

Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer



Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer (1723-1790) was born in Charles County. A fourth generation Marylander, he never married. William Pierce, a delegate from Georgia to the Constitutional Convention, described him as

a Gentleman of fortune in Maryland: He is always in good humour; never fails to make his company pleased with him. He sits silent in the Senate, and seems to be conscious that he is no politician. From his long continuance in single life, no doubt but he has made the vow of celibacy. He speaks warmly of the Ladies notwithstanding.

Jenifer was an authority on fiscal matters. He held the office of Intendant of the Revenue for Maryland during and after the Revolution; a post similar to, but far more demanding than, the one he had held under the proprietor before independence. He had a particular hatred of paper money and inflation.

In 1785 Jenifer represented Maryland at the Mount Vernon Conference. The compact he signed for Maryland was a major step forward in interstate cooperation and hinted at what could be done if all the states could be bound together more firmly. By virtue of the compact neither state could regulate fishing or commerce on the Bay and the Potomac without the express approval of the other.

By 1787 Jenifer had been a proprietary placeman, a congressman, a delegate, and president of the Maryland Senate. As a strong advocate of conservative fiscal policies who favored an improved national government, he made his views known as early as 1779 in a letter to Governor Thomas Johnson.

I wish with all my heart we had an executive, and agree with you in opinion that the want of it is a strong reason for entering into some kind of confederation or other. But it has always hurt me to think of confederating on terms that would not be lasting. . . . God grant us wisdom to determine with that judgment and precision which the grand object requires we should do.

The election of Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer as a delegate to Philadelphia proved controversial. Someone, it was alleged, tried to stuff the ballot box. On the first ballot, Jenifer was tied with Gabriel Duvall (later a U.S. Supreme Court justice). On the second ballot it appeared Duvall had a majority of votes, but the House protested for the most curious of reasons. It accused its own members of not following the rules:

the ballots for Gabriel Duvall, Esquire, appeared to be thirty-seven, and those for Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer, Esquire, thirty-five, which, upon examination were found to be five more than there were members attending the General Assembly . . . [This was due], we apprehend, to the mistake of some of the delegates, who on a ballot being called for some time before going into one, put their tickets then in the box, and afterwards, when the general ballot took place, not recollecting this circumstance, put in again. . . . We propose that a ballot again be had . . .

The Senate was “somewhat surprised” by the finding of the House and stated flatly that in their opinion there had been no irregularity. To “prevent any further delay in this important business,” however, the Senate agreed to include both men in the delegation. Ironically it was Duvall who then decided that he could not find time to go and withdrew his name.

Jenifer arrived in Philadelphia on June 2. Throughout the Convention he said very little. On the debate over the term of office for senators he noted “that in Maryland the Senators, chosen for five years, could hold no other office; and that this circumstance gained them the greatest confidence of the people.” He proposed that elections be held every three years, “observing that the too great frequency of elections rendered the people indifferent to them, and made the best men unwilling to engage in so precarious a service.”

On matters of trade, Jenifer and the rest of the Maryland delegation presented a united front. However, on other issues the delegation was frequently divided, a fact that Martin attributed to Jenifer’s persistence in voting on the opposite side of the question from himself.