

NEW JERSEY'S
RATIFICATION
OF THE
UNITED STATES
CONSTITUTION
1787



NEW JERSEY
NJSA
STATE ARCHIVES

New Jersey's Ratification of the United States Constitution

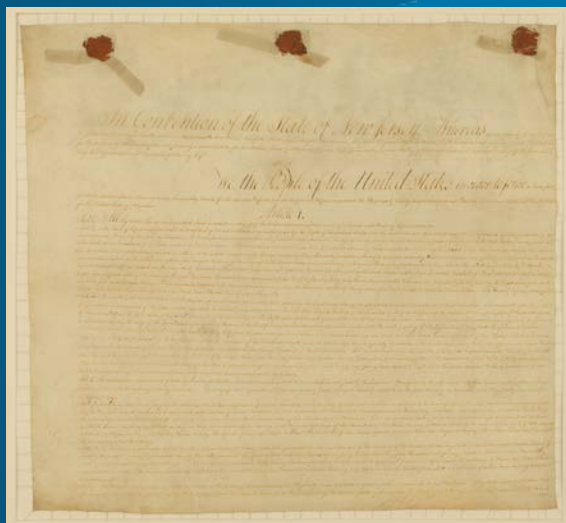
During the Revolutionary War, the thirteen American states (formerly British colonies) adopted the Articles of Confederation as their first, unified governing document. This initial federal charter preserved state sovereignty but lacked the authority to enforce broad legislation across the nation. By early 1787, the people's representatives in the Continental Congress determined to establish a "firm national government" and planned for a convention to deliberate on this in Philadelphia in May.

New Jersey's five convention delegates were David Brearley, Jonathan Dayton, William Houston, William Livingston (the State's first governor), and William Paterson. Ultimately the convention decided to replace the Articles of Confederation with a new federal constitution creating three branches of government--legislative, executive, and judicial.



William Livingston and William Paterson (l-r)
Images courtesy of the NJ State Museum

A major point of contention was how the states would be represented. Virginia sought a bicameral (two-house) legislature based solely on population. New Jersey delegate William Paterson proposed an alternate plan in which representation in a unicameral (one-house) legislature would be the same for each state. This "New Jersey Plan" was initially rejected, causing some of the smaller states to threaten to leave the convention. Ultimately, the "Great Compromise" provided for two legislative bodies: a lower house (of Representatives) based on population and an upper house (Senate) composed of two members from each state.



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the State." Spanning four large parchments, it contains the full text of the federal charter beginning with "We the people ...," the form of ratification, the original signatures of the thirty-eight delegates present, and convention secretary Samuel W. Stockton's attestation.

On September 17, 1787, the convention put forth a draft federal constitution for consideration and ratification by the states. New Jersey held elections to choose 3 representatives from each of the 13 existing counties for a state convention. The first meeting of the 39 delegates was held December 11, 1787 in Trenton. They required just six days to establish rules, review the document, and complete deliberations. On December 18th, the delegates present unanimously approved the United States Constitution, making New Jersey the third state to join the new American union. The ready adoption of the proposed federal charter reflects the people of New Jersey's dissatisfaction with the Articles of Confederation.

With the approval of the Constitution, the convention directed its secretary to engross the ratification for signature. Two copies were ordered: "one for the Congress of the United States, and the other to be deposited among the Archives of

The United States Constitution was ratified by the required two-thirds majority of states (nine) on June 21, 1788 and officially went into effect at the time.

For more information visit: <https://nj.gov/state/archives/docratification.html>

the Archives of the State