

JOHN JAY

First Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and President of the American Bible Society, 1821-1829

by Dr. Catherine Millard, © 2018.

1745	Born on 12 th December in New York City
1764	Graduated from King's College (Columbia)
1768	Admitted to the bar
1774-77	Member of the Continental Congress
1776-	Member of the New York legislature
1776-79	Chief Justice of the New York Supreme Court
1778-79	President of the Continental Congress
1779-82	Minister from the United States to Spain
1782-84	Peace Commissioner from the United States in Paris
1784	Regent of King's College, New York
1784-89	United States Secretary of Foreign Affairs
1789-95	Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court
1794	Commissioner from the United States to Britain
1795-1801	Governor of New York
1816	Vice President of the American Bible Society
1821-1829	President of the American Bible Society
1829	Died on May 17 th in Bedford, New York.



John Jay, L.L.D., First Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, First Vice-President of the American Bible Society and its President from 1821-1829. After Gilbert Stuart's painting of the founding father. Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

...His affection for me was unbounded, and he knew I was conscious of it. . . *Thank God, there is another world in which we may meet and be happy.* His being there is a new motive to my following his footsteps. *I assure you I know the value of Christian resignation:* it has been friendly to me on several occasions, which may, perhaps, one day furnish us with matter for conversation. I thank you most sincerely for reminding me of the great business and purpose of my life. Such admonitions, so given, are never unreasonable, and always kind. I am persuaded that they who have no regard for their own souls, will seldom have much for the interest and happiness of others. . .

John Jay was also a first *Vice-President of the American Bible Society*, founded in 1816; and its *President* from 1821 to the time of his death in 1829.

The American Bible Society began on May 8th, 1816, as follows:

At a Meeting of the Delegates from different *Bible Societies*, convened in the Consistory Room of the *Reformed Dutch Church* on the 8th day of May, 1816: **Joshua M. Wallace, Esq.** of New-Jersey was chosen President of the Convention, and the **Rev. Dr. J.B. Romeyn, and Rev. Lyman Beecher**, Secretaries.

The meeting was then opened with prayer by the **Rev. Dr. Nott**...To the commissioned delegates were added the following representatives of their respective Societies: Rev. Dr. Jedediah Morse, from the *Middlesex, New Hampshire and Dartmouth University Bible Society*; Mr. William Jay, from the *Westchester Bible Society* and Rev. Henshaw, Mr. Joshua Sands and General Swift from the *Bible and Common Prayer Book Society* of Long-Island; John Murray, Jr., Thomas Eddy, John Griscom and Dr. Valentine Mott of the *Society of Friends*.

Frequently asked questions about John Jay:

1. **As President of the Continental Congress, Minister from the United States to Spain and First Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court – what evidence do we have of this founding father's Christianity?**

John Jay was descended from a French Huguenot family, his father having emigrated to New York. At age eight, Jay was sent to grammar school, taught by the pastor of the French Huguenot Church at New Rochelle, which prepared him to enter *King's College* at age 14.

After the death of his beloved father, he wrote the following lines to a friend:

On Motion,

Resolved unanimously, That it is expedient to establish without delay, a general Bible Institution, for the circulation of the *Holy Scriptures* without note or comment.

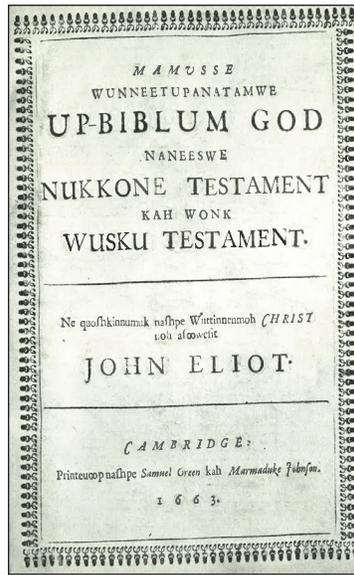
Officers of the American Bible Society elected were the **Honorable Elias Boudinot**, of New Jersey as *President*, and the **Honorable John Jay** of New York, as *Vice-President*, together with 22 additional Vice-Presidents from seventeen States, and the District of Columbia. Founding fathers, **Hon. John Langdon** of New Hampshire and **Hon. Charles C. Pinckney** of South Carolina; including **Honorable Bushrod Washington** (George Washington's nephew), of Virginia; and **Joseph Nourse, Esq.** (First Registrar of the Treasury) of the District of Columbia, were among the Vice-Presidents.

Its **CONSTITUTION** reads as follows:

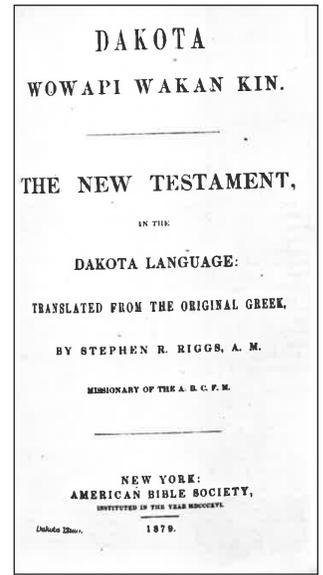
1. This Society shall be known by the name of **THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY**, of which the sole object shall be, to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment. The only copies in the English language to be circulated by the Society, shall be of the version now in common use.
2. This Society shall add its endeavours to those employed by other Societies, for circulating the Scriptures throughout the United States and their territories; and shall furnish them with stereotype plates, or such other assistance as circumstances may require. This Society shall also, according to its ability, extend its influence to other countries, whether Christian, Mahometan, or Pagan.
3. All Bible Societies shall be allowed to purchase at cost from this Society, Bibles for distribution within their own districts. The members of all such Bible Societies as shall agree to place their surplus revenue, after supplying their own districts with Bibles, at the disposal of this Society, shall be entitled to vote in all meetings of the Society; and the officers of such Societies shall be, ex officio, directors of this Society...¹

The first Bible printed in the western hemisphere was the **Algonquin Indian Bible** of 1663, translated by John Eliot. Scriptures for the American Indians were the concern of the American Bible Society less than six months after its founding in 1816, and two years later its first Indian publication appeared, the **Epistles of St. John** in Delaware (1818). The only complete Bible for the Indians of the United States, other than the Algonquin Bible of John Eliot, was the **first Dakota Bible**, published in 1879. Translation and publication were also carried out in Seneca, Mohawk, Ojibwa, Choctaw, Muskogee, and Cherokee, and later the Society printed translations for the Navahos, Comanches, and Cheyennes.

¹Excerpted from, *The Truth about the Founding Fathers of the American Republic*, © 2015 by Catherine Millard.

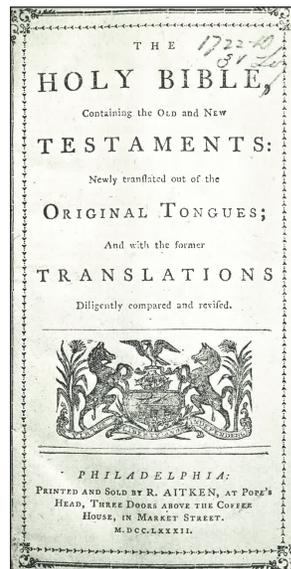


The first American Missionary Bible, 1663.



The first Dakota Bible, 1879.

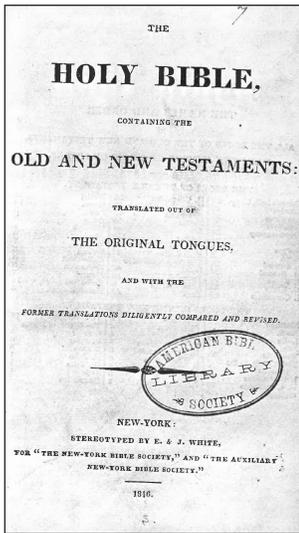
The first English Bible printed in America bears the date 1782, sponsored by Congress, and referred to as the “Bible of the Revolution;” for under English rule no English Bible could be printed in the Colonies. **The first Bible to bear the American Bible Society imprint** is a fine duodecimo of 1816 – the King James version of the English Bible. Another important Bible published by the Society is **Christopher Saur's German Bible of 1743, the first American Bible in a language of western Europe**. A major endeavor of the Society, dear to the hearts of many of its members, past and present, was to provide for young and newly established Christian communities all over the world. Throughout its history the Society has worked with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and other missionary societies, even with individual missionaries, in furthering translation and publication in languages, more often than not never before committed to paper. In the 1830's work was begun on the African continent with a **Grebo (Liberian) St. Matthew's Gospel**, and in the Orient with the support of Chinese translations.



The first American Bible in English, 1782. “The Bible of The Revolution”.



The first American Bible in a west European language, 1743.

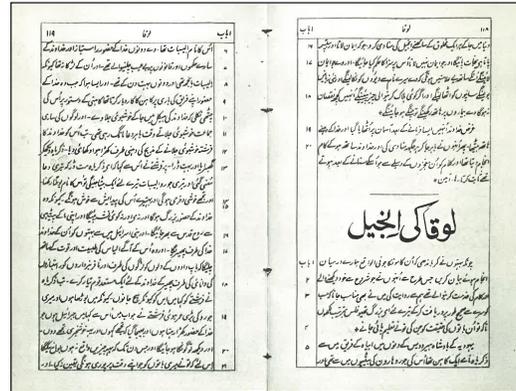


The first Bible published by the American Bible Society, 1816.



The first Hawaiian Bible, 1839.

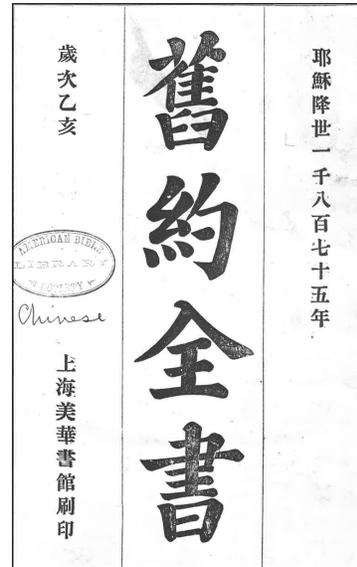
The first Chinese New Testament was published in 1814; The Danish-English New Testament, in 1849. The American Bible Society was responsible for the first Bibles in Zulu (1883), Japanese (1887), Siamese (1896), Hawaiian (1839), Gilbertese (1893), and many others, to include the Urdu New Testament (1873) and The Chinese-Mandarin New Testament, printed in 1885 in Shanghai at the American Presbyterian Mission Press for the American Bible Society. The Psalter in Judeo-Spanish was printed in Constantinople (now Istanbul) by the American Bible Society in 1878, intended for the use of Jewish exiles from Spain, known as Sephardim, who had settled in Turkey, Italy and Holland. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century practically all editions were prepared for Spanish speaking Jews in Turkey and printed in Hebrew character. The Psalter of 1878 was a new version prepared by a missionary of the Church of Scotland.



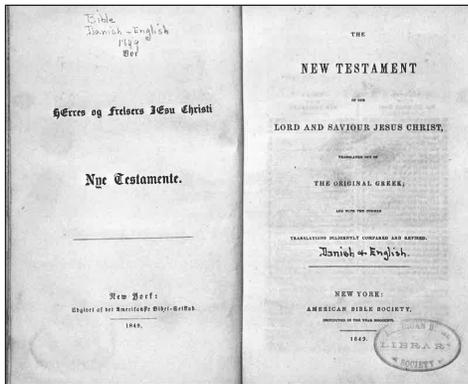
The Urdu New Testament, 1873.



The first Chinese New Testament, 1814.



The Chinese-Mandarin New Testament, 1885



The Danish-English New Testament, 1849.

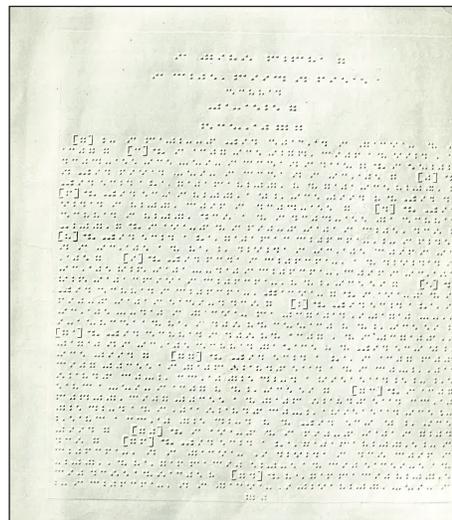
The Bible in German was printed in Philadelphia by Georg W. Mentz for the American Bible Society in 1834. In the early years of the American Bible Society, German Scriptures were secured from the British and Foreign Bible Society in London. Georg Mentz was the first to print German Bibles for the Society under contract. By the middle of the century the Society had secured its own plates and was printing the German Bible in New York. The translation is that of Martin Luther, first printed in full in 1534.

A *War Testament* was printed in New York by the American Bible Society in 1864. During the Civil War the American Bible Society, continuing a policy begun with the Army and Navy in 1817, supplied Bibles and New Testaments to the armies of both sides. More than 3,000,000 volumes had been distributed to soldiers in this way by the end of the war. A hand-written note in one volume gives confirmation of such a book's value:

“This is the Holy Bible Precious Book Divine, and from its sacred pages, O the Blessed comfort and consolation I received while passing through the awful strife, the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, while on the long and weary marches and the lonely camps in the prison pens, those awful dens. There too in the midst of 5,700 prisoners, I read from these Blessed pages, and the Spirit of the Blessed Master came upon us all and we rejoiced in the Spirit of the Lord. Amen.”

Helen Keller's Bible was printed in Louisville by the *American Publishing House for the Blind* for the American Bible Society in 1908. The census of 1835 listed 5,000 blind persons in the United States. With this information before it, the Board of the American Bible Society decided to do all in its power to provide the blind with written Scriptures. Shortly afterwards, supported by American Bible Society funds, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe of the *Perkins School for the Blind* (Watertown, Massachusetts) devised the first really practical system to be used in the United States. In April of 1843 the stereotyped plates for the complete Bible in *line letter* were finished. Ever since, the Bible Society has been foremost in providing the Scriptures for the blind in a variety of systems. The point character was invented by the Frenchman, Charles

Barbier, and perfected to its present form by Louis Braille, whose name it bears. In 1874, after the Bible Society had distributed over 19,000 volumes to the blind, Mr. William B. Waite of the *New York Institute for the Blind* developed a rearrangement of the Braille system, known as New York Point. Shown is the first, of eleven volumes of one of Helen Keller's earlier Bibles. It is printed in the New York Point System.¹



Helen Keller's Bible.

Worthy of note is that **John Jay**, first Vice-President in 1816, and President (1821-1829) of the American Bible Society, served as the first Chief Justice of the newly-formed United States of America from 1789-1795, being chosen and appointed by its first President, George Washington – a fellow Christian, whose numerous Bibles have been preserved for posterity.

¹Washington Cathedral Rare Book Library.