

Freemasons And The Creation Of The Constitution Of The United States

By

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How many times do the words “slave” and “slavery” appear in the Constitution of the United States? I will answer this question later.

During the American War for Independence, the colonists began to form a new government. Many of the men who deliberated and crafted the documents for the new government were Freemasons. This paper will describe the contributions of Freemasons to the third document that governed our nation, and the one by which we are guided today, the Constitution of the United States of America.

Philadelphia Convention or Constitutional Convention

Several states disputed the right of the other states to navigate along the Potomac River. The Virginia legislature urged all states to send delegates to Annapolis, Maryland to discuss the rules for interstate commerce. Only five states sent delegates to this meeting held in September, 1786 and it was clear that the issues could not be resolved by representatives of those few states. The twelve delegates sent a report to the Continental Congress and the states asking for a broader meeting to be held in Philadelphia the next May.^{1 2} This report, and other events such as

Shays’ Rebellion, led to the Constitutional Convention of 1787.³

The Continental Congress passed a resolution calling for a new convention on February 21, 1787. By this time, seven states had already authorized delegations and identified many of their representatives.

Each state directed its delegation how to act and cast a vote to make changes to the Articles of Confederation. Only Delaware instructed its delegates not to change the one state, one vote system of the Continental Congress.⁴

Delegates met in Philadelphia in late May 1787 to amend the Articles of Confederation. Twelve of the thirteen states sent delegates. Rhode Island declined to participate. The convention was held in the Pennsylvania State House with the windows kept shut so others could not hear the discussions.⁵

The secretary performed his recordkeeping duties indifferently; however, Brothers Rufus King, James McHenry, and William Paterson kept journals and notes, and are thus able to give us more details about the details of the creation of the Constitution.⁶

¹ Wikipedia, “Annapolis Convention,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annapolis_Convention_\(1786\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annapolis_Convention_(1786)), 8 September 2006.

² Family Encyclopedia of American History, The Reader’s Digest, The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., p. 45.

³ Wikipedia, op.cit.

⁴ Charleton, James H., and others, *Framers of the Constitution*, National Archives and Records Administration, 1986, p. 22-23.

⁵ Wikipedia, “Philadelphia Convention,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphia_convention, 12 October 2006.

⁶ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 35.

George Washington

George Washington attended the Constitutional Convention at the urging of his friends and served as President of the Convention.^{7 8}

Washington received his degrees from Fredericksburg Lodge No. in Virginia in 1752 and 1753. He served as Charter Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 39 in 1788 and 1789, then under the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. During this time, Most Worshipful Edmund Randolph signed the charter of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 (now Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22). On September 18, 1793, President Washington laid the cornerstone of the National Capitol in Washington, D.C., one of the greatest public Masonic occasions in American history.⁹

Rufus King

King, one of the youngest delegates to the Constitutional Convention, was one of the most capable orators, attended every session, and his notes on the proceedings have been valuable to historians. Initially, he did not believe the Articles of Confederation needed substantive change, but later supported the nationalist caucus. He served on the committee on postponed matters and the committee on style.¹⁰

Records show that King was a member of St. John's Lodge in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and present at several meetings held from 1781 through 1784.¹¹

James McHenry

McHenry missed many sessions and did not take part in many debates. However, he kept a private journal and campaigned for ratification of the Constitution in Maryland.¹²

McHenry was not a Mason at the time of the Constitutional Convention. He received his degrees from Spiritual Lodge No. 23 in Maryland in 1806.¹³

William Paterson

Paterson co-authored and advocated the New Jersey Plan that asserted the rights of the small states against the large states. He took notes of the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention until he left in late July, returned to sign the final document, and supported its ratification in New Jersey.¹⁴

Paterson received his degrees from Trenton Lodge No. 5 in New Jersey in 1791.¹⁵

Of the 55 delegates who attended the Constitutional Convention, we have evidence that only seventeen of them were Masons.

⁷ Wikipedia, "Philadelphia Convention, op.cit.

⁸ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 206.

⁹ Heaton, Ronald E., Masonic Membership of the Founding Fathers, The Masonic Service Association, p. 56, 74.

¹⁰ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 163.

¹¹ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., 33-34.

¹² Charleton, James H., and others., op.cit., p. 171.

¹³ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 42-43.

¹⁴ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 188.

¹⁵ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 52-53.

- Council of Revision consisting of the executive and some of the national judiciary that would have the power to veto and revise national legislation, subject to override¹⁸

Edmund Randolph

Randolph presented the Virginia Plan for creating a new government very soon after the Constitutional Convention opened. The plan proposed (1) a strong central government composed of legislative, executive, and judicial branches, (2) enabling the legislature to veto state laws, and (3) using force against states that failed to fulfill their obligations. He alternated between the Federalist and Anti-federalist points of view. He was a member of the committee of detail that prepared a draft of the Constitution, but did not sign the Constitution. Randolph returned to Virginia, supported the Constitution, and urged ratification of the document.¹⁹

Randolph received his degrees from Williamsburg Lodge No. 6 in 1774, and served as the third Grand Master of Masons in Virginia from 1786-1788.²⁰

The delegates debated the Virginia Plan from May 30 through June 13, 1787. On May 30, the delegates voted and approved substitute wording suggested by Brother Randolph to establish a “*national Government . . . consisting of a supreme Legislative, Executive, & Judiciary.*”²¹

However, Brother Paterson and other delegates from small states “resented the loss of equal power they enjoyed under the Articles of Confederation and feared they would be dominated or even swallowed up by the large states.” They “insisted that representation in at

least one house should be by state as it was in the Continental Congress.”²²

Debate ended on June 13, with the following modifications to the Virginia Plan:

- Members of the lower house would serve for three years
- Members of the upper house would serve for seven years
- All members must be at least 30 years old
- Central government would pay members instead of the states
- Legislature would elect the executive for one seven-year term
- Executive could veto legislative acts unless overridden by two-thirds of both houses
- Upper house would select a “supreme Tribunal” of judges²³

Several features of the revised Virginia Plan continued to alienate delegates from the small states so they proposed their own plan known as the New Jersey or Paterson Plan on June 15.²⁴

New Jersey Plan

Some delegates, including Brother William Paterson, were concerned that the larger states were being given too much power. They proposed revising and strengthening the Articles of Confederation. Paterson presented an alternative plan to the delegates on June 15, 1787 that became known as the New Jersey Plan.^{25 26}

The following changes were proposed:

- The Articles of Confederation would be maintained

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 194-95.

²⁰ Heaton, Ronald E., op., cit., p. 56.

²¹ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 40.

²² Ibid., p. 41.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁵ Wikipedia, “Philadelphia Convention, op.cit..

²⁶ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 43.

- Congress would be granted new powers, such as setting taxes and forcing their collection
- A plural executive would be elected by Congress for a single term and subject to removal by the state executives²⁷
- A judiciary would be appointed by the executives, with life-terms of service
- Laws enacted by the Congress would take precedence over state laws²⁸

The committee of the whole debated the New Jersey Plan on June 16 and 19. Delegates continued to argue about whether they had authority only modify the Articles of Confederation or to write a completely new document.²⁹

Brother Benjamin Franklin proposed that the daily sessions be opened with prayer by a local clergyman to subdue passions. This suggestion died when everyone realized there were no funds to pay a clergyman.³⁰

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was 81 years of age and the oldest delegate at the convention. He suffered from ill health, and was so infirm that he was carried from his home to the sessions in his sedan chair by prisoners from the city jail, and missed very few sessions of the Continental Congress. He did not approve of many aspects of the finished document, yet was able to sooth passions and compromise disputes.^{31 32}

Franklin received his degrees from St. John's Lodge in Philadelphia in 1731. In 1734 he was elected Grand Master of Pennsylvania.³³

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wikipedia, "Philadelphia Convention, op.cit.

²⁹ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

³¹ Ibid., p. 149.

Debate on Representation of Both Houses

In early July 1787, the delegates debated and discussed how the upper and lower houses should be represented, but could not reach an agreement. To break the impasse, each of the eleven states appointed one member to serve as a committee. Remember, Rhode Island declined to send a delegate, and the delegates from New Hampshire did not arrive in Philadelphia until July 23 because the state did not provide funds and they had to pay their own way. This committee included Brothers Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and William Paterson of New Jersey, and they met while the main body of delegates adjourned to celebrate independence.³⁴

This committee suggested that

- (1) representation in the lower house be based on the free population and three-fifths of the slaves,
- (2) the states would select members of the upper house
- (3) the lower house possess exclusive power to initiate appropriations bills without changes by the upper house
- (4) every 40,000 inhabitants would be represented by one member, and those states with fewer than 40,000 population would each be guaranteed one member.

When the main body of delegates returned on July 6, they approved the portion of the report that gave special powers to the lower house.³⁵

Also on July 6, a different committee was formed to discuss the numerical formula for the proposed lower house. This committee included Brothers Rufus King of Massachusetts and Edmund Randolph of Virginia, and recommended that the

³² Wikipedia, "Philadelphia Convention, op.cit.

³³ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 18-19.

³⁴ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit, p. 34, 45-46.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 46.

lower house be based primarily on population and secondarily on wealth. They also recommended that the first assembly of the lower house consist of 56 seats, and that future alterations continue to be based on population and wealth.³⁶

A third committee was established to recommend a different formula for distributing seats in the lower house, and included Brothers Rufus King, David Brearly, and Daniel Carroll. They decided to increase the number of seats to 65, which increased the number of delegates for most of the states by one. This formula was approved by the delegates.³⁷

David Brearly

Brearily attended sessions regularly, chaired the committee on postponed matters, and was a follower of Paterson.³⁸

David McGregor writes in The History of Freemasonry in New Jersey 1787-1937 that Brearily was made a Mason in Military Lodge No. 19 in Pennsylvania. Brearily served as the first Grand Master of Masons in New Jersey from 1786 until his death in 1790.³⁹

Daniel Carroll

Carroll attended the Constitutional Convention regularly, spoke about 20 times, and served on the committee on postponed matters. When he returned to Maryland, he campaigned for ratification of the Constitution.⁴⁰

Carroll received his degrees in 1780 and 1781 from Lodge No. 16 in Maryland.⁴¹

On July 11, contentious debate focused on the role of slaves in determining representation and the need for and process for a national census. Most delegates from the southern states wanted to exclude slaves from computing taxes and to include them when determining representation in the lower house. Delegates from northern states made other proposals including counting three-fifths of the slaves that were rejected.⁴²

On Friday, July 13, delegates voted to reject wealth as a basis for representation in the lower house of the national legislature.⁴³

Great Compromise or Connecticut Compromise

On July 16, 1787, two Connecticut delegates proposed two houses; a lower house that favored representation based on population as suggested by the Virginia Plan, and an upper house that would have two representatives from each state as proposed by the New Jersey Plan. This became known as the Great Compromise or Connecticut Compromise.⁴⁴

Freemasons Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Gunning Bedford, Jr, and William Paterson all favored proportional representation. Washington believed that equal representation would dilute the sovereignty of the national government. Gunning Bedford, Jr, stated that if the Senate did not have equality, "the small [states] w[ould] find some foreign ally of more honor and good faith, who will take them by the hand and do them justice."⁴⁵

³⁶ Ibid., 1986, p. 46-47.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 130.

³⁹ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 7.

⁴⁰ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 133-4.

⁴¹ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 9.

⁴² Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 47-48.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁴ Wikipedia, "Connecticut Compromise,"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connecticut_Compromise,
11 October 2006.

⁴⁵ Ibid.,

Gunning Bedford, Jr.

Bedford was one of the more active members of the Constitutional Convention and missed few sessions. He was a member of the committee that drafted the Great Compromise. He was an ardent small state advocate and warned that small states may be required to seek foreign alliances unless their interests were accommodated.⁴⁶

Bedford was a member of Lodge No. 14 at Christiana Ferry in Delaware and received his degrees in 1782. He was installed as the first Grand Master of Delaware on August 4, 1806 subsequent to his election two months earlier.⁴⁷

The Great Compromise was successful because both large and small states compromised. Small states abandoned their hopes for a group of independent states as stated by the Articles of Confederation and yielded on equal representation in the lower house. Large states ended their desire to dominate the government by accepting equal voting power in the upper house of the national legislature.⁴⁸

From July 17 to July 26 the delegates agreed on some of the specifics of the Constitution that included the following:

- The national legislature would enact legislation for the general interests of the Union
- Each state in the upper house would have two representatives who would vote as individuals instead of as one unit; and
- The national court system would have jurisdiction over cases about laws passed by the legislature and other questions related to national peace and harmony.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 126.

⁴⁷ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 4.

⁴⁸ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 50.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Committee of Detail

During this time, the most difficult issue was the process for election of the executive. The Convention appointed a “committee of detail” to prepare a draft that reflected the decisions made over the preceding few weeks. Brother Edmund Randolph was a member of this committee.⁵⁰

Details agreed to by the committee of detail included:

- Entering names to the members and branches of the national government, such as President, Speaker, and Supreme Court;
- Adding the opening phrase of the preamble, “We the People of the States...; and listed each of the 13 states”⁵¹
- Enumerating congressional powers that included
 - The power to impose and collect taxes;
 - Regulation of commerce
 - Establishment of rules for naturalization of citizens
 - Overriding a veto by the President by two-thirds vote of both houses
 - Extradition of criminals
 - Admission of new states by two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress
 - Authority to call up state militias
 - Coining of money; and
 - Borrowing of money.⁵²
- Stating the prerogatives of each body of the national legislature
 - The Senate would
 - Appoint ambassadors and Supreme Court judges
 - Make treaties

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁵² Ibid., p. 53.

- Participate in settling interstate disputes
 - The House of Representatives would
 - Have power to impeach
 - Originate money bills
- Both houses would be required to pass a bill before it could become law.⁵³
- The committee made the following decisions about the President:
 - Election by the legislature for a single 7-year term
 - The power to veto bills proposed by the Congress
 - Enforcement all national laws
 - Appointment of key officials
 - The right to pardon
 - Serving as commander in chief
 - Informing and making recommendations to the supreme legislature about state matters; and
 - Receiving ambassadors⁵⁴
- Provisions concerning the courts included
 - Noting jurisdictional areas for the federal courts; and
 - Defining the powers of the Supreme Court⁵⁵
- Prohibited the states from certain activities:
 - Coining money
 - Granting letters of marque and reprisal
 - Emitting bills of credit
 - Issuing paper money
 - Taxing imports and exports
 - Making agreements with other states; and
 - Making independent alliances or confederations,
 - Waging war independently, and

- Granting titles of nobility that were previously specified by the Articles of Confederation.⁵⁶

In addition, and contrary to the will of the delegates, the committee of detail also specified that the congressmen would be paid by the states.⁵⁷

The Convention reconvened on August 6, and the delegates received individual printed copies of the first draft.⁵⁸

Revisions

Delegates had been away from their homes and professional duties since May and were anxious to return home. Some were dissatisfied with the proceedings and departed early.⁵⁹

The new document was studied line by line and article by article. Those who stayed tended to give shorter speeches and were more willing to compromise.⁶⁰ Delegates agreed to the following changes:

- Population each member of the lower house would represent was changed from 40,000 inhabitants to read “not exceeding the rate of one for every forty thousand.”
- Residency of the members of the House and Senate were changed to 7 years citizenship for House members and 9 years citizenship for Senate members.
- Delegates reinserted the provision paying congressman from the national treasury.
- Delegates discussed the war debts incurred by the states, and included ambiguous wording that did not specify the debts that were valid.
- Delegates made the following decisions regarding state militias:

⁵³ Ibid., p. 53-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

- National government could pass laws requiring uniform organizations among states
- Uniformity of arms and discipline
- Control of units called into federal service
- Slaves were allowed to be imported until 1808 in those states existing in 1787. Note that the words “slave” and “slavery” do not appear in the final document; words such as “other persons” are used instead.
- Changed the number of members of both houses of Congress to override a veto from two-thirds to three-fourths.
- Provided that the President be 35 years of age and a resident for 21 years.
- Adopted ambiguous language that allowed new states to enter the Union as equals of the original states.⁶¹

A committee on postponed matters consisting of one member from each state was appointed to finish the details of several remaining items. Members of this committee included Brothers David Brearly (Chairman), John Dickinson, Daniel Carroll, Sr., Rufus King, and Nicholas Gilman.⁶²

John Dickinson

Although Dickinson missed some sessions of the Continental Congress, departed early, and did not sign the Constitution, he served on the committee on postponed matters, assisted in promoting the Great Compromise, and wrote public letters supporting ratification of the Constitution.⁶³

Dickinson was initiated in Lodge No. 18 in Dover, Delaware in 1780 and did not return for the remaining degrees.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 57-63.

⁶² Ibid., p. 64.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶⁴ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 15-16.

Nicholas Gilman

Gilman arrived at the Constitutional Convention after much major business had already taken place. Though he played only a minor part in the deliberations, he served on the committee on postponed matters. He also actively promoted its acceptance in New Hampshire.⁶⁵

Gilman became a member of St. John’s Lodge in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1777.⁶⁶

This committee on postponed matters proposed the following recommendations on September 8:

- President:
 - Residence requirement was reduced from 21 years to 14 years
 - Required to be native-born or a U.S. citizen
 - Authorized to make treaties with approval of 2/3 of the Senate
 - Authorized to appoint ambassadors, judges, Supreme Court, and other officials with approval of majority of the Senate
 - Established method of electors to cast ballots for President
- Senate:
 - Try impeachments of high officials; 2/3 majority for conviction
 - Would not select President if no candidate received a majority
- House of Representatives:
 - Would select President if no candidate received a majority with each state having one vote
 - Would originate money bills with senatorial amendment⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 152.

⁶⁶ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 21.

⁶⁷ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 64-66.

Final Draft

A five-member committee of style was selected to complete the writing of the document and put it in final form. They submitted the draft on September 12th that included the following changes:⁶⁸

- Reduced 23 articles to 7
- Changed the preamble to read, “We the People of the United States...”
- Forbade states from passing laws that might impair the obligation of contracts⁶⁹

Brother Rufus King was a member of this committee.

While the final draft was being prepared, the other delegates made a few additional changes:

- Amendments could be initiated by two-thirds of the Congress or by a constitutional convention requested by two-thirds of the state legislatures, and
- Proposed amendments would be approved by legislatures of conventions of three-fourths of the states.⁷⁰

During discussion of the final modifications on September 12, additional decisions were made:

- Reduced the number of both houses to override a Presidential veto from three-fourths to two-thirds, and
- Rejected writing a bill of rights.⁷¹

The delegates carefully reviewed the finished document over the next three days. Many changes were editorial in nature. However, they made some additional changes:

- President could appoint a national treasurer
- Prohibited chief executive from receiving payment other than salary from national government

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 66-7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 66-7.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 67.

- Two-thirds of states’ legislatures could request future constitutional conventions⁷²

On September 15, the delegates voted unanimously to adopt the Constitution, directed the printer to make appropriate revisions to the type set on September 13, and ordered copies of the completed document to be printed.⁷³

Signing

The Convention reconvened on September 17 for the delegates to sign the Constitution.⁷⁴ ⁷⁵ Brother Benjamin Franklin obtained permissions to speak, and said, in part, the following words:

I confess that I do not entirely approve of this Constitution at present, but Sir, I am not sure I shall never approve it: For having lived long, I have experienced many Instances of being oblig’d, by better Information or fuller Consideration, to change Opinions even on important Subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise....

In these Sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution, with all its Faults, if they are such: because I think a General Government necessary for us, and there is no Form of Government but what may be a Blessing to the People if well administred; and I believe farther that this is likely to be well administred for a Course of Years,

On the whole, Sir, I cannot help expressing a Wish, that every Member of the Convention, who may still have Objections to it, would with me on this

⁷² Ibid., p. 69-71.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 71.

⁷⁴ Wikipedia, “Philadelphia Convention, op.cit..

⁷⁵ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 71.

Occasion doubt a little of his own Infallability, and to make *manifest* our *Unanimity*, put his Name to this Instrument.⁷⁶

At the conclusion, Franklin offered a motion to persuade some dissenting members to sign. “Done in Convention by the unanimous Consent of the States present the seventeenth day of September. . . .” The motion passed ten states to none with South Carolina divided.⁷⁷

On this day, the delegates made two additional changes:

- Representation in the House would not exceed one for every 30,000 inhabitants, and

- Convention papers were given to George Washington for safekeeping, until Congress could order their disposition.⁷⁸

Signing occurred the afternoon of September 17th. When complete, the convention adjourned, and the delegates walked to the City Tavern for dinner and farewells.⁷⁹

Of the seventeen Masons that began attending the Constitutional Convention, thirteen remained to the end, and only twelve signed the Constitution. Brother Edmund Randolph did not sign the document because he felt it was not sufficiently republican, and was reluctant to create a one-man executive.⁸⁰

Delegates to Constitutional Convention			
Freemasons			
Name	State	1787 - Delegate to Constitutional Convention ¹	1787 - Signed Constitution ²
Bedford, Gunning, Jr.	DE	X	X
Blair, John	VA	X	X
Brearley, David	NJ	X	X
Broom, Jacob	DE	X	X
Carroll, Daniel, Sr.	MD	X	X
Dayton, Jonathan	NJ	X	X
Dickinson, John	DE	X	X
Ellsworth, Oliver	NJ	X	
Franklin, Benjamin	PA	X	X
Gilman, Nicholas	NH	X	X
Houstoun, William	GA	X	
King, Rufus	MA	X	X
McClurg, James	VA	X	
McHenry, James	MD	X	
Paterson, William	NJ	X	X
Pierce, William	GA	X	
Randolph, Edmund	VA	X	
Washington, George	VA	X	X
¹ Charleton, James H., and others, <u>Framers of the Constitution</u> , National Archives and Records Administration, 1986, p. 28-9.			
² Morris, S. Brent, <u>The Complete Idiot's Guide to Freemasonry</u> , 2006, p. 33-4.			

⁷⁶ Library of America, The Debate on the Constitution: Part One, “Benjamin Franklin’s Speech at the Conclusion of the Constitutional Convention,” p. 3-4.

⁷⁷ Charleton, James H., and others, *op.cit.*, p. 71-73.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194-5.

After the delegates signed the Constitution, the printer made copies, and the next day the Secretary of the Constitutional Convention carried a copy to the Secretary of the Continental Congress in New York along with a letter of transmittal signed by the George Washington, President of the Constitutional Convention. In addition, the Constitution was printed by Philadelphia newspapers and was read to Pennsylvania legislators and spectators.⁸¹

Ratification

The Continental Congress began two days of debate on September 26, 1787. Some felt the proposed Constitution was too broad and exceeded amending the Articles of Confederation that had been authorized. Some criticized the lack of a bill of rights and suggested they be attached before submitting to the states. However, all delegates agreed to compromising, non-committal language to forward the document to the states.⁸²

The Constitution could not be executed until ratified by nine States, as stated by Article VII.⁸³ “Each state legislature had to call an election for delegates to the convention, decide on their eligibility, and determine the qualifications of citizens voting in the election.”⁸⁴

When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification, two groups began debating the merits of the proposed changes, the Federalist and anti-Federalists.⁸⁵

Federalists and Anti-Federalists

The Federalists believed that the Articles of Confederation created a federal government that was too weak. Members of this movement were generally involved in commerce. Their objectives were to

- Extend protectionist barriers
- Guarantee recovery of war debts
- Collect taxes
- Sustain a military capable of enforcing internal colonization and slavery
- Suppress protests⁸⁶

The Anti-Federalists were satisfied with the Articles of Confederation, and opposed replacing it with a new document. Members of this group had a local perspective, such as farmers. Their objective was to keep government as defined in the Articles of Confederation, and they had the following concerns:

- A stronger national government threatened the states, localities, and individuals
- A centralized stronger government would replace that of Great Britain
- Personal interests would be threatened⁸⁷
⁸⁸

The Federalists and anti-Federalists wrote articles and public letters to promote their arguments.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 85-6.

⁸² Ibid., p. 86.

⁸³ Ibid., 1986, p. 227.

⁸⁴ Labunski, Richard, *James Madison and the Struggle for the Bill of Rights*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 49.

⁸⁵ Wikipedia, “Federalist Papers,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_Papers, 6 October 2006.

⁸⁶ Wikipedia, “Federalism (United States),” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalism_%28United_States%29, 12 October 2006.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Wikipedia, “Anti-Federalism,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Federalists>, 11 October 2006.

⁸⁹ Wikipedia, “Federalist Papers, op.cit.

Bill of Rights

One other argument was stated by the different groups. The “Anti-Federalists believed the Constitutional Convention had proposed a government that would consolidate power to the detriment of the states and the rights of the people” and demanded that amendments be a condition of ratification.^{90 91} The Federalists countered that “the states were the primary source of protection of liberty” and that the proposed Constitution had to be accepted or rejected as written.^{92 93}

The amending provision did not receive much attention by the delegates at the Constitutional Convention. Even though Brother and Governor Randolph mentioned early in the proceedings that a provision should be made to amend the Articles of Union whenever necessary, the Committee of Detail wrote most of Article V. One week before signing the Constitution, the delegates reconsidered their previously approved Article V and agreed to requiring three-fourth of states ratify proposed amendments.⁹⁴

Many people were apprehensive about how few personal rights were specifically protected by the Constitution. Some were so concerned about the lack of rights that they talked of calling a second convention.⁹⁵ Others suggested that no amending mechanism was necessary because the constitutions of the original thirteen states did not contain any amending provisions. Yet, no bill of rights could have been proposed without a process for introducing amendments.⁹⁶

Labunski writes that newspapers were “generally supportive of the idea that ratification should include recommended amendments. Fifteen to

twenty-six newspapers printed various versions of an article that contained this statement: “The true friends to union, that is, to liberty, happiness and national glory, are those who wish to go hand in hand with Massachusetts — adopt the constitution as they have done — and then propose such amendments as may be thought necessary.”⁹⁷

On January 31, 1788, Brother John Hancock, Governor of Massachusetts, proposed that the Constitution be ratified with Amendments.

“When the Convention met in the afternoon, His Excellency the President observed, that a motion had been made and seconded, that this Convention do assent to, and ratify, the Constitution which had been under consideration...he was induced to propose to them, whether the introduction of some general amendments would not be attended with the happiest consequences: For that purpose he should, with the leave of the Hon. Convention, submit to their consideration a proposition, in order to remove the doubts, and quiet the apprehensions of gentlemen; and if in any degree the object should be acquired he should feel himself perfectly satisfied....”⁹⁸

Massachusetts Compromise

One week later, on February 6, 1788, Hancock made some final observations:

“...That a general system of government is indispensably necessary to save our

⁹⁰ Labunski, Richard, op.cit., p. 60-1.

⁹¹ Wikipedia, “Massachusetts Compromise,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_compromise, 19 September 2006.

⁹² Labunski, Richard, op.cit., p. 62.

⁹³ Wikipedia, “Massachusetts Compromise, op.cit.

⁹⁴ Labunski, Richard, op.cit., p. 126-8.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁹⁸ Library of America, The, “John Hancock Proposes Ratification, with Amendments Recommended to “Quiet the Apprehensions of Gentlemen,” Debate on the Constitution: Part One, p. 921-922.

country from ruin, is agreed upon all sides. That the one now to be decided upon has its defects, all agree; But when we consider the variety of interests, and the different habits of the men it is intended for, it would be very singular to have an entire union of sentiment respecting it...I give my assent to the Constitution in full confidence that the amendments proposed will soon become a part of the system—these amendments being in no wise local, but calculated to give security and ease alike to all the States, I think that all will agree to them.

...The question now before you is such as no nation on earth, without the limits of America, have ever had the privilege of deciding upon. As the Supreme Ruler of the Universe has seen fit to bestow upon us this glorious opportunity, let us decide upon it — appealing to him for the rectitude of our intentions — and in humble confidence that he will yet continue to bless and save our country.”
99

Anti-Federalists in Massachusetts strongly opposed ratification of the proposed Constitution. A compromise was proposed by John Hancock and John Adams. The anti-Federalists would agree to ratify the Constitution provided certain amendments, the bill of rights, would also be approved. After Massachusetts voted to ratify the Constitution, four other states ratified the document and recommended similar amendments.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Library of America, The, “John Hancock’s Final Observations: “We Must All Rise or Fall Together,” Debate on the Constitution: Part One, p. 941-942.

¹⁰⁰ Wikipedia, “Massachusetts Compromise, op.cit.

Other Opinions

On February 17, George Washington wrote Marquis de Lafayette noting two reasons to support the Constitution:

“...With regard to the two great points (the pivots on which the whole machine must move) my Creed is simply:--

1st.—That the general Government is not invested with more Powers than are indispensably necessary to perform the functions of a good Government; and, consequently, that no objection ought to be made against the quantity of Power delegated to it:

2^{ly}.—That these Powers (as the appointment of all Rulers will forever arise from, and, at short stated intervals, recur to the free suffrage of the People) are so distributed among the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches, into which the general Government is arranged, that it can never be in danger of degenerating into a monarchy, an Oligarchy, an Aristocracy, or any other despotic or oppressive form; so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the People.—...”¹⁰¹

Washington added, “A spirit of emigration to the western Country is very pre-dominant. Congress have sold, in the year past, a pretty large quantity of lands on the Ohio, for public Securities, and thereby diminished the domestic debt considerably. . . From such beginnings much may be expected...”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Library of America, The, “Two Basic Reasons to Support the Constitution: George Washington to Marquis de Lafayette,” Debate on the Constitution: Part Two, p. 178.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Brother John Dickinson wrote about freedom and society in the Pennsylvania Mercury and Universal Advertiser on April 17, 1788. He stated, in part

“The Writer of this Address hopes, that he will now be thought so disengaged from the objections against the part of the principle assumed, concerning *the power of the people*, that he may be excused for recurring to his assertion, that — *the power of the people* pervading the proposed system, together with *the strong confederation of the states*, will form an adequate security against every danger that has been apprehended....

“...As in forming a political society, each individual *contributes* some of his rights, in order that he may, from *a common stock* of rights, derive greater benefits, than he could from merely *his own*; so, in forming a confederation, each political society should *contribute* such a share of their rights, as will, from a *common stock* of rights, produce the largest quantity of benefits for them....

Each individual then must contribute such a share of his rights, as is necessary for attaining that SECURITY that is essential to freedom; and he is bound to make this contribution by the law of his nature; that is, by the command of his creator; therefore, *he must submit his will, in what concerns all, to the will of the whole society....*”¹⁰³

A few days later, on April 29, 1788, Brother Dickinson wrote another article in the Pennsylvania Mercury and General Advertiser.

“The proposed confederation offers to us a system of diversified representation in the legislative, executive, and judicial department, as essentially necessary to the good government of an extensive republican empire. Every argument to recommend it, receives new force, by contemplating events, that must take place. The number of states in *America* will encrease (sic). If not united to the present, the consequences are evident. IF united, it must be by a plan that will communicate *equal liberty* and assure *just protection* to them. These ends can never be attained, but by a *close combination* of the several states.”¹⁰⁴

Near the end Dickinson adds, “It cannot be with reason apprehended, that Congress will refuse to act upon any articles calculated to promote the *common welfare*, tho’ they may be unwilling to act upon such as are designed to advance *PARTIAL interests*: but, whatever their sentiments may be, they **MUST** call a Convention for proposing amendments, on applications of two-thirds of the legislatures of the several states.”¹⁰⁵

Brother and Governor Edmund Randolph expressed his reasons for now supporting the Constitution with amendments on June 4, 1788. He wrote, in part:

“I have acted in the strictest obedience to the dictates of my conscience, in discharging what I conceive to be my duty to my country. I refused my signature, and if the same reasons, operated on my mind, I would still refuse; but as I think that those eight States which

¹⁰³ Library of America, The, “Fabius, Observations on the Constitution Proposed by the Federal Convention III” Debate on the Constitution: Part Two, p. 408-410.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 424.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 429.

have adopted the Constitution will not recede, I am a friend to the Union.”¹⁰⁶

A few days later, on June 17, 1788, Governor Randolph expressed his support for the Constitution.

“...I declared some days ago that I would give my suffrage for this Constitution, not because I considered it without blemish, but because the critical situation of our

country demanded it. I invite those who think with me to vote for the Constitution.— But where things occur in it which I disapprove of, I shall be candid in exposing my objections.”¹⁰⁷

Eventually nine states ratified the Constitution, and the document became law. The following table lists the dates the original thirteen states ratified the Constitution:

Dates Original States Entered Union		
Order	State	Date Constitution Ratified
1	Delaware	7 December 1787
2	Pennsylvania	12 December 1787
3	New Jersey	18 December 1787
4	Georgia	2 January 1788
5	Connecticut	9 January 1788
6	Massachusetts	6 February 1788
7	Maryland	28 April 1788
8	South Carolina	23 May 1788
9	New Hampshire	21 June 1788
10	Virginia	25 June 1788
11	New York	26 July 1788
12	North Carolina	21 November 1789
13	Rhode Island	29 May 1790

John Blair

Although Blair faithfully attended the Constitutional Convention, he never spoke or served on a committee. As a member of the Virginia delegation, he usually sided with the position of the rest of the Virginia delegation. Blair helped to win backing for the new

framework of government during the commonwealth ratifying convention.¹⁰⁸

Blair was initiated in 1762, and later received his Fellowcraft and Master Mason Degrees from Williamsburg Lodge No. 6 in 1773. He was Worshipful Master of the Lodge in 1774-5, and was elected the first Grand Master of Masons in Virginia in 1778.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Library of America, The, “Governor Edmund Randolph Explains Why He Now Supports the Constitution with Amendments” Debate on the Constitution: Part Two, p. 604.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 709.

¹⁰⁸ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 127.

¹⁰⁹ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 6.

Jonathan Dayton

Dayton faithfully attended the Constitutional Convention, spoke with moderate frequency, and signed the Constitution, even though he objected to some of the provisions of it.¹¹⁰

Dayton was “probably a member of Temple Lodge No. 1, at Elizabethtown,” Delaware.¹¹¹

Jacob Broom

Broom never missed a session of the Constitutional Convention, spoke on several occasions, and had only a minor role.¹¹²

Broom was a member of Lodge No. 14 at Christiana Ferry in Delaware under the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, and served as Secretary, Treasurer, and Junior Warden.¹¹³

Oliver Ellsworth

Ellsworth proposed that representation in the legislative branch remain by state as under the Articles of Confederation during the debate on the Great Compromise. He also proposed changing the word “national” to “United States.” Subsequent to approval, “United States” was used to designate the government. Ellsworth also served on the committee of five that prepared the first draft of the Constitution. Regarding enumeration of slaves, he favored the three-fifths compromise and opposed the abolition of the foreign slave trade. Even though he returned to Connecticut early and did not sign the final document, he urged that the Constitution be adopted and wrote *Letters of a Landholder* to promote its ratification.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 138.

¹¹¹ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 13-14.

¹¹² Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 131.

¹¹³ Heaton, Ronald E., op.cit., p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Charleton, James H., and others, oop.cit., p. 143.

Ellsworth was a member of Lodge at Prince Town in New Jersey.¹¹⁵

William Houston

Houston served on a committee to consider the distribution of seats in the lower house, was forced to leave early due to illness, and did not sign the Constitution.¹¹⁶

Houston was a member of Solomon’s Lodge No. 1 in South Carolina.¹¹⁷

William Pierce

Pierce recommended that the federal government be strengthened, participated in three debates at the Constitutional Convention, argued for the election of one house of the federal legislature by the people and one house by the states, and preferred a 3-year term for the second house instead of a 7-year term. Pierce left early and returned to Savannah to minimize losses from his business, and did not sign the Constitution. Pierce took notes of the proceedings and included character sketches that provided valuable information about the lesser known delegates.¹¹⁸

Pierce was a member of Solomon’s Lodge No. 1 in South Carolina.¹¹⁹

James McClurg

McClurg advocated life tenure for the President, argued that the federal government should have the power to override state laws, and championed greater independence of the executive from the

¹¹⁵ Morris, S. Brent, [The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Freemasonry](#), Alpha Books, p. 34.

¹¹⁶ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 157.

¹¹⁷ Morris, S. Brent, op.cit., p. 34.

¹¹⁸ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 189.

¹¹⁹ Morris, S. Brent, op.cit., p. 34.

legislative branch. He left the Convention early and did not sign the Constitution.¹²⁰

McClurg was a member of Williamsburg Lodge in Virginia.¹²¹

What Do the Masons Who Participated in the Constitutional Convention Mean to Us?

Two important compromises allowed the framers of the Constitution to decide some tough issues. The Great Compromise or Connecticut Compromise solved the issue of representation of both houses of Congress. The Massachusetts Compromise provided for Congress to enact a Bill of Rights after ratification of the Constitution by the states. Yet, these compromises were suggested, discussed, and endorsed or criticized by both Freemasons and non-Masons.

Some think that there was a conspiracy or plot of Freemasons to create the government of the United States. Even though Masons like Benjamin Franklin and Rufus King made significant contributions to the deliberations, other Freemasons, such as Jacob Broom, made minor contributions. Other men, such as James Madison and Roger Sherman, who were not Masons, made equally important contributions. And Brother Edmund Randolph participated in the Constitutional Convention, but did not sign the completed document.

I noticed one interesting item. Brother Benjamin Franklin, who previously served as Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania, and Brother Gunning Bedford, Jr., who would be Grand Master of Masons in Delaware, were members of delegations of the first two states to ratify the

Constitution. I think that this is nothing more than a coincidence.

Of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, only 17 (or 31 percent) were Freemasons, and of those 17, only 12 (or 22 percent) signed the Constitution. That small number certainly does not suggest any kind of conspiracy or effort by Masons to dominate discussions and the formation of our government.

I do not believe that Freemasons conspired to create the Constitution of the United States. I think that both Freemasons and non-Masons worked equally hard to create our governing document.

Now for a rhetorical question: How do statesmen and stateswomen today compare with those statesmen in 1787? If a situation called for creation of a brand new Constitution, would today's leaders have the foresight to create a document that would last for over two hundred years?

¹²⁰ Charleton, James H., and others, op.cit., p. 170.

¹²¹ Morris, S. Brent, op.cit., p. 34.

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