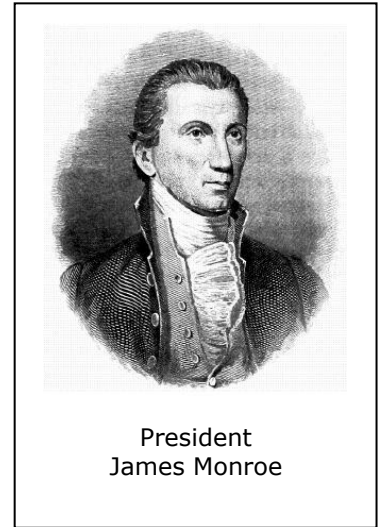


# Fifteenth Congress

Mar. 4, 1817 – Mar. 4, 1819

## First Administration of James Monroe

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### Historical Background

Finally, in a state of peace, the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress was instead faced with domestic and economic concerns. During 1818 the United States experienced an economic upsurge accompanied by liberal land and credit policies, followed by a speculative boom and an overextension of credit. As a result, the Bank of the United States was unable to hold back this inflationary process. While the economy had been suffering in previous years as a result of the War of 1812 and trade restrictions, 1819 brought with it the first serious financial panic and subsequent depression.

Meanwhile, the end of the War of 1812 contributed to the life of the fledgling republic in numerous ways. In a basic way, American victories against the United States’ erstwhile imperial masters began to instill upon its citizens a sense of patriotic identification with the United States as a union, rather than simply the individual states from which each hailed. The Congress in 1818 established that the flag of the United States would have 13 horizontal stripes representing the thirteen original States in alternate red and white, and a white star in a field of blue for each State—the same flag that flew at Ft. McHenry in Baltimore and which inspired Francis Scott Key to write “The Star-Spangled Banner.” A few days later, the Senate approved the Rush-Bagot Agreement between the United States and Great Britain, which addressed some of the issues underpinning the recent hostilities. According to the agreement, Great Britain and the United States established a limitation of their naval forces on the inland waterways, including the Great Lakes and to a gradual demilitarization of border fortifications between Canada and the United States.

Another ancillary effect of the end of the war was a freeing of military assets to deal with other threats to U.S. interests, perceived or otherwise.

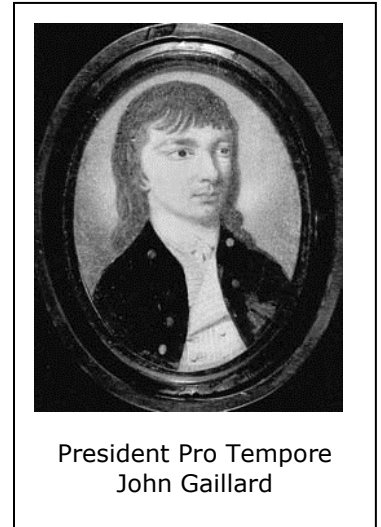
House	Senate
Majority Party: Jeffersonian Republicans (146 seats)	Majority Party: Republican (30 seats)
Minority Party: Federalists (39 seats)	Minority Party: Federalists (12 seats)
Other Parties: None	Other Parties: None
Speaker of the House: Henry Clay	President Pro Tempore: John Gaillard; James Barbour

Beginning in 1816 and culminating in the Adams–Onís Treaty of 1819, General Andrew Jackson led excursions against raiding Seminole Indians in West Florida and Spanish Florida. According to the terms of the Adams–Onís Treaty, which ended this First Seminole War, Spain ceded Florida to the United States.

Although immigration was too slow to a trickle for the next decade, Congress did enact the Steerage Act of 1819, the first law which made it possible to compile accurate statistics on those who were subsequently to enter the United States.

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#), Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005



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## War or Peace?

### Territorial Boundaries and Indian Wars

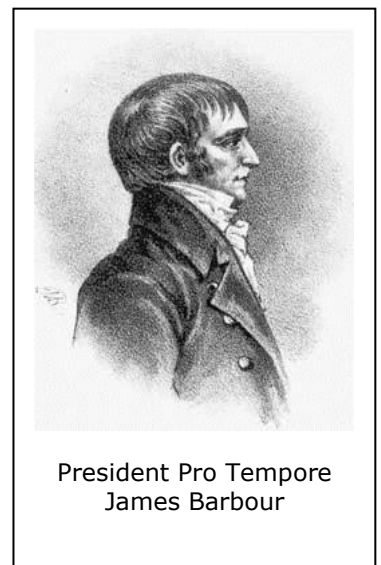
During 1817 and 1818, the United States and Great Britain reached important agreements that resulted in the demilitarization of the Great Lakes and the Canadian border, extended the northern national boundary along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel west to the Rocky Mountains, and provided for joint occupation of the Oregon Country. In 1817, President Monroe ordered naval action against pirates and slave traders operating on islands off the coasts of Georgia and Texas.

Meanwhile, in 1818 and 1819, General Andrew Jackson played an important role in what became the most important foreign policy triumph of President Monroe's first term: the acquisition of Florida from Spain. In the spring of 1818, during a four-month campaign, Jackson embarked on a punitive expedition into Florida against Seminole Indians and fugitive slave settlements. Jackson often exceeded orders, attacking Spanish posts and hanging foreign nationals in the course of destroying Seminole and fugitive camps.

Secretary of State John Adams used Andrew Jackson's demonstration of Spain's weakness to help negotiate a treaty: the Transcontinental, or Adams-Onís Treaty. Spain ceded Florida to the U.S. in exchange for the U.S. assumption of private American claims against Spain for up to \$5 million, with the money going to American citizens. Spain also agreed to a transcontinental boundary for the Louisiana Purchase that ran along the Sabine, Red, and Arkansas Rivers north and west, thence to the 42<sup>nd</sup> parallel and the Pacific Coast, as well as abandoning its claims to the Oregon Country.

Sources:

["Great Britain – April 28, 1817. Arrangement for armed vessels on the lakes."](#) (18 Stat. 296; Apr. 28, 1817). ProQuest Congressional



Monroe, James. [\*Message of the President of the United States at the commencement of the First Session of the Fifteenth Congress\*](#). Dec. 2, 1817. 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, For.rel.289. ProQuest Congressional, ASP04 For.rel.289

Monroe, James. [\*President's message at the commencement of the Session\*](#). Nov. 17, 1818. 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, For.rel.304. ProQuest Congressional, ASP04 For.rel.304

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## Economic Trends and Conditions

Following the War of 1812, economic relations with Great Britain were chilly, with the Crown excluding American ships from trading in the West Indies. Congress retaliated by passing the Navigation Act of 1817, which imposed increasingly stringent restrictions on West Indian goods, with Congress eventually banning all British vessels and colonies in the Americas from trade with the United States.

The United States suffered its first economic recession during Monroe's presidency. From 1815, the return of peace in the European and North American continents had contributed to inflationary prices on cotton, tobacco and wool. Then, in December 1818, the price of raw cotton began a dramatic decline—after topping out at 32.5 cents per pound that October—which continued for some months. Other contributors to the recessionary economy during this period included an escalation of speculation in newly available western land, mismanagement of the Second Bank of the United States subsequent to its re-charter in 1816, and the over-issuance of paper bank notes by local banks.

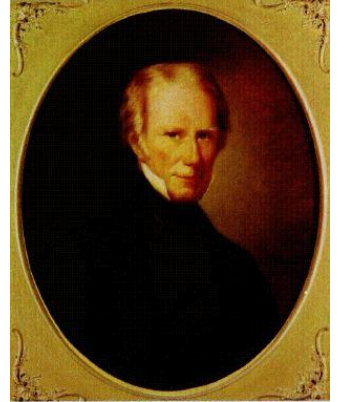
What is more, the Supreme Court's decision in the *McCulloch v. Maryland* case had important implications for the organization of Federal versus State power, particularly in the realm of taxation. Chief Justice John Marshall allowed that the chartering a national bank was not among the enumerated powers granted the Federal government by the Constitution. At the same time, citing the "implied powers clause," the Court upheld the constitutionality of the Bank of the United States. By denying Maryland's right to tax the Bank, Marshall asserted Federal sovereignty over the states and the Bank's sovereignty over state banking institutions. This argument further validated the loose construction of the "implied powers clause," thereby opening the door for future expansion of the powers and activities of the Federal government.

Sources:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [\*Constitution of the United States of America, Analysis and Interpretation\*](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

Monroe, James. [\*Message of the President of the United States at the commencement of the First Session of the Fifteenth Congress\*](#). Dec. 2, 1817. 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, For.rel.289. ProQuest Congressional, ASP04 For.rel.289

Monroe, James. [\*President's message at the commencement of the Session\*](#). Nov. 17, 1818. 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, For.rel.304. ProQuest Congressional, ASP04 For.rel.304



Speaker of the House  
Henry Clay

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## Major Treaties

**Rush-Bagot Agreement.** Provided for the mutual disarmament on the Great Lakes of the military forces of the United States and Great Britain in the aftermath of the Treaty of Ghent. In addition, it provided for the gradual demilitarization of military forces between Canada and the United States. Concluded April 28-29, 1817. Approved by the Senate on Apr. 16, 1818 ([8 Stat. 231](#))

**Adams-Onis Treaty.** Provided that Spain would cede Florida and parts of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi to the United States, renounce all claims to the Oregon Territory, and established a joint commission to define the borders between the Spanish and United States dominions from the 42d parallel southwest to the Sabine River. Also under the treaty, the U.S. Government assumed responsibility for any claims by American citizens against Spain. Concluded February 22, 1819. Approved by the Senate Feb. 22, 1819. Ratification again advised by the Senate Feb. 19, 1821. ([8 Stat. 252](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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## Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

*McCulloch v. Maryland*, concluding that under the principle of national supremacy where under instrumentalities of the Federal government are immune for state taxation, a Maryland law imposing a tax on notes issued by a branch of the Bank of the United States was unconstitutional, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 316 (1819)

*Sturgis v. Crowninshield*, concluding that a retroactive operation of a New York insolvency law to discharge the obligation of a debtor on a promissory note negotiated prior to its adoption violated the U.S. Constitution's obligation of contracts clause, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 518 (1819)

*Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, concluding that a New Hampshire law which altered a charter granted to a private eleemosynary corporation by the British Crown prior to the revolution was deemed to violate the Constitution's obligation of contracts clause, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 518 (1819)

Sources:

Costello. George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

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## 1817 Events

- **Feb. 12:** The Argentine/Chilean patriotic army defeats the Spanish in Battle of Chacabuco
- **Apr. 19:** English economist David Ricardo publishes his most important work, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*
- **Apr. 28-29:** [Rush-Bagot Agreement signed by United States and Great Britain to provide for the mutual disarmament on the Great Lakes](#)
- **June 12:** German inventor Karl Drais drives his “dandy horse,” the earliest form of bicycle, in Mannheim
- **July 4:** Construction of the Erie Canal begins at Rome, NY
- **July 18:** English novelist Jane Austen dies in Winchester, England
- **Aug. 15:** The Alabama territory is created by splitting the Mississippi Territory in half
- **Oct. 17:** At the Wartburg festival in Jena, German students gather to celebrate the anniversaries of the death of the German Protestant reformer Martin Luther and the Battle of Leipzig (the defeat of Napoleon I), demonstrating growing German nationalism
- **Dec. 10:** [Mississippi is admitted as the 20<sup>th</sup> U.S. State](#)

## 1818 Events

- **Feb. 12:** The Spanish colony of Chile proclaims its independence
- **Mar. 11:** Mary Shelley’s gothic-horror novel *Frankenstein* is published anonymously
- **Mar. 15:** *First Seminole War* - [General Andrew Jackson invades West Florida, arguing Seminole Indians and escaped slaves living there were a threat to Georgia and initiating the First Seminole War](#)
- **Apr. 5:** [Official design of the United States flag agreed to by Congress](#)
- **Apr. 6:** *First Seminole War* – General Jackson seized the Spanish fort at St. Marks
- **Apr. 7:** Brooks Brothers, the oldest men’s clothier in the United States, open its first store in New York City
- **Oct. 20:** Treaty between the U.S. and the United Kingdom establishes the boundary between the U.S. and British North America (Canada) as the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel from the Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains
- **Dec. 21:** Armand du Plessis, duc de Richelieu, resigns as Prime Minister in France and is succeeded by Elie, duc de Decazes

Sources:

[“An Act to establish the flag of the United States.”](#) (3 Stat. 415, Chap. 34; Apr. 4, 1818). ProQuest Congressional

Clarke, Archibald Smith, et al. [Defeat of the Seminole Indians--capture of Spanish posts in Florida--and the trial and execution of Arbuthnot and Ambrister.](#) Department of War, Nov. 17, 1818. 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Mil.aff.164/1. ProQuest Congressional, ASP016 Mil.aff.164/1

[“Great Britain – April 28, 1817. Arrangement for armed vessels on the lakes.”](#) (18 Stat. 296; Apr. 28, 1817). ProQuest Congressional

Holmes, David. [Letter from his excellency David Holmes, Governor of the State of Mississippi, transmitting a copy of the constitution and form of government of the said state.](#) House, Nov. 6, 1817. 15th Congress, 1st Session, H.doc.2. ProQuest Congressional, 5 H.doc.2

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## Major Acts

**Flag Act of 1818.** Provided that the United States flag was to retain 13 stripes as a permanent part of its design, but a star would be added for each State at the time of admission to the Union. Approved Apr. 4, 1818 ([3 Stat. 415, Chap. 34](#))

**Navigation Act of 1818.** Closed the ports of the United States to vessels owned by British subjects and arriving from any port in a British colony or territory closed to vessels owned by citizens of the United States. Approved Apr. 18, 1818 ([3 Stat. 432, Chap. 70](#))

**Steerage Act of 1819.** Established rules and procedures for passenger ships bringing immigrants to the U.S., the most important of which was numerical registry of immigration. This made it possible for the first time to compile accurate statistics on immigration. Approved Mar. 2, 1819. ([3 Stat. 488, Chap. 46](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980.](#) Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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