Even Alexander Hamilton had to deal with state travel expenses—and waiting to be reimbursed. During the summer of 1787, Hamilton was one of three delegates sent by New York to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Virginia’s seven-member delegation was led by George Washington, who was unanimously selected to preside over the Convention. Pennsylvania sent an eight-member delegation headed by Benjamin Franklin. Over 230 years later, we are still learning new information about the process which led to the creation of the US Constitution.

Until recently, it was unclear if Hamilton had to pay his own way to the Constitutional Convention. The process of reimbursing delegates was also uncertain. Newly discovered journal entries in the New York State Archives shed light on this formative period. I recently unearthed these exciting discoveries, working with John Diefenderfer and Jamie Brinkman, archivists in the New York State Archives. The journal entries appear in the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance Journals, Ledgers, and Registers of Receipts and Payments by the State, a collection containing 442.2 cubic feet of records.

Virginia, the largest state in 1787, authorized the payment of $6 per day for its delegates to attend the Constitutional Convention. New Jersey reimbursed $4 per day, while Delaware paid 40 shillings per day. Maryland’s delegates were paid based on the same rates used for Congress. We now know that Alexander Hamilton was reimbursed exactly 121 pounds, 12 shillings and 0 pence for his attendance in Philadelphia in May, June, August, and September of 1787.

With these discoveries we are also beginning to better understand the bookkeeping and reimbursement process used by New York. Journal entry 298 reflects a payment to Hamilton for attending the convention and demonstrates, among other things, that Hamilton in effect made an interest free loan to the State of the New York, since it took almost a year to be reimbursed. By contrast, some states paid their delegates in advance. It is likely that the state treasurer would have approved the reimbursement, which would have been sworn to and subscribed by Hamilton. Once we found the May 1788 payment to Hamilton, we realized that we would likely also find the amount paid to Hamilton for attendance at the Annapolis Convention in 1786. And we did, among the 826 volumes of financial records dating back to 1775. Journal entry 296 reflects payment to “Benson & Hamilton [for] their expenses in attending a Convention in Anapolis [sic].” Of course, the Annapolis Convention laid the groundwork for the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Indeed, the Report of the Annapolis Convention was written by none other than Hamilton.
Interestingly, Hamilton’s reimbursement for the Constitutional Convention was paid in May 1788, the month preceding the bitterly contested New York ratification convention in Poughkeepsie. New York narrowly ratified the Constitution by a vote of 30-27, becoming the eleventh state to join the union. The outnumbered Federalists were led by Hamilton. The Anti-federalists opposing ratification included New York Governor George Clinton and Hamilton’s co-delegates in Philadelphia, John Lansing and Robert Yates. ■

More details about this ongoing research can be found on the free history website www.StatutesandStories.com. These topics, including a pending documentary about the Constitution’s “Cover Letter,” will be discussed during New York Archives magazine’s Online Speaker Series on November 9. See page 13 for details.

Above: Journal entry 298 reflects a payment on May 19, 1788, to “Alexander Hamilton for his attending the Convention at Phil.”

Below: Journal entry 296 reflects payment to Hamilton for attending the Annapolis Convention in 1786.