also recently ceded the Kentucky District to the national government, paving the way for Kentucky's future statehood. Furthermore, some prominent leaders in Virginia such as Thomas Jefferson sympathized with the cause of Franklin, relating the Franklinite struggle to the larger American struggle against the British for independence. During the confrontation between Franklin and its mother state, the Virginia government had even offered its services as a mediator to settle the dispute between North Carolina and Franklin, but was harshly rejected by resolution of the North Carolina Assembly. The Franklinites hoped to use Virginia's influence in the Congress and its experience with the Kentucky cession to gain support for their own independence and statehood.9

Unfortunately, the prospects of forming such a constructive relationship with Virginia were complicated by Arthur Campbell, the leader of a separate statehood movement in Washington County in southwestern Virginia that was not part of the recently ceded Kentucky district. Colonel Campbell's separatist movement became the key issue of contention in the relationship between Franklin and Virginia and was intertwined with the issue of Virginia's support or lack thereof for Franklin's independence. Campbell had advocated the formation of the greater State of Frankland and had a tremendous influence on the constitutional convention process in Franklin. Although the Franklin movement moved ahead without Campbell who wanted to gain Virginia's approval for separation, Campbell quickly wanted to incorporate Washington County into the new state because the region around Abingdon in

4 John Sevier to Governor George Matthews, March 3, 1787, in ibid., 72; John Sevier to Governor of Georgia, April 10, 1788, in ibid., 92; and Extract of Letter from John Sevier to Georgia Assembly reprinted in The Kentucky Gazette, October 6, 1787, in William A. Provine Papers, Box 4, Folder 10, Microfilm and Originals at TSLA.

5 Estonia, 23, 34, 62.
Washington County was more integrated with the counties of western North Carolina than it was with the rest of Virginia. Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia was opposed to the separation of Washington County from the state and sent veterans of the Continental Army from the east to command the militia in the southwest.  

To assuage Henry's fears that the State of Franklin sought to incorporate southwestern Virginia into its territory, Sevier wrote a letter to Henry promising that "not will we receive any of them unless by consent of your state." Sevier also expressed his desire that "we hope soon to convince them all [Congress and the other states] that we are not a banditti, but a people who mean to do right as far as our knowledge will lead us." He hoped that Franklin might find a friend in Virginia by refusing to incorporate Arthur Campbell's Washington County into their state and that Virginia's powerful influence would make a significant difference among those who supported Franklin's bid for independence in Congress. During the earlier congressional vote, Virginia had been one of the two votes against the acceptance of the North Carolina cession act. The overtures made by Sevier and other Franklin officials were an attempt to persuade the Virginians to support their cause when the issue was brought to another vote in Congress. Virginia had not earlier supported the Franklinites movement because the state was struggling to suppress a separate statehood movement within its own borders and giving support to Franklin in its struggle with North Carolina would only embolden Arthur Campbell and other separatists in Virginia. However, the correspondence between Sevier and Henry and the support of prominent Virginians such as Jefferson gave some legitimacy to the Franklin movement.

Failing to find support from North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, or the Confederation Congress, the Franklinites made some curious diplomatic overtures to the Cherokee and the Spanish to gain potential allies in securing their independence. Previously, many within the United States perceived the Franklin movement with its hunger for more land as a potential provocateur of a general war with the Indians or with the Spanish Empire. However, the Franklinites were determined to have a government of their own, separate from North Carolina, and sought the assistance of the Cherokees and the Spanish in achieving that end through manipulating the potential of such assistance as leverage in its attempt to gain admission to the Union. Sevier, a popular Indian fighter who had used his reputation to propel himself to the governorship of Franklin, made a diplomatic overture to the Cherokees in June 1785 to secure land south of the French Broad and Holston Rivers that was already beginning to be settled by the Franklinites. In the resulting Treaty of Dumplin Creek,


47 John Sevier to Governor Patrick Henry, July 19, 1785, in Sevier and Madden, Sevier Family History, 64.


49 Alderman, Overmountain Men, 211.

the Cherokee chief set up a "perpetual settlement," and the Cherokees agreed to sell land concessions in exchange for the willingness of Congress to support the government established in Franklin. During the treaty negotiations, Franklin had several other attempts to form such an incorporation into the United States that would give them statehood before the Congress and the government had surrendered the idea of including the Cherokees in the federal system. A new treaty of 1806, including the national government, was included in the territorial cessions to the federal government.

Later in November 1785, by negotiating a treaty between the new government and the Cherokees, were succeeded by a treaty of 1806, and a series of land sales and concessions by the federal government. Much of the state's proposed Cherokee territory was defended by the agents of the state of Georgia, and the Cherokee for ceding land concessions for.

48 Thomas Perkins Adams, ed., The Papers of a Letter from a Gentleman of the State of Georgia, September 18, 1785, and Originals at TSLA, in Franklin, 78.
the Cherokee chiefs agreed to the land cessions and a promise of peace with Franklin's settlers in exchange for "a reasonable and liberal compensation." Regardless of the unwillingness of Congress to accept Franklin's statehood, Sevier and the Franklin government demonstrated their legitimacy as a functioning de facto state through the diplomacy with the neighboring Cherokee that led to the Treaty of Dumplin Creek.

During the treaty negotiations, an odd proposal was laid on the bargaining table. According to Samuel Cole Williams, two Presbyterian ministers, Samuel Houston and H. Balch, proposed an incorporation of the Cherokee as part of the new state of Franklin with rights to send delegates to the General Assembly. The incorporation of the Cherokee into Franklin would be an unprecedented move in the new United States that would bolster its population and territory to make a better case for statehood before Congress under the Ordinance of 1784. However, the notion of including the Cherokees in the new state was quickly forgotten perhaps because such an incorporation would offend the states that Franklin would rely upon in votes on her admission to the Union. Furthermore, Williams argues that Sevier, the renowned Indian fighter, would not have agreed to or pursued the idealistic plan of the two clergy. In the time after the Treaty of Dumplin Creek, the Franklin government had significant trouble with the Cherokees and the Creek tribe after the radical idea of incorporating the Indians as citizens in the new state was rejected or forgotten, a new treaty conflicting with the Treaty of Dumplin Creek was made by the national government, and the Franklinites continued pushing their settlements further into Indian territory.

Later in November 1785, the Confederation Congress asserted its weak power by negotiating a treaty with the Cherokee, marking the first time the national government had made a treaty with the Indians rather than the individual states. Treaties made between the Indians and individual states, such as the Treaty of Dumplin Creek, were subsequently discarded by the national government. The resulting Treaty of Hopewell included the Cherokee admission of the supremacy of the United States and a series of land concessions by both the Congress and the Cherokee. The land conceded by the congressional agents significantly affected Franklin's size because much of the state's land (including its new capital at Greeneville) was now considered Cherokee territory. Williams contends that Franklin was intentionally punished by the agents negotiating the treaty because two of the four national agents were from North Carolina. In fact, North Carolina received some compensation from the Cherokee for ceding these parts of Franklin's territory while negotiating Cherokee land concessions for the settlers of the Cumberland region around Nashville. However, these punitive provisions were likely the work of the individual agents because

---

the North Carolina Assembly immediately condemned the Treaty of Hopewell.49

The Hopewell Treaty negotiations of the national government created a more complicated relationship between the Franklinites and the Cherokee because the land-hungry settlers were living on land considered to be part of Cherokee territory by the Confederation. Determined to drive the settlers off the lands they had gained from the Hopewell Treaty, the Cherokee began attacking settlements. In response to the attacks, Governor Sevier and other Franklin militia commanders led raids to destroy Cherokee villages in retaliation. This treaty, as already noted, also complicated the relationship between Franklin and the Confederation Congress because the national government had bargained away some of the land claimed by the Franklinites. Determined to maintain their lands and uphold their de facto independence, the Franklin Assembly appointed a set of commissioners to negotiate a new treaty with the Cherokee to reaffirm the Dumplin Creek Treaty and protect their settlers. After the militia had defeated the Cherokee and destroyed some of their villages, the commissioners forced the Cherokees to sign the Treaty of Coyatee under duress in August 1786. The new treaty established new borders for the State of Franklin that were even larger than those set by the Treaty of Dumplin Creek by allowing for white settlements as far south as the Little Tennessee River.50

The fighting between the Cherokees and the settlers continued and took a brutal turn in 1788 when John Kirk, a Franklinite, murdered five or six Cherokees in cold blood. Under a white flag of truce, Kirk struck his victims in the head with a tomahawk, killing two Cherokee chiefs, Abraham and Tassel. Although Governor Sevier had been leading the force in pursuit of the Cherokees who had killed Kirk’s family, he was absent (some say conveniently) when this murder occurred. This horrific display of frontier violence drew a round of condemnation from the Confederation Congress and other individuals. Combined with the dubious Treaty of Coyatee, this massacre called Franklin’s credibility into question although the state continued to exercise the powers of a legitimate de facto state by conducting negotiations and organizing military expeditions. The fighting between the settlers and the Cherokees continued well after the eventual demise of Franklin until a shaky peace was established at the Treaty of the Holston in 1791. Even then, the militant Chickamauga faction of the tribe continued hostilities until 1794.51

In 1788 after much of the momentum for Franklin’s statehood had dissipated, John Sevier sought the help of the Spanish to secure independence or at least to use such help as a bargaining tool with North Carolina and Congress in debates over the new state’s admission to the Union. Earlier in 1786, the groundwork for Franklin’s so-called “Spanish intrigue” was laid when Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay negotiated a treaty with Spain that granted the United States generous territorial and

49 Williams, History of the Lost State of Franklin, 95-97.
50 Ibid., 98-100.
51 Ibid., 207-209.

trade concessions in return for the right to close the river to Spanish ships. When settlers in Franklin were not content with the concessions, voting for it and the Southern states to oppose Spain to control the Mississippi they turned to the Northern states opposing Spain to control the Mississippi began thinking about settling their land, and their commerce.

Shortly after the treaty began the Franklinites to persuade the frontiersmen of Franklin, inegrate their inexperience into see how much Spanish goling of an independent nation was planned to deliver an ultimatum while threatening to form a United States would find unexpected that their state would frontier diplomats only case until they settled the one called in Philadelphia to rule because Franklin had a sign over Spain’s colonial garrisons in Louisiana Territory. These because of the Franklinites.

When the state’s future was uncertain when Governor Sevier wrote to the United States, expected people of this country have

49 Gerson, Franklin, 96-100.
50 Ibid., 101-104.
traded concessions in return for total Spanish control over the Mississippi River and the right to close the river to American shipping for up to thirty years. The western settlers in Franklin were mortified by the provisions of this treaty because they depended on the Mississippi River and the Spanish port of New Orleans for shipping their goods. In fact, effigies of John Jay were hanged in some Franklin's settlements. Ultimately, the Confederation Congress rejected the treaty with the Northern states voting for it and the Southern states voting against it. At this point, author Noel Gerson explains that "Franklin began to think of completely separating herself from the United States" because the Southern states opposed her statehood in Congress and the Northern states opposed her economic interests by voting for a treaty allowing Spain to control the Mississippi River. In Franklin's moment of despair, leaders in New Spain began thinking of trying to lure Franklin, Kentucky, and other western settlers under her control or promoting their independence to create an independent power that would be a buffer zone between the Spanish colonies and the United States. The diplomatic efforts of the Confederation national government had a profound effect on Franklin's domestic affairs and its foreign policy as Franklinite leaders began pursuing diplomatic relations with the Spanish to protect their independence, their land, and their commercial interests.55

Shortly after the treaty battle in 1786, the Spanish began secret negotiations with the Franklinites to persuade them to break away from the United States. The wily frontiersmen of Franklin, inexperienced in international diplomacy, planned to exaggerate their ignorance in order to give the Spanish a false sense of security and to see how much Spanish gold they could obtain unconditionally to support the formation of an independent nation of Franklin. Once Franklin became independent, they planned to deliver an ultimatum to the Confederation Congress demanding statehood while threatening to form an alliance with the Spanish monarchy. Assuming that the United States would find such an alliance totally unacceptable, the Franklinites expected that their state would be granted statehood in short order. However, Franklin's frontier diplomats only casually pursued the negotiations with the Spanish, delaying until they could see the outcome of the Constitutional Convention that had been called in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. They were able to delay because Franklin had a significant military advantage with its militia of sharpshooters over Spain's colonial garrison of 500 soldiers that was assigned to protect the entire Louisiana Territory. These early negotiations between Franklin and Spain soon ended because of the Franklinites' stalling tactics.56

When the state's future seemed bleak, Franklin resumed its overtures to Spain when Governor Sevier wrote a letter to Diego de Gardoqui, the Spanish minister to the United States, expressing his desire for Spain's patronage of Franklin: "The people of this country have come to truly realize upon what part of the world and

55 Gerson, Franklin, 96-100.
56 Ibid., 101-104.
upon which nation depend their future happiness and security, and they readily infer that the interest and prosperity of it depend entirely upon the protection and liberality of your government." In his correspondence with Garboqui, Sevier also requested money from Spain because specie was so rare on the frontier as well as protection from Spain’s Indian allies so that settlers were able to safely colonize the Muscle Shoals region. In response to Sevier’s requests, Garboqui sent two shipments of hard currency to Franklin’s governor via an emissary to bolster the amount of specie in the frontier state.  

The Franklinites demonstrated their shrewd tactics of diplomacy once again when Garboqui sent an emissary, Don Juan de Cristobal, to deliver a shipment of hard currency and bribe Franklin’s officials to affiliate with the Spanish. Governor Sevier and several other prominent Franklinites staged an elaborate dinner for Cristobal in which they planned to deceive him. The frontiersmen discussed how North Carolina’s opposition to the new Constitution doomed Franklin’s hopes for statehood and how it was time to declare the state as an independent nation. Cristobal was totally convinced by the ruse and reported back to Garboqui, who was also deceived. Garboqui then sent the second shipment of Spanish gold to Franklin.  

According to historian A. P. Whitaker, the intrigue with Spain was not just an attempt to manipulate the United States or a desperate tactic to secure Franklinite independence, it was also a plan to gain Spanish protection of a future Muscle Shoals colony that would be established by Sevier if the State of Franklin failed (which seemed like a certainty at this point) or a plan to create a greater State of Franklin in the Spanish dominion that included Muscle Shoals.  

Sevier’s intrigue with the Spanish, his last desperate gamble to maintain Franklin’s independence, came to a swift conclusion after Sevier sent his one of his sons, James, on an abortive mission to obtain further funds from Garboqui in New York. By this time, Garboqui had figured out he was being deceived and that the clever Franklinites were only manipulating the Spanish in order to gain statehood. He decided that he would use no more gold from the Spanish treasury to convince Franklin to leave the United States. Matters difficult for the request for additional monies to present his case to Garboqui. This completely abandoned the negotiations to potentially maintain a Spanish alliance.  

The negotiations were handled by Franklin’s leadership and Franklin, who had not been a resident in their desire to avoid war that were allied with the Spanish. Esteban Miro issued permits who lived in what became the future of Louisiana. The former leaders of Franklin which became Federalists and a majority of a stronger group of former Franklinites which led United States federal services they desired. Their unwillingness to sacrifice made such negotiating the autocratic nature of the relations with the Spanish illegal and formal relationship with Congress or other nations.  

Throughout Florida Franklinites sought a new government and, first diplomatic efforts were rebuffed their appeal.  

54 John Sevier to Don Diego de Garboqui, September 12, 1788, in Sevier and Madden, Sevier family history, 95-97. Sayem, "Disunited States," 41.  

55 Gerson, Franklin, 145-146.  


59 Esteban Miro, Miro Papers, Box 6.  

upon which nation depend their future happiness and security, and they readily infer that the interest and prosperity of it depend entirely upon the protection and liberality of your government." In his correspondence with Gardoqui, Sevier also requested money from Spain because specie was so rare on the frontier as well as protection from Spain's Indian allies so that region. In response to Sevier's cry to Franklin's governor via an agent.  

Of diplomacy once again when to deliver a shipment of hard to the Spanish. Governor Sevier elaborated dinner for Cristobal in 1788 how North Carolinians had to statehood as well as protection for the frontier. Cristobal was Gardoqui, whom Franklin not only agreed to, but according to the same and not just an attempt to manipulate Franklin's independence, it was to get a Muscle Shoals colony that would form (which seemed like a certainty to Franklin in the Spanish dominion region).  

The gamble to maintain Franklin's independence in 1785 sent his one of his sons, James, to New York to meet Gardoqui in New York. By this time, Franklin proved that the clever Franklin knew how to gain statehood. He decided to send James to London to convince Franklin to join the United States and ally with Spain. Presumably, Gardoqui decided to make matters difficult for the shrewd Franklinites. Rather than directly denying Sevier's request for additional funds, Gardoqui instructed Sevier's son to travel to New Orleans to present his father's requests after he had already traveled to New York to visit Gardoqui. This circuitous journey angered Governor Sevier so much that he abandoned the negotiations with the Spanish except for using rumors of such an intrigue to potentially manipulate Congress into granting Franklin statehood.  

The negotiations with Spain, never too seriously pursued, were a scheme devised by Franklin's leaders. Franklin's ordinary citizens were opposed to the prospect of any relationship with the autocratic Spanish. By late 1788, the remaining people of Franklin who had not embraced pardons from North Carolina were strongly motivated in their desires to maintain the dying state because of a hatred for the Indian tribes that were allied with Spain. These dichotomous Franklinites were further enraged when Ezequiel Miró issued a proclamation in April 1789 that welcomed the frontiersmen who lived in what were considered Indian hunting grounds by the United States to settle in Louisiana and forsake their Protestantism and convert to Catholicism. The former leaders of Franklin such as Sevier, after swearing allegiance to North Carolina, became Federalists because they were interested in gaining the protection and governance of a stronger central government. With the ratification of the Constitution, the former Franklinites abandoned what was left of the Spanish intrigue because the new United States federal government would be able to provide the protection and services they desired much better than the Spanish colonial government. Moreover, the unwillingness of the Spanish to provide any more gold for Franklin's independence made such negotiations seem less appealing to the Franklinites who despised the autocratic nature and Catholicism of the Spanish. Franklin's diplomatic negotiations with the Spanish were never a serious attempt on the part of the Franklinites at a formal relationship with Spain, but a desperate gamble to gain leverage in convincing Congress or other states to support its independence and statehood.  

Throughout Franklin's short history, Governor John Sevier and other prominent Franklinites sought the support of outsiders to legitimize their independence and their new government as well as advocate for Franklin's admission into the Union. Their first diplomatic efforts turned to their parent state of North Carolina, which not only rebuffed their appeals but then actively worked to restore Franklin to their state.  


58 Whitaker, "Spanish Intrigue in the Old Southwest," 148-161.  

59 Ezequiel Miró, Memorandum of Concessions to Westerners, April 20, 1789, in Samuel Cole Williams Papers, Box 6, Folder 10, Microfilm and Originals at TSLA.  

Franklinites also directly appealed to the Confederation Congress for admission as well as the neighboring states of Georgia and Virginia, only to be met with further disappointment. In a surprising and later desperate fashion, the Franklinites even approached the Cherokees and the Spanish for assistance. These petitions to these various governments and peoples demonstrate how truly committed the Franklinite leaders were to gaining independence for their state. Furthermore, the different types of business conducted by Franklin with North Carolina, Congress, Georgia, Virginia, the Cherokees, and Spain demonstrated a range of activities that a legitimate government would pursue, including engaging in interstate commerce, settling boundary disputes, negotiating treaties, and providing military assistance. This range of activities reveals the significance of the State of Franklin as a functioning, de facto American state, never officially recognized by the Confederation, but unofficially recognized by individual states and nations through the business conducted between governments. Furthermore, this narrative of Franklin’s diplomatic efforts to secure independence offers a new story to be considered in the larger historiography of diplomatic history during the Articles of Confederation era.

Although all their attempts at securing allies were rejected or abandoned for various reasons, the Franklinites gained some later success when North Carolina once again ceded its western lands to Congress in 1790. Congress created the Southwest Territory with William Blount as governor for the region. Many of Blount’s appointees in the territorial government had once held office in the Franklin movement, the most obvious of whom was John Sevier who was commissioned as a brigadier general of militia for the eastern district of the Southwest Territory. In 1796, the region that had once been the State of Franklin was admitted to the Union as a part of the larger state of Tennessee and, in a moment of irony, John Sevier was once elected as the new state’s first governor.

* The author is a retired business consultant, Toms River, New Jersey.

1 Marshall DeLancey Haywood, ed., The History of Tennessee (1903): 94-95. The river in front of the Tennessee General Assembly Building was named the Tennessee River and it was renamed as the Clinch River.

2 Loyall Farragut, The Life of David Farragut, 1:4. It is believed George received his early education in the Mediterranean as a cabin boy on the Glasgow Farragut, "Panorama del Almirante de los E.E.U.U. Davi, 12. The article were the parish books of St. George’s, Farragut was born on the nearby island of U.S. Farragut lived for a century and a half.

3 David G. Farragut to Lyman G. Downer, Secretary of the American Philosophical Society, reprinted in American History, 1815-1891: The Fifty Years’ War Between the United States and Spain, ed. by J. F. Draper (1815-1891). He sought much of his information for this letter from David Glasgow Farragut. 