

CONSTITUTION MINUTES

Constitution Week, September 17-23, commemorates the signing of the Constitution of the United States. The first plan of national government the United States had was called Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, quickly shortened to the Articles of Confederation by most people. The Confederation was a loosely joined group of states that gives only limited powers to the central government. The Articles were drawn up in 1777 and went out of existence when the Constitution was adopted in 1789.

1. Of the written national constitutions, the U.S. Constitution has endured longer than any other constitution in the world and has been used by many other countries as a model for drafting their own constitutions.

2. On February 21, 1787, the Continental Congress resolved that...“on the second Monday in May a Convention of delegates who shall have been appointed by the several States be held at Philadelphia for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation...” The original states, except Rhode Island, collectively appointed 70 delegates, but only 55 could attend and only 39 actually signed.

3. At 81, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania was the oldest delegate at the Constitutional Convention and at 26, Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey was the youngest.

4. The delegates to the Convention were long-lived for their era with the average age of their death 67 years old. Samuel Johnson reached the age of 92 and Few, Franklin, Madison, Williamson and Wythe lived into their 80s. Hamilton and Spaight both were killed in duels. Madison lived the longest, dying in 1836.

5. Most of the delegates were married and raised children. Roger Sherman had 15 children by 2 wives and nine of the delegates had at least two wives. Four of the delegates, Abraham Baldwin, Nicholas Gilman, Jr., Alexander Martin, and Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer were lifelong bachelors. The men mirrored the overwhelmingly protestant character of American religious life at the time and were members of various denominations. Only two, Carroll and Fitzsimons, were Roman Catholics.

6. Most of the delegates were natives of the 13 colonies. Only seven were born elsewhere; Butler, Fitzsimons, McHenry and Paterson were born in Ireland and, Davie and Robert Morris were born in England; Wilson was born in Scotland and Hamilton was born in the British Leeward Islands. Reflecting the mobility that has always characterized American life.

12. Written in 1787, the Constitution was signed on September 17th. But it wasn't until 1788 that it was ratified by the necessary nine states. The U.S. Constitution was prepared in secret, behind locked doors that were guarded by sentries.

13. Some of the original framers and many delegates in the state ratifying conventions were very troubled that the original Constitution lacked a description of individual rights. In 1791, Americans added a list of rights to the Constitution. The first ten amendments became known as The Bill of Rights.

14. Established on November 26, 1789, the first national "Thanksgiving Day" was originally created by George Washington as a way of "giving thanks" for the Constitution.

15. The original Constitution is on display at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, it was moved to Fort Knox for safekeeping.

16. More than 11,000 amendments have been introduced in Congress. Thirty three have gone to the states to be ratified and twenty seven have received the necessary approval from the states to actually become amendments to the Constitution.