

Stephen Moylan “Proof Package” Including Addendum Version 1.1

December 5, 2025

Stephen Moylan and the First Written Use of “United States of America”

The Historical Claim

Current scholarship identifies **Stephen Moylan (1737–1811)** — Irish-born patriot, aide-de-camp to General George Washington, and later Quartermaster General of the Continental Army — as the author of the **earliest known documentary use** of the exact phrase:

“United States of America”

This phrase appears in a letter Moylan wrote to **Colonel Joseph Reed** dated **2–3 January 1776**, several months before the Declaration of Independence formally introduced the nation under that name.

The Primary Source

The original handwritten letter is preserved in the **Joseph Reed Papers**, part of the **Thomas Addis Emmet Collection** at the **New York Public Library (Manuscripts and Archives Division)**.

In this correspondence, Moylan expresses his desire to travel to Spain and serve as a representative of what he explicitly calls the “United States of America.” Historians and archivists have identified this as the **earliest surviving written appearance** of the nation’s name in this exact form.

For researchers and the public, this manuscript can be traced through the New York Public Library’s archival finding aids for the Joseph Reed Papers within the Thomas Addis Emmet Collection.

Independent Scholarly Confirmation

Multiple historical institutions and scholars have examined and affirmed the significance of this letter, including:

- The **New-York Historical Society** and **New York Public Library**, which highlight the Moylan-Reed letter as the first known documentary appearance of “United States of America.”

- The **Christian Science Monitor**, which reported the discovery and scholarly recognition of Moylan’s phrasing.
- The **New England Historical Society**, which credits Moylan as the earliest known writer of the phrase.
- Academic publication **Raven: A Journal of Vexillology**, which reproduces the manuscript and identifies it as the earliest documentary evidence of the nation’s name.

Together, these sources establish a consistent scholarly consensus: Stephen Moylan authored the earliest surviving written use of the words “United States of America” presently known to historians.

Stephen Moylan and the Society of The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick

In **1771**, Moylan helped found the **Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick** in Philadelphia and served as its **first president**. The organization brought together prominent Irish immigrants committed to mutual assistance and civic responsibility.

As president, Moylan oversaw the early development of the society, including its symbolic traditions. Members wore a gold medal depicting **St. Patrick** and iconography representing the unity between **Ireland and America**, reflecting a shared identity and collective purpose during the years leading to the American Revolution.

Historians have suggested that this emphasis on unity — visually represented through the society’s medal — may have influenced Moylan’s later articulation of the phrase “United States of America,” though this remains an area of interpretive scholarship rather than definitive causation.

IA250’s Historical Position

IA250 recognizes Stephen Moylan as:

- The author of the **earliest known written use** of the phrase “United States of America”
- A founding leader and first president of the original Friendly Sons of St. Patrick
- A key Irish-American patriot whose language and leadership helped shape early American identity

In presenting this history, IA250 employs careful language such as “**earliest known documentary use**” or “**first surviving written use**” to reflect both scholarly rigor and historical integrity.

MEDIA FACT SHEET

Stephen Moylan and the Origin of the Name “United States of America”

Background Summary for Media Use

Stephen Moylan (1737–1811) was an Irish-born merchant, patriot, and military officer who served on General George Washington’s staff during the American Revolution and later became Quartermaster General of the Continental Army.

The Documented Evidence

In a letter dated **2–3 January 1776** to **Colonel Joseph Reed**, Stephen Moylan used the exact phrase “United States of America” while discussing his wish to travel to Spain on behalf of the emerging nation. The original manuscript is preserved in the **Joseph Reed Papers**, part of the **Thomas Addis Emmet Collection** at the **New York Public Library (Manuscripts and Archives Division)**.

This letter predates the Declaration of Independence by nearly six months and is widely recognized by historians as the **earliest surviving written use** of the nation’s name in its final form.

Scholarly Reassurance

Institutions and historians confirming this interpretation include:

- New York Public Library
- New-York Historical Society
- New England Historical Society
- Academic journal *Raven* (vexillology)
- Christian Science Monitor

These independent sources collectively support the claim that Moylan’s letter is the earliest known documentary appearance of the phrase “United States of America.”

Society of The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick

Stephen Moylan was also a co-founder and the **first president** of the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, established in Philadelphia in 1771. The society’s

emblematic gold medal symbolized unity between Ireland and America, reflecting the organization's commitment to shared identity, mutual aid, and patriotism during the Revolutionary era.

For accuracy and historical integrity, IA250 uses the following phrasing:

“Stephen Moylan is credited as the author of the **earliest known written use** of the phrase ‘United States of America,’ appearing in his January 1776 letter to Joseph Reed, preserved in the New York Public Library’s Joseph Reed Papers.”

This language reflects current scholarly consensus while acknowledging the possibility of earlier, now-lost uses not preserved in historical records.

Quick Facts

- Name: Stephen Moylan
- Born: Cork, Ireland, 1737
- Died: 1811
- Role: Aide-de-camp to George Washington; Quartermaster General
- Historic Contribution: Earliest known written use of “United States of America”
- Civic Role: First President, Friendly Sons of St. Patrick (Philadelphia, 1771)

Addendum to the Proof Package (Version 1.1)

Clarifying Authorship and Institutional Roles in the 1909 Stephen Moylan Publication

Prepared by: Joseph P. Heenan

Date: December 5, 2025

Status: Formal Addendum; no revision to original findings

D.1 Purpose of This Addendum

This Addendum is incorporated into the Master Packet to **clarify authorship and institutional roles** identified through continued archival review following the preparation of the original Proof Package.

This Addendum **does not revise, retract, or supersede** any factual findings contained in the Proof Package. Rather, it refines attribution in accordance with historical and scholarly best practices by:

- Explicitly recognizing **Martin I. J. Griffin** as the author and compiler of the 1909 Stephen Moylan biography; and
- Reaffirming the **commissioning, funding, and distribution role** of the **Society of the Friendly Sons & Daughters of Saint Patrick for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland** (“the Society”).

D.2 Authorship of the 1909 Moylan Biography

The biography entitled:

Stephen Moylan: Muster-Master General, Secretary and Aide-de-Camp to Washington
Published in Philadelphia, 1909

was **authored and compiled by Martin I. J. Griffin**, a recognized Irish-American historian.

At the time the work was undertaken and published:

- Griffin had been **formally elected Historian of the Society (1907)**; and
- He prepared the Moylan biography **in that official capacity**, as confirmed by Society minutes and correspondence entered into the record.

All scholarly and creative authorship of the 1909 volume properly rests with **Martin I. J. Griffin**, and this attribution is expressly affirmed herein.

D.3 Institutional Role of the Society of the Friendly Sons

While Griffin was the author, the archival record establishes that **the Society was the commissioning, funding, and distributing body** responsible for the publication’s existence and circulation.

Records preserved by **Villanova University’s Distinctive Special Collections** document that the Society:

1. **Commissioned the Work**
 - Following Griffin’s election as Historian in 1907, he formally advised the Society of his intention to prepare a biography of Stephen Moylan for presentation to the membership.
2. **Funded the Publication**
 - A Society **ledger entry dated January 16, 1909** records payment for the printing of **650 copies** of the Moylan biography.

- The same records document payment of **\$250 to Griffin** “for his services in the publication.”
- 3. **Authorized and Directed Distribution**
 - Society resolutions directed those copies of the published work be provided to members of the Society.

Accordingly, the Society did not merely possess or later acquire the publication; **it affirmatively caused the publication to exist** through formal authorization, financial support, and controlled distribution.

D.4 Significance of the 1909 Publication

The 1909 biography authored by Griffin includes the **earliest known printed transcription** of **Stephen Moylan’s January 2, 1776 letter to Joseph Reed**, in which Moylan uses the phrase:

“United States of America.”

While the letter had long existed in manuscript form, the Society-authorized 1909 volume represents the **earliest documented instance of the phrase’s appearance in print**.

Later historical treatments have often acknowledged the existence of Griffin’s 1909 biography without recognizing:

- the Society’s commissioning role, or
- the publication’s status as the first printed appearance of the phrase.

This Addendum supplies that missing institutional and documentary context.

D.5 Standard Attribution Language for Future Use

To ensure consistent and accurate reference across publications, correspondence, and institutional communications, the following attribution is recommended:

“The earliest known printed appearance of the phrase ‘United States of America’ occurred in 1909 in a biography of Stephen Moylan authored by Martin I. J. Griffin, then Historian of the Society of the Friendly Sons & Daughters of Saint Patrick, which commissioned, funded, and distributed the publication.”

D.6 Relationship to the Original Proof Package

All findings, exhibits, and conclusions contained in the original Proof Package **remain unchanged and fully supported**.

This Addendum enhances clarity, scholarly precision, and institutional transparency, while aligning the Proof Package with subsequent public-facing communications, including Immediate Release materials.

D.7 Concluding Statement

By commissioning and publishing Griffin's 1909 biography, the Society ensured that one of the earliest printed expressions of American national identity was preserved for posterity.

This Addendum affirms both the **authorship of Martin I. J. Griffin** and the **institutional stewardship of the Society**, accurately reflecting the full historical record.

SECTION VI — END MATTER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Credits Villanova University, the Society, Griffin, and the rediscovery work of Joseph P. Heenan.