

The Signers of the U.S. Constitution

On September 17, 1787, the Constitutional Convention came to a close in the Assembly Room of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There were seventy individuals chosen to attend the meetings with the initial purpose of amending the Articles of Confederation. Rhode Island opted to not send any delegates. Fifty-five men attended most of the meetings, there were never more than forty-six present at any one time, and ultimately only thirty-nine delegates actually signed the Constitution. (William Jackson, who was the secretary of the convention, but not a delegate, also signed the Constitution. John Delaware was absent but had another delegate sign for him.) While offering incredible contributions, George Mason of Virginia, Edmund Randolph of Virginia, and Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts refused to sign the final document because of basic philosophical differences. Mainly, they were fearful of an all-powerful government and wanted a bill of rights added to protect the rights of the people.

The following is a list of those individuals who signed the Constitution along with a brief bit of information concerning what happened to each person after 1787. Many of those who signed the Constitution went on to serve more years in public service under the new form of government. The states are listed in alphabetical order followed by each state's signers.

Connecticut

William S. Johnson (1727-1819)—He became the president of Columbia College (formerly known as King's College), and was then appointed as a United States Senator in 1789. He resigned from the Senate in 1791 to return to Columbia. He retired from education in 1800.

Roger Sherman (1723-1793)—He campaigned strongly for the ratification of the Constitution and served as a United States Representative (1789-1791) and Senator (1791-1793) until his death in 1793 at the age of 72.

Delaware

Richard Bassett (1745-1815)—He was appointed as a United States Senator from Delaware (1789-1793), and was instrumental in the organization of the Judiciary of the United States. He favored moving the nation's capital from New York City to Washington, D.C., and was opposed to Alexander Hamilton's plan of the assumption of state debts by the federal government. After his retirement from the Senate, he devoted the rest of his life to public affairs in Delaware. He was elected governor of Delaware (1799-1801).

Gunning Bedford, Jr. (1747-1812)—President Washington appointed him the first United States district judge for the state of Delaware in 1789, a position he held until his death in 1812.

Delaware *(Continued)*

Jacob Broom (1752-1810)—Broom became the first postmaster of Delaware from 1790-1792, and was the head of the board of the Delaware Bank of Wilmington. He was involved in business ventures such as operating a cotton mill and running a machine shop, and was involved with attempts to improve the infrastructure of the state of Delaware in such areas as toll roads, canals, and bridges. He also served on the board of the College of Wilmington and showed concern for many other philanthropic activities.

John Dickinson (1732-1808)—He lived for twenty years after the official ratification of the Constitution but held no public offices. He spent much of his time writing about politics, and criticized the administration of President John Adams. He died in 1808 at the age of 75. Thomas Jefferson wrote: “A more estimable man or truer patriot could not have left us ... It has been a great comfort to me to have retained his friendship to the last moment of his life.”

George Read (1733-1798)—He served for four years as a United States Senator (1789-1793), and became the first chief justice of Delaware in 1793.

Georgia

Abraham Baldwin (1754-1807)—He served in the House of Representatives (1789-1799), and was appointed for two terms to the United States Senate (1799-1807). He died before completing his second term.

William Few (1748-1828)—He was appointed as a United States Senator from Georgia (1789), and was defeated for his seat in 1795. He moved to New York in 1799 and was elected to the state legislature in 1801. From 1804-1814 he was the director of the Manhattan Bank and the president of City Bank.

Maryland

Daniel Carroll (1730-1796)—He served one term in the United States House of Representatives (1789-1791), and was appointed by President George Washington to oversee the construction of the federal capital on the Potomac River. Washington, D.C., is situated on one of his farms.

Daniel Jenifer of St. Thomas (1723-1790)—He did not really take an active part in the development of the Constitution. He and the other delegate from Maryland oftentimes voted against each other. He did, however, campaign for the Constitution's ratification and afterwards retired from public life.

James McHenry (1753-1816)—After the Convention McHenry went back to his home state and served in various positions of the state legislature (1789-1796) and was appointed Secretary of War by President George Washington (1796-1800). He proved rather ineffectual in this position, and President John Adams called for his resignation in 1800. He retired from public office, and in 1812 was stricken with paralysis in both legs. He was bedridden for the remainder of his life.

Massachusetts

Nathaniel Gorham (1738-1796)—When the Constitutional Convention was finished, Gorham retired from public life. He got heavily into land speculation in New York, but his overindulgence eventually got him into deep financial trouble. He suffered from apoplexy and died a poor man in 1796.

Rufus King (1755-1827)—He was a member of the ratification convention in Massachusetts but moved to New York and became a United States Senator (1789-1795; 1813-1825). He failed to win the Federalist Party's nomination for president in 1816, but was appointed Minister to England in 1824.

New Hampshire

Nicholas Gilman (1755-1814)—He was elected to the United States House of Representatives (1789-1797), and was a United States Senator (1805-1814).

John Langdon (1741-1819)— He served as a United States Senator for twelve years (1789-1801), and served as governor of New Hampshire from 1805-1812 (with the exception of the year 1809).

New Jersey

David Brearly (1745-1790)—He lived only three years after the end of the Constitutional Convention. He was a main supporter of the Constitution at the New Jersey ratifying convention, and President Washington rewarded him with an appointment as a federal district judge. Brearly was active in the Masonic Order in New Jersey and the Society of the Cincinnati (an organization of former Revolutionary War officers).

Jonathan Dayton (1760-1824)—He served in the United States House of Representatives from 1791 to 1799, and was chosen Speaker of the House for four years. He became a United States Senator (1799-1805), and was a close acquaintance of Aaron Burr. Dayton was indicted in 1807 for treason along with Burr in a plot to combine Mexico and the Western Territories of the United States. His (Dayton's) case was never brought to trial.

William Livingston (1723-1790)—He helped in the ratification fight for the Constitution and served as the governor of New Jersey until his death in 1790.

William Paterson (Patterson) (1745-1806)—He was appointed to the United States Senate (1789-1790), and was also appointed by President George Washington as a justice of the United States Supreme Court (1793) until his death.

New York

Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804)—After the Convention, Hamilton worked with John Jay and James Madison on a series of articles known as the “Federalist Papers” as propaganda for the Constitution. He served as the first United States Secretary of the Treasury from 1789 to 1795. He retired to his law practice and was later appointed to the position of Major General from 1798 to 1800 during an impending war with France. When Hamilton helped defeat Aaron Burr’s quest for the governorship of New York, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. He was killed by Burr on July 12, 1804.

North Carolina

William Blount (1749-1800)—Although he signed the Constitution, that action was taken just to prove that he was “present.” He supported its ratification because it would help Western expansion, and he used various elected positions to gain land for his own economic advancement. Blount served as state senator (1788-1790), governor of the territory south of the Ohio River (1790), president of the Tennessee constitutional convention (1796), and as a United States Senator from Tennessee (1796-1797). Blount was involved in a conspiracy for inciting the Creek and Cherokee Indians to collaborate with the British Fleet in attacking Spanish Florida and Louisiana. Based upon these charges Blount was impeached by the House of Representatives and expelled by the Senate in 1797. He returned to Tennessee and served in the state senate.

Richard D. Spaight (1758-1802)—He was elected to three terms as governor of North Carolina beginning in 1792, and was a major force in moving the capital from New Bern to Raleigh. He was elected a member of the United States House of Representatives (1798-1801) and was killed in a duel by his successor in Congress (John Stanly) in 1802.

Hugh Williamson (1735-1819)—He was elected to two terms in the United States House of Representatives (1789-1793), and then retired from public life. He spent many of his remaining years at the New York Hospital, dedicating much of his time to the study of medicine. One of his chief interests was writing on the climate of North America.

Pennsylvania

George Clymer (1739-1813)—He was elected to the United States House of Representatives (1789-1791) and became involved in civic and cultural activities in and around Philadelphia. He served as the president of the Bank of Philadelphia.

Thomas Fitzsimons (1741-1811)—Fitzsimons served as a member of the United States House of Representatives (1789-1795) and strongly supported the financial plan of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. When he left Congress, he spent the remainder of his life in private business, and served as president of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. Fitzsimons was concerned with religious affairs, public education, and served as trustee of the University of Pennsylvania.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)—At the same time that Franklin was attending the Constitutional Convention, he was also the president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (1787). Harvard, Yale, St. Andrews, William and Mary, and Oxford all granted him honorary degrees. He died in 1790 at the age of eighty-four.

Jared Ingersoll (1749-1822)—He served as Attorney General of Pennsylvania from 1790 to 1799, and also as city solicitor of Philadelphia from 1789 to 1801. He ran as the vice presidential candidate under George Clinton in the election of 1812 against James Madison and Elbridge Gerry and lost. He then served as the presiding judge of the district court of Philadelphia from 1821 to 1822.

Thomas Mifflin (1744-1800)—He was elected the first governor of Pennsylvania in 1790 and held that position until 1799. He also served as a major general and commander-in-chief of the Philadelphia militia.

Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816)—He was appointed by President George Washington as the United States Commissioner to England (1790-1791) and the United States Minister to France (1792-1794). He became a United States Senator (1800-1803), and was the chairman of the Erie Canal Commission (1810-1813). His last elected position was that of president of the New York Historical Society (1816).

Robert Morris (1734-1806)—Morris was chosen as the first United States Senator from Pennsylvania and served in that position from 1789 to 1795. President George Washington asked him to become the first Secretary of the Treasury but he declined the position and recommended Alexander Hamilton instead. After governmental service, Morris was deeply involved in land speculation in the District of Columbia and in Ohio. He was the “Richest Man in America” but met financial ruin and spent three years in debtor’s prison. Morris died penniless in 1806.

James Wilson (1742-1798)—Wilson returned to Pennsylvania after the Constitutional Convention and played a major role in its successful ratification. He served on the United States Supreme Court (1789-1798) and as a professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania. He was deeply involved in questionable land deals and soon got himself in severe financial difficulty. While visiting a fellow Supreme Court justice, James Iredell in Edenton, North Carolina, Wilson had a nervous breakdown. He died a pauper in 1798.

South Carolina

Pierce Butler (1744-1822)—He was appointed one of the state's first two senators (1789) and served until he resigned in 1796. He was appointed a seat in the United States Senate in 1803 but resigned (again) before the end of his appointment in 1804.

Charles Pinckney (1757-1824)—He was elected governor of South Carolina (1789-1792; 1796-1798; 1806-1808), and also served as a United States Senator (1798-1801). He resigned his senate seat to become minister to Spain from 1801-1809, served in the South Carolina state legislature (1810-1814), and then became a member of the House of Representatives from 1819-1821 where he adamantly opposed the Missouri Compromise.

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (1746-1825)—He served as the United States Minister to France during the administration of George Washington and was part of the mission to France during the so-called "XYZ Affair." It was Pinckney who said at the time, "Millions for defense, sir, but not one cent for tribute!," and upon his return to the United States he began to prepare for a war with France with former President Washington and Alexander Hamilton. However, the situation was resolved before it could come to that. He ran unsuccessfully for the vice presidency as the Federalist candidate along with John Adams in 1800. Pinckney also lost his bid for the presidency against Thomas Jefferson in 1804 and James Madison in 1808.

John Rutledge (1739-1800)—Rutledge was appointed an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court (1789-1791). He was then appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1795, but was not confirmed because of his negative feelings toward the Jay Treaty.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island did not send any delegates to the Constitutional Convention.

Virginia

John Blair (1732-1800)—His accomplishments were overshadowed by contributions of James Madison, but his support for the Constitution was rewarded by President George Washington with an appointment to the United States Supreme Court in 1789. He served in that position until his retirement due to ill health in 1796.

James Madison (1751-1836)—When the work of the Constitutional Convention was completed, Madison went on to play a major part in its ratification process by joining John Jay and Alexander Hamilton in writing the “Federalist Papers.” He became a member of the House of Representatives (1789-1797), was United States Secretary of State (1801-1809), and President of the United States (1809-1817). He outlived all of the other Founding Fathers.

George Washington (1732-1799)—Washington served for eight years as the first President of the United States under the new Constitution. His first four years were dominated by domestic issues and the second four years by foreign policy issues. During the administration of President John Adams there was a threat of war with France, and again, Washington came back to serve his country in the capacity of Commander-in-Chief. With the threat of war over he went back to live his last days at his beloved Mt. Vernon. He died there on December 14, 1799. At a memorial “Light Horse Harry” Lee said that George Washington was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”



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