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The Founding Fathers and the New York Society Library

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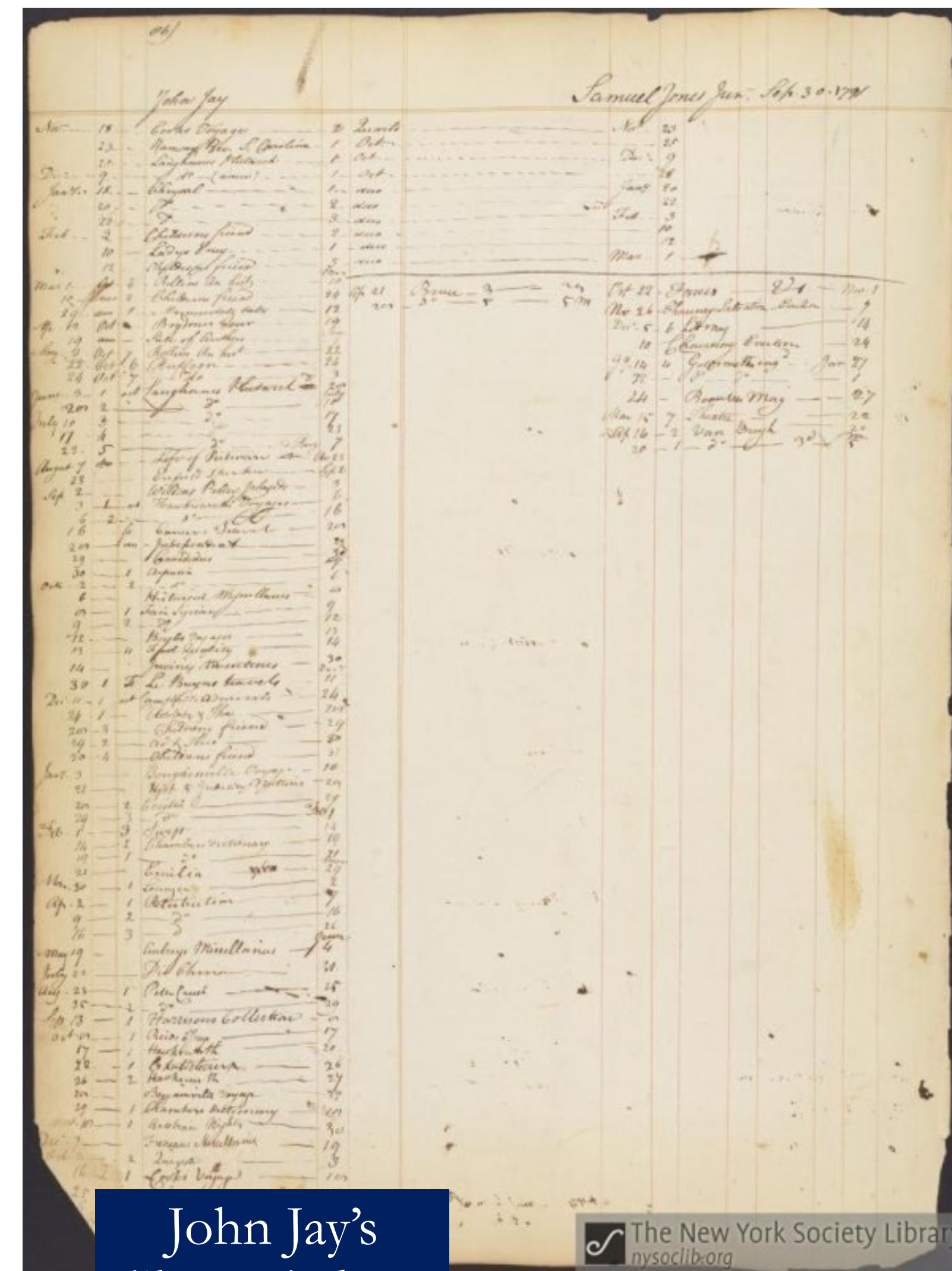
Whose Ledger Is It Anyway?

The Founding Fathers and America's Oldest Library

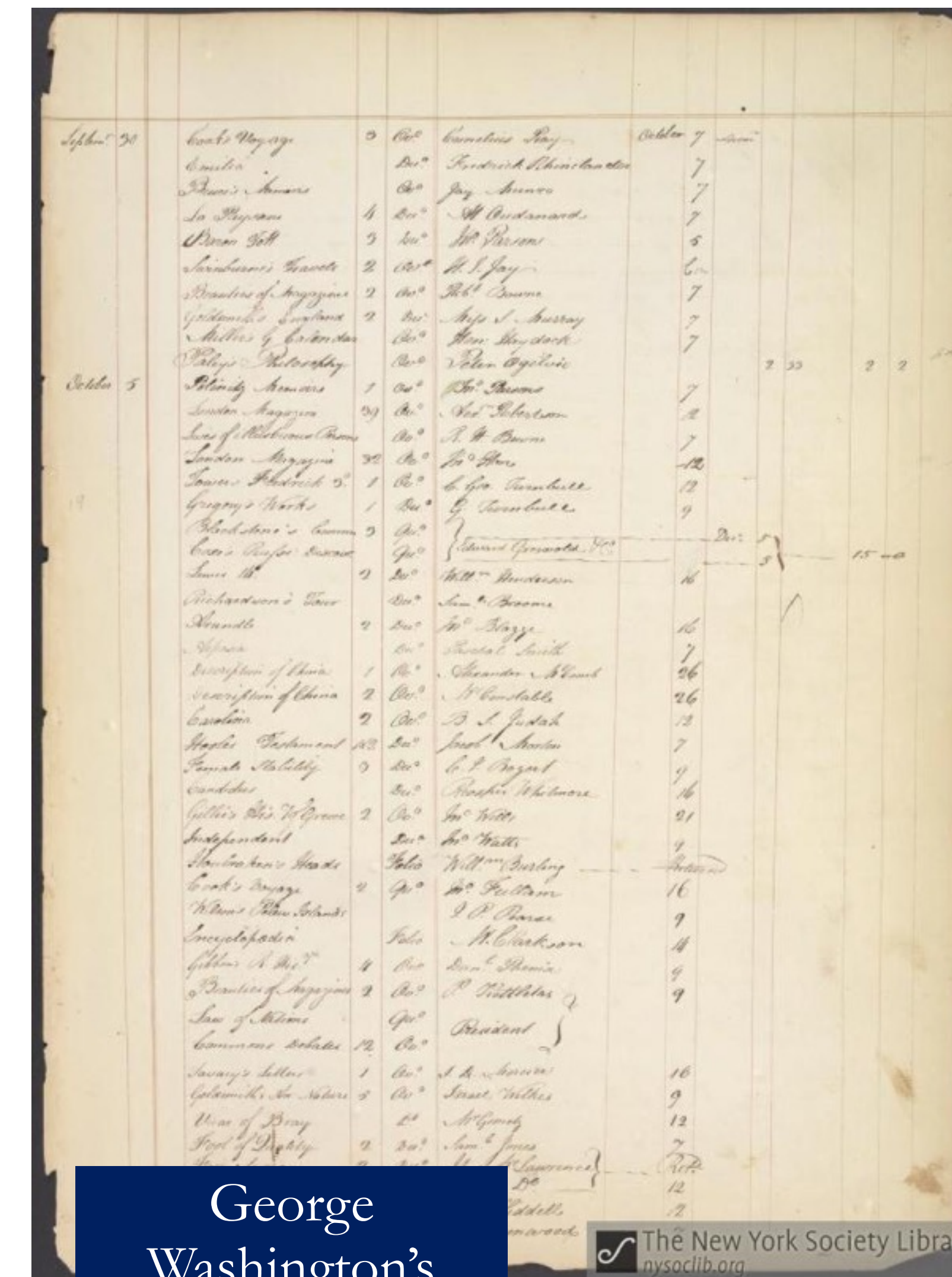
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AUTHOR AND GENDER

Upon first glance at the New York Society Library's Founding Fathers ledgers from 1789-1805, it is evident that the books borrowed from the NYSL during this time were authored by not just men, but women as well. This data visualization depicts that 47% of the Founding Fathers present in the ledgers read works by female writers. Female authors were comparatively less popular than their male contemporaries. The notion that the works of female authors were included in the reading habits of these important men shows that these ideas, which were previously silenced, were read and researched by not just any men, but arguably, the most influential men of the era.



John Jay's
library ledger



George
Washington's
library ledger

PLACE OF AUTHORSHIP

This map illustrates that seven of the most popular authors lived and wrote in England, while the other three were in Germany and Prussia. Many of the preferred texts at the NYSL came from Europe, so the Founding Fathers appeared to have thoroughly enjoyed the themes of European literature. It shows that these books were authored by European writers from a variety of countries. It also demonstrates that though the Founding Fathers were American citizens when reading these texts, they were still actively involved in the affairs, values, and ideas of their ancestors and contemporaries "across the pond" (Wolverton). The interests of these educated men surpassed geographic and nationalistic limitations.

ABSTRACT

The Founding Fathers of the United States of America have long been considered the creators of the modern democratic system. Like their educated, political-minded contemporaries around the world, these men supplemented their learning with outside reading borrowed from libraries like the New York Society Library; as the oldest library in New York City (founded in 1754), the thousands of entries in its ledgers track the lending histories of books read before, during, and after the American Revolution. Through examination of the digitized ledger pages available at the New York Society Library from 1789 and 1805, the books that these Founding Fathers chose to read shed light on who these men were, both politically and personally, in relation to the world around them. By visualizing data from the New York Society Library's ledgers and analyzing the relationships present between these men and literature that they read, this project explores how the Founding Fathers were influenced by their continual education. They were more than the American political icons that they have come to embody.

