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# THE DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Volume XXVI

Ratification of the Constitution  
by the States

## RHODE ISLAND

[3]

Editors

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**W**E, the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the General Welfare, and secure the Liberty to Ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

### ARTICLE I.

*Sec. 1.* All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

*Sec. 2.* The House of Representatives shall be composed of members chosen every second year by the people of the several states, and the electors in each state shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of the state legislature.

No person shall be a representative who shall not have attained to the age of twenty-five years, and been seven years a citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an inhabitant of that state in which he shall be chosen.

Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons. The actual enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law direct. The number of representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty thousand, but each state shall have at least one representative; and until such enumeration shall be made, the state of New-Hampshire shall be en-



## RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION BY THE STATES

RHODE ISLAND was the last of the original thirteen states to ratify the Constitution. For three tempestuous years, the state's freemen virulently contested the Constitution within the context of their own state politics, which was dominated by a radical economic policy begun in the spring of 1786. Out of the mainstream of British America from its very origins, when its first English settlers were banished from Massachusetts, Rhode Island continued its unconventional ways during and after the War for Independence. In 1782 it was the only state to reject the Impost of 1781 that would have given Congress the power to levy a tariff that would have provided it with an independent source of revenue to pay the wartime debt. Without this tariff, Congress relied on requisitions on the states for money, which state legislatures were not always willing or able to supply. Throughout the Confederation years, Rhode Island was vilified for killing the Impost and perpetuating the country's economic distress during the 1780s.

Rhode Island's radical economic policy relied upon an emission of paper money in 1786 that, after it greatly depreciated, was used to retire the state wartime debt, largely in the hands of hated speculators. A bitter partisan political struggle between the dominant Country party (Antifederalists) and the minority Mercantile party (Federalists) ensued from the spring of 1786 until the Constitution was ratified in the spring of 1790. Having a large majority of supporters in all but a few of the state's thirty towns, the Country party controlled all branches of state government. Although the state had appointed commissioners to the Annapolis Convention of 1786, the legislature on three occasions refused to appoint delegates to the Constitutional Convention that met from May to September 1787.

The legislature, dominated by the Country party, defeated the Mercantile party's motions for a state convention to consider the Constitution as the Philadelphia Convention and Congress had recommended. Instead, it called a statewide referendum to be held on 24 March 1788 in town meetings in which the freemen voted individually for or against the Constitution—a procedure unique to Rhode Island. Many Federalists boycotted the referendum, particularly in the large Federalist towns of Providence and Newport. The vote—2,714 to 238—reflected the overwhelming opposition to the Constitution in Rhode Island. Only two of the state's thirty towns voted for the Constitution.

In January 1790, after Rhode Island had paid its state wartime debt with depreciated paper money, the legislature called a convention to consider the Constitution. The Convention, with a sizable Antifederalist majority, met in early March 1790 in South

*(continued on back endflap)*



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*To*

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In addition to being our publisher, the Wisconsin Historical Society is our primary research library. The Society's staff continues its invaluable support as does the staff at the University's Memorial Library.

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Finally, we thank Isaac Dorsch who, under the direction of Tanya Buckingham of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartography Laboratory, prepared the Rhode Island map found on the endpapers.

This final of three Rhode Island volumes can only be dedicated to one person—Dr. Patrick T. Conley, the first historian laureate of Rhode Island. For more than fifty years no one has written more extensively on Rhode Island. His expertise in the political, economic, legal, constitutional, religious, local, and biographical history of Rhode Island is remarkable. His bibliographic knowledge of the Founding Era is extensive and perhaps unmatched. The Ratification project has been fortunate to have Dr. Conley serve as a consulting editor on all three Rhode Island volumes. His diligence and insightfulness have been a boon to our editorial efforts.

## Organization

*The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* is divided into:

- (1) *Constitutional Documents and Records, 1776–1787* (1 volume),
- (2) *Ratification of the Constitution by the States* (21 volumes),
- (3) *Commentaries on the Constitution: Public and Private* (6 volumes),
- (4) *The Bill of Rights* (2 or 3 volumes).

### *Internet Availability*

The four volumes on Massachusetts ratification (volumes IV–VII) and their supplemental documents can be found on the web site of the Wisconsin Historical Society at [www.wisconsinhistory.org/ratification](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/ratification). These volumes, and all other volumes, including the Rhode Island volumes, will be found at the web site of “Rotunda: American Founding Era Collection,” maintained by the University of Virginia Press at <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu>. The Rhode Island supplemental documents will be found on the web site of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries at <http://library.wisc.edu>.

### *Constitutional Documents and Records, 1776–1787* (Vol. I).

This introductory volume, a companion to all of the other volumes, traces the constitutional development of the United States during its first twelve years. Cross-references to it appear frequently in other volumes when contemporaries refer to events and proposals from 1776 to 1787. The documents include: (1) the Declaration of Independence, (2) the Articles of Confederation, (3) ratification of the Articles, (4) proposed amendments to the Articles, proposed grants of power to Congress, and ordinances for the Western Territory, (5) the calling of the Constitutional Convention, (6) the appointment of Convention delegates, (7) the resolutions and draft constitutions of the Convention, (8) the report of the Convention, and (9) the Confederation Congress and the Constitution.

### *Ratification of the Constitution by the States* (Vols. II–XII, XIX–XXIX).

The volumes are arranged roughly in the order in which the states considered the Constitution. Although there are variations, the documents for each state are organized into the following groups: (1) commentaries from the adjournment of the Constitutional Convention to the meeting of the state legislature that called the state convention, (2) the proceedings of the legislature in calling the convention, (3) commentaries from the call of the convention until its meeting, (4) the

election of convention delegates, (5) the proceedings of the convention, and (6) post-convention documents.

*Supplements to Ratification of the Constitution by the States.*

The supplemental documents for Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and all future volumes are no longer placed on microfiche. The Massachusetts supplemental documents can be found on the Wisconsin Historical Society's web site. The Rhode Island supplemental documents can be found on the web site of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries at <http://library.wisc.edu>.

Much of the material for each state is repetitious or peripheral but still valuable. Literal transcripts of this material are placed in the supplements. Occasionally, images of significant manuscripts are also included.

The types of documents in the supplements are:

- (1) newspaper items that repeat arguments, examples of which are printed in the state volumes,
- (2) pamphlets that circulated primarily within one state and that are not printed in the state volumes or in *Commentaries*,
- (3) letters that contain supplementary material about politics and social relationships,
- (4) images of petitions with the names of signers,
- (5) images of manuscripts, such as notes of debates, and
- (6) miscellaneous documents, such as election certificates, attendance records, pay vouchers and other financial records, etc.

*Commentaries on the Constitution: Public and Private* (Vols. XIII–XVIII).

This series contains newspaper items, pamphlets, and broadsides that circulated regionally or nationally. It also includes some private letters that give the writers' opinions of the Constitution in general or report on the prospects for ratification in several states. Except for some grouped items, documents are arranged chronologically and are numbered consecutively throughout the six volumes. There are frequent cross-references between *Commentaries* and the state series.

*The Bill of Rights.*

The public and private debate on the Constitution continued in several states after ratification. It was centered on the issue of whether there should be amendments to the Constitution and the manner in which amendments should be proposed—by a second constitutional convention or by the new U.S. Congress. A bill of rights was proposed



in the U.S. Congress on 8 June 1789. Twelve amendments were adopted on 25 September and were sent to the states on 2 October. These volumes will contain the documents related to the public and private debate over amendments, to the proposal of amendments by Congress, and to the ratification of the Bill of Rights by the states.

## Editorial Procedures

All documents are transcribed literally. Obvious slips of the pen and errors in typesetting are silently corrected. When spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, and spacing between words are unclear, modern usage is followed. Superscripts and interlineations are lowered to the line, and marginalia are inserted where the author intended. The thorn is spelled out (i.e., “ye” becomes “the”). Crossed-out words are retained when significant. Obsolete meanings of words are supplied in footnotes.

Square brackets are used for editorial insertions. Conjectural readings are enclosed in brackets with a question mark or in angle brackets as noted. Illegible and missing words are indicated by dashes enclosed in brackets. However, when the author’s intent is obvious, illegible or missing text (up to five characters in length) is silently provided.

All headings are supplied by the editors. Salutations, closings of letters, addresses, endorsements, docketings, and postmarks are deleted unless they provide important information, in which case they are retained in the document or placed in editorial notes. Contemporary footnotes and marginal citations are printed after the text of the document and immediately preceding editorial footnotes. Symbols used by contemporaries, such as stars, asterisks, and daggers, have been replaced by superscripted letters (a), (b), (c), etc.

Many documents, particularly letters, are excerpted when they contain material that is not relevant to ratification. Whenever an excerpt is printed in this edition and a longer excerpt or the entire document appears elsewhere in this edition or in other editions, this is noted. “Editors’ Notes” have been used frequently to discuss important events as well as out-of-state newspaper essays or pamphlets that circulated in Rhode Island but are printed elsewhere in the edition.

## General Ratification Chronology, 1786–1791

### 1786

21 January	Virginia calls meeting to consider granting Congress power to regulate trade.
11–14 September	Annapolis Convention.
20 September	Congress receives Annapolis Convention report recommending that states elect delegates to a convention at Philadelphia in May 1787.
11 October	Congress appoints committee to consider Annapolis Convention report.
23 November	Virginia authorizes election of delegates to Convention at Philadelphia.
23 November	New Jersey elects delegates.
4 December	Virginia elects delegates.
30 December	Pennsylvania elects delegates.

### 1787

6 January	North Carolina elects delegates.
17 January	New Hampshire elects delegates.
3 February	Delaware elects delegates.
10 February	Georgia elects delegates.
21 February	Congress calls Constitutional Convention.
22 February	Massachusetts authorizes election of delegates.
28 February	New York authorizes election of delegates.
3 March	Massachusetts elects delegates.
6 March	New York elects delegates.
8 March	South Carolina elects delegates.
14 March	Rhode Island refuses to elect delegates.
23 April–26 May	Maryland elects delegates.
5 May	Rhode Island again refuses to elect delegates.
14 May	Convention meets; quorum not present.
14–17 May	Connecticut elects delegates.
25 May	Convention begins with quorum of seven states.
16 June	Rhode Island again refuses to elect delegates.
27 June	New Hampshire renews election of delegates.
13 July	Congress adopts Northwest Ordinance.
6 August	Committee of Detail submits draft constitution to Convention.
12 September	Committee of Style submits draft constitution to Convention.
17 September	Constitution signed and Convention adjourns <i>sine die</i> .
20 September	Congress reads Constitution.
26–28 September	Congress debates Constitution.
28 September	Congress transmits Constitution to the states.
28–29 September	Pennsylvania calls state convention.
17 October	Connecticut calls state convention.

25 October	Massachusetts calls state convention.
26 October	Georgia calls state convention.
31 October	Virginia calls state convention.
1 November	New Jersey calls state convention.
6 November	Pennsylvania elects delegates to state convention.
10 November	Delaware calls state convention.
12 November	Connecticut elects delegates to state convention.
19 November– 7 January 1788	Massachusetts elects delegates to state convention.
20 November– 15 December	Pennsylvania Convention.
26 November	Delaware elects delegates to state convention.
27 November– 1 December	Maryland calls state convention.
27 November– 1 December	New Jersey elects delegates to state convention.
3–7 December	Delaware Convention.
4–5 December	Georgia elects delegates to state convention.
6 December	North Carolina calls state convention.
7 December	Delaware Convention ratifies Constitution, 30 to 0.
11–20 December	New Jersey Convention.
12 December	Pennsylvania Convention ratifies Constitution, 46 to 23.
14 December	New Hampshire calls state convention.
18 December	New Jersey Convention ratifies Constitution, 38 to 0.
25 December– 5 January 1788	Georgia Convention.
31 December	Georgia Convention ratifies Constitution, 26 to 0.
31 December– 12 February 1788	New Hampshire elects delegates to state convention.
<b>1788</b>	
3–9 January	Connecticut Convention.
9 January	Connecticut Convention ratifies Constitution, 128 to 40.
9 January–7 February	Massachusetts Convention.
19 January	South Carolina calls state convention.
1 February	New York calls state convention.
6 February	Massachusetts Convention ratifies Constitution, 187 to 168, and proposes amendments.
13–22 February	New Hampshire Convention: first session.
1 March	Rhode Island calls statewide referendum on Constitution.
3–27 March	Virginia elects delegates to state convention.
24 March	Rhode Island referendum: voters reject Constitution, 2,714 to 238.
28–29 March	North Carolina elects delegates to state convention.
7 April	Maryland elects delegates to state convention.
11–12 April	South Carolina elects delegates to state convention.
21–29 April	Maryland Convention.
26 April	Maryland Convention ratifies Constitution, 63 to 11.
29 April–3 May	New York elects delegates to state convention.
12–24 May	South Carolina Convention.

23 May	South Carolina Convention ratifies Constitution, 149 to 73, and proposes amendments.
2–27 June	Virginia Convention.
17 June–26 July	New York Convention.
18–21 June	New Hampshire Convention: second session.
21 June	New Hampshire Convention ratifies Constitution, 57 to 47, and proposes amendments.
25 June	Virginia Convention ratifies Constitution, 89 to 79.
27 June	Virginia Convention proposes amendments.
2 July	New Hampshire ratification read in Congress; Congress appoints committee to put the Constitution into operation.
21 July–4 August	First North Carolina Convention.
26 July	New York Convention Circular Letter calls for second constitutional convention.
26 July	New York Convention ratifies Constitution, 30 to 27, and proposes amendments.
2 August	North Carolina Convention proposes amendments and refuses to ratify until amendments are submitted to Congress and to a second constitutional convention.
13 September	Congress sets dates for election of President and meeting of new government under the Constitution.
20 November	Virginia requests Congress under the Constitution to call a second constitutional convention.
30 November	North Carolina calls second state convention.

#### 1789

4 March	First Federal Congress convenes.
1 April	House of Representatives attains quorum.
6 April	Senate attains quorum.
30 April	George Washington inaugurated first President.
8 June	James Madison proposes Bill of Rights in Congress.
21–22 August	North Carolina elects delegates to second state convention.
25 September	Congress adopts twelve amendments to Constitution to be submitted to the states.
16–23 November	Second North Carolina Convention.
21 November	Second North Carolina Convention ratifies Constitution, 194 to 77, and proposes amendments.

#### 1790

17 January	Rhode Island calls state convention.
8 February	Rhode Island elects delegates to state convention.
1–6 March	Rhode Island Convention: first session.
24–29 May	Rhode Island Convention: second session.
29 May	Rhode Island Convention ratifies Constitution, 34 to 32, and proposes amendments.

#### 1791

15 December	Bill of Rights adopted.
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# Calendar for the Years 1787–1790

## 1787

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## 1788

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1789

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1790

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## Symbols

### FOR MANUSCRIPTS, MANUSCRIPT DEPOSITORIES, SHORT TITLES, AND CROSS-REFERENCES

#### Manuscripts

FC	File Copy
MS	Manuscript
RC	Recipient's Copy
Tr	Translation from Foreign Language

#### Manuscript Depositories

DLC	Library of Congress
DNA	National Archives
MHi	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
NRom	Jervis Public Library, Rome, N.Y.
R-Ar	Rhode Island State Archives, Providence
RHi	Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence
RNHi	Newport Historical Society
RPJCB	John Carter Brown Library, Providence

#### Short Titles

Abbot, <i>Washington, Confederation Series</i>	W. W. Abbot, ed., <i>The Papers of George Washington: Confederation Series</i> (6 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1992–1997).
Abbot, <i>Washington, Presidential Series</i>	W. W. Abbot, Dorothy Twohig, et al., eds., <i>The Papers of George Washington: Presidential Series</i> (Charlottesville, Va., 1987–).
Bartlett, <i>Records</i>	John Russell Bartlett, ed., <i>Records of the Colony [State] of Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations, in New England</i> (10 vols., Providence, 1856–1865).
Blackstone, <i>Commentaries</i>	Sir William Blackstone, <i>Commentaries on the Laws of England. In Four Books.</i> (Re-printed from the British Copy, Page for Page with the Last Edition, 5 vols., Philadelphia, 1771–1772). Originally published in London from 1765 to 1769.



- Boyd Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1950–).
- Conley, *Democracy in Decline* Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island's Constitutional Development, 1776–1841* (Providence, 1977).
- DHFFC Linda Grant De Pauw, Charlene Bangs Bickford, Kenneth R. Bowling, et al., eds., *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America, March 4, 1789–March 3, 1791* (Baltimore, 1972–).
- DHFFE Merrill Jensen, Robert A. Becker, and Gordon DenBoer, eds., *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788–1790* (4 vols., Madison, Wis., 1976–1989).
- Evans Charles Evans, *American Bibliography* (12 vols., Chicago, 1903–1934).
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- Staples William R. Staples, *Rhode Island in the Continental Congress, 1765–1790 . . .* (edited by Reuben Aldridge Guild, Providence, 1870).
- Thorpe Francis N. Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions . . .* (7 vols., Washington, D.C., 1909).

**Cross-references to Volumes of  
*The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution***

- CC References to *Commentaries on the Constitution* are cited as “CC” followed by the number of the document. For example: “CC:25.”

- CDR References to the first volume, titled *Constitutional Documents and Records, 1776–1787*, are cited as “CDR” followed by the page number. For example: “CDR, 325.”
- RCS References to the series of volumes titled, *Ratification of the Constitution by the States*, are cited as “RCS” followed by the abbreviation of the state and the page number. For example: “RCS:R.I., 325.”
- Mfm References to the microfiche supplements to the “RCS” volumes are cited as “Mfm” followed by the abbreviation of the state and the number of the document. For example: “Mfm:R.I. 25.” No microfiche supplement will be published for RCS:N.Y. and RCS:R.I. All Mfm:N.Y. and Mfm:R.I. documents will be placed on the web site of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries at <http://library.wisc.edu>.

## Rhode Island Chronology, 1772–1790

### 1772

9–10 June H.M.S. *Gaspee* revenue schooner burned off the coast of Warwick

### 1773

January, May–June Witnesses boycott hearings on the burning of the *Gaspee*

### 1774

17 May Providence Town Meeting calls for a continental congress  
15 June Legislature appoints delegates to First Continental Congress  
12 December H.M.S. *Rose* arrives in R.I. to suppress smuggling

### 1775

2 March Providence Tea Party burns tea in Market Square  
25 April Legislature votes to raise “Army of Observation” (1,500 men)  
7 May Nathanael Greene given command of “Army of Observation”  
May–June Legislature replaces Loyalist governor-elect  
15 June Legislature creates state navy  
26 August Legislature asks First Continental Congress to establish a navy

### 1776

4 May Legislature renounces allegiance to King George III and instructs R.I. delegates to Congress to work for a Union and to fight to preserve liberty  
19 July Legislature ratifies Declaration of Independence  
8 December British occupy Newport

### 1778

16 February Legislature instructs delegates to Second Continental Congress to sign Articles of Confederation and to submit three proposed amendments  
23 June Congress rejects R.I.’s proposed amendments  
9 July R.I. delegates to Congress sign Articles of Confederation  
29 August Battle of Rhode Island concludes unsuccessful siege of Newport

### 1779

25 October British evacuate Newport

### 1780

10 July French fleet and troops arrive in Newport

**1782**

1 November House of Deputies unanimously rejects Impost of 1781

**1783**

6 March Legislature admits Roman Catholics to rights of citizenship

**1784**

1 March R.I. law for the gradual abolition of slavery goes into effect

**1785**

March House of Deputies rejects 1783 Confederation amendment to apportion federal expenses by population

5 March Legislature adopts Impost of 1783 with qualifications

5 March Legislature adopts 1784 grant of temporary power for Congress to regulate commerce

2 November Legislature adopts for a second time 1784 grant of temporary power for Congress to regulate commerce

**1786**

3 March Congress requests R.I. to revise its 1784 grant of temporary commercial power for Congress

4 March Legislature adopts Impost of 1783

15 March Legislature revises previous adoption of 1784 grant of temporary commercial power for Congress

19 April Country party wins control of state government in annual state elections

6 May Legislature passes paper-money act

28 June, 1 July Legislature appoints commissioners to Annapolis Convention

30 June Legislature passes first penalty act

26 August Legislature passes second penalty act

13 September Smithfield Convention of Providence County towns proposes radical state trade system

26 September Superior Court decides *Trevett v. Weeden*

7 October Legislature asks town meetings to instruct deputies on draft test act

1 November House of Deputies reads instructions on test act indicating freemen overwhelmingly oppose the act

**1787**

1 March Legislative committee estimates state's debt to be £153,000

12–17 March Legislature rejects sending delegates to Constitutional Convention

17 March Legislature begins redeeming first part of state debt in quarterly installments

18 April Country party landslide in annual state elections

2–5 May Legislature rejects sending delegates to Constitutional Convention

25 May–17 September	Constitutional Convention meets without R.I. being represented
11–16 June	Legislature rejects sending delegates to Constitutional Convention
20–22 August	Legislature fails to obtain a quorum
15 September	Legislature adopts letter to Congress giving reasons for not sending delegates to Constitutional Convention
17 September	Newport and Providence deputies protest legislative letter to Congress
17 September	Governor John Collins sends legislative letter and protest to Congress
31 October	Legislature prohibits foreign slave trade by R.I. citizens
3 November	Legislature rejects calling a state convention, but votes to print copies of Constitution for distribution to towns

### 1788

14 February	News of Massachusetts ratification with recommendatory amendments first printed in R.I.
29 February	House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention, 43–15
1 March	Legislature passes act submitting Constitution to referendum of freemen in town meetings
24 March	Freemen in town meetings vote against Constitution, 2,714–238
2 April	House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention by a majority of 27
5 April	Legislature adopts letter to President of Congress explaining referendum results
16 April	Country party again wins annual state elections
7–10 May	Legislative session takes no action on the Constitution
14 June	Motion for a state convention is “not noticed” by House of Deputies
24 June	News reaches R.I. of New Hampshire’s ratification
27 June	Providence resolves to celebrate the adoption of the Constitution by nine states and the anniversary of American independence on Fourth of July
3–4 July	Antifederalist threats of violence and Providence celebration
5 July	News reaches R.I. of Virginia’s ratification
29 July	News reaches R.I. of New York’s ratification
21 August	News reaches R.I. of North Carolina Convention’s adjournment without ratifying the Constitution
1 November	Legislature begins redeeming second part of state debt in quarterly installments
1 November	House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention, 40–14
1 November	Legislature orders New York Convention’s circular letter and amendments sent to towns for their consideration
22 November– 29 December	Town meetings consider New York circular letter

## 1789

- 1 January           Legislature reviews instructions from towns on New York circular letter
- 1 January           House of Deputies rejects motion for a state convention, 34–12
- 4 March            New Constitution goes into effect without R.I. in the Union
- 13 March           House of Deputies rejects motion for a state convention, 36–19
- 15 April            Country party wins annual state elections
- 9 May               Legislature postpones motion for a state convention until its June session
- 11 June             House of Deputies rejects motion for a state convention by a majority of 11
- 27, 28 August      Providence and Newport petitions to Congress asking exemption from payment of foreign tonnage duties
- September         Entire state debt redeemed or forfeited
- 18 September      Legislature asks freemen in town meetings on 19 October to vote on calling a state convention
- 19 September      Legislature temporarily suspends tender provision of paper-money act of 1786
- 19 September      Legislature approves letter to President and Congress asking for exemption from foreign duties
- 19 September      Gov. John Collins sends legislative letter to President and Congress
- 2 October           President George Washington transmits amendments to Constitution proposed by Congress to state executives, including Gov. Collins
- 15 October         Legislature orders congressional amendments to Constitution printed and sent to towns for their 19 October meetings
- 17 October         Legislature repeals tender provision of paper-money act of 1786 and allows real estate and personal property to be used to repay debts
- 19 October         Town meetings instruct deputies on calling a state convention
- 29 October         House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention, 39–17
- 12 December       News of North Carolina's ratification first printed in R.I.

## 1790

- 15–17 January     Legislature considers bills calling a state convention
- 16 January         House of Deputies votes to call a state convention, 32–11
- 17 January         Gov. John Collins breaks tie vote in House of Magistrates to call a state convention
- 17 January         Legislature orders act calling a state convention to be sent to Congress with a request for further commercial indulgences
- 2 February         Antifederalist convention held at East Greenwich to influence state convention elections
- 8 February         Election of delegates to state convention

1–6 March	State Convention meets in South Kingstown
6 March	Convention votes 41–28 to adjourn until May
6 March	Convention sends bill of rights and proposed amendments to towns for their consideration on 21 April
6 March	Antifederalist “nocturnal convention” proposes election prox with Daniel Owen as candidate for governor
18 March	Antifederalist convention substitutes Arthur Fenner for Daniel Owen
6 April	Federalist convention held at East Greenwich proposes a coalition prox
21 April	Country party wins annual state election
21 April–1 May	Town meetings deliberate on R.I.’s bill of rights and proposed amendments
8 May	Gov. Arthur Fenner, in council, states he will call a special session of legislature if Convention ratifies Constitution
18 May	U.S. Senate passes bill discriminating against R.I. in commerce
20 May	Gov. Fenner writes to President George Washington indicating R.I. will soon ratify
25–29 May	R.I. state Convention meets in Newport
29 May	R.I. Convention ratifies Constitution, 34–32
29 May	Convention recommends that the state legislature should adopt congressional amendments
29 May	Convention President Daniel Owen informs President Washington of R.I.’s ratification
29 May	News arrives in Providence of R.I. ratification at 11:00 P.M.
1 June	President Washington transmits word to Congress of R.I.’s ratification
3 June	Gov. Fenner informs Mass. Gov. John Hancock of R.I.’s ratification
4 June	President Washington congratulates Gov. Fenner on R.I. ratification
9 June	Convention President Owen sends President Washington official form of ratification
10 June	Officers at legislative session take oath to Constitution
11 June	Adoption of 11 of 12 congressional amendments
12 June	Legislature passes election bill
12 June	Legislature elects Joseph Stanton, Jr., and Theodore Foster as U.S. Senators
12 June	Legislature orders Gov. Fenner to issue proclamation notifying all state officers to take oath to Constitution
14 June	Gov. Fenner issues proclamation on oaths
14 June	Congress passes act putting federal tariff into effect in R.I.
16 June	President Washington transmits official R.I. form of ratification to Congress
25 June	R.I. Senators take their seats
17–19 August	President Washington’s entourage visits R.I.
31 August	Towns vote for R.I.’s U.S. Representative
9 September	Legislature declares Benjamin Bourne elected U.S. Representative

## Officers of the State of Rhode Island 1786–1790

### *Governor*

John Collins (May 1786–May 1790)  
Arthur Fenner (first elected April 1790)

### *Deputy Governor*

Daniel Owen (May 1786–May 1790)  
Samuel J. Potter (first elected  
April 1790)

### *Justices of the Superior Court of Judicature*

#### *Elected May 1786*

Paul Mumford, Chief  
Joseph Hazard  
Thomas Tillinghast  
Gilbert Devol  
David Howell

#### *Elected May 1787*

Paul Mumford, Chief  
William West  
Stephen Potter  
Walter Cooke  
John Waite (declined)  
Simeon Clarke, Jr. (elected in Sept.)

#### *Elected June 1788 and May 1789*

Othniel Gorton, Chief  
William West  
Stephen Potter  
Walter Cooke  
Simeon Clarke, Jr.

#### *Elected May 1790*

Othniel Gorton, Chief  
Daniel Owen  
Sylvester Robinson  
Walter Cooke  
Ezekiel Gardner, Jr.

### *Secretary*

Henry Ward

### *Attorney General*

William Channing (elected April 1786)  
Henry Goodwin (elected April 1787 and  
April 1788)  
David Howell (elected April 1789)  
Daniel Updike (elected April 1790)

### *Treasurer*

Joseph Clarke

### *Annapolis Convention Commissioners*

#### *Elected June 1786*

Jabez Bowen\*  
Christopher Champlin (declined)  
Samuel Ward\*  
\*Did not arrive before adjournment

### *Delegates to Congress*

#### *Elected May 1786*

James Mitchell Varnum  
Nathan Miller  
George Champlin\*  
Peleg Arnold

#### *Elected May 1787*

Peleg Arnold  
Jonathan J. Hazard\*  
Daniel Manton\*  
Sylvester Gardner\*

#### *Elected May 1788 and May 1789*

Peleg Arnold  
Jonathan J. Hazard  
Thomas Holden\*  
John Gardner (\* in 1788)  
\*Did not take seat in Congress

### *Continental Loan Officer*

William Ellery

### *Judge, Northwest Territory*

James Mitchell Varnum



## The Rhode Island Legislature 1786–1790

### HOUSE OF MAGISTRATES (ASSISTANTS)

	1786	1787	1788	1789	1790
First	John Mathewson	John Mathewson	John Williams	John Williams	Thomas G. Hazard
Second	Joseph Stanton, Jr.	Joseph Stanton, Jr.	Sylvanus Sayles	Sylvanus Sayles	Peleg Arnold
Third	John Williams	John Williams	James Arnold	James Arnold	James Arnold
Fourth	Richard Searle	Sylvanus Sayles	Caleb Gardner	Caleb Gardner	Caleb Gardner
Fifth	James Arnold	James Arnold	John Cooke	John Cooke	John Cooke
Sixth	William Hammond	William Congdon	William Congdon	James Congdon	James Congdon
Seventh	Gideon Clarke	Caleb Gardner	Joseph W. Tweedy	Joseph W. Tweedy	Thomas Hoxsie
Eighth	Thomas G. Hazard	Thomas G. Hazard	Thomas Coggeshall	Cromel Child	Thomas Holden
Ninth	John Cooke	John Cooke	Thomas Hazard (Prov.)	John Dorrance	Job Watson
Tenth	Oliver Durfee	Oliver Durfee	Thomas Hoxsie	Thomas Hoxsie	John Harris

*Alphabetically with years:*

James Arnold, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1789, 1790  
 Peleg Arnold, 1790  
 Cromel Child, 1789  
 Gideon Clarke, 1786  
 Thomas Coggeshall, 1788  
 James Congdon, 1789, 1790  
 William Congdon, 1787, 1788  
 John Cooke, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1789, 1790

John Dorrance, 1789  
 Oliver Durfee, 1786, 1787  
 Caleb Gardner, 1787, 1788, 1789, 1790  
 William Hammond, 1786  
 John Harris, 1790  
 Thomas Hazard (of Providence), 1788  
 Thomas G. Hazard, 1786, 1787, 1790  
 Thomas Holden, 1790

Thomas Hoxsie, 1788, 1789, 1790  
 John Mathewson, 1786, 1787  
 Sylvanus Sayles, 1787, 1788, 1789  
 Richard Searle, 1786  
 Joseph Stanton, Jr., 1786, 1787  
 Joseph W. Tweedy, 1788, 1789  
 Job Watson, 1790  
 John Williams, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1789

## HOUSE OF DEPUTIES (TOWN REPRESENTATIVES)

*\*Speaker of the House*

	1786		1787		1788		1789		1790	
	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.
<b><i>Barrington</i></b>										
Matthew Allen					X					
Samuel Allen	X				X	X	X			
Vial Allen		X	X							
Joshua Bicknell			X				X	X	X	X
Josiah Humphry	X	X								
Josiah Humphry, Jr.								X	X	X
Nathaniel Martin				X						
Ebenezer Tiffany						X				
<b><i>Bristol</i></b>										
Shearjashub Bourne				X	X		X	X	X	X
William Bradford	X*		X	X*	X	X	X	X*	X	X
Stephen Smith	X	X	X							
Samuel Wardwell										X
<b><i>Charlestown</i></b>										
Robert Congdon										X
Peleg Cross, Jr.								X		
Jonathan J. Hazard	X	X	X	X		X				
Jonathan Hazard, Jr.					X		X			
Joseph Hoxsie								X		
Stephen Hoxsie										X
Thomas Hoxsie	X	X	X							
Jonathan Macomber									X	
Joseph Stanton, Jr.					X	X*	X*		X*	
Lodowick Stanton				X						
<b><i>Coventry</i></b>										
Benjamin Arnold								X		X
William Burlingame	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
John Clarke										
Jeremiah Fenner	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Job Greene									X	X
<b><i>Cranston</i></b>										
Jeriah Hawkins								X		
Nehemiah Knight			X							
Matthew Manchester	X	X				X	X		X	
William Potter					X	X	X			
Stephen Sprague	X									
Peter Stone										X
George Waterman		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Abraham Whipple				X						

	1786		1787		1788		1789		1790	
	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.
<b><i>Cumberland</i></b>										
Levi Ballou								X	X	X
Elijah Brown						X	X			
John S. Dexter								X	X	X
John Gould, Jr.	X				X					
John Lapham	X	X	X		X		X			
Roger Sheldon				X						
Stephen Whipple		X	X			X				
<b><i>East Greenwich</i></b>										
Job Comstock	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Joseph Fry	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Benjamin Howland										X
James Sweet							X	X	X	X
<b><i>Exeter</i></b>										
Christopher Champlin	X									X
Joseph Reynolds	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Charles Tripp										X
Abraham Wilcox, Jr.									X	
Job Wilcox		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
<b><i>Foster</i></b>										
Christopher Colwell	X	X	X							
Jonathan Hopkins, Jr.					X	X	X	X		
Daniel Howard						X	X	X		X
William Howard						X	X	X	X	
William Tyler										X
John Westcott	X	X	X							
John Williams									X	
<b><i>Glocester</i></b>										
Seth Hunt	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Timothy Wilmarth							X			
Stephen Winsor	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
<b><i>Hopkinton</i></b>										
Ross Coon						X				
Oliver Davis				X				X	X	X
David Nichols				X	X	X	X			
Abel Tanner	X	X	X							
George Thurston						X	X	X	X	X
Thomas Wells II	X	X	X							

	1786		1787		1788		1789		1790	
	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.
<b><i>Jamestown</i></b>										
Edward Carr									X	
John Eldred				X	X		X			
John Franklin			X							
John Gardner			X							
Job Hopkins										X
Isaac Howland									X	
John Howland	X						X			
Benjamin Remington					X	X				
Rowland Robinson	X	X		X						
John Weeden								X		
<b><i>Johnston</i></b>										
Philip Arnold				X	X	X				
Abraham Belknap	X	X	X							
Andrew Harris	X	X	X							
William B. King								X		
Noah Mathewson							X	X	X	X
William Waterman				X	X	X	X		X	X
<b><i>Little Compton</i></b>										
John Davis						X		X	X	X
Fobes Little							X			
Thomas Palmer					X					
William Richmond						X		X		
Nathaniel Searle	X	X	X	X						
George Simmons	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Philip Taylor									X	X
<b><i>Middletown</i></b>										
Elisha Allen				X						
Joshua Barker						X	X	X	X	
Pardon Brown									X	
Joseph Coggeshall			X	X	X					
Thomas Coggeshall		X	X							
John Gould	X									
William Peckham, Jr.	X				X					X
James Potter						X	X	X		X

	1786		1787		1788		1789		1790	
	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.
<b><i>Newport</i></b>										
Robert N. Auchmuty										X
John L. Boss										X
Francis Brinley										X
George Champlin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Peleg Clarke	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
George Hazard	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Henry Marchant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Daniel Mason	X	X	X	X						
George Sears							X	X	X	
John Topham	X	X	X	X	X					
William Tripp		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b><i>New Shoreham</i></b>										
Rowse J. Helme					X		X			
Edward Hull	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
William Littlefield	X									
John Sands		X							X	
Ray Sands			X	X						
<b><i>North Kingstown</i></b>										
Bowen Card	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
James Congdon	X	X	X	X	X					
Sylvester Gardner						X	X	X	X	X
<b><i>North Providence</i></b>										
Elisha Brown							X	X	X	X
Esek Hopkins	X									
Thomas Olney			X	X	X					
Edward Smith	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jabez Whipple						X				
<b><i>Portsmouth</i></b>										
Tillinghast Almy								X		X
Burrington Anthony			X	X	X	X	X			
William Anthony, Jr.	X									
Benjamin Brownell	X		X							
Holder Chace									X	
Elijah Cobb	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Job Durfee				X	X	X	X			
Benjamin Hall	X		X		X		X			
Henry Lawton								X	X	X
Robert Lawton								X	X	X
Thomas Potter								X	X	X

	1786		1787		1788		1789		1790	
	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.
<b><i>Providence</i></b>										
Welcome Arnold			X	X					X	X*
Amos Atwell										X
William Barton					X	X				
Benjamin Bourne		X	X	X			X	X	X	
Jabez Bowen					X	X	X	X	X	
John Brown	X	X	X							
John I. Clark								X		
Amasa Gray							X	X	X	
John Jenckes	X	X			X	X	X			
Charles Keene	X	X								
Sylvanus Martin										X
Robert Newell										X
Joseph Nightingale			X	X						
Amos Throop					X	X				
Thomas Truman	X									
Nathaniel Wheaton				X						
<b><i>Richmond</i></b>										
Thomas James	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
James Sheldon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b><i>Scituate</i></b>										
James Aldrich					X	X	X	X	X	X
Nathan Bates	X	X	X	X						
Peleg Fisk					X	X	X			
John Harris								X		
Nathaniel Medbury									X	X
Thomas Mowry	X	X	X							
Caleb Westcott				X						
<b><i>Smithfield</i></b>										
Job Aldrich									X	X
John Sayles	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Andrew Waterman	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Stephen Whipple								X		
<b><i>South Kingstown</i></b>										
Rowland Brown									X	X
John Gardner	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Jonathan J. Hazard							X	X	X	X
Samuel J. Potter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
<b><i>Tiverton</i></b>										
Joseph Almy	X	X							X	X
Thomas Durfee			X	X	X	X	X		X	
Benjamin Howland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Philip Sisson								X		

	1786		1787		1788		1789		1790	
	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.	May	Oct.
<b>Warren</b>										
William Barton	X									X
Benjamin Bosworth										X
Smith Bowen		X	X	X	X					
Robert Carr	X									
Cromel Child		X	X	X	X					
Nathan Miller						X	X	X	X	
Samuel Peirce						X	X	X	X	
<b>Warwick</b>										
Benjamin Arnold							X		X	
Gideon Arnold	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Moses Arnold								X		X
Joseph Brown										X
Samuel Budlong						X	X			
Jonathan Gorton			X	X	X				X	X
Othniel Gorton	X	X*	X*	X*	X*					
Benjamin Greene							X			
Anthony Holden			X		X	X		X	X	X
Thomas Holden	X	X								
John Low	X	X								
Thomas Rice, Jr.						X		X		
<b>Westerly</b>										
Joseph Noyes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
George Stillman									X	X
Walter White	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>West Greenwich</b>										
Jonathan Comstock										X
Caleb Hall						X	X			
Thomas Joslin	X	X	X	X	X					
William Mathewson		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
William Nichols								X	X	
Jonathan Niles	X									
Benjamin Tillinghast										X
<b>Clerks</b>										
Benjamin Bourne	X									
John S. Dexter		X	X							
Ray Greene										X
Rowse J. Helme			X	X	X	X				
Daniel Updike							X	X	X	





**The Ratification of the  
Constitution by  
the States**

**R H O D E I S L A N D**

**[3]**



**VI.**  
**THE DEBATE OVER THE**  
**CONSTITUTION IN RHODE ISLAND**  
**20 January–29 May 1790**

**Introduction**

During the four months from the passage of the act calling a state convention to the ratification of the Constitution by the second session of the Convention on 29 May 1790, the Rhode Island debate over the Constitution intensified. Some Rhode Islanders and out-of-state commentators predicted that the state Convention, scheduled to meet in South Kingstown on 1 March, would ratify the Constitution. Their optimism was soon dampened when, on 8 February, the Antifederalists elected a majority of Convention delegates (RCS:R.I., 684–708). Rhode Islanders were concerned about how the federal government would treat them as the only state still outside of the Union. In late February Rhode Island newspapers were filled with items appealing to the state Convention delegates. All but one of the items were Federalist pieces that stressed the dire consequences if the Convention did not ratify the Constitution.

The first session of the Rhode Island Convention met from 1 to 6 March. It drafted and approved a bill of rights and amendments and ordered them sent to the towns for their consideration before adjourning to 24 May (VII, below). The Convention's failure to ratify the Constitution produced an outpouring of Federalist private letters and newspaper items. Federalists disparaged Antifederalist motives for adjourning the Convention, asked for federal aid in pressuring Antifederalists, and enumerated the dangers of remaining outside the Union. Several Antifederalist newspaper pieces countered these arguments.

The decision to adjourn the Convention was made in hopes of facilitating a Country party victory in the annual spring election of state officers, assistants, and deputies, all on 21 April. Antifederalists dropped Governor John Collins and nominated Daniel Owen, who did not want to run. Arthur Fenner replaced Owen at the head of the Antifederalist ticket. Federalists knew they could not win a statewide election, but they hoped to elect half of the assistants through a coalition prox. Antifederalists dismissed the Federalist plan. The entire Antifederalist ticket was victorious. The town meetings of 21 April had also been enjoined by the state Convention to deliberate on the Convention's bill of rights and amendments and to instruct their Convention delegates accordingly.

For some time, Rhode Island Federalists had asked Congress to pressure the state's Antifederalist majority more aggressively. On 28 April the U.S. Senate began to consider whether to enact a bill to subject Rhode Island's trade to draconian sanctions if it remained outside of the Union. The Senate passed the bill on 18 May. The House of Representatives was considering the bill as the second session of the Rhode Island Convention met. On 24 May, the first day of the second session, a special town meeting was convened in Providence. Fearing that the Convention might again refuse to ratify the Constitution, freemen contemplated the separation of Providence, Newport, and other Federalist seaport towns from Rhode Island.

In the eleven weeks between the first and second sessions of the Rhode Island Convention, the number of Federalist essays appearing in newspapers increased significantly. The state legislature, meeting in early May, took no action on the Constitution. Speculation was rife, inside and outside of the state, about whether the Convention would finally ratify the Constitution when it met in Newport on 24 May. (See VIII, below, for the Convention's second session.)

*The Public Debate on the Constitution*

All four Rhode Island newspapers published items on the Constitution between 20 January and 29 May. The *Newport Herald* published seventeen essays, six editorial commentaries, two news items, and a poem. The Federalist position was represented by ten of the essays ("A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island," 18 February; "A Freeholder," 18, 25 February; "Agricola," 11 March, 1 April; "Spectator," 25 March; "X.," 8 April; "Buccinator," 15 April; "Friends to the Coalition of Parties," 15 April; "One of the Freemen of the State of Rhode-Island," 15 April), all six editorial commentaries (20 January, 4, 18 February, 11 March [2], 8 April), and a poem (25 February). Seven essays were Antifederalist or Antifederalist leaning ("Greenwichiensis," 25 February, 18 March, 8 April; Nos. I-III, 18, 25 March, 1 April; and anonymous, 15 April). The *Newport Mercury* printed only three items on the Constitution: two Federalist editorial commentaries (20 January and 15 February) and a Federalist essay by "A Friend to Justice and good Government" (15 March).

The two Providence newspapers printed three Federalist essays signed "Solon, junior" (David Howell?): *United States Chronicle*, 25 February, 4 March; and *Providence Gazette*, 27 February. The *Chronicle* printed five Federalist letters from New York City and the *Gazette* two, all but one from members of Congress. Items related to the 21 April annual election appeared in the *Gazette* (Daniel Owen's address, 3 April; Newport and Providence Committee to Arthur Fenner, 27 March; and election tickets, 10 April) and in the *Chronicle* (Fenner's response, 1 April; and the

Newport and Providence Committee's call for a meeting, 1 April). The *Providence Gazette* printed two additional Federalist essays ("A Farmer," 22 May; and "Matthew Mizen," 20 March), Federalist David Howell's address to the state's freemen (17 April), and three Federalist editorial commentaries (6 February, 20 March, and 3 April). The *United States Chronicle* printed an additional Federalist essay ("A Freeman," 15 April), three Antifederalist essays ("Alpha," 11 February; "A Countryman," 15 April; and "A. B. C. D. &c. &c.," 15 April), two Federalist editorial commentaries (25 February and 13 May), and one brief anonymous Antifederalist item (15 April).

Out-of-state newspapers also printed items on the debate over the Constitution in Rhode Island. These items appeared in three Boston newspapers (*Boston Gazette*, *Herald of Freedom*, and *Massachusetts Centinel*), four New York City newspapers (*Daily Advertiser*, *Gazette of the United States*, *New York Daily Gazette*, and *New York Journal*), and two Philadelphia newspapers (*Federal Gazette* and *Pennsylvania Packet*). The items consisted of ten letters (mostly from Rhode Islanders), seven editorial commentaries, four essays, and five reports of congressional action on Rhode Island. Only two items were Antifederalist: "Plutarch," *Massachusetts Centinel*, 8 May, and an editorial commentary in the Antifederalist *New York Journal*, 18 May. Three Federalist essays were printed in the Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*. They were written by "Prudens" (5 April) and "A Citizen of United America" to the people of Rhode Island (Tench Coxe) (6, 12 April).

#### *Private Commentaries on the Constitution*

Forty-nine manuscript letters discussing the Constitution and Rhode Island politics are printed in this part. Ten letters were written from Providence, thirteen from Newport, twenty from New York City, two from Philadelphia, and one each from Biddeford, Maine, Boston, Durham, N.H., and a suburb of London, England. The 20 May letter from Governor Arthur Fenner to President George Washington is the only letter written by an Antifederalist. Letters by Federalists include ten from William Ellery, six from U.S. Vice President John Adams, eight from U.S. Representatives, three from U.S. Senators, and two from Theodore Foster. Two letters are from French diplomats stationed in New York City, two are from U.S. Treasury official Tench Coxe, and two are from the Providence mercantile firm of Brown & Benson. Thirteen other individuals each wrote a single letter.

Newspapers printed excerpts of letters dealing with Rhode Island politics and the Constitution. Four letters came from Newport, three from Rhode Island, two from Providence, one from Philadelphia, and seven from New York City (six from members of Congress). Rhode

Island newspapers also printed addresses to state voters by Daniel Owen, Arthur Fenner, and David Howell in the weeks before the 21 April state elections.

*The Legislature and Town Meetings*

The Rhode Island legislature met only once during this four-month period. The *Newport Herald*, 13 May, printed a brief report of the proceedings of this session, which indicated that the General Assembly largely ignored the Constitution. Two letters from William Ellery (11, 13 May) described the legislative proceedings relating to the Constitution in more detail.

On 21 April the towns met to elect state officers, assistants, and deputies and to consider the bill of rights and amendments sent to the towns by the state Convention on 6 March. Records of action on the bill of rights and amendments have been found for twelve towns. Three documents relating to the Providence town meeting of 24 May, which drafted instructions for the town's delegates to the state Convention, are also printed below.

*Rhode Island and the Union*

Numerous private letters and newspaper items commented on Rhode Island's relationship to the United States. Federalists painted a grim future for their state if it continued to remain outside the Union and asked for help from the federal government to convince the Antifederalist majority to ratify the Constitution. Federalists in the seaport towns even contemplated seceding from their state and joining the Union. Congress had granted Rhode Island an exemption from foreign import and tonnage duties until 15 January but in early February it extended the exemption until 1 April to give the Rhode Island Convention an opportunity to ratify the Constitution. However, within four weeks before the second session of the Rhode Island Convention was scheduled to meet on 24 May, Congress began to consider legislation to punish Rhode Island if it did not ratify the Constitution.

**Newport Mercury, 20 January 1790<sup>1</sup>**

A Correspondent is happy to learn, that there was a Majority in the General Assembly, at their last Session holden at Providence, for calling a Convention.

This pleasing Circumstance opens the Way for this State's adopting the FEDERAL CONSTITUTION; a *Constitution which is fully adequate to remedy the Evils under which we labour, and the Adoption of which will procure to us every national Blessing.*

Our Correspondent adds, that his *Fellow-Citizens will do well to examine with the strictest Care into the present State of their Situation*, and he flatters himself, *that the Result of that Examination will convince them, that they are too feeble as a State to subsist alone, and that it will be for their political Happiness to support the Pillars of the FEDERAL Temple. And when the Temple is completed, the Lover of LAWS founded on JUSTICE and EQUITY, may rest securely under his own Vine and Fig Tree, and have none to make him afraid.*<sup>2</sup>—*While the Wretch who with a sacrilegious Hand attempts to dam up the Streams which flow from that Source from whence the People derive their Safety and Security, will have Cause to fear and tremble.*

1. These paragraphs follow immediately after the *Newport Mercury's* report of the January legislative proceedings (Mfm:R.I.).

2. Micah 4:4.

### **Newport Herald, 21 January 1790<sup>1</sup>**

A Correspondent congratulates his Fellow-Citizens, and the Public, on the pleasing prospects that are afforded in consequence of the General Assembly having ordered a Convention to be called, and to meet on the first Monday in *March*—He flatters himself that before the month of April, we shall be united to the NEW CONSTITUTION; a Constitution which was formed by the labour of wisdom, and which if cordially adopted by us, may give us reason to hope for the accomplishment of our rational wishes: our trade will flourish, the farmer *find* a market for his produce, and industry a reward.

1. Reprinted: *New York Daily Gazette*, 5 February; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 11 February.

### **Theodore Foster to Dwight Foster Providence, 22 January 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

Frater Charissime,

Deus hanc Diem faustam nobis dedit.—Dies enim nullus fuit in quo nos qui sumus Providentiæ plus gavisī fuimus.—et Gratias Deo agimus.<sup>2</sup>—

I wish to transmit an animating Spark of the Federal Fire of the Rhode Island Elder to the Bosom of my Brother at Brookfield that he may participate in the General Joy of the Federalists of this State on Account of the Act of the Legislature for calling a Convention to adopt the New Constitution of the National Government a Copy of which I Send you in the inclosed Newspaper.<sup>3</sup> I congratulate you on this auspicious Event.—An Event long wished for by Me. The Federal Temple will now soon be completed and Peace Joy and Plenty I hope pervade the Land. . . .

1. RC, Dwight Foster Papers, MHi. Theodore Foster apparently held on to this letter for a while before sending it. At the top of the blank third page, he dated it "Sunday Evening Feb. 14. 1790." The letter is addressed "To/Dwight Foster Esqr/Brookfield/On Favour of/Mr Hitchcock." It is docketed as "Theodore Foster Esqr/Letter Recd. Feby 15, 1790."

2. Latin: God gave to us this favorable day. For there was no day in which we lived rejoicing more of divine Providence—and we press forward thanks to God.

3. The *United States Chronicle*, 21 January, and the *Providence Gazette*, 23 January, printed the text of the act calling a state Convention (RCS:R.I., 675–76).

### **Philadelphia Federal Gazette, 1 February 1790**

The accession of Rhode-Island to the confederation, is an event, which it can no longer be doubted, will soon take place. All that was wanting to effect the adoption of the constitution of the United States, was a fair and impartial examination. This it will now have, and from this it will never lose. On the contrary, the more it is examined, the more manifest will its excellencies become. Every friend to union and good government will rejoice to hear, that this deluded people have become sensible of their errors; and that paper money and tender laws will be banished from this their last hold.

The success which has crowned the perseverance of the virtuous and well disposed part of that community, may teach us a useful and important lesson, never to desist from our endeavours to obtain that which is right, nor to be disheartened, however powerful and determined our adversaries may be; for, sooner or later, the cause of truth and justice will prevail.

### **William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington**

**Newport, 2 February 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

I have received your letter of the 23d. of last month with the News papers, and thank you for them.—I have written two letters to you before this, the receipt whereof please to acknowledge in your next if you should have received them. . . .

I have given to Mr. Partridge<sup>2</sup> the best account of the state of parties here, that I can obtain at present.—In the course of the next week I shall be able to determin what will be the result of the Convention. The Delegates will I am afraid be nearly equal. I hope the majority will be in favour of the New-Constitution. If the Feds should fail it will not be from a want of the most strenuous exertions.—

With great esteem

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Printed: DHFFC, XVIII, 387–89. In the omitted portion of this letter Ellery comments on the 14 January report of Secretary of the



Treasury Alexander Hamilton on public credit and the 12 January report of Secretary of War Henry Knox on the Indian Department and the southwestern frontier (DHFFC, V, 743–823, 1279–93).

2. For more than thirty years, George Partridge was sheriff of Plymouth County, Mass. He voted to ratify the Constitution in the Massachusetts Convention on 6 February 1788, and he served in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–90.

**Moses Brown to Isaac Lawton, Jacob Mott, and Sampson Sherman  
Providence, 4 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Esteemed Friends

It having been permitted by the Governor of the Universe that a great revolution should take place in the gov't of this country & that a Const. for the National Gov't should be formed by the common counsel, & peaceably established by the common consent of the people of 12 of the 13 states, it is now the period when this state must decide whether it will be one of the Union or not. A period perhaps as interesting as any the state has known—so much so that did I not hear the contrary I should suppose there would not be any opposition to the adoption of the Const. with the amendments that are proposed by Congress or on the proposal of others may be thot necessary. But hearing there is likely to be an attempt in your town to choose such persons for Members of the Convention as will *reject the Constitution*,<sup>2</sup> I tho't it would be well for our F[rien]ds to manifest their desire of uniting with our sister states in the *adoption* of the Const. & those who have been opposed to some parts thereof like Dan'l Howld<sup>3</sup> & myself will like him do themselves & the public the justice to show in town mtg or otherwise that the amendments proposed & the distressed situation of this state (should we long continue separate) require that we manifest our opinion as a people of some influence in the state among our neighbors & that we think the time is come when our acceptance of the new gov't will be better for us than to any longer stand out being alone & there can be no possibility, in my view, of any advantageous alteration in our favor. But were we represented by good men at Congress we should then have a voice equal to any state in the Union to propose & to adopt any alteration that may appear best

Having been a tour around as far as E. Greenwich with our esteemed friend Isaac I have conversed with Dan'l Howland on this subject & we are agreed that however our opinion has been that the Constitution might be [a]mended it is now only to be first adopted before we can attempt amendments. Indeed we think some of those proposed by Congress<sup>4</sup> so important that the Governm't will be the best & the most peaceably founded, perhaps, of any in the world. The

administration will depend upon the people that are sent & stand appointed to administer it, who if they are men of wisdom & integrity we have reason to hope & expect as much happiness under the form agreed upon as under any form whatever. I wish, therefore, our Friends would consider this matter; a matter on which perhaps it may never hereafter be in their power to act, & do what may contribute to the best interest of this poor, lonely, divided State in such manner as may appear best. If it should be alleged that it is uncertain whether the amendments will be adopted

a passage here hardly legible [— — —] at present

Friends address to Gen'l Washington<sup>5</sup> I esteem as designed principally to manifest thier cordial acceptance of the Gov'tmt I am united with them therein & hope that none may conclude this letter is designed to serve any political party or to encourage Friends therein, but in practically manifesting our prospects & unitedly using our freedom in this cause as a right I have no doubt we may innocently exercise

With love to Freinds I conclude Your affectionate Freind

To Isaac Lawton, Jacob Mott, Sampson Sherman or any other Freind to whom they may think proper to communicate

1. FC and Copy, Austin Collection, #12, RPJCB. The file copy appears to be a nearly illegible press copy. A copy of the letter seems to have been transcribed by Samuel Austin. An "N. B." reads "This contains an important letter, scarcely legible, together with a copy made by Samuel Austin—See also the accompanying copy from S. A.'s MS. which traces the probable influence of the letter" (Mfm:R.I.). Lawton, Mott, and Sherman were Quakers living in Portsmouth. None of these men voted in the March 1788 referendum on the Constitution.

2. For the election of Convention delegates in Portsmouth, see RCS:R.I., 695–703.

3. Daniel Howland was an influential Quaker in East Greenwich.

4. For the twelve amendments to the Constitution adopted by Congress on 25 September 1789, see Appendix I (below).

5. Perhaps a reference to the address to George Washington from the yearly meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), which was held in Philadelphia from 28 September through 3 October 1789 and represented Friends from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and the western parts of Virginia and Maryland. See Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, IV, 265–69n.

### Newport Herald, 4 February 1790

A Correspondent requests us to inform the public, that by a letter from New-York, of the 29th of January, from a gentleman of good information, he is advised, that it appears to be the sense of both Houses of Congress, that the Acts of Congress, subjecting the citizens of this State to foreign tonnage and foreign duties, would be suspended in

consequence of the request of the Legislature of this State, and their declaration that there was every reason to hope that this State would in a short time accede to the Federal Government:<sup>1</sup> and that it is of the utmost importance that members from this State should go forward as soon as possible, as reports of a most interesting nature are under the consideration of Congress, and will probably be decided upon this session, which it is expected may be protracted until May or June next, which will give this State an opportunity of being represented in Congress.

Our Correspondent hopes that his fellow-citizens will not by slighting the repeated indulgence of Congress, provoke the resentment of the United States; but at the approaching Town-meetings<sup>2</sup> make such provision as that the New Government may be immediately embraced: And he further hopes, that this State may be represented in Congress, and assist with its councils in matters now on the carpet which are highly interesting to this State, and which will probably be decided upon this session.

1. See Governor John Collins to President George Washington, 18 January (RCS:R.I., 677–78).

2. The town meetings scheduled to meet on 8 February were to elect delegates to the state Convention called to consider the Constitution (RCS:R.I., 684–705).

### **Providence Gazette, 6 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in New-York to  
his Friend in this Town, dated January 30.*

“I congratulate you very sincerely on your Prospect of a Return to the Path of Honour, and the Road to Happiness—to a Participation of the Blessings which we enjoy under the New Constitution of the States.

“A curious Anecdote is circulated here, that a *Parson* in your Senate<sup>2</sup> was violently opposed to a Convention, and prevented the Passing of the Act for calling one: That the Governor proposed deferring the Business till next Day (*Sunday*) which was agreed to: That the Parson, being obliged to attend to the Cure of Souls, was under a Necessity of banishing *worldly Cares* on that Day; and that his Absence occasioned an equal Division of the Senate, which furnished the Governor with an Opportunity of doing a popular Act, and turning the Scale in Favour of a Convention.”

1. The entire extract was reprinted six times by 25 March: N.H. (1), Mass. (1), Conn. (1), N.Y. (2), Pa. (1). The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 24 February, reprinted only the first paragraph.

2. John Williams. See *Newport Herald*, 21 January, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 671).

**Antoine de la Forest to Comte de la Luzerne****New York, 10 February 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

I have the honor to send you the translation of an act of Congress, to take effect the 8th of next month, to apply the provisions of the acts relative to the customs duties of the United States to North Carolina. The act is the first one that Congress has passed in its second session, and the general interest did not permit it to spend a long time in deliberation. . . .

The last clause of the act of which I have the honor to give you an account, sir, postpones until the 1st of next April the moment when the inhabitants of the state of Rhode Island will be treated in the Union as foreigners.<sup>2</sup> The 16th of last September Congress extended to them until the 15th of the following January the favors reserved to the ships of the United States, in the supposition that the state would be reunited with the others before that time.<sup>3</sup> The same sentiment of moderation urged Congress to temporize further and it has moreover become very probable that the accession of Rhode Island will not be delayed much longer. To begin with, the Federalists of this state have gained a small majority to repeal the laws relative to its paper money; they have just taken an even greater step in obtaining the convening of a convention for the first Monday in March. It is not expected that this convention can be immediately brought to ratify the Constitution. It is more realistic that it will adjourn; but in the end it will not be able to resist the current which carries all the other states and under these circumstances Congress believes it should avoid all severe decisions.

1. RC (Tr), Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Consulaires, BI 910, New York, ff. 282–83, Archives Nationales, Paris.

2. See *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

3. See John Adams to John Brown, 15 September 1789, note 3 (RCS:R.I., 599).

**Alpha****Providence United States Chronicle, 11 February 1790***TO THE EDITOR OF THE CHRONICLE.*

SIR, Much has been said by a certain Class of Men, against a *Nocturnal Convention*,<sup>1</sup> held on the Evening of the 6th Inst at the House of General Thayer.<sup>2</sup>—The Conduct of the Members of that Convention by a partial interested *Few* has been reprobated in the strongest Terms.—To answer certain Purposes it is represented to have been a Meeting of the Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers<sup>3</sup>—this is denied.—It is affirmed, Sir, in Contradiction to those who willfully misrepresent—That it was a Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Providence—that it was a Meeting from which no Freeman of the Town

upon Application would have been excluded.—It is true, Sir, the Meeting consisted principally of Mechanics; but then, even if the Members of the *Convention* who were the same Evening assembled at the Lower End of the Town, threatening Destruction to the Liberties of those poor ignoble Mechanics, had advanced in a Body, tho' the Phalanx must have appeared terrible, without Opposition it would have been admitted.

These Sir, are Facts,—if any Person could be found to deny them, he would not be called “*a Liar*”—but with all Politeness imaginable, he would be proved to be such.—But allowing that this was a Meeting of the Mechanics and Manufacturers alone, and from which all other Classes of Men would have been excluded, where was the Criminality of it.—Is there any existing Law, in this State which forbids such Meetings?—Does not the Disapprobation of this Meeting come from the wrong Persons? With what Propriety can Men who have for Years past met *in Convention* and agreed upon certain Persons for Representatives for the Town, and indeed almost all the other Officers, come forward, and with so much Warmth and ill Temper execrate the Proceedings of the Meeting at Gen. Thayer's.—Do they suppose themselves the “*well born*” few,—and that they alone are to regulate the Choice of the Representatives, and other Officers of this Town.—This, Sir, has heretofore been too much the Case—the Mechanics and other Freemen of this Town have been a long Time duped by a certain Class of Men—but, thank God, the Scales have fallen from their Eyes,<sup>4</sup> and they have opened them to a Sense of their Liberties.

If these *Nocturnal Conventions* do strike at the Freedom of Elections; if they are as replete with Evils as the Box of Pandora,<sup>5</sup> who are to blame?—*Let those who introduced them decide?*

*Providence, Feb. 9, 1790*

1. “Nocturnal conventions” was a term usually used to describe the Country party caucuses to plot strategy or nominate officers (see “Glossary,” RCS:R.I., 317).

2. Simeon Thayer, a major in the Continental Army during the Revolution and then a brigadier-general in the Rhode Island militia, owned a tavern on Constitution Hill in Providence.

3. In March 1789, the Rhode Island legislature incorporated the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers (Bartlett, *Records*, X, 315–17).

4. In Acts 9:18, scales fell from Saul's eyes, curing his blindness; whereupon, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and converted to Christianity, becoming St. Paul.

5. In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman on earth. She was given a box (or a large jar) which was not to be opened. Curiosity, however, consumed her and she opened the box, which then released all the evils that spread throughout the world. Hurriedly she closed the box, to retain in it only Hope.

**William Peck to Henry Knox****Providence, 15 February 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . When the Legislature of Rhode Island Order'd a convention of the State to meet the first of March next, our Federal Friends were happy in the (almost) certainty of soon becoming a part of the Union; nor had they any cause to change their opinion, untill they found the *Antis*, by their unremitted exertions, had elected a Majority of their own people to decide upon the Constitution—What their decision will be is yet uncertain—We however hope for the best—Our Federal Delegates are many of them men of abilities and good Speakers; this circumstance justifies us in the hope that ignorance & obstinacy will give way to Eloquence & fair reasoning—but should we fail in this, we expect that *Solid Arguments*, a principle by which many of them have been frequently Sway'd will again have its desired effect. . . .

1. RC, Knox Papers, GLC 02437.04513. The Gilder Lehrman Collection, courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, at the New-York Historical Society. In the rest of the letter, Peck asked Knox to recommend him for the position of naval officer at Providence in the customs service. Peck also wrote President George Washington directly on 15 February saying that, because a state convention had been called and there was hope that Rhode Island would soon join the Union, he wished to be considered for the position of naval officer (Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 149–50n). Peck (1755–1832), a native of Lyme, Conn., and a Yale College graduate (1775), was a Continental Army officer, 1776–81, serving as deputy adjutant of the general forces in Rhode Island, 1777–81. After the war, he moved to Providence. He was appointed the U.S. marshal for Rhode Island in July 1790, serving until 1810.

**Newport Mercury, 15 February 1790***From a Correspondent.*

In a few Days our political Happiness or Misery will be determined—But before that Day arrives, it is hinted to those Gentlemen, who are opposed to the Federal Government, that they be cautious, lest they plunge themselves into irretrievable Ruin and Disgrace.

Much is expected from the Convention who meet the first Monday in March. Congress have suspended all Acts respecting this State, in Consequence of the Request of the Legislature of this State, and their Declaration that there was every Reason to hope that this State would in a short Time accede to the Federal Government.<sup>1</sup>—Expectation is on tip toe, and Fame, with Wings expanded, and a Trumpet in her Hand,<sup>2</sup> waits earnestly to waft the happy Intelligence to our Sister States.—Consider, ye who are to decide upon the all important Question—Let your Hearts be open to Conviction—Remember that you cannot stand alone—but united to the other Pillars you will be protected, and become respectable.

Be wise for yourselves, and may the State of Rhode-Island rise from the anarchial Gulph into which it has, for many Years been plunged—to the Zenith of political Glory and Fame.

In the Answer of the Legislature of Massachusetts to the Governor's Speech, is the following Paragraph:<sup>3</sup>

“The Accession of another State [i.e., North Carolina] to our Union, by so large a Majority of its Citizens, is a happy Presage of those Blessings we wish to obtain by the Adoption of the Federal Constitution.—We are convinced that the Strength and Respectability of the Confederation, essentially depend on the united Exertions of all the independent States of America. From this Consideration we sincerely hope, that the Citizens of Rhode Island will, at their ensuing Convention, exercise their wonted Patriotism—and by their Decisions complete the Union. Thus allied under One Federal Government, and by paying a strict Attention to its Administration, we cannot but anticipate Peace, Liberty and every National Happiness.”

1. For the legislature's request to Congress, see RCS:R.I., 676–78. For Congress' suspension, see *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

2. A reference to the Roman goddess Fama (Greek goddess PHEME).

3. A reference to the legislature's response to Governor John Hancock's 19 January address to the legislature. For the portion of the address on Rhode Island, see the *Massachusetts Centinel*, 20 January (Mfm:R.I.). The response appeared in the *Centinel* on 6 February.

### **A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island Newport Herald, 18 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

In the present uncertain and critical situation of our affairs I beg leave to propose the following observations to the serious consideration of the Delegates to the approaching Convention, on whom depends the happiness or misery of this State.

The General Assembly at their last session passed two Acts, in one of which they recommended a Convention to be called for a *full and free investigation of and decision* upon the New Constitution,—and in the other they set forth that unless a further suspension of the Acts of Congress, subjecting the citizens of this State to foreign tonnage and foreign duties, could be obtained, the operation of the then existing laws of Congress would prove *greatly injurious* to the commercial interests of this State, and therefore requested the Governor to make application in the name of this State to Congress for reviving the indulgence granted by them to the citizens thereof by their Act passed at their last session, &c. and in order to induce Congress to comply with their earnest request, they further declared that there was *every reason* to hope that this State would in a *short time* accede to the Federal Union.<sup>2</sup>

An application was accordingly made, and Congress relying upon the assurances of the Legislature, and willing to conquer opposition by moderation, have further indulged the State to the first of April next.<sup>3</sup>

Now let me ask the Delegates appointed to the Convention, most of whom are members of the General Assembly, what sentiments will Congress entertain of you and the Legislature of the State, if, contrary to the declarations in the Act last referred to, you should refuse to ratify the New Constitution, or which will be considered by Congress as tantamount to a rejection, you should adjourn without a decision,—and what consequences would flow from such refusal or an adjournment of the Convention.

Would they not consider the Legislature as having trifled with them, and imposed upon their leniency? you as insensible or wilfully opposed to the real interest of the State and the United States, and take such measures to reclaim us as their wisdom and justice should warrant and direct?—They certainly would.

The operation of the Act imposing foreign tonnage and foreign duties will as the Legislature *justly* express it, prove *greatly injurious* to the commercial interest, and, let me add, for they are inseparably connected, the landed interest of this State.—All intercourse between this and the United States, by land as well as by water, will, by the operation of that Act, be so clogged, as to amount to an almost absolute prohibition.—It will be left to the charity of our once Sister States, grown cold by our obstinacy, if not turned to resentment, to determine whether some of the principal towns in the State shall be supplied with bread and fuel or not;—and great numbers who depend immediately on commerce for their subsistence must perish.

The farmers in general, and they especially whose estates are nearest to the large commercial towns, will not be exempted from the common distress. Some of them receive their fire wood and a considerable part of their bread from the other States, and the faculty of the inhabitants of the sea ports for purchasing the produce of the farmer, being diminished by the embarrassments of trade, the price of their produce must fall, and their estates, which have already sunk 25 per cent. must sink still lower in their value.—These observations are so natural and so obviously true, that one would think they could not have escaped the notice of the farmer; and, discerning the truth of them, it would seem almost impossible that he should not unite with the merchant in promoting measures calculated to extend trade, agriculture, and mechanic arts; and yet as obvious as these observations are some artful and designing men have so far deluded a number of the citizens of this State, as to induce them to believe that the interests of the mer-



chant and farmer are distinct, and have inflamed them to such a degree against the former,<sup>4</sup> as that they seem to delight in counteracting their views, and even to glory in effecting their ruin.—Yea these base partizans have gone such lengths to accomplish their purposes, as to represent a Constitution evidently calculated to extend commerce, promote agriculture, and manufactures, and to secure the liberties of the state, as a system of government contrived to enslave the mass of the people, and to aggrandize a few ambitious, avaricious characters.—They have represented that the monies, drawn from the people, into the public Treasury, instead of being under the control, and appropriation of their representatives, may be taken from thence at the will of individual Officers, and particularly that by the New Constitution the President holds the keys of the Treasury; and may take out of it what and when he pleases.—The most palpable falshoods delivered with solemnity by those who have acquired a confidence with persons, who have neither leisure, nor perhaps inclination, to examine into facts, too frequently make impressions which cannot be easily erased.—By such prepossessions a number of the good people of this State have, alas! been too long governed.

The General Assembly of the State have at length by their letters to Congress, and by the Act of the last session disclosed to the people, that commerce is essential to the happiness of the State, that the privileges of it cannot be obtained but by adopting the New Constitution,—and sensible that a right understanding of the New Constitution cannot be acquired without a *full* and *free* investigation, thereof by Delegates appointed by the people for that purpose; have recommended a Convention to be called, and Delegates are accordingly chosen.—As *they* will have sufficient leisure, and without doubt will be disposed to communicate and receive light, and to embrace the truth with honest minds on which side soever it may appear, it is to be hoped, that seeing the evils which will ensue a rejection of the Constitution, and the advantages which will result from adopting it they may be induced to ratify it.

Having in general pointed out the misery and distress which will attend the operation of the Act subjecting the trade of this State to foreign tonnage and foreign duties, which Act will operate in full force against us after the first day of April next, if the Constitution is not previously ratified by this State—I now proceed to propose a few questions to the consideration of the Delegates to the Convention, leaving the solution of them to their own judgments.—Will not our continuing detached from the Union interfere with the Revenue Acts of the United States,—with their plans for the common defence, and for establishing

public credit?—Will Congress suffer a single refractory State to embarrass its great, necessary national measures? Have not the United States an undoubted right, on the principles of national justice, to prevent, in such way as they shall judge proper, our embarrassing the execution of their political system?—Hath not Congress a right to insist upon, and even to compel us to pay our quota of the debt contracted by the war;—and although this State should consider itself as foreign, and independent, yet, upon the principles of an incorporate union, to view us as a part of the United States, subject to its general government, and to demand from the State its proportion of the expence accrued, and accruing by the General Government?—Now let me ask what would be the consequence if the Congress should make a demand solely of the payment of our quota of the debt contracted by the late war?—Is this State able to pay it?—And would not the country suffer essential injury by distrainments?—Let me further ask, is it just that the other States should sustain the whole expence of establishing and administering the Federal Government,—securing the Western Territory, &c. &c. and that this State, without contributing towards it, should enter the Union, and reap all the benefits of that Government and that territory, whenever it shall please to adopt it?<sup>5</sup>

Can justice admit such an ungenerous sentiment, and will the wisdom of the United States, to use a familiar proverb, beat the bush and suffer this State to take the bird?<sup>6</sup>

What measures the Great Council of the Union may take with us, besides leaving us to the operation of her acts of trade, and to our own destruction it would be presumptuous in me to suggest.—But if any degree of resentment could be supposed to enter into their deliberations, might we not expect the most rigorous treatment, would be the consequence of unexampled moderation, ignominiously abused.

The hints I have thrown out are intended to awaken the attention of the Delegates to the Convention to the true interests of this State; for the honor and happiness of which I am anxiously solicitous. Sure I am that if they will advert to this, and deliberately weigh the merits of the New Constitution, we shall not experience the calamities which a rejection of it will most certainly bring upon us.—But if on the contrary this State must fall a sacrifice to inconsideration and invincible prejudice, which may Heaven prevent! they who have endeavored, and shall still endeavor to support it, will have this consolation that they have done their duty, while the stings which will goad the consciences of those who have contributed to her ruin will be sharpened by everlasting reproach.

1. The *Providence Gazette*, 27 February, reprinted this article “*By request*,” along with “A Freeholder” (immediately below).

2. For the two acts, see RCS:R.I., 675–78.

3. See *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

4. “Farmer” in the original printing but corrected to “former” by an errata in the *Newport Herald*, 25 February. The *Providence Gazette* reprinting used the corrected “former.”

5. A condensed and modified version of this paragraph appeared in the *New York Daily Advertiser*, 15 March (Mfm:R.I.), and was reprinted in the *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 19 March; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 25 March; and *Charleston City Gazette*, 9 April.

6. John Heywood, *A dialogue conteinyng the number in effect of all prouerbes in the english tongue* . . . (London, 1546), Part I, chapter 3: “And whyle I at length debate and beate the bush/There shall steppe in other men, & catche the burdes.”

## A Freeholder

**Newport Herald, 18 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*To the OPPOSERS of the CONSTITUTION of the UNITED STATES, in this State.*

An ancient Sage being asked, how he acquired so superior a degree of knowledge? replied, that he examined all subjects before he adopted or rejected them, with as much circumspection as the blind man who feels with his stick the ground on which he is going to step;—But the manner of obtaining information (or rather of ignorance) in this State, hath been blindly to step first, and then to feel; hence many are found in the ditch.

Hearing a person warmly inveigh against the Constitution of the United States, I asked him what parts of it he objected to?—all—all of it, he replied—’twill strip us of our houses—lands—make us slaves,—I’ll therefore have nothing to do with it, but kick it out.—You have not perused it with candor, rejoined I.—No, said he, I have never read it:—Never read it, cried I with astonishment, and yet oppose it!—No, replied he; for Squire —— and neighbor —— told me what it was, and I am therefore against it.—Wretched picture of ignorance, and a melancholy proof of the baneful influence of party spirit!

Long—too long, have we determined the merit, or demerit of propositions, which have been submitted to us in this State by the principle of party; ’tis time therefore, that each one searches for himself before he makes up his judgment, and pay some regard to the general good.

The Constitution of the United States hath undergone a liberal and manly discussion in the twelve States that have adopted it.—The imperfections that the most critical could point out, are so trifling as not to be placed in competition with its merits; but however important they

are, the amendments proposed by Congress, and already ratified by several States, will remedy those defects.<sup>2</sup>

At this late period of discussion by this State, we have not only to consider of the fitness of the Constitution, but the necessity of our adopting it,—the leading characters in opposition have openly avowed that the latter principle must sooner or later operate.—Deputy-Governor Owen, in the preamble to a Bill he presented, (in order to supersede the appointment of a State Convention, by) referring it again to the people, declares, that “*the Constitution recommended by the General Convention held in Philadelphia, on the 17th day of September, A. D. 1787, has been adopted by twelve of the United States: And that the said twelve States have proceeded to organize a Federal Government conformable to the principles thereof, and have put the same into actual operation: And that from the operation thereof the citizens of this State will suffer great and manifold inconveniences and discouragements in their trade and commerce, and otherwise, while they are considered and treated as foreigners, wholly disconnected from all the said States: By reason whereof it has become the interest and policy of this State to take the most prudent measures for acceding to the Union of the said twelve States, formed and organized as aforesaid: And that the accession of the State of North-Carolina to the said Union, and the grievous operation of the Federal Government on the interests of many of the citizens of this State, since the last measures taken by the General Assembly on the subject, have presented the same to our view and consideration in a very different attitude from that in which it then appeared,*”<sup>3</sup>—Of this necessity however, the present opposers are the only cause.—There was a time when our voice was called for in the General Convention, to join in forming a Constitution,<sup>4</sup> when, from the respectability of the State, we had a full share of influence in the Union, and could thereby have effected what had been conformable to our wishes, provided they were founded on the general good—There was also a time when, if we had considered the Constitution in a State Convention, and should have found it inapplicable to our happiness, our objections, if they comported with reason, would have influenced other States in their decision; but the policy of the leading opposers to it, hath been to procrastinate an investigation of it, while the State hath experienced all the evils consequent to an undecided government.—The adoption of it now is of moment to us—Questions of revenue, which involve the most important events to the interest of this State, are now before Congress; should we again delay, we may lose an opportunity of doing essential service to the interest of the State.

From the proceedings of Congress it appears, that in consequence of an application from this State, agreeably to a Resolve of the last sessions of Assembly, they have continued a further suspension of the

Navigation Laws, as it regards this State, to the first of April next;<sup>5</sup> and by private letters we are informed, that Congress viewed the assurances conveyed by this Resolution of the Assembly, as leaving no doubt of an immediate adoption of the Constitution: Should we therefore reject it, Congress must consider the Assembly either as purposely deceiving them, or totally ignorant of the principles of their constituents: Or should the State Convention adjourn, it must be viewed by them as a pitiful trifling with government.

It hath been a subject of astonishment, that the Constitution should have been opposed by the landed interest, as it evidently bears harder on the mercantile.—The revenue for the exigencies of government, is raised only by imposts on the importation of foreign goods, while agriculture and manufactures are encouraged—The consumer, it is true, will eventually pay this tax; but are not the inhabitants of ⟨sea-port⟩<sup>6</sup> towns the greatest consumers of foreign luxuries? and is it not a heavier tax on them, than by quotaing a sum according to wealth, or numbers? besides no one is obliged to pay, but he who dresses in rich attire, or satiates his appetite with dainties of foreign climes; for our lands with industry, will yield every thing necessary for the support and convenience of life.

The prosperity of this State is much dependent on commerce; it is the medium for disposing of the produce of our country, besides enabling us to build ships and be the carriers for others.

⟨The value of lands have risen or fallen according to the thriftiness or decline of our sea ports: Before the war, lands in this State were sold from 50 to 200 per cent. higher than the price they will now command; and the lands upon this island<sup>7</sup> are valued at a proportionable higher rate, than lands of equal goodness, but not so contiguous to the market—hence it is evident, that the landed interest is connected with the mercantile, and that the landholders upon this island are more interested than others in the success of this town—It was therefore with surprize the inhabitants of it learnt that the towns of Portsmouth and Middletown, upon this island, should be opposed to the Constitution, as the existence of this town is so dependent upon its adoption.

If the State Convention should be so regardless to the true interest of this State, as to reject the Constitution, or even to adjourn the decision of it, the situation of Newport would be ruinous, unless remedied in a way that would be painful to their connexion with the State—Their coasting vessels could no longer sail under the high imposition of foreign tonnage and port charges, and their foreign vessels would be rotting in the docks, for want of markets in the neighboring States to vend the excess of the supply here, they would therefore be pre-

vented from purchasing of the country their produce: or should the town of Newport be driven by distress and apprehension of total ruin, to apply to Congress to be admitted into the Union separate and distinct from the State, there would scarcely be found a man among them so regardless of the honor and interest of their town as to purchase any articles of those characters, who, by opposing the Constitution, should have thus forced them to a dismemberment from the State.)<sup>8</sup>

These are subjects of serious consideration—they are not the effusions of temper, but the result of dispassionate reason.

Examine then with coolness, what you have opposed from prejudice—Consider that you tread on dangerous ground, and that if you persevere in opposing the adoption of the Constitution, you may entail misery on yourselves, or cause the annihilation of the government of the State.

1. The *Providence Gazette*, 27 February, reprinted this article “*By request*,” along with “A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island” (immediately above).

2. For the twelve amendments to the Constitution adopted by Congress on 25 September 1789 and sent by President George Washington to the states for ratification on 2 October, see Appendix I (below). By 18 February 1790, New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Hampshire, and Delaware had ratified some or all of the amendments.

3. See “Daniel Owen’s Bill Calling Town Meetings to Give Instructions on the New Constitution,” 17 January 1790 (RCS:R.I., 673–75n).

4. Rhode Island refused to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention. See RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxv–xxxvii, 8–23.

5. For the legislature’s “application” to Congress, see RCS:R.I., 676–78. For Congress’ suspension, see the *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

6. An errata in the *Newport Herald*, 25 February, indicated that the word in angle brackets should have been inserted before the word “towns.” The *Providence Gazette* re-printing included “sea-port.”

7. A reference to the island of Rhode Island (i.e., Aquidneck) which contained the towns of Portsmouth, Middletown, and Newport.

8. The text in angle brackets was reprinted in the New York *Daily Advertiser*, 15 March (Mfm:R.I.); Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 19 March; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 25 March; and Charleston *City Gazette*, 12 April.

### Newport Herald, 18 February 1790<sup>1</sup>

It is to be hoped, says a Correspondent, that the *State of Rhode-Island* is destined to share with her Sister States, the honors, advantages and felicity resulting from the Federal Government. The great Father of Nature has chequered her condition with the passing clouds of dejection, but the force of Federalism will burst her into being—She shall then look back with regret at the causes which have impeded her progress to political virtue and happiness, and blush that she procrastinated to so late a period, the adoption of a Constitution which will

encourage and promote every useful art, afford her peace at home, and render her respectable abroad.

1. Reprinted: *Boston Gazette*, 22 February; *New Hampshire Spy*, 24 February; *New York Daily Advertiser*, 5 March; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 12 March; and *Charleston City Gazette*, 19 March.

### **New York Daily Advertiser, 20 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from Newport, (Rhode-Island) Feb. 11.*

“At present our island and state may not improperly be called the *Botany Bay*<sup>2</sup> of America, the receptacle of the seditious, the disaffected, and the bankrupts of other states, an Augean stable, whose accumulated filth will take some modern Hercules<sup>3</sup> at least thirty years to clear away; for we are still in hopes there is virtue and magnanimity enough among us to remove some time or another, the mass of pollution collected in this state in the course of the last six years. The sons of Belial<sup>4</sup> are numerous amongst us, tho’ there are some hopes of their reformation in as much as Dr. I—— T——<sup>5</sup> and Co. have published some letters in which they assert that should the general government be *wisely* and *prudently* administred they make no doubt its subjects may be the richest and happiest people on earth, which (says T——) is my sincere prayer. &c. What a lovely, immaculate creature is this Dr. I—— T—— and lo! he prayeth! [”]

1. Reprinted: Stockbridge, Mass., *Western Star*, 2 March; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 18 March. The writer of this letter is attacking John Taylor, a Massachusetts Antifederalist who had recently moved to Smithfield, R.I. For Taylor, see *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 6 August 1789, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 566). For Taylor’s defense of himself, see “John Taylor,” *Newport Mercury*, 15 February 1790 (Mfm:R.I.).

2. A reference to the British penal colony in Australia.

3. According to myth, King Augeas was the largest owner of cattle in Greece and each night all of the animals were confined to the stables, which created massive filth. Hercules is fabled to have cleaned Augeas’ stables in one day.

4. See “A Friend to Rule and Order,” *Providence Gazette*, 15 March 1788, note 1 (RCS:R.I., 139).

5. The Stockbridge, Mass., *Western Star*, 2 March, reprint changed “I—— T——” to “JOHN TAYLOR.”

### **A Freeholder**

#### **Newport Herald, 25 February 1790**

TO THE HONORABLE THE DELEGATES OF THE STATE CONVENTION.

To the Delegates of a free people, the Address of a Freeholder cannot be displeasing, especially at a period when the State is convulsed by parties, and the public decision is called for on a question that is

pregnant with the most interesting consequences—The citizen therefore, who shall communicate his sentiments on public affairs with decency, hath, at least, a claim to attention and candor.

Regular government is essential to the happiness of society, to protect the poor from the rich, and the weak from the strong, to give security to the fruits of our labor, and safety to our persons,—All civilized societies have therefore considered it as the greatest of human blessings: but so uninformed have been the mass of the people in the first origin of social compacts, in the various nations of Europe, that they have neglected improving an important crisis to form a free and efficient government, but left it to chance or ambition—Hence there is a chaos in their systems, and a tyranny more or less in the executions of them: But America hath shaken off the yoke of ancient ignorance, and seized the favorable moment, to deliberate upon and form a Constitution upon the great principles of liberty and security: How far the present Constitution of the United States comports with those principles, and is adapted to the happiness of this State, is with you, GENTLEMEN, a subject of serious consideration, you are honored by the suffrages of a free people, to fully investigate and decide this question—a question the most important that can be submitted to a public body:—It is therefore presumed, that in your discussions and determination of it, you will act unbiassed by party attachments, or sinister motives.

The Constitution is calculated for a confederacy of States: It vests in Congress the power, of making war, peace, and treaties; over concerns of a foreign and general nature, of regulating commerce, providing for the support of government, and establishing correspondent judicial and executive authorities—Can these powers, or any of them, be exercised to effect or advantage by this State, in its individual capacity? Experience hath taught us they cannot.

States or individuals, entering into civil compacts, must give up a share of liberty to preserve the rest in a more perfect manner; and where the interests are various, arising from situation, habits, or trade, concessions must be made by each: Upon these principles (which are sanctioned by the experience and wisdom of mankind) the merits of the Constitution appear; for there is not a right, important to the States, which are not by them retained; nor will this State cede greater advantages to the Union, in the adoption of the Constitution, than the State which is the least benefited by it.

It is prudent and wise, not only to consider of the merits of the Constitution before you adopt it; but in case you meditate an adjournment or a rejection, that you look forward to consequences which may result therefrom.



Should you adjourn, upon what principle could you do it? What reason could you give, that would be satisfactory? One of the State Conventions, it is true, did adjourn, but this was at an early period;<sup>1</sup> you cannot have the same reason, because you have had two years longer to consider of it, and their wisdom to guide you. Plausible as may be your ostensible reasons for such a measure, will not another and perhaps the true construction be put upon it? Will Congress be again induced by any assurances, to further suspend the operation of their laws? You must be sensible they will not:—Besides exposing our citizens to ruin, do you not hazard the interest of the State? The general Government hath been organized a year, and the revenues arising from the Impost of the States now in Union, have paid the expences of it and left a surplus in the Treasury towards discharging the interest of the public debt; is it not then a privilege to be admitted now (at the eleventh hour) to a participation of the government, without having contributed towards its establishment? Must we not expect, that if an adoption is delayed, that Congress at least will require, our proportion of the general expences, as a preliminary for admission?—And this at a time, when we shall have no other resource left but taxation, for with the stagnation that will take place in our trade, the revenues that have arisen therefrom, will cease.

A rejection of the Constitution will be a solemn declaration of seceding from an union with the other States:—If we were blessed with the greatest domestic harmony, such a secession would be dangerous, but when we consider the division that prevails, the numbers and respectability of those, who advocate an adoption, will not a rejection be madness in the extreme? Will the State have power to prevent a dismemberment of it? It is evident they will not. Or should we be called upon for a payment of our quota of the foreign and domestic debt, have we any funds provided? Or are there any resources that would furnish it? There are none. Since then a rejection would be ruinous, and an adjournment productive of numerous evils, what reason can there be for delaying an adoption?

GENTLEMEN, The trust reposed in you, is of the highest importance, and your responsibility is consequently great.—That you may discharge your duty to the honor and interest of the State, and meet with the just and grateful approbation of your Fellow Citizens, is the ardent wish of A FREEHOLDER.

1. On 22 February 1788 the New Hampshire Convention adjourned to 18 June 1788 (CC:554). The reconvened Convention ratified the Constitution on 21 June (CC:785).

**Greenwichensis****Newport Herald, 25 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Mr. Edes, *Please to give the following remarks on two pieces published in your last paper, the one signed A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island, and the other A Freeholder;*<sup>2</sup> *a place in your impartial Herald, and you will oblige*

GREENWICHENSIS.

The writers of the two pieces referred to have both endeavored, by representing, in striking colours, the evils which will result to the landed as well as the mercantile interest of this State, from a rejection of the Constitution by the ensuing Convention, to induce the Delegates to adopt it;—and the *Freeholder* has ventured so far, as to hold up the idea that a dismemberment of the State may be the consequence of a rejection.

That the landed and mercantile interest are inseparably connected,—that the landed interest at large must be involved in the ruin of the trading towns, and that the farmers who are contiguous to those towns will soonest feel, and participate in their distress must be acknowledged by every thinking man,—and I will agree with those writers that the Commerce of this State would be utterly ruined by a rejection of the Constitution if we were reduced to their Hobson's choice.<sup>3</sup>—But is there not a channel through which our commerce might flow enlarged, and by which our agriculture and manufactures might be promoted, even if we should be excluded from the privileges of the Union?—There is,—and is it not surprizing, that our politicians, who in other respects have shown themselves to be possessed of extensive forecast, as well as fortitude, should have so long overlooked or neglected it?—Let the Constitution be immediately rejected, we have dallied with it too long for our interest,—the Revenue Act of the State be repealed,<sup>4</sup>—and our ports thrown open to all the world, commerce will then revive, and agriculture and manufactures flourish.—Our harbors will be covered with the ships, and our stores be replenished with the produce of foreign nations, and they will readily admit us to all the benefits of a reciprocal intercourse.—A high demand for our productions and manufactures will ensue, and give an animating impulse to industry and agriculture.—All the States on the Continent of America will bring hither their produce, their manufactures and their money to exchange for and to purchase the foreign articles in which we shall abound.—We shall exceed St. Eustatius<sup>5</sup> in its most flourishing state, and, instead of experiencing those evils, which have frightened the Federalists, and with a gloomy picture of which they have endeavoured to frighten the Antifederalists, we shall soon become the wealthiest, the happiest, and

the most envied State in the World.—This plan for advancing our opulence and felicity is so easily executed, and the advantages which will flow from its execution are so great and obvious that it ought to be immediately embraced. But if we do not adopt the Constitution we shall soon cease to exist as a State, says *the Freeholder*, Congress will destroy our State jurisdiction, and dismember the State.—It must be confessed that this threat if it were well founded would be alarming;—but pray what has this menace to support it, but a metaphysical, cobweb bottom woven with the subtle threads of distinction between an incorporate Union and a federal Alliance?—Is not this State a free, distinct sovereignty, absolutely independent of the rightful control of any and all the States and kingdoms of the Earth?<sup>6</sup>—and, this being palpably the case, what right have the United States to interfere with US?—What right have they to annihilate, and dismember this State?—What right have they to exercise dominion over us?—We are not a conquered people; nor have they any right to make war upon us.—If they should attempt to subjugate us, would not foreign powers, who will find their account in a commercial intercourse with us, combine to support us, and apart from this, would not all the Sovereign Powers of the Earth consider such an attempt, even upon a small Sovereignty, as an insult upon Sovereignty itself?—Did not every crowned head, in Europe, and in the World feel and resent the decapitation of Charles the First?<sup>7</sup>—Trust me my Antifederal Friends, these hints of a dismemberment are intended solely to intimidate you.—They are mere scare-crows.—As a free distinct independent, Sovereign State, you are not bound to enter into any alliance but what you conceive will be for your interest;—and it is interest alone that doth, and which alone ought to govern Sovereign, Independent States.

That Commerce is essential to the happiness of this State, is allowed by its Legislature, and on all hands, and if our commerce must be ruined unless we accede to the Union, we ought immediately to accede to it;—but if on the contrary, by rejecting the Constitution, and pursuing the plan I have proposed, our commerce, our agriculture, our manufactures, and our wealth will be increased, we most clearly ought, without hesitation to reject it (dallying and adjourning will only prolong our distress,) and embrace a measure which will ensure to us such extensive, and such lasting benefits.

1. For a response to this piece, see “Agricola,” *Newport Herald*, 11 March (below).

2. See “A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island” and “A Freeholder,” *Newport Herald*, 18 February (both above).

3. The option of taking the one thing offered or nothing.

4. In May 1789 the Rhode Island legislature passed an act providing that the state would collect the same impost duties as Congress would enact (*Newport Mercury*, 11 May

1789, RCS:R.I., 501–2). The legislature revised the act and appointed state collectors in September (General Assembly Schedule, September 1789 Session [Providence, 1789] [Evans 22104], 5–25, 27). See also Bartlett, *Records*, X, 340–55.

5. St. Eustatius was a Dutch island in the West Indies that served as an entrepôt for smuggling.

6. Article II of the Articles of Confederation provided that “Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence” (CDR, 86).

7. King Charles I was executed by order of Parliament in 1649 during the last stages of the English Civil War.

### Newport Herald, 25 February 1790

*The prayers and prophesy of JONAS in the Whale’s Belly.*<sup>1</sup>

What shocking news I lately hear,  
 Which fill’s our souls with trembling fear;  
 That Antifederal foes invade,  
 And have a mighty conquest made;  
 If Antifederal powers commence,  
 Consult the gloomy consequence!  
 Our Liberty we must deny,  
 Or like good martyrs bravely die!  
 Heaven grant us what is wanted most,  
 A Washington to lead our host;  
 A Congress to support our laws,  
 And long protect the righteous cause!  
 Thus head and members shall agree,  
 And peace shall reign o’er land and sea.  
 For Sion’s sake, O Lord, arise,  
 And scatter all our enemies!  
 While fraud and treach’ry shall reign,  
 And wise and wholesome laws prophane!  
 Can Antifed’s in any wise,  
 Pray God to bless their enterprize?  
 The time will come, O Antifed’s,  
 When shame shall clothe your empty heads!  
 When heaven shall all your schemes defeat,  
 And kindly raise the good and great.

1. See Jonah, chapters 1–2.

### Newport Herald, 25 February 1790

The following is an extract from an act passed at the present session of the Congress of the United States of America, entitled, An act for

giving effect to the several acts therein mentioned, in respect to the State of North-Carolina, and other purposes.<sup>1</sup>—

“And be it further enacted, That the second section of the act, entitled, ‘An act to suspend part of an act, entitled an act to regulate the collection of duties imposed by law, on the tonnage of ships or vessels, and on goods, wares, and merchandizes, imported into the United States, and for other purposes,’ passed the sixteenth day of September last,<sup>2</sup> shall, with respect to the inhabitants and citizens of the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, be revived, and also, that the fourth section of the said act shall be revived, and both continue in force until the first day of April next, AND NO LONGER.”

1. The extract is clause 6 of the North Carolina Act of 8 February 1790. The act provided for the collection of impost and tonnage duties in North Carolina since it was now in the Union. For legislative action on and the text of the act, see DHFFC, VI, 1532–51.

2. See John Adams to Henry Marchant, 17 September 1789, note 2 (RCS:R.I., 610n).

### Solon, junior

#### Providence United States Chronicle, 25 February 1790<sup>1</sup>

Under the old Confederation the several States retained the power of regulating trade exclusively, by levying imposts, or otherwise: And altho applied to by Congress, several of them pertinaciously refused to part with that power.<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to see that under the operation of that power, lodged in the several State Legislatures, the trade of this State *might* and probably *would*, in a short space of time, have been shackled with restraints, and reduced to embarrassments, similar, and perhaps equal to those under which it labours at present. It must therefore be evident, that, in this particular, the old Confederation was inadequate to our protection. The expedient of vesting Congress with power to raise a revenue from trade would not have remedied that defect. It might have placed us in our present situation, charged with a heavy impost, and shut out from the neighbouring ports, with this difference only, that in that case the duties which now go into our own coffers would have gone into those of Congress.

Before the powers of the Sword and Purse could be lodged both together in the general Government, with safety, *radical alterations were necessary in the very frame and constitution of that government*. This did not escape the examination of those enlightened patriots who met at Philadelphia in the year 1787. The letter from their President to that of Congress contains the following remarkable passage.

“The friends of our country have long seen and desired, that the powers of making war, peace and treaties;—that of levying money, and

regulating commerce, and the correspondent executive and judicial authorities, should be fully and effectually vested in the general Government of the Union:—But the impropriety of delegating such extensive trust to one body of men is evident—HENCE RESULTS THE NECESSITY OF A DIFFERENT ORGANIZATION.”<sup>3</sup>

This sentiment, sanctioned by such venerable authority, must dignify the characters of those men and those States, that refused the powers of revenue to the old Congress, viz. the patriots and States of New-York and Pennsylvania, who finally refused to grant those powers, even after this State had complied.<sup>4</sup>

Pennsylvania having experienced the inconveniences of a single Legislature, in the late reform of their Constitution, has divided their Legislature into two Houses.<sup>5</sup>

The new federal Constitution contains a wise and beautiful organization.—The Representatives of the people, chosen by all the freemen personally,—the Senate, chosen by the State Legislatures,—and the Supreme Executive, chosen by Electors, specially appointed by the Legislatures for that purpose.

In the business of legislation the two Houses have a concurrent jurisdiction, and the Supreme Executive a qualified negative.

Here we mark traces of the British Constitution—the admiration of the world;—but with mighty advantages to the democratic interest:—For in that we behold hereditary Lords, constituting a separate estate in the Legislature;—in ours a Senate, periodically eligible, by our State Legislatures: In that we behold a King, possessing his crown by hereditary right, and fortified with an absolute negative on both the other estates, and many other prerogatives;—in ours, an elective President, who is to become a private citizen at the end of four years, unless revived by the breath of the people, possessing only certain and definite powers.

Let any candid person compare the old Congress, a single body, without a head, possessing and exercising, as the spur of the occasion might suggest, by themselves or their committees, or boards, legislative, judicial and executive powers, blended and confused in the undistinguishable mass of their impotence (if such an expression may be used) with the present well-organized national Legislature, and a decided preference must be given to the latter.—In the latter will be found the great out-lines of a free efficient and well-balanced government; while the former must appear to have been only a fluctuating body of aristocrats, not chosen by the freemen at large (except in this State and that of Connecticut); but by the Legislatures of States<sup>6</sup>—an assembly of ambassadors from sovereign States, armed with full powers only—to give advice.

These remarks may serve to account for the greater confidence reposed in the present Congress, in regard to the collection and expenditure of the national revenues.

It would not be difficult to point out, in a variety of particulars, the changeableness, and the want of economy<sup>(a)</sup> as well as of system, in the old Congress—but it becomes us to tread lightly on the ashes of the dead;—many venerable patriots have at all times belonged to that body, and as much, good, and as little mischief, has been done by them, as was to be expected from the deliberations of a single assembly, appointed and authorized as they were.

It may not perhaps become an individual, whose abilities and learning are felt by him to be incompetent to the deep research, to attempt to decide on the merits of the new federal Constitution, relatively to the amendments made, or to be made; nor doth the Writer of these lines even flatter himself with the vain hope of bringing all his fellow-citizens to the standard of his own scanty ideas of political propriety. He knows that the opinions of mankind are, and always will be discordant, and that “*difference of sentiments is no crime among freemen,*” and he expects to submit ultimately to the general voice of his country—that is *to be governed*, and not to govern by his *single voice*.—Yet at a time when a question, in which the fortunes of his fellow-citizens, as well as himself, and of those he expects to leave behind him on the stage of life at his departure, are so deeply concerned, is about to receive a solemn decision, he cannot think he has discharged the duties of a good citizen, without declaring his sentiments in the most explicit manner.

(a) *It will appear by their Journals, that upwards of THIRTY-FOUR THOUSAND DOLLARS, in real money, were ordered to be paid, and actually were paid, to one of their general Officers, between the years 1784 and 1788 inclusively.*<sup>7</sup>

1. “Solon, junior” was perhaps David Howell. See “Solon, jun.,” *Providence Gazette*, 5 July 1788, note 1 (RCS:R.I., 348).

2. On 30 April 1784 Congress sent to the states an amendment to the Articles of Confederation granting Congress the power to regulate commerce for fifteen years (CDR, 153–54). On 23 October 1786 a congressional committee reported on the acts adopted by the various states ratifying that amendment. The committee found that the ratifications of New Hampshire, North Carolina, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and South Carolina were not proper. Congress resolved that these states reconsider their ratifications and make them acceptable to Congress (JCC, XXXI, 907–9).

3. See the second paragraph of the letter from George Washington, president of the Constitutional Convention, to the president of Congress, 17 September 1787 (RCS:R.I., 322). The last eight words were not in small capital letters in the original letter.

4. A reference to the Impost of 1783, which Rhode Island finally granted to Congress in March 1786 (RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxviii–xxix). For New York’s action on the Impost of

1783, see RCS:N.Y., Vol. 1, xxxvi–xl. On 27 July 1786 Congress declared that Pennsylvania's act adopting the Impost of 1783 contained clauses that needed to be repealed before the impost could go into effect (JCC, XXX, 443).

5. The Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention (1789–90) then meeting was drafting a new state constitution which would replace the unicameral legislature of the Constitution of 1776 with a bicameral legislature.

6. According to Article V of the Articles of Confederation, delegates to Congress were “annually appointed in such manner as the legislature of each state shall direct” (CDR, 87). Only in Rhode Island and Connecticut were delegates to Congress elected directly by the people. In the other eleven states, the state legislatures elected congressional delegates.

7. Probably a reference to the compensation Congress approved for Baron von Steuben for his service as a major general and inspector general during the Revolutionary War. David Howell was in Congress when it considered granting von Steuben \$45,000 in April 1784. The amount was reduced to \$10,000. Howell likewise was involved in granting von Steuben \$7,000 in September 1785. See JCC, XXVI, 217–19, 227–30; XXIX, 771–74.

### **Providence United States Chronicle, 25 February 1790**

LET THOSE WHO CAN SPARE TIME — READ.

So much has been said, and wrote on the subject of the federal Constitution, that little new remains to offer the honorable Members of the Convention, appointed to meet next week.—Yet I will venture for the first time, to impress the magnitude of the business entrusted to their care, and to point out a few of the many reasons which urge the necessity of a speedy adoption of that Constitution our sister States now enjoy.

Sensible as they all were of the unhappy consequences which flowed from the old confederated system, the people at large, by their Representatives, appointed and sent forward the best and most respectable of their fellow-citizens, either to revise and strengthen the old or form a new government, that would secure to themselves and posterity their liberties and properties. This State unfortunately was almost destroyed by internal commotions—party rage and private malice so occupied the thoughts of those who turned the wheels of government, that little attention was paid to the advice of any, when those worthy well-informed Delegates met in 1787, and without our assistance,<sup>1</sup> on cool deliberation, formed and proposed that Constitution the States have now individually chosen for to bind themselves together.—A government that must necessarily increase the welfare of all classes of men, and render them beloved and respected at home and abroad.

The want of power to protect us from invasion, or internal insurrections,—to promote our Agricultures and Manufactures at home, and our Commerce abroad was sufficiently exemplified under the old Confederation. How often during the last war, when Congress applied to



the States for men and money, were they either refused, or treated with silence and contempt—they were devoid of power to enforce obedience, and consequently were many times reduced to the brink of ruin and slavery, and saved alone by the kind assistance of our European allies, who advanced that property Congress had not credit to procure at home. This inability since the war has been sufficiently exemplified. Have not our enemies the Britons, in direct violation of the treaty of peace, held subjected to them our Western Territory? have not the Savages with impunity been murdering and stealing our Western Brethren? and have not their cries for assistance been neglected? is there a nation on earth to whom we carry the produce of our farms, or our manufactures, who do not impose such heavy and intolerable burthens as almost amount to a prohibition? our offers of treaties abroad were spurned at with contempt, and knowing we had not power under our divided inefficient government to retaliate, they have taken every advantage, and almost reduced our Commerce to a shadow, consequently our lands and their produce to small, very small value.

In this contemptible situation we were the scorn of other nations, the bye word, the reproach of all.—To remedy those defects the Constitution you are I hope about to adopt was proposed;—the adoption by the other States has gained them as many advantages as the most sanguine admirers of it could promise.

Calmly then, my dear fellow-citizens, revert to our particular situation:—Consult your own unbiassed judgments; let your generous sentiments and views be coextensive with the welfare of the Union, and I will answer for it, scarce one among you but will say, we ought and will be once more united with those we love, from interest and connexion.

That there are objections, no one will have the presumption to deny—a plan that would promote the exclusive interest of one, would be injurious to the other States. The President of the General Convention has told you, mutual concessions were made; they were indispensable, and that they did not expect the entire approbation of each State;—yet that he, with the members, religiously believed it would promote the lasting welfare, and secure the freedom and happiness of our beloved country.<sup>2</sup>—Experience thus far has verified those predictions—they increase in wealth and population.—Agriculture, Manufactures, and Commerce flourish—whilst we, *not gradually* but *rapidly*, are driving towards inevitable ruin and disgrace.—Our industrious and invaluable inhabitants, starving for want of encouragement, quit their native soil, emigrate westward and cultivate wildernesses;—Agriculture, the mistress of all arts, droops her head; our farms are decreased in value at least one half, and our dependent commerce, before limited by the

arbitrary will of foreigners, *on the rejection, or even the postponement of the adoption of the Constitution*, will be utterly ruined: We must not again expect from Congress a continuance of lenity.<sup>3</sup>—However well disposed they may be, justice to their own citizens demands an alteration of measures, and an entire stoppage of all commerce by land, and no other by sea except as foreigners, will follow.

Would to God our sufferings were at an end here, or that I had abilities to depicture, and you time to read them. Alas, difficulties crowd on difficulties—turn your eyes on which side you please; the prospect darkens, and not a glimpse of relief opens from any other quarter than our union with those States, we are allied to by kindred, by inclination, by interest and by situation.

Their impost promises a sufficiency to pay the expences of government, and their proportion of the foreign debt. When they call on us for payment of our part, how shall we be prepared? Will the present warm opposers, find any other method than by *direct taxation*—a mode of raising a revenue the present Congress will never adopt, but in case of invasion—no dependence can be placed on the payment of our Impost but in paper-money, whilst the present act continues;<sup>4</sup> and even allowing specie were paid, we should not raise one-third the sum by impost that we should if joined in the Union, with the advantage our local situation affords us, of importing for the consumption of a large part of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont.

Without dwelling longer on the misfortunes which surround us, and which you are sensible are daily in a rapid manner increasing,—Let me assure you the eyes of the world are on you—and individually, your names will be held up, either as the fomenters of discord and injustice, or the promoters of public justice and private virtue.—Let me request you to give a candid unbiassed hearing to the arguments used on both sides, and let me intreat you to give that construction which arises from your good judgment, not your jealousy to those around you. Beware of those *intriguing, designing* men, who will flock round and cry down all order and good government—be assured they are never happy but in broils, and that their importance continues only whilst the minds of honest men are unhappily heated by party prejudice—be wise, therefore, adopt, and *Make Hay while the Sun shines*.<sup>5</sup>

1. For Rhode Island's refusal to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention, see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxv–xxxvii, 8–23.

2. See the letter from George Washington, the president of the Constitutional Convention, to the president of Congress, 17 September 1787 (RCS:R.I., 322–23).

3. See *Newport Herald*, 25 February 1790 (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

4. For Rhode Island's 1789 impost law, see "Greenwichiensis," *Newport Herald*, 25 February, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 734–36n).

5. John Heywood, *A dialogue conteinyng the nomber in effect of all the prouerbes in the english tongue* . . . (London, 1546), Part I, chapter 3: “Whan the sonne synth make hey. whiche is to saie./Take tyme whan tyme comth, lest tyme stele awaie.”

**John Adams to Jabez Bowen**  
**New York, 27 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Your letter of the 15th never reached me till yesterday I condole with you in the unfavorable aspect of your elections: but still hope that your people will cool upon reflection and that a majority of the convention may be induced to accept the constitution. It is in vain to enquire what Congress may or can do, at present they can do nothing. The awful object before them, I mean the national debt, monopolizes the attention of Congress to such a degree that untill some system is digested no member of either house will be able to attend to any thing else. When the affair of Rhode Island shall be taken up, there will be twenty different plans proposed, time must be spent in examination discussion and deliberation.

He must be less than a thinking being who can be at a loss to foresee what Congress will ultimately do with Rhode Island, if she obstinately refuses to come in—But it would not be prudent in me to predict it The opposition of Rhode Island to the impost seems to have been the instrument which providence thought fit to use for the great purpose of establishing the present constitution:<sup>2</sup> I sincerely hope their infatuation may not oblige the United states to take severe measures at their expence to convince the people that their interests are in the power of their neighbours and to gain strength to the New government by punishing its rash opposers. I must finally say to you in confidence that I beleive Congress will never beg or pray or exhort your Antis to come in. They will leave them at perfect liberty—and whenever they take any steps it will not be till injuries shall be multiplied and their just resentment approved by all the world

1. FC, Adams Papers, Letterbook, MHi. Adams is responding to Bowen's letter of 15 February (RCS:R.I., 706–7).

2. A reference to Rhode Island's refusal to ratify the Impost of 1781, which killed the measure that would have given Congress an independent source of revenue (RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxviii).

**Samuel A. Otis to William Smith**  
**New York, 27 February 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . The prospect of accession by the State of R I is unfavorable, there are restless & abandoned men there who want curbing, but I know not when it will take place. . . .

1. RC, Smith-Carter Family Papers, MHi. The letter was addressed “Willm. Smith Esqr./Merch[an]t/Boston.” Otis (1740–1814), a graduate of Harvard College (1759) and a Federalist from Massachusetts, was a delegate to Congress, 1787–88, and secretary to the U.S. Senate, 1789–1814. Smith (1755–1816) was a very wealthy Boston merchant-shipowner.

### Solon, junior

**Providence Gazette, 27 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

It was observed, in a former paper, that the happiness of the people in all countries is the result of the spirit of the times, and of the administration of government, rather than the letter of their Constitutions, on paper or parchment;<sup>2</sup> and it must give real satisfaction to those who have seen or thought they saw defects in the new Federal Constitution, to learn that those defects are in any cases remedied by legislative regulation. I need instance only in one particular.—The want of security for trial by jury, in civil causes, has been a very popular objection against the Constitution. The act for establishing the judicial courts of the United States provides, that “*the trial of issues in fact, in the district courts, in all causes except civil causes of admiralty and maritime jurisdiction, shall be by jury.*”<sup>3</sup>

As all three of the branches of the legislative body are elective, and in a shorter period than even the only popular part of the British legislature,<sup>4</sup> let us hope, that, while the people at large are attentive to the characters of their rulers, and preserve and cherish a diffusive spirit of liberty and justice, the nation may be happy, and that *constitutional defects may be remedied by legislative regulation.*

Such is the crisis of our present affairs, that the question, however, does not seem to be, whether the best possible Constitution is presented to us?—But, whether it is for the interest of the State to remain in its present abandoned situation, in preference to adopting it, such as it is?

The public happiness is the aggregate of that of individuals; and just and faithful rulers will have an equal and impartial eye to the conditions of all classes of people, as the head of a family regards all branches of it with the same paternal affection. That will be thought a very defective administration, that does not attend to the distresses of a part, and even a small part, of the people; nay, let me say, of an individual—for no individual can be supposed ever to have entered into society on such terms, as that he might fall a sacrifice to any policy, without any crime on his part. Protection and allegiance ought to be in all cases reciprocal. That government which provides only for the majority of the people, treads on too narrow ground.—The reasonable wants and

the various conditions of all must be supplied, and attended to, otherwise all may in their turns suffer.

The proneness of mankind to bandy into parties, is an evil incident to human nature, and perhaps irremediable. Great and wise men, instead of fomenting this passion, will endeavour to assuage it—to soften the tempers of their fellow-citizens, and to sweeten their dispositions—to heal breaches, rather than to widen them.—However this humane and generous service may be rewarded, in times when real merit is out of the question, or to whatever unworthy motives it may be ascribed, it will not fail ultimately of rewarding itself.

The duration of a party is perhaps not reducible, in all cases, to accurate calculation; yet there are certain general canons that apply. It will be directly as the extent of territory, and inversely according to the number and aggravation of the injuries committed—for which latter reason it is the policy of those in power, if they are actuated by no better principle, to listen to the cries of distress, and to consider that the best way to kill our enemies is to do it with kindness.

⟨The people of this State, from its first settlement, have been used to breath in a free air—their spirits are firm, and unbroken by the inroads of arbitrary power: Even the persons who apprehend the present zeal of those who oppose the adoption of the new Constitution to be a mistaken zeal, cannot fail in many instances to applaud the principles that nourish it: But let me pray and beseech those whose breasts glow with the love of real liberty, to attend for a moment to the actual situation of the sea-port towns, and of our seafaring brethren. Cast your eyes on the people that are planted around our bay, in a circuit of more than one hundred miles; consider their various distresses, and will they not reach the inmost recesses of your hearts? Will they not move the humane, the tender feelings of the mind, and melt your very souls in sympathetic distress? Will not the complaints of a long train of mechanics and labourers, in want of business and of bread, move you? Will not the still greater distresses of the poor, daily increasing in their streets, affect you? Or shall I paint to your view the impoverished widow in her lonely cell, dividing her mouldy bread among her famished children? Will not such scenes—scenes not of imagination, but real life, interest all your feelings, and force the tear of compassion?

There remain many other sources of conviction to be applied to. The commercial system adopted by the federal States will turn and settle their trade into other channels than those heretofore accustomed, and it will not be a very easy thing to command its return to this little State, more especially exhausted as it is of its trading stock and resources, and drained of its inhabitants—not to mention the stain fixed

on our credit as a people, which it is to be feared will not be easily wiped off.

This State has an account open with the other twelve, which are now in the receipt of a great revenue from their trade. Can it be thought that we shall be admitted to a rateable participation of it hereafter, without producing an equivalent? as, suppose two years elapse before our accession, and the net proceeds of their revenue amount to 2,000,000 dollars, and our estimated quota of it amounts to a fiftieth, or 40,000 dollars—shall we not be called on to make good our 40,000 dollars on acceding to the Union, and from what funds will it be raised? Is it not well known, that our present duties are payable in paper, in which the State may sustain a loss of 30 to 40 per cent.? And after our accession to the Union, what resources will be at our command to supply the deficiency, other than a capitation or a land tax?—Let those resolve this difficulty, who advise a longer continuance in our present situation.)<sup>5</sup>

1. "Solon, junior" was perhaps David Howell. See "Solon, jun.," *Providence Gazette*, 5 July 1788, note 1 (RCS:R.I., 348).

2. See "Solon, junior," *Providence Gazette*, 9 August 1788 (RCS:R.I., 386).

3. The quoted text is the last sentence in section nine of the Judiciary Act of 1789 (DHFFC, V, 1154).

4. U.S. representatives were elected for a two-year term, the president for a four-year term, and U.S. senators for a six-year term, while members of the House of Commons, per the Septennial Act (1716), were elected for a term that could last no more than seven years.

5. The New York *Daily Advertiser*, 16 March, and *Pennsylvania Packet*, 20 March, reprinted the text in angle brackets under a "PROVIDENCE (R.I.) March 5." dateline with substantial revisions to the first paragraph. The *Daily Advertiser's* revision of the first paragraph is as follows:

The people of this state, from its first settlement have been used to breath in a free air, their spirits are firm and unbroken by the modes of arbitrary power. Even the persons who apprehend the present zeal of those who opposed the adoption of the new constitution to be of a mistaken kind cannot fail, in many instances, to applaud the principles that nourish it. But let us attend for a moment to the actual situation of our seaport towns and of our sea faring brethren. Let us take a view of the people planted round our bay, in a circuit of more than 100 miles, consider their various distresses and will they not move the humane, the tender feelings of the mind.

"Yes—duller must he be than the fat weed

That roots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,

Who would not grieve for this."

Will not the complaints of a long train of mechanics and day labourers in want of business and of bread, be of some weight in the federal scale—the still greater distresses of the poor, daily increasing in the streets—the impoverish'd widow in her lonely cell dividing her mouldy bread among her famished children—will not such scenes—scenes not of imagination, but real life, interest all the feelings natural to the heart of man, and force the tear of compassion?—

The quoted verse is adapted from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, scene 5, lines 32–34.

**From Caleb Strong**

**New York, pre-28 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The idea of a perpetual separation cannot I am sure find place in the mind of one reflecting man. There has been no instance in the history of mankind when two contiguous and unconnected states have existed for a length of time in [un]interrupted peace, and the sources of contention in the present case would be numerous—By the accession of North Carolina you stand alone.

1. Printed: *Flying Quill* (Goodspeed's), March 1941, Item 51. A longer extract from this letter, without attribution, was printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 20 May 1790 (below). The *Chronicle* indicated that this letter was written before Strong's letter of 28 February to Theodore Foster (below).

Strong (1745–1819), a lawyer and a graduate of Harvard College (1764), had been a Massachusetts delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, but left at least three weeks before the final adjournment on 17 September 1787. He voted to ratify the Constitution in the Massachusetts Convention on 6 February 1788. Strong was a U.S. Senator, 1789–96, and governor of Massachusetts, 1800–1807, 1812–16.

**John Adams to Brown & Francis**

**New York, 28 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Your Letter of the 16th. I recd only by the Post of last Wednesday.— I am really much affected at the obstinate Infatuation of so great a Part of the People of Rhode Island. It is inconceivable how men of common Sense can reconcile such a Conduct to their Understanding, men of common Honesty, to their Consciences; or men of human Feelings, to their Hearts.

Do the Antis of Rhode Island expect that the Congress of twelve states will send them a Petition, to pray them humbly, to take a share in the great Council of the Nation? or do they wait for the President to send them an Ambassador in great Pomp and state to negotiate their Accession to the Union?

The Inhabitants of Rhode Island are Freemen and I presume will be treated like Freemen. Congress will not think themselves authorised, by the Principles they profess, to make a Conquest of that People, or to bring them into the Union by Coertion.

If the Convention should reject the Constitution or adjourn without adopting it, Congress will probably find it necessary to treat them as they are, as Foreigners, and extend all the Laws to them as such. This will be disagreeable because it will involve our Friends in Inconvenience

as well as others. But you know that in all national Calamities, the same Fortune attends the good and the Evil the Just and unjust.<sup>2</sup> Providence itself does not distinguish, and Nations cannot.—If the lime, the Barley and all other Articles whether of foreign or domestic Growth or Manufacture, should be Subjected to a Duty, it would soon shew your People that their Interests are in the Power of their Neighbours.

The benign Influence of the new Constitution, upon the Commerce, Manufactures and Agriculture of the Country, has been already Seen and felt, in as great a degree as the most sanguine Admirer of it, could have reasonably expected. If the People of your state will not be convinced either by Reasoning or Experience, what can be done? but to let them have their Way, and treat them like Aliens as they choose to be considered?

I cannot however doubt, but that when the Convention meet and begin to think, converse and debate upon the Subject a majority of reasonable Men will be found.

1. RC (photocopy of original), John Brown Collection, MSS 312.1, RHi. The original is in Henry A. L. Brown Deposit, MSS 1031, RHi. Adams's letterbook copy is in the Adams Papers, MHi. Adams is responding to Brown & Francis' letter of 16 February (RCS:R.I., 707–8).

2. Matthew 5:45. "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust."

**John Adams to William Ellery  
New York, 28 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Many months ago I received a kind letter from you,<sup>2</sup> which by some sad accident or strange fatality has never been answered, I really know not how this happened: but I hope you will excuse it and beleive me to be as I am, at all times ready to promote your views, expressed in it as far as I may have opportunity and ability. We are very greatly disappointed in the election of Delegates to your Convention. We are told that a majority are unfriendly to the union of the nation. I still flatter myself however, that when the members assemble they will see objects in a new light and feel affections for their sister states which they have not yet been sensible of. It is now become of more importance than ever for your State to act right, as it will not be possible much longer to extend that lenity and indulgence, which has been hitherto granted.<sup>3</sup> Since the accession of North Carolina, I have learned with certainty that a correspondence has been maintained between your Anti's and theirs, and I wish to know whether the hopes of your opposition are



still supported by secret communications from Virginia or Boston. Insinuations of that kind are thrown out here.—What can any Gentlemen mean? Can they coolly or warmly wish to raise a storm? The national debt engages all attention at present; but when that is over if Rhode Island should be still refractory, something must be done. I should be glad to hear from you Sir, and will be a better correspondent for the future, being with great and sincere esteem and regard Yours

1. FC, Adams Papers, Letterbook, MHi.
2. For Ellery to Adams, 30 March 1789, see Mfm:R.I.
3. See *Newport Herald*, 25 February 1790 (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

### **Caleb Strong to Theodore Foster**

**New York, 28 February 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Our Accounts from several Gentlemen in your State are not very favourable as to the Fate of the Constitution with you, but be the Event what it may I am glad a Convention has been called, as the Result of it will enable us to determine what to depend upon, if the Constitution is rejected in direct Terms, or if the Convention adjourns without acceptance, which, after so long Time to reflect on the Subject will be only a delicate Mode of Rejection the Government here will be justified even to the discerning People in Rhode Island in pursuing Measures that in other Circumstances might be thought severe, but I hope your Expectations of an Adoption will not be disappointed. . . .

1. RC, Foster Papers, RHi. The letter was actually dated “Feby. 29th. 1790” by Strong, but 1790 was not a leap year. The letter was postmarked “Feb 28.” Foster docketed the address page as “Letter from/Honble. Caleb Strong Esqr/Dated Feby 29th./1790/Recd. March 7th. 1790./Being Sunday Evening after/my Return from Convention.—/of the State at South Kingstown.” An extract of this letter was printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 20 May (below).

### **Richard Bassett to George Read**

**New York, 1 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Rhoe Island it is said will not come in, that there is a Majority of 12. against it—The Eastern Men here are exerting all possible influence to bring them in, from this motive principally alone I fear, to give a Clearer decided Majority. . . .

1. RC, Richard S. Rodney Collection of Read Papers, Book B, Delaware Historical Society. Bassett (1745–1815) was a Dover, Del., lawyer. Bassett and Read represented Delaware in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and signed the Constitution. Both men were serving in the U.S. Senate.

**Solon, junior****Providence United States Chronicle, 4 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The efficiency of government is the life of it. The principles of the late Union were deficient in this particular. The subjects of Congressional legislation were sovereign States, and the only effectual mean of compelling obedience was war. The subjects of legislation under the new government are as numerous as the individual inhabitants, and the mean of securing obedience apply to their personal honour and interests.

Requisitions of Congress made on the States, and by them disregarded, at once swell the journals of the late Congress, and prostrate the national honour.

It has been generally said, that this State is in advance,<sup>2</sup>—admitting the fact, and that we had continued to exhaust and depauperate our people, by furnishing our quotas, what remedy was given us against the delinquent States, some of which had put nothing into the general coffers since the close of the war? Clearly there was no compulsive power in the hands of Congress, but beginning a domestic war to defray the expences incurred in the foreign one.

Mark the policy of the new general government—they have authority to apply, by their officers, to individuals,—they arrest the cash where it is to be had, and bring their application as closely to the people of one State as another.

The want of an Executive was a capital defect in the old Congress;—this defect was palliated, but not fully remedied, by the establishment of the great departments,<sup>3</sup>—for they were the creatures of Congress, and, as such, dependant on that body; they were not possessed of native vigour, and their secondary powers were inadequate to the great object.

The powerful Executive in the new government is the soul of it, and its glory, as the man who fills that place, is of the nation. When an individual is personally responsible to the people for the operation of their laws, his personal honour, his patriotism, and every consideration, that can reach the mind of man, secures him from failing in his duty; and the estate, or interest, every subordinate officer thus appointed, will have in his office will guard him, in many instances, perhaps, no less than his virtue, from the temptations of indolence and corruption.

The power also of establishing Judicial Courts for punishing offenders, as well as for the purposes of distributive justice in matters of property—the execution of the decrees of which being also secured by the aid of the militias of the district, when necessary, gives weight and dignity, as well as energy, to the public corrective arm of the general government.

1. "Solon, junior," was perhaps David Howell. See "Solon, jun.," *Providence Gazette*, 5 July 1788, note 1 (RCS:R.I., 348).

2. A report by the Confederation Board of Treasury indicates that by 31 March 1788 Rhode Island had paid 24% of its share of the specie and indents levied by congressional requisitions from October 1781 to October 1787. Five states had paid smaller percentages of their quotas. (See RCS:N.Y., 14, note 4.)

3. The Confederation Congress created four separate departments: Foreign Affairs, Finance (later the Board of Treasury), War, and the Post Office. See Jennings B. Sanders, *Evolution of Executive Departments of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935).

**Brown & Benson to Thayer, Bartlett & Co.  
Providence, 6 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . The Convention of this State assembled this Week to discuss the Constitution but we expect they will make a short adjournment before they ratify it We are extremely impatient to be introduced to the embraces of the Union and hope the other states will e'er long rejoice at the return of the Prodigal.<sup>2</sup> . . .

1. FC, Brown Papers, RPJCB. The letter was sent "~~to~~ Capt. Pain." and was delivered by Pain on 16 April. Thayer, Bartlett & Co. responded the next day (Mfm:R.I.). Thayer, Bartlett & Co. was a mercantile firm in Charleston, S.C.

2. For the parable of the Prodigal Son, see Luke 15:11–32.

**William Ellery to John Adams  
Newport, post-6 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

Engaged as you are in public business, and this State not having shown a disposition to join the Union I did not wonder, although I could not but regret, that my letter should remain so long unanswered.<sup>2</sup>—

I wish that our affairs now afforded a prospect of a speedy accession.—

Before you receive this letter you will have heard of the proceedings of our Convention.—They met, framed a bill of rights, collected a long string of amendments to the Constitution, ordered them to be laid before the people at the annual meeting for proxying for Genl. Officers and chusing representatives, and adjourned to the fourth monday in May.—Unless something is done by Congress which will make the Antis feel they will in my opinion adjourn again and again.—The Feds will continue to exert themselves;—but the Antis appear to be steeled against the most powerful addresses to their reason, their passions and their interest.—It is the opinion of many that they are supported and hardend in their opposition from the quarters you mentioned;—but it cannot yet be reduced to a certainty.—The report of the Commée of

your State, appointed to consider what further Amendments are necessary to be added to the Constitution of the United States,<sup>3</sup> will give an handle to our Antis to put off our accession.—If it is the wish of your State that this State should speedily become a member of the federal government it appears to me that their conduct is altogether impolitic.—

Some of our Antis have had the courage to say, that if the State stood out but six months longer, there would be such insurrections in the other States as would overturn the New Government;—and that their opposition would be the salvation not only of our own but of the thirteen States.—

Others talk as if they really thought Congress would still extend their lenity and indulgence to the trade of this State.—When the Federal members of the Convention, in order to obtain an adjournment to the last monday in March, represented in strong, pathetic<sup>4</sup> terms, the distresses in which the Sea-port towns would be involved at the expiration of the Act reviving the suspension of the navigation Act,<sup>5</sup> an Anti replied that they were in no danger,—that upon an Application of the merchants further indulgence would be granted;—for Congress would do any thing to favour their friends.—

The operation of the navigation act will have no influence upon the Antis until the fall, and then they will probably rather pay an advanced freight, and receive less profit upon what they may have to export to the other States, than accede to the Union.—

Something must be done.—

An address to the Genl. Assembly at their Session on the first wednesday in May next, setting forth the advantages which will result to the United States and this State from her accession, and the necessity which Congress will be under to use rigorous measures if she should still persist in her opposition might answer the purpose.—

A requisition of our quota of the public debt with a declaration that, unless it was collected at the time assigned, an equivalent would be distrained would have a good effect.—

If Congress have a right to consider us as a part of the United States, and to extend their Genl. Government to us, and would make a declaration that they have such authority, and would exercise it if the State did not adopt the Constitution, I have no doubt but that it would be adopted at the next Session of the Convention.—

Wisdom as Father Sherman<sup>6</sup> used to say, in difficult cases, is profitable to direct, and the great Council of the United States are possessed of a large share of it.—

Uncertain as it is when this State will adopt the New Government; yet it must sooner or later become a member of the Union, and federal Officers be appointed for it. . . .

With great esteem and regard I am Yr. friend & servt.

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi. Ellery dated the letter "March 1790." The letter was written after the Rhode Island Convention adjourned on 6 March. In the omitted portion of the letter, Ellery asks for Adams's support in gaining an appointment as collector of customs for Newport.

2. Ellery had last written to Adams on 30 March 1789 (Mfm:R.I.) when he asked for Adams's help in obtaining an appointment as a federal district judge. Adams replied to that letter on 28 February 1790 (above).

3. See the Boston *Herald of Freedom*, 23 March 1790, note 2 (below).

4. "Pathetic" means moving, passionate, or in earnest.

5. See the *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

6. Representative Roger Sherman of Connecticut.

### **Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox Newport, 7 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Your kind favour of the 25th Ulto came safe to hand, I must beg you to accept my warmest thanks for your friendship, in my Application to the President of the United States. Last Evening our State Convention after a Session of six days, rose, without taking the Question, upon the adopting, or rejecting, the Constitution of the United States, and have adjourned themselves to the 24th. of May next then to meet in Newport. This Extraordinary Step was warmly opposed, but without effect; Reason, Duty; necessity, and every other Argument was made use of, to no purpose. The grand aim of our Anti party by postponing this Business is to secure themselves in the State Government (which Choice will be the Middle of April next) whereby they expect to have sufficient strength in the Legislature to make Choice of their own kind of Creatures to represent this State in the Senate of the United States, and thereby have sufficient Influence to establish such of their friends in office as will best serve their purpose; every step is taking by us to frustrate their design, and from present Appearances I am warranted to say we shall be able to Obtain a Majority in the State Legislature.

The Convention in Order to Cover their design and keep in with the Ignorant, have by a Committee of their Body reported a Number of Articles they call a Bill of Rights, all of which the Constitution has provided for; Likewise Nineteen Amendments to the Constitution, principally taken from New York, Massachusetts, and North Carolina,<sup>2</sup> this Notable performance they have ordered printed and sent to the several Towns in the State for the Information of the people on proxing Day.<sup>3</sup>

This Cobweb Covering to their Iniquity, will be set in a true Light, and that advantage which they expect to derive therefrom will be turned to their Injury.

I do myself the pleasure to Inclose you the Newport Herald,<sup>4</sup> which States the proceedings of the late Convention.

That we may find Deliverance, ere long from a Sett of Men whose great Object is to destroy good Government, is the Ardent Wish of,

1. RC, Knox Papers, GLC 02437.04533, The Gilder Lehrman Collection, courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, at the New-York Historical Society.

2. For the Massachusetts, New York, and North Carolina amendments, see CC:508 or RCS:Mass., 1468–71; CC:818 or RCS:N.Y., 2326–35; and CC:821.

3. See “Rhode Island Convention: Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments,” 6 March (RCS:R.I., 976–81).

4. The *Newport Herald* printed accounts of the Convention’s proceedings on 4 and 11 March (VII below).

**William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington  
Newport, 8 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

I have received all the letters you have written to me which could have come to hand by this time.—

In answer to that of the 13th. of February I would observe that the Militia system of the Secretary of War<sup>2</sup> has not been made publick; because it was thought it might hurt the cause of federalism; especially among the Quakers; and as you have not desired my sentiments upon it I have thought it prudent to say little or nothing about it.—Some plan of national defense is certainly necessary, and that which will be the least burthensome and expensive, and most agreeable to the spirit and manners of the people, will in general be the most suitable to adopt.—I coincide with you in opinion respecting the probable effects of the Secretary’s plan.—I presume that no plan of militia regulations will be fixed upon this Session.—Your whole time will be taken up I imagin in contriving and establishing a system for funding the public debt.—I have not as yet seen Mr. Maddison’s plan.<sup>3</sup>—If a discrimination can be possibly made which will satisfy the origl. holders of securities, and the present possessors of them, and a considerable saving be made to the public it ought to be made.—It cannot be expected that the great council of the nation should split hairs.—De minimis non curat lex,<sup>4</sup> and the trouble of making discriminations, should not be suffered to outweigh the public Interest.—I trust that no system of finance will be determined upon until Congress shall be sure of sufficient funds for discharging the interest of the debt they shall contract to pay.—If they should fail here the whole fabrick of public credit,

however speciously and ingeniously it may be built, will tumble into ruin.—You have time enough to consult about and wisdom enough to form a plan for establishing public credit, which shall be satisfactory to the people at large.—To please every one is impossible.—We are informed that your house have, by a large Majority, determined against making any discrimination between the Original and present holders of public securities,—that you are upon that part of the Secry's report which respects the Assumption of the State Debts, and that no debt prior to the commencement of the war will be considered as a part thereof, because, I suppose, the admission of debts which accrued before that period might too much enhance the aggregate debt.—

You have heard of the Act of this State forfeiting such of the State's securities, given for articles furnished during the war, which were not exchanged for paper bills at par by certain periods.<sup>5</sup> Some persons in consequence of that Act received paper in exchange for their Securities and delivered them up into the Treasury of the State,—and others refused to exchange them, and still hold their Securities.—Will an estimate be made of the specie value of the paper received by the first, and the difference between that and the Specie value of their Securities be considered as a part of this State's Debt?—and will the Securities which have not been delivered up come within the description of and be viewed as State debt?—Upon the principles of Justice I think that they, who, for fear of loosing the whole of their debt, received in fact but a part only, ought to have the deficiency made up to them;—and that they who still hold their securities ought to receive their full value.—It would be hard indeed if the last should loose their whole debt; because they refused to submit to a most iniquitous law.—

When the New Constitution shall be adopted the Fed's will do every thing in their power to prevent an Antifedl. Election to Congress,—The Convention, after sitting only one week, have adjourned to the fourth monday in May next to meet in this town.—

It was the determination of the Feds to force the Antis to a decision on the Constitution but they could not effect it.—When they failed in that point they moved for an adjournment to the last monday in March; but could not succede,—they then tried for the fourth monday in April, here they failed also,—they represented that the State would suffer great injury if the Constitution was not adopted before the time limited for the suspension of the navigation act of the U.S. as it respects this State;<sup>6</sup> that the trade of the State would be ruined, a great number of its inhabit[ant]s be thrown out of employ, and in a word that we should be involved in the deepest distress;—but it was to no purpose,—the Antis must have a bill of rights, and a long string of Amendments to

lay before the freemen at the annual Town-meetings for proxying for Genl. Officers on the third wednesday in April next,—then the time for planting Indian Corn would be at hand,—that the merchants would be able on application to Congress to procure another revival of the suspension act &c &c, and in short an adjournment could not be obtained to a shorter period than that I have mentioned.—The Antis carried their bill of rights and twenty amendments, exclusive of the amendments proposed by Congress all which except the first they approved.<sup>7</sup>—The bill of rights is I am informed innocent enough.—Their Amendments are made up of the Amendments proposed by N. Carolina, and some other States.—In the course of the debate on the Constitution they made but few objections, reserving to them a place in their Amendments.—On every question which they considered as important, and which they had settled in their private meetings they carried a majority from four or five to twelve.—Some others they lost by a small majority.—What will be the result of the next meeting of the Convention it is impossible to say,—it has hitherto been the design of the Antis to amuse Congress and the Feds,—and in my opinion they will continue to do it until Congress shall take some measures that will make them feel more sensibly than will the operation of the navigation Act.—If Congress have a right to comprehend this State in the exercise of their general government, and were to declare that they had such right, and would exercise it unless the State acceded to the Union it would have a powerful effect;—this and an annihilation of our State jurisdiction, and a division of the State they are more afraid of than a requisition of our quota of the public debt, the loss of this States share in the profits of the Western territory; or any thing else.—

The Feds will endeavour to gain some of them over to their side between this and the next meeting of the Convention, and to lessen their numbers in the legislature at the election in April but exitus in dubio est.<sup>8</sup> . . .

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Printed: DHFFC, XVIII, 784–86. The portion of the letter not printed here concerns payment of Ellery for his services as commissioner of the Continental Loan Office for Rhode Island. Endorsed by Huntington as “Recd the 18th March/1790/Answered March 23d 1790/by Capt. Brown with 300/Dollars—BH.”

2. Secretary of War Henry Knox’s plan, drawn up by him and President Washington, nationalized the state militias and was widely and bitterly opposed after it was presented to Congress in January 1790. Congress’ Uniform Militia Act of 1792 bore little resemblance to the Knox-Washington plan as it did not provide for effective national regulation of the state militias. See Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword . . .* (New York and London, 1975), 128–38, and DHFFC, V, 1433–57.

3. James Madison opposed Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton’s 14 January 1790 proposal to fund the federal debt by issuing new securities for the entire face value to the present holders. Madison wanted to issue some securities to the original holders



of the debt and only a portion of the face value to the present holders, many of whom were believed to be speculators. (See DHFFC, V, 713–937, especially pp. 840–41, for Madison’s “plan.”)

4. Latin: The law does not concern itself with trifles.

5. For the funding of the state debt in quarterly installments, see the “Introduction” (RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxiii–xxxv).

6. A law, dated 8 February 1790, exempted Rhode Island from duties charged against foreign countries until 1 April 1790. See *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

7. See “Rhode Island Convention: Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments,” 6 March (RCS:R.I., 976–81).

8. Latin: The outcome is in doubt.

### **Jabez Bowen to John Adams Providence, 9 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Your favour of the 27th. ulto came safe to hand yesterday.<sup>2</sup>

I attended the Convention last week and after choosing a President &c we heard the Constitution Read by paragra[h]s with the objections which were verry few and of no great importance, and were fully answered. a Committe was then appointed to draw a Bill of Rights with such Amendments as they thot necessary. which they Reported and after the necessary discussion they were Received. A Motion was then made to Adjorn. which was carrid by a Majority of *Nine*. the Bill of Rights with the Amendments were Orderd to be Printed<sup>3</sup> and sent out to the people to be consider’d of by them at the Anual Town Meetings to be held on the Third Monday of April and the Convention Adjorned to the Twenty fourth Day of May.

We are not much disappointed in the event but much Mortify’d; more especially as we cañot see any end to our sufferings, if good arose to the U[nite]d States from our opposition to the five per Cent Impost.<sup>4</sup> I fancy your Excellency will be obliged to Rack your Invention to point out the advantages that can possibly arise to the United or to this particular State from our late determination.

We had five old Tories in the Convention who would keep a Day of Thanksgiveing on hearing that the Federal Government was dessolved, and some of the principle officers carred away prisoners to Babilon alius G.B.<sup>5</sup> we had many of Desperate Circumstances and the principle heads of the Papermoney faction, all added their strength together made the bottom to[o] firm [to be?] broken, and these same people never will come so long as they can possibly keep a Majority. the Convention we are almost discouraged from making further Exertions. our best Citizens are looking out to dispose of their property and to Remove out of the Government. the Restrictions on Trade will fall intirely on our Friends at which the oposers of the Fedl. Government will

be well pleased so that on the whole we begin to turn our Eyes back on the Country that we left and must all turn Tories, for any thing I can see.

be so kind Sir as to let the President know how our Convention has ended and that the Friends of the Federal Government are in desponding Circumstances at present.

We would willingly Recive the necessary Officers for Collecting the Impost; if Congress would Order them to be appointed.

So I Remain with much Esteem your most Obedeint & verry Hum[b]le Servant

P S. as the Freeman at large are to take up the Amendments on the 17th of April<sup>6</sup> I cannot help reminding you that it will be a good opportunity for an Remonstrance or Adress from Congress to the People stateing the Reasons for their Adopting & the probable Consequences of their Rejection.

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi.

2. See Adams to Bowen, 27 February (above).

3. See "Rhode Island Convention: Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments," 6 March (RCS:R.I., 976–81).

4. Rhode Island's rejection of the Impost of 1781 killed the measure. See RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxviii.

5. "Carried away as prisoners to Babylon alias Great Britain." Bowen is alluding to the Israelite captivity in Babylon.

6. See "Town Meetings Consider Rhode Island Convention Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments," 21 April 1790 (below).

## Agricola

### Newport Herald, 11 March 1790<sup>1</sup>

Mr. EDDES, In observing a piece in your paper No. 157, with the signature of *Greenwichiensis*,<sup>2</sup> I confess that I am scarcely possessed of penetration sufficient to discover whether the author was really serious, or meant to treat the subject in a ludicrous light—if serious, he may possibly deserve an answer.

This author animadverts on two pieces published in the Herald No. 156,<sup>3</sup> in which are contained some pertinent observations on the present crisis of public affairs, and weighty reasons for the speedy adoption of the New Constitution, and the dangerous consequences that would arise to this State, if it should be rejected, or the adoption of it procrastinated.—Those this incomparable politician treats as mere bugbears, fantoms, and metaphysical cobwebs, of the authors own raising and without any foundation in reason or nature; and after accusing the whole race of politicians of neglect or want of understanding, he, Machieval like, launches forth into a field that has remained, and ever will

remain untrodden, unless by men who are so unhappy as to be deprived of reason, or cease the exercise of the same.

Let us hear the advice that this sage statesman gives us.—“Let the Constitution be immediately rejected, we have dallied with it too long for our interest,—the revenue act of the State be repealed—and our ports thrown open to all the world,—commerce will then revive, and agriculture and manufactures flourish.—Our harbours will be covered with the ships, and our stores be replenished with the produce of foreign nations.”—O delightful prospect! O halcyon days! may this golden age, moved on more rapid than the car of time, soon be with us—then shall the heads of the wise of the earth be converted into barbers blocks, and when too late be convinced that virtue and honesty are mere chimeras and fit only to warm the brain of the enthusiast—and that old rags possess more intrinsic worth than gold or silver, or the most durable property.—But to be serious, I would beg that Greenwichensis would inform me what inducements foreign nations can have to cover our harbours with their ships, or fill our stores with their produce? Is it the practice of mercantile bodies to send their ships and produce to countries where they can have nothing in return? And where are the staples, or the circulating medium, that will induce foreigners to trade with us, or those manufactures for which he tells us a high demand will ensue? But if he should fail in answering those points, in any other way, I suppose he will refer us to his piece, where he says, that “all the States on the Continent of America will bring hither their produce, their manufactures and their money to exchange for and to purchase the foreign articles in which we shall abound,”—and to conclude, “we shall soon become the wealthiest, the happiest and the most envied State in the world.”

I am surprised that a man possessed of such an amazing foresight had not discovered, that a government, invested with such extensive powers, as many of his party ascribe to the Federal Government, should not have the authority and inclination to prevent any commercial intercourse between this State and the States under their jurisdiction.

Would the other States, when they saw all *that wealth and happiness*, which he has painted out<sup>t</sup> rolling in full tides into this most “envied State,” set down contented with their situation? Would they acquiesce in the idea, that that child whom they had fostered and nurtured, for whom they had expended their blood and treasure, should now secede from her Sister States and refuse to pay her quota of that debt by which she purchased independence; and not only refuse to pay her proportion, but prevent *their* discharging it, by intercepting their trade and depriving them of their revenues? No—surely they will not tamely look

on and suffer their resources to be engrossed and their wealth swallowed up by a people whom they had raised to independence—And what nation on earth will interfere? What European nation[s] are such novices, as to expend millions in protecting the trade of a people who never will refund them a groat?<sup>5</sup>—Is it the French, the Dutch, or the Spanish, that are coming three thousand miles to protect and support you? And for what? Because you are unwilling to pay them the monies you borrowed of them twelve or fourteen years since, and prevent those who are willing, from refunding it.<sup>6</sup>

A truly glorious cause! and characteristic of their wisdom and policy!—No, believe me my countrymen, whatever may be the insinuations of designing men, there is no power in Christendom that will interfere in support of our sovereignty, nor, had they the abilities, would they have a disposition, of defending us—Let us no longer be led about by the illusions of fancy, but taking reason for our guide and pole-star, adopt a form of government, wherein safety and security may be ensured to our persons and properties, trade and manufactures extend their salutary influence—and every one rest in peace under his own vine and fig-tree.<sup>7</sup>

1. For a response to “Agricola,” see “Greenwichensis,” *Newport Herald*, 18 March (below).

2. See “Greenwichensis,” *Newport Herald*, 25 February (above).

3. See “A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island” and “A Freeholder,” *Newport Herald*, 18 February (both above).

4. To express or display by painting.

5. A groat was a British silver coin worth four pence.

6. A reference to the loans given to the U.S. during the Revolution by France, Spain, and the Netherlands.

7. Micah 4:4.

### **Newport Herald, 11 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

In commencing a detail of the proceedings of the Convention of this State, we forebore a recital of the conduct of the leading characters in opposition since the appointment of it, from the flattering hopes that the Constitution would be not only investigated, but candidly decided on; but these hopes being blasted, duty and honor forbid us to be silent.

Previous to the election of Delegates, letters of an insidious nature were circulated in every town where they could be supposed to influence, and in many of them were read in open meeting—innumerable falshoods were propagated, and every artifice used, to excite and continue the fatal delusion of the people.—In one of the towns, the Serjeant was furnished by a leading Antifederalist with a bugbear lie, to

relate to every Freeman whom he warned, in order to excite prejudices against the federal candidates—And when this partizan was charged with fabricating the lie, he had the effrontery to declare, “*that he was a party man, and would stick at no measures to carry his point.*” A spirit of insurrection was disseminated in the Northern and Western parts of the State, and several of the leaders of the Anties (among whom were some who sustain offices under government) at a clandestine meeting, actually deliberated upon levying a body of men, and marching them in a hostile manner, to prevent the meeting of the Convention—Though this measure was not attempted to be carried into execution, it however shows the licentiousness of the opposition.

1. Reprinted: Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 18 March; Hartford *American Mercury*, 22 March; Northampton, Mass., *Hampshire Gazette*, 24 March; New York *Daily Advertiser*, 26 March; and *Pennsylvania Packet*, 5 April. This item comes immediately before the *Newport Herald's* report of the Convention proceedings for 2–6 March (VII, below).

### **Newport Herald, 11 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The members of the Convention in opposition to the Constitution, met in North-Kingston on Sunday evening, and afterwards at South-Kingston, on Monday and Tuesday evening:—At these Nocturnal Meetings,<sup>2</sup> the adjournment was agreed upon, and the time fixed as was voted by the Convention—One powerful reason which operated at those meetings, to induce an adjournment of the Convention to so distant a period, was an expectation that the report of the Secretary of the Treasury,<sup>3</sup> would create great uneasiness in the States in the Union, which would terminate in insurrections, and thereby would establish the antifederal power in this State, and make it the centre of opposition.

From the conduct and conversation of many of the members of the majority in the Convention, in and out of the House, we have reason to believe, that it is their determination again to adjourn, and never to agree to an adoption, but upon the most urgent necessity.

In justice to the numerous spectators who attended the Convention, we cannot but observe, that although many of them were known to entertain an unfavorable opinion of the new Government, yet they conducted themselves with great decency; and from the attention which they gave to the debates, and what has since fallen from them, we are led to believe, that many of them are persuaded that they have been deceived, and were before unacquainted with the merits of the Constitution.

1. Reprinted: *Boston Gazette*, 15 March; *Massachusetts Spy*, 18 March; *New York Gazette of the United States*, 20 March; *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 25 March; and *Pennsylvania Packet*, 31

March. On 5 April the *Pennsylvania Packet* again reprinted the second paragraph. The first two paragraphs were reprinted in the *Salem Mercury*, 16 March; Newburyport, Mass., *Essex Journal*, 17 March; and *Connecticut Courant*, 22 March. The first paragraph appeared in the Charleston *City Gazette*, 14 May. The Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 18 March, and Northampton, Mass., *Hampshire Gazette*, 24 March, reprinted the second paragraph. This item comes immediately after the *Newport Herald's* report of the Convention proceedings for 2–6 March (VII, below).

2. For more on “nocturnal conventions,” see “Glossary” (RCS:R.I., 317).

3. For Alexander Hamilton’s 14 January 1790 report on public credit, see DHFFC, V, 743–823.

### **Providence United States Chronicle, 11 March 1790**

The Convention of this State, which convened last Week at South-Kingstown, adjourned on Saturday, to meet at Newport on the 24th of May next—having previously agreed to a Bill of Rights, and proposed a Number of Amendments to be annexed to the Ratification of the Constitution, provided they are agreeable to the Inhabitants of the State.—Copies of which are ordered to be printed and laid before the Freemen of the State, at the annual Town-Meetings next Month.

“It is highly honorary to the Convention of this State, and to the Gentlemen who supported the Measure (says a Correspondent) that they, in so decided a Manner, expressed their Disapprobation of the *infamous African Slave-Trade*.”<sup>1</sup>

1. The debate in the Rhode Island Convention on Article I, section 9, of the Constitution, which pertained to the slave trade, took place on 3 and 6 March (RCS:R.I., 923–30, 955–57).

### **Louis-Guillaume Otto to Comte de Montmorin New York, 13 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

... The hopes one had concerning the approaching accession of Rhodeisland, to the new Confederation vanished very suddenly. The Antifederalists feeling that they had the majority in the convention of this state, adroitly had a motion passed, that questions of adjournment and of amendment will always be considered before that of adoption. Giving themselves neither the time to read the new Constitution nor to examine any article in it they proposed to adjourn the following day and to compel the good people to name a new Convention to draw up amendments to this constitution. This conduct unique in its type since there have been conventions in America, has angered several Federalists to the point of wanting to persuade the Congress to conquer Rhode island, others have laughed about it, and she [Rhode Island] inspires pity in all intelligent men. The tiny state has carried on this extravagance to the point of imagining that it can retain its independence in

the center of the United States and that by means of free commerce it will be able to become for them what the Island of Eutache is for the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> The majority of Antifederalists there is much too small to be able to resist for long the torrent of public opinion and the powerful motives which must persuade them to take part in the union of the United States. In spite of appearances, Congress is beginning to grow tired of all the manœuvres, which they have used to deceive their expectations and several senators are preparing a violent motion, the substance of which they have communicated to me. Under penalty of confiscation of ships, vehicles and goods and even of fines and imprisonment they are proposing to prohibit all communication with Rhodeisland by land and water and to authorise the President of the united States to exact from this state the payment of its part of the debt contracted during the war.<sup>3</sup> They are waiting for things to be ripe to pass this motion, which will probably only be done in two months and which, until then, they will keep secret to shelter themselves from intrigues.

1. MS Copy (Tr), Henry Adams Transcripts, French State Papers, Moustier and Otto, 1790–91, DLC. Printed: DHFFC, XVIII, 847–49. The original letter is in Correspondance Politique, États-Unis, Vol. 35, ff. 66–70, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris. This is dispatch No. 22 and was received by Montmorin on 2 July.

2. St. Eustatius was a Dutch island in the West Indies that served as an entrepôt for smuggling.

3. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (below).

### **A Friend to Justice and good Government Newport Mercury, 15 March 1790**

MR. BARBER, *Please to give the following a Place in your Paper, and you will oblige*

A CUSTOMER.

This may shew the disposition of a set of people in the town of West-Greenwich, that are so embittered against giving Congress power. They say if the Constitution takes place, they shall be undone, and in three year's time their estates will be all taken away.—I think they judge Congress by their own works, for the sole power of town taxation in this town lieth in those sort of people, for instance, in December 1789, at a town-meeting in said town they ordered a town tax of two hundred pounds silver money, to be paid in silver money or Indian corn, or in paper money at fifteen for one, in which tax, as they proportioned it, one man's proportion was one hundred and seventy pounds seven shillings and six-pence, and two sons that lived with him was taxed thirteen

pounds twelve shillings and six-pence, which made in all one hundred and eighty-four pounds, which he has since paid in money, the greater part of which, by corrupt laws, he was obliged to take on par for silver money debts; had it been all so, it would have cost him the whole tax, lacking sixteen pounds, which should have been divided amongst three hundred and fifty persons, the better part of them called freemen, and each man had an equal vote with that man in taxation and other things. It is supposed what made the unequal proportion was three things.—First, that man lent the town a considerable sum of silver money, to answer an execution, to keep their Treasurer from going to gaol, and they took that way to pay him a good part of it—the second thing was, because he was in favour of the Constitution—the third, and worst of all, was, because one of the Assessors lodged a hundred and odd pounds of paper money for him when the depreciation was eighteen hundred per cent. from the time the money was sent.—If any Antifederalist has a mind to purchase, he will sell his real estate in this town, at half price, and let them all go to their haven together, provided he has the real money in hand, for there remains no trust.

I can but resent the bad usage of my friend in this town.

West-Greenwich, February, 1790.

### Massachusetts Centinel, 17 March 1790<sup>1</sup>

#### RHODE-ISLAND.

The Convention of this deluded State has adjourned to the last *Monday* of *May* next—then to meet at *Newport*. And this too, after an acknowledgement on the part of OPPOSITION of the necessity of an adoption of the Constitution of the United States, and the danger to be dreaded from a rejection of it. The question of an adjournment to *May*, was carried by a majority of *four*—and all the proceedings were agreed upon in Nocturnal Conclaves<sup>2</sup> of the *anti-members*, some evenings before the decision. This strange derilection from every principle of honour and interest, cannot fail to draw on the majority of that *little State*, the execrations of every patriot and friend to his country. Nor can the *strong arm* of the Union suffer its interest to be hurt, by so insignificant a district—And they may be assured, that to relieve the *virtuous few* who suffer under the tyranny of these lawless rulers, and to bring the *vicious many* to a sense of their duty and interest, the *whole body* of the people of this part of the Union, stand ready to *obey* and to *execute any measures* that shall *be thought* necessary to be pursued by the Head of the Union, against these *Aliens*.



1. Reprinted: Springfield, Mass., *Hampshire Chronicle*, 24 March; *New Hampshire Gazetteer*, 27 March; and New Hampshire *Concord Herald*, 30 March.

2. For more on “nocturnal conventions,” see “Glossary” (RCS:R.I., 317).

### **Greenwichiensis**

**Newport Herald, 18 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

And so Mr. Agricola, you are scarcely possessed of penetration enough to discover whether Greenwichiensis was really serious or not.—What an excellent judge of composition! If I were to ask you whether you was in earnest or not, I might run the hazard of being thought a ——.

You are mistaken Sir, I did not accuse the whole race of politicians of neglect,—the clear-sighted and the long-sighted Anties were the only characters I taxed with neglect, and to whom I distantly imputed a want of proper spirit. The advice I gave them was such as, if you knew a little more than you do, you would acknowledge would be highly advantageous to the State.—After repeating the benefits which I boldly declared would result to it, from a speedy rejection of the Constitution, you rhapsodically and ironically exclaim—O delightful prospect! O halcyon days!—may this golden age, moved on more rapid than the car of time, soon be with us,—and,—

*Thou Dalhousy great God of war,  
Lieutenant-Colonel to the Earl of Mar.*<sup>2</sup>—

When will the time, ye Gods, when will the time come, when blockheads shall be inspired, and Agricolas become politicians!

But you would be serious.—Your serious people sometimes ask very silly questions.—You want to know, do you?—are you really serious?—You (want to know what inducements foreign nations can have to cover our harbors with their ships, or fill our stores with their produce?—I answer by asking you what has induced foreigners to send their ships and produce to St. Eustatius?<sup>3</sup>—The produce and manufactures of that Island are not so great as the produce and manufactures of this State:—and I repeat it, if our ports were thrown open to the world all the States on the continent of America would bring hither their productions, their manufactures and their money to exchange for, and to purchase the foreign articles in which we shall abound;—and we should soon become the happiest and most envied State in the world.)—And what have you said in answer to this? why you affect to wonder that I have not the foresight to discover that the Federal Government would have authority and inclination to prevent any commercial intercourse between this State and the States under their jurisdiction, I did, Mr.

Agricola, and do foresee that that government hath authority to regulate the trade of the United States with this State, or any other foreign nation: but I know also that (mankind are governed by their interest, and I am confident that, actuated by that powerful principle, there never would be found a majority in Congress who would consent to interdict the citizens of the United States a trade with this State, when such prodigious advantages would be derived from it as I have pointed out.)—Some of the other States might indeed envy our prosperity; but they would sacrifice that passion to their interest.—Those States would have more sense than Agricola supposes they can be possessed of.—But the other States have nurtured and fostered us, and have expended their blood and treasure for us.—We never to be sure shewed any fondness, nor expended any blood or treasure for them. We secede from *them?* you mistake the matter, *they* have seceded from us.—(We refuse to pay our quota of that debt by which this State purchased her independence? No Sir,—The plan I have proposed will enable her to do it,) and I will warrant that her inclination will coincide with her duty. But, pursuing this plan, we shall intercept their trade and deprive them (the United States I suppose) of their revenues.—This is the first time I ever heard that opening a commodious, beneficial trade to any people was an interception of their trade and a deprivation of their revenues.—No, Agricola, No—This is the way to augment both,—and I trust the United States will never exhibit such an instance of injustice and ingratitude as to (attempt to subjugate us, for increasing their commerce and their wealth.—Besides the nations of the earth never have been and I believe never will be tame spectators of invaded sovereignty.—An attack upon the sovereignty of this State would be an attack of their sovereignties through its side.)<sup>4</sup>—But for what, ask you, would they protect us, and like Deborah of old return an answer to yourself;<sup>5</sup> and, in my opinion, a very miserable one indeed. I have already told you that my plan will enable us to pay our quota of the public debt, which comprehends the foreign as well as domestic debt; and I again tell you that we shall be willing to do it; which will be an additional reason for France, Spain and Holland, to espouse our cause, if we should be unrighteously and impolitically invaded by the United States.

In a word, it will be against the interest and the honor of the United States to attempt to subjugate us, and it will be for the interest and honor of all the maritime powers in Europe to defend and protect us,—and in this just view of the matter I pronounce again your menaces to be bugbears and scare-crows.

I am not against my countrymen's sharing in the supposed advantages of the Union if they choose it; but if they will follow my scheme,

notwithstanding any thing you have alledged against it, they will be a happy and a flourishing people.

At all events it will not do to dally any longer with the New Constitution.—We should reject it and open our ports, or adopt it and suffer or rejoice with our once Sister States—Every day that we continue in this condition our distresses will increase, and in the course of a few months they will become so great that they will not be easily removed.

1. The text in angle brackets was reprinted in the *New York Daily Advertiser*, 29 March, with many variations in order to take it out of the context of a debate between “Agricola” and “Greenwichiensis.” The *Advertiser’s* excerpted version was reprinted in the *New York Daily Gazette*, 30 March; *Philadelphia Federal Gazette* and *Pennsylvania Packet*, 5 April; and the *New Jersey Journal*, 7 April. See also note 4 below. “Greenwichiensis” is responding to “Agricola,” *Newport Herald*, 11 March (above). For a response to “Greenwichiensis,” see Agricola, *Newport Herald*, 1 April (below).

2. Alexander Pope, *Peri Bathous Or, Martinus Scriblerus His Treatise of the Art of Sinking in Poetry*, in Jonathan Swift, *Miscellanies. The Last Volume* (London, 1731), 57.

3. St. Eustatius was an island in the Dutch West Indies which served as an entrepôt for smuggling.

4. The *New York Daily Advertiser* concluded its reprinting of excerpts from this item (note 1, above) with the following editorial comment: “Here it might be asked, whether these same nations of the earth know Rhode-Island as a sovereign power, when disconnected with the other states.” None of the four newspapers that reprinted the *Advertiser’s* version included the comment.

5. A reference to the prophetess and judge Deborah of the Old Testament. See Judges, chapters 4 and 5.

## Newport Herald, 18 March 1790

For the NEWPORT HERALD,

NO. I.<sup>1</sup>

MR. EDES, As the press is free, and most people are dabbling in politics, the public will pardon me while taking my turn with other scribblers. Last week Agricola<sup>2</sup> grins at Greenwichiensis of the week before, who is of the opinion that we had better reject the new Federal Constitution, and earnestly apply to the reformation of our State laws, as the readiest means of reviving our declining commerce, of arriving at political grandeur, and domestic happiness; yet, says he, if our commerce must be ruined, unless we accede to the Constitution, let us accede; but if we can thrive better without it, reject it immediately; for dallying and adjourning will only prolong our distress,—is not this speaking like a candid politician? By implication he thus addresses his fellow-citizens,—my friends, you see that our political situation, on many accounts, is unhappy; we all wish a remedy; on one hand, I have prescribed; on the other, the Convention has prescribed; consider therefore which prescription will best relieve your disorders, and apply that

without hesitation.—Is such advice censurable? The public should ever be led by reasoning on information, and not by the harangues of interested persons, which, in this State, have hitherto had too much influence.

The new Federal Compact has obviously some defects, which will prove so many inlets to the destructive tide of ambition and avarice—individuals have already received more of its beneficial influence than the great body of the people, for which it was constructed;—will government hereafter progress more in our favor? history shews us that delegated power seldom progresses in favor of the people, and therefore that it ought to be guarded by the strongest barriers; those barriers consist in a well defined constitution; the Federal Compact is not well defined, and consequently ought to be rejected, or subjected to amendments; but what say sticklers for offices?—let it go down at all events? those I shall join when for interest I barter my sentiments, or am convinced.

1. For No. II and No. III, see *Newport Herald*, 25 March and 1 April (both below).
2. See “Agricola,” *Newport Herald*, 11 March (above).

### **The Annual Spring Elections and the Attempt to Form a Coalition of Parties, 19 March–21 April 1790**

The fate of the Constitution in Rhode Island was tied to the annual spring elections on Wednesday, 21 April 1790. Both Federalists and Antifederalists indicated that the adjournment of the March ratifying Convention until after the spring elections was designed to assure the Country party (Antifederalists) another year in control of the state government. (See Henry Marchant to John Adams, 7 March, and Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox, 7 March [RCS:R.I., 753–54].) In fact, the Antifederalist delegates to the state Convention met in a “nocturnal convention” shortly after the Convention adjourned, on the evening of 6 March, and formed their election ticket (or prox). Governor John Collins, a loyal Country party member but a supporter of the Constitution, was passed over and replaced by Daniel Owen. Owen, however, did not want to run and suggested that Arthur Fenner be the gubernatorial candidate.

Federalists, hoping to elect more assistants and deputies to the legislature than in the past and to obtain a ratification of the Constitution in the upcoming state Convention, proposed a coalition prox with Arthur Fenner at the top of the ticket. Fenner rejected the Federalists’ efforts to create a coalition of parties. A month later, Federalists met at East Greenwich on 6 April and prepared their nomination list. Both the Antifederalist and the Federalist proxies appeared as broadsides and in two Rhode Island newspapers. Several writers contributed pieces to Rhode Island newspapers commenting on the attempt to form a coalition prox, on Daniel Owen’s letter to the freemen of the state explaining his reasons for declining to run for governor, and on his efforts to get Arthur Fenner to be the Country party’s candidate.

The Country party, as they had done since 1786, won all of the state-wide offices and elected their slate of ten assistants.

### **Daniel Owen to the Freeman of Rhode Island 19 March–3 April 1790**

Country party leaders met in South Kingstown on Saturday evening, 6 March (the day the state ratifying Convention adjourned until May), and nominated Convention president Daniel Owen for governor. Owen wanted to decline the nomination and suggested that Arthur Fenner be nominated instead. Fenner refused, leaving Owen to head the party's election ticket (or prox). Owen eventually persuaded Fenner to run, and a convention of Country party leaders substituted Fenner for Owen on the evening of 18 March.

Two different versions of Owen's letter to the freeman giving his reasons for declining the nomination exist. The first is an unsigned smooth manuscript copy in Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts, Mss 9003, 3:129, at the Rhode Island Historical Society. It is docketed "Copy/Govr. Owen's/Circular Letter" and dated "Providence March. 19th 1790." The second version, dated "Glocester, March 29, 1790," first appeared in the *Providence Gazette*, 3 April, and was reprinted in the *Newport Herald*, 8 April; *United States Chronicle*, 8 April; and *Newport Mercury*, 10 April. Both versions are printed here.

#### *Manuscript Version of Daniel Owen's Circular Letter Providence, 19 March 1790*

Permit me Sir, to address you with my usual Freedom & Candour. Mankind being designed for social beings, it is the indispensable duty of every individual to divest himself of every kind of prejudice, render himself a useful Member of Society, & endeavour to support the rights & Liberties of the People.

You will remember Sir, that in the Convention held at Southkingston on Saturday Evening 6th of March current, it was thought best that a Prox should then be agreed on; And after discussing the subject I had the Honour of being nominated for the head of the Prox. Sensible of the confidence reposed in me, I sincerely thanked the Convention, wished to be excused & gave my reasons, which were my local situation, my infirmities &c & proposed Mr. Fenner, knowing his situation to be much more eligible than mine, & that his superior abilities, his candour & firmness, his veracity, his Attachment to, & Zeal for the Liberties & Privileges of the People of this State could not be doubted. Mr. Fenner being then present rather declined & I was overruled.

Previous to my being appointed a Delegate to the State convention, I frequently solicited Esqr. Fenner to permit me to nominate him for that Honourable Post[.] He refused me as he did the Convention. Since my return home I have repeated my solicitations & with the assistance

of our Friends have at length prevailed on him to accept. With the unanimous consent of the Breth[r]en & Friends in the Northern part of the State, I have willingly & cheerfully resigned to him hoping he will not only meet your approbation & support, but also of all our Friends in the State. From the best information we expect a powerfull opposition: and after making the necessary calculations it was the general opinion that Esqr. Fenner from his convenient situation would make the greatest Vote.—I beg you, & it is the unanimous wish of the Convention held last Evening, that you wou'd use every just argument, & exert every Nerve to assist Mr. Fenner during this critical Juncture—My sentiments have ever been uniform: they are still the same: they are on the side of the Liberties of the People; and I will to the utmost of my abilities, aid & support, not only the Gentleman now agreed on but also the present administration. Inclosed I send you a Prox which is the same agreed on at South-kingston except the alteration in this County & one Assistant for the County of Kent

With sentiments of Esteem & due respect your very humble Servt.

*Printed Version of Daniel Owen's Circular Letter  
Providence Gazette, 3 April 1790*

*To the FREEMEN of the State of RHODE-ISLAND.*

GENTLEMEN, It having been customary, in this State, for those more generally conversant in political affairs, as well those belonging to the Legislature as others, to assemble and agree upon a prox, or nomination-ticket, previous to the annual choice on the third Wednesday of April, a respectable Convention, consisting of gentlemen from every town in the State, was therefore holden for this purpose, at South-Kingstown, in the evening of the sixth day of March inst. when a prox was agreed on. I then had the honour of being nominated as Chief Magistrate. I was gratefully sensible of the honour done me, and expressed my gratitude to the Convention for the repeated and distinguished marks of confidence with which I had been honoured by the State, but more particularly for the nomination then made. But the most weighty reasons, such as my residence in the country, distant from the centre of public business, and inconvenient on that account, the infirm state of my health, my wish to live in retirement, and to be excused from the cares of public life, and other considerations, induced me to decline accepting that important trust, and to propose ARTHUR FENNER, Esquire, of Providence, for the office, knowing his central situation was convenient for the public—that his abilities were great—and that his candour, his firmness, his attachment to and zeal for the safety, liberties

and privileges, of the people of this State, could not be doubted. Mr. Fenner having been then present, declined, and I was over-ruled.

Previous to my being appointed a Delegate to the State Convention, I frequently solicited Mr. Fenner to permit me to nominate him for that honourable post. He refused me, as he did the Convention. But after my return home I repeated my solicitations, and, with the assistance of a number of our friends, at length obtained his consent to serve in the office, if chosen. I have willingly and cheerfully resigned the nomination, with which I was honoured, to him, hoping that he will meet with the approbation and support of the State at large.

Permit me, Gentlemen, on thus retiring from public life, in this public manner to acknowledge the grateful sense I have of the confidence so often placed in me by my fellow-citizens, in their repeated election of me to the office of Deputy-Governor. I have endeavoured to serve them to the best of my abilities; my sentiments have ever been republican; they have been and will continue to be on the side of the liberties of the people. That the freemen may experience all the blessings of a mild, just and equitable government; that their agriculture, trade and manufactures, may flourish; that plenty, peace and felicity, by the beneficent Providence of Almighty God, may be multiplied to them, to their children and children's children, are the sincere wishes of, Gentlemen, your obliged and obedient servant,

DANIEL OWEN.

*Glocester, March 29, 1790.*

**Newport and Providence Committee to Arthur Fenner  
Providence Gazette, 27 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Mr. CARTER,* Many persons who were present at the late Convention held in South-Kingstown, for the purpose of deliberating on the proposed Federal Constitution, will recollect, that at the close of the Convention, when the gentlemen on both sides of the House were forming a nomination-list for General Officers at the ensuing election, a proposal was made, on the part of the federalists, for a coalition in the nomination of General Officers, equally from both parties. As this proposal appeared to be rejected at that time rather from the hurry and agitation with which affairs were then going on, it has been thought proper to renew it in a more definite and formal manner, for the calm and deliberate consideration of our fellow-citizens of all descriptions.

For the most early information of all parties, and that nothing may be concealed of a transaction which has for its object no other than

the public good, you are requested to insert the following in your next Gazette,

*By the COMMITTEE.*

*At a very full Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Providence, after general Notice, on the 22d of Third Month (called March) 1790, for the Purpose of promoting Measures for a Coalition of all Parties in the Nomination and Choice of General Officers for this State the ensuing Year.*

JABEZ BOWEN, Esq; in the Chair.

Resolved unanimously, That a Committee be appointed to write to the different towns in this State, and propose a meeting of such inhabitants as are desirous to promote a coalition of parties.

Resolved unanimously, That John Brown, Welcome Arnold, and David Howell, Esqrs. Col. Zephaniah Andrews, and Jabez Bowen, Esq; be the Committee for that purpose; and that they are desired first to wait upon the citizens of Newport, and endeavour to obtain their concurrence, in writing to the several towns aforesaid, or in any other measures that may be mutually agreed on by the aforesaid Committee, and such good citizens of Newport as they may consult.

THOMAS ARNOLD, *Clerk.*

In pursuance of the above appointment, the Committee conferred with a number of the citizens of Newport, who joined with them in the following letter, which was delivered on the 26th inst. to the gentleman to whom it is addressed, and a reply is now waited for.

*Newport, March 24, 1790.*

SIR, Many of the good people of this State see, with deep concern, the unhappy divisions which for a long time have distracted their political concerns, distressed the mercantile interest, and threatened destruction to all.—They also consider it a duty to study for peace, as the only mean by which the best interest of the State may be built up, mutual confidence restored, and the felicity of all be best effected. Moved by these considerations, the inhabitants of the town of Providence have had a very general meeting, in which it was unanimously resolved, that a coalition of parties should be earnestly attempted, and for that purpose appointed a Committee to consult with the people of Newport, and other towns, and request their assistance in a measure so necessary and so very desirable.

The subscribers have therefore not only had a meeting for that purpose, but have had some considerable opportunity of consulting many others; and from the disposition which they have for some time perceived and pervade the minds of the people at large, conceive it their



duty, as far as respects themselves, and the general peace and happiness of the State, to propose for your consideration, and that of your friends, who are desirous to place you at the head of administration for the year ensuing, that there be a *prox* agreed upon as nearly equal as may be, and filled up on principles truly and sincerely conciliatory: That you, or such other person as you and your friends may agree upon, be recommended as Chief Magistrate: That a Deputy Governor be proposed who shall be agreeable to those who have for some time been considered as the minority, and that the Assistants be as nearly divided as may be: In accomplishing which, you and your friends may expect from us, and as far as our influence may extend, every reasonable condescension, so that the main object may be accomplished, which we assure you is no other than the peace and lasting prosperity of the State.

We wish your serious consideration of this proposition, and your hearty concurrence in an object so very important, and which it must be the earnest desire of all good men to see happily obtained. We shall be ready to meet you, and such friends as you may think proper to consult, at any time and place you may notify to us in the *course of a week* from this time.

We are, Sir, your very humble servants,

GEORGE CHAMPLIN,

HENRY MARCHANT,

GEORGE GIBBS,

JAMES ROBINSON,

ISAAC SENTER,

JOHN BROWN,

WELCOME ARNOLD,

DAVID HOWELL,

ZEPHANIAH ANDREWS,

JABEZ BOWEN,

} *Providence Committee.*

ARTHUR FENNER, *Esq*;

*to be communicated.*

1. This item was also sent to Bennett Wheeler who printed it in his *United States Chronicle* on 1 April. The *Newport Herald*, 1 April, and *Charleston City Gazette*, 21 April, both reprinted this item from the *Providence Gazette*.

### Providence United States Chronicle, 1 April 1790<sup>1</sup>

MR. WHEELER, Being informed, that the Letter of the joint Committee from Newport and Providence, which was directed to me “*to be communicated,*” is to be published in your next Paper; and having, agree-

able to their Request, delivered them my Answer, I wish you to publish it also in the same Paper,

*Your's, &c.*

A. FENNER.

*Providence, March 30, 1790.*

*Providence, March 29, 1790.*

GENTLEMEN, Your Letter, dated at Newport, the 24th Instant, I received on Friday last.

No Man more deeply regrets the unhappy Divisions which have been so long prevalent in the State, or more anxiously wishes that mutual Confidence may be restored, and that the Felicity of all may be promoted by the joint Exertions of all, for the common Good of the State. But I cannot see the Propriety of particularly addressing to me the Proposal which you so strongly recommend to my "serious Consideration."

In a free republican Government, the reasonable Wishes of the Body of the People ought to be, and they must be, attended to; if they are not, sooner or later their Voice will reach and influence the Seats of Legislation.

Every Government therefore ought to be so administered, as that it will have the Hearts of the People for its Support, and it will generally have this Support if it deserves it. Not but that an unjustifiable Party Spirit may sometimes spring up in Society, and from Resentment and personal Considerations, be continued to the public Detriment: But in general it may be observed, that if the Administration of the Government has in Fact been changed by the elective Voice of the People, because they suppose it to have been ill administered, and Parties have arisen in the State by Reason of such Change, the readiest and most prudent Way, in such Case, to allay the Spirit of Party, is to yield little Matters, and to comply with the general reasonable Views of the major Part of the People, till by the mild Voice of Persuasion, and from the Coalition and Commixture of Sentiments in the public Mind, one general Object, the public Good, shall unite all in promoting their mutual and common Happiness.

It is impossible but that the Body of the People should wish the Promotion of the general Good in the common Security of their Persons and Property, though they may sometimes mistake their Measures in accomplishing it. It therefore ought always to be a Maxim in Republics, that Party is to be influenced by Persuasion not to be irritated by Bitterness of Invective, or provoked to Desperation by the Application of Force. The public Opinion may be wrong for a Time, but it will

generally settle on what is right, especially if proper Means are used for the public Information.

The great Principle of Republics is, that the Majority shall govern; and that they may govern rightly and most for the Happiness of the State, the wise, the magnanimous and the patriotic, tho' perhaps not personally concerned in the Administration, should unite to enlighten by their Information, and to assist by their Counsels, in the Way most likely to serve the Public, and most conducive to the Honour of the Government.

I express these Sentiments because I think they are such as ought to prevail, and if attended to, will have a Tendency to extirpate the Animosity of Party, and to restore mutual Benevolence and confidential Esteem, the sweetest Ingredients of human Felicity.

I beg Leave to mention, that I cannot help thinking that the Proposal, which you have been pleased to address to me, would with much greater Propriety have been addressed to the Freemen at large, or the Representatives of the People appointed for the Purpose of agreeing upon a Prox, or Nomination-List, without my Name being mentioned.

From the obliging Expressions you use I am unwilling to believe, that any thing unfair was intended, or to suppose that the Proposal was made on any other than "*Principles truly and sincerely conciliatory*,"—but the Publication of the Letter in a public News-paper, within 24 Hours after it was delivered to me, with a Notification to the Public, that "*a Reply was waited for*," when the "*Course of a Week*," from the Date, was mentioned as allowed for an Answer, seems to indicate at least an Haste of Proceedings.

You say, that "*you shall be ready to meet me, and such Friends as I may think proper to consult at any Time and Place in the Course of a Week*," from the Date of your Letter. You will excuse me for suggesting by the following Query the Impropriety, as it appears to me, of my doing any Thing respecting such a Meeting.—Would it not indicate a very extraordinary Fondness of an Office and appear like Presumption and Arrogance in me, when honoured with the Nomination made in the Letter, to attempt to call a Convention of the State to ratify it? Beside, there was not sufficient Time allowed for notifying and assembling a Convention of the whole State, to consider of the Proposition, and there would be an Impropriety in taking it up partially. The Truth is, that it is a Matter which rests with the Freemen at large. By the Publication of the Proposal in the News-Paper, the Business was taken off my Hands, and thrown into the proper Channel, and the Freemen now have it before them for Consideration. They will act respecting it as

their Wisdom and Prudence shall direct, in such Manner I hope as will eventually best subserve and promote the true Interest and Happiness of the State at large, which no Man has more at Heart than, Gentlemen,  
Your most obedient and humble Servant,

A. FENNER.

GEORGE CHAMPLIN,  
HENRY MARCHANT,  
GEORGE GIBBS,  
JAMES ROBINSON,  
ISAAC SENTER,  
JOHN BROWN,  
WELCOME ARNOLD,  
DAVID HOWELL,  
ZEPHANIAH ANDREWS,  
JABEZ BOWEN,  
*to be communicated.*

} Esquires,

1. This item was also printed in the *Newport Herald*, 1 April, without the introductory paragraph, and in the *Providence Gazette*, 3 April, with an alternative introduction. A manuscript draft of the letter is in Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts, MSS 9003, 14:143, at the Rhode Island Historical Society. It is endorsed "A Fenner's Answer/to the/Electioneering Committee" and differs in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing from the newspaper versions.

**Providence United States Chronicle, 1 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

⟨Mr. WHEELER, As no Time nor Place has been mutually agreed on to meet together for the Purpose of forming a COALITION-PROX, we request your publishing the following Notification in your next, and you will oblige

THE COMMITTEE.⟩

*Providence, March 31, 1790.*

GENTLEMEN, No Prox for the General Officers of this State for the Year ensuing having been recommended to the Governor, agreeable to the Custom of former Times, and Information being received, that some Persons, without previously consulting their Fellow-Citizens in general, or possessing any representative Power for that Purpose, have formed a PROX, of Persons almost entirely of one Party: And it being considered the indefeasible Right of Freemen to give their Suffrages in their own Manner.—And as it is just and reasonable that all Interests in the State, all Classes of People, and all their different Sentiments, should be adequately represented in the Legislature; to the End, therefore, that a Nomination-List of General Officers of this State for the Year ensuing

may be proposed to the Freemen, on the most liberal, candid and conciliatory Principles—such of the Freemen of this State as may be desirous to cooperate in a Business so necessary to establish a good Administration of Government therein, are requested to attend for that Purpose, at the Court-House in East-Greenwich, on TUESDAY, the Sixth of April next, at Two o’Clock, P. M.

*We remain your most humble Servants,*

JOHN BROWN,  
WELCOME ARNOLD,  
DAVID HOWELL,  
ZEPHANIAH ANDREWS,  
JABEZ BOWEN.

1. This item also appeared in the *Providence Gazette* on 3 April and as a broadside (Evans 22825). The broadside did not include the text in angle brackets.

**William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington**  
**Newport, 5 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Before this letter reaches you, you will probably have seen a proposal from a Comm̄ee of the town of Providence and some private gentlemen of this town, directed to Arthur Fenner[,] who is at the head of the Antifedl. prox, for a coalition.—The design of the Feds in this manœuvre was to introduce, if they could, some fedl. members into the upper house, and thereby increase their strength in the Legislature.—If the Feds had previously concluded to have opposed the Antifedl. prox, the proposal of a coalition might have had an influence upon some moderate men;—but without that it could not possibly, in my opinion, answer any good purpose, and so I told the Providence Comm̄ee.—However they were feirce for the measure, and to gratify them some of our gentlemen joined with them.—For my part I esteem honesty to be the best policy, and I have no notion of coalescing with the unfruitful works of darkness.<sup>2</sup>—I think I told you in my last<sup>3</sup> that it was not probable that any opposition would be made to their prox;—but that the Feds would exert themselves to gain a majority in the Lower House.—An opposition would be unsuccessful,—and therefore I still suppose will not be made.—There is I think a prospect of an addition of strength in the Lower-House.—If we should by a superiority in that house be able to ballance their superiority in the Upper House, we may at the election, appoint some federal State officers who would be of great use at a future election of Genl. Officers, and if the Constitution should be adopted we may possibly stand a chance to get one Senator. . . .

Since I wrote the foregoing, the Gentlemen of Providence who formed the Comm̄ee before mentioned, have advertised the people at large to meet at Greenwich to morrow to form a prox.—If the Antis will not unite in a prox which will admit into it a number of Feds, ~~it is~~ <sup>it is probable</sup> the Feds will either print a prox with a federal Head; or only insert into their new prox a few federal Assistants leaving to it an Antifedl. head.—When they meet if the Antis will not join with them they will do what they think will be most beneficial.—I do not expect that the Antis will meet with them;—or that any advantage will result from issuing a prox in any form;—but some of our principal Feds had proceeded so far;—that I beleive it is necessary to go farther. . . .

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Docketed “Recd 10th ~~th~~ Post.” Another portion of the letter is printed below (RCS:R.I., 807–9). The beginning of the letter, not printed in this volume, deals with Ellery’s salary as commissioner of the Continental Loan Office for Rhode Island.

2. Ephesians 5:11.

3. See Ellery to Huntington, 28 March (RCS:R.I., 800–801).

### Providence Gazette, 10 April 1790<sup>1</sup>

*To the PRINTER of the PROVIDENCE GAZETTE.*

Herewith you will receive the two Proxes that are to be proposed to the Freemen for their Approbation, at the ensuing Town-Meetings.—The ANTIFEDERAL PROX was formed by Deputy-Governor OWEN, and such Friends of the present Administration as it was thought necessary to consult.—The FEDERAL PROX was formed by a very respectable Number of Freemen, from a Majority of Towns in the State, which met the present Week at East-Greenwich.—Your publishing them in your Paper will oblige

THE COMMITTEE.

*Providence, April 9, 1790.*

MAJORITY, OR ANTIFEDERAL PROX.<sup>2</sup>

His Excellency ARTHUR FENNER, Esq;

GOVERNOR.

The Honourable SAMUEL J. POTTER, Esq;

DEPUTY-GOVERNOR.

ASSISTANTS.

1. THOMAS G. HAZARD, Esq;
2. SYLVANUS SAYLES, Esq;
3. JAMES ARNOLD, Esq;
4. CALEB GARDNER, Esq;
5. JAMES CONGDON, Esq;

6. JOHN COOKE, Esq;
7. THOMAS HOXSIE, Esq;
8. THOMAS HOLDEN, Esq;
9. JOB WATSON, Esq;
10. JOHN HARRIS, Esq;  
HENRY WARD, Esq; Secretary.  
DANIEL UPDIKE, Esq; Attorney-General.  
JOSEPH CLARKE, Esq; General-Treasurer.

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COALITION, OR FEDERAL PROX.<sup>3</sup>

His Excellency ARTHUR FENNER, Esq;  
GOVERNOR.

The Honourable SAMUEL J. POTTER, Esq;  
DEPUTY-GOVERNOR.

ASSISTANTS.

1. HENRY BLISS, Esq;
2. RUFUS SMITH, Esq; (of Gloucester)
3. JAMES ARNOLD, Esq; (of Cranston)
4. JOHN DORRANCE, Esq;
5. JAMES CONGDON, Esq; (of N. Kingstown)
6. JOHN COOKE, Esq;
7. SAMUEL BABCOCK, Esq; (of Hopkinton)
8. JOHN WATERMAN, Esq; (of Warwick)
9. JOB WATSON, Esq; (of Jamestown)
10. ELISHA BARTLET, Esq; (of Smithfield)  
HENRY WARD, Esq; Secretary.  
DAVID HOWELL, Esq; Attorney-General.  
JOSEPH CLARKE, Esq; General-Treasurer.

1. This item also appeared in the *Newport Herald* on 15 April.

2. Bennett Wheeler, the printer of the *United States Chronicle*, printed the “Country Prox, 1790” as a broadside (Evans 45986). The broadside included the following before listing the nominees: “*The PROTECTORS of their COUNTRY, and the SUPPORTERS of the RIGHTS of MANKIND.*”

3. For the broadside version of the “COALITION PROX,” see Evans 45985.

### Massachusetts Centinel, 14 April 1790<sup>1</sup>

The antifederalists of Rhode-Island have agreed upon a list of officers for the next year—in which they have left out Governour COLLINS, and nominated Deputy-Gov. OWEN to fill the *stool*—Mr. Owen has publicly declined the nomination, and has nominated Mr. ARTHUR FENNER—who, it is said, will be chosen.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

Wanted, by the anties of R. I. a person of the following description, to officiate as their Chief Magistrate for the year ensuing.

He must be a firm antifederalist, that would rather fight the other twelve States than be in the Union with them.

The candidate must not resemble a gentleman, nor be a merchant of character, as such an one cannot please the country.

His religion may be that of an athiest or deist; but should he profess any other principles, or have been known to go to publick worship within seven years last past, he will not do.

He must be largely in debt, otherwise he might inhumanly assist in forming acts of government to destroy that liberty debtors now have, and enable creditors to collect their just dues.

The perquisites of government being small, if he can twig a trout out of the river, or shoot down a pigeon on the leisure day called Sunday, so much the better, as he may thereby supply his table expenses without a salary, which the anties are *woundily*<sup>2</sup> against.

The candidate must be as ill-natured and obstinate as any mule, that he may kick and bite every federalist that comes within reach of his head or heels until they become good anties.

He must be a complete master of the art of fabricating political l—s, and making fair promises, and understand the most advantageous way of retailing them to the people when they are greedy for such intelligence.

One with the character of a modern hermit<sup>3</sup> would fill the station of government with satisfaction, as he could instruct the people in the art of fishing and fowling, to compensate them for the losses they may sustain in their trade by being out of the Union.

Any one answering the above description, that is either athiest, deist, hermit, paper money tenderer, or know-ye receiver, let him repair to the Hermitage in Providence, where he will be received with open arms by the *Grand Sanhedrim* of the anti's, and supported with as much vigour as G——l W—— fought the Federal Ox, on the memorable Fourth of July, 1788.<sup>4</sup>

1. Reprinted: New York *Daily Advertiser*, 28 April. The first paragraph was reprinted in the Portland, Maine, *Cumberland Gazette*, 19 April; Stockbridge, Mass., *Western Star*, 27 April; and *State Gazette of North Carolina*, 15 May. The advertisement was reprinted in the *Vermont Journal*, 19 May, and Pittsfield, Mass., *Berkshire Chronicle*, 3 June.

2. "Woundily" here means excessively, extremely, or dreadfully.

3. A reference to Arthur Fenner, who was sometimes described as the "Political Hermit." See "Observer," *Newport Herald*, 24 July 1788, and *Newport Herald*, 27 November 1788 (RCS:R.I., 365, 449–51).



4. Former militia brigadier general William West was one of the leaders of an Antifederalist mob that threatened to disrupt the Fourth of July celebration in Providence if the ratification of the Constitution by nine states was also celebrated. See RCS:R.I., 285–86, 296–307.

### **Buccinator**

**Newport Herald, 15 April 1790**

If the world refused to acknowledge, and render due praise to merit; the love of fame, instead of being an incentive to beneficial and noble achievements, would be an unnecessary, tormenting passion. Nature has not tantalized her children by endowing them with ardent desires never to be gratified;—nor has she constrained meritorious characters to trumpet their own praise.—America hath given an incontrovertible evidence that mankind are neither insensible to merit, nor indisposed to remunerate with unanimous and exalted encomiums, the vigor, the fortitude and the capacity which have been exerted, and displayed in public occupations,—and mankind have agreed, that next, in ridicule and contempt to the hypocritic who soundeth a trumpet before him when he is about to give alms,<sup>1</sup> is the man who swollen with self conceit braits<sup>2</sup> his own commendation.

An address to the freemen of this State published in the last Herald and signed Daniel Owen,<sup>3</sup> led me to the foregoing observations.

When I read the relation he has given of his nomination as chief magistrate by a late convention,—his expressions of gratitude for repeated and distinguished marks of confidence,—his weighty, apologetical reasons for declining to accept the important trust of Governor of the State, and for retiring from public life, I did not know which most to admire the folly, the vanity, or the false representations of the man.

To increase the importance of his nomination he tells the public that it has been customary for those more generally conversant in political affairs to assemble and agree upon a prox or nomination ticket, previous to the annual choice on the third Wednesday of April, and that a *respectable* convention of gentlemen from every town in this State met at South-Kingstown, for this purpose, and that he had the *honor* of being nominated as Chief Magistrate.—Would not any stranger to this State, and this little *i*, the hero of his own tale hence conclude that the principal, leading, political characters of every town in it had assembled at South-Kingstown solely for the purpose of framing a prox, and that they were all present upon that occasion?—He certainly must;—and would it not surprize him to be informed that this august, political assembly was principally composed of the Antifederal Delegates who

had met there at that time to inspect and decide upon the New Constitution,—and that there was not one Federalist among them. It doubtless would,—and it is a fact.

The Antifederalists alone were the gentlemen more generally conversant in political affairs who compelled our modest Deputy-Governor Owen to accept the nomination of Chief Magistrate.—But what made him resign it?—His reasons for it are so multifarious that I must refer the reader to his letter for them, only remarking that among them he forbore to mention a want of capacity.

He declined accepting the important trust (of Governor[]), before he was elected to it, and proposed Arthur Fenner, Esq. whom he has bepraised so amazingly that he could not possibly add to his commendations: unless he had acknowledged, which his vanity would not permit, that Governor Arthur, was as great a man as himself.

That he should recommend his friend in the highest strains is not much to be wondered at, when it is considered that there is a similarity, in their cast, and political sentiments,—the principal difference between them as I am informed being this, Fenner is more absolute, and decided than Owen, and is not so deeply tinctured with jesuitism and duplicity as his flatterer.—I never heard that the former among Federalists held the conversation, and put on the appearance of a friend to the new constitution;—but the latter has frequently endeavored to impose upon them by that specious artifice.

Conscious that the reasons which he has alledged were not the genuine reasons for his resigning, and anxious to deceive, he has taken great pains to inform the freemen of the State, that, previous to his being appointed a delegate to the State Convention (which his vanity has impelled him to lug in here) he had solicited his friend Fenner to *permit* him to nominate him to that *honorable* post;—that after he had returned home, he repeated his solicitations, and, in fine, that he *willingly* and *cheerfully* resigned the nomination.—The truth of fact is, after Deputy Governor Owen was nominated for Chief Magistrate, and had accepted the nomination, his nominators were informed that the Federalists intended to issue a prox headed by a gentleman greatly esteemed. This alarmed him and them, occasioned his resignation, and induced them to place Mr. Fenner, at the head of their prox, who they conceive has greater influence among the Anties than Mr. Owen.

The true reason of his retiring from public life is not because he is satiated with honor; but because it would not stand with party policy that both Governor and Deputy-Governor should be inhabitants of the county of Providence, and at the Convention of the Anties at South-Kingstown Samuel Potter, Esq. of that town had been agreed upon as

Deputy-Governor.—Thus this star of the first magnitude has fallen from office, and is compelled to retire from public life, or condescend to shine in the humble sphere of a representative.

When we contemplate this sagacious legislator, this frank candid character retiring from the busy, bustling scene of public life, and apologizing with infinite modesty as he retires, can we forbear running a parallel between him and the illustrious American Hero, retiring from the field of renown, to enjoy leisure with dignity, attended with the universal gratitude and applause of his admiring countrymen.<sup>4</sup>—

Had you, great Owen, duly estimated your own worth and services, and the disposition of the citizens of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations to reward conspicuous merit, you would not have dishonored yourself by trumpeting your own fame. The incense of praise is a just oblation to those who have rendered eminent services to their country; and however eager I may be to check aspiring vanity, and detect duplicity, when noble achievements are accompanied with modesty, I shall burst forward, and with distended cheeks endeavor to fill the clarion of fame and augment their renown.

1. Matthew 6:1–4.

2. The author may have meant “braids,” which could mean to upbraid or reproach.

3. See “Daniel Owen to the Freemen of Rhode Island,” 19 March–3 April (RCS:R.I., 769–71).

4. A reference to George Washington’s retirement as commander in chief of the Continental Army in December 1783.

### **Friends to the Coalition of Parties Newport Herald, 15 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*To the FREEMEN of the State of Rhode-Island  
and Providence-Plantations.*

GENTLEMEN, The time approaches when you will be called upon to select from your Fellow-Citizens your rulers for the year ensuing. Your happiness as individuals and that of the public will greatly depend on your exercising this privilege with integrity, discretion and candour. The actual situation of our political affairs cannot fail to awaken your attention, to alarm your apprehensions, and to call forth the exercise of all your wisdom and virtue.

It is natural to suppose that you will look back on the past conduct of your rulers and consider the effects of their administration, as well on the private interests of the people as their relative concerns in the union to which the State once belonged. Strictures on these subjects are beside our present purpose. Let us cast the mantle of charity on past transactions, and let it be our great concern to ponder well our future steps.

Painful experience of the evils of dissensions among brethren and Fellow-Citizens has led us to recommend to you a coalition of parties; and notwithstanding this proposal may have been treated with evasion and neglect by some who aspire to rule over you and mean to keep the management of your affairs in their own hands, we do not lay it before you with less confidence of success on that account. You cannot feel yourselves so much interested in the elevation and aggrandisement of any individuals as in the public tranquility and good government of the State.

The prox for general officers which we hold up to your view contains six magistrates named by the convention of South-Kingston and six named by that of East-Greenwich.<sup>2</sup> In an accommodation of parties, whose comparative strength is at least doubtful, it was thought candid as well as convenient, neglecting fractional calculations, to yield to an equal participation in numbers—and that entire moderation may appear on our part, you will please to take notice, that both the Governor and Deputy-Governor are nominated by others.

That the rulers of the people, on the principle of a virtuous democracy ought to be taken in due proportion from citizens of all ranks, occupations, interests and sentiments, is a truth we presume that needs no illustration. Another common principle is that a majority have a right to govern. This requires to be explained with candor and exercised with propriety. A majority most clearly have no right to associate to nullify or to impair their obligations to the lesser number. There are first principles and fundamental laws that no majority can abolish.

The wants, conveniences and luxuries of mankind have introduced various occupations among them. In almost all countries the cultivators of the earth furnish the necessaries of life and form the great basis of wealth. The necessity of working up and fashioning for the various purposes of life the raw material furnished by that class gives rise to the order of mechanics. The interchange of the productions of various countries is the occupation of merchants. Wise Legislators have thought all those occupations entitled to protection and encouragement and to a proportionable participation of seats in their Legislative bodies.

Cast your eyes, Gentlemen, around you in this State, contemplate all the sources of wealth, and then resolve which you will dry up and destroy, or in other words which you will place wholly in the power of the others. Admitting that the agricultural interest prevails is it not inseparably connected with the mercantile, and do they not both essentially require the aid and assistance of the mechanic arts? If therefore a majority under a false pretence of upholding the country interest should attempt to seat themselves exclusively in power to monopolize

the offices of government and to prostrate the other orders in society, ought they to receive countenance and support in a pursuit so unwarrantable? Would you dignify such a conspiracy against the rights of so many worthy fellow-citizens with the name of government? Would you not suspect them to be as liable to be seduced from the paths of honor and justice by the flattering prospects of personal interest to promotion to office as those who only put in a humble claim to their proportional voice in Legislation?

The social compact was doubtless entered into by individuals for the safety of their persons and property. Some natural rights are given up; but greater security for the residue is expected as a compensation. Government therefore cannot strip any class of men or even an individual of his property and leave him to ruin without violation of the public faith. The public arm is made powerful to relieve and not to oppress. It is a maxim in the British law that there is no wrong without a remedy. And shall it be said that we have thrown off that government to establish one less friendly to the rights of individuals? If you carefully attend, gentlemen, to the complaints of your fellow-citizens, will you not discover a great defect in the administration of distributive justice? Are not the existing laws unequal and oppressive? Has not the measure of right been uncertain and fluctuating? Is industry protected and encouraged? Are the people contented and happy? Are not our seaport towns and our State in general depopulating and going to ruin? Are not the poor and dependant part of the people in want of employment and in want of bread? And in the sensibility of distresses heretofore, even in time of a desolating war, unknown among us, to what quarter are we to direct our eyes for their culpable cause? Can it be thought that heaven has doomed us to fall a sacrifice unless to our folly and impolicy? Is it prudent, therefore, any further blindly to pursue the road that has led to those calamities?

Let us intreat you to contemplate the tranquil and happy circumstance of our once sister States, and you will behold them united under a government, not perfect indeed, but perhaps the best actually existing in the world. You will behold them under the protection of just laws flourishing in agriculture, arts, and commerce.—You will see them as contented and united, nay more so than any other people on the face of the earth—and need you go far abroad to discover their citizens growing rich by commerce driven from your ports?

If therefore you have any feeling for the distresses of the poor, almost starving in the streets of your seaport towns.—If you can be touched with the sufferings of your seafaring brethren, if you wish the prosperity of commerce, if you want just and equal laws to govern your courts of

justice, if you are solicitous for the general peace, interest and honor of the State you live in, if you regard the desire of all good men for your union with the great American confederacy, and finally, if you have any regard for your welfare, and that of your posterity here and hereafter, let us beseech and intreat you to attend on town-meeting day and to vote agreeably to your conscience.

1. Also printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 15 April, and reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 17 April. On 3 June David Howell informed Thomas Jefferson that he was the author of this piece (RCS:R.I., 1027).

2. See *Providence Gazette*, 10 April (RCS:R.I., 778–79).

**One of the Freemen of the State of Rhode-Island  
Newport Herald, 15 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*A PROTEST.*

Lest silence may be construed as approbation, One of “the Freemen of the State of Rhode-Island” conceives it his duty to protest against the Address signed “Daniel Owen.”

Because it stiles that Convention “*respectable*” which was clandestinely held by a faction under the dark cover of the night, in order to perpetuate themselves or creatures in office.

Because it declares and implies that this “*respectable Convention*” consisted “*of gentlemen from every town in the State*” who “*were more generally conversant in political affairs, as well those belonging to the Legislature as others,*” although no person attended from this town who possessed its confidence enough to be honored with the most menial office.

Because it makes a merit of an absolute necessity, by representing *that the subscriber of that address declined the nomination made of him for Chief Magistrate, in consequence of his being distant from the centre of public business, his infirm state of health, and his wish to live in retirement, and to be excused from the cares of public life.*—Notwithstanding it is the decided opinion of a large and respectable number of the freemen of this State, that it was his most ardent wish to continue in office, especially to fill the place of Chief Magistrate, and that the only reason of his resigning was in consequence of a gentleman being nominated to oppose him, whom he and his friends well knew would carry the election.

Because it contains *fulsome adulatory praise of a man*, whose abilities, if they had been rightly exerted, would have rendered him too celebrated in qualifications to have needed an OWEN, as a *vouchee* for them.

Finally, because it vaunteth much of what the signer of it has done, instead of leaving his constituents to declare it, and puffeth forth bubble wishes for the public good, instead of exhibiting any patriotic exertions.

1. This item is an answer to “Daniel Owen to the Freemen of Rhode Island,” 19 March–3 April (RCS:R.I., 769–71).

### A Countryman

**Providence United States Chronicle, 15 April 1790**

Mr. WHEELER, Be pleased to publish the following, in your useful paper, and you will oblige

A NUMBER OF YOUR READERS.

To the FREEMEN of the *State* of RHODE-ISLAND.

My FELLOW-CITIZENS, We are called upon to agree to a COALITION PROX, which has been proposed by a Convention of a number of gentlemen, who met at East-Greenwich, on the sixth inst. The proposal seems to carry with it a degree of plausibility. But on mature consideration I am of opinion, that the people at large, can best judge for themselves, in whom they can confide; and tho' I am not a scholar, being only a plain countryman, and unused to addressing you in this way, I have thought it my duty, as well as I could, to express my sentiments, respecting the two Proxes, which were published in the Providence Gazette, of Saturday last.<sup>1</sup>

When I saw the Prox proposed from East-Greenwich, I could not help thinking of the dream of Nebuchadnezer, as related at large, with the interpretation thereof, in the 2d. Chap. of the Book of the Prophet Daniel; and that the dream and the interpretation, if *rightly applied*, would assist us in forming a just opinion of this Prox. The Prophet informs us, that the great king Nebuchadnezer, saw in his dream, “*An Image, whose head was of fine gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet, part of iron and part of clay.*” And when he came to interpret the dream, he says: “*And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potter's clay, and part of iron; the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron; for as much as thou sawest the iron mixtd with miry clay; and as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, SO THE KINGDOM SHALL BE PARTLY STRONG AND PARTLY BROKEN. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: But they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.*”<sup>2</sup>

Now it appears to me, that if we rightly apply this passage of scripture, we may by way of inference, learn, that attempting to mix together, an EQUAL NUMBER of members of different sentiments in our Upper House of Assembly, who have a negative on all that is done in the Lower House, will be as incongruous, as the feet and the toes of the image, *part of potter's clay and part of iron; and that the KINGDOM WILL BE*

*DIVIDED*; “and being partly strong and partly broken,” that your Rulers will not “cleave one to another” “even as iron is not mixed with clay.” The consequence will be that the public business will be clogged, delayed and defeated, and the wheels of government will move on heavily and irregularly, if they should not come even to a DEAD SET.

And why, my Fellow-Citizens, should you consent to this? What are you to gain by it? For what do you appoint your members of the General Assembly? And are those men so likely to serve you to your satisfaction whose sentiments you do not know, any otherwise than as they are supposed to be opposed to yours in general, as those whom you have tried, and with whom you are well acquainted? The people in general, in a free government will judge right respecting proper persons to serve in public office: That nomination therefore which came from the body of the people, through those appointed to represent them, deserves your attention, and when it is attempted to be defeated, you ought to look out, and take care that you are not misled.

Whether the *Coalition-Prox*, as it is called, shall meet with success or not, at the approaching election, so far as it respects the members of the Upper House, is to me one and the same question as to ask, Whether you will preserve the balance of power in the hands of the present administration? or, Whether you will give it up to be managed, you know not how? It is contention of party with party, in a new form; and if this Prox succeeds, as effectually answers the purpose of establishing the government in the hands of the MINORITY, as if they nominated all the officers, in as much as they will have the *casting vote*. It is a dispute, whether or no you shall keep the government yourselves; or whether you will be governed by the minority, and the mercantile interest? It is a struggle speciously disguised, under the plausible pretext of *Coalition*, when it does not seem that there is any *Coalition* in the matter. The East-Greenwich Prox was formed intirely by those who have been with the minority. No others were admitted, and it has been reported, that when a gentleman who was supposed to be of different sentiments, desired to be present, that he was requested to withdraw: whether this is true or not, it may be relied on, that this is a Minority-Prox, and intended to support minority measures, and if it succeeds, will give the government into the hands of the minority.

You are presented in the Providence Gazette, with two Proxes, curiously intitled, one, “MAJORITY, OR ANTIFEDERAL PROX.” The other, “COALITION, OR FEDERAL PROX.” And you are told, that “the ANTIFEDERAL PROX, was formed by Deputy-Governor Owen, and such friends of the present administration, as it was thought necessary to consult.” That “the FEDERAL PROX was formed by a *respectable number* of freemen, from



a majority of the towns in the State, when met at East-Greenwich.” The words *Federal* and *Antifederal*, as here used, have a strong emphatic and are intended to have an *influential* meaning. Be not deceived, my Fellow-Citizens, by mere sounds without substance. An attempt is made to stigmatize the people’s Prox, by the epithet of *Antifederal*; and to embellish the other with the title of *Federal*, as if the General Officers, whom you are now about to elect, were to determine, whether the new Constitution should be adopted or not. This is a matter now before the Convention of the People of the State, and respecting which they will act as their wisdom and prudence shall direct, uninfluenced by the approaching election. Be the event what it may, ought you not to have members in both Houses of Assembly, who will attend to the general wishes of the people? Who will study the true interest of the State at large, and have resolution to support it?

His Honour Deputy-Governor Owen has informed you in his address, in what manner the Country Prox was formed;<sup>3</sup> the insinuation therefore, that it was formed by a Convention not so *respectable and numerous* as that at East-Greenwich was unfair, and the *stigma* of “*Antifederal*” affixed to the Country Prox may be considered as a specimen of the COALITION that exists.

My Fellow-Citizens, judge for yourselves.—You have the right. The principles of power are with you. And you ought to put men into power who will aim solely for your good, and who have your esteem and confidence. That government which seeks for the common good of the whole people, securing to every man his right, and the quiet enjoyment of the fruits of his honest industry, with the safety, liberty and privileges of the Freeman, is the government that you ought to cherish, support and vote for.

And after declaring these sentiments, may I recommend to your favour, so far as respects the Members of the Upper House, that Prox not marked with the signs of “THE MIRY CLAY.”

*Washington-County, April 12, 1790.*

1. See the *Providence Gazette*, 10 April (RCS:R.I., 778–79).

2. Daniel 2:32–33, 41–43.

3. See “Daniel Owen to the Freeman of Rhode Island,” 19 March–3 April (RCS:R.I., 769–71).

## **A Freeman**

**Providence United States Chronicle, 15 April 1790**

*To the FREEMEN of the Town of PROVIDENCE.*

GENTLEMEN, Next Wednesday you are to give your Votes for General Officers—two Proxies are held up to your View;—and I am sure you

cannot hesitate a Moment which to give the Preference.—You are almost all known to be *Federalists*;—the Prox agreed on at East-Greenwich is a *Federal Prox*;<sup>1</sup> and I cannot doubt but you will one and all attend Town-Meeting, and vote for the Gentlemen nominated in it.

1. See the *Providence Gazette*, 10 April (RCS:R.I., 778–79).

### **Providence United States Chronicle, 15 April 1790**

Mr. WHEELER, From your avowed Impartiality I am led to expect, that you will publish the following Information in your next Paper.

CENTINEL.

On Saturday Night last (10th April) a *Nocturnal Convention*<sup>1</sup> was held at Mr. Dagget's Tavern, of a Number of mercantile Gentlemen, at which was admitted *two* or *three* of another Class. The Object and Proceedings of this Meeting is attempted to be kept a profound Secret—whether the Members were sworn or not is not publicly known—it has however *leaked out*, that the Intention of the Meeting was to *raise Monies* to defray the Expences of the *Coalition-Business*, and for *secret Services*—dont say to *buy Votes*.

FREEMEN BEWARE!

1. “Nocturnal conventions” was a term usually used to describe Country party caucuses to plot strategy or nominate candidates (see “Glossary,” RCS:R.I., 317).

### **A. B. C. D. &c. &c.**

#### **Providence United States Chronicle, 15 April 1790**

*To the MECHANICS of PROVIDENCE.*

Next week will be the time by law appointed for to give your suffrages for General Officers for the year ensuing;—and the *Coalition-Committee* have endeavoured to stamp such of you as *Antifederalists* who do not vote for *their* Prox.—I hope you will act like Freemen and vote for the men you like best.—The *Country People* have made a Prox, and the *Merchants* have made a Prox, and I cannot see why the *Mechanics* ought not to be allowed to vote for such Men as they like, whether in either of the proposed Proxes, or not, or not to vote at all? For my own part, I am a poor Man (altho' a Voter) but I know if I go to Town-Meeting, and do not vote as my Employer does, he will *turn me out* of his Employ, as he has lately done some others—so I believe I shall be *very unwell* Town-Meeting day.

### **Providence Gazette, 17 April 1790**

*To the FREEMEN of the State of RHODE-ISLAND.*

GENTLEMEN, An opposition against me, in the place of Attorney-General for this State, was notified to you in the last Providence Gazette.<sup>1</sup>—My standing in the practice of the law would have admonished

me to have withdrawn my name from the competition, had any gentleman of longer professional experience been held up to your view.

I have not been able to learn that any other objection prevails against me, than that I was active in forwarding the State Convention for deciding on the Federal Constitution.—I can meet this objection only with an acknowledgment of the truth of the fact. I have been fully convinced that it would have been for the advantage of this State to have adopted that Constitution, and that we suffered loss every moment of delay; yet I might have suppressed this conviction, and remained inactive, had I not been actuated more by a wish to secure your interests, than the emoluments of an office.

If the whole tenor of my conduct in life hitherto has not been in favour of the rights of the people, nothing I can now say will deserve your attention.

I shall only add, that as I have no doubt but that you will exercise the privilege of appointing your officers according to your best discretion, so it will not disquiet me to be voted against by those who can persuade themselves that my competitor ought to be put into the office I now hold, merely on account of the difference of our opinions on that subject.

I am, Gentlemen, your most obedient and very humble Servant,

D. HOWELL.

*Providence, April 16, 1790.*

1. Daniel Updike was the candidate for attorney general on the Antifederal Prox printed in the *Providence Gazette*, 10 April (RCS:R.I., 778–79).

### **Editors' Note** **Annual Spring Election, 21 April 1790**

Town meetings were held on Wednesday, 21 April, to elect state officers, assistants, and deputies to the General Assembly. All of the candidates on the Antifederalist Prox (*Providence Gazette*, 10 April [RCS:R.I., 778–79]) were elected. On that day the towns also considered the declaration of rights and amendments to the Constitution proposed by the state Convention on 6 March (for this action, see RCS:R.I., 830–36).

### **John Adams to Henry Marchant** **New York, 20 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Your favors of the 19th Decr. 18 Januy. and 7 March are all before me.<sup>2</sup> I am much obliged to you for the accurate and useful information in all of them. It is a mortifying thing to be obliged to take so much

pains with a man to prevent him from setting fire to his own house, when he knows that he must burn the whole town with it. I can give you no other advice my friend than to persevere with the same zeal candour honour probity and public virtue which you have hitherto discovered and leave the event to time. Congress I hope will now take a firm part; and make Rhode Island Cheese, butter, lime and every thing else foreign. To be trifled with again would be too much.

Can it not be discovered who are the men among you who carry on the correspondence with the Antis, in New York, Virginia, Massac[huse]tts North Carolina &c. and who are their correspondents. Your Champions are all but poor puppets danced on the wires of certain hot spirits in other states whose ambition is greater than their talents or virtues, and whose vanity is greater still. Nothing in all this surprises me so much as the blockheadly ignorance and stupidity of your common people which suffers them to be made the dupes of artists so unskillful. This fact among many others serves to show that in proportion as you approach in a Constitution of government to a complete democracy by the same degrees your people must become Savages. The vulgar envy and malignity will not be content with plundering the helpless and Defenceless, but they will not bear the least superiority in knowledge nor in virtue. They will never be content till all are equally fools knaves and brutes. Equality! perfect equality!

Your exertions and your influence my good friend have hitherto done a great deal to procure mercy to your fellow citizens. That esteem and respect in which you and a few others are held will still induce many to wish that the day of grace may be prolonged. I cannot say it will not: but I must say that I believe it will not: and that I think it ought not. There are three sorts of men, who are like three discordant materials in a chemical composition; The old whiggs; the old tories and the youngsters. The old whiggs are hated by the old tories and envied by the youngsters. Hatred and envy therefore have allied themselves together and the old whigs have many of them given great advantages against themselves to this confederacy by an obstinate attachment to very ignorant notions and pernicious principles of government, which will end in their ruin. But not perhaps till they have excited a civil war and involved their country in calamities more dreadful than those we have escaped. Rhode Island is pursuing a conduct more directly tending to this end than any other state. The character of a Legislator has in all ages been held above that of an hero. Lycurgus and Solon are ranked higher than Alexander or Cæsar. The most profound and sublime genius, the most extensive information and the vastest views have been always considered as indispensable. A consummate master of science

and literature a long experience in affairs of government, travel through all the known world were among the ancients thought little enough for a founder of Laws. But in America Dr Young, Common sense Paine Samuel Adams and R H Lee<sup>3</sup> have been our founders of Empires. I esteem them all, but God knows there is not a legislator among them: and if this poor people will not learn, some better plan of government than those gentlemen even with the assistance of Dr Price Mr Turgot and Dr Franklin<sup>4</sup> are capable of, they will atone with their blood in a civil war for their negligence, rashness and willful ignorance.

1. FC, Adams Papers, Letterbook, MHi.

2. For Marchant to Adams, 19 December 1789, 18 January 1790, and 7 March, see RCS:R.I., 649–50, 680–82n, 981–83.

3. Dr. Thomas Young, Thomas Paine (the author of *Common Sense*), Samuel Adams, and Richard Henry Lee were all patriots during the Revolutionary War whom John Adams viewed as revolutionaries supporting forms of government that were too popular. Both Young and Paine supported the democratic Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 with its unicameral legislature.

4. A reference to Englishman Richard Price, Frenchman Anne Robert Jacques Turqot, the Baron de l'Aulne, and Benjamin Franklin. Adams attacked Turgot's and Price's support for unicameral legislatures, weak executives, and the drift toward democracy in his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* . . . (CC:16). Adams believed Franklin to be too supportive of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776.

**William Vassall to James Lloyd  
Clapham Common (near London), 20 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Mr. Smith informed me that the Genl. Assembly of Rhode Island had ordered a Convention Some time in this month, to determine whether they will Accede to the New Constitution or not. And it is thought they will Accede. I wait till I know whether Rhode Island will accede or not before I Commence any Actions at the Supreme Federal Judicial-Court at New York—I Consider myself as a greatly injured Person both by Massachusetts & Rhode Islands States, And am determined to Employ the most able Counsel to Commence Actions at the Supreme federal Court at New York against Oliver Windell Esqr for unjustly and illegally Seizing and Selling my Household Goods, Against Mess Davis Dawes &c a Committee of the General Court for Seizing Letting and Mortgaging my Mansion house in Boston And against the Treasurer or Government of Rhode Island for illegally Seizing & Selling my Farm at Bristol, On which Actions I shall Undoubtedly recover full and Ample Damages. . . .

1. RC, Papers of Temple, Nelson, Lloyd, Vassall, & Borland, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Vassall (1715–1800), a graduate of Harvard College (1733) and a banished Boston Loyalist, was living in a suburb of London, England, and was intent on

receiving compensation for his confiscated property, some of which was on Poppasquash Neck in Bristol, R.I. A portion of his Rhode Island property was purchased by Providence merchant John Brown. Lloyd (1728–1810), a native of Long Island, N.Y., and a member of one of New York's great landholding families, was a graduate of Harvard College (1747) and a wealthy Boston obstetrician and surgeon. His inherited estate on Long Island had been destroyed by British troops. He served as an agent for Vassall and other Loyalist absentees. In 1789 Lloyd went to England seeking compensation but returned to Boston after his claim was denied.

### Matthew Mizen

**Providence Gazette, 20 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*To the ANTIFEDDOES in the State of RHODE-ISLAND.*

The first of April<sup>2</sup> is close aboard, d'ye see, when we shall be *April Fools* in good earnest; and many an honest sailor must then haul himself up, and suck his paws, or pad the hoof to other States for employ.—What say you, my honies? Would it not be fair dealing for the Antifeddoes to advance a couple of months pay, or so, to such as shall be without a ship after the day of *All Fools*? The business of *eating*, d'ye see, can't well be *adjourned*.—Think of this a little, my chickens, and let's hear from you.

1. Reprinted: Boston *Independent Chronicle* and Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 1 April; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 6 April; and Charleston *City Gazette*, 12 May.

2. The exemption granted by Congress to Rhode Island from foreign tonnage and impost duties was set to expire on 1 April. See the *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

### Providence Gazette, 20 March 1790<sup>1</sup>

A Correspondent remarks, that the People of this State must be very happy in their present Circumstances, as they are so disinclined to alter them. If Happiness lies in absolute Sovereignty and Independence, no People on Earth have a better Claim to it.—The State is as free from the Congress, either old or new, as it is from the King of Great-Britain, or France.—In short, the State is as free as an Individual in a State of Nature; and there is *no more* Reason for an Adoption of the new Constitution, than there is for such Individual to enter into a State of Government.

1. Reprinted nine times by 19 April: Mass. (2), N.Y. (3), Pa. (2), Va. (1), S.C. (1).

### New York Gazette of the United States, 20 March 1790<sup>1</sup>

*Extract of a letter from Providence, (Rhode-Island,) dated March 7, 1790.*

“Alas for poor Rhode-Island! doomed still to experience the evils attendant on anarchy and misrule.

[“]The delegates of this place are just returned from South-Kingstown, (the convention having risen last evening at ten o’clock, without accomplishing the important business of their appointment. The convention stands adjourned to the 24th of May, then to meet at Newport)—which favourite measure was carried by a majority of 1.—Every objection raised against the general government was clearly obviated; but antifederalism, obstinacy and ignorance, were triumphant. A committee was early appointed to draft and report a bill of rights, and amendments to the constitution: The former, I am told, is nearly a copy of the Virginia bill<sup>2</sup>—the latter are said to have been collected chiefly from amendments proposed by other states. Where any thing *new* has been introduced, stupidity is the characteristic feature. The old game of handing these to *the people*, is once more to be played; and yet no mode is pointed out whereby their sentiments are to be collected. An adjournment till after our election, is intended to serve the purposes of party, and obtain a re-election of the powers that be, or others of similar character.

“It is much to be lamented, that an exemption from foreign impost and tonnage was ever asked for or granted.<sup>3</sup> The first indulgence afforded our antifeds an opportunity to dispose of their fall produce and they must be made to *feel*, before they can be brought to a sense of duty.[”]

1. Reprinted: *New Jersey Journal* and *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 24 March; *Pennsylvania Mercury* and *Pennsylvania Packet*, 25 March; and *State Gazette of North Carolina*, 10 April. The text in angle brackets, with slight variations, was reprinted in the *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 31 March; *North Carolina Gazette*, 15 April; and *North Carolina Chronicle*, 10 May.

2. For the Virginia declaration of rights and amendments, see CC:790. They were not reprinted in Rhode Island. For the declaration of rights and amendments adopted by the Rhode Island Convention on 6 March, see RCS:R.I., 976–81.

3. See the *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

### **Tench Coxe to James Madison Philadelphia, 21 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

I am sorry to find that the Rhode Island Convention have adjourned without determining in favor of the Constitution. This conduct is however so far favorable as it may be deemed a proof that they are not violently bent against it. The general causes of the conduct of that State are perfectly well understood, but I wish much to know as far as you have collected them and are at liberty to communicate them, their present views & intentions—Such things as they wish to accomplish before their adoption and the consequences they fear or pretend to

fear in the event of their coming into this Union. I wish to make myself master of the subject and to make such use of the information I may collect as may be proper in a publication.<sup>2</sup> Our affairs with them must ere long draw to a point—Legislative or more forcible coercion must be at least considered—The case is so new and delicate that a reasonable procedure, which may be expected to bring them to their duty, will be difficult to devise. . . .

1. RC, Madison Papers, DLC. Printed: Rutland, *Madison*, XIII, 111–15n. Coxe (1755–1824), a Philadelphia merchant, was a delegate to the Annapolis Convention (1786). After the Constitutional Convention (1787), he became one of the most prolific writers in support of the Constitution. He was an assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury, 1789–92, and the commissioner of revenue, 1792–97. Madison, a Virginia member of the U.S. House of Representatives, responded to Coxe on 28 March; Coxe replied on 31 March (both below).

2. For Coxe's essays to the freemen of Rhode Island, see "A Citizen of United America," *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 6 and 12 April (both below).

### **Boston Herald of Freedom, 23 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from Newport, dated March 18.*

"I prognosticate we shall be in a miserable situation in this town this summer, on account of our not adopting the constitution. Trade will be entirely stagnated, and no business for any body but the farmer—what will be done I know not—the people seem to be very much dejected—I do not think we shall adopt the Constitution in May—the amendments proposed by the committee of your assembly<sup>2</sup> will operate in favour of the Anties in this state, and I believe will strengthen them—I am sorry they made their appearance at this time."

1. Reprinted: *New Hampshire Gazette*, 31 March; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 5 April.

2. On 25 September 1789 Congress adopted twelve amendments to the Constitution to be considered by the states. For the amendments, see Appendix I (below). On 29 January 1790 the Massachusetts Senate adopted ten of the twelve congressional amendments and appointed members to a joint committee to consider further amendments to the Constitution. Four days later the Massachusetts House of Representatives adopted nine of the proposed twelve amendments and appointed its members to the joint committee. The legislature never resolved the internal differences over ratifying the congressional amendments, but on 24 February the Senate ordered 190 copies of the joint committee's report be printed for its use (Evans 22655). Since the session was almost over, consideration of the report was referred to the next session.

On 25 March the *United States Chronicle* reprinted the report at the request of "A constant reader" (Mfm:R.I.). The committee reported that further amendments "are necessary to secure the Liberties of the People." After justifying the need for further amendments at length, the committee reported twelve amendments that would "secure the blessings of freedom without injuring the nerves of Government."



**Massachusetts Centinel, 24 March 1790<sup>1</sup>***THE DEY OF ALGIERS' LETTER.*


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*To our beloved Friends in Rhode-Island, in America, GREETING.  
Peace be to those who tread in the right way.*

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We, the servant of the true Prophet, and slave of the Sublime Porte, Dey of *Algiers*, &c. &c. have hitherto deemed it far beneath the dignity of true Musselmen to unite in bonds of alliance with any nation of faithless Christian Dogs; but from divers information to us communicated of your dispositions, modes of thinking, and disregard for the absurd tenets held by the Christian nations,<sup>2</sup> have condescended to deem you worthy our friendship and alliance.

For our mutual benefit—and in order that our future operations against the faithless nations of the globe, who respect not the sign of the Prophet—and that the States of *Algiers*, &c. may be synonymous with Rhode-Island—and Rhode-Island synonymous with *Algiers*—we have appointed our trusty and well-beloved slave, ABUCACAER, the Minister and General of our Gallies, &c. to the end that he, with such persons as you may appoint, may form and agree upon articles of Alliance, eventual and defensive—that in future our enemies may be your enemies—and our friends your friends, and that our devastations on the property of the world, who shall not pay us due tribute and respect—may be prompt and efficient.

*At our city of Algiers—done, in the 1167th year of Hegira,<sup>3</sup> &c. &c.*

1. Reprinted in the *Newport Herald*, 1 April, and in fourteen other newspapers by 31 May: Vt. (1), N.H. (2), Mass. (2), Conn. (1), N.Y. (2), Pa. (2), Va. (1), N.C. (2), S.C. (1).

2. See *Philadelphia American Museum*, August 1788 (Addendum, below).

3. The flight of Mohammed from Mecca in 622 A.D.

**Newport Herald, 25 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*For the NEWPORT HERALD.*

No. II.

Mr. EDES, In our first number we asserted that the Federal Compact was not sufficiently guarded against the ordinary innovations of avarice and ambition; that it had obvious defects, which ought to be mended, prior to its adoption by patriotic Americans, who have been liberal of their blood and treasure to obtain a system of laws, that might equally operate from the shivering beggar to the possessor of millions; to such a system the light of the present age entitle us—Such a system would render the States equal to the happiest parts of the world; but if such

a system is not within our power, we must be contented to make the best of our situation. At present the people of Rhode-Island are at liberty to choose for themselves; their own interest ought to be their polar star, whence no influence should divert them,—hence the only questions, at present, that occur in politics are, is it better to receive the Constitution as it is? if not, shall we insist on amendments, or place our whole dependance on our domestic policy? we do not think ourselves competent to answer these important questions; we shall obtain our object, and think ourselves very happy, if, by a number of hints, we can bring our fellow-citizens to reason for themselves.—That the public may have proper information, we request them to view past debates, and the amendments proposed by the several States, some of which have been recommended by Congress; that demonstrates that the collected wisdom of the Union thought the Constitution imperfect; yet, my friends, how many conceited politicians have we heard exclaim, even before there was one amendment proposed, that the wisdom of man could not have contrived a better constitution.—O ye place-hunters! ye thirsters for popularity! ye sticklers for the favors of the great! when ye thus exclaimed, were ye ignorant, or designing?—It is certain the Constitution has been defective, because the collected wisdom of the Union has mended it: It is still obvious to us that some defects remain, and therefore we highly applaud the cautious proceedings of our late Convention, which will perpetuate their memory, while a spark of liberty warms the bosom of a grateful posterity.

1. For No. I and No. III, see the *Newport Herald*, 18 March (above) and 1 April (below).

### Spectator

**Newport Herald, 25 March 1790**

“Sure fix’d on Virtue may your Nation stand,  
And public Evil never touch the Land.”

HOMER.<sup>1</sup>

When I take a retrospective view of the evils once impending on my country ready to burst in chains and fetters upon her for ever, I see her seize the golden moment to defend her unalienable rights, struggling for liberty, the continent desolated by the ravages of war during the full period of eight years, assisted by a generous ally, and the expence of the best blood that ever fired the breast of perhaps any nation on earth, she is at length acknowledged free and independent.

A greater evidence of the want of a general government need not be given than the rejection of the five per cent. impost, which the general voice of the continent about this period declared highly nec-

essary, to pay part of the debts contracted in the greatest emergencies; yet this inferior State opposed the plan,<sup>2</sup> and some of its enemies have since denied that they opposed it.—Such is owned to be the stain which they have incurred.

Our situation and circumstances fully indicate that we may yet be respectable, unless we suffer a set of men who sacrifice the public good, and set at nought every thing civil and sacred, which they think may obstruct their advancement to popularity, to overthrow all government.—Why, my countrymen, do we listen to the MAN *of infamous character*, who ceases not to invent ways and means to deceive honest men?—Let us but a moment reflect upon the probable motives which excite him to attend our general councils,—obtruding in one company—listening in this—gliding there—stepping here, as though much hurried—at length measuring the utmost bounds of the State spreading his baneful influence,—Let us, I say, reflect if this proceeds from a true regard for the establishment of a civil government, without which never yet was a nation happy,—or from some private views, which he endeavors to conceal, and if publicly known, must excite the utmost indignation and contempt.

1. Alexander Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer. Translated from the Greek* (5 vols., London, 1725–26), Volume II, Book XIII, p. 240, lines 60–61.

2. Rhode Island's rejection of the Impost of 1781 killed the measure (see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxviii).

### **New York Daily Advertiser, 27 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from Providence (R.I.) March 13.*

“Heaven only knows what will become of us, if our next convention should persist in refusing to accede to the Union. There is not the least probability of our obtaining any further exemption from the foreign impost and tonnage duties than to the first of April,<sup>2</sup> and the navigation laws of the twelve states must then operate with such severity on several classes of our citizens, as without doubt, will oblige them to emigrate into other states, rather than to remain and starve at home.”

1. Reprinted: *Pennsylvania Packet*, 2 April; *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 3 April; Philadelphia *Freeman's Journal*, 7 April; Lansingburgh, N.Y., *Federal Herald*, 12 April; New Jersey *Burlington Advertiser*, 13 April; and *State Gazette of South Carolina*, 27 May.

2. See the *Newport Herald*, 25 February (RCS:R.I., 736–37).

### **John Adams to Jabez Bowen New York, 28 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

If your state would as you hint in your letter of the 9th<sup>2</sup> all turn Tories and go back to Britain openly; I should not be obliged to rack my

invention to point out the advantages which would result to the United States. For as this would oblige us to chastise the treachery, insolence and ingratitude of your people, it would be an exemplary vengeance to all others whose hearts are no better than theirs: and consequently would sufficiently strengthen the national government: A remonstrance or Address from Congress would employ them better than the Quaker petition<sup>3</sup> but there are other things which await their decisions of much more import than either. As I know it to be impossible that Congress should interpose by an address, so I hope they will no more interpose by their lenity: but treat Rhode Island in all points as a foreign state. If your people are desirous of trying their strength and their wit with us, I am for joining the issue. I shall feel for you and some others. But I say Come out from among them.

1. FC, Adams Papers, Letterbook, MHi.

2. See Bowen to Adams, 9 March (above).

3. For the memorial from the Society of Friends (Quakers) against the slave trade presented to the House of Representatives on 11 February and an outline of congressional action on it through 23 March, see DHFFC, VIII, 314–38.

**William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington  
Newport, 28 March 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

I have received your letters of the 3d. and 8th. of March on the same sheet, and in answer to the first refer you to my letter giving a general account of the proceedings of the Convention,<sup>2</sup> which you had not recd when you wrote last; only observing that the Anti's wanted time not to give information to their Constituents; for they have studiously endeavoured to conceal it from and to deceive them;—but to secure to themselves the administration at the next election, and to put off the adoption of the Constitution as long as it should suit their interest.—They have fixed upon their prox for General Officers, and have admitted into it not more than one Fed, and two Mongrels:—and these they would have excluded had they not imagined that an admission of them might silence the first, and stimulate the last in their favour.—They have dropped Govr. Collins, and placed Arthur Fenner of Providence, a violent Anti, at the head of their Prox.—They first intended that the Deputy Governor, Owens, should have been the man;—but expecting an opposition from the Feds, they chose Fenner on account of his superior influence. Samuel Potter of Southkingston is to be their Depy. Govr.—I question whether the Feds will oppose their prox.—If they should there is no prospect of their succeeding,—and it may be the best policy to exert themselves in procuring a majority in the house of Deputies; and this may possibly be obtained if the Antis should not be

alarmed by an opposition to their prox. The Feds will do all they can to increase their weight and influence in the Assembly;—but, they are still overpowered by numbers, and are obliged to fight undermost.—If they could receive any assistance from Congress before the election, which will be on the third Wednesday in April, it would have a good effect. . . .

When do you expect Congress will rise?—and do you think that Congress will do any thing respecting this State at this Session?—Will the goods, wares, productions and manufactures of this State excepting cheese and rum be Subject to pay any duty after the first of April without a positive act for that purpose?—There is no act of Congress laying a duty upon lime, flaxseed, or barley that I can recollect,—and if those articles are allowed to pass into the other States duty free the Antis will not be impelled by a sense of interest to adopt the Constitution; unless Congress should require an immediate payment of a sum of money from the State with an assurance that if not collected an equivalent will be distrained. Whatever Congress mean to do should be done before the Convention meets, and it would be best that it should be done before the third wednesday in April, which is the day of our election. . . .

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. The omitted portions of the letter deal with Ellery's position as commissioner of the Continental Loan Office for Rhode Island. Ellery added two postscripts on the last page, the first saying "I intended to have sent this letter by Capt. Peterson but he sailed unexpectedly last saturday early in the morning." He then added: "Peterson is driven back by the fog and I now send this epistle by him."

2. See Ellery to Huntington, 8 March (above).

### **James Madison to Tench Coxe New York, 28 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . I regret that it is not in my power to supply the explanations you wish with regard to Rho. Island. I have fallen in with no one who seems to possess an accurate and authentic knowledge of the springs which direct the misconduct of that State. My conjectures would resolve it into the contrivances of a few leaders who are interested in keeping the disaffected party together, and the fear that the federal Constitution might present obstacles to some unfinished iniquities. As the crisis which has arrived in relation to that infatuated people seems to have suggested to you the idea of discussing the subject, it would have given me particular pleasure, if I had been able to contribute any lights that might be of use to you. . . .

1. RC, Madison Papers, DLC. Printed: Rutland, *Madison*, XIII, 128–29. Madison is responding to Coxe's letter of 21 March (above). Coxe responded to Madison's letter on 31 March (immediately below).

**Tench Coxe to James Madison****Philadelphia, 31 March 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

I recd. your favor of the 28th. instant by yesterday's post. . . . I had applied my Sunday morning to what I consider as a pious work, some notice of the affairs of R. Isld., before your favor reached me—I had not intended it as argumentative, because I hoped for matter from you. I am sorry to find that it is nothing more than that general depravity, with which it is too plain that those people are justly chargable. I enclose you the paper<sup>2</sup> above alluded to in the form & manner of which I have endeavoured to address the seeds of honest & serious feeling which I believe remain in the hearts of the most corrupted people. There is one point on which I have not, from delicacy, laid quite the stress I now think I ought to have done. I mean the personal character of the President which I find every where impressive. It has been so much the custom to seize every opty to plaister with the praises<sup>3</sup> this excellent gentleman, that I wished to be very brief whenever I found it proper to mention him. It is probable I may use some other notes wch. I have made this unhappy case of R. Island. I own I have great fears of their Obstinacy—and think their reformation an object of the first magnitude to the United States and interesting in a high degree to every lover of Mankind. . . .

It appears to me advisable to have the Rhode Island paper reprinted in one of the New York Gazettes,<sup>4</sup> that is least friendly to the constitution. If it is not done within a few days I submit to you whether this step may not be of use—

1. RC, Madison Papers, DLC. Printed: Rutland, *Madison*, XIII, 130–33n. Coxe is responding to Madison's letter of 28 March (immediately above).

2. Coxe probably sent to Madison a manuscript copy of one or both of the essays he wrote to the freemen of Rhode Island. See "A Citizen of United America," *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 6 and 12 April (both below).

3. "To seize every opportunity to plaster [i.e., lavish] with the praises."

4. The *New York Daily Gazette* reprinted the two essays by "A Citizen of United America" on 10 and 15 April.

**Newport Herald, 1 April 1790<sup>1</sup>***For the NEWPORT HERALD.*

NO. III.

MR. EDES, In a series of numbers we intended to display some of the deficiencies of the Continental Government; to tender some advice relative to our present situation; and to conclude with remarks on the

proceedings of the present Congress, especially on the intended funding act,<sup>2</sup> which will probably be adopted, and which, at once, will subject this country to an immense, unnecessary loss: we say the loss will be unnecessary, as it is not demanded by good policy, or common justice, but by the avarice of a few, who, at a low price, have purchased the greatest part of the public stock, or securities, and by certain courtiers, who expect to profit by advocating the mercenary schemes of the rich and powerful—so rapid is the progress of avarice and ambition, whose train are poverty and misery.—Those things are highly aggravating to the patriot; really distressing to a free people who live by their labor; yet, perhaps, they better be hid from our eyes, as the necessity of our situation will probably soon or late, subject us to them, and as anticipating unavoidable evils will but increase our sufferings; therefore, from real affection to our fellow-citizens, with whom we mean to rise, or fall, we shall quit our first purpose, after making some observations, and paying the tribute of a few tears to Liberty lately triumphant, but now receiving chains, the weight of which must daily increase—yet our situation is not desperate; some of our amendments may be received, and the Constitution has the form of liberality, affording many privileges, which we presume will continue, while its present illustrious head presides,<sup>3</sup> and the feelings of the present generation remain; but that head, and those feelings, will naturally cease; then this flourishing country must dwindle to servitude, or again struggle, in civil discord, for that liberty and security which the present Constitution may be qualified to perpetuate:—Those considerations may well fill the impartial with a melancholy, not to be dissipated by the designing harangues and misrepresentations of partial interest.

1. For No. I and No. II, see the *Newport Herald*, 18 and 25 March (both above). For a criticism of these three anonymous essays, see “X.,” *Newport Herald*, 8 April (below).

2. For the Funding Act and an outline of legislative action on it, see DHFFC, V, 713–937, especially pp. 721–38.

3. President George Washington.

## **Agricola**

**Newport Herald, 1 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I Should be sorry to burden the press and trouble the public with my doubts and queries a second time,<sup>2</sup> did I not conclude that myself and other Agricolas, who are so unfortunate as not to be born Solons nor Lycurgus’s, nor trained up under the discipline of Greenwichensis or his *coadjutor*,<sup>3</sup> should, by a careful perusal of *their performances*, gain

some small portion of that knowledge, which must flow in copious streams from the pens of such consummate politicians.

Mr. Greenwichensis, be calm, be consistent, or you may possibly forfeit the opinion we have imbibed of your wisdom. I do not recollect of reading that any of the sages of antiquity flew into a passion because some more ignorant than they, wanted information.—You have, Sir, to thank the GOD of nature, who has bestowed on you such a profusion of talents that you far exceed in forecast and penetration a class of politicians, with whom Agricola never had the audacity to think of putting himself in competition. You ought to pity the man, whose apprehensions were so dull, and whose knowledge of composition was so small, that it was difficult for him to determine, whether that person was serious or not, who declared that it was the highest interest of the smallest State, of thirteen, and the most dependant on, and exposed to the other States, to become wholly independent of, and unconnected with them; a situation which not one State in the thirteen have ever thought it their interest or their power to support—And who further asserts “that it is interest alone which doth and ought to govern sovereign independent States.” Pardon me, Sir, “for the sin of ignorance is to be winked at,” if I thought that even sovereign independent States, were bound by some other principles beside interest.—I must confess that I had an idea, that the principles of commutative and distributive justice were obligatory on States, as well as individuals: nor do I conceive that sovereign States are authorised by the laws of GOD or Nature, to violate the most solemn compacts; to take away the lives, liberties, or properties of the innocent and defenceless, merely because they think it their interest so to do.

There are certain extensive geniuses, who with the greatest facility solve all questions by asking others:—And you, Mr. Greenwichensis, in answer to my quere, what could be the inducements for foreign nations to cover our harbors with their ships and fill our stores with their produce? return the question, by asking what has induced foreigners to send their ships and produce to St. Eustatius?—I will endeavor to answer your question, *however wise*—The principal incentive is a contraband trade, that is carried on by that island and that of Curracoe with the Spanish colonies; a trade that is very advantageous to the Dutch, to whom those islands belong, and by them is it encouraged and protected.<sup>4</sup>

The situation of this State is very different from that of the island of St. Eustatius, or any of the West-India islands; they belong to European powers, they are not exposed to the resentment of any rival neighboring power: it is the interest of the European nations to guarantee to



each other the possession of those islands; and that of Eustatius belongs to one of the greatest maritime powers in Europe; and the moment Spain attempted to take it, or be revenged for the injuries she suffers in her trade in consequence of it, that moment she would suffer much greater losses by a deprivation or destruction of some of her possessions in America.—This State is not allied nor dependant on any European potentate, who will defend her; her interest, I say, and shall attempt to prove, must contravene with that of the States which are on each side of her;<sup>5</sup> and who, from their situation, have but little to fear from any foreign nation; but who, were they provoked, might materially affect the interest of almost any of the powers of Europe.

Greenwichensis says, “there never can be found a majority in Congress, who would consent to interdict the citizens a trade with this State, when such prodigious advantages would be derived from it as he had pointed out.” If the advantages that arise from this lucrative trade accrue only to the citizens of this State, I do not see what influence that ought to have on Congress to prevent the inhibiting the other States a commercial intercourse with this: but if it will, as he intimates, be productive of such advantageous consequences to these States, I will agree that Congress will not prohibit the trade—But this is not the case.—It is an undeniable truth that it is the interest of every commercial people to be the carriers of their own produce and manufactures. Have not Congress been convinced of this, by the discrimination they have made between the ships of the United States and those of foreign nations?<sup>6</sup> Then surely as this State is to be the grand store-house from which the other States are to receive the produce and manufactures, of foreign countries, and in return are to deposit their own, the United States must according to your own stating, Mr. Greenwichensis, have no manner of use for any shipping excepting a few coasting vessels, and be wholly deprived of the duty on foreign tonnage; and what is that but intercepting their trade and depriving them of their revenues?—I wish Sir, you had been a little more particular in pointing out the advantages that would result to the Union by making this State a free port.—If by making other nations their carriers—if by destroying the vent for their staple commodities—if by taking the bread out of the mouths of a useful class of citizens, the United States are to reap such surprising benefits, then will it be their interest, that this State be a *free port*; otherwise not. If a free port should be found necessary to the prosperity of the United States, they have within *their* own territories ports that are more advantageously situated for trade, and to draw the attention of other nations, than any port in this State; and they never can think it for their interest to make foreign merchants their factors; to

carry their produce, their manufactures and money, to enrich and aggrandize a foreign State, when only by opening a free port, they share all the advantages themselves.—You trust, Sir, “the United States will never exhibit such an instance of injustice and ingratitude as to attempt to subjugate us for increasing their commerce and their wealth.”—I have never hinted that they had an idea of subjugating us, nor do I believe they will find it by any means necessary: But pray, Sir, why do you talk of *injustice* and *ingratitude*? according to your principles, a *sovereign State* has nothing to do with either, and they may not only subjugate you, but do whatever else they please, if it should be for their *interest*; and foreign powers, unless their *interest* is at stake, will never move a finger for your support.

With due deference, you must have been a little mistaken in saying that no nation on earth have ever been tame spectators of invaded sovereignty. What nation ever interfered in support of the brave and heroic Welsh, when their darling liberties and independence were invaded, when the greatest supporters of their rights were massacred in cold blood?<sup>7</sup> Is not Ireland, that garden of Europe, dependant on the crown of Great Britain? she was once a sovereign Kingdom, but by arms was reduced to her present State of vassalage, and no nation thought their honor or sovereignty so much wounded, as to step forth in support of her invaded rights.

Poland a rich and powerful nation, has lately been divested of her sovereignty and divided among three European powers, the one of which had been her vassals, the other had been rescued from destruction by her assistance, and the third had been made to tremble by her arms;<sup>8</sup> yet the rest of Europe were *tame spectators*, and peaceably suffered this valuable jewel to be annexed to the crowns of their rival neighbors.

Is Greenwichensis or his supporter a friend to *reason*; so am I.—Do they wish the happiness and prosperity of the State,—I am as much its friend and concerned for its happiness; and wish that we may find the clue that will lead to it.—Are they averse to the public’s being led by the *harangues* of *interested* or *designing men*,—I am equally so.—Do they wish that the State may earnestly apply to the *reformation* of her *laws*,—I have no manner of objection.

My sentiments are, as I believe, founded on the basis of truth, and as I condemn no man who thinks different from me, so I shall neither *barter* them for *interest*, nor relinquish them for the *barking* or *growling* of any one; but when by reasonable arguments I am convinced of the fallacy of them, I will willingly renounce my present opinion, and adopt that which shall appear more consonant with reason and the interests of my country.

I fully agree, that it will not do to dally and trifle with the Constitution any longer; a further procrastination of its adoption would be considered as a rejection; and we should experience all the evils that would arise from a total rejection. The present moment is of the greatest importance; we, by a speedy adoption of a Constitution, that we and our posterity must ultimately live under, and share the blessings or miseries in consequence thereof, may be able, with the assistance of the *friends to liberty and good government*, to amend whatever can be found in it, that is objectionable, and to ascertain and define whatever is doubtful, and finally to ensure prosperity, harmony, wealth, and grandeur to the State.

1. "Agricola" is responding to "Greenwichiensis," *Newport Herald*, 25 February and 18 March (both above). For a response to "Agricola," see "Greenwichiensis," *Newport Herald*, 8 April (below).

2. For the first essay by "Agricola," see the *Newport Herald*, 11 March (above).

3. For the "coadjutor" of "Greenwichiensis," see anonymous essays No. I, No. II, and No. III, *Newport Herald*, 18 and 25 March and 1 April (all above).

4. St. Eustatius and Curaçao were islands in the Dutch West Indies that served as entrepôts for smuggling.

5. Massachusetts and Connecticut.

6. See "Z.," *Newport Mercury*, 30 December 1789, note 5 (RCS:R.I., 655).

7. Probably a reference to the English conquest of Wales by Edward I in 1277 and the crushing of the Welsh revolt in 1282–83, wherein most members of the Welsh nobility were executed, imprisoned, or dispossessed of their estates. Wales lost its independence.

8. A reference to the partition of Poland in 1772 by Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

### **Providence Gazette, 3 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

#### *Article from a Correspondent.*

Last Week Mr. Abner Merrifield, of Medway, in the State of Massachusetts, having purchased in this Town a Chest of Tea, and other Articles, was proceeding homeward with the Goods in a Waggon, when his Property was seized by a Revenue Officer, and sent to Boston.—By Act of Congress, not only the Goods, but Waggon and Team are forfeited. Blessed Effect of our being out of the Union!—Mr. Merrifield had long dealt in this Town, and expended much Money therein.

1. Reprinted in eighteen newspapers by 31 May: Mass. (6), Conn. (3), N.Y. (3), N.J. (1), Pa. (2), Va. (1), N.C. (2).

### **William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington**

#### **Newport, 5 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . You mention that common report says the adjournment of the Convention was agreed to in hopes that Congress would in the present

Session do something which might be considered by the Antis as alarming, and so to frighten the people still more against adopting the Constitution.—This is entirely new to me, and appears to be calculated to prevent Congress from taking any rigorous measures.—If Congress do nothing, I am confident the Convention will adjourn again and again.—In a former letter I assigned what I take to be the true reasons for their agreeing to adjourn.<sup>2</sup>—The only reason in my mind against their adjourning again (they are afraid to reject the Constitution) is this:—The longer they delay the adoption of it, the less may be their ability to chuse such Senators as they please, when it shall be adopted;—and the two men who wish for that appointment are I believe anxious to be possessed of that honour and profit.—One of them is the famous Jonathan Hazard, and the other is Theodore Foster, a brother in law to Mr. Fenner, but a clever fellow and a Fed at heart.—

It is regretted that so much time has been spent in a business about which nothing effectual can be done until the year 1808.—The Quakers are very persevering in whatever they undertake, and they act in concert.<sup>3</sup>—When Congress are besieged by religious bodies of men, they may expect to be not a little perplexed.—At the first session of Congress, under the old Confederation, the Baptists made an application requesting the interference of Congress respecting their persecution in Massachusetts,—and they endeavoured to procure aid from the Quakers in Philadelphia;—but by the happy management of the Adams's, then delegates from Massachusetts, the Quakers were detached from them, and the danger was averted.—The Vice-Presidt. can tell you the story, I was not then in Congress, and it is worth hearing.<sup>4</sup>—The Quakers have several times applied to Congress on the subject of Slavery, and it always occassioned some heat in the Southern members.—While they consider the Quakers as enthusiasts, and that it is for their interest to countenance slavery, any attempts to abolish it before 1808, will without doubt disturb them; and it seems to me that any applications for that purpose before that period ought not to be encouraged. . . .

The goods, wares, productions and manufactures of this State I am told are still admitted into the United States duty free, and they must be so admitted unless Congress passes an Act prohibiting their importation, or laying a duty upon them,—and unless one or the other is done the country party, who are the Antis, will feel no inconvenience from not adopting the Constitution,—the Feds alone will be the sufferers,—and further the former, not suffering any disadvantage from the Impost Act as it now stands, will triumph in their opposition to the

Constitution.—If a discrimination cannot be made in favour of the Feds, the Antis certainly ought not to be indulged.—

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Docketed “Recd 10th ~~th~~ Post.” Another portion of the letter is printed above (RCS:R.I., 777–78). The beginning of the letter, not printed in this volume, deals with Ellery’s salary as commissioner of the Continental Loan Office for Rhode Island.

2. See Ellery to Huntington, 28 March (above).

3. For the Quaker memorial against the slave trade, see John Adams to Jabez Bowen, 28 March, note 3 (above).

4. On 14 September 1774 the Warren Baptist Association of Massachusetts voted to send the Reverend Isaac Backus to Philadelphia to apply to the First Continental Congress for greater religious liberty for Baptists. Backus and several other Baptists traveled to Philadelphia, where they met with Quakers to gain support before presenting their plea to Congress. The Quakers recommended that the Baptists not address the entire Congress but rather have a conference with the Massachusetts delegates and other members of Congress who supported religious liberty. At the conference on 14 October, the Reverend James Manning briefly spoke before reading the memorial stating the Baptists’ grievances. John and Samuel Adams opposed the memorial in long speeches. See William G. McLoughlin, ed., *The Diary of Isaac Backus* (3 vols., Providence, 1979), II, 911–19.

### **Boston Gazette, 5 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Extract of a letter.—*Newport*, April Fools-day, 1790,

“And Fools I think the people of this State are, in not adopting the *CONSTITUTION*, and we shall soon feel the sad effects of our *Folly*.”

1. Reprinted: New Hampshire *Concord Herald*, 20 April.

### **Prudens**

#### **Philadelphia Federal Gazette, 5 April 1790**

*To the* CITIZENS *of the* UNITED STATES.

The time is unhappily arrived, when the general government of these states have declared it necessary, that the ships and vessels of our perverse or deluded breth[r]en in the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, should enter our ports under the same charges as those of foreign nations.<sup>1</sup> They have hitherto persisted in a conduct that will be fatal to themselves, and may be exceedingly inconvenient to us. As their continuance in that disunited state forcibly suggests to us the danger of promoting their growth or strength, it seems highly proper that we should consider, whether it will not be prudent in us to enter into associations not to import, purchase or consume any article of the growth, produce or manufacture of that state. The articles which they usually export are flaxseed, horses, cattle, pickled meat, fish,

onions, cheese, butter, barley and poultry, and of all of these Providence has given us enough and to spare, without the smallest occasion to depend on them. The same may be said of all the little articles of manufacture which they can make. As their convention is yet to meet again, and may unite us all in one bond of brotherhood, it would be equally indelicate and unnecessary to enter into such an association at this moment. But as it is a measure of great moment, it will be of use to have it before the public, till the unhappy necessity to adopt it shall arise. In the mean time let us earnestly implore the Supreme Governor of the universe, to incline their hearts to join us, as ours are sincerely inclined to embrace them.

1. The exemption Congress granted Rhode Island from foreign tonnage and impost duties expired on 1 April 1790.

### **A Citizen of United America**

**Philadelphia Federal Gazette, 6 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*To the People of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations.*

Every prudent man in your little commonwealth must feel the importance of employing *in sober thought* the short time between the present moment and the adjourned meeting of your convention. The determination of that body must have an influence upon every interest, every present advantage, and every future expectation of your State. It must either produce your accession to the more perfect union of the North American States, or the hazardous attempt of some new and untried plan. This must be the case, considering the measure only as it will influence *your* future conduct. But it is not to be forgotten, that your decision is of great importance, as it will affect *our* future deportment towards you. Seeing then how momentous your determination is, it will be wise in you and us to apply to the subject honestly, prudently and dispassionately the whole strength of our minds.

Your conduct in this business, of the reform of our government, has been attentively observed by us, from the beginning. It was known, that several of the greatest evils, which the new constitution was meant to cure, existed in a peculiar degree among your Paper-money tenders, and ex post facto, or retrospective laws, are all that will be brought into public view at this moment. From your habits in the baneful use of paper tenders, through almost the whole of the present century, it was known, that the essential principles of religion, both natural and revealed, and the simple but divine rules of right and wrong, *as they regard the property of our neighbour*, had become almost blotted out of your laws.

Even your old men, whose near approach to the tribunal of eternal and almighty justice, ought even now to make them tremble like *Felix*,<sup>2</sup> even your old men cannot remember the time, when the unhappy people of your State were free from the temptations of paper-money. We are told in holy writ, that *forty* years long was the Almighty grieved with the doings of an evil generation,<sup>3</sup> but *eighty years* is the melancholy race of your unhappy state in paper tenders.<sup>4</sup> It ought to be a serious question with you, whether there is not a real and great danger, that so long a practice of doing to others what ye would *not*, that others should do unto you, may not have so far corrupted your moral sense (or sense of right and wrong) as to render it improbable, that of yourselves, you could be reclaimed. You are not to suppose, that these things are here mentioned for the sake of accusing you. Tis only done to shew you, that the Americans and the world at large had a perfect conception of the state of things among you, and that from this knowledge of you, it was generally feared that great difficulties in the attempts towards the establishment of just government would arise from you. Accordingly it happened, that when the laxness of government, the lost credit and the sinking honor of our country drew together that band of *pure*, of *wise*, and of *enlightened* men, who probed to the bottom our numerous political maladies you refused even to attend at the consultation.<sup>5</sup> It was not that the form or spirit of the constitution displeased you, for it was unknown—it was not that the cause was unimportant or insufficient, for our enemies were not more severe in their accusations, than were our friends strenuous in their remonstrances at our neglect to reform our government—no. The cause was very different; for tho' the hand of providence had formed your minds, like other men's, to virtue, *legal injustice* had become familiar to you. It had ceased to be an object of disgust, and consequently, sheltering yourselves under forms and words, you avoided to consult with the chosen friends of your country about the restoration of her virtue and her honor. Your subsequent conduct has corresponded with these motives and these measures. It remains now to consider, after the approaching meeting of your convention, what must be the consequence, should it terminate without your accession to our union.

The public indignation is so highly raised, and the possibility of inconveniences and injuries from you has so quickened the feelings of our people, that an immediate reduction of your state is the wish of many. A measure, involving such serious consequences, will neither be *advocated* nor *opposed* in this paper. Blessed be God, we have a legislative power competent to this delicate and interesting question—and a chief

magistrate whom you well know to be equal to the execution of their ordinances. It is not necessary here to compare the strength of *Rhode-Island* and THE NEW UNION—you know as well as we, that your majority is but little more numerous than your minority—that your minority are our decided and firm friends—that they are panting for the accession to the union—that the opponents of the new constitution in your state, with their families, do not amount to 30,000—that the population of Boston, New-York, and Philadelphia, and of scores of counties in the United States, do each exceed that number—that if every opponent to the union, in your state, who is able to bear arms, could be induced into so rash, so ruinous a measure, you could not embody 5000 men—that you could neither furnish them with arms nor artillery fit to take the field, nor with powder, ball, nor cloathing—that your cattle, and horses might be driven from your state—that you have no stores in salt provisions or *Flour*—that if you had, you could not risque a general engagement to protect them—and that you have not coin or other funds to pay your forces. But it is needless to waste your time by combating the preposterous wild idea of a military opposition on your part.

Let us consider with becoming seriousness the injuries you must sustain and the sufferings you must endure from not acceding to the union, in consequence of the self-defensive and bloodless measures we must in that event be obliged to take.

Your vessels have already become subject to foreign tonnage, but as we want not their aid in our trade, having enough of our own, we shall find it prudent to raise the tonnage on them till it becomes equal to a prohibition, and this will throw all your workmen for building and fitting ships *out of employ*, and will induce them to emigrate to us, and as it is well known that their labor is *higher* in *many* of our ports than in either of yours, their change of situation will be *to their advantage*. The only hardships they have to fear are from staying among you. Good wages and a cordial welcome are ready for them among us, and temporary associations will no doubt be formed to assist them with employment, dwelling places, and money immediately on their arrival. The ships built in your state prior to the meeting of your convention (but not after) may be received by us as free American bottoms, if first actually bought and owned by our merchants, by which means there will cease to be any work in repairing them in your ports, and many thousand pounds of property and many valuable captains, mates and sailors will be induced to leave you and come to us; thereby impairing your strength and encreasing our own.

In regard to your manufactures of rum, loaf sugar, chocolate, nails, anchors, shoes, hats, coarse linens, cheese, butter, &c. it will be necessary that they pay in our ports not only the same duties as foreign goods



of the same kinds, but that an addition be made to those, which shall be equivalent to the charges of importation. The most compact article you make and send into our ports is linen, on which, in addition to the impost on foreign linen, we shall find it necessary to put 20 per cent. for the charges of importing those for instance of Ireland and Germany, which countries are more friendly to us in their department than you; so of butter, cheese, nails, rum, &c. which are imported from foreign countries under charges of 30, 40 and 50 per cent. according to their bulk, for we cannot sacrifice our manufacturers, who are a great strength to us, to support yours, who will by their prosperity enable you to incommode, and, if you can to injure us. As in the case of your shipbuilders, &c. so in this of your manufacturers, the want of the markets of the United States must impel them to remove from your towns, from whence their goods and wares cannot be sent into our cities where the duties on your goods, and on foreign goods will operate directly and powerfully to encourage them. With us they will be sure of success for raw materials, flour and fuel are cheaper, in the United States than in Rhode-Island, and wages are generally better from the plenty of land, which occasions a constant want of people.

It will also be necessary that we should lay the same burden upon your produce[,] fish and live stock[,] flax, hemp, flaxseed, horses, cattle, sheep, cheese, butter, barley, hops, onions, potatoes, cod fish, mackerel, salmon, beef, pork, and poultry, [which]<sup>6</sup> are produced among ourselves. We must cherish our own farmers who are the main strength of our country, by consuming their productions. Your articles which interfere with them, we cannot consent to buy, because as before observed, it will increase your strength or at least preserve you in as good a situation as you are, and perhaps enable you to injure us, and to keep your farmers employed at home. As the emigration of your manufacturers, mariners and merchants, and the total decline of your foreign trade must lessen your home demand for the produce of your lands and interrupt the exportation of them, your farmers will also find themselves compelled to leave you, and to repair to the other states in which farms are much more numerous and cheap, and there is a constant market for produce.

As the virtuous part of your citizens are entitled to the brotherly affection of the American people and to the tender care of the Federal government, it is probable that Congress will allot them a body of lands, on which those, who have not money or a trade, may settle with a prospect of great advantage. To every male adult, who would emigrate and settle, might be given 200 acres of land, if married 100 acres more might be given *for his wife*, and if he should have children 50 acres

more for *each*. Supposing your whole population to be 50,000 souls, then five millions of acres of land would be sufficient to make the above distribution, besides an additional allowance for ministers of the gospel and teachers of children.

Bounties in money might be very wisely offered to several descriptions of men, who should make themselves citizens and residents of the new union. The expence of a single brigade thro' one campaign, would amount to more money. Ten dollars extra for example to each of your sailors, who should move to us with his family and enter on board one of our vessels. You never had 3000 seamen, and the above bounty upon that number would amount to no more than 30,000 dollars. This might be extended to some other classes of people to whom the money would be an object.

There is a prevailing inclination among many here to enter into an agreement not to export to or import from you, nor to consume any article made or raised in your state, nor any foreign goods imported from it, nor to charter or ship goods in Rhode-Island bottoms.<sup>7</sup> The motions of government will, however, be waited for, which the people are ready to second and support. One very weighty reason that induces our people to think of such an association is, that it is known that some among you expect to *defeat our revenue laws, and to ruin our fair traders* by collusion and smuggling. It is particularly believed, that you will attempt to supply our fishermen with salt, who, coming in with their salted fish, will have no occasion to enter or report it, but yet may endeavour to obtain the drawback of the salt duty on exportation.

You formerly enjoyed considerable advantages in the West-India trade, by being enabled to load your vessels with boards, staves, &c. imported from the United States now in the new union. The necessary measures must be taken to prevent this in future, and perhaps this may produce a prohibition of your vessels entering our ports on any terms whatever.

In addition to these obvious means of checking your growth and promoting our strength, many will no doubt be suggested by the wisdom and vigilance of our government, as well as by experience. A future paper<sup>8</sup> will lay before you other considerations of a nature, that appear also to demand your serious attention.

1. Reprinted: *New York Daily Gazette*, 10 April; *Newport Herald*, 13 May; and *Providence Gazette*, 15 May. This piece and another under the same pseudonym printed in the *Federal Gazette*, 12 April (below), were written by Tench Coxe, a Philadelphia merchant. A prolific Federalist writer, Coxe sent copies of these articles to Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and Congressman James Madison in New York City (see Coxe to Madison, 6 April, Rutland, *Madison*, XIII, 141–42n. Coxe's letter to Hamilton of 6 April has not been found.). The manuscript draft of this essay is in the Coxe Papers, Series III, Essays, Addresses, and Resource Material, at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Mfm:R.I.).

2. Acts 24:25.

3. Psalms 95:10.

4. Rhode Island first authorized an emission of paper money at the July 1710 legislative session to finance the colony's participation in a military expedition against the French in Nova Scotia (Bartlett, *Records*, IV, 96–98).

5. For Rhode Island's refusal to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention, see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxv–xxxvii, 8–23.

6. The *New York Daily Gazette* inserted "which." The other reprints reproduced the *Federal Gazette's* version.

7. See "Prudens," Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 5 April (immediately above).

8. See note 1 (above).

### **Abraham Baldwin to Joel Barlow New York, 7 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

My dear friend

. . . R Island convention was together a few days last month, the artis had a majority of 12. they are to meet again the last of next month. what they will dare to do is uncertain. I think we shall dare to manage them pretty soon if they adjourn again without coming to a determination. I have no doubt of our powers on the subject. . . .

1. RC, Baldwin Collection, Yale University Library. Baldwin, Barlow's brother-in-law and a native of Connecticut, represented Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives. Barlow (1754–1812), a Yale College graduate (1778), a lawyer, a member of the "Connecticut Wits," and a well-published author of epic poetry, who went to Europe in May 1788 as an agent of the Scioto Land Company, an endeavor that ended disastrously in France.

### **Greenwichensis Newport Herald, 8 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I am happy to find that Agricola, however he may have mistaken my sentiments and my feelings, is possessed of that moderation and ingenuity which I hope may ever mark the character of my antagonist. My coadjutor, as he styles the anonymous writer, who has promised to come forth in numbers,<sup>2</sup> he may be assured is a volunteer whose services are neither required nor needed by me.—The occasion demands no such aid;—and when I find that my ground is not tenable, I shall readily quit it, without calling in any one to my support.

When I wrote my last piece,<sup>3</sup> I was, as I am now, perfectly calm, and in the best of humors—disposed to smile where I ought, and to be candid where I can,—happy to think that my system for the prosperity of the public has called forth the abilities of a writer, whose extensive genius may adorn the Herald and instruct his fellow-citizens.

The principles of commutative and distributive justice are indeed obligatory on States as well as on individuals;—but are not individuals governed by their interest, and are not, and ought not States to be governed by that principle?—Indeed, Agricola, interest in some shape

or other, is the pursuit of individuals, as well as societies:—And if a State, instead of being actuated by apparent interest, were to proceed on the frigid ground of moral investigation, opportunities for its advancement might pass away before it came to a determination; or it might be overthrown, unless all States were to become moral philosophers, while it was deliberating, whether it were consistent or not, with the principles of morality to defend itself.—*Mores* may form *Utopias*,<sup>4</sup> but until the Empires, Kingdoms, and States of the world shall be new cast by his model, their apparent interest ought, in my opinion, to govern them.

The reason why foreigners send their ships to St. Eustatius, *however wise* it may be, is on account of the articles which are collected there from other places; and I humbly conceive if the goods of other countries were collected here, this State would be visited by the vessels of the United States and other maritime powers, for a reason similar to that which produces traffic at St. Eustatius:<sup>5</sup> This I take to be sound analogical reasoning.—But, says Agricola, the situation of this State differs from *St. Eustatius*, or any of the *West-India* islands,—they belong to *European* powers,—they are not exposed to the resentment of any rival neighboring powers, &c. and *St. Eustatius* belongs to one of the greatest maritime powers, &c. &c.

Strange!—Have none of the islands in the West Indies experienced the resentment of rival powers?—Did not the island of *Jamaica* once belong to the *Spaniard*?—and was not *St. Eustatius* taken by the *British* in the late war?—Is the *United Netherlands* one of the greatest maritime powers in Europe?—There is scarcely a maritime power in *Europe* that is not superior to it in naval force, and you might as well compare the strength of an armed pinnace with that of a first-rate ship of war, as the naval strength of the *United Netherlands* with that of *Spain*.—There was a time indeed, when *Van Trump* hoisted a broom at the mast head of his ship, and threatened to sweep the *British* channel;<sup>6</sup> but that time has long since elapsed.

But, say you, the moment *Spain* should attempt to take *St. Eustatius*; or to revenge the injuries she suffers from its trade with her territories, she would suffer much greater loss by a deprivation or destruction of some of her possessions in *America*,—on the principles of commutative justice I suppose,—But, pray Sir, what power would in that case undertake to deprive *Spain* of some of those possessions? The *Dutch* alone are certainly unable to make such conquests;—and who would assist them? If any of the maritime powers should aid them to recover *St. Eustatius* from the *Spaniard*, or to invade his *American* territories—it clearly could not be on your grand principles of justice, it must be on

the bottom of *interest*; and here we are on the *true ground* of national operation.—Indeed you observe, that the *interest* of this State must contravene that of the States on each side of her, and therefore they may, without fear from any foreign nation, control this State.—I know you renounce the idea of subjugating it, but if your argument don't go to something like this, it amounts to nothing at all.—But how do you prove this contravention?—Why,—it is the interest of every commercial people to be the carriers of their own produce and manufactures.—True, O King Agricola!—but if the vessels of the United States bring their goods and manufactures here to be exchanged for foreign produce and manufactures, they will not be the carriers of their own produce and manufactures? The question answers itself.—But the *United States*, you say, according to my stating, will have no manner of use for any shipping, excepting a few coasting vessels.—I must again recur to my comparison of this State, with *St. Eustatius*, and again ask a question, with your leave, to shew that your inference from my stating is not well founded.—Doth the trade to that island employ all the ships of the maritime powers who trade there? Certainly not;—nor did I mean that all the vessels of the *United States* would be employed in a trade to this State; nor do I conceive what I said, could be fairly taken in an absolute, universal sense.—Again, I ask, for I love to ask pertinent questions, is there any State which objects to trading to *St. Eustatius* on account of a loss of the duty of foreign tonnage?—If the United States should lose a portion of that duty, it would be amply compensated by the saving in insurance, and the facility of procuring a number of foreign articles in exchange for their goods, wares and productions in this State.—To gratify you, Sir, I have been thus particular.

The *United States*, will never agree to open a free port within their jurisdiction for this short plain reason; because the benefits of it would be so great that they will never consent that any one State should receive them in preference to the rest.

I repeat it again; because I believe it to be true, that no nation on earth hath ever been a tame spectator of invaded superiority, and I do not imagine that the instances you have adduced militate against that observation.

It hath happened, and probably it will re-occur, that sovereign powers may be attacked, and subdued;—but it never was, nor can it be the case where there has been ability in a neighboring or an interested State to protect and support it.—Who could defend Ireland and Wales against the arms of Britain at the time they were conquered by her; and who could prevent the dismemberment of Poland?<sup>7</sup> But doth it follow from these examples that the neighboring powers who received

no share of the spoil, acquiesced in the division of Poland, or that the conquest of Ireland and Wales excited no jealousy in Europe.—I think not.—*Interest*, and ability aside, invaded Sovereignty, becomes the common cause of Sovereigns;—and it holds equally good in Sovereign States as well as among individual Princes.—I gave the effect which the decapitation of *Charles the First* had on the Princes of *Europe*, as an instance in point.—I now mention that *Queen Elizabeth*, notwithstanding her bitter enmity against *Mary Queen of Scots*; yet when she was imprisoned by her subjects, resented their conduct, and for the first time interposed sincerely in her behalf.<sup>8</sup>

Kings, and Queens, Sovereign heads, I presume proceed in their resentments of violated majesty on this ground,—the example is dangerous to their honor and existence; and the reason should operate as powerfully with respect to Sovereign States,—the destruction of one augments the power of another, and destroys that balance which serves to protect all.

Professing as great a regard for *reason*, and the happiness of this State as *Agricola*, I ventured to hold out a system to the public, which I thought would be eventually beneficial to the State. I aimed not at the character of a *Solon* or *Lycurgus*.—I received it not from any terrestrial or celestial nymph.—It was the offspring of my own invention, and I have defended it as such, against the attacks of *Agricola*, as well as I could in so contracted a field as a news-paper.—If I have failed I would chuse that it should be attributed to the superior abilities of my antagonist, rather than the badness of the plan, or the imbecility of its defence; because I respect his ingenuity, and because I am not altogether destitute of vanity.—But let the public opinion be as it may, I am happy to find that however different our reasonings may have been, we agree in our conclusion, that dallying any longer with the constitution will prove extremely injurious to the State.

1. "Greenwichensis" is responding to "Agricola," *Newport Herald*, 1 April (above).
2. For the "coadjutor" of "Greenwichensis," see three anonymous essays, No. I, No. II, and No. III, *Newport Herald*, 18 and 25 March and 1 April (all above).
3. See "Greenwichensis," *Newport Herald*, 18 March (above).
4. Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), an English lawyer and statesman, was the author of *Utopia* (1516), a book set in an imaginary island with a political system based upon monastic communalism.
5. See "Greenwichensis," *Newport Herald*, 18 March, note 3 (above).
6. A reference to Dutch Admiral Maarten Harpertzoon Tromp's naval battles against the English in 1652–53.
7. A reference to the partition of Poland in 1772 by Russia, Prussia, and Austria.
8. Mary, Queen of Scots, was forced to abdicate and was imprisoned in 1567. After unsuccessfully trying to regain her throne, she fled to England and sought protection

from her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. Seeing Mary as a rival to the English throne, Elizabeth placed Mary under house arrest. In 1587 Mary was executed.

“X.”

**Newport Herald, 8 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The three NUMBERS which have appeared in the Herald<sup>2</sup> claimed the perusal of one of your readers. The author of them is opposed to the Constitution, however, he is truly a *weak* opposer.—He is labored extremely hard to produce something, but indeed, he has spun out a large portion of nonsense.—He thinks the Continental Government is defective; but if we may judge from his writings, he finds it difficult to point out its defects.—He would drop a tear to Liberty lately triumphant, but *now receiving chains*,<sup>3</sup>—Alas Mr. Numbers! thy tears proceed from an effeminacy, unbecoming a firm opposer,—they are the overflowings of a timid heart.—If it be true that thou art EURIPIDES, as has been hinted,<sup>4</sup> or whoever the writer may be, it is sincerely recommended to him to lay aside his pen; however if he is determined to indulge that petulant desire of appearing as an author (which will surely bring on him the disgrace that naturally attends labors such as his) he will have this consolation, that his productions will be read with that mixture of *pity* and *contempt* which they truly merit.

1. For a response to “X.,” see the *Newport Herald*, 15 April (RCS:R.I., 827).

2. For the three numbered and anonymous essays, see the *Newport Herald*, 18 and 25 March and 1 April (all above).

3. Quoted from the third anonymous essay (*Newport Herald*, 1 April [above]).

4. The *Newport Herald*, 1 April, printed the following statement under the heading “A HINT”: “LOOK out Federalists—EURIPIDES has awoke from his slumbers.—and strong in NUMBERS, he boldly attacks the Constitution.” Euripides (c. 480–406 BC) was the last of the three great Greek tragedians.

**Newport Herald, 8 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*POLITICIANS.—A SCRAP.*

No country, perhaps, in the habitable globe, contains so many government *amenders* and declaimers on the subject of Constitutions, as the United States.—Every man seems to think himself born a Legislator, and is generally so tenacious of his own darling sentiment, that unless it is adopted, he is continually complaining. But this TRUTH, advanced by the SOLON of our country, ought to be known:—That the experience of the world hath shewn, that a person “may defend the principles of liberty, and the rights of mankind with great abilities, and

yet after all, when called upon to propose a plan of Legislation, he may astonish the world with a signal absurdity.[<sup>1</sup>]<sup>2</sup>

1. Reprinted: *New York Gazette of the United States*, 21 April; *Winchester Virginia Gazette*, 8 May; and *New York Daily Gazette* and *New York Morning Post*, 24 May.

2. The quoted material is from John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* . . . (3 vols., London, 1787–1788), I, Letter LIV, 365.

### **New York Daily Advertiser, 9 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

#### A RHODE ISLAND MEDITATION.

Embark'd on an ocean long noted for gales  
And amply provided with rigging and sails  
The bulky Twelve-sisters her anchor has weigh'd  
We wish we could say that her builders were paid.

Success to her Pilots—bad luck to her foes  
May fortune go with her wherever she goes,  
May she ever be able to weather the gale  
Without a Rhode-Island to tow at her tail.

As for us, we are waiting to take an ebb-tide  
And sail by ourselves (as the ocean is wide)  
Our pilot in England has took his degrees  
And swears he can live upon onions and cheese.

It is true, you are able to hoist us on deck  
But what if your vessel should happen to wreck;  
Your draught is so great, we can make it appear  
That you would lie thumping, where we should go clear.

If the weather is good, and you're sailing all free,  
Rhode-Island might query, what is it to me;—  
To force us along would be rather ungracious  
So leave us alone—to become a *Eustatius*.<sup>2</sup>

But to drop this dull practice of talking in tropes,  
As we've told you our fears we will tell you our hopes:  
As deep as the ocean, a scheme we have laid  
To worry your gizzards by cramping your trade.

In a union with you we could hardly be blest  
If not in a wrangle, we're never at rest;  
The world has acknowledged our merit in scheming  
He rises full early that catches us dreaming.



If tonnage is out of the question, tis' clear  
 All Britain will come with her merchandize here,  
 From duties give up, and no tonnages paid  
 Rhode-Island shall be the emporium of trade.

Then, then we shall see the effects of our struggling  
 When our island abounds with the spirit—of smuggling:  
 Not a day shall arrive but will bring us some booty  
 By *running* you packages, *free of all duty*.

Altho' you may brand us with many a curse,  
 We can put up with that, if you do nothing worse.  
 All Europe shall help in erecting our pile, and  
*Jack Taylor*<sup>3</sup> shall be first King of Rhode-Island.

1. Reprinted: Hartford *American Mercury*, 19 April; *Massachusetts Centinel*, 28 April; *State Gazette of North Carolina*, 1 May; *New Hampshire Gazetteer*, 7 May; *Charleston City Gazette*, 18 May; and *Vermont Journal*, 2 June.

2. See "Greenwichiensis," *Newport Herald*, 18 March, note 3 (above).

3. For Antifederalist John Taylor of Massachusetts, who had moved to Smithfield, R.I., see *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 6 August 1789, at note 4 and note 4 (RCS:R.I., 566).

### **New York Daily Advertiser, 10 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from Philadelphia, April 8.*

"Pennsylvania has ever claimed a pre-eminence, in doing her endeavour to accommodate such unfortunate persons as have been necessitated to emigrate to her shores. A recent instance of this is our Hibernian society,<sup>2</sup> which bids fair to be of immense public utility, in regard to putting a number of destitute persons in a way of getting their bread by their industry. I have lately mentioned to some of my friends here, and now mention to you with the same view, that a similar association for the relief of distressed Rhode-Islanders ought, in justice, to be set on foot. Thro' the obstinacy of the antifederalists of that state, it is more than probable that numbers of a contrary sentiment will soon think of changing their situation to prevent a want of employ reducing them to speedy distress. These will generally be tradesmen, sailors and a few farmers; and are consequently the very people we should relieve and encourage."

1. Reprinted: *Charleston City Gazette*, 10 May. For more on aiding potential Rhode Island emigrants, see the *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 15 April (below).

2. A reference to the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland that was founded in Philadelphia on 3 March 1790 (*Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 13 March).

### A Citizen of United America

Philadelphia Federal Gazette, 12 April 1790<sup>1</sup>

To the PEOPLE of the STATE  
of RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS.

In our last paper we proposed further to consider those circumstances, that ought to prevent your persevering to decline an accession to the new union, to which we now proceed.

When the United States dissolved their connexion with the British nation, they certainly considered themselves as *one independent people*, and were not then anxious for any other object, but establishing themselves as *one body of free equal citizens*. It was solely owing to their having been *thirteen* Provinces, that they were afterwards thrown into the form of *thirteen* States, and however important and expedient it may now appear, that the State governments should be preserved, it was not then deemed a matter of any moment, compared with the great object of forming them into one republic. The sense of the majority was uniformly held up, and wisely was it done, as the supreme law of the land. Hence it may be argued, that the design of the American revolution is counteracted, and the spirit of the declaration of independence is contravened, whenever state politics prevent the execution of the will of *a real majority* of the citizens of the United States. In this view of the subject what can you say, what will the world think of 50,000 people in your state persevering to oppose the sense of three millions of their fellow citizens? Can such conduct be permitted—Can we consent to allow to the sixtieth part of our nation a right to secede from us, and to keep in their hands a dangerous rendezvous for hostile fleets, *which we considered as ours at the moment of the revolution*, and of which we can easily possess ourselves in a single day. If this may be done by your state, because you do not like a constitution, which a large and increasing majority approve, does it not follow, that a majority of the inhabitants of the island of Rhode-Island<sup>2</sup> may secede from you and join us—and that other districts may do the same? Shall we not be justified in defending them in their secession from you, upon the very principles on which you will first have seceded from us?

Some of you, we are told, hold out to your fellow-citizens the dangerous and delusive idea of making advantageous foreign connections. The nations from whom you must look for such advantages will certainly expect that their vessels, manufactures and merchandize will sustain *every burden in our ports, which Congress can devise*. They will put your consumption against ours in the two sides of the scale, and as fifty

thousand people, whose territory is incapable of much greater population, are much less important than three millions with a very extensive territory to contain their increase, so *our* scale *must* preponderate, if those who hold the balance, have common sense. If they look a little further and consider how they are to be paid *by you*, they will quickly find, that paper-money has banished all your coin—that you cannot supply their islands with boards, staves, flour, bread and Indian-Corn, nor can you pay them in furs, tobacco, indigo, rice, square timber, masts, spars, &c. for their European markets—and that you can give them only butter, cheese, wet provisions and fish, which they either prohibit, or load with high duties, because they have them from their own dominions or fisheries.

It is manifest, that all the American States, which have no vacant territory, will be unable to maintain their present weight or importance in the union, but by the advancement of their commerce, fisheries and manufactures. All their surplus people must emigrate to less populated scenes, unless *trade, navigation, manufactures and the arts* can be made to employ them. It is therefore deeply injurious to your future importance as a state, that your laws, paper tenders, and your still withholding from our union, are rapidly destroying your merchants, fishermen, manufacturers and artizans. No prudent man therefore will breed his son in your State to those occupations—no prudent foreigner will set down among you with a store of goods, or a valuable work-shop and property, in raw materials, for the same reasons. He will be afraid to deal with you for fear of your laws and paper-money—the European nations take no American manufactures—and our States, as before observed, must in self defence prohibit your goods of every sort and kind. Thus your *only* means of increasing in wealth, people and strength are now wantonly thrown away—You have already lost much, while we have gained; but under the new laws, which we must pass, your suffering will be great indeed.

Some of your public papers have formerly held out the idea of dangers to liberty from the new constitution. You well know, that amendments have *since* been made<sup>3</sup>—that many points not so fully explained or secured, have been strengthened by new clauses, and that there is a constitutional mode of obtaining others by means of the state legislatures, though Congress should refuse them.<sup>4</sup> You also know that the opposition to the constitution has every where become more mild, and that in many places the objections have been given up from its being better understood, and that several of the states that very reluctantly adopted the constitution, have since returned to the federal and state legislatures known friends of that new plan of government and union.

Some of your politicians have undertaken to say, there is particular danger to liberty in the circumstance of our having chosen the greatest and most virtuous of our citizens to fill the principal stations in the government; because, say they, it will render the people less sensible of the faults of the constitution. In answer to this it may be justly observed, that any errors and improprieties, which may have crept into it, are placed before the known friends of the people, long approved for their wisdom and virtue; so that whatever is really wrong, will be discovered by their abilities, and will be amended by their integrity. It is much more just and reasonable that we should assert, that there really cannot be this supposed danger to the liberty and happiness of our country, from a constitution which a long list of our worthiest and most enlightened patriots, *with our political father at their head*,<sup>5</sup> continue after mature reflection and experience, *deliberately and decidedly to approve*. Superlatively base and infamous would be the return for the series of essential services performed by our most excellent chief magistrate, were we to admit a bare possibility, that he could calmly view the destruction of that liberty and public happiness, which he so long laboured to procure, and is now toiling to perpetuate. How much do your wretched politicians wantonly hazard, when, in torturing every thought and circumstance into forms of deception and alarm, they will venture to suggest, that he who has almost grown old in the practice of every public and private virtue, can endure torpidly to witness through the remainder of his days the ruin of his country.

The declared and manifest design of the new federal constitution, is the obtaining and securing the most desirable and estimable objects of civil society. It has been always conceded, even by its opponents, that the people of America cannot secure these blessings without an Union among at least four or five contiguous states. How preposterous, how wild then would an attempt to maintain the separate independency of your state appear. You know already the difference of our population and yours; our territory is six hundred and thirty-eight millions of acres, yours is not two millions; our wealth is greater than yours by more than the proportion of population, for you are not as rich according to numbers as the other states are at a medium. You cannot increase in people for want of room, and from other causes already laid before you; we must increase from the abundance of vacant territory and other advantages which we possess. What must be the consequence of your declaring for a separation, or your continuing to maintain it, which you must suppose we consider as the same thing. You cannot any longer shelter yourselves under forms or ingenious pretences. Affairs

are brought to the point of maturity and time, that if you are not with us you are against us. Though you may cautiously avoid to draw the sword, you will, by your conduct, declare yourselves hostile to our tranquility, and that you are prepared to receive upon equal terms *us* and our *enemies*. Your convention may expect by procrastinating their decision till the adjournment of the federal legislature to avoid the immediate adoption of those measures, which Congress might think proper to pursue in the event of your not acceding to our union. Do not be deceived. So early an adjournment of the federal legislature most probably will not take place, and if it should, the President of the United States has power to convene them, whenever he shall think the public good requires it.

You may not be accurately acquainted with the value of the western lands, which you would lose by seceding from the American union. They are above one hundred and ten times larger than your state and amount to 220 millions of acres, and none of them have been yet sold under two-thirds of a dollar payable in public securities. If the medium value of those, that have been sold and of those that shall be sold hereafter, should prove to be no more than one-third of a dollar per acre in certificates, this would produce 73 1-3 millions of dollars, which is the total amount of the foreign and domestic federal and state debts, with the arrears of interest due thereon.

The portion of power given to your state in the federal legislature is very great. We have often repeated, that your population is but one sixtieth of that of the whole union. Yet in the senate, without whose consent no law, can pass, you have a thirteenth vote, that is, though you are but one sixtieth of the people you have near five sixtieths of the power. *While that is the case* can your liberty be in danger, and *it must always be the case* as long as you desire it, because the constitution declares “*that no state shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the senate without its consent.*”<sup>6</sup> It becomes you seriously to reflect, and candidly to say whether you think any terms of union will ever be granted to you more favorable than these.

The extinction of the separate government of your state appears likely to be the consequence of your rejecting the new constitution. Your principal islands will be unable to endure the destruction of your commerce, fisheries, ship-building and manufactures, including those of *cheese and butter*. They will consequently secede from you in some moment of deep distress and despair, and if they secede will undoubtedly join themselves to Massachusetts or Connecticut; so that when circumstances force the remainder of your state to return to us, your people

will probably be averse to the expence of a separate government, but will rather wish to connect themselves with the two states above mentioned according to local circumstances. Those, therefore, who wish to hold that share of power in your commonwealth, which they now possess, have a strong personal interest in acceding to the new union without delay.

The United States are now prepared to pay off the arrears of interest and part of the principal of the foreign debt, for which (as well as the domestic) you are bound. They cannot permit their credit and national honor to suffer from a further delay of this claim upon their gratitude and justice. It is a serious question, which your convention should be able to answer, whether you can immediately produce your proportion, *not* in depreciated paper bills, *but in solid coin*. If you do not honestly discharge your proportion and yet persist in declining to continue in our union, it will be manifest to the French, Spanish and Dutch nations that you mean to treat them as you have already treated your own citizens, many of ours and some of theirs. Your hopes of a profitable connexion with them, if any such hopes you really had, will thus be blasted in the bud, and they would be more likely to assist us in operating against you, which we cannot want, than to form commercial treaties with you.

It is very certain that every citizen of the United States, who endeavours to shew you the danger of declining to accede to the new union, may be considered as speaking in favor of a measure, which it is his interest to promote. But though this may inspire you with caution, it ought not to occasion you to shut your ears and hearts against truth and reason. Rhode-Island and the twelve United States are not natural enemies, but have one common interest. Such has been the universal opinion of our best and wisest men at every period, from the first moment of opposition to Great Britain down to the present time. When we persuade you, therefore, to do that which *our* interest requires, we also advise you to that which *your* interest no less demands: your separation from us can only incommode, but not deeply injure us, but it may deeply injure, nay must destroy you. Let us, therefore, exhort you to consider the manifold and dreadful evils, that must befall your commerce, manufactures, fisheries and agriculture as soon as we commence our bloodless legislative operations against you. In the day of calamity let it be remembered, that we have warned you of the approaching evil, and that we have deplored your infatuation, not in silence, but earnestly entreating of you for your sakes and for our own to come again into our political family.

1. Reprinted: *New York Daily Gazette*, 15 April; *Newport Herald*, 20 May; and *Providence Gazette*, 22 May. See "A Citizen of United America" (Tench Coxe), *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 6 April, note 1 (above).

2. See "A Freeholder;" *Newport Herald*, 18 February, note 7 (above).

3. On 25 September 1789 Congress approved twelve amendments to the Constitution (Appendix I, below).

4. Article V of the Constitution provided that whenever the legislatures of two-thirds of the states requested that Congress call a constitutional convention for proposing amendments to the Constitution, Congress was obliged to call the convention (RCS:R.I., 332).

5. George Washington.

6. Paraphrased from Article V of the Constitution (RCS:R.I., 333).

### **Newport Herald, 15 April 1790**

Mr. EDES, In the last Herald Mr. X<sup>1</sup> observes that the author of the numbers<sup>2</sup> was a weak opposer to the constitution; that was apparent to every body,—prudential reasons, as he says, induced him to suppress the materials he had collected, for subsequent numbers, to which the former were introductory; therefore the opposition (if any) must be weak.—What did you mean by "he is labored extremely *hard*?" which expression contains neither sense, nor grammar, and yet you tell of "spinning out a large *portion of nonsense*;"—ridiculous! Where, Mr. X, did you learn the use of tropes and figures? perhaps in the shop, by putting up large portions of m—e. You cry out in distress for Mr. Numbers, because he shed tears, and therefore is effeminate; fie, Mr. X, are you ignorant? observation, and the records of nature will inform you that the brave and generous often shed tears; weeping therefore, is no certain sign of effeminacy.—As to Euripides, he has ever been a good citizen, and a firm friend to this State; if he wrote the numbers they were well meant, and deserve more candor than actuates the soul of X, whose insignificancy will ever place him below the notice of so good a man as Euripides; but all parts of creation have their several appointments, X somewhere may be useful, therefore I have written these strictures lest X should burst with conceit, like the frog in the fable, who would equal the bulk of the ox.<sup>3</sup>

1. For "X,," see *Newport Herald*, 8 April (above).

2. A reference to No. I, No. II, and No. III, *Newport Herald*, 18, 25 March and 1 April (all above).

3. A reference to one of Aesop's fables, in which a frog, in an attempt to impress his son, tries to become as large as an ox by puffing himself up, but eventually bursts as a result. The moral is that self-conceit can lead to self-destruction.

### **Philadelphia Federal Gazette, 15 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

A correspondent recommends to inhabitants of Boston, New-York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, and other principal sea-port or

manufacturing towns in the United States, to establish societies for the advice, encouragement and assistance of Rhode-Island emigrants, in case the convention of that state should not adopt the constitution. Many valuable citizens of that state will be under the necessity of leaving them, if they persist in keeping out of the union. Ship-carpenters, sail-makers, rope-makers, mast-makers, anchor and black-smiths, block-makers, riggers, weavers, shoe-makers, tanners, hatters, wheel-wrights, cabinet-makers, distillers, painters, glaziers, and almost every other tradesman, artificer and manufacturer will find better wages in some one of the seaports southward of Rhode-Island state, than they can get at home—as also the captains and mates of vessels, and sailors. Labouring men in the farming way are wanted in all the states. Abundant employment, cheap lands to buy, and low rents ensure them and their families comfortable living.

1. Reprinted: *State Gazette of North Carolina*, 8 May. For more on aiding potential Rhode Island emigrants, see the *New York Daily Advertiser*, 10 April (above).

**William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington**  
**Newport, 17 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . I believe I mentioned in my last letter that any act which Congress might think proper to pass, laying duties on the goods, wares and productions of this State should be passed in time to reach this State previous to the sitting of the Genl. Assembly.<sup>2</sup> Lest I should have omitted it I now mention it.—You may depend upon it that an Act of that kind would have a considerable effect upon our Antis in general,—and probably might induce the General Assembly to request Congress to let the goods &c of this State pass duty free into the other States, upon its adoption of the Constitution, which request would greatly influence the conduct of the Convention.—The fall of the year is the time when the produce &c of this State is shipped to the other States, and then Congress will not be in session; where fore if Congress should pass their act in season, the Antis, who I am sure will be desirous to avoid its operation, will be naturally led to make a request similar to that I have suggested.—

I repeat it, such an Act passed so as to be here before the sitting of the Genl. Assembly would be highly beneficial.—

The Assembly will sit on the 1st. wednesday in May.—

If this State should not adopt the Constitution before the next Session of Congress it is probable that this town, the town of Providence, and some other towns in this State may apply to Congress to be received



into the Union,—and an application may be made before Congress rises, if the Constitution should be rejected by the Convention.—Such an application would alarm the Antis and might endanger the Feds, unless the former should apprehend that Congress would protect the latter against any violence which might be offered to them in consequence of their application.—If the applying towns should be received into the Union they would of course be safe under the protection of the United States;—but if their application should fail they may be involved in a war with the Antis. In that event would Congress assist the Feds if they should request Assistances?—Please to favour me with your opinion, and that of other leading characters in your house [i.e., the U.S. House of Representatives] on this question.—

The non-assumption of the States Debts will I am afraid occasion great confusion in the business of financiering; and disturb state creditors exceedingly.—How the States will be able to make provision for the payment of debts due to their citizens, while their revenues are engaged for the public debt I cannot devise; unless they should go into practices like to that of this State.—What methods N. Carolina has taken and means to take to pay her State debt I don't know exactly.—I hope She has not used, and doth not intend to use the R. Island sponge.—

Ubi longa est fabula, longa sunt ambages.<sup>3</sup>—I recollect that under the old Confederation there was a time when long speeches were thought to retard public business, and therefore all the members of Congress, save one, agreed not to speak longer than 15 minutes.<sup>4</sup>—While the galleries of Congress are open spouting may be expected;—and perhaps the advantages resulting from open doors may more than countervail the loss of time occasioned by protracted declamations.—The noble art of amplification may be hereby learned;—and that mode of exciting and engaging the passions be acquired which will be necessary as long as men shall be influenced more by passion than by reason. Besides common auditors measure the depth of a man's understanding by the length of his speech;—and the printer of the United States gazettes, which is a matter of infinite importance, will be furnished with ample matter for his paper while speech-i-fi-ca-tion exists.—

But I should recollect to whom I am writing,—and that a long epistle may be as tedious as a long speech.—

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar.

2. See Ellery to Huntington, 28 March (above).

3. Latin: When the story is long, extensive are the complexities.

4. See Ellery to Huntington, 21 July 1789, note 7 (RCS:R.I., 562).

## **Town Meetings Consider Rhode Island Convention Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments, 21 April 1790**

The Rhode Island Convention on 6 March 1790 proposed a bill of rights and amendments to be added to the Constitution. The Convention then voted to send a copy of the bill of rights and amendments to each town to be considered in town meetings on Wednesday, 21 April. At these meetings the towns also voted for state officers, assistants, and deputies to the General Assembly.

Records of action on the bill of rights and amendments have been located for twelve of the thirty Rhode Island towns. Most towns approved the bill of rights and amendments, with some recommending additional amendments. Several towns instructed their delegates to vote for ratification of the Constitution while several other towns instructed their delegates to use their discretion on amendments.

### **Charlestown Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At A Town Meeting held in Charles Town, in Washington County, on the 21 day of April AD 1790 at the Dwelling House of Joseph Kinyon Junr.

Thomas Hoxsie Esqr. chosen Moderator . . .

Voted that the Bill of rites formed by this States convention, be approved of by this Town Meeting.

Voted that this Town Meeting do approve of the amendments made by this States convention to the New constitution.

Voted that this Town Meeting do instruct, there delagates, to add as followeth, to this States, Amendments viz that the Judiciary power of the United States, be more explicitly, defined, and more accurately, destinguished from those of the respective States,

that the Senate Shall not possess all the Executive, and Judicial powers now vested in that body,

that it be left to the Several States, to make compensations to theirs (senitors and) representatives, respectively, for there services in Congress.

that the States Legislatures have power to recall, when they may think it, expedient there Federal senators and to Send others in their Stead.

Voted that the Deligates from this Town do not Adopt the constitution of the United States, untill the Amendments proposed by our State convention Shall become a part of Said Constitution,

Benja; Hosxie Junr T Clerk

1. MS, Town Council and Probate Record, 1788–1793, Vol. 4, Town Hall, Charlestown, R.I. Another copy is in Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

**Cumberland Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At an annual Town Meeting held in Cumberland in the County of Providence in the State of Rhode Island &c. on the third wednesday in April, being the 21st. Day of said Month AD. 1790.—

Mr. John Lapham chosen Moderator. . . .

Voted—That the Bill of Rights and Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, proposed by the Convention of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations appointed to discuss and decide on said Constitution, are satisfactory to the Freemen of said Town of Cumberland in this present Town Meeting assembled. . . .

Voted—That this present Town Meeting be dissolved—

Attest. Jno S. Dexter Jr Esqr Town Clk.

1. MS, Council Records, 1746–1816, Vol. 1, City Hall, Cumberland, R.I.

**Glocester Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Town Meeting held at Glocester on the 21st. Day of April A D. 1790 John Smith Son [of] B Chosn. Morderator . . .

Voted that it is the Opinion of this Meeting that this State always keep it in their Power to Recall their Senators When they think fit—

Voted that this Town is Willing to adopt the Constitution When the Amendments that were proposed in this State the first Monday of March Last are added to it & made a part of it—

Voted that this Meeting be Desolved

1. MS, Town Meeting Records, 1786–1865, Vol. 2, Town Hall, Glocester, R.I.

**Little Compton Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Town Meeting Legally Warned and held in Little Compton April the 21st AD 1790

Voted that Thomas Palmer Eqr Be Moderator of this Meeting . . .

Voted that this Town Except of [i.e., accept] the Bill of Rights and Amendments to the Constitution Proposed By the Convention held at South Kingstown on the first Monday of March Last . . .

Voted that Cpt John Davis draw out of the Town treasury the Sum of Seven pounds Ten shillings for Serving the town as Deputy at october Sessions 1789 and Januuary Sessions 1790 and also for attending the Convention at Southkingstown in March 1790

Voted that This Town Will Pay Cpt John Davis Interest for all the Money voted him By the town for Serving as Deputy at the General Assembly and as Delegate at the Convention untill Paid. . . .

1. MS, Town Records, 1759–1855, Vol. 2, Town Hall, Little Compton, R.I.

**Middletown Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Town Meeting held in Middletown April 21th. AD 1790

Joseph Peabody Esqr. Morderator . . .

Voted that the Bill of Rights and a Mendments proposed by the Convention held at South Kingston in the County of Washington on the first monday of March 1790. be approved of—

Voted that this Meeting Do approve of the Bill of Rights and amendments Submitted by the late Convention & the Deligates of this Town are hereby Instructed to use their Votes and Influence for Adopting the Constitution of the United States, if the Said Bill of Rights And Said Amendments first become a part of the Said Constitution Together with the following Additional Amendment

Viz that the pay of the Senators & Representatives be Assertained and paid by their Respective States and recalld when their respective Legislatives may think proper and others appointed in their Stead

And otherwise that they the Said Delegates be and they hereby are Instructed to Oppose An Adoption thereof . . .

1. MS, Town Meetings, 1743–1808, Vol. 1, Town Hall, Middletown, R.I. Another copy is in Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

**North Kingstown Town Meeting, 21 April 1790***Appointment of Committee to Draft Instructions (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>*

At a Town Meeting held at the Dwelling House ⟨of⟩ [– – –] [– – –] met in North Kingstown ⟨on April 21st.⟩ AD 1790 . . .

Voted Wm. Hammond [– – –] [– – –] [– – –] ⟨be⟩ a Committee to draught ⟨instructions to the⟩ Deligates Respecting the ⟨amendments⟩ to the Constitution &c. . . .

Voted that the Next Town Meetg be at [– – –] [– – –]

This is Disolved

*Instructions<sup>2</sup>*

Instructions For the Deligates of the Town of North kings town when in convention Assembled on the 24th. day of may A. D. 1790. Respecting the Bill of Rights & Amendments Recommended to the consideration of the Freemen of this Town—

Voted that the amendments proposed by the State convention Convened at South kingston in March last. are conceived by the Freemen of this Town as inadequate to real and Substantial Amendments and we Recommend that Further Amendments be made [to] the Federal constitution as their wisdom Shall direct; in particular such as respect

the Several States recalling their Deligates from congress—Whenever they think fit and that Each State Retain its Sovereignty in paying their own Deligates their Respective Saleries and that they do not Adopt the Constitution untill their proseedings be again laid before & coneded to by the Freeman of this State & the Amendments made by Sd. Convention be agreed to by the Congress of the United States.

Voted received & that it be copyed & Delivered to the Deligates accordingly.

The Above is a True Copy of the Instructions to this Towns Deligates, Voted & passed at a Town Meeting held in North kings town on the 21st day of April A.D. 1790

Taken from the minutes.

☞ Geo[rg]e Thomas Tn. Clk.

1. MS, Town Council Meetings, Earmarks, and Strays, 1762–1832, Town Hall, North Kingstown, R.I. The manuscript was severely damaged by fire. The words within angle brackets are conjectural.

2. MS, Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

### **Portsmouth Town Meetings, 21 and 26 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Town Meeting of the Freeman of Portsmouth in the County of Newport & State of Rhode-Island &c. Held the 21st day of the month called April AD 1790. at Burrington Anthony's

The Warrant being read

Voted & Jonathan Freeborn Esqr. is Chosen Moderator . . .

Voted that this Meeting be adjourned to the 26th Instant at one OClock in the after noon. the[n] to meet at this place . . .

At a Town Meeting of the Freeman of Portsmouth Held by adjournment the 26th day of the month called April AD 1790. at Burringn. Anthony's . . .

Voted that the following Instructions be given to the Delagates of this Town to wit; That it is the sense of this Town Meeting that the Instructions given to their Delegates at the State Convention, held at South-Kingstown the first Monday in march last past. be ratified,<sup>2</sup> and again be recommended to the Delagates in order to regulate their Conduct at the Meeting of the adjournment of the said Convention, which is to meet at Newport the fourth monday in May next, with this additional Instruction—that they do not by any means agree to another adjournment—but at said next meeting use all their Influence & Abilities to have the New Constitution as proposed by Congress—Agreed to and Ratified by this State.—

Voted that the following Report be received.

Portsmouth April 26. 1790 . . .

Voted that this be Dissolved & it is Dissolved accordingly

1. MS, Town Meetings, Vol. 2, 1786–1835, Town Hall, Portsmouth, R.I. Another copy is in Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

2. See Portsmouth Town Meeting, 27 February 1790 (RCS:R.I., 699–702, 703n).

**Providence Town Meeting: Instructions to Convention Delegates  
21 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The proposed Bill of Rights and Amendments to the Constitution as agreed to by the Convention and referred to the several Towns for their Consideration, being laid before the Meeting, It is Voted, That the Delegates from this Town be instructed, to conduct relative to said Bill of Rights and Amendments in such Manner, as will in their Judgment be most likely to procure a Ratification of said Constitution, by the aforesaid Convention: And that in Case the Seventeenth Article of Amendments be moved to be expunged, that the Delegates of this Town, use their Influence to have the same retained, as an Article recommendatory to take Place, as soon as may be consistent with the Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

1. MS, Town Records, City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Providence, R.I.

2. The seventeenth amendment called for Congress to prohibit the foreign slave trade "as soon as may be." See "Rhode Island Convention: Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments," 6 March (RCS:R.I., 981).

**Richmond Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Town Meeting held in Richmond in the County of Washington the Twenty first Day of April AD 1790. . . .

Upon the Bill [of] Rights and amendments feederal Constitution proposed by the Convention of this State it's Voted that sam[e] be and hereby are approved by this Meeting and that the Representitives for this Town use their Influence in the State Convention at their Adjournment That following amendments be added to said Amendments: That Each State have the power of paying and pay the Compensations to their Senators and Representative and that Congress take effectual Measures for the emediate abolition of Slavery and that direct taxes be apportioned by the Value of property And that Each State have power to Recall their Senators and Send others in their Room. . . .

1. MS, Town Meetings, 1776–90, Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Richmond, R.I. Another copy is in Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

**Scituate Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At the Annual Meeting of the Freeman of the Town of Scituate in the County of Providence held on the 21st. Day of April 1790, it being

the Day affixed by Law [for] Choosing Deputies & for Proxing for Genl. Officers

William West Esqr. Chosen Moderator. . . .

Whereas the Bill of Rights & amendments proposed to the Federal Constitution, was laid before this meeting & Read for the Consideration, of the freemen, agreeable to the Resolve of the State Convention held at S. Kingstown in March last, and after having Duely Considered the Same—It is Voted that the Delegates appointed to Represent this Town in said State Convention act and do Respecting said Bill of Rights & Amendments as they shall [think] best and most to the benefit & Interest of this State—when Convened in Convention agreeable to adjnt.—

Voted this Meeting be Dissolved—

⌘ order John Harris T. Clk

1. MS, Town Meeting Records, 1735–1825, Nos. 1 & 2, Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, North Scituate, R.I.

### **South Kingstown Town Meetings, 21 April and 1 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*21 April 1790 (excerpts)*

At a Town Meeting held in South Kingston the 21st. day of April 1790

Colo Joseph Hazard Chosen Moderator . . .

Voted that this Town approve of the Bill of Rights which was framed by the late Convention . . .

Voted this Town Meeting stand adjourned untill next Saturday Week

*1 May 1790*

At a Town Meeting held in South Kingston by adjournment the 1st Day of May 1790

Samuel Babcock Esqr. chosen Moderator

Voted that the Amendments to the proposed Constitution made by the Convention in March last are approved of by this Town

1. MS, Town Meetings, 1776–1836, Town Hall, South Kingstown, R.I.

### **West Greenwich Town Meeting, 21 April 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Town Meeting held at West Greenwich in the County of Kent at the Dwelling House of William Nichols. Esqr. Innholder on the 21st. day of April AD 1790—

Voted Samuel Hopkins Esqr Chosen Moderator of this Meeting. . . .

The Bill of Rights and amendments to the new proposed Constitution as Recommended by the State Convention being Laid before this

Meeting for their Consideration—Whereupon Voted and Resolved as the opinion of this Meeting that we will give no Kind of toleration for the Adoption of Said Constitution under the Restrictions Contained in the said Bill of Rights and Amendments: but that the doings of the Said Convention in that Respect are by this Meeting Altogether Disapproved of. . . .

1. MS, Town Meeting Book, Vol. 2, 1773–1811, R-Ar.

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**Theodore Sedgwick to Theodore Foster  
New York, 26 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Every man of integrity or humanity will lament the evils attendant on the fri[e]nds of good government in your state, and (there is nothing which could give me more sincere pleasure than again to embrace in the arms of the confederacy our wandering sister, who I am very confident will soon return to the family, from which she has been led astray) by the address and arts of wicked or the delusion of ignorant or misguided men.—(I have the utmost confidence in her returning good sense and that she will voluntarily relieve us from all those disagreeable consequences which might result from her longer continuance in her revolt.<sup>2</sup> There is none<sup>3</sup> so weak as not to perceive that an ultimate seperation between your state and the rest of the nation cannot take place.)—

Every thing new you will learn from the public papers. . . .

1. RC, Foster Papers, RHi. Sedgwick was Foster's uncle (Foster's mother, Dorothy Dwight, was the older half-sister of Pamela Sedgwick, Theodore Sedgwick's second wife). The text within angle brackets was reprinted in the *United States Chronicle*, 27 May. Significant alterations in capitalization and punctuation occurred in the reprinting. (See also notes 2 and 3.)

2. In the newspaper extract, "Elopement" replaced "revolt."

3. In the newspaper extract, "no one" replaced "none."

**Massachusetts Centinel, 28 April 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from Newport, dated April 21, 1790, to the Printer.*

"The Hermit of Providence (*one* ARTHUR FENNER) was yesterday chosen *Governour*, by the votes of the People of this *State*, without opposition. If the best man in the State had set up against him, he the said FENNER would beat him by a great majority.—By this the world may judge what a people we are. Gov. COLLINS was too federal for us—and I think he must be happy in being rid of such a pack as the majority of this State are."



1. Reprinted: Portland, Maine, *Cumberland Gazette*, 3 May; *New Hampshire Gazette*, 5 May; Stockbridge, Mass., *Western Star*, 11 May; and *New Hampshire Recorder*, 27 May.

## **Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island, 28 April–1 June 1790**

On 28 April 1790 the Senate, on motion of Maryland Senator Charles Carroll of Carrollton, appointed a committee to consider what to do about Rhode Island's failure to ratify the Constitution. On 5 May the committee reported that a bill should be prepared to prohibit commerce with Rhode Island. The following day the committee asked for its report back so that it could be amended. On 10 May the committee reported resolutions, which were debated on that day and the next. On the 11th the Senate adopted the resolutions ordering the committee to bring in a bill or bills. The committee presented a bill on 13 May, which was read a first time. The next day the Senate read the bill a second time and, by a vote of 12 to 7, agreed to a third reading on 17 May. The bill was sent back to committee on the 17th, reported out of the committee the next day with amendments, read a third time, and passed by a vote of 13 to 8. In the Senate the opponents of the bill argued that it was premature, coercive, and would have a negative impact on the second session of the Rhode Island Convention scheduled to meet on 24 May.

The Senate bill prohibited the importation into the United States of any items from Rhode Island, barred United States vessels from entering Rhode Island ports, provided harsh penalties for violating the act, and demanded that Rhode Island pay the United States \$25,000 by 1 December 1790 for its share of the expenses that the country had incurred before 4 March 1789. An early draft of the bill was printed in the *New York Gazette of the United States*, 15 May, and the paper was brought to Providence by a gentleman from New York just as the *United States Chronicle* of 20 May "was going to Press." The *Chronicle* reprinted the text of the bill in that issue, as did the *Newport Herald* on 20 May. The *Providence Gazette* reprinted the bill on the 22nd.

The House of Representatives received the bill from the Senate on 19 May, and, despite opposition from John Page of Virginia, the House read the bill for the first time. On the next day the House read the bill a second time and committed it to the Committee of the Whole for consideration. On 26 May Page renewed his objections to the bill in the Committee of the Whole, with other members joining in the debate. On 1 June President George Washington informed the House that Rhode Island had ratified the Constitution, and the House ordered that the Committee of the Whole be discharged from further action on the bill.

French Counsel General Louis-Guillaume Otto informed his government in mid-March that "many senators," exasperated at Rhode Island's antics, were "preparing a violent motion" to put pressure on that state. They were waiting for the right time to act (to Comte de Montmorin, 13 March, above). Representative John Steele of North Carolina described the bill as "tyrannical, and arbitrary in the highest degree" (to Joseph Winston, 22 May [below]). The *United States Chronicle*, 20 May, printed a series of letters from members of Congress commenting on the bill, which underscored the growing impatience

of Congress with Rhode Island's failure to ratify the Constitution (below). On 22 May the New York *Daily Advertiser* stated that "So great a majority of the house [of representatives] appear to be in favor of the bill that no doubt can exist of its passing" (Mfm:R.I.). The French Vice Consul in New York City described the provisions of the bill in a dispatch home and noted that the House of Representatives, after reading the bill for a first time, "carefully managed delays" to give the Rhode Island Convention, scheduled to meet on 24 May, time to ratify the Constitution (Antoine de la Forest to Comte de la Luzerne, 1 June [RCS:R.I., 1019-20]).

The Senate proceedings are printed from DHFFC, I, 294-95, 296, 303, 305-6, 307, 309, 311, 312, 313-14. The Senate committee reports are taken from DHFFC, VI, 1811-12. The entries from William Maclay's Journal are printed from DHFFC, IX, 255, 260, 261, 263, 264, 268, 270-71. The House proceedings are printed from DHFFC, III, 417, 418, 441-42; while the debates are printed from DHFFC, XIII, 1356, 1359-60, 1446-47, 1458-59, 1460-63, and the *New York Daily Gazette*, 21, 22 May 1790.

### **U.S. Senate Proceedings and Debates, 28 April-18 May 1790**

#### **Senate Journal, Wednesday, 28 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

... On motion,

ORDERED, That

Mr. Carroll<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Ellsworth

Mr. Morris

Mr. Izard and

Mr. Butler, be a Committee to consider

what provisions will be proper for Congress to make, in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island. . . .

#### **William Maclay Journal, Wednesday, 28 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>3</sup>**

... As we had nothing to do in Senate. Carrol moved for a Committee to consider What was to be done about Rhode Island &ca. One was accordingly appointed. . . .

#### **Senate Journal, Thursday, 29 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>4</sup>**

... ORDERED, That Mr. Strong be added to the Committee appointed the 28th April, "To consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make, in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island," instead of Mr. Butler, excused at his own desire, his colleague being on the Committee.<sup>5</sup> . . .

#### **William Maclay Journal, Thursday, 29 April 1790 (excerpt)**

called to see Col. Gun. [Senator James Gunn of Georgia] he was willing to talk and I had no mind to interrupt him. he spoke freely

relating to the bare faced Conduct of King [Senator Rufus King of New York] & Ellsworth [Senator Oliver Ellsworth of Connecticut] in Supporting every Measure proposed, by the Secretaries.<sup>6</sup> Indeed their Toolism is sufficiently evident, to every Body. He says the agitating the affair of Rhode Island, is only to furnish a Pretext to raise more Troops. be this as it may. That Carrol was only a Tool, in bringing it forward Yesterday was sufficiently evident. . . .

**Senate Journal, Wednesday, 5 May 1790 (excerpt)**

. . . Mr. Carroll reported from the Committee appointed the 28th of April, "To consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island."

ORDERED, That Monday next, be assigned to take this report into consideration. . . .

**Senate Committee Report, Wednesday, 5 May 1790**

That all commercial intercourse between the United States and the State of Rhode Island, from and after the                    day of next should be prohibited under suitable penalties; and that a bill should be brought in for that purpose.

**William Maclay Journal, Wednesday, 5 May 1790 (excerpt)**

A Considerable deal of Business was done in Senate but no debate was entered on[.] the Rhode Island Committee reported. The amount of it was to put that State in a kind of Commercial Coventry. to prevent all intercourse with them in the way of Trade. I think the Whole Business premature. We adjourned early . . .

**William Maclay Journal, Thursday, 6 May 1790 (excerpt)**

. . . The Rhode Island Committee. requested That they might have back their Report. to amend it. this was comply'd with. Their amendment amounted to [Maclay left blank space here presumably for the text of the amendment] . . .

**Senate Committee Report, c. 6–10 May 1790**

Raised by the U.S. to the 1st. Augt. 90. say—	1,800,000 dr.
Decr. say $\frac{1}{4}$ for support of the Present Government	450,000
	<hr/>
	1,350,000
	<hr/>
of which say $\frac{1}{50}$ the quota of R.I.	27,000

That the President of the U.S. be authorised to demand of the State of R.I.—27,000 dollrs., to be paid into the treasury of the U.S. by the 1st. day of Augt. next; which shall be credited to the sd. State in acct. with the U.S.

**Senate Journal, Monday, 10 May 1790 (excerpt)**

... The Senate proceeded to consider the report of the Committee appointed the 28th of April, “To consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island,”—and

ORDERED, That the consideration hereof be postponed until to-morrow. . . .

**William Maclay Journal, Monday, 10 May 1790 (excerpt)**

... When we came in. We found them on the Rhode Island Resolves[.] the Committee had been called on to give reasons on which they founded their Resolutions. Elsworth spoke with great deliberation, often and long. and Yet. I was not convinced by him. I saw I must if I followed my Judgment Vote against both resolutions. It was therefore incumbent, on me to give some reasons for my Vote. I observed that the Business was under deliberation in Rhode Island. That the Resolves carried on the face of them, a punishment. for rejection. On Supposition That they would ruin our Revenue. let Us first establish the fact against them that an intercourse with them has ruined injured our revenue, before we punish them with a prohibition of all intercourse. This Resolution I considered as premature. The other for the demand of 27,000 doll.<sup>7</sup> I considered as equally so. let the Accounts be settled. & Rhode Island has a right to be charged with, & has a right to pay her proportion of the Price of Independence. By the present Resolutions, the attack comes visibly from Us. she is furnished with an Apology and will stand justified, to all the World, if she should enter into any foreign Engagements. . . .

**Senate Journal, Tuesday, 11 May 1790 (excerpt)**

... The Senate proceeded to consider the report of the Committee appointed the 28th of April, “To consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island,”—whereupon

RESOLVED, That all commercial intercourse between the United States and the State of Rhode-Island, from and after the first day of July next,

be prohibited under suitable penalties; and that the President of the United States be authorized to demand of the State of Rhode-Island,                   dollars, to be paid into the Treasury of the United States, by the                   day of                   next; which shall be credited to the said State, in account with the United States,—and that a Bill or Bills be brought in for those purposes.

ORDERED, That the Committee who brought in the above report, prepare and report a Bill accordingly.

The Senate adjourned to 11 o'clock to-morrow.

**William Maclay Journal, Tuesday, 11 May 1790 (excerpt)**

. . . The Rhode Island resolutions were taken up. I was twice up against these Resolutions. They admitted all hands That Rhode Island was independent. and did not deny that the Measures now taken were meant to force her into an adoption of the constitution of the United States. and founded their Arguments in our Strength and her Weakness. I could not help telling them plainly that this was playing the Tyrant. to all intents & purposes. I was twice up and said a good deal, but it answered no purpose Whatever.

**Pierce Butler's Notes, c. 11–18 May 1790<sup>8</sup>**

It is no infringement on Her Sovereignty to withdraw Your Trade—Civilized Countrys call this a declaration of War[.] opposition to Boston Port Bill<sup>9</sup> was Natural right[.] Pray what is this—It is hard that so Small a part should have any power as it were to put a Veto on the Interests of the whole[.] Granted—Mr. [Ralph] Izard [S.C.] says thire little State is brought into Compact with the other States.

**Senate Journal, Thursday, 13 May 1790 (excerpt)**

. . . Mr. Morris from the Committee appointed the 28th of April, “To consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island,” reported a Bill on that subject, which was read the FIRST time.

ORDERED, That this Bill have the SECOND reading to-morrow. . . .

**Senate Journal, Friday, 14 May 1790 (excerpt)**

. . . The Senate proceeded to the SECOND reading of the Bill, “To prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, into the United States; and to authorize a demand of money from the said State,”—

And on the question, to assign a time for the THIRD reading of this Bill, the yeas and nays being required by one fifth of the Senators present,

Mr. [Richard] Bassett [Del.]	Yea	
Mr. [Pierce] Butler [S.C.]		Nay
Mr. [Charles] Carroll [Md.]	Yea	
Mr. [Tristram] Dalton [Mass.]	Yea	
Mr. [Oliver] Ellsworth [Conn.]	Yea	
Mr. [Jonathan] Elmer [N.J.]		Nay
Mr. [James] Gunn [Ga.]		Nay
Mr. [John] Henry [Md.]		Nay
Mr. [William Samuel] Johnson [Conn.]	Yea	
Mr. [Samuel] Johnston [N.C.]	Yea	
Mr. [Ralph] Izard [S.C.]	Yea	
Mr. [Rufus] King [N.Y.]	Yea	
Mr. [John] Langdon [N.H.]	Yea	
Mr. [William] Maclay [Pa.]		Nay
Mr. [Robert] Morris [Pa.]	Yea	
Mr. [George] Read [Del.]	Yea	
Mr. [Philip] Schuyler [N.Y.]	Yea	
Mr. [Caleb] Strong [Mass.]	Yea	
Mr. [John] Walker [Va.]		Nay
Mr. [Paine] Wingate [N.H.]		Nay
Yeas—13		
Nays—7		

So it was

ORDERED, That this Bill have the THIRD reading on Monday next.  
The Senate adjourned to 11 o'clock on Monday next.

### William Maclay Journal, Friday, 14 May 1790 (excerpt)

The business of most importance agitated this day was the Rhode Island bill which must have had a first reading Yesterday While I was out. I contented myself with giving my Negative to every particle of it. I knew I could gain no Proselites, and that as the bill could not be justified on the Principles of freedom law the Constitution or any other Mode Whatever. Argument could only end in Anger. Mr. [Robert] Morris [Pa.] was one of the Warmest Men for it altho' he knows well, That the only Views of the Yorkers are to get Two Senators more into the House on whose Votes They reckon, on the Question of residence.<sup>10</sup> But he must think. the getting Rhode Island in Superior to all other Considerations. The Yeas & nays were called. and now after the Question was taken there seemed a disposition for Argument. and some very

remarkable Expressions were Used. Izard said *if gentlemen will show Us how we can accomplish our End by any means less arbitrary and Tyrannical I will agree to them.* when we were on the Clause for demanding 25,000 dollars, Mr. Morris said this is the most Arbitrary of the Whole of it— The nays were Butler, Elmer, Gun, Henry, Maclay, Walker, Wyngate. 7 Yeas Basset[,] Carrol[,] Dalton[,] Elsworth[,] Johnson[,] Johnston[,] Izard[,] King[,] Langdon[,] Morris[,] Strong[,] Schyler[,] Read.

### Senate Journal, Monday, 17 May 1790 (excerpt)

. . . The Senate proceeded to the THIRD reading of the Bill, “To prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes, from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, into the United States; and to authorize a demand of money from the said State:”

And on motion—

ORDERED, That this Bill be re-committed.

The Senate adjourned to 11 o'clock to-morrow.

### Senate Journal, Tuesday, 18 May 1790 (excerpt)

. . . Mr. Carroll, from the Committee appointed April the 28th, “To consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present session, respecting the State of Rhode-Island,” and to whom it was referred to bring in a Bill on that subject, reported several additional clauses to the Bill “To prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes, from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, into the United States; and to authorize a demand of money from the said State:” Which report was agreed to as amendments to the Bill.

The Senate proceeded to the THIRD reading of the Bill, “To prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes, from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, into the United States; and to authorize a demand of money from the said State,”—

And on the question, shall this Bill pass? the yeas and nays being required by one fifth of the Senators present,

Mr. [Richard] Bassett [Del.]	Yea	
Mr. [Pierce] Butler [S.C.]		Nay
Mr. [Charles] Carroll [Md.]	Yea	
Mr. [Tristram] Dalton [Mass.]	Yea	
Mr. [Oliver] Ellsworth [Conn.]	Yea	
Mr. [Jonathan] Elmer [N.J.]		Nay
Mr. [Benjamin] Hawkins [N.C.]		Nay
Mr. [John] Henry [Md.]		Nay
Mr. [William Samuel] Johnson [Conn.]	Yea	

Mr. [Samuel] Johnston [N.C.]	Yea	
Mr. [Ralph] Izard [S.C.]	Yea	
Mr. [Rufus] King [N.Y.]	Yea	
Mr. [John] Langdon [N.H.]	Yea	
Mr. [Richard Henry] Lee [Va.]		Nay
Mr. [William] Maclay [Pa.]		Nay
Mr. [Robert] Morris [Pa.]	Yea	
Mr. [George] Read [Del.]	Yea	
Mr. [Philip] Schuyler [N.Y.]	Yea	
Mr. [Caleb] Strong [Mass.]	Yea	
Mr. [John] Walker [Va.]		Nay
Mr. [Paine] Wingate [N.H.]		Nay
Yeas—13		
Nays—8		

So it was

RESOLVED, That this Bill DO PASS; that the title of it be “An Act to prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes, from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, into the United States, and to authorize a demand of money from the said State;” That it be engrossed and carried to the House of Representatives, for concurrence therein. . . .

### William Maclay Journal, Tuesday, 18 May 1790

no debate of any Consequence arose this day. Untill the Rhode Island bill, which had been recommitted, was reported[.] Mr. [Richard Henry] Lee [Va.] opposed it in a long & sensible speech[.] [Pierce] Butler [S.C.] blustered away but in a loose & desultory Manner. [Rufus] King [N.Y.] [Oliver] E[ll]sworth [Conn.] [Caleb] Strong [Mass.] [Ralph] Izard [S.C.] spouted out for it. It was long before there was a Slack. As this was to be the last reading & as the Yeas and nays would in my Opinion be called. I took What ~~in my Opinion~~ I thought was new Ground. The bill had been assigned to Various Motives. self defense self preservation, self interest &ca. I began with observing, that the Convention of Rhode-Island met in a Week. that the design of this bill evidently, was to impress the People of Rhode Island, with Terror. It was an Application to their fears, hoping to obtain from them, an Adoption of the Constitution, a thing despaired of, from their free Will or their Judgment. That it was meant to be Used the same Way That a Robber does a dagger or a Highwayman a pistol. & to obtain the end desired by putting the party in fear. That where independence was the property of both sides. no End Whatever could justify the Use of such



means, in the Aggressors. I therefore was against the bill in every point of View &ca. &ca. the debate was long[.] I was up a second time. but to no avail. the Question was put at about 3 OClock and carried[.] the Yeas & Nays were called & Stood nearly as before. With the addition of Mr. [Richard Henry] Lee to the negative. . . .

1. The *Providence Gazette*, 8 May, and *United States Chronicle*, 13 May, reprinted these proceedings.

2. Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737–1832), a wealthy Maryland planter and Federalist, signed the Declaration of Independence and had been selected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, but declined to serve.

3. Maclay (1737–1804), a surveyor and Federalist, served in the Pennsylvania assembly and on the supreme executive council in the 1780s. He was a U.S. Senator, 1789–91, and his journal provides the most complete account of the Senate debates (which were closed to the public and press) for the First Federal Congress. The selections from his diary printed here come from DHFFC, IX.

4. The *Newport Mercury*, 8 May, and *Providence Gazette*, 8 May, reprinted, under a “NEW-YORK, May 1,” dateline, a summary of these proceedings.

5. Pierce Butler and Ralph Izard both represented South Carolina. The appointment of Caleb Strong of Massachusetts added geographic balance to the committee.

6. Probably a reference to the policies put forth by Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and Secretary of War Henry Knox (see Hamilton’s 14 January report on public credit and Knox’s 12 January report on the Indian Department and southwestern frontiers, DHFFC, V, 743–825, 1279–93).

7. See Senate Committee Report, 6 May, for how this amount was calculated (above). The amount was reduced to \$25,000 in the version of the bill that passed the Senate on 18 May.

8. Butler (1744–1822), a native of Ireland and a South Carolina planter, was a member of the S.C. House of Representatives, 1776–89, and a delegate to Congress, 1787, and the Constitutional Convention. He served in the U.S. Senate, 1789–96. Butler took very limited notes of the Senate debates for the First Federal Congress. The notes printed here are taken from DHFFC, IX, 458.

9. The Boston Port Bill, one of the Coercive Acts or “Intolerable Acts” (as the Americans called them) passed by Parliament in 1774, virtually closed the port of Boston until compensation was made for the East India Company’s tea that was dumped overboard in the Boston Tea Party of December 1773.

10. A reference to the ongoing public debate over the location of the federal capital. It was thought that Rhode Island would support New York City over Philadelphia for the site of the federal capital. Northern senators, in general, looked to Rhode Island’s two senators to help counteract southern opposition to legislation favorable to the North.

**U.S. Senate Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island, 13 May 1790  
(As Reprinted in the *Providence United States Chronicle*  
20 May 1790)<sup>1</sup>**

*A Gentleman, who arrived in Town from New-York just as this Paper was going to Press, has favored us with the Gazette of the United States, printed in that City on Saturday last, from which the following is copied:—*

NEW-YORK, May 15.

We are informed that the following is now pending before the Senate of the United States.

*An Act to prevent bringing Goods, Wares and Merchandizes, from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, into the United States; and to authorize a Demand of Money from the said State.*

Whereas it is necessary to the security of the revenue, and other essential interests of the United States, to provide against goods, wares and merchandize, being brought into the same thro or from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, ~~so long as that State shall refuse to assent to the Constitution and Laws of the United States:~~

SEC. 1. *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled,* That from and after the 1st day of July next, no goods, wares, or merchandizes, of the growth or manufacture of ~~whatever~~ <sup>(any)</sup><sup>2</sup> place or country <sup>(whatsoever)</sup>, shall be brought into the United States, from the State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, by land or water; nor shall any ship or vessel belonging to any inhabitant or inhabitants of said State, enter any port, harbour, creek or river of the United States, except in case of distress; nor, except in like case, shall any ship or vessel belonging to any inhabitant or inhabitants of the United States, enter any port, harbour, creek or river of the said State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations: And all goods, wares and merchandizes, which shall be brought into the United States contrary to this Act, shall be forfeited, together with the ships or vessels in which the same shall be brought, if brought in by water; or together with the carriages, horses and oxen employed in conveying the same, if brought in by land. And all ships and vessels which shall enter any port, harbour, creek or river of the United States, contrary to this Act, shall be forfeited, together with their lading: And all ships and vessels which, contrary to this Act, shall enter any port, harbour, creek or river of the said State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, shall be forfeited, and shall be liable to seizure in any port of the United States, at any time within one year after such forfeiture shall have accrued. And all <sup>(every)</sup> persons who shall bring into the United States any goods, wares or merchandizes, contrary to this Act, or who shall be aiding therein; or who, being owners ~~or captains~~ <sup>(part owner master or commander)</sup> of any ships or vessels, shall contrary to this act, order or navigate the same into any port, harbour, creek or river of the said State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, shall forfeit <sup>(500)</sup> dollars; and be moreover liable to imprisonment, not exceeding <sup>(6)</sup> months.

SEC. 2. *And be it further enacted*, That the forfeitures accruing by breach of this act, shall be recovered in the manner provided in the case of forfeitures of a similar nature in the Act to regulate the collection of the duties imposed by law on the tonnage of ships and vessels, and on goods, wares and merchandizes imported into the United States;<sup>3</sup> and shall be disposed of in the manner provided in the case of penalties, fines and forfeitures, in the said Act: And every collector, naval officer, and surveyor, or other person, specially appointed by either of them, or aiding and assisting in the execution of this act, shall have the like power and authority, and be entitled to the indemnification and mode of defence, expressed or given in the said Act to regulate the collection of duties.

SEC. 3. And to the end that the said State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, may contribute to the supplies raised for discharging the engagements of the United States entered into previous to the 4th day of March, 1789, *Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid*, That the President of the United States be, and he hereby is authorized and requested to demand of the said State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, (25,000) dollars, to be paid into the Treasury of the United States, on or before the (first) day of (Dec) next; which being paid, shall be credited to the said State in account with the United States.

~~SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted*, That this act shall continue in force until a Convention of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations, shall assent to and ratify the Constitution, and give notice thereof to the President of the United States, and no longer.~~

1. The bill was first printed in the *New York Gazette of the United States* and *New York Daily Gazette* on 15 May. The *United States Chronicle*, 20 May, reprinted the bill from the *Gazette of the United States*, while the *Newport Herald*, 20 May, reprinted it "From a New-York Paper of May 15," and the *Providence Gazette*, 22 May, reprinted it under a "NEW-YORK, May 15" dateline. Other American newspapers also reprinted the text of the bill.

Manuscript copies of the bill (S-11) and the various amendments offered in the Senate are in Senate Bills, Records of the United States Senate, First Congress, 1789–1791, RG 46, DNA (see DHFFC, VI, 1812–14). The Senate Records also contain a broadside copy of the bill with annotation probably by Senate Secretary Samuel A. Otis. In the *United States Chronicle* version of the bill printed here, Otis's handwritten additions are indicated in text that is set in angle brackets, while deletions by Otis are set in crossed-out type. A second annotated copy of the broadside is in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress. The annotation on this copy is in the hand of Senator William Samuel Johnson of Connecticut. (For this two-page broadside, printed for the Senate by John Fenno, printer of the *New York Gazette of the United States*, see Evans 46066.) The Library of Congress also has a second copy of the broadside without any annotation. A third annotated copy is at Dartmouth College. Senator Paine Wingate of New Hampshire wrote on this copy of the broadside.

The text of the bill appears on page three of the *United States Chronicle*. Previous to this item the *Chronicle* printed or reprinted a series of letters from members of Congress in New York commenting on this bill (see below under 20 May).

2. "Any" is from William Samuel Johnson's copy in the Library of Congress and is not in Samuel A. Otis's broadside at the National Archives.

3. For this act, see DHFFC, IV, 309–34.

### **U.S. House of Representatives Proceedings and Debates 19 May–1 June 1790**

#### **House Journal, Wednesday, 19 May 1790 (excerpts)**

. . . A message from the Senate by Mr. [Samuel A.] Otis their Secretary.

MR. SPEAKER, . . . The Senate have also passed a bill, intituled, "An act to prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes from the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations into the United States, and to authorize a demand of money from the said State," to which they desire the concurrence of this House: And then he withdrew.

The said bill was read the first time. . . .

#### **Newspaper Reports of House Debates, Wednesday, 19 May 1790**

*New York Daily Gazette, 20 May 1790 (excerpt)*

. . . The act respecting Rhode-Island was read the first time.

*New York Daily Gazette, 21 May 1790*

☞ In the Minutes of Wednesday's Proceedings, which appeared in yesterday's Gazette, we mentioned, that the bill respecting Rhode-Island, which originated in the Senate, was read the first time.

It should, however, have been then observed, that there was an opposition made by several members; and Mr. [John] Page [Va.], in particular, opposed its being printed, and declared, "that he thought it ought, not only not to be printed, but that it ought not to be read again in that house, and that he should object to it as improper, unjust, and highly impolitic."

*New York Daily Gazette, 22 May 1790*

☞ In yesterday's Gazette we mentioned that Mr. Page, and several other members, opposed the bill respecting Rhode-Island; but this was a mistake, as Mr. Page *alone* objected, and made the observations stated in yesterday's paper. On Thursday the bill was read a second time, and committed to a committee of the whole on Monday se'ennight.

*New York Gazette of the United States, 22 May 1790 (excerpts)*

... A message was received from the Senate informing the house, ... also that they have passed an act for prohibiting an intercourse after the first of July next, between the United States, and the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, &c. in which they request the concurrence of the House. This bill<sup>(a)</sup> was read, and then the House adjourned.

*(a) At the first reading of this bill, it was moved that it should be printed for the use of the House; but it was said to be unnecessary, as the variations made by the Senate from the copy, printed by their order, were very few. Mr. Page made some short objections to the bill; but no other member offered any observations upon it, and it received the second reading on Thursday, without any opposition whatever.*

#### **House Journal, Thursday, 20 May 1790 (excerpt)**

The bill sent from the Senate, intituled, “An act to prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes from the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations into the United States, and to authorize a demand of money from the said State,” was read the second time, and ordered to be committed to a committee of the whole House on Monday se’nnight. . . .

#### **Reports of House Debates, Wednesday, 26 May 1790**

*Thomas Lloyd’s Notes, 26 May 1790 (excerpt)*<sup>1</sup>

JOHN PAGE (Va.)<sup>2</sup> Move to discharge the committee of the whole on the Rhode Island bill. They ought to consider it unbiassed. There should be no force. It sadly unbecoming a free state to make anything like threats. Hardly worthy of being in the union if they are driven. Unworthy of it. Consider part of other members—none perfect. When the people called nest of smugglers and recollect a bill that resembles this, we ought not to suffer such a bill to be read. The Boston Port Bill<sup>3</sup>—scarcely a member but remembers with indignation. The people of Rhode Island must view it in the same light. Wish put myself into their situation, feel indignation. It supposed necessary to lay these severe threats. It said to be the only means to prevent smuggling. The states in Europe never thought of this idea to secure their commerce. The people who did it in Europe would be mad. It would amount to a declaration of war. We ought to cherish every sentiment of liberty, ought to have none but those who like the government. The people of

the minority in every state must be wounded. The state of North Carolina would (see that) the same means made use of to bring them in. Several states [- - -] [- - -]. Other states watch the government. Highly impolitic to drive from us Rhode Island and wound the feelings of people. Were I member of that Convention, never would come into the Union until you had repealed. They had right to consider whether they approve the Constitution. Their purpose should be considered. They should be considered as allies. But mean and contemptible if they undertake to decide on the question until left free to choose for themselves. They be laughed at by majority and despised by minority. They like a soldier pressed into the service, will desert the first opportunity. They will be weak enough or wicked enough. It would crush—You more desire of making up recruits than extending the benefit of government—there not a people but wish that state stand out and distract and run from union. There not a nation on earth that can wish well to us but the French. When they see they can't hold their possessions in the West Indies, it be their wish to see you state of little [- - -], instead of free and united one. Our enemies be delighted with it and friends weep over it.

Discharge the committee and reject the bill. Let her come in free. If she should, she comes in in a condition to be embraced by us. If one part have wicked designs, it answers very good purpose to put them in situation of foreign nations in alliance with us, all that compatible with our opinions. If to bring them into union, it is improper. If to secure the revenue, can bring in [another?]. Consider what they would felt if they had been a power so much superior to them. If such held over their heads they would [- - -] the Convention—immediately adjourn. Hope remove all terror and take care of our revenue. When they see your government benign they will come in.

JAMES JACKSON (Ga.). Move—Of the same opinion. I detest tyranny, whether in grip of tyrant or [democratic?]. If not more than Boston Port Bill—it makes no discrimination between the guilty [and the innocent]—one of the complaints of which began the war. I think it matter of policy. If any part of state comes in I would receive them<sup>4</sup> but not punish the innocent with the guilty.

JOSIAH PARKER (Va.). Second it.

WILLIAM SMITH (S.C.). Think it premature, when they going into the committee of the whole on it. I have no doubt but make it appear that the bill unnecessary for the existence of this country. Am surprised that a gentleman who in [citing/cutting?]<sup>5</sup> intercourse with West Indies, on the same principle—The gentlemen of Senate as little disposed to show disposition to tyranny.

PARKER. Hope they come in without threats. [If the opposite to suffer it to lie?]—

MICHAEL JENIFER STONE (Md.). All that necessary is temper and moderation.

DANIEL HIESTER (Pa.). Think the ways and means be first considered before they proceed on this bill. We know there will be opposition. We [have] petitions from very considerable part of union to be exempted from the small duties now laid and will we recognize a debt which don't know whether able to make provision for or not? Take time to consider of it. Lay over for the present. . . .

*New York Daily Gazette, 27 May 1790 (excerpt)*

Mr. [John] PAGE [Va.] moved to discharge the committee on the bill respecting Rhode-Island. He was averse to the idea of dragooning the people of that state into an accession to the present constitution: it was like making a declaration of war against them, and would be productive of smuggling. He further observed, that as a convention was expected to meet very soon, this bill would raise the indignation of the members who would compose that body, and they would esteem themselves contemptible to accede to the new constitution under the influence of threatening measures; besides, it might have other dangerous consequences, in forcing them to look for aid to foreign nations, which might occasion distraction in our government. He therefore wished that the people of Rhode-Island should be left, at least, on as good a footing as other countries not in alliance with the United States.

Mr. [William] SMITH (S.C.) said that, unless the gentleman (Mr. Page) withdrew his motion, he would move for the previous question; as this business was made the order of a future day, and it was therefore premature in the gentleman to move for discharging the committee.

Mr. [James] JACKSON [Ga.] rose to declare his approbation of Mr. Page's motion, yet he wished it to be withdrawn for the present; he considered the bill similar to the *Boston port bill*. Several members spoke against its coming on this day, and

Mr. [George] GALE [Md.] moved for the house to go into the funding bill, as reported yesterday by the committee of the whole. . . .

*New York Gazette of the United States, 29 May 1790<sup>6</sup>*

Mr. Page made a motion which was seconded by Mr. Parker, that the committee of the whole be discharged from any further consideration of the bill respecting the State of Rhode-Island, and added the following observations:

Mr. [John] PAGE (Va.). Sir, I rise to move that the committee of the whole be discharged from considering the bill respecting the State of Rhode Island, which originated in the Senate—and hope that it will by the house be rejected—for I think, as the Convention of that State is to sit in a few days, we should have nothing before Congress which could tend to influence their choice of the Constitution, under which they are to live. It peculiarly behoves this House, as Representatives of Republican States, which have always asserted their rights to judge for themselves in all cases which interested them as freemen—which adopted the plan of government after mature deliberation, unbiassed by any such motives as the bill alluded to holds out to Rhode Island. I say it becomes this House therefore to take care that their sister State, now about to consider of the propriety of adopting the Constitution, shall be as free to judge for herself as was any other State in the Union—Should this bill pass, and should Rhode-Island adopt the Constitution, she will come with so bad a grace into the Union, that she must be ashamed when she enters it, and the independent States must blush when they receive her—She will be laughed at by the majorities in the other States, and despised by the minorities—How far this may tend to strengthen the Union let those who favor the bill judge. She would be in the situation of a soldier, prest into the service, looked upon as unworthy to be ranged with the volunteers—suspected of an inclination to desert, till perhaps indeed it may become her interest, like his to do so, and to act vigorously against those who had insulted her.

Surely, Sir, it becomes this House to pity the frailty of the weak and ignorant, who know not the blessings of our New-Government, to forgive the perverse and wicked who oppose it from base principles, and to shew a generous indulgence to that jealous, cautious republican spirit, which indeed we should cherish and revere. Let this House manifest such a disposition, and I will venture to predict the happiest consequences. Rhode Island will find it her interest to unite with States possessing such magnanimity—her rights she will see can never be violated, and her true interests never can be neglected; but Sir, if we shew that we are more anxious to compleat the numbers of our States than to preserve inviolate the rights of freemen, and the principles of the late glorious revolution—if we are more solicitous to restrict smuggling than to extend the benign influence of our New Constitution, through the state of Rhode-Island, as well as through the twelve other States, what can that State expect from a union with States thus disposed? But if we not only manifestly shew this disposition, but also a malevolence resembling that which Great Britain shewed when she in her rage to answer her revenge, and extend her despotic power over



America, shut up the port of Boston, hoping to starve into submission its virtuous citizens—Must not the Rhode Islanders, like the Bostonians detest the cruel attempt, resent it, and by their resentment, may not the consequences be too much like those which followed in the case alluded to? May they not be applauded by true Republicans throughout the world? May they not be supported by the enemies of our peace?

Sir, they will take advantage of every circumstance which may afford them an opportunity of gratifying their envy or revenge. There is perhaps but one nation upon earth, which wishes to see these States flourish in peace, and it may not be long before she may think that our growing greatness may interfere with hers. Let us not therefore run the risk of endangering the peace and harmony of the United States—Let us not even wound the feelings of a sister State—Let us not expose ourselves to the charge of inconsistency, impropriety, rashness, and cruelty; but let us to avoid those charges, discharge the committee of the whole, take up the bill in the House and reject it at once—leaving Rhode Island unbiassed (by any thing Congress can do) to adopt or reject the Constitution, as they may think proper. If they adopt it the bill will be unnecessary—If they should reject it, then let us leave them on a footing with foreigners—they are allies at present, and should be treated as such. But it is said our revenue is in danger. Sir, take my advice, and you will make it the interest of Rhode Island to unite with us, or at least lay her under an high obligation not to smuggle; but go on with the bill, and you force her to smuggle—nay, perhaps to be your enemy for ever. States in Europe adjoining each other, shew us, that this bill is unnecessary. It would be thought madness there, to interdict all commercial intercourse of neighboring States, merely with a view to prevent smuggling—It would I believe too be looked upon as equal to a declaration of war.

Sir I lament that this bill has been committed, but if it should now be taken up and rejected, it will be doing all that can be done—and will shew that as soon as the attention of the House was turned to it, a proper regard was shewn for the rights of freemen. This bill is too inconsistent with the character the Representatives of these States ought to support—it has too much the appearance of certain British acts of Parliament, which our constituents have execrated. Surely Sir, the Representatives of Massachusetts, must unite with me in opinion, that such a bill should not be committed—The Members of States which applauded the glorious spirit of that State in opposition to a similar act, risked their all in her support, and thereby acquired liberty and immortal honor, will, I trust, vote with me—and surely the States which came late into the Union and such as adopted the Constitution by a small majority, will consider that the case of Rhode-Island, might have

been their own—Surely even those, if such there be amongst us, who think that devoted State to be as British Ministers said America was, a nest of miscreants, will allow that it will be inhuman to punish the innocent with the guilty. I think therefore that the bill deserves not the sanction of this house—that it is impolitic and unjust—I hope the committee will be discharged, and the bill taken up for a third reading, and rejected, time enough, to leave the Convention of Rhode-Island free to adopt the Constitution or reject it as they may please.

Let us consider with what indignation the Convention of any of the States, which we represent, if about to sit on such an occasion, would have received such an Act of Congress—would they not have protested against it, as an insult, and adjourned without deliberating on the favorite Constitution? Is there a man in this house were he in such a Convention, who would not agree to such protest and adjournment? But Sir, let us consider the design of the bill: If it be intended to induce the State of Rhode Island to come into the Union, I think I have shewn that it is badly calculated to answer that purpose—and if intended to prevent smuggling, I think I have shewn that it is more likely to produce that evil, than to prevent it. If the motion be agreed to, no inconvenience can arise, but much mischief may be prevented. I hope therefore that the House will agree with me, that the committee of the whole be discharged, and will not leave such a bill hanging over the heads of the people of Rhode-Island, which must put them into a situation different from that of any other State in the Union when they adopted the Constitution. Let it not be said, Sir, I conjure this House, that the confederated Republics of America have united upon any other principle than that of a free and perfect conviction of the excellence of their federal plan of government—Let it not be said that fear had any share in bringing even the smallest state into the Union—Let us not treat a sister state in the very manner we disdained to be treated by Great Britain.

Several gentlemen observed on the impropriety of the motion, as the bill was made the order of a future day—next Monday—and Mr. Parker having withdrawn his second, the motion subsided.

### **House Journal, Tuesday, 1 June 1790 (excerpts)**

... A message, in writing, was received from the President of the United States, by Mr. [Tobias] Lear his Secretary, as followeth:

UNITED STATES, June 1, 1790

GENTLEMEN of the SENATE and HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES,

HAVING received official information of the accession of the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations to the Constitution of the

United States, I take the earliest opportunity of communicating the same to you, with my congratulations on this happy event, which unites under the General Government all the states which were originally confederated; and have directed my Secretary to lay before you a copy of the letter from the President of the Convention of the state of Rhode-Island to the President of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

G. WASHINGTON . . .

ORDERED, That a committee be appointed to prepare and bring in a bill or bills for giving effect to the laws of the United States within the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations; and that Mr. [Theodore] Sedgwick [Mass.], Mr. [Egbert] Benson [N.Y.], and Mr. [Thomas Tudor] Tucker [S.C.], do prepare and bring in the same.

ORDERED, That the committee of the whole House be discharged from further proceeding on the bill sent from the Senate, intituled, “An act to prevent bringing goods, wares and merchandizes, from the state of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations into the United States; and to authorize a demand of money from the said State.” . . .

1. Thomas Lloyd (1756–1827), a freelance shorthand reporter, took notes of the debates of the House of Representatives, which he proposed to publish in his new *Congressional Register*. The *Congressional Register* ceased publication on 8 March 1790, which make Lloyd’s shorthand notes invaluable for the debate on the Rhode Island Trade Bill in May 1790. The Library of Congress has two volumes of Lloyd’s shorthand notes. The transcriptions of Lloyd’s notes are taken from DHFFC, Vol. XIII.

2. Writing from London, England, John Brown Cutting informed William Short on 3 July that Rhode Island had ratified the Constitution: “Thus this little stray commonwealth is reclaimed. Mr Page of Virginia before the news had arrived—with his wonted mildness and liberal philanthropy—spoke against the penal bill for compelling her to accede—Three days afterwards it was found unnecessary” (Short Papers, DLC).

3. See RCS:R.I., 845, note 9.

4. Federalists in the Rhode Island port towns considered separating from the interior towns and joining the Union. For example, see Jabez Bowen to George Washington, 15 December 1789, and William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, 17 April and 3 May 1790 (RCS:R.I., 649, 828–29, 856).

5. The shorthand could be possibly translated as either citing or cutting.

6. The *Providence Gazette*, 12 June, and *United States Chronicle*, 17 June, reprinted Page’s motion and speech.

7. See President of Convention Daniel Owen to President George Washington, 29 May (RCS:R.I., 1006–7).

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### William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington Newport, 3 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>

. . . Our Genl. Assembly will meet here on Wednesday next. If they should do any thing worthy of notice I will give you an account of it.—

The Antis will have a considerable majority, and from them no good thing is to be expected.—

I am sorry that it was not convenient for Congress to take measures with this State, which might have had an influence on the Assembly, and of course on the Convention.—It is my opinion still that the Convention will adjourn again unless you do something which will touch the interest of the Anti's before the Convention meets; which will be the last monday in this month.—

You did not answer that part of my last letter<sup>2</sup> which expressed a desire to be informed whether upon the a failure of the [state Convention to ratify the Constitution and subsequent] application which the Federal towns might make to Congress to be put under the protection of The United States, Congress would defend them against any violence which might, in consequence of such application, be offered to them by the Antis?—For my part I do not imagin that the Antis would resent such an application in a hostile manner; nor should I fear them if they should;—but among the Feds there are some prudent men who would wish to be sure of a favorable issue to their application; or of protection if Congress should not think it political to receive our federal towns into the Union.—

I should be glad to know when it is probable Congress will rise.—

Present my regards to my friends in Congress.—

I am yr. friend and hble servant

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1420. The letter was docketed: "Answered May 12th 1790." In the omitted portion of the letter, Ellery informed Huntington that he had sent to Huntington eight dollars by Colonel William Peck. For more on the eight dollars, see Huntington to Ellery, 8, 12 May (below).

2. See Ellery to Huntington, 17 April (above).

### **The Rhode Island General Assembly Newport, 5–8 May 1790**

*Newport Herald*, 13 May 1790<sup>1</sup>

The Hon. General Assembly of this State rose on Saturday last, and adjourned to this town the 2d Monday of June next.

No business of a public nature was done at this session other than the election of officers for the present year (a list of whom we shall publish in our next.)—There is no material change, except in the Supreme Court—this was much wished for, and we are assured that it will be pleasing to the larger part of the community.

The Lower House sent a message to his Excellency the Governor, requesting him to convene the Assembly immediately after the rising

of the State Convention, in case they should adopt the Constitution of the United States.

The Convention meets in this town on Monday the 24th of this instant, May.

1. Reprinted: *Salem Gazette*, 18 May; *Massachusetts Centinel*, 19 May (1st and 3rd paragraphs); *Massachusetts Spy*, 20 May; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 28 May; and *Carlisle Gazette*, 2 June. For more on this session, see William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, 11 May, and Ellery to John Adams, 13 May (both below).

**Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard**  
**Boston, 7 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

My dear Sir

. . . You speak of the ferment into which Congress were thrown by the Quakers petition;<sup>2</sup> I wish you had given me or that you would give me your sentiments on the propriety of such an application—& a particular reason for my desiring it is this—That there is an *abolition society* set up at Providence, & they have elected several Gent[leme]n of this Town & vicinity corresponding members of w[hic]h number I am one<sup>3</sup>—The other day each of us recd a Letter from the Presidt *David Howell* by order of the Society requesting that we would promote an Association of the advocates of freedom & humanity here, with a view to “join with the Society of New York & bring on the Subject next Session with additional weight—a Movement which (he says) we understand the Society there are preparing to make.”

This proposition does not strike me agreeably—first it comes from a *foul quarter*, Rhode Island—2dly I am loth to meddle with things that do not belong to me—When there was a call to petition ag[ains]t the slave trade to our own genl Court, I was forward in the matter because I tho’t it my duty, & the application happily succeeded; but there does not appear to be any such Call now—But 3dly & principally—I conceive the present Constitution to be a Compact between the states & one of the express stipulations is that “the migration or importation of such persons as *any of the states* now existing shall think proper to admit shall not be prohibited by Congress prior to the year 1808”—Therefore all applications to Congress for such prohibition are absolutely precluded—& I apprehend that the stirring up a Controversy on this subject may endanger the Union—I was not pleased with the Petition of the Quakers, I think them very contemptible politicians—they are governed by their feelings & they do not reason—they think all mankind must submit to what their impulses dictate—I wish they had been consistent with themselves & that as they profess to be advocates

for the *Rights of mankind* they had shewn some regard to the Rights of *white* people as well as *black*—What did they do toward supporting the Rights of America when invaded by Brittain—Then there was a clear call to support the Rights and Liberties of their Country—but we heard nothing of their movings & drawings in *that* Cause, unless it was the wrong way—Now, there is an union & compact formed on *certain Conditions*, they want to violate those Conditions, & set us again into a state of Anarchy—Suppose the southern states should say the principles of the union are infringed & we will withdraw—we will keep our slaves & you may keep your Quakers—what: a contemptible figure will America make in the eyes of the world? I wish the Quakers would lie still & mind their own business—& let Government mind theirs, without any more meddling.—Once our forefathers here in NE overstrained their Zeal in persecuting the Quakers—& ever since their Posterity have been convinced of their error they have been overdoing the other way—complimenting the Quakers & flattering them & speaking better of them than they deserve—I have lived among them long enough to know that they are no better than other people, either in point of morality, or wisdom or even *neatness* for w[hic]h they are so much celebrated.—Have you seen a piece w[hic]h *Brissot de Warville* has written about them?<sup>4</sup> I am told he married a Quaker Wife—Well so much for the Quakers—my Question is what is your Society about? Do they intend to petition Congress? & with what view?—Let me know your tho'ts on the matter as soon as convenient that I may be able to form a proper answer to this Mr *David Howell*—Do you know any thing of this man's Character? I have heard that he is a person of no principle but a seeker of popularity . . .

& I am Dr Sir yr very affectionate friend

1. RC, Belknap Papers, MHi. Printed: “The Belknap Papers,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 5th series, Vol. III (Boston, 1877), 219–22.

2. At their yearly meeting on 3 October 1789, Quakers from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the western parts of Maryland and Virginia approved a petition asking Congress to prohibit the African slave trade. This petition, along with petitions from the New York yearly meeting and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, was submitted to a House of Representatives select committee, which reported on 12 February 1790. The House considered the report from 16 to 23 March 1790 (John P. Kaminski, ed., *A Necessary Evil? Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution* [Madison, Wis., 1995], 202–3, 210–30; and DHFFC, VIII, 314–38).

3. The Providence Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery was founded in February 1789 and received a charter of incorporation from the legislature in June 1790. (See *United States Chronicle*, 26 February 1789. For the charter, see Bartlett, *Records*, X, 382–85.)

4. Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, *Examen Critique des Voyages dans L'Amérique Septentrionale, de M. le Marquis de Chatellux, ou Lettre a M. le Marquis de Chatellux, dans laquelle on*

*réfute principalement ses opinions sur les Quakers, sur les negres, sur le Peuple, & sur l'Homme* (London, 1786).

**Brown & Benson to Champion & Dickason**  
**Providence, 7 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . We wish we could fully Confirm the intelligence you mention relative to the Repeal of the Tender Law in this State it is only a partial repeal<sup>2</sup> and still operates in a Legal discharge of executions by a tender of the Paper at fifteen for one or else Certain Articles at specified Prices which are 20 P.Ct perhaps higher than they will Command in Money, and with respect to the Paper it has now Ceas'd being a Currency having depreciated 25 or upward for one and no Person will receive it at any rate unless he is previously Certain that he Can apply it without loss, thus we are still depriv'd of every Legal Method to Recover the full Amot. of our Demands and our Debtors in general avail themselves of this Circumstance to procrastinate Payment, to this unfortunate State of our Publick affairs we have to add that the same administration is again elected for the Present year, and tho' the federalists by great exertions obtain'd the appointment of a Convention to Deliberate on the Constitution yet a Majority of Antifederalists secur'd this election & adjourn'd to the last of this Month and we subjoin with great regret that we have but a faint hope that they will then adopt the Constitution, in Consequence of our being thus excluded from the Union & subject to such Unrighteous Laws the Mercantile interests have suffer'd & Continue to suffer more than you can Conceive—but yet sirs you may Rely that every Measure shall be pursued by us to diminish our Debt. . . .

1. FC, Brown Papers, RPJCB. Docketed: "Copy letter to Champion/& Dickason May 7. 1790/via Boston <sup>to</sup> the Mary/capn Barnard/& copy <sup>to</sup>/Neptune Scott."

2. The Rhode Island legislature at its first October 1789 session modified the legal tender provision of the paper-money act of May 1786. See RCS:R.I., 616–18.

**Benjamin Huntington to William Ellery**  
**New York, 8, 12 May 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . You are sensible I cannot give an Official nor even an Authentic answer to your Question "Whether upon a failure of the [Rhode Island Convention to ratify the Constitution and the subsequent] Application which the Federal towns might make to Congress to be put under the protection of the United States, Congress would defend them against any Violence which might in Consequence of such application be offered to them by the Anties?[""]<sup>2</sup> This is a Question which Congress alone could answer, but I have no doubt of their Doing it because I know there is a Number of that Body who would Justify such an Appli-

cation and I believe very few who would Refuse Relief to their Friends the Feds when under an Oppression of an Enemy I suppose the Anties would Charge such applicants with Treachery and Rebellion, as should apply to be Received into the union which they would Construe as an attempt at the Subversion of the Constitution & State of Rhode Island but they must be better assured of Success than their own Strength would Warrant, before they could with Prudence take measures to Punish the Federal Parts of the State as Traitors. The Consequence of the measure might be very serious I Cannot Suppose it will be proper to Commence an Application of that Nature unless at the Beginning of a Session of Congress—at Present there is a Prospect of Rising in the course of a few weeks and it might be fatal to the Feds if Congress should not be in Session during the whole Progress of the Business—We have so many Merciful men among us who chuse to wait to see the Result of the Next Session of your Convention, that I am not Certain they will agree to any Coercive measures with the Little Sister untill they are convinced of her finale Obstinancy . . .

May 12th, 1790. . . .

By the NYork Packett of the 8th you will See, the Senate have appointed a Committee on the 28th of April to Consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the Present Session Respecting the State of Rhode Island—Nothing has yet come from that house on the Subject nor have I heard of any thing proposed by the Committee on the Business of their appointment.<sup>3</sup>

I am Sir your Friend & Hum Servt

1. FC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1450–51, 1492. Huntington docketed the letter as “Not Sent.” In the first part of the letter, omitted here, Huntington wrote that he was returning the eight dollars that Ellery had sent as payment for services rendered by Huntington. Huntington described his service “as a small act of kindness to an old friend.” For the eight-dollar payment, see Ellery to Huntington, 3 May, note 1 (above).

2. Quoted from Ellery to Huntington, 3 May (above).

3. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above). The *New York Packet*, 8 May, reprinted the Senate proceedings for 28–29 April from the Senate journal.

## Plutarch

Massachusetts Centinel, 8 May 1790<sup>1</sup>

### A CHARACTER

In peace to govern, and the *few* controul,  
The *few* must chuse the GOVERNOUR of the *whole*;



For if the *many* dare to claim the right,  
 They're worse than devils—What their *favourite*?  
 He's some "OLD HERMIT" from his darken'd cell,  
 Where fiends incarnate, and the damned dwell.

I was led to these reflections on reading in a late Centinel, "*The Hermit of Providence—one ARTHUR FENNER—is elected Governour of the State of Rhode-Island.*"<sup>2</sup> The illiberality of the paragraph struck me so forcibly; and the design of the publication appeared so evidently calculated to deceive the good people of this State, I was induced to set the matter in its true light, and in justice to Mr. Fenner, as far as I am acquainted with him, to give to the publick his real character.

He was ever esteemed a man of strict honour, honesty and integrity, until the party disputes took place about the Federal Constitution; and he would now claim the same honourable epithets from his calumniators, if he would but become a staunch federalist. He never was fond of fine clothes, or expensive entertainments; he always lived decently, and in the style of a good farmer, but not in that of an "*Hermit.*" He inherited from his father a very valuable real property, in houses and land, both in town and country. His profession was properly that of a farmer—not a laborious farmer, nor yet an idle one—the management and improvement of his numerous estates, found him always a considerable employment, without making it necessary for him to labour; nor has his property diminished in his hands—he has now a very ample estate. He was not educated at College, nor is he versed in the dead languages, but whoever has seen his compositions in English will not say he is an illiterate man. He was not brought up either at the bar, or in the compting-house, but he is possessed of very strong mental powers and faculties, and has been long concerned in trade under the firm of *Fenner and White*. He has been Clerk of the Supreme Court in that State for many years past—he never appeared desirous of any other office, although he has long since been very popular. It is said his political influence has been sufficiently extensive to have been Governour of that State several years ago, but he would not permit his friends to hold him up as a candidate, so long as Gov. C——NS<sup>3</sup> administration met the approbation of the majority.—Since Gov. C——NS changed his politicks, it became necessary to elect another man, and Mr. Fenner was obliged to come forward. He is no orator, but a man of good knowledge, and competent talents. He is an able antifederalist, and a powerful head to the party. He is neither a disciple of Chesterfield, nor of St. Paul,<sup>4</sup> but a bold defender of his principles. He is no sophist, but a man of strong reason and argument. These are qualifications which

make him more feared than despised by his enemies—more dreaded than beloved by the minority, who denominate themselves federalists.

1. On 5 May the *Massachusetts Centinel* announced that “Plutarch is received.”

2. See the *Massachusetts Centinel*, 28 April 1790 (above).

3. John Collins was governor from May 1786 until May 1790.

4. Philip Dormer Stanhope (1694–1773), the fourth Earl of Chesterfield, was a prominent English politician and author whose fame as a writer was primarily derived from letters that he wrote to his son. Published in 1774, the letters were intended to improve the manners of his son and to inculcate in him the art of worldly success. St. Paul, by contrast, urged his followers to pursue spiritual fulfillment.

### **New York Gazette of the United States, 8 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

#### *FROM CORRESPONDENTS.*

The people of America endured various and dreadful evils during the contest with Britain. They justly expected that they should be rewarded by establishing a free government—the people of Rhode-Island made great exertions in the war, yet at the end of it, what have they obtained? Is property safe? Is it a government by law or by men? Is liberty enjoyed there—and if enjoyed, by whom—by a part, or the whole? When Boston a single town was oppressed in 1774,<sup>2</sup> all America asserted her cause. If right may be violated and liberty destroyed in a part of the country with impunity and without redress, in the course of time and events it may be destroyed every where.—The distresses of Newport and Providence are truly deplorable.

Rhode-Island is divided by parties. Those who pay the duties are not the favorites of the government which imposes them, neither is much confidence placed in the wise and just disposal of the revenue; under such real necessities, and with so many causes of provocation and complaint, it is not in human nature to pay the duties cheerfully. A government so loosely and capriciously administered will not be able to prevent frauds. With ruin before their eyes, the traders will be forced upon the practice of smuggling—the State is favorably situated for illicit trade—instead of paying duties to the national treasury, the citizens of the United States will in fact pay duties to the support of the government of Rhode-Island, for the people of the adjoining States are supplied with goods imported into that State. Frauds will multiply in proportion to the increased rate of duties imposed by Congress; because the profit of smuggling will incite to practise them. It is rather shameful to remain tributary to that State. Their governor in his public letter to the President last September, informed that they were taking measures to pay their part of the debt.<sup>3</sup> Is it not time to ask if they are ready?

1. Reprinted: *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 May; *Providence Gazette*, 15 May; and *Newport Herald* and *United States Chronicle*, 20 May. The *New Hampshire Concord Herald*, 1 June, reprinted the first paragraph.

2. See Jabez Bowen to John Adams, 19 May 1789, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 509).

3. See "Rhode Island General Assembly to the President, the Senate, and the House of Representatives," 19 September 1789 (RCS:R.I., 605–7).

**William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington  
Newport, 11 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I wrote to you lately by Col. Peck of Providence, and sent to you by him eight dollars.<sup>2</sup>—and at the same time I promised to give you an account of the proceedings of the Genl. Assembly.—The Antifederalists are in both houses, about 15 strong,<sup>3</sup> and of course the election of Officers in general has been according to their wishes. The principal alteration has been in the superior Court. The Conduct of Judges [William] West, [Stephen] Potter and [Simeon] Clark had been so flagrantly bad, as to excite the indignation of the people at large, and to render it impossible for the Antis to continue them in office any longer.—They were obliged to resign, and by the address of the Feds two honest men are introduced to the Superior bench, one of whom is a Fed, and the other, if an Anti, a moderate one.<sup>4</sup>—As it is of the last importance that the Superior Court should be filled with men of integrity we consider this as a great acquisition.—

Towards the close of the Session, a bill was proffered empowering debtors in contracts for specific articles to discharge judgment which might be obtained against them either by a delivery of the specific articles, or by paying as much specie as they should be worth when the judgments should be obtained.—Notwithstanding this bill is in favour of the debtor, and was proffered by the Governor—yet it was referred by a majority of four for consideration to the next Session which will be in this town on the second monday of June next.—It was whispered out of doors that this bill was designed to reconcile the people to an adoption of the New Constitution; and as an act of this sort could work no material injury to the creditor the Feds were for acting upon it then, and would have given their voices in favour of it if they could have it brought to the question.—Perhaps some violent Antis in the house might apprehend that it would prove a leading step to embracing the Constitution, and therefore bid that it should be referred as before mentioned.—If it had been properly matured in a nocturnal Convention<sup>5</sup> it would probably have been acted upon, and passed into a law.—But that it was honestly intended to pave the way for an adoption of the New Government I have not faith enough to believe.—

It is true that the Antis, in private conversations with the Feds, have talked more favorably respecting an accession to it, than they had heretofore;—but it is my opinion it was only to amuse—If it was their intention that the New Constitution should be adopted at the ensuing Convention, which will commence on the fourth monday in this month, it would have been so agreed at some of their nightly Conventions;—but it was not made even the subject of discussion at any of them.—

I find by the news papers that the Senate have appointed a Commēe to consider what provision should be made respecting this State at the present Session of Congress.<sup>6</sup> If any measures should be taken before the meeting of the Convention which would make the Antis feel that their interest would be affected by holding out, it might induce an adoption of it this month;—otherwise the Convention in my opinion will adjourn again.—The Antis had it in contemplation at the late Session of the Assembly to pass an Act recommending it to the several towns in the State to call town meetings for the purpose of taking the sense of the people whether the New Constitution should be adopted or not.—This would have taken the business out of the hands of the Convention and again remitted it to the people.—They found upon sounding some of the Federal Deputies, that such an absurd proposition would fail of success, and therefore dropped it.—Not a word was said in the Genl. Assembly respecting the New Constitution until the Lower House had agreed to an adjournment, then one of our Deputies moved that the sense of the House might be taken whether the Governour should be requested to call the Assembly provided the Constitution should be adopted by the ensuing Convention,<sup>7</sup> which he ventured to say he did not doubt would be the case; or should be rejected.—Some of the Antis sneered,—but no objection was made to his motion.—He was desired to wait upon the Upper House and acquaint the Governor with the sense of the Lower House. He did and his Excellency said that, in either of those events, he would immediately call the Assembly.—The intention of the gentleman who moved the question was to feel the pulse of the Assembly if he could,—and to provide in case of an adoption that Senators should be appointed to attend Congress before it should rise,—and if rejected to consult what measures should be taken to prevent the mischiefs which might follow from a rejection.—

If Congress should pass any act respecting this State, as I hope they will before the meeting of our Convention, I would be obliged to you if you would send me an authenticated copy of it immediately.—

Will Congress defend the Feds if they should apply to Congress for protection, and the Antis should [— —] war with them on that account?—

When will Congress rise?—How goes [— —] business?—The application of the Quakers [for abolition?] of Slavery<sup>8</sup> I find has created ill blood among you. No application made by a religious Society as such ought ever to be countenanced by Congress.—If the Question had been asked the applicants whether their petition was founded on religious or political principles;—ye would have found that they were moved by religious motives, and that politics was a secondary consideration, in their minds,—and if ye think as I do ye might have got rid of them on that ground.

They will come again I expect.—If they should I hope Congress will tell them that they have nothing to do with their religious matters.—The non assumption of the State debts will be the cause of future trouble, as the question on that subject has been a cause of uneasiness in the present Congress.—

Business proceeds best when there is a good understanding among those who are to execute it.—

They who come hither from New York say that there are contentions among you.—Where every man has his text, and every man his parlor, the preaching and music will not be edifying.—Hoping for the perfect establishment of peace among the brethren; and of the New Government

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Huntington docketed this letter as “Answered May 22d Free.”

2. See Ellery to Huntington, 3 May, note 1 (above).

3. In his 13 May letter to John Adams, Ellery indicated that the Antifederalists had a ten-vote majority in the upper house and a five-vote majority in the lower (below).

4. The new justices were former Deputy Governor Daniel Owen, Sylvester Robinson, and Ezekiel Gardner, Jr. The Superior Court was Rhode Island’s highest judicial court; it was renamed the Supreme Judicial Court in 1798.

5. For “nocturnal conventions,” see “Glossary” (RCS:R.I., 317).

6. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).

7. See “The Rhode Island General Assembly,” 5–8 May (above); President of Convention Daniel Owen to President George Washington, 29 May (RCS:R.I., 1006–7); and the *Newport Herald*, 3 June (RCS:R.I., 1029).

8. For the Quaker petition to Congress, see Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard, 7 May, note 2 (above).

### **New York Gazette of the United States, 12 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Rhode-Island,  
to his friend in this city, dated April 28.*

“There will be a majority of Anties in our New Assembly, which convenes at Newport next week. Mr. FENNER who succeeds Gov. Collins,

possesses good natural abilities, and without the graces of a courtier, hath acquired a considerable popularity—the appointment was not his wish, but the result of necessity, it being more consonant to his views to govern behind the curtain, as he was free from responsibility if any measures should prove injurious, and could claim the credit of such as were beneficial; but the anties fearful that a federal character might be in nomination, brought him forward as the most popular man of their party.

“Most of the *country* towns are as much opposed to the Constitution as ever, being dupes to the misrepresentations and falshoods of their designing leaders. The *seaports* are *all* federal. At the late election of officers in Newport there was 348 proxes for federal characters—but 17 for Anties—and these 17 consisted of new fangled officers of the customs, tide-waiters, with a paper-money Judge and his sons. Providence, Warren, and Bristol had also *large* majorities for the federal prox. Should not the Constitution be adopted by the Convention at their next meeting, (which I very much doubt) necessity will drive the sea-ports to measures of a most serious nature, measures, which will pave the way for a dismemberment of this unhappy State.”—

1. Reprinted ten times by 9 June: Vt. (1), Mass. (3), N.Y. (2), Pa. (2), Va. (1), S.C. (1).

**William Ellery to John Adams**  
**Newport, 13 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Immediately on the receipt of your letter of the 28th. of Febry. last, I returned an answer to it.<sup>2</sup> Since that time I have not had the pleasure of receiving a line from you, which induces me to apprehend that my letter miscarried; especially as you promised to be a better correspondent in future.—

Our May session began and finished the last week. The Antifederal prox succeeded. The Antis have ten majority in the Upper and five majority in the Lower House. However the Feds had the address to bring a good Fed. and a moderate Anti into the Supr. Court,<sup>3</sup> and to obtain several other points in the election of officers.—

The New Constitution was not made a subject of debate during the Session.—At the close of it, after the Lower House had agreed to adjourn to the second monday in June, one of our Deputies observed that the Convention would meet on the fourth monday in May, and would then without doubt adopt the Constitution, in which event it would be necessary that the Assembly should be immediately called to chuse Senators &c and therefore moved that the sense of the house should be taken, that the Governour should be requested to convene

the Assembly on that occasion. Some of the Antis sneered, but none of them objected to the motion, or said a word about the Constitution.—The Assembly will be convened agreeably to the motion; which was partly designed to feel the pulse of the majority.—In the Session it was whispered out of doors by some of the Antis that something would be done to pave the way to the adoption of the Constitution.—On the last day (Saturday) a bill was brought in, which was said to originate with the Governor, empowering debtors to discharge Judgments obtained against them on specific Contracts; either in the articles specified in the Contracts, or by specie amounting to their value at the time Judgments should be obtained.—Notwithstanding the bill was in favour of the debtor, the consideration of it was referred to the next Session by a majority of four.—The Feds, viewing it as a stepping stone, voted that it should be acted upon immediately;—the Antis perhaps for the same reason voted ad referendum.—It is said that the framer of the bill was much disappointed; but we cannot certainly tell what Antis mean by what they say. They have endeavoured to amuse Congress as well as the Federalists of the State.—

What the result of the Convention will be is conjectural. Some suppose that the Constitution will be adopted with recommendatory amendments;—some that it will be adopted conditionally;—and some that the Convention will adjourn again. It is the universal opinion that it will not be absolutely rejected.—I cannot conceive that even the Antis can be so absurd as to vote for a conditional adoption; for they know that such an adoption is and will be considered by Congress as tantamount to a rejection; and I have not faith enough to embrace the first supposition.

It has been intimated to me that the Governor would favour the adoption if he could be satisfied that his friend [Ebenezer] Thompson, who is now Collector of the Impost for the Providence district, could hold that office under the Federal Government; and the Governour has great influence among the Antis.—Mr. Thompson was a violent Anti; but it is said he has lately become a Fed.—How this is I don't know;—but I believe interest has a mighty effect on the opinions of Men.—

I find by the News papers that the Senate have appointed a Com̄tee to consider what provisions will be proper for Congress to make in the present Session.<sup>4</sup> If any thing should be done which would wound the interest of the Antis it might have a good effect.—

If the Convention should adopt the Constitution the interval between the time that Congress can receive the ratification and their rising will be so short that there will be little or no opportunity to apply for offices,

and as *Exitus in dubio est*<sup>5</sup> give me leave to intreat you to renew your applications in my behalf to the President of Congress, and to address those whom he may consult with on such occasions, that I may be appointed Collector of this district. The known Character of the present Custom house officer will prevent their being candidates; and without disparaging others who may solicit for that office I believe I may venture to say that my pretensions are equal at least to any of them.—

With sincere esteem & regard

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHI.
2. See Adams to Ellery, 28 February, and Ellery to Adams, post-6 March (both above).
3. See Ellery to Huntington, 11 May, note 4 (above).
4. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).
5. Latin: The outcome is in doubt.

### Providence United States Chronicle, 13 May 1790

It must give the highest Satisfaction, says a Correspondent, to every true Friend to his Country, to observe that happy Tranquility and that universal Acquiescence and Confidence of the People at large, in the new National Government of the United States.—By a Gentleman arrived directly from North-Carolina we are informed, that in that State, which received the New Government with so much Reluctance, it hath been lately organized, and is now compleatly established there, to the great Joy and Satisfaction of the Body of the People, whose Apprehensions that it might prove detrimental to their Interests and Liberties are entirely removed. We are also informed, that in those Parts of the United States where there was the greatest Opposition to the Adoption of the New Government, the People in general are now disposed to strengthen and support it, as they already experience the great Blessings and Advantages derived from the Union in their commercial Regulations, and in the happy Confidence they feel, in being ensured against domestic Violence and the Disputes of one State with another, of which without the Union they would live in constant Dread. There are some Persons in all Communities, who wish that there may be no Government unless they can have the Direction of it, and who are therefore constantly endeavouring to pull down, to vilify and destroy *that*, that is established, in hopes thereby of raising themselves into Importance. This always has been and will always continue to be a Misfortune incident to Society. These selfish *little Geniuses*, continually croak against the new Government, as they would against any other that they did not administer themselves, and were we to give them Credit as they wish, we should believe their Misrepresentations—that the People of the United



States are universally discontented—That they have lost all Confidence in the Men they have sent to Congress—That they no more revere the President-General—That the People are oppressed and about to be enslaved—But at the same Time that the new Government is tumbling to the Ground, &c. &c. with many other Things of the like Stamp equally inconsistent, ridiculous, groundless and futile.

### **John Brown to John Francis**

**Providence, 14 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . our Genl. Assembly made a better Superior Court than before, Potter & West was obliged to Resign for want of Friends to Support them, Judge Clark[e] was also put out Govr. Owen's[,] Ezekiel Gardner & Silvester Robinson was Chose in thier places, Mr. J Clark[e] who is from Boston Jest Informs me of the Report of the Committee of Congress to Call On this State for 27,000 Dolls. & to Cut of[f] all Communication with us after the 1st of July<sup>2</sup> how this will go Down with our Convention the Week after next cant say but I think they must from Computation do what they have no Naturel Inclination to do without Vz Adopt the Constitution, if this Reaches You before You Return through new York do Touch with Mr. Morris & others on the Scheme of a Discrimination the Antie's of this State most Certinly Desearves *Very Different* Treetment from the Fedderals, if possible pray Git Such a Discrimination, why may You not petition Congress for our haveing Leave to Enter the Uonin [i.e., Union], When She Arives. Either at New York or Philada. on the Same terms as tho we belonged their You Can but ask, if You do not Succeede we Shall be but ware we are, but Shure I am We Are Desearveing of a Discrimination . . .

1. RC, Henry A. L. Brown Deposit, Mss 1031, RHi. For another letter between these two men, see Brown to Francis, 20 May (Mfm:R.I.).

2. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (above).

### **William Channing to Theodore Foster**

**Newport, 18 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I left a note with you some time since against a Mr Windsor for butter—This is so very scarce with us at present that you would Oblidge me greatly if you could procure a payment on that Account—it is certainly time that the Note was dischargd—If you should fail from this quarter And can otherwise ~~purchase~~ procure for me a Tub of good Butter by the meeting of the convention I will when I see you the next Week give you the Cash for it.—I have not heard from Providence since

you left this place on the subject of Politicks—Pray what is passing with you! Are measures pursuing that may have a tendency to produce an adoption of the constitution the next Week—Without it We shall be ruin'd—This Town will first feel, but the whole State must soon experience all the distresses consequent upon rejection—If Congress shall pass resolutions conformable to the report of the Commee. of the Senate<sup>2</sup> a greater evil can not befall us but I have no referrence to this measure in working an adoption of the Constn. the next Week—If this shall not take place I am apprehensive of the most serious consequences—People with us will become desperate—And a dissolution of government may be expected—In times of such confusion those concern'd in the administration of Governm will find themselves in a situation the most distressing As it respects our friend I wish to avoid this evil—And as I wish well to his reputation I can not but hope but that we shall be happy in the adoption of the constitution the ensuing week—I convers'd with you & Mr F.<sup>3</sup> freely on this Subject at the election—You then had my sentiments—and you gave me yours—I have no doubt therefore but that every thing will be done upon the principles we conversed upon to effect an Adoption—The present Administn. will never have a more favorable opportunity of effecting their various purposes than by an immediate accession—Their decided Majority will give them all the advantages they can wish for—I hope you have suggested to your friend F—— the probable consequences of his interference at this time—I am persuaded he can be of advantage—and if this shall appear it will be favorable to his Application I have not time to add—but beg you to inform me by a Letter on the morrow if any thing new has occurrd in Your quarter—and whether any change is effected so as to ensure a favorable decision the next Week—In haste

1. RC, Foster Papers, RHi. Docketed: "Letter from/William Channing Esq/Dated May 18. 1790/Recd. Wednesday/Morning May 19th./1790—/By Hand of Saml./Westcots Son." For Foster's response of 24 May, see below. Channing (1751–1793), a 1769 graduate of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) and a Newport lawyer, was Rhode Island attorney general, 1777–87, 1791–93. He was William Ellery's son-in-law.

2. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (above).

3. Perhaps Governor Arthur Fenner, Foster's brother-in-law.

### **New York Journal, 18 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

A correspondent observes, that he is surprized a certain member of the S—— had not taken pains to enquire the national disposition of the Rhode-Islanders previous to his originating a *certain Bill*<sup>2</sup>—for, says he, it is sufficiently ascertained, that they are disposed, *like hogs*, to *run back* in proportion to the attempts to *drive them forward*.

1. Reprinted six times by 11 June: Mass. (1), Conn. (4), N.C. (1).

2. A reference to Maryland Senator Charles Carroll of Carrollton. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (above).

**John Adams to William Ellery**  
**New York, 19 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I have received your favor of the 13th. as I did that of [several?] in due season<sup>2</sup>—One wishes to be informed of all facts in which the public is interested, but the detail of Rhode Island manœuvres is distressing. The Senate yesterday passed a bill, which cutts off all communication with Rhode Island,<sup>3</sup> if she chooses such a solitary selfish and unsocial system. The bill passed by a great majority, and the Senators appear very decided in this business. I would send you a copy of the bill, if I had one, but it is not necessary to send to town to get one, because the newspapers have already contained the substance of the bill, and the true bill as it passed will be with you in the gazetts before this letter.

If the inland part of your people are so abandoned as to refuse still to ratify the Constitution, there will be no part left for the Seaports, but to do what I think they ought to have done long ago, meet and adopt the Constitution for themselves and petition congress to be received and protected. Your views and wishes I have communicated to several gentlemen in confidence, but not to the President. He has been very ill and unable to attend to business.<sup>4</sup> It is a rule with me to meddle as little as possible in appointments; and I know not who are candidates for the office you speak of at New Port. Whenever my opinion is asked concerning any candidates within my acquaintance I always give it according to my best judgment—I presume that the applications of your Antis, are made to other men, to such as they have consulted with already too long—Your convention meet next monday—Our bill cannot pass the house soon enough to reach you till many days after. I sincerely hope that your people will adopt the Constitution and send us an account of it before the bill passes the house.—I know not the character of the Governor[’s] friend Mr [Ebenezer] Thompson; but possession you know is eleven points and if there is not any pointed objection against him, it would not I presume be difficult to gratify the Governor.

1. FC, Adams Papers, Letterbook, MHi.

2. See Ellery to Adams, post-6 March and 13 May (both above).

3. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (above).

4. Washington contracted influenza in the spring which then developed into pneumonia. By 15 May his life was threatened; he began to recover on the 16th. See Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 393–400.

**Pennsylvania Packet, 19 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Rhode Island  
to a merchant in this city, dated 29th April.*

“The convention of this state meet next month at Newport, when it is tho’t by many that the new constitution will be adopted, though in my opinion it is a very doubtful matter. The place they meet in will, however, contribute more to effect it than any change in the sentiments of the people, as the delegates will be more under the federal influence. The difficulty arises solely from the danger which a few unprincipled leading characters apprehend of the validity of the late tenders and payments of depreciated paper in discharge of their just debts, and from their not having got quite clear of all their paper for real securities, under the sanction of the existing laws. And when we consider what sort of men are selected to serve as delegates, it is not to be wondered that such opinions and conduct should prevail among us—one of the delegates to the present convention, for a neighbouring town (Portsmouth) worked as a day-labourer all last fall with Mr. E——, making the common kind of stone fences, and offered to hire himself to him, for that kind of work, for the ensuing year. Many others are in worse situations, and perfectly illiterate. Indeed the being able to vote with the faction is all the qualification required of a representative.”

1. Reprinted seven times by 11 June: Mass. (1), N.Y. (4), N.C. (1), S.C. (1).

**Governor Arthur Fenner to President George Washington  
Providence, 20 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Having been lately elected, by the Freemen of this State, to the Office of their first Magistrate, I therefore embrace this early opportunity of assuring you of the sincere regard which I, in common with the Citizens in general, feel for your Excellency personally.—Admist the Universal Applause and the grateful Acknowledgements of United America singular indeed would it be, if the Citizens of Rhode Island were insensible of the Obligations they are under to your Excellency for the constant Exertions and display of those Talents, and that Patriotism manifested on all Occasions, since you came into public life, and which so much contributed to the Emancipation and Independence of our Country.—The Citizens of this State were among the foremost in the support of the common cause of the American Confederacy, in the late War, and they will always remember with Gratitude and pride the repeated Testimonials you was pleased to give of your Approbation of their Exertions, and of the Valour of their Troops, on Various Occasions, in the Hours of difficulty and Danger.

This State was at all times during the War anxious if possible to comply with every Wish signified to them by your Excellency. And when it is considered that a large Army of the Enemy for near three Years of the most gloomy and uncertain Periods of the War were, in Possession of their Capital, and of the Island of Rhode Island, and the other Islands in the Narraganset Bay.<sup>2</sup>—That the Towns of Warren, Bristol and Jamestown were burnt on excursions of the Enemy, and that during the whole Period of their having Possession of Rhode Island, a considerable part of the Militia of the State were necessar[i]ly kept in constant Duty, guarding the Shores of the Narraganset Bay more than sixty Miles in Extent, it will be natural to conclude that no State suffered more than the State of Rhode Island in proportion to their Numbers and extent, or made greater Exertions for the support of the common Cause. I Just mention these Circumstanc's to recal to your Excellency's mind those trying times when we looked to your Excellency as our common Protector, Friend, and Father endearing Appellations under which we hope yet long to consider you. It hath been published in the Newspapers that a Bill is now pending before the Senate of the United States entitled "An Act to prevent bringing goods wares and Merchandize from the State of Rhode Island and providence Plantations into the United [States] and to Authorize a demand of Mon[e]y from the said State" A Copy of which Bill at large hath been published.<sup>3</sup>

This being a matter highly interesting to this State your Excellency will permit me to make some Observations upon it. It was natural to expect that there should be a Degree of Anxiety and impatience in the States in the Union on seeing this State not under the General Government. But after it was known to Congress that a Convention of the people of this State had been called agreeable to the Recommendation of the Convention of Philadelphia and the consequent Resolution of Congress, and that the Convention of this State was adjourned to the last Monday of this Month for the purpose of Reconciling the people to an Adoption of the Constitution, who had been oposed to it and when there was the greatest Probability that the New Constitution would then be adopted by the Convention of this State, a Measure of such an Hostile appearance and so degrading to this State as the one before mentioned could not be expected by us—I can account for it only by supposing that Representations unfavourable to the Adoption of the Constitution here must have been forwarded to Congress by Persons in this State who have had selfish and personally interesting Motives therefor It must be a matter known to your Excellency and to Congress that this State hath been very unhappy for several Years past, in having been involved in all the dificulties and Animosities of party Spirit—

The great Exertions of the People in general in the War caused an heavy accumulation of Debt payable from the Public to the Individuals, who had done personal services or Advanced property. But the public having taken no seasonably effectual Measures for keeping up the Credit of their Securities, till they greatly depreciated and had generally been parted with by the Original Holders or Earners for very small Considerations to the Richer, the more Speculating, and enterprising part of the Community, who availed themselves of the then low price—When therefore the Body of the People who had thus parted with their securities came to be taxed for the annual Interest of six per Cent payable on the Face of the Securities which in a short time would amount to more than the Purchasors had given both for principal and interest it caused investigations and discussions of the Reasonableness and Justice of the Public paying so much more than the purchasers had given for the Securities. Especially as many of the Purchasers had been instrumental in depreciating the Securities and at the time of purchasing had made use of the Argument of the uncertainty of their ever being paid to induce the Original [Holders or] Earners to part with them at a low price.—Many supposed that there ought to have been a discrimination in favour of the present original Holders and a Liquidation of those which had been transferred that the same Arguments and the same principles and the same policy which led the Congress *in 1780* to adopt the Measure of sinking forty Dollars of their Currency for one Silver Dollar<sup>4</sup> notwithstanding the Bill promised forty Silver Dollars would apply with the same Equity and Reason proportionably to the Case of the Securities which had been purchased for less than a quarter of their Nominal Amount[.] Difference of Opinion respecting this interesting Subject and the Introduction of the paper Mon[e]y here in 1786 and the unremitted Efforts of a part of the State to destroy its Currency, by depreciating it, and the jarring Interests introduced by the Depreciation with some Local considerations and personal Resentments naturally consequent thereon laid the Foundation of that party Spirit which hath agitated the Government of this State for sometime past, and hath Occasioned the unfavourable Complexion of many of its Legislative proceedings and that Torrent of Obloquy and Abuse of the State and its Officers which hath been poured forth in the Newspapers.—But I mean not to Trouble your Excellency with an Account in detail of the Circumstances which have led Step by Step, to our present unhappy Situation—Was I to undertake it, your Excellency would behold the Picture of a People who from being respectable in themselves, by their Struggles in party, have been reduced into a Political situation so uncommon & peculiar, and of such irreconcilably

varying and jarring interests, that to a benevolent and philosophic Mind particularly informed of the Circumstances, they would appear rather to deserve the Mantle of Charity, than the Obloquy of Reproach, and to merit pity rather than resentment or contempt. The Conduct of the Legislature respecting the New Constitution is a proof more of Indecision of Council, than of Refractoriness of Disposition. In *May 1787* on the Question in the Lower House whether Delegates should be sent to the Convention then about meeting at Philadelphia it was, after long Debate Voted in the Affirmative, by a Majority of two, and Non-concurred in the upper House by the same Majority. But at the Session in June following it appearing that the other States had all agreed to a Convention, the upper House altered their opinion and by a large Majority Voted to send forward Delegates. But on sending their Vote to the Lower House they in their turn Non concurred and no Delegates were sent.<sup>5</sup> And since the Publication of the Constitution and the Adoption of it by the other States the Various and numerous proceedings of the Legislature respecting it, from time to time, have been more influenced by party considerations than a determination finally to reject it. And as I can now assure your Excellency that all the other States having joined the New Confederacy and many important Amendments having been proposed, some of which have already been agreed to,<sup>6</sup> many persons of influence who have heretofore opposed the Adoption of the New Constitution here, have withdrawn their opposition, There is therefore reason to suppose that it will be very soon adopted in this State; and as measures which have the appearance of Coertion may be productive of Alienation of Affection, and will be peculiarly degrading to a State, which though small when she comes to join the Union will not be wanting in that public Spirit and Patriotism which She hath heretofore been acknowledged to Possess Permit me Therefore in behalf of a State, towards which your Excellency hath heretofore appeared friendly disposed, to solicit your Excellency to take such measures as your Wisdom shall suggest for preventing any fu[r]ther proceedings of Congress, on the before mentioned Report of the Committee of the Hoñble the Senate, at least until it shall be determined, by the Convention of this State whether they will adopt the New Constitution or not of which your Excellency shall have the Earliest information immediately after their rising.—

Any Communications your Excellency may wish to have made to the Legislature of this State committed to my care shall have the earliest and most respectful attention paid them by him who begs leave to subscribe himself with the highest sentiments of Esteem and the sincerest Regard

1. RC, RG 59, Department of State, Miscellaneous Letters, DNA. For Washington's 4 June response, see RCS:R.I., 1032.

2. The British occupied Newport on Rhode Island in Narragansett Bay from 8 December 1776 to 25 October 1779.

3. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (above). Fenner probably refers to the 20 May reprinting of the bill in the *United States Chronicle*.

4. On 18 March 1780 Congress revalued its Continental Currency at a rate of 40 to 1. The actual value of the currency had depreciated far greater. See E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776–1790* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 51–52.

5. For the General Assembly's refusal to appoint delegates to the Constitutional Convention, see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxv–xxxvii, 8–23.

6. On 25 September 1789 Congress approved twelve amendments to the Constitution. On 2 October President George Washington transmitted the amendments to the states for their ratification. (See Appendix I, below.) By 10 March 1790 eight states had ratified ten of the amendments, not yet a sufficient number of states to meet the three-quarters requirement necessary to adopt the amendments. With Virginia's ratification on 15 December 1791, a sufficient number of states had adopted ten of the amendments.

### Providence *United States Chronicle*, 20 May 1790

*Extract of a Letter from a Member of Congress, to a Gentleman in Boston, dated New-York, May 6.*

"A Committee of Senate, to whom was referred a Consideration of the Provision proper to be made in the present Session respecting Rhode-Island, have reported, that all commercial Intercourse between Rhode-Island and the United States should be prohibited after the First of July next—and that a Requisition be made on Rhode-Island for 27,000 Dollars, to be paid into the public Treasury before the First of August next.—Monday is assigned for a Consideration of this Report.<sup>1</sup> It is universally agreed, that the public Good requires a decisive Line of Conduct towards these People."

(On the above Extract appearing in the last Saturday's Paper,<sup>2</sup> it was suggested by several, that it was probably fabricated here—the Editor of this Paper has enquired into the Fact, and can, in the most positive Manner, assure all such, that it is a true Extract from a Letter received by a Gentleman of Character in Boston from a very distinguished Member of the Senate of the United States.—Accounts since received, directly from New-York, corroborate the Intelligence.—The following Extracts of Letters from two distinguished Members of the House of Representatives, and from a Member of the Senate of the United States contain further Information on this important Subject—the Originals, from which these Extracts are made, the Editor has seen, and vouches for their Authenticity.)



*Extract of a Letter of a late Date from a very respectable Member of Congress to a Gentleman in Providence.*<sup>3</sup>

“I think the Period cannot be very remote when the People in general in your State will discern, that a Union with us *is necessary to their own Interest*. The Idea of a perpetual Separation cannot I am sure find Place in the Mind of one reflecting Man. There has been no Instance in the History of Mankind, where two contiguous and unconnected States have existed for a Length of Time in uninterrupted Peace, *and the Sources of Contention in the present Case would be numerous*.—If we are ever to be united, Delay would manifestly be injurious as well to Rhode-Island as to the other States.—Many Questions, in which the Interest of your State will be deeply concerned, are yet to be decided.—By the Accession of North-Carolina you stand alone, if it is probable that will continue to be the Case, the Safety of this Government, and the Collection of its Revenue, may require *that Measures disagreeable to your Citizens should be adopted*.—If such are adopted I am sure it will be with Reluctance.”

*Extract of another Letter from the same Gentleman of a still later Date.*<sup>4</sup>

“Our Accounts from your State are not very favourable as to the Fate of the Constitution with you; but be the Event what it may I am glad a Convention has been called, and that the Constitution is before them, as the Result of it will enable us to determine what to depend upon; if the Constitution is rejected in direct Terms, or if the Convention again adjourn without Acceptance, which, after so long a Time to reflect on the Subject, *will be only a delicate Mode of Rejection*, the Government here will be justified even to the discerning People in Rhode-Island, in pursuing Measures *that in other Circumstances might be thought severe*,—but I hope your Expectations of an Adoption will not be disappointed.”

*Extract of a Letter from a very respectable Gentleman in Congress, dated New-York, May 11, 1790, to his Friend in this Town.*<sup>5</sup>

“The local Situation of your State, its commercial Advantages and Pursuits,—the Energy and Enterprize of its Citizens, combined in Consideration with its former Connections with the Nation, will render it impossible that an ultimate Separation should take Place.

“It being now generally believed that your Convention will reject the Constitution, the Measures to be pursued in that Event are in the Contemplation of the Senate. It is probable the Result will be, that all commercial Intercourse between Rhode-Island and the United States will be interdicted, as well by Land as Water; and that a Demand of immediate Payment of the Interest at least, perhaps the Principal, of her Proportion of the National Debt; while Humanity will regret the Evils

to be produced by these Measures, their Necessity, I am persuaded will justify them to the Candour even of those who may be the principal Sufferers.—These Evils, which I am confident you will believe I ardently wish may be avoided, are the least that can be done under the present Circumstances. They may be averted, and I will not altogether despair, that Rhode-Island will yet, before it is too late, know and pursue the Things which belong to her Peace and Happiness.”

*Extract of a Letter from a Member of Congress,  
dated New-York, May 11, 1790.*<sup>6</sup>

“The Senate is employed in framing a Bill for prohibiting all Intercourse with Rhode-Island by Land or Water, after the 1st of July, and also to require the Payment of your Quota of the Debt without Delay.

“If Congress should begin to coerce your State they must proceed; and I should suppose that your Opposers would readily see the Prudence of preventing Coercion, by an immediate Return to their Federal Duty. What is now before the Senate, and which is supported by a Majority perfectly disposed to bring your State into the Union, ought to be made known in your State. The People in the back Parts ought no longer to be deceived with the Idea, that the Condition of single Independence is an eligible one. I sincerely wish your Efforts may succeed on the 24th; and am,” &c.

Many of the Inhabitants in the Country Towns in this State, are opposed to the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, because Congress are providing Ways and Means to pay the *full Amount of the Continental Debt to the present Holders of the Securities*<sup>7</sup>—most of whom they say purchased them under Par;—and suggest, that by keeping out of the Union we shall avoid paying our Proportion of such Debt. One Moment’s Reflection must convince all such, that the State of Rhode-Island must pay her Proportion of *whatever Congress shall declare to be the Continental Debt*.—For instance, suppose Congress, by adopting the Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, should declare, *that the United States owe 54,124,464 Dolls. 56 Cents*,<sup>8</sup> and should further declare, *that they will pay the Interest of that Sum in Gold or Silver, in Quarterly Payments, to the present Holders of the Securities*:—Can Rhode-Island prevent this by refusing to join the Union? Must she not pay her Proportion? It is acknowledged from all Quarters, that we must pay our just Proportion of the foreign Debt. And is it probable that the other States will agree to receive of this State less in Proportion than *they* pay of the domestic Debt, because *some of her Inhabitants* think Congress have not done right *in funding the whole nominal Amount*? Who shall determine the Proportion which shall be paid by this State? Will Congress consent that it shall be determined

by us? No—He must have but little Knowledge of the Effects of National Pride on the human Heart, and of the Motives which influence a powerful People to Action, who can suppose that even the Antifederalists of the other States would not unitedly join, in the most decisive Measures, to oblige this State to pay her equal Proportion with them of what they shall consent to pay themselves. Is it not then the most mistaken Policy to refuse joining the Union when we are sure to be bound by the Decisions of their Government without our having any Voice in it? the people of this State ought seriously to reflect on their present dangerous Situation. They can no longer postpone the Adoption of the New Constitution without endangering the very Existence of their Government—An hostile Disposition towards this State is already beginning to arise in the other States, and when an hostile Spirit where the odds is so amazingly great shall be once excited and provoked, who can tell what fatal Consequences may result therefrom to us as a People.—Surely no one can think of opposing Force to Force. Our Political Salvation then depends on the Adoption of the New Constitution the next Week. In Case of an Adoption, Peace, Tranquility, public Prosperity, at least so far as it is enjoyed by the other States, in perfect Friendship with them, may be expected. But if it is not adopted, have we not Reason to fear the greatest Evils, and the most deplorable Distress, that can come upon a divided and an unhappy People?

1. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).

2. The extract of a letter dated May 6 from a member of Congress was reprinted from the *Providence Gazette*, 15 May. It was also reprinted in the *Albany Gazette*, 24 May, and *Norwich Packet*, 28 May.

3. Reprinted: *Providence Gazette*, 22 May. This extract is from a letter from U.S. Senator Caleb Strong of Massachusetts (RCS:R.I., 747).

4. Reprinted: *Providence Gazette*, 22 May. This extract is from a letter written by Caleb Strong to Theodore Foster, 28 February (RCS:R.I., 749).

5. Reprinted: *Providence Gazette*, 22 May, and *New York Gazette of the United States*, 2 June. According to George Benson’s 21 May letter to Theodore Sedgwick (immediately below), this extract comes from a letter written by Sedgwick to Benson, which was received on 16 May.

6. Reprinted: *Providence Gazette*, 22 May; *Massachusetts Centinel*, 26 May; Northampton, Mass., *Hampshire Gazette*, 28 May; *New Hampshire Spy*, 29 May; and Connecticut *Litchfield Monitor*, 29 May. This extract is perhaps from a letter written by U.S. Representative Fisher Ames of Massachusetts to Jabez Bowen and John Brown. See George Benson to Theodore Sedgwick, 21 May, at note 2 (immediately below).

7. In his 14 January report on public credit Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton proposed to fund the entire federal debt at the face value of the outstanding securities (DHFFC, V, 743–823).

8. This amount comes from Hamilton’s 14 January report on public credit (*ibid.*, 758).

**George Benson to Theodore Sedgwick  
Providence, 21 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I now do myself the pleasure to acknowledge the reception of your very acceptable favr. of the 11th inst. which reach'd me on sunday last [16 May], the very important and no less pleasing Contents, I immediately imparted to several particular friends, who express'd great pleasure in the intelligence and Conceiv'd it advisable that most of the Letter should be publish'd, and as your Worthy Colleague Mr. Ames whose friendly attention we gratefully feel had written to Govr. Bowen & Mr. Jno. Brown by the same opportunity, and Mr. Foster having not long since received a Letter from Mr. Strong, several extracts of Corresponding import are Publish'd in the News Paper, which I have now the honour to transmit you.<sup>2</sup>—The bill which appears to be design'd as a wholesome but severe applycation to the Political Maladies of this State arriv'd in Town several days after I recd. your Esteem'd favour, and is also inserted in the Paper<sup>3</sup>—We are extremely anxious to hear the result of the debates, which have probably before this period decided the important Point. The Letter with which you favour'd me, with the others on the same Subject, have furnish'd a topic of much interesting Conversation, and it is with ineffable satisfaction, I assure you that the Contents have made a very alarming impression, on the anti-federal minds, it is very obvious that no Occurrence has produced effects so apparently auspicious to our wishes, and we are now inspir'd with the most sanguine expectations that the Convention next week will adopt the Constitution, and rescue us from that Deplorable State into which the Malignant Policy and Perverseness of the Anties, have plung'd us, and also avert the more Deplorable evils which appear impending, tho' I Confess we rather enjoy than regret the expected operation of the Prohibitory Bill, as the inveterate Enemies of the Federal Government will then Suffer in the Common Calamity—hitherto the restraints have been Partial, and unhappily felt & lamented by those only, Who have long and ardently wish'd & endeavour'd for an accession to the united States.—

I Cannot Sir do ample Justice to those Grateful Sentiments of my heart which your Obliging kindness has impress'd, as so long time had elaps'd since I assum'd the liberty to address you, I was painfully apprehensive that you Consider'd me, as Presuming on an acquaintance too transient, to Warrant the freedom I exercis'd, and I am now embarrass'd for language, in which to express, how much I admire the Delicacy of your apology, and how sensibly I feel the favour you have done me.—Will you my Kind, sir be so obliging as to inform my truly

estimable friend Mr. Ames, that my best and grateful respects Court his acceptance, and permit me to subjoin that our most Judicious and Discerning Characters—Justly Conceive—Mr. Sedgwick, and Mr. Ames, as having the most Distinguish'd Claim to the exalted Character of Enlighten'd, and Eloquent Statesmen, and as the most influential advocates for the interests of the Eastern States.—if it was not very ungraceful, for an *alien* to Censure—I should *expatiate* where, I only *hint*—but, in reference to a Gentleman in the Massachusetts representation—some Persons, *not very Captious*, Cannot forbear Complaining in the language of sacred Writ,—“*one to his farm*”<sup>4</sup>—but I hope the good man will return to his seat in Season to *signify* his affirmative to the assumption of the State Debts,<sup>5</sup> should that Question be finally negativ'd—it will be productive of Evils more injurious to the Federal Government than the defection of many *Rhode Islands*—but the alarming Consequences of a *non assumption* you have fully, solemnly, and irrefutably, stated to Congress in sentiments, and language, which should be recorded in “Letters of Gold”—tho' they are more indelibly engraven on the grateful hearts of the numerous State Creditors, where they will erect a Monument to your Fame, that shall flourish unimpair'd, “When Statues and Triumphal Arches, shall moulder in the Dust.”<sup>6</sup> with every sentiment of respect attachment and Esteem—I am Sir Your much Obliged, & very obedt. Friend,

1. RC, Sedgwick Papers, MHI.

2. The letters mentioned by Benson were printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 20 May (immediately above).

3. See “U.S. Senate Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 13 May (RCS:R.I., 845–48n). The bill was printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 20 May.

4. Matthew 22:5.

5. Probably a reference to George Leonard. In mid-April 1790 Massachusetts representatives Leonard and Sedgwick were granted permission to be away from Congress. They had both returned in time to cast a vote on 26 May (DHFFC, III, 364, 371, 425).

6. From a 1730 sermon delivered in Boston by the Reverend Benjamin Colman (1673–1747) at the beginning of Governor Jonathan Belcher's term as governor of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The sermon was published under the title *Government the Pillar of the Earth* (Evans 3262, p. 16).

### John Steele to Joseph Winston

New York, 22 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>

. . . A bill has lately passed the Senate, and sent to us for concurrence which is designed to prohibit any further intercourse with Rhodeisland, untill she shall ratify.<sup>2</sup> It is tyrannical, and arbitrary in the highest degree, and the author of it, indeed the Senate by passing it, seem to have lost sight of that sperit of moderation, and mutual forbearance

which ought forever to subsist between Governments, related as they are to us, as well as between individuals.

It is certain that little state was not backward in the late Revolution, that she performed essential services, that she sustained important sacrifices and is therefore entitled to respect.

How far she is wrong in her present politicks? Or how far she is right? are questions (which the unerring wisdom of the deity is only capable of deciding.)<sup>3</sup>

I hope however the bill will be rejected in the house of Representatives, if it should not, and be finally passed into a law, it will be a public testimonial given to the world of the slender<sup>4</sup> foundation of all human Friendships, or political connections . . .

1. RC, Steele Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1562–63. The address page was annotated as “Recd. & forwarded June 22nd. by your Most Obt./Servant/Jno. Sibley.” Steele wrote a similar letter to North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin on 17 May (*ibid.*, 1527–28). See notes 3 and 4 below for significant differences between the two letters. Steele (1764–1815), a Salisbury, N.C., merchant, was a Federalist member of both the Hillsborough and Fayetteville conventions and voted to ratify the Constitution in the latter convention in November 1789. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1790–93. Winston (1746–1815), a Stokes County, N.C., planter, was a militia major during the Revolutionary War, leading troops at the important battles of King’s Mountain (1780) and Guilford Courthouse (1781). In 1790 he was elected to the North Carolina Senate.

2. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).

3. In the letter to Governor Martin, the text in angle brackets reads “which time only can decide.”

4. In the letter to Governor Martin, he wrote “sandy” instead of “slender.”

## A Farmer

### Providence Gazette, 22 May 1790<sup>1</sup>

*“Justum et tenacem propositi virum  
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,  
Non vultus instantis tyranni  
Mente qualis solida.”*

HORACE.<sup>2</sup>

Long experience of British usurpations rendered us veterans in the cause of pulling down government: In building it up, we are still novices. We have learned to resist the “*vultus instantis tyranni*”—but still yield to the “*ardor civium prava jubentium*.”—Let us however charitably hope, that the people judge according to the information they possess; for—“*non cuivis homini conti[n]git adire Corynthus*.”<sup>3</sup>

The writer of this piece entertains no vulgar opinion of the mother wit of the people of this State.—According to the best of his observation, no country can boast of greater force of natural genius, or of a more powerful *penchant* in the people to perpetuate their liberties: But the strongest fermented liquors undergo the greatest fermentation, and give proofs of their strength in that which rises and remains over them, as well as in that which settles.

While those who execute a delegated authority may feel an obligation to listen to the voice of their employers, it may be expected that those who are exonerated from official duties, and have no party to serve, should attend to the voice of their own reason and judgment.—If ever there was a time when our dear country required the services of all her honest-hearted sons—if any period—any crisis of affairs—can possibly be conceived, when the services of every person, though he may contribute only the widow's mite,<sup>4</sup> can be required—surely that period, and that crisis of affairs, have at length arrived.

Let us not reflect on past measures, that cannot now be helped;—let us not bring into view particular characters, to stigmatize them;—let us forgive all, and forget as much as we can: But let us not persevere in travelling a road, after we are convinced that it will lead us to ruin; let us not continue to support error, because we have advanced it.

The cares of government are weighty, and rulers ought to consider well the interests of the people. The administration of government requires all the great talents of the human mind to be united with real goodness of heart, and great industry. It has no doubt been the solicitude of the people of this State to commit their affairs into such hands; and to them they now look up for relief from the pressure of many evils, and for the adoption of a Constitution to establish and perpetuate their rights and liberties.

Twelve of the sister States have acceded to a new union. Shall we any longer stand aloof? A jury, after being possessed of a case a long time, brought in their verdict. The Judge, curious to know, asked the difficulties in their way, when one of the jury pertly replied, that he believed “never man's lot fell with eleven more obstinate fellows; for,” said he, “I was agreed at first, and have laboured all this time to bring them over to *my* opinion—but such was their obstinacy, that I was at last obliged to yield to *them*.”

From my small observation in life, it does very well for a man to be obstinate who is generally right; but for a man who is subject to err, and full of errors, to appear also obstinate in them, is odious. Admitting that our sister States have only as much wisdom and regard for their

own safety as we have for ours, it may be proved from Dr. Arbuthnot's doctrine of chances,<sup>5</sup> that the chance of our being right in refusing to adopt the Constitution is against us, twelve to one. Again, if we carefully revise the Constitution—the organization of the legislature—the power of each branch—the Supreme Executive—his powers—the judicial department—if we consider that the whole is elective—their responsibility to the people—the checks and balances—and, in short, the great national objects to be secured by the confederacy—and then peruse the amendments thereto, suggested by our majority in Convention,<sup>6</sup> after they had had opportunity to profit by length of time and the remarks of others—will not the chance be half as great, to wit, at least as six to one, that our politicians do not possess more wisdom and penetration, in political affairs, than the Convention of Philadelphia?

Many persons doubtless in other States have also objections to the Constitution—but others have objections to their objections, as well as to our objections. And is it probable that the antifederals could agree among themselves in their objections? In fine, is a constitution never to be adopted till one is framed unobjectionable? Then indeed there is an end of the business. The Constitution offered to us, notwithstanding all objections to it, is perhaps preferable to any other actually existing in the known world.

The expensiveness of the national civil list operates with some; but, admitting we are to become a self-created independent State, will that lessen our expence?—Of two evils, that will be choosing the greatest.

The aggravation of the national debt, by payment *at par*, *assumption*, &c.<sup>7</sup> may operate with others; but will not the Twelve States fix the national debt as they please? If so, will our avoiding them lessen our quota? The policy pursued in this State would suggest, send forward your Senators and your Representative—let them be men after your own hearts; and, by their influence in the National Councils, diminish the value of the continental securities; lower salaries, and augment the revenues—or by a—*coup de main*<sup>8</sup>—disincumber the nation of debt.

Why has a contrary policy prevailed? Are there no gentlemen, among those who are eligible, to be trusted abroad? Are there none, whose influence would do more to obstruct a measure, by appearing against it, than for it?

Some say, let Congress adopt our amendments before we join them—that is, we are willing Congress should come under *our* constitution; but utterly refuse to come under *theirs*—for it must be obvious, that Congress cannot ratify our amendments. That business vests constitutionally in the State legislatures, and must of course prove a work of time.



*The Banks of Mooshawsick, May 20, 1790.*<sup>9</sup>

P. S. I am seriously alarmed, under an apprehension that my lands must be taxed to make up the arrearage of revenue that will be due to the federal treasury from this State, for the interval of time from the organization of the federal government, till the adoption thereof by this State. This arrearage I am told the present Congress are about to demand in a very serious manner<sup>10</sup>—and where is our hard money to meet that demand? Have we not very unwisely suffered our impost to be paid in a fallacious medium for the last four years? to the ease of the merchant indeed, who has charged the impost on his goods in real money; but, I fear, eventually to the oppression of those from whom the deficiency must be raised by direct taxes.

1. David Howell seemingly claimed to be the author of this essay. See Howell to Thomas Jefferson, 3 June (RCS:R.I., 1027).

2. Latin: The man of firm and righteous will,/No rabble, clamorous for the wrong,/No tyrant's brow, whose frown may kill,/Can shake the strength that makes him strong (Horace, *Carmina*, Book III, poem 3, lines 1–4).

3. Latin: It is not every man who can go to Corinth (Horace, *Epistles*, Book I, epistle 17, line 36).

4. Mark 12:41–44.

5. John Arbuthnot (1667–1735), by profession a physician, translated Christiaan Huygen's *De Ratiociniis in Ludo Aleae* (1657) under the title *Of the Laws of Chance . . .*, to which he added some probability calculations on different dice and card games.

6. For the amendments proposed by the Rhode Island Convention on 6 March, see RCS:R.I., 1000–1002.

7. A reference to Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton's plans to fund the federal debt at face value and to assume the states' wartime debts. (See his 14 January report on public credit, DHFFC, V, 743–823.)

8. A swift attack or a sudden action.

9. Or Moshassuck River. The river is a small stream rising in present-day Lincoln (Smithfield in 1790) and flowing southerly into the Providence River at Market Square in Providence.

10. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (above).

### Jeremiah Hill to George Thatcher

**Biddeford, Maine, 23 May 1790 (excerpt)**<sup>1</sup>

. . . I think there is a great deal of propriety in making a distinction in the Revenue Laws between nations in commercial Treaty & those that are not, of course I like the *bold stroke* your house has made<sup>2</sup>—Rhode Island appears to me to be in a fit of Lunacy, I am rather [Jealous?]<sup>3</sup> whether *Physic* will answer any good purpose except the *Physician* is directed to let a *little Blood* which the doctors commonly allow to be very good in such disorders—

1. RC, Thatcher Papers, Boston Public Library. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1570–71.
2. A reference to the Trade and Navigation Bill (HR-66) presented to the House of Representatives on 17 May. The bill provided a higher duty on ships owned by persons from nations not having a commercial treaty with the United States (DHFFC, VI, 1972–73). Thatcher was a U.S. Representative from Massachusetts.
3. Hill probably meant to write “jealous,” which could mean, in this context, suspiciously careful or watchful.

**Abraham Baldwin to Joel Barlow**  
**New York, 24 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

My dear friend

... Rhode Island convention meets today, the whigs say they will reject if they dare, you will see the act which has passed the senate, and which will probably pass into a law if they do not prevent it by a pretty speedy adoption.<sup>2</sup> It will never do to let them remain in this situation, they will prevent the collection of a great proportion of our revenue, you know my maxim, that the great Sachem called society has his natural rights as well as other folks, and that whatever is necessary to his preservation, perfection and happiness, is as good as any of the rest of the laws of nature. If their place of existence was more remote from ours, we might let them take their own way in safety, but in our present situation, self preservation requires us to *modify* them, sic utere tuo ut alienum non ledas.<sup>3</sup> In fact I have no doubt of organizing the government over their heads at once, as it is over the rest of us, let them bounce, it would give us little trouble. . . .

1. RC, Baldwin Collection, Yale University Library. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1582–84n. Docketed: “A Baldwin/24 May 1790—/No. 27.”

2. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).

3. Latin: Use your own property in such a manner as not to injure that of another.

**John Collins to George Washington**  
**Newport, 24 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

In all the Vicissitudes of time, and changes of Sentiments that have taken place in the united states, I have uniformly believed that the most essential happiness of our Country, ultimately depended, upon the establishment of an efficient executive power, under one foederal head; being the only means, to obtain that tone to government necessary, to answer the ends of its institution; the securing the general peace, promoting the general interest, establishing the National character and rendering the Union indissolubly permanent—A power to controul the selfish interests of a Single state, and to compel the sacrifice of partial views to promote the common-weal.

A government thus calculated to cultivate the principles of universal Justice, probity and honour, must be the source of national strength, as well as happiness to mankind—However I have been Uniformly Actuated by these principles, the ill directed Zeal of the majority of the people of this state counteracting these principles, and my consciousness of possessing the general confidence hath hitherto led me to a degree of caution in my conduct and open declarations on the score of political concerns; expecting to effect more from my moderation and influence in public character, than by a conduct more explicit & pointed; which is fully evinced by what has taken place in consequence of my act in the appointment of a convention to adopt the constitution; which depended solely on me; and such was the caprice of the people, that all public confidence was withdrawn from me, and was deprived of every public trust and emolument—This was a Voluntary sacrifice, the event being well known, and comparatively a small one when Just Anticipations pourtray to me the great, the general advantages arising from a Completion of the union of the states (for have no doubt of the Adoption) but altho personal sacrifices for the general good, have been long familiar to me, (and if you have any Knowledge of my property or character you must be conscious they have been many and weighty) they are more easily supported by the hope of compensation—and when I reflect upon your friendship, generosity and goodness, with how much it will be in your power to gratifie me, you will give me leave to anticipate your influence and appointment to the Office of Collector for the district of Newport<sup>2</sup>—your Excellencys attention to me in this shall be ever had in lasting remembrance.

Your goodness will forgive the trouble given you, by an application from him, who will obey your commands with chearfulness and Alacrity—and honour you without flattery. I am with every Sentiment of respect & Esteem Your Humble servt.

1. RC, Washington Papers, DLC.

2. William Ellery, not Collins, was appointed collector of customs for Newport.

**Theodore Foster to William Channing  
Providence, 24 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Exertions have, with great Industry, been made by those you allude to in your Letter,<sup>2</sup> for procuring an Adoption of the New National Constitution by the Convention this Week.—I have not Time to write you the Particulars—of which I will inform you when I have the satisfaction of personal Conversation.—I have Strong Hopes but not without some Fears.—Many of the Antifederalists wish the Business done

but do not love to do it themselves. I anxiously wish to see it accomplished. The Adoption of the Constitution by our State will compleat a Revolution in Favour of Government,<sup>3</sup> as remarkable as any mentioned in History, exhibiting the American Character in a more respectable Point of View, than that of most other Nations in this, that their Goodness, Prudence and Wisdom have erected a Fabrick of Government, on the Broad and Solid Foundation of the Public Liberty, secured by a General Election of the People at large, so curiously compacted and Restricted, as that the *Vox Populi*<sup>4</sup> may be heard and will be attended to, in every part of the magnificent Dome, in such a Manner as to be productive of the General Good, without the Confusion ever attendant on Democracy, which Mr. Ames justly compared to “*a Volcano which conceals the feiry Materials of its own Destruction*[”]<sup>5</sup>—The New Constitution knits and weaves the states together by a firm and Strong Web but it leaves them so much of Seperate Independency as that they serve as a controuling Balance upon each other and upon the whole united productive and preservative of the General Liberty of every part of the Empire, and of all the Individuals that compose it.—I *anticipate* Halcyon days of Peace, Tranquility, and Happiness under a Wise and a Prudent Administration of the New Government and that you and yours may long *participate* therein in joy and in Health with all the Blessings of Heaven attending you Sincerely pray, your Friend

1. RC, Channing-Ellery Papers, RHi.

2. See Channing to Foster, 18 May (above).

3. The phrase “revolution in favor of *Government*” appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 5 September 1787 (CC:72). The *Gazette*’s piece was reprinted twenty-five times by 25 September, including in the *Providence Gazette*, 15 September.

4. Latin: Voice of the people.

5. See Fisher Ames’s speech in the Massachusetts Convention on 15 January 1788, in which he asserted that “A democracy is a volcano, which conceals the fiery materials of its own destruction” (RCS:Mass., 1192). The italics were supplied by Foster. The *Newport Herald* and *United States Chronicle*, 24 January, and *Providence Gazette*, 26 January, reprinted Ames’s speech.

### **Providence: Instructions to Town’s Delegates to the State Convention 24 May 1790**

*Freemen Request Town Meeting  
Providence, 24 May 1790*<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the situation of this State will become extremely critical & alarming in case the Convention should not adopt the Constitution at their present Meeting & it is necessary that the sentiments of the Freemen of this Town shou’d be known relative to the measures which in

that event it will be proper to take, in order to secure a Continuance of our Commercial Intercourse with the United States. You are therefore requested to cause the Freemen of the Town of Providence to be convened at Four o'Clock this afternoon for the purpose of adopting such measures relative to the subject aforesaid as they may think proper— & for transacting any other necessary business—

John Tillinghast	Jona. Tillinghast
Jos. Nightingale	John Ward
Nichos Brown	Joseph Peck
John Brown	William Earle
Jereh. Olney	Daniel Bucklin
Ephm Bowen Jr.	

*Town Meeting, 24 May 1790<sup>2</sup>*

At a Town Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Providence, legally warned and assembled at the State House on Monday the 24th. Day of May A.D. 1790—

John Dorrance, Esqr. Moderator

Resolved That Messieurs, John Brown, Welcome Arnold, John Dorrance, Gershom Jones, Jeremiah Olney, George Benson, Zephaniah Andrews, Joseph Nightingale and the Clerk [Daniel Cook], be a Committee, to draught Instructions to our Delegates in State Convention relative to the Subject of this present Meeting; and that they report as soon as may be.

The Subscribers being appointed a Committee to draught Instructions to our Delegates in State Convention beg Leave to report the following Resolutions, to wit:

Resolved, That in Case the Convention of this State now convened in Newport shall not at the present Session adopt the Constitution, but shall either reject the same or adjourn to some future Day, that in such Case the Delegates from this Town at the said Convention, be and they are hereby instructed to enter a solemn and spirited Protest against such Rejection or Adjournment.

It is further Resolved, That it is our Opinion that on the Rejection of the said Constitution, or further Delay of a Decision thereon, the respective Towns of the State have a Right to make Application to the Congress of the United States for the same Privileges, and Protection which are afforded to the Towns under their Jurisdiction: And in such Case the Delegates from this Town be and they are hereby fully authorized and empowered to meet with the Delegates from the Town of Newport and the Delegates from such other Towns as may think proper

to join them, for the purpose of consulting and devising such Mode of Application as they in their Wisdom may think proper and to carry the Result of their Deliberations, into immediate Effect and that they make Report of their Doings to the next Town Meeting

Ordered, That the Clerk furnish our Delegates with a Copy hereof for their Instructions—

John Brown  
 Welcome Arnold  
 John Dorrance  
 Gershom Jones  
 Jerah. Olney  
 Geo. Benson  
 Zephh. Andrews  
 Jos. Nightingale  
 Danl. Cooke

And the said Report being duly considered, It is Voted and Resolved, That the same be received and accepted; and that a Copy thereof be transmitted to our Delegates as their Instructions.—

The Meeting is Dissolved

*Grotius: Proposed Prefatory Resolutions to Instructions  
 Providence United States Chronicle, 27 May 1790<sup>3</sup>*

MR. WHEELER, As the Instructions of this Town to its Delegates in Convention, in Case of their not adopting the Constitution at the present Session, to secede from the Authority of this State is a Measure in its Nature serious and extraordinary, it was thought proper to notify the Principles *on which alone it could be justified*; this is attempted in the following Resolutions, intended to have been submitted to the Freemen of the Town, had not the Writer of them been necessarily absent.

As the Instructions passed on Monday last, passed without Apology, Preface, Reasons or Principles, or even any State of Facts to justify them, you are requested to publish these Resolutions, which may serve in Nature of a *Manifesto* till a better *Justificative* for those Instructions may be published by the Advocates of them.

GROTIUS.

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*At a Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Providence, in Town-Meeting legally assembled, on the 24th Day of May, A. D. 1790.*

RESOLVED, That the People of these Countries reverted to a State of natural Liberty on their Declaration of Independence on the British Government.

Resolved, That the People of this, then Colony, never consented,

either expressly or implicitly, to assume and exercise a Sovereignty disconnected from the People of our then Sister Colonies.

Resolved, That the People of this Town owe no Allegiance to the Government administered over them at present, any further than this State is considered as one of the Thirteen United States of America.

Resolved, That in Case the Convention of this State refuse to become re-united with the Rest of the States aforesaid, the People inhabiting this Town will be authorised to make Use of all their natural Rights, for the Security of their Lives, Liberties and Property.

Resolved, That any further Continuance of the Question for deciding on the proposed Federal Constitution in the present State Convention, will be considered by the Freemen of this Town equivalent to a Rejection thereof.

And to the End that the Sentiments of the People of this Town may be seasonably made known to their Brethren in other Parts of the State, that such of them as may concur in Opinion with us may be prepared to co-operate with us in such Measures as may be eventually judged proper:

Resolved, That a Copy of these Resolutions be certified by the Clerk and delivered to the Delegates representing this Town in the present State Convention, to be by them communicated.

Resolved, That the foregoing be printed in the next Providence News-Papers.

1. Providence Town Papers, Vol. 13, no. 5627, RHi. The request was addressed "To Daniel Cooke Esqr./Town Clk of Providence." Cooke immediately notified the town's sergeant or either of the two constables to warn the freemen to meet at the statehouse at 4 p.m. on that day. Town Sergeant Henry Bowen warned the freemen as requested. For the 24 May warrant, see Mfm:RI.

2. Providence Town Records, pp. 168–70, City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Providence, R.I. The original manuscript report of the committee, with the signatures of the committee members affixed, is in the Providence Town Papers, Vol. 13, no. 5628, RHi. "A true Copy" of the instructions witnessed by town clerk Daniel Cooke, which he sent to the town's Convention delegates, is in the Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

A version of the resolutions was printed in the New York *Daily Advertiser*, 1 June, and reprinted in the *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 3 June; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 4 June; and *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 16 June. On 30 May, U.S. Senator Philip Schuyler, in New York City, wrote that Jeremiah Olney had written him on 25 May stating that "the Rhode Island Convention had convened on the preceeding day, and the appearances of an Adoption were very Slender.—The Town of Providence have in town meeting resolved that If the state does not Accede to the constitution, that town will entreat the protection of Congress and separate from the state. It is believed Newport will do the like" (to Stephen Van Rensselaer, DHFFC, XIX, 1644–45). Olney had been on the committee that drafted the Providence instructions adopted on 24 May.

3. Reprinted: *Boston Gazette*, 31 May; *Salem Mercury*, 1 June.

**William Loughton Smith to Edward Rutledge****New York, 24 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . The R. Island Convention meet to day—the Bill from the Senate (which past by a majority of two to one in that house) is fixed to be taken up this day week in a Comm̃ee of the whole;<sup>2</sup> by that time we shall learn what they intend doing—it may work upon them Successfully. . . .

1. RC, William Loughton Smith Papers, South Carolina Historical Society. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1587–88. Smith (1758–1812), a Charleston, S.C., lawyer, was a member of the S.C. House of Representatives, 1785–89, and the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–97. He voted to ratify the Constitution in the South Carolina Convention in May 1788. Rutledge (1749–1800), a Charleston, S.C., lawyer, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a delegate to the South Carolina Convention, where he voted to ratify the Constitution.

2. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).

**John Sullivan to John Langdon****Durham, N.H., 24 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . I am very much mortified to hear that the President of the united States is Indisposed;<sup>2</sup> may god preserve him for the good of a rising Empire and for the benefit of the world in General. I am much pleased that we are not threatned with any foreign attacks and that the Little speck in Creation *Rhode Island* can do us but lit[t]le hurt even if the old Spirit prevail. . . .

1. RC, Langdon Papers, Portsmouth Athenaeum, Portsmouth, N.H. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1588–89. Sullivan (1740–1795), a Durham, N.H., lawyer, and a major general in the Continental Army during the Revolution (he commanded the troops in the siege of Newport in 1778), was president of New Hampshire, 1786–88, 1789–90, and president of the New Hampshire Convention, where he voted to ratify the Constitution on 21 June 1788. He was a U.S. district judge for New Hampshire, 1789–95. Langdon (1741–1819), was a Portsmouth, N.H., merchant and president of New Hampshire 1785–86, 1788–89, and U.S. Senator, 1789–1801. He signed the Constitution in the Constitutional Convention, 1787, and voted to ratify the Constitution in the New Hampshire Convention.

2. See John Adams to William Ellery, 19 May, note 4 (above).

**New York Daily Advertiser, 26 May 1790<sup>1</sup>***Extract of a letter from Rhode-Island.*

“Do not blame us all with too much severity for what may appear to you in our conduct absolute perverseness and obstinacy. Wherever ignorance and prejudice prevail, both those vices will also abound. Where numbers of the representatives of the people have been collected from



the dregs of the people, what better is to be expected than opposition to what they have been taught to believe contrary to their interests. No one person out of fifty thinks or reasons for himself, and a few artful and interested knaves have found means to keep this little state in a ferment for a long time past, and probably may do the same in some degree, for a considerable time to come. I predict, however, that their reign is almost at an end. *Illiterate hirelings* certainly cannot much longer find a place in our public bodies. The meeting of the convention at Newport, the latter end of May, augurs well to the federal cause, and evidently shews that the main weight is coming into that scale. Paper money is the real cause of all the remaining opposition, and the dread of being obliged to pay past debts with solid coin, is at the root of antifederalism. Hundreds of villains will run away the moment a majority adopts the new constitution.”

1. Reprinted: *Pennsylvania Packet*, 28 May; *New York Weekly Museum*, 29 May; *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 29 May; and *Maryland Herald*, 8 June.

**Henry Wynkoop to Reading Beatty**  
**New York, 27 May 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . On monday last the Motion for fixing the next Meeting of Congress at Philadelphia was made in the Senate by Mr. [Robert] Mor[r]is & seconded by Mr. [John] Langdon, which lay on the Table until yesterday when it was again brought forward & postponed to that day week, to afford time for Rhode Island to send forward their Senators, the Votes stood 13 for the postponement & 11 against, thus you see our sanguine Prospects of going to Philadelphia are at least rendered precarious, tho’ we will not consider it as lost yet, *Perseverando*, you know was the Motto of one of our Continental Bills.<sup>2</sup>

The Assumption of the State Debts was again brought forward as you will perceive by the papers, but was rejected as part of the funding Bill, which this day has been compleated, so far as to be engrossed for a third reading on monday next;<sup>3</sup> this done Mr. Fitsimonds<sup>4</sup> introduced the following Motion, *That Congress meet & hold their next Session in Philadelphia*, this was seconded from various parts of the House & now lays on the Table, what will be its fate time will discover, many Gentlemen are yet sanguine, while others wear long faces upon it; The coming in of Rhode-Island is yet precarious, as the Communications from thence are various in Opinion, some Gentlemen conceiving they will adopt the Constitution while others are positive in assertions to the contrary. . . .

1. RC, Wynkoop Letters, Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pa. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1613–14. Wynkoop (1737–1816), the owner of a large estate in Bucks

County, Pa., held many local and state posts in the county. He was a delegate to Congress, 1779–82, and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–91. Wynkoop was also a delegate to the Pennsylvania Convention, where he voted to ratify the Constitution on 12 December 1787. Beatty (1757–1831), a Bucks County physician, was Wynkoop's son-in-law. He served as a doctor during the Revolution and after the war was a member of the Society of the Cincinnati.

2. The motto appeared on six dollar bills issued by the Continental Congress from 1775 to 1778.

3. On 24 May Elbridge Gerry moved to add several sections to the funding bill for the purpose of assuming the state debts. The House debated Gerry's proposed sections but did not incorporate them into the bill (DHFFC, V, 733–34, 874n–76n; XIII, 1377–92, *passim*).

4. Representative Thomas FitzSimons of Pennsylvania.

### **Providence United States Chronicle, 27 May 1790**

The CONVENTION, elected by the Freemen of this State, for the Purpose of “investigating and DECIDING” on the Constitution of the United States, is now in Session at Newport.

A Gentleman from New-York informs, that the Bill which was published in our last as being before the Senate of the United States, had passed that House with some Amendments—the Sum to be required of this State is 33,000 Dollars, to be paid in August.—It was to be taken up in the House of Representatives on Friday last.<sup>1</sup>

1. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (above).

### **Providence Gazette, 29 May 1790**

*Extract of a Letter from a Member of Congress, to a Gentleman in this Town, dated New-York, May 18.*

“It has been very difficult to persuade Congress or the Public to believe that your Majority intend to stand out. It is a jest, to pretend to single Independence. What then can be their Object? The Minority cannot expect to dictate a Form of Government to the Majority. A real or affected Dislike of the Constitution has not appeared to me a sufficient Reason for refusing to adopt it. Absolute Independence, if your People could support it, would be a bitter Curse to them. To maintain it, even a short Time, against the other States, would require such Exertions as would exhaust and distress them more than their Contributions to the Union perhaps for a Century—and, after all, a Breath would destroy it; for if they could support it, by foreign Aid, it would be ten Times worse. In that Case, the Work of Ruin would be sooner accomplished, as both Friends and Foes would work at it. It is a strange

Thing to talk of an Independence against the Union, which cannot be maintained a Minute longer than the Union shall permit. Is it not inconsistent and absurd to say, we cannot live with you as Fellow-Citizens under one Government, but we are willing to live near you under a separate one, which your Will and Pleasure may demolish? The less your People like the Constitution, the more strange this Language and Conduct will appear. Whatever is bad in it, or pretended to be in it, you will suffer—and whatever is valuable you will be deprived of, if you make yourselves Strangers to the Union. As Citizens, you would be entitled to the Privileges, and secured by the many Checks upon the Powers of Government. While you keep out of the Union, you have no Claim to these. Your People therefore say what amounts to this—the Government is under several Restraints—but still we do not think it safe to live under—but without any of these Securities we cheerfully consent, nay insist upon living exposed to the Operation of this Government. I do not know whether I have explained the Idea I have endeavoured to convey, so as to make it intelligible.—To my Understanding, however, there seems to be a singular Absurdity in the Reason given for refusing to adopt the Constitution. We are afraid of it, say they; but we are not afraid of that, and worse.

“I have been informed that infinite Pains have been taken to embitter the Minds of your People against their Brethren in the twelve States. I can easily conceive that it is very unpleasant to tread back the Steps which have been taken in a wrong Path, and that the human Mind readily assents to any Story which will justify a Man in his own Eyes. We ought not to expect, that even honest and discerning Men will escape being deceived under Circumstances which make Truth undesirable. Your People refused to have any Thing to do with framing the Government,<sup>1</sup> and afterwards to adopt it. That soon created a Distinction between them and the Union—what was hastily begun, was passionately maintained. Self-Love would certainly justify itself—supposing themselves perfectly in the Right, as People ever do, and that they were going to be oppressed by the Union, they have been open to a Thousand Deceptions, and afflicted with a Thousand groundless Fears. In this Situation of Things, some will find it convenient to help deceive others, perhaps being themselves deceived.—I have been trying to account for the Refusal of your State to join the Union, on such Principles as will throw the least possible Censure upon the great Body of your Citizens who have supported that Refusal. When we judge of the Motives of great Bodies of Men, we cannot exercise too much Candour. But whatever Reason may have guided your State in rejecting the Union, it is a Subject of perfect Astonishment among all Ranks of People in

this Quarter, and I believe extensively through America. It is constantly asked, what does your State mean to do? How far is the present System to be carried? It seems to be expected that the Constitution will not be adopted, and that the Convention ought to be considered as a Measure of Evasion. Formerly it was thought impossible that you should continue long in a State of Disunion, and that you might be let alone. Now a very different Sentiment seems to prevail.

“Congress is about funding the Debt, and the Creditors are impatient to have it accomplished, as you may suppose. The People at large seem to wish for it too, because they expect, and I believe justly and with good Reason, that a funded Debt will favour the Circulation of Money and active Property. Two Things are asserted in Regard to your State, which do Violence to these Hopes:—That you are collecting Duties into your State Treasury upon imported Articles, which are consumed chiefly by the People in the Union; so that you escape paying your Share of the common Debt, while you actually tax your Neighbours, who are obliged to pay it—and further, that your State will nearly destroy the Collection of the national Duties, by favouring the illicit Passage of dutied Goods.

“Measures which will oblige your State to pay its Part, and secure our Citizens from paying to your Treasury, and at the same Time will secure the Revenue from Loss, by smuggling through your State, seem to be indispensable: The Creditors and People at large will concur to call for them. The former will not consent to go unpaid, nor the latter to pay for others. Justice requires that your State should pay its Part; and your Legislature will not be able to find any Pretext of Complaint, as by their Letter to the President they have consented to the Principle, and given Assurances that they were getting ready to pay;<sup>2</sup> nor can your People, of Right, claim the Trade and Privileges of Citizens, if they prefer the Condition of Strangers. Upon these Principles the Senate of the United States have nearly completed a Bill to forbid all Intercourse with Rhode-Island; and to demand about 27,000 Dollars without Delay: This has passed hitherto by a great Majority in the Senate.<sup>3</sup> The House of Representatives have not expressed any Opinion on this Subject; but my Conversation with Individuals has led me to this Opinion, that the Demand of Money is thought to be unexceptionably just—and that Duties on the Articles of the Growth or Manufacture of Rhode-Island, which the Senate cannot impose constitutionally, as Bills for Revenue must originate in the House, ought to be laid. Whatever Reluctance Congress may have discovered heretofore to a System of Rigour in Regard to you, the Necessities of Revenue will soon force them to it.—Your People could not object to Duties upon your Produce as cruel

and unjust—and have they weighed the Operation of such Duties? While this City is growing so fast, a large Sum will be paid for your Lime. A moderate Duty would put an End to the Trade. The Breweries of this Place and Philadelphia furnish an increasing Vent for your Barley. Your Cheese, Butter, &c. find their *best*, and many of your Articles their *only* Market in the States. A Preference will be given to the Articles of the like Kind produced in the States, and you will admit that it ought to be so. What unknown Blessings attend your State of Disunion, to balance these grievous Inconveniences, I know not.—I do not believe that any such exist. Now, in the Name of Peace and Union, which your Accession would make perfect, is there no Possibility of keeping Men's Passions quiet long enough to bring these Things before their Eyes? Is there no one among the good Men who still oppose the Constitution, and who alone will be heard with entire Confidence, who will shew how much better he loves his Country than his Party, by warning his Friends of these Evils, by shewing how weak, how useless and unavailing, how pernicious and dangerous, any further Opposition will be? Though such a Man may wear the Name of an Antifederalist, and be ever so obnoxious to the adverse Party, I shall not hesitate to pronounce him a Patriot, the Benefactor of his Country, the Preserver of its Peace and Honour. Men may overcome or despise the Passions of other Men, but it is the Part of true Magnanimity to overcome one's own—and if your Opponents should yield to the Duty which they seem manifestly to owe their Constituents, they will go far to refute an Opinion which many have adopted, that they do not care what may become of the Interest of the Public in future, if they can only make Shift to keep in Power. I confess I feel an Anxiety upon this Subject—I long to see the Union complete—to see your State joining with the others in those Measures which I verily believe will make our Nation the most respectable in the World.—We are Brethren—the State of Discord and Alienation is unnatural, and ought not to last a Day longer than may be necessary to employ honest Men of both Parties to put an End to it.”

1. For Rhode Island's refusal to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxv–xxxvii, 8–23.

2. See “Rhode Island General Assembly to the President, the Senate, and the House of Representatives,” 19 September 1789 (RCS:R.I., 605–7).

3. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June 1790 (above).

**VII.**  
**THE RHODE ISLAND CONVENTION**  
**FIRST SESSION**  
**1–6 March 1790**

**Introduction**

The opening session of the Rhode Island Convention met on 1 March 1790 at 3:00 P.M. at the statehouse in Little Rest (now Kingston), the town seat of South Kingstown and the seat of Washington County. All seventy delegates attended on 1 March when, in an uncontested election, Antifederalist Deputy Governor Daniel Owen, a Gloucester delegate, was chosen president. Antifederalist Daniel Updike of North Kingstown, the clerk of the House of Deputies, defeated Federalist Theodore Foster of Providence as secretary by twelve votes. The Convention then appointed a five-man committee to draft and report rules and orders.

On 2 March the rules committee reported. After amending the final rule so that a “previous question” to vote on an amendment or adjournment would take precedence over a vote on ratification, the rules were accepted. Smithfield Antifederalist John Sayles, seconded by his fellow townsman Andrew Waterman, then moved that a committee be appointed that would draft a bill of rights and amendments to be sent to the towns for their consideration and that the Convention should then immediately adjourn to a future day. The delegates adjourned to 3:00 P.M., when the Convention read the Constitution, the resolution of Congress of 28 September 1787 transmitting the Constitution to the states, and the resolution of the General Assembly calling the Convention. After some debate on the Constitution, the delegates adjourned to the next morning when, setting aside Sayles’ motion, they began considering the Constitution by paragraphs.

On Thursday morning, 4 March, the Convention completed its consideration of the Constitution. After reading the amendments to the Constitution proposed by the new U.S. Congress and those proposed by the conventions of several states, a committee of ten (two delegates from each county) was appointed to draft amendments to the Constitution. The Convention met at 9:00 A.M. on Friday, 5 March, but adjourned to 3:00 P.M. because the committee’s report was not yet ready. It re-assembled, and after a further brief delay, Secretary Updike read the report to the delegates and the observers who crowded the statehouse.

The report consisted of a bill of rights and amendments. After the bill of rights was read, Antifederalist Job Comstock moved that the Con-

vention adjourn without considering the committee's report, which, he suggested, should be submitted to the towns for their consideration. Federalist Henry Marchant of Newport wanted the Convention to consider and approve the bill of rights and then consider the amendments. The Convention debated the report the rest of the afternoon of Friday, 5 March, and on Saturday until shortly before 1:00 P.M. The delegates voted to approve the bill of rights and to strike out two amendments. By a majority of one, the Convention decided to retain the amendment condemning the Constitution's prohibition of a congressional ban on the African slave trade before 1808. Federalists then wanted to vote on ratifying the Constitution, while Antifederalists argued for an adjournment to consult with their constituents. After a long debate, the delegates voted 41 to 28 to adjourn to a future day. They considered the end of March, the end of April, and the end of May. If a long adjournment was approved, Federalist Nathan Miller of Warren threatened that his constituents would petition Congress to be transferred to Massachusetts from whence Warren came in 1747. The delegates voted that the Convention's bill of rights and amendments should be submitted to the regular annual town meetings on 21 April. The delegates voted 38 to 31 against setting the end of March as the time to assemble again. They then voted 36 to 32 to reconvene on 24 May 1790. A vote of 35 to 34 provided that the Convention should reassemble in Newport, the seat of Newport County, rather than East Greenwich, the seat of Kent County.

## Sources for the Rhode Island Convention

### *Convention Proceedings*

The official proceedings of both sessions of the Convention were recorded by Convention secretary Daniel Updike. Like most ratifying conventions, the proceedings provide only a skeletal outline of the official actions. The Convention proceedings were turned over to the Rhode Island secretary of state John Russell Bartlett in 1863 by Wilkins Updike, Daniel Updike's youngest brother. The papers now reside in the Rhode Island State Archives in a book labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution. William R. Staples, a former chief justice of the state supreme court, edited the proceedings and related documents in the posthumously published *Rhode Island in the Continental Congress, with the Journal of the Convention that Adopted the Constitution, 1765–1790* (Providence, 1870), 640–81.

### *Daniel Updike's Notes of the Convention Debates*

In addition to the official proceedings of the Convention, Daniel Updike recorded brief accounts of some of the speeches delivered between 2 and 6 March. His notes of debates for 3–4 March (placed within angle brackets) have been interwoven with Theodore Foster's notes of debates for those two days (see below). By coupling the two versions of a particular speech, the editors believe each complements the other, often illuminating the cryptic nature of both sets of notes.

### *Theodore Foster's Notes of the Convention Debates*

Although Theodore Foster failed to become the Convention's secretary, being defeated by Updike, he took it upon himself, as an observer, to take notes of the debates at the March 1790 session. These notes consist of eighty-one numbered manuscript pages, each measuring about four by seven inches. They were donated in 1840 to the Rhode Island Historical Society by Charles F. Tillinghast, Foster's grandson. The notes were transcribed and published for the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1929 by Robert C. Cotner as *Theodore Foster's Minutes of the Convention Held at South Kingstown, Rhode Island in March, 1790, Which Failed to Adopt the Constitution of the United States*. Cotner's edition was reprinted in 1967 by the American Antiquarian Society.

Foster's notes were apparently hurriedly written as each delegate spoke. Words are often abbreviated or seem to trail off without completion and most sentences are incomplete. Because of the cryptic nature of the notes, they are not only difficult to transcribe, but once transcribed verbatim, they are often difficult to understand. Consequently, the editors have expanded the text that is printed here. Literal



transcriptions appear in Mfm:R.I. To further assist the reader, the editors have interfiled Foster's and Updike's notes for 3 and 4 March 1790. (These two sets of notes often complement each other, making them more understandable.) Updike's notes for these two dates are placed within angle brackets.

#### *Loose Convention Papers*

A variety of loose papers are in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution in the Rhode Island State Archives. Among these papers are (1) a draft amendment to one of the Convention's rules, (2) drafts of various motions, (3) drafts of amendments, (4) committee reports, and (5) lists of delegates. The loose papers also include a list of delegates annotated to show the vote on adjournment taken on 26 May and the final vote on ratification on 29 May. Most of these papers have been placed either in footnotes in this volume or in Mfm:R.I.

#### *Bill of Rights and Amendments, March 1790*

The March session's bill of rights and proposed amendments to the Constitution were printed in all four Rhode Island newspapers and as a one-page broadside. A Convention order of 6 March was printed after the final amendment at the bottom of the broadside. This order provided that one copy of the printed bill of rights and amendments was to be given to each Convention delegate, each member of the state legislature, and to each town clerk. The distribution was to be made through the county sheriffs.

Several manuscript versions of the bill of rights and amendments are extant, including the original report of the ten-man committee that contains crossed-out passages and insertions. "True copies" of the final report are also in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution in the Rhode Island State Archives.

#### *Newspapers*

No Rhode Island newspaper printed extensive accounts of the debates of the Rhode Island Convention similar to those newspaper reports of the Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania conventions. The *Newport Herald*, 4, 11 March, published a general account of what transpired on each day of the March Convention. Briefer accounts appeared in the three other Rhode Island newspapers. The *Providence Gazette*, 13 March, printed a detailed description of the Convention proceedings for 6 March, which included the names of the delegates who voted for and against adjournment. The *Connecticut Gazette*, 5 March,

and the *Providence Gazette*, 6 March, each printed an extract of a letter describing Convention proceedings. All four Rhode Island newspapers printed the bill of rights and proposed amendments adopted by the March Convention.

The newspaper coverage of the May session of the Convention is even less extensive than that of the March session. The *Newport Herald* and *United States Chronicle* each printed one brief but informative account of the Convention's proceedings, with the *Chronicle* listing the names of the delegates who voted for or against ratification. The *Providence Gazette* and *Newport Mercury* printed an almost identical brief paragraph on the Convention. All four Rhode Island newspapers printed the form of ratification, bill of rights, and proposed amendments adopted on 29 May.

#### *Town Records*

The first session of the Rhode Island Convention sent the bill of rights and amendments that it adopted on 6 March to the towns for their consideration in their regular annual meetings on 21 April. Records have been found of the action taken on the bill of rights and amendments for twelve towns (RCS:R.I., 828–34). When the Convention re-assembled in May, it considered the suggestions made by the town meetings and added four amendments to those adopted in March for inclusion in the form of ratification. Middletown and Portsmouth, both on Aquidneck Island just north of Newport where the Convention was meeting, also took action in town meetings on 29 May that affected the outcome of the vote on ratification of the Constitution that same day.

#### *Form of Ratification with a Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments, 29 May 1790*

Two official engrossed copies of the form of ratification were made—one sent to the U.S. Congress and one retained by the state. The former is located in the National Archives, while the latter is in the Rhode Island State Archives. A working copy of the form of ratification is also in the Rhode Island State Archives. Two broadside versions of the form of ratification were printed. John Carter of the *Providence Gazette* printed an abbreviated one-page version which was reprinted in at least nineteen newspapers. Peter Edes of the *Newport Herald* printed the complete form of ratification (including the U.S. Constitution) by order of the Convention. At least twenty-four newspapers (including all four in Rhode Island) reprinted the complete form of ratification (omitting the U.S. Constitution). For details about the form of ratification, see the footnote that accompanies the document in this volume (RCS:R.I., 1002n–4n).

*Letters*

Only two letters of substance exist that describe the March session of Rhode Island's Convention: Henry Marchant to John Adams and Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox, both dated 7 March.

*Financial Records*

The delegates to the Rhode Island Convention were paid by their towns, but only a few records of these payments have been located. The General Assembly ordered the state treasurer to pay Convention president Daniel Owen and secretary Daniel Updike as well as two scribes for copying the form of ratification. Peter Edes was also paid by the state for his broadside printing of the Constitution and the form of ratification. These financial records have been placed on Mfm:R.I. An abstract of these payments appears at the end of Part VIII (RCS:R.I., 1010–12).

## Delegates to the Rhode Island Convention

The roster lists all of the delegates for the March and May sessions of the Rhode Island Convention. Federalist Nathan Miller of Warren died shortly before the second session assembled on 24 May, and Federalist Benjamin Bosworth filled the vacancy. Antifederalist William Peckham, Jr., of Middletown resigned on 29 May rather than vote to ratify the Constitution as instructed by the town meeting of that day. He was replaced by Federalist Elisha Barker.

The vote given for each delegate is the 29 May vote to ratify the Constitution, which carried 34 to 32. A "Y" indicates a vote to ratify the Constitution; an "N" a vote against ratification; and an "A" a delegate who was either absent or abstained. Five Antifederalists (marked by an \*) voted for ratification. Four Antifederalists did not vote, including Daniel Owen, who was president of the Convention.

The honorific titles have been obtained from the 8 February 1790 town meetings that elected the delegates, the election certificates, the Convention proceedings and debates, and the two lists of the delegates in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Ratification of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives.

### CONVENTION OFFICIALS

#### PRESIDENT

Hon. Daniel Owen, Esqr.

#### SECRETARY

Daniel Updike, Esqr.

#### MONITORS

Col. William Barton

Mr. Nathan Bates

#### PRESIDING MINISTERS (May Session)

William Patten (Congregational)

William Smith (Episcopal)

Gardner Thurston (Baptist)

### DELEGATES

#### BARRINGTON

Samuel Allen, Esqr. (Y)

Col. Thomas Allen (Y)

#### BRISTOL

Hon. William Bradford, Esqr. (Y)

Shearjashub Bourne, Esqr. (Y)

#### CHARLESTOWN

Thomas Hoxsie, Esqr. (N)

Gen. Joseph Stanton, Jr., Esqr. (N)

#### COVENTRY

Benjamin Arnold, Esqr. (N)

Lieut. Job Greene (N)

#### CRANSTON

Jonathan Sprague, Jr., Esqr. (N)

Peter Stone, Esqr. (N)

#### CUMBERLAND

Levi Ballou, Esqr. (Y)

John S. Dexter, Esqr. (Y)

#### EAST GREENWICH

Job Comstock, Esqr. (N)

Mr. Pardon Mawney (N)

#### EXETER

Mr. Joseph Reynolds (N)

Capt. Job Wilcox (N)

#### FOSTER

Capt. William Howard (N)

John Williams, Esqr. (N)

#### GLOCESTER

Hon. Daniel Owen, Esqr. (A)

Stephen Steere, Esqr. (N)

#### HOPKINTON

Mr. John Brown (Y)\*

Col. Jesse Maxson (Y)\*

#### JAMESTOWN

Mr. Nicholas Carr (Y)

Capt. Benjamin Remington (Y)

## JOHNSTON

Mr. William B. King (N)  
Noah Mathewson, Esqr. (N)

## LITTLE COMPTON

Capt. John Davis (Y)  
Capt. William Ladd (Y)

## MIDDLETOWN

Mr. Elisha Barker (Y)  
Joshua Barker, Esqr. (Y)\*  
Mr. William Peckham, Jr.  
(resigned)

## NEWPORT

George Champlin, Esqr. (Y)  
Peleg Clarke, Esqr. (Y)  
George Hazard, Esqr. (Y)  
Henry Marchant, Esqr. (Y)  
George Sears, Esqr. (Y)  
Mr. William Tripp (Y)

## NEW SHOREHAM

Capt. Edward Hull, Esqr. (A)  
Col. Ray Sands, Esqr. (A)

## NORTH KINGSTOWN

Bowen Card, Esqr. (N)  
William Congdon, Esqr. (N)

## NORTH PROVIDENCE

Elisha Brown, Esqr. (N)  
Mr. Ezek Esten (N)

## PORTSMOUTH

Mr. Burrington Anthony (Y)\*  
Mr. Peter Barker (Y)\*  
Mr. Job Durfee (A)  
Mr. Giles Slocum (N)

## PROVIDENCE

Col. William Barton (Y)  
Benjamin Bourne, Esqr. (Y)  
Hon. Jabez Bowen, Esqr. (Y)  
John I. Clark, Esqr. (Y)

## RICHMOND

Mr. Thomas James (N)  
James Sheldon, Esqr. (N)

## SCITUATE

Capt. James Aldrich (N)  
Mr. Nathan Bates (N)

## SMITHFIELD

John Sayles, Esqr. (N)  
Andrew Waterman, Esqr. (N)

## SOUTH KINGSTOWN

Jonathan J. Hazard, Esqr. (N)  
Samuel J. Potter, Esqr. (N)

## TIVERTON

Mr. Abraham Barker (Y)  
Mr. Isaac Manchester (Y)

## WARREN

Mr. Benjamin Bosworth, Esqr. (Y)  
Gen. Nathan Miller, Esqr. (deceased)  
Mr. Samuel Peirce (Y)

## WARWICK

Mr. (or Col.) Benjamin Arnold, Jr. (Y)  
Mr. Gideon Arnold (N)  
Mr. Christopher Greene, Jr. (Y)  
Thomas Rice, Jr., Esqr. (N)

## WESTERLY

Mr. George Stillman, Esqr. (Y)  
Mr. (or Capt.) Walter White (Y)

## WEST GREENWICH

Mr. William Mathewson (N)  
William Nichols, Esqr. (N)

**The Rhode Island Convention**  
**Monday**  
**1 March 1790**

**Convention Proceedings, 1 March 1790**

At a Convention *of Delegates* began and holden at South Kingston in the County of Washington on the first Monday of March AD 1790. Pursuant to an Act of the Genl. Assembly passed at their session in January AD 1790. for the Purpose of Investigating and Deciding on the new Constitution Proposed for the United States

Present.

[Here appears a roster of all seventy of the Convention delegates.]

The Honble. Danl. Owen Esqr. Chosen President—D. Updike—Secty.

Vote of this house—appointing Mr. Henry Marchant, Mr. Andrew Waterman Mr. Jona. J. Hazard Mr. Job Combstock & Mr. Saml. Allin a com̄tee. to prepare and report rules and orders for the Govemt. of this Convention—

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Vote adjourn 'till Tomorrow Mornng—9 oclock.

**Convention Debates (Foster), 1 March 1790**

The Convention met at the state House in the County of Washington at 3 o'clock in the Afternoon

**Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings, 1 March 1790**

*Newport Herald, 4 March 1790 (excerpt)*<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, 3 o'clock, P. M.*—The Convention was formed—The Hon. DANIEL OWEN, Esq; (Deputy-Governor) was elected President, without opposition.

Theodore Foster, Esq; and Daniel Updike,<sup>2</sup> Esq; were in nomination for Secretary; upon a ballot being taken, the latter was elected by a majority of 12.

A committee of five members was appointed to draft the rules and regulations, when the Convention adjourned. . . .

1. Reprinted: *New York Daily Gazette*, 19 March; *Boston Gazette*, 29 March. A similar account of the proceedings appeared in the *Providence Gazette*, 6 March (Mfm:R.I.). For the last three paragraphs of the *Newport Herald's* account, see "Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings," 2 March (RCS:R.I., 914–15).

2. Antifederalist Daniel Updike (c. 1761–1842), a North Kingstown lawyer and a member of its most prominent family, studied law with James Mitchell Varnum, the premier

lawyer in Rhode Island. Updike was clerk of the House of Deputies, 1789–90, and state attorney general, 1790–91. He represented North Kingstown in the House of Deputies, 1791–96.

*Connecticut Gazette*, 5 March 1790 (*excerpt*)<sup>1</sup>

Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Rhode-Island, to his Friend in this City [New London], dated Tuesday, March 2d.

“The Convention met yesterday at three o’clock, P.M. and Deputy-Governor Owen was elected President without any opposition. Mr. Theodore Foster was nominated for Secretary—Mr. Updike, the Clerk of the Lower House, was however appointed by a Majority of 12.—And by subsequent Votes, we find the *Antis* have that majority.

“Portsmouth on [the island of] Rhode-Island, have instructed their Members in favour of the Constitution,<sup>2</sup> but the Instructions are not and will not be regarded: It is therefore now reduced to a certainty that the Constitution will not at the present Meeting be adopted, *nor will it be rejected*—To avoid the consequences of such an Act an Adjournment is proposed, and the last of May is in Contemplation for the time.—It will be either the last of this, or the next Month. The *Antis* are now in Convention deciding on the Measures to be pursued on the Morrow.[”] . . .

1. The final paragraph comments on the proceedings of 2 March. (See “Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings,” 2 March [RCS:R.I., 915]). Reprinted fifteen times by 3 April: N.H. (2), Mass. (1), Conn. (1), N.Y. (3), Pa. (6), N.C. (1), S.C. (1). The Lansingburgh, N.Y., *Federal Herald*, 22 March, shortened this item to read:

A letter from Rhodeisland, March 2, says—

The convention met yesterday—and their proceedings have reduced to a certainty that the constitution will not at the present meeting be adopted, nor will it be rejected—An adjournment is proposed to the last of May.

2. For the Portsmouth instructions, see RCS:R.I., 695–703n.

## The Rhode Island Convention

Tuesday

2 March 1790

### Convention Proceedings, 2 March 1790

Tuesday Mornng 9 oclock house met—

Present as yesterday

---

Mr. Marchant Chairman of the Cõmtee. appointed to prepare rules & orders for this Convention reported as follows (viz)

Rules and orders of the Convention of this State of Rhode Island &c held at South Kingston in the County of Washington within said State

on the First Monday of March AD 1790. agreeable to an Act of the Genl. Assembly at their session in January last, for taking into Consideration the Constitution of the United States of America and deciding thereon

1st. Every Member shall give his Attendance at the times to which said Convention shall be adjourned and shall not absent himself without leave of the President

2d. Every Member when called shall ansr. in his Place—

3d. A Member desiring to Speak shall rise in his place and first address himself to the President for leave to Speak—

4th. No Member shall interrupt another Member while Speaking, unless it be to Call the Member to Order in which Case the Question of order shall first be determined by the President or by the House if insisted on by Two Members

5th. No Member shall Speak more than Twice in a Debate previous to any other Member who shall be desirous to speak and who has not before Spoken Twice—

6th. When a Question shall be Properly Moved and Seconded; upon the Close of the debate thereon Such Questions shall be put by the President in such words as shall Properly Convey the Meaning of the Motion—The above however not to Preclude the Previous Question.<sup>1</sup>

The above rules and orders was reported by the Chairman of the Committee and upon their being read in Convention the following addition was Made to the 6th. Article upon the Motion of Mr. Combstock (Viz) Especially if any Motion be made during the Arguments for amendments of the Constitution or for an adjournmt of this Convention the same shall be determined before the grand Question for the adoption or rejection of the Constitution shall take place in this Convention.<sup>2</sup>

Vote Ordering the rules and orders as agreed by the house with this Amendmt. be engrossed.

---

Vote appointing Mr. Nathan Bates and Collo. Willm. Barton Monitors<sup>3</sup>—

---

Vote This House adjourn to 3 oclock P.M.—

---

Three oclock P.M. House met accordg to adjournmt.

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The Constitution of the United States the Resolutions of Congress and those of the Legislature of this State respecting the same being read.<sup>4</sup>



The Convention Proceeded to consider Generally the proposed Federal Constitution.—

The house adjourn to 9. o'clock Tomorrow Morn'g—

1. For a definition of the term "previous question," see *Convention Debates* (Foster), 2 March, note 2 (RCS:R.I., 913n).

2. In the volume labeled *Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution* (R-Ar) is the following comment on action to amend rule number 6:

The Clause respecting the Previous Question was reported with the other rules and orders at the first meeting of this convention—an addition was moved for & caried including the same thing but I should concurr most certainly that whenever a Previous Question is called for—The motion Next made being for an Amendmt—adjournmt and when determined the Grand Question must then unavoidably follow, and no other ~~Question~~ motion can be taken as a Previous Question.

3. Monitors in legislative bodies were appointed to see that members complied with the rules and orders that governed the business of the body. See, for example, RCS:Mass., 1161, 1169.

4. Rhode Island Secretary Henry Ward prepared a packet of documents for the Convention with a cover letter dated 26 February 1790:

The Papers inclosed contain every Thing in the Secretary's Office respecting the present Constitution of the United States; which I request may be returned at the Rising of the Convention, excepting the printed Papers in this State.

The Ratifications of the other States are, I suppose, with His Excellency the Governor (*Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution*, R-Ar).

### **Convention Debates (Updike), 2 March 1790**

Argumts for Passing the 6th Articles of Rules & orders Majo[rity] for Amdts. their argumts are to reserve an opportunity by way of a Previous Questn. To take Questn. for Adjournmt. or Am[endmen]ts before the Grand Questn. other side say the Questn. shall be direct & previous Questn. Concurd. Genel.—amendmts

Motion by SAYLES<sup>1</sup> For Apt. Comtee to draw Amts. to this Assembly Convention & Bill [of] Rights and report on future day and adjournmt.<sup>2</sup>

The Constitution being read

The Convention Proceeded to consider Generally the Proposed Feederal Constitution

1. John Sayles (1722–1822) was briefly a militia colonel in the Revolutionary War. He represented Smithfield in the House of Deputies, 1756–57, 1759–60, 1786–91, and was an assistant, 1774–79. In July 1788 Sayles was one of the leaders of the Country party mob which protested the proposal to celebrate the ratification of the Constitution by nine states during Providence's commemoration of the Fourth of July. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

2. See *Convention Debates* (Foster), 2 March, footnote 13 (RCS:R.I., 913n–14n).

**Convention Debates (Foster), 2 March 1790**

Tuesday Morning—The House assembled and called—

Mr. HENRY MARCHANT from the Committee appointed to draw up Rules made Report—

The Sixth Rule objected to by JOB COMSTOCK as not being sufficiently explicit—Supported in the objection by MR. JONATHAN J. HAZARD<sup>1</sup>

Mr. GEORGE CHAMPLIN says he does not consider that there is not any material Difference in the Report and the amendment proposed—explain the Nature of the Term “Previous Question”<sup>2</sup>—says the Gentleman is alarmed without Cause—

JOHN SAYLES will observe one Thing—

It is confessed by both the worthy Members that the Report and the Amendment mean the same Thing—He does not think so that the Amendment is most clear and is for adopting it—

Mr. BENJAMIN BOURNE says That the Report is [best?] because it allows the Whole Business to be taken up at large—That the Amendment will confine the House to the Two particular Questions mentioned in the Amendment

J. HAZARD. Did not intend to say any thing on the Matter—that the Gentlemen both mean the same thing—That he does not suppose the Gentlemen advocating the Report will depart from what they profess

B. BOURNE calls for Reading the Amendment proposed by J Comstock. confirms what he had said

ANDREW WATERMAN.<sup>3</sup> There has been much said about the Previous Question: That if a Motion is made to Postpone or adopt there can be no previous Question—

J. HAZARD explains the Nature of the Previous Question—

WATERMAN mentions the famous Dispute on the Proceedings at the Last Session

B. BOURNE says We have a Right to adopt the Rules of the House

COMSTOCK is not alarmed—not startled—not afraid—We make Rules that no advantages may be taken—Moves for Vote—

ELISHA BROWN<sup>4</sup> moves that the Amendment be added—That the President [i.e., Daniel Owen] has a Right to determine

Mr. MARCHANT says Mr. Comstock has observed that from the Expression adopting the Rule of the Lower [House] will preclude what was intended to be remedied—has known as many as 8 or 10 Previous Questions put in Congress for maturing and Ripening the Business<sup>5</sup>—The Report is agreeable to parliamentary Proceedings

WATERMAN

J. HAZARD has known that in Congress There was a Question in Congress where the seat of Congress should be<sup>6</sup>

WILLIAM CONGDON.<sup>7</sup> What need of all this Contention if both mean the same Thing—Let us adopt the Amendment

Report and Amendment both Read—

GEORGE HAZARD.<sup>8</sup> We may lead ourselves into an Error—*That* the Report is more extensive than the Amendment—That the Amendment is confining the Business to Two Motions—Why should we thus fetter ourselves—is sorry to see publick Acts made for particular purposes—wishes The Laws may like the sun shine on all—can see no Reason for making an Amendment Confining ourselves.

COMSTOCK says he made the Draft of this Rule before Mr Marchant inserted any thing respecting it. Moves the Word Especially be inserted in the Room of [— — —]

Gen. JOSEPH STANTON, JR. We cannot be too explicit. Supposed at the End of the week There should be a Question whether there should be a Question Adopt or adjourn—Can the President then dispense of putting the Question—

PRESIDENT [DANIEL OWEN] explains how he understands the Report—and then on.

PARDON MAWNEY<sup>9</sup> moves again for adoption of the Amendment

PRESIDENT. About to put the Vote when Mr. JAMES SHELDON<sup>10</sup> moved to know what Rules of the Lower House are intended.

Mr. MARCHANT explains. Notes &c on the Table

SHELDON moves that the portion of the Report respecting the Rules and orders of the Lower House be strucked out—agreed to by the House—Struck out—

The Rules read again—

COMSTOCK still moves that his Amendment be added—Says He That makes the Law his Rule May bend it like a Leaden Tool<sup>11</sup>—That Disputes may arise—To avoid them adopt

MAWNEY Seconds him—

Vote at last Taken—

Conversation. ELISHA BROWN &c

COMSTOCK. Is not so apt to see sights as to suppose a Lyon in the Way<sup>12</sup>—But there has been so much said he is still further induced to wish the Amendments may be adopted—

J. HAZARD Gives the History of the Dispute between Mr. Marchant and Mr. Comstock all Three of them having been on the Committee—concludes that both mean the same Thing—

Mr. COMSTOCK makes an Amendment

B. BOURNE again objects to the Amendment

~~Vote Taken~~

Gov. WILLIAM BRADFORD. Suppose J Comstock moves immediately on the Rules being adopted That We adjourn and Govr Bradford moves that We adopt—can the Question be put—President says he should not be at Liberty to give the Vote for the Adoption

COMSTOCK. Fair Play is a Jewel—He wants no Advantage

Mr. MARCHANT. Will one man explain the Nature of the Previous Question—The Gentleman mistakes the Previous Question for the Main Question—Goes at length into the Nature of it by illustrations—

COMSTOCK is not fond of being afraid—but they will force him to be afraid—He is more zealous than ever for adopting the Amendment.

Mr. CHAMPLIN. Enquires whether the Adoption of the Amendment will not preclude those who wish the Main Question to be put—

PRESIDENT [OWEN] says If there are any Rules & orders Mr. Comstock has said enough

COMSTOCK however goes on to enlarge—He wants not to trick any Body—Wishes to act agreeable to the Wishes of the People—The Voice of the People is the Voice of God—If it was the best Constitution—it would be a bad one if disagreeable to the Minds of the People, and he will not agree to it till the Minds of the People are reconciled to it—

STANTON Thanks the President for having the Patience to hear Mr. Comstock.

Mr. B. BOURNE Says That if a Motion is made and seconded it is inconsistent with Rule that any Previous Question should be made—

~~SAYLES calls for Vote~~

J. HAZARD answers Bourne

Adopt	39
Not.	27

Twelve Majority for the Adoption

Mr. JOHN WILLIAMS moves that the Vote be now finished.—

SAYLES says he has a Motion in writing.<sup>13</sup>

Col. WILLIAM BARTON<sup>14</sup> moves That Monitors be appointed. Objected to by Gov. BRADFORD—BARTON says Monitors appointed in Massachusetts.<sup>15</sup>—Motion agreed to—

Monitors. Mr. [Nathan] Bates, Col. Barton.—

Mr. SAYLES Moves That a Committee be appointed to draw up a Bill of Rights and Amendments and that this Convention be adjourned—to a future day.

B. BOURNE moves for the Previous Question That the Constitution be first Read—

Instructions from Portsmouth delivered to the President by Mr Elam. Read—by Mr Channing<sup>16</sup>—

Adjourned till afternoon.

1. Marchant, Comstock, and Hazard were all members of the five-man rules committee. The other members were Samuel Allen and Andrew Waterman. Only Allen did not take part in this debate on the rules.

2. *Black's Law Dictionary* (revised 4th edition) defines the "previous question": "In parliamentary practice, the question whether a vote shall be taken on the main issue, or not, brought forward before the main or real question is put by the speaker and for the purpose of avoiding, if the vote is in the negative, the putting of this question."

3. Andrew Waterman (c. 1724–1812), owned a saw and grist mill, a furnace, and about 2,000 acres of land in Smithfield, where he held such town offices as overseer of the poor and moderator of the town meeting. Waterman was a captain in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He represented Smithfield in the House of Deputies, 1776–77, 1779, 1781, and 1786–89. Waterman voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

4. Elisha Brown (1717–1802), a wealthy merchant and prominent politician during the colonial period, represented Providence in the House of Deputies, 1747, 1749–54, 1755–57, 1757–58. He was an assistant, 1758–59; sheriff of Providence County, 1761–62; and deputy governor, 1765–67. Brown lost political prominence in 1767 when he was defeated in his attempt to continue serving as deputy governor. By 1770 he was nearly bankrupt. Brown represented North Providence in the House of Deputies, 1770, 1789–91, 1791–92. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790. He was an uncle of John, Moses, and Nicholas Brown of Providence.

5. Marchant attended the Second Continental Congress between 1777 and 1779.

6. In the three days prior to Hazard's leaving the Confederation Congress on 7 August 1788, he was involved in determining the location where the new government under the Constitution would meet. See DHFFE, I, 60–77n.

7. William Congdon (1736–1815) of North Kingstown was an assistant, 1787–89. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790. Congdon was the moderator of the town meeting that voted on the referendum.

8. George Hazard (1724–1797), a Newport merchant, served for many years as chief judge of the Court of Common Pleas for Newport County, resigning his commission in August 1776. Hazard sat in the House of Deputies, 1762–75, 1784–90. He was mayor of Newport, 1784–87, the only man to serve in that position under the first city charter before it was revoked by the Country party in March 1787. Hazard voted to ratify the Constitution in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

9. Pardon Mawney (originally LeMoine) (1748–1831), an East Greenwich farmer and justice of the peace in 1773, voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

10. James Sheldon (1743–1828), a militia ensign during the Revolutionary War and justice of the peace from South Kingstown, 1779–83, represented Richmond in the House of Deputies, 1785–91. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790. Sheldon died in Jefferson County, N.Y., to which he had emigrated.

11. See Nathaniel Ames, *An Astronomical Diary, Or, an Almanack For the Year of our Lord Christ 1746* (Boston, 1746) (Evans 5531), for the month of February: "May uncorrupted Law decide/Each weighty Cause that now is try'd;/But some who make the Law their Rule/Would bend it like a Leaden Tool."

12. Proverbs 26:13. "The slothful man saith, there is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets."

13. The volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution (R-Ar) contains the following item:

Moved by John Sayles that a Com̄tee be appointed to form a bill of rights and prepare Amends to the Proposed Constitution formed by the Convention at Philadelphia on the 17th. day of sep[tembe]r 1787. for the govt. of the united States and report to this Convention and that this Convention be adjournd to a future day.

John Sayles

Seconded by. Andrew Waterman

14. William Barton (1748–1831), a native of Warren who was a hatter early in life, was a militia officer during the Revolutionary War, rising from adjutant to colonel. Because Barton captured a British general in a daring raid, the Second Continental Congress gave him “an elegant sword” and the Rhode Island legislature formally thanked him. Barton represented Providence in the House of Deputies, 1782, 1788–89, and Warren, 1786, 1791. He was collector of impost for Bristol County, 1785–87, and in May 1788 he was appointed adjutant general of the state militia. On 29 May 1790, while representing Providence, he voted to ratify the Constitution in the state Convention. Barton was an original member of the R.I. Society of the Cincinnati and the person selected to carry the news of Rhode Island’s ratification to George Washington in New York.

15. See Convention Proceedings, 2 March, note 3 (RCS:R.I., 909).

16. For the text of Portsmouth’s instructions, see Portsmouth Town Meeting, 27 February 1790 (RCS:R.I., 699–703n). For Samuel Elam, see *ibid.*, 703n. Channing was probably William Channing, a former state attorney general, and a resident of Newport. Neither Elam nor Channing was a Convention delegate. Despite instructions not to vote for an adjournment, on 6 March all four of Portsmouth’s delegates voted to adjourn to a later date.

### Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings, 2 March 1790

*Newport Herald*, 4, 11 March 1790 (*excerpt*)<sup>1</sup>

... *Tuesday*,—The report of the committee, of the rules and regulations necessary to be adopted, was taken up—one of these rules provided, for taking the question on any motion that might be made, but subject to the previous question;—an addition to this rule was moved, providing, that questions for amendments and adjournments, should be taken before the questions for adoption, &c.—Although the rule as reported, gave this liberty, and was so construed by the President, yet the addition was contended for by those opposed to the Constitution, from a fear that the question for an adoption might be taken—The debates continued till 12 o’clock, when the question was taken upon the motion for the addition to the rule, and it passed in the affirmative, by a majority of 12.

Immediately upon this decision, Mr. Sayles made a motion in writing,<sup>2</sup> for the appointment of a Committee<sup>3</sup> to report amendments for the consideration of the people, and that thereupon the Convention be adjourned—A motion was then made for reading the Constitution, but it was observed that it was not in order, that the addition to the rule precluded any question while there was a motion for adjournment

undecided, the Convention therefore were not at liberty to deviate from the first motion.—The Anties perceived the inconsistency of their Procedure, to recommend amendments to the people, and adjourn for further consideration of a Constitution that they had not given a reading, would appear the highest of absurdities; they therefore found themselves under a necessity of adjourning to 3 o'clock, to plan some measure to extricate themselves from the difficulty.

(From a view of the proceedings thus far, it seems that an adjournment will take place;—the month of June, the last of May, and the last of April are mentioned, it will not (we conceive) be at an earlier period than the last.)

[11 March] At 3 o'clock, p. m. the Convention resumed the consideration of the two motions made in the morning, and determined that the first motion for an adjournment, was premature and not in order—The last motion for reading the proposed Constitution was agreed to, and the Constitution was accordingly read—After some general observations, it was agreed to enter into an investigation of the same, by paragraphs.

1. Reprinted, without the paragraph in angle brackets, in the *Boston Gazette*, 29 March. For the first part of the report printed by the *Newport Herald* on 4 March, see “Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings,” 1 March (RCS:R.I., 906–7n). The remainder of the report printed by the *Herald* on 11 March can be found in the newspaper reports of the Convention proceedings for 3, 5–6 March (below).

2. For Sayles’s motion, see *Convention Debates* (Foster), 2 March, note 13 (RCS:R.I., 913n–14n).

3. The *Herald* incorrectly used the word “Convention.”

*Connecticut Gazette, 5 March 1790 (excerpt)*<sup>1</sup>

Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Rhode-Island, to his Friend  
in this City [New London], dated Tuesday, March 2d.

. . . “A committee was appointed yesterday in the Afternoon, to draft and report the Rules, &c. this Forenoon was employed in fixing upon them; and immediately after they were passed. A Motion was made in writing to appoint a Committee to report a Bill of Rights and Amendments, and that the Convention be adjourned to a future Day—but as the Constitution had not been read, it was agreed that the Motion should lie on the Table; and this Afternoon the Constitution was read. After some general Observations made thereon by Mr. Marchant, the Convention adjourned to the Morning to take up the Constitution by Paragraphs. But this will answer no other Purpose than to prepare the way for an Adjournment, which I expect will take Place on Thursday.”

1. For the first two paragraphs of this “Extract of a Letter,” and for the newspaper reprints, see “Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings,” 1 March (RCS:R.I., 907).

*Providence Gazette, 6 March 1790 (excerpt)*<sup>1</sup>

... Tuesday Morning the Committee reported Rules, &c. Immediately after they had been adopted, and before the Constitution had been read, Mr. Sayles moved that a Committee should be appointed to prepare and report a Bill of Rights, and Amendments to the Constitution.<sup>2</sup> This Motion, being in Writing, was laid on the Board, and the Convention adjourned till the Afternoon.

At the Meeting in the Afternoon, the Motion of Mr. Sayles was revived. The Constitution was also read, and agreed to be taken up and considered by Paragraphs.

The Remainder of Tuesday, the Whole of Wednesday, and Thursday Forenoon, were occupied in hearing and obviating Objections, &c. . . .

1. For the entire report, which contains accounts of the Convention proceedings on 1 March and on Thursday morning, 4 March, see Mfm:R.I. Reprinted: *Newport Mercury*, 15 March.

2. For Sayles's motion, see *Convention Debates (Foster)*, 2 March, note 13 (RCS:R.I., 913n-14n).

## The Rhode Island Convention Wednesday 3 March 1790

### Convention Proceedings, 3 March 1790

House met March 3d. according to adjournmt.

Present as yesterday

Colo. Sayles motioned Comtee. to form bill rights & am[endmen]ts. and adjourn to future day to lay on Table

The convention proceeded to consider by Paragraphs the Proposed Federal Constitution—

House adjourn: to 3 oclock P.M.—

3 oclock P.M. House met accordg to adjournmt, and proceeded to the Consideration of the Constitution as in the forenoon [Article I] Sec. 8

House adjourn to tomorrow Morng. 9 Clock.



**Convention Debates, 3 March 1790**

The notes of the Convention debates for 3 March taken by Theodore Foster and Daniel Updike have been combined. All of Updike's notes are placed within angle brackets.

Wednesday Morning March 3d. In Convention

⟨March 3d. The Constitution being read by Paragrafts the Member from So. Kingston [JONATHAN J. HAZARD] Objected to Sec[tio]n 2d. art. 1st. Argmt by Mr. CHAMPLIN Mr. BOWEN & B. BOURNE & Mr. MARCHANT.⟩

Mr. HENRY MARCHANT Gives a History of the Difficulties attending the Mode of apportioning taxes in Congress—Has observed on the Difficulties of an Actual Enumeration<sup>1</sup>—

Says it would operate against us to have this mode altered—That he has Fear on the subject—That he will submit to the Determination of the Majority—Says that Mr Hazard has been so Candid as to acknowledge that as the Numbers increase to the Westward the Taxes will lessen here—That there is no custom in the World of a Country like this—That the Wealth of a Country will not increase in Proportion to the Numbers—That therefore as we shall not increase in Numbers Equal with the other States it will be advantageous to us to agree to the proposed Mode—We find by Experience that no System of Government can be at once established—None of the New England States have proposed an Amendment in this Respect<sup>2</sup>—

JOSEPH STANTON says the Reason why no State has objected to this mode of Taxation by Numbers was because they were represented in the Convention and made the best Bargain they could. That 20 Planters in the Southern States are worth 30 of Us.

Gen. NATHAN MILLER<sup>3</sup> says That there is no weight in the Gentleman's Motion—That he will grant this 20 Planters have more Property than 300 Of our Farmers—This is no Time now to object to the Constitution we are now to take—

⟨Genl. MILLER said no part objectionable & that no subterfuge for the People of this State but adoption of the Constitution.—⟩

Col. WILLIAM BARTON. We have met on a very interesting Piece of Business as much so as any ever within these Walls—agreed to hear the Constitution Discussed by Paragraphs.—He is open to Conviction if it appears Detrimental he will be against this.—the section before us—the Power of Direct Taxes—asks If the state of Rhode Island was ordered to raise 20,000 Dollars?—

⟨Colon. BARTON.⟩

Mr. MARCHANT Answers him—That

BARTON says if there is not

GEORGE HAZARD says enough has been said on this Head—But we have always found it Difficult to make the Estimate and apportion Taxes agreeable there to in this State—He thought this Clause the best way—our own Experience has shewn that it is impossible to obtain a Just Estimate—Could not obtain a Just one. It Has been made clearly to appear that on the Principle of Numbers we shall be advantaged by an Adoption—we shall gain in a future day—

(Mr. G. HAZARD if all be confined to the sectn. I draw my Concerns—not for myself but for my countrymen that is the Landholders of whom I am one and unless Some Time [be] allowed. the adoption of five pct. woud hav extricated us from this difficulty.)

Mr. JONATHAN J. HAZARD observed that this Clause is the most material part of the Constitution—which he had objections—Shall we Risque putting our Country into Difficult Situation for—

We know our Country is over loaded with Debt—It Draws his Attention—This Debt of 54 Millions of Dollars<sup>d</sup> is like a Cloud cast upon us—it eats like a Canker Worm Night & Day—

Mr. WILLIAM CONGDON objects to Mr Hazard going on—He goes on to Observe that the Landed Interest ought to agree to this Measure—The Farmers objected to the 5 per Cent Act<sup>e</sup>—

He heard a Merchant say he would go through a Revolution before he would agree to the 5 per Cent

CONGDON says it has been observed that the apportionment of Taxes in this state has been by Estimate—That if Taxes were to be assessed on our Jamestown & Portsmouth by Numbers how unequal would it be<sup>6</sup>—

(Mr. CONGDON—Present mode of Taxing by Numbers unequal as between towns. James To[w]n & W Greenwich great inequality if Taxed by Numbers—)

Mr. MARCHANT answers him that the Quota will be assessed by Numbers but will be Detailed.

Gen. MILLER says we stand with the United States as Jamestown is to this state—The mode of Estimate is therefore most advantageous to us

(Genl. MILLER reverses the ob[ject]ion and says we are advantaged by the mode accordingly.)

Gen. STANTON says we ought to be honest that Gen. Miller has given us this Argument

Mr. BENJAMIN BOURNE says That the other New England States have not objected to this mode—Their silence on the occasion is a strong Argument in favour of this Mode for amendment.—

Says the Reason assigned in North Carolina against this Clause was because they supposed it was in Favour of the [New] England States.<sup>7</sup>

⟨Mr. B. BOURNE—says they have not pointed out the disadvantages of taxing by Numbers argumts respectg the Convention of 87—& that this mode not objected to there—why has not other States made objections & that the Northern State[s] are Advantaged and that it operates injuriously to the Southern States and much in favour of Northern States will[in]g to propose the am[endmen]t—⟩

ELISHA BROWN says we have been at great Expense to have an Estimate taken in our State—Why should this Expense.

Says they are

⟨Mr. E. BROWN moves to put the questn. [alter?] that paragt. or not. Mentioned the Proceedings of the late Estimates—⟩

Col. GEORGE CHAMPLIN Answers That he was a Member on the Committee of apportioning the Taxes—That the Estimate was not right—That no Tax has been assessed by it—no Regard had to the Estimate—There cannot be a Just Estimate Taken.

⟨Mr. CHAMPLIN—the gen[tlema]n arguts. directly agt. him and suggests that the Estimate refered to was erroneious and that all the Towns were then over-Taxed—&c.⟩

Mr. MARCHANT proposes that no vote should be taken—

The PRESIDENT [DANIEL OWEN] rises and agrees to it—mentions Col. Sayles's Motion—That it is given way that Col. Sayles's Motion be postponed to give opportunity for Discussion—

E. BROWN says his Town was Honest—He gave a Just account of his Money.—

Conversation Desultory—STANTON says the Flying Committees for taking the Estimate were like Jack with a Lanthorn.<sup>8</sup>

J. HAZARD says the Estimate of 5 [percent] was a Just one—it was taken when the Enemy were on Rhode Island<sup>9</sup>—That the Flying committees were appointed to Rectify Mistakes.<sup>10</sup>

PRESIDENT [OWEN] proposes to get rid of this Section—by proceeding—

JAMES SHELDON inquires whether an Amendment is to be proposed on this subject—He has been attentive to the observations.—The principal objections he had heard is the Difficulty of obtaining a Just Estimate—He does not think this a sufficient Just objection—suppose Taxes were assessed in this State by Numbers.—would it be so good as the Mode now proposed—says that Mr. Marchant observed that the Inhabitants of the Land of Canaan—

Gen. MILLER. Why need we quarrel with our own Bread & Cheese—

SHELDON Replies—Is this the way that we are going to establish a Government for the United States by taking an Advantage

Mr. BOURNE says That Mr. Sheldon ought to show that then his Mode is best—Reads an objection made in the south

Gov. WILLIAM BRADFORD. Is pleased that so much Candour has been shown—That he is brought Up by some observations made by some of the Gentlemen that we ought not to see the other Parts of the Union—That he is clearly of opinion That the Mode objected to is the best for us. Our Wealth will encrease and be greater in Proportion than their Numbers—We were one great Seaport—our Navigation encreasing—Why should We be concerned Respecting the other States if they are contented—should be glad that Mr Sheldon could point out a Mode of obtaining a Just Estimate—Can he find a Committee to go through the Continent. If it is to be done by the states can it be depended on—No plan so well fixed as this for Commerce—He has objections to the Constitution—But it [is] best for us to adopt it—

He does not know whether it will appear perfectly right in the Eyes of him who sees through all things—There are indeed Men in the City of London [who] are worth more than whole Towns in the Kingdom

SHELDON answers That Gov. Bradford has mentioned if we advert to the Kingdom of England—We shall find no Instance there of taxes assessed by Numbers—and no Instance in the United States—There is great difference in the states—The southern states

Gov. BRADFORD Says That he acknowledges That it will not do to tax individuals by Numbers—But in apportioning taxes to Countries it is the best way—it will not do to tax an Inhabitant

J. HAZARD Proposes That the Mode of ~~Estimating~~ apportioning the Taxes should be by their Exports—

Gov. BRADFORD Answers him that the Imports of Provisions must be also considered—

J. HAZARD mentions Virginie Negroes—interrupted.—He is glad no Virginieman is present.

Third Section of the First Article read—no objection.

⟨The second sec[tio]n being objected to and argumts largely on both sides agreed to lie—& Proceed to the 3d. which was not objected to⟩  
4th. Section read.

JOHN SAYLES says that this Section is very exceptionable—It has been objected to by the States which have Ratified the Constitution—Congress never ought to have the Power of altering the Mode of Elections—It ought to be Reserved to the People—

⟨The fourth being read was thought exceptionable by Mr. SAYLES⟩

Mr. MARCHANT says the Gentleman has mistook the Point—*The Times Places & Manner*—not the *Qualifications*—Not a Word said about the Qualifications otherwise than that they shall be the same as for choosing Representatives in their own states—

⟨Mr. MARCHANT opposes amdt.⟩

J. HAZARD says That every Part of the Election is at the Discretion of [Congress]

⟨Mr. J. HAZARD then Congress has a right [to] alter place of chusing Repr[esentative]s but not of Chusing Senators⟩

Mr. BOURNE says this is the most exceptionable part of the Constitution—No Amendment has yet been proposed which is likely to take Place<sup>11</sup>—Proposes that the Congress should not interfere unless the Legislature neglect to make Provision—

⟨Mr. B. BOURNE—that it be the most estimab[le] part of Consti[tu]tion and been Considered as such in other States. & that Congress will not attem[p]t to alter unless in time of Invasion⟩

seems to be agreed to by the House—

Col. BARTON Vindicates this Clause of the Constitution—Says the Mercantile Influence is always great—such the Case of a ~~Person~~ an Election ordered in Newport<sup>12</sup>—The People may then apply to Congress for Redress—

agreed to go on

5th Section.

SHELDON says that it ought to be more explicit—That the Words “from Time to Time”—are indefinite—It may be from 50 Years to 50 Years—

⟨House then proceed to the 5th. [section] article [I] which was excepted to by Mr. SHELDON—as to the time of Publishing their Journals the time not being Limited desires the Time might be fixed in the am[en]dmen[ts]⟩

J. HAZARD says there is no Danger—The Congress have published & will be published—Let us make no objections but such as are necessary—The Congress are responsible to the Senates and Assemblies

Agreed to be referred to the Committee<sup>13</sup>

Section 6th.

⟨6th. Section being then read—⟩

J. HAZARD objects—proposes that a Person should be appointed from Each State to determine what shall be allowed—proposed to be referred to the Committee

⟨Mr. J. HAZARD Prop[ose]d that there should be person chosen from Each State to asc[e]rt[ai]n the sums due as compensation due Members for Services—⟩

7th. Section.

⟨7th. Sectn. being read⟩

STANTON objects to the Power of the President to reject a Bill—says that he has the Power of one Third of Congress—That it would [be] Sufficient for the President to refer it back and if both Houses of Congress and if they adhered that the Law should be passed

⟨Genl. STANTON Objected to the same as vesting too much Power in President tho best of men.—⟩

Mr. MARCHANT says the Gentleman on Reflection will be sure. The English Constitution admired by the World—States the Nature of the Balances in Government and the checks necessary—The British House of Commons may be consulted—States the “Process of an Act through Congress and the Advantages which will arise to the People—This the most beautiful Part of the Constitution—we ought [to] be careful how we destroy it.[”]

⟨Mr. MARCHANT said that it was the Wisdom of Legislation to vest this Power of Govrt. in equal Branches as British Const[itut]ion which is subject to Corruption this Provids agt. it. and went into the Nature of the British govrt. and then states the Propriety of the Article as beautiful and beneficial &c. as well Counterpoised.⟩

Gen. MILLER says it is well as it is—There are Two Interests in this Government—a Northern & Southern Interest—The President to hold the Balance—Therefore let Two Thirds of Congress determine

Mr. BOURNE. When it is Considered that the President is Elected by the People—That he states his objection in Writing—He is responsible to them—Mentions that Massachusetts has a veto<sup>14</sup>

⟨Mr. B. BOURNE that the Presidt. is one of the People & amenable to them and this Clause Similar to Consti[tu]tion [of] Massachusetts⟩

Gov. BRADFORD Confirms what Genl. Miller had observed.—hopes Genl. Stanton will give up his objection.

⟨Dr. BRADFORD that it is the greatest Check on the Disagreemt. on No[r]thern & Southern members—⟩

Gen. STANTON says there is a Disposition in all the Race of Adam to assume Power—It may be observed—is sorry we so often Refer to the British Government—The present President is a Republican & the Gentleman who mentioned it is a Republican—

⟨Genl. STANTON that he might be curtailed of this Great Power—Cannot see much beauty in this clause—& that have been accustomed to royal Govnt. & hanker after it—⟩

Mr. MARCHANT explains—further the Advantage their Negatives may postpone Business when too suddenly passed

⟨Mr. MARCHANT that a Person chosen by all the States a happy check upon all—&c. an excellency in the Constitution and not to be blotted out—⟩

Referred to the Committee to be appointed to draft Amendments.

⟨Adjourn to 3 oclock PM.⟩

Afternoon.—

⟨House met acordingly—⟩

8th. Section of the Constitution read—and now under Consideration—no objections made and Gov. JABEZ BOWEN moving to proceed—the

9th. Section is therefore read—

⟨Sec[tio]n 8th. being read and not objected to⟩

Gen. STANTON says that the 9th Section tends to encourage the African Trade—He therefore disapproves of it—and would

⟨Sec[tio]n 9th. was read & objected to by Genl. STANTON that all Mankind was alike free &c—⟩

B. BOURNE says it is singular that a Gentleman who has advocated that no powers of Congress ought to have been given more than were allowed by the old Congress—That the old Congress had no Power to interfere. By this Constitution the Congress may abolish that Trade in 20 Years—a valuable Acquisition

⟨by Mr. B. BOURNE was [sure?] the Paragraft was a valuable acquisition to the Constitution—&c)⟩

JOB COMSTOCK. Mr. Bourne has missed the Mark. He does not find that the Congress can in 20 Years put an End to the trade—The [clause] allowing the 20 Year Importation will extend to the End of this Generation—The First Congress would not allow their Vessels to be used in the Trade.<sup>15</sup> The Trade iniquitous—Righteousness exalteth a Nation But Iniquity is a Reproach to any People<sup>16</sup>

⟨Mr. COMSTOCK If so be they be admitted to import slaves for 20 years there will never be an end of it—former congress Said they never woud import slaves. the importing slaves wicked and iniquitous we have lost sight of Virtue &c no man has the front<sup>17</sup> to oppose the am[en]d-[men]t—⟩

J. HAZARD Wishes to propose Amendments in which we may be interested—The southern states must answer for themselves—They must Conduce their own Legislation as they please—They can regulate their Trade as they please—We are not interested [on] one Hand nor answerable in our Consciences on the other—They must answer for [their] own Crimes—The southern states will separate from us before they will agree to this Alternate proposed—They will say that they do not interfere with our [Northern?] Legislatures why should we with theirs—The

Constitution does not prevent any of the states from suppressing the Trade—to move for this Amendment will be to abridge the sovereignty of the states

(Mr. J. HAZARD. wish to [propose] am[en]dments Beneficial to the State. The Southern States answerable for their conduct Southern States cannot regulate their affairs & we are not Interestd on the one hand nor benefited on the other—Therefore wish to let this Sectn rest—each State can in that particular case enact for themselves—and best not to move for an amdt. that does not particularly concern us)

COMSTOCK. According to Gentleman's Doctrine He will permit his Neighbor to murder his Neighbor—We give up things indifferent—why should we not insist on the Southern states giving up an iniquitous Measure—We are commendable for the Laws we have made—We ought to address Congress on the subject—to bear Testimony against. Shall the same Community of which [we] are a part Join in Abominations.—

(Mr. COMSTOCK—we must give up apart of our natur[al] rights why should not the Southern States do the same [It] become[s] us to guard agt. wicked Practices

best for us to offer our Sentiments to congress for it is certainly an Iniquitous practice & this new Consti[tu]tion in this [is] very remis National reproach &c—and the am[en]dments ought to be made)

MR. CHAMPLIN agrees with J. Hazard. The Convention of Philadelphia were disposed to suppress slavery—They found great Difficulties. Did what they could—could agree on no other Measure.—At the End of 20 Years they can—If we move for an Amendment on this Head it will lessen our Influence on the Account of other Amendments. This Constitution has no Influence on the Laws of the states—Mentions the Laws we passed—They are sufficient—if any have more tender feelings

(Mr. CHAMPLIN convention had in view the abolition of slav[ery] but it could not be supposed the property in the Southern States consisting in Slaves could be given up. Congress can however take it [away?] in future time. and can continue it longer or abolish it.—the gent at the Southward has their view as well as wee—the constitution does not prevent importing slaves here but we have done it our selves<sup>18</sup>—and are justified in stoping here & best to pass the Sec. over—)

Col. BARTON. I think this a Matter of very great Consequence. We are all on board of one ship—The Ship of Liberty—to enjoy it ourselves but that it may spread through the World—he concludes it is the Wishes of every person composing this Convention. Inadequate to the Task. Sometimes uses improper Words—Sometimes Mistakes—hopes not now.—I beg Liberty to call the Attention to the Resolution of Congress in 1776<sup>19</sup>—They were then sensible of the situation this Country



was in—What did they do? They Resolved that no Vessels should be used—Sorry I am that any thing should appear to countenance this statute Order—wishes all men may be free—can any one Justify the Trade to Guinea—no one can—Mr. J. Hazard says the Iniquities must rest with them & their Children. I say no if we come into the Compact—we partner with them. As I love the Constitution let us therefore show our Disapprobation of that Trade—

(Colo. BARTON—we Say Sir we are all embarked on board one ship the ship of Liberty I concluded Sir that the wish of every Person apt to make use of words very Improperly try call the attn. of house to resolution of congress then contending with powerful Enemy and woud let no vessel go on such Business sorry to countenance a Trade to enslave our fellow Creatures Can a single Person here Justify the Trade &c—on doing to all men as we wish to be done to the grand question Says if we Unite on board this Con[s]ti[tu]tion. Ship of Liberty as I love the Cause of my Country wish this Convention to Shew their disap[proval] of that trade.)

J. HAZARD. I am Sorry to rise again. I am Sure it is not for the Interests of this State to ask for Amendment concerning—The Gentlemen who have spoken have acted on right Principle. I must Rely on it that the Motion is contesting the Advantages we now have—It will be Stabbing to the Vitals [of] the S. States—Do they not mean to pay their Quota of the Debts acquired with them—begs the Gentlemen to let the Southern States act for themselves—why shall we struggle [for] what we can never obtain. Impolitic to ask for too much—we may obtain something but not all.—There is another objection—a Number of Gentlemen, the Abolition Society,<sup>20</sup> in this state have attempted to Join [in] influencing the Whites—That is turning the world upside down—Let the southern states alone—He is a Land Holder—We cannot injure one order of Men without injuring all

(Mr. J. HAZARD we shall have the same right to abolish Slavery after the Adoption of consti[tution] as we have now. and cannot stab the Southern States as by this am[endment]t Stript the Southern States of their Slaves and we disable them to pay their quotas—we are clear of it let Southern States Proceed act for themselves. we shall need of Assistance to have our Am[endment]ts accd. to woud not move for amts that cannot be—there is a set men who contend for [same?] amts. as I do we are arguing to enslave the Blacks & enslave the Whites have been dec[eive]d by those gent of Abolition Society—leave the Southern States to act for themselves must say I consider every order of men of the same Family Injure one you hurt all. attend to that only by which [we?] can be benefitted)

Mr. G. HAZARD. This General Law—why should we bring a particular Matter into Consideration—Laws have been made in this state Against the Slave Trade.<sup>21</sup>—When the convention came to consider the Matter on General Principles they considered that a Part of the Community were more interested than others—

We will give notice to this Part of the Community that they must Submit in Time to the General Regulation—would our own Experience warrant an immediate Law for abolition of all slavery—we have in part undertaken it<sup>22</sup>—Was all to be dealt with as they reason, who could be Justified—He has been in the Trade—he is not convinced of its Wickedness—But ~~will Submit to~~ it has been so much expected he will no further pursue.—Man is but Man—His Feelings are affected by his Interest—Touch a Man here he will be affected—as the Evil spirit said of Job<sup>23</sup>—may be applied to the Possessor of Slaves. As Congress has considered it [in] this Light as they have done—as such Reasonable Measures have been proposed let us make the best of it—let us improve—mentions the Measures we have adopted—Let us go on—

If we totally abolish Slavery it will Ruin many persons.—We have read of Persons of old who made great outcry but were not altogether blameless<sup>24</sup>—Time and Season for all Things<sup>25</sup>—we may go too fast—will not be possible to effect the Full Abolition of Slavery at present—after all the Reflections

(G. HAZARD That set of men who made Constitu[tion] drew many things into Consideration we have held up our Sentime[n]ts respecting that Trade<sup>26</sup> has there ever been since that time a Slave Imported since into our State. that body acted on Genl principles—Or enter into Business and determine in [a moment or Precipitately?] they have taken long time and we may take our own time—

congress said they will Satisfy the Persons of the abolition Society by saying they would act on it at future time<sup>27</sup>)

Gen. STANTON. Cannot but observe what a Beautiful Introduction the Constitution commences with—Reads it<sup>28</sup>—Why in the Name of Common [Sense] should not this Liberty be extended to the Africans? Sorry it has been urged that it greatly affects the southern states—It has been a capital object with them.

(Genl. STANTON read Preamble Why should not we extend Liberty to the Affrecans there shall not be any Alteration made untill 1808—)

Gen. MILLER says that he has the Word of God in his House—It does not prohibit Slavery—Why should we make Laws for the Africans for the French for the Dutch—From now it will [- - -] here the Number of Inhabitants—If we may now secure Innovations—This Gentleman

may make a Law that he should look like him which god forbid. Paul was willing to pay for the Labor of his Servant.<sup>29</sup>—

⟨Genl. MILLER I have the words of god in my house and contains nothing agt. Slavery—they are god's Creation so are the French butt let us take Care of our self—if I must believe the gent. on the other side I must look like him next the matter very injurious to this State—we had better let the matter alone.⟩

Gen. STANTON said Paul treated him as a Brother—if General Miller will treat his Africans as his Brethren he will be contented—

Mr. MARCHANT. Miller's Time misspent—if the Gentleman from Charleston [Joseph Stanton, Jr.] had adverted to the Last Clause in the 4th & 9th Clauses.<sup>30</sup> Does the Gentleman suppose that we can obtain an Amendment which if obtained would dissolve this Compact—stands at all Times as Advocate for Liberty public & Private—Respects the Gentlemen who have advocated the Abolition of Slavery—we have a Right to encourage the Abolition if we can do it without infringing the Laws of particular States. The old Congress made an Agreement which they personally Adhered to<sup>31</sup>—but it was only recommendatory. The old Congress had no power to make a Law—The Convention generous, wise, and Candid did all that could be done.—Wishes to see as much candour in those who have now here to determine in this Constitution—mentions the Complying Disposition of Southern Members—The Slaves in South Carolina equal to Half their real Estate—This Property was obtained when it was not Suppressed—not lawful even in this State—They acquired a Right which they supposed to be Equal to that to their Real Estate—

⟨Mr. MARCHANT. The gentn. [Jonathan J. Hazard] has found out that this Article has expres[sly] Provided that that article shall not affect the first & fo[u]rth article &c—Impossible to Comply with gent. unless we destroy the constitution &c Let me say that I could wish I could see as much generosity here as was shewn in other States where they have agreed to give one half of their Property to the U.S. we could not compell them to give up [one?] slave but they have made Liberal concessions in those States to the Sou[t]hward.⟩

PRESIDENT [OWEN] calls to order—That the p[oin]t is only whether the Imports from Africa shall be stopped.

[MARCHANT] says he will confine himself to the Importation—not all been done that could be done—We had Right to insist on any such Regulation—A Number were dissatisfied when the Constitution first was forwarded—but are now Reconciled to it—thinking that here is a Disposition that there shall be a gradual Abolition—That in 20 Years

it will [be] time to take.—Nothing further can be gained on account of the Provisional Clause So far mentioned.—Why should we propose Amendments which will disaffect the Southern States when we cannot accomplish our purpose—

COMSTOCK says He will treat the Subject coolly. Mr. Marchant was warm—hope to see the Time when he will be a [— — —] old man. Will mention his Sentiments. Mr. Marchant says that the 5th Article is part of the Constitution and unalterable.—He does not think so<sup>32</sup>—Every Part of the Constitution may be altered. We are not going to take Arms or to see the Virginia Slaves free—The object wished is only to Show our disapprobation of the Length of Time allowed by Congress for the Importation—It is a Bargain we are about to make—[Every?] Family a Pact. We make the Proposal if we see fit—Have we not some show of Character—Are we not interested—The abolition Society embarked in a Good Cause.—will not be lengthy.—Submits—

(Mr. COMSTOCK. I wish not to say much to the amends as comtee must take up the matter fully—the fifth article liable to amds. I thought every part of Consti[tu]tion liable to amts. It will redound to the Shame & disgrace of comtee if they do not limit it—&c. hope the comtee will not pass it over—I hope the State [of] Virginia will [think] it best to give up part [of] their privileges if we do part of ours—have not we some share of character as well as Virginia I have an Oppinion of my own & just drop these hints & hope comtee will Amend.)

E. BROWN is sorry to hear [his Name?]—It is well known that the Neighboring States have made Laws against the Trade. The southern states have not<sup>33</sup>—by that Means our Citizens get away their Vessels—and thus Defy it—all the Regulations that may be made—hopes that this House will not preclude the Committee from Reporting on it—Massachusetts have made Law

(E. BROWN the sou[t]hern State[s] have made no laws agt. imprtg Slaves which frustrates all our Laws wish comtee to take up the matter and stop it for future but not to destroy slaves now there—)

Col. BARTON says Mr. Hazard was right to have the Motion passed over—has yet heard no [argument] Against on the Real Right or Wrong of it—The Principal argument That it cannot annihilate it because the southern States are so much Interested. Shall we be thus led off the Ground—We will press & Argue—is sorry to hear Genl. Miller express himself as he Did—That he quoted some Scripture—He did not distinctly hear all—But he seemed to Justify slavery from the scriptures—He has Read some Scripture. There was many among the Jews a Year of Jubilee when those who were servants were to be called on and be freed if not.<sup>34</sup> The New Testament directs that we do to all as we would

have them do to us<sup>35</sup>—Will the Gentleman be willing that his tender Grand Children should be taken and carried away as he sees Africans. He trusts the Committee will report in favor of this Amendment.

⟨Colo. BARTON. I have not heard any argumts abt the right & wrong of it—I wish this matter might be heard in Serious manner &c I think Genl Miller Quoted Scripture I have read Scripture as well as he the Scripture does not Justify Slavery a Jubile year when every slave was to be Set free & his Ears nailed to the post of the door that Gent. is Cunning as fox if my worthy Friend woud read the new Testament where we are taught do as you'd be done by—I will not trouble the house the comtee will take up this matter and we shal wash our garm[en]ts clean<sup>36</sup>)

Gen. MILLER. If the Gentleman will read in Leviticus That the Children of the Heathen and the Stranger we may have them for servants to keep.<sup>37</sup>

⟨Gen MILLER I am Sorry the gent. will not read Leviticus where If I buy a slave of Hithan [i.e., Heathen] I have right to keep him—)

G. HAZARD says we ought to be modest and cool in offering our Argument. That the Right of Trade has not been gone into—They should Consider whether they would be willing by the General Government—we were all men & have our being—And shall we propose a Measure to injure the Union. Hopes no Gentleman will blame those who are against the Amendment—Let us not use untempered Motions—He has an open Heart and Good will to all. If it is the opinion of the Committee he will be Perfectly Resigned—it is Right for all freely &ca.

⟨G. HAZARD. whenever any Sec[tio]n is introduced we should offer our Argumts. with decency Mr Sayles Sir has been in order &c Should their real Estates be Stript of their slaves at Southward would break up that hap[pi]nes[s] that would arise from our union I have an open heart & free will to believe other[s] act on good principles as I do most good done while we act with Propriety—)

Gov. BRADFORD says Time enough has been. The Argument can be of no [Service?]. It is not before us whether slavery was allowed in the Days of Christ. The Convention was composed of a Number of Gentlemen who had Slaves—They have expressly said that there shall be no alteration Until the year 1808—We cannot effect any alteration. That the Gentlemen may display their Abilities to ingratiate themselves with a particular set of p[ea]ple—

⟨Dr. BRADFORD Congress have said they will not alter the laws respecting Slavery untill year 1808)

J. HAZARD. Speaks not to display his Oratory—The Reason he gave before was: we wish for Amendments interesting to us—Then I would

not move for Amendment we are sure we cannot succeed in—The Instant we move on it we Stick a Dagger in the Hearts of the southern Members—and shall immediately have 29 Members against us<sup>38</sup>

⟨J. HAZARD. have no int[e]r[est] in the Matter it beho[o]ves this State—I hope that [those who] do follow will accept it but we wish for amts. therefore I woud not wish to ask for amts which will make enemies[.] as we Propose [amendments] all the States southward of Pennsylvania will oppose our motion & other requests.⟩

E. BROWN moved to adjourn—

10th Section read.<sup>39</sup>—

Col. BARTON says we are now to investigate this Matter fully That we have passed over—Says he has an objection to the Poll Tax.<sup>40</sup> He always considered it grievous—There are People in the seaports who have not a foot of Land and will pay more than many large Farmers—That he cannot consent that Congress shall have the Power of Capitation Tax—The Congress men of Fortune do not feel for the Common People.

⟨Col. BARTON object. to Capitation or Poll Tax. Many People in sea Ports who have not any Lands will pay a greivous Tax on Comon people would have it recomend that Congress shal not have the power of laying Poll Tax. & this comte take [it] up acc[or]d[in]g[ly]—⟩

Gen. STANTON Seconds Col. Barton's.<sup>41</sup>

⟨Gen. STANTON agrees to motion⟩

Mr. MARCHANT says there is no Poll Tax allowed—

⟨Mr. MARCHANT I do not understand what gentm. means no poll Tax mentioned in sd Sect.—⟩

Gov. BRADFORD Reads the Clause referred to by Col. Barton—says it is only to shew in what Manner the Apportionment shall be made

J. HAZARD of the same opinion

⟨Mr. J. HAZARD this is the apportio[n]me[n]t of taxes in Several States this my conception of it.—⟩

STANTON says it implies there may be such a Tax

⟨Gen STANTON Congress are not obliged to lay Poll Tax but they can do it—⟩

Gen. MILLER. The Clause was inserted for greater Caution no Doubt at the Instigation of some of the New England States—and rather implies that a Poll Tax is not to be allowed—

⟨Gen. MILLER this clause put it out [of] the power of Congress to take any advantage of the People—⟩

Mr. MARCHANT says as Congress do not mean to intermeddle with the Internal Legislation of the States—they have provided that no Capitation—it will not appear well to make such an Amendment

⟨Mr. MARCHANT whenever there is a direct Tax we only Apportion our part of it—that the State shall not lay any Assessment but as has been before mentoned in Acts or excises—Congress not a going to Assess any Tax. that left to Several States—⟩

Gen. MILLER says in the first Clause it is said that Taxation and Representation should go together—That when the Convention came to this Part of the Constitution—they recommended that Tax should be laid unless.

⟨Genl. MILLER Congress not a going to make Capitation tax at any time—⟩

Col. BARTON says the Congress have an undoubted Right to levy a Capitation Tax—It is greivous in the Kingdom of Great Britain—every man pays a Tax for every Drink of Grog—

⟨Colo. BARTON. If I am mistaken I am happy—but I understand that they may lay any one of the Taxes on the People & I woud guard agt it.⟩

Gen. STANTON. This is one of the obscurist Parts of the Constitution—Wishes to have it explained—and is for having the Matter fully explained—and the Congress prohibited from making a Poll Tax

⟨Gen STANTON this one of the obstruse part of this Consti[tu]tion if direct tax as laid shall be according to censis aforesd. & capit[a]tion also.⟩

B. BOURNE. The Congress have the Right by Virtue of the preceding Clause to levy this Tax—The Gentleman ought to have mentioned it in the proper place.

⟨Mr. B. BOURNE. the clause mention[ed] is a restrictive clause but in the genl. clause respecting laying Taxes—the States—&c⟩

⟨Mr. MARCHANT I am averse to such a Tax if meant  
house adjourns to morrow mornng 9 Clock—⟩

1. See a brief discussion on, and the text of, the Confederation Congress' "Amendment to Share Expenses According to Population," 18 April 1783 (CDR, 148–50). Every state except New Hampshire and Rhode Island ratified this amendment to the Articles of Confederation. In March 1785 Rhode Island's upper house approved the amendment, but the lower house almost unanimously rejected it with only one deputy voting in favor of it (*Newport Mercury*, 12 March 1785).

2. Massachusetts and New Hampshire were the only two New England conventions that recommended amendments to the Constitution. Neither proposed to change the apportionment of direct taxes from population to wealth.

3. Nathan Miller (1743–1790), a Warren merchant and shipbuilder, sat in the House of Deputies, 1772–75, 1785–86, 1788–90. He represented Rhode Island in the Confederation Congress in 1786. Miller served as a militia colonel for Bristol County, 1777–79, and as brigadier general for Newport and Bristol counties, 1779–86. He sat in the state Convention in March 1790, but died several days before the Convention reassembled in May 1790.

4. In a report on the public credit, dated 14 January 1790, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton stated that the foreign and domestic debts of the United States, taken together and computed to the end of 1790, would amount to \$54,124,464.56 (DHFFC, V, 758).

5. A reference to the Impost of 1781. See RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, p. xxviii, and Polishook, 57–80.

6. In 1790 Jamestown had a population of 507, the smallest number of any of the state's towns. Portsmouth had triple the population at 1,560 (RCS:R.I., 321). According to Daniel Updike's notes Congdon used West Greenwich, which had a population of 2,054, as his foil to Jamestown.

7. On 24 July 1788, William Goudy, a Guilford County, N.C., Antifederalist, spoke against the three-fifths clause and proportional representation for the U.S. House of Representatives. His speech in the first North Carolina Convention argued that "This clause of taxation will give an advantage to some states over the others. It will be oppressive to the southern states. Taxes are equal to our representation. To augment our taxes, and increase our burthens, our negroes are to be represented. If a state has fifty thousand negroes, she is to send one representative for them. I wish not to be represented with negroes, especially if it encreases my burthens" (*Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North-Carolina* [Edenton, N.C., 1789] [Evans 22037], 51).

8. Jack-a-Lantern, or Will o' the Wisp, was a regional folk name for the glowing balls of light that appeared over marshes and swamps throughout the British Isles. They supposedly led travelers astray.

9. A reference to the island of Rhode Island (i.e., Aquidneck), comprising the towns of Portsmouth, Middletown, and Newport, which the British occupied from December 1776 to October 1779.

10. During the 1770s and 1780s the Rhode Island legislature vigorously debated tax policy with the rural towns pitted against the commercial towns. The legislature would create a committee to examine the question of estimating taxes. Dissatisfied with the committee's conclusions, the legislature would revoke its authority and would appoint a new committee, which often suffered the same fate. And so the process continued. See Robert A. Becker, *Revolution, Reform, and the Politics of American Taxation, 1763–1783* (Baton Rouge, La., and London, 1980), 134–45; and Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 63–71.

11. For examples of these amendments, see CC:508 (p. 68), CC:790 (p. 205), and CC:818–B (p. 302).

12. Since the British-occupied towns of Newport, Portsmouth, Middletown, and Jamestown were deprived of their customary meeting places for electing general officers and deputies to the General Assembly from 8 December 1776 until 25 October 1779, the legislature authorized and empowered at least seven freemen from each town to meet in places designated by the Assembly to hold their elections. The freemen of Newport could meet at the Statehouse in Providence, those from Portsmouth and Middletown at William Durfee's house in Tiverton, and those from Jamestown in Matthew Allen's house in North Kingstown (Bartlett, *Records*, VIII, 174–75, 194). Newport was represented by six deputies in the May 1777 session, four in the May 1778 session, and none in the May 1779 session (*ibid.*, 218, 386, 529).

13. The committee of ten on amendments, two from each of the state's five counties, was appointed at the end of the morning session on 4 March (RCS:R.I., 936, 940).

14. The president's veto power was modeled on the governor's veto power in the Massachusetts Constitution (1780). See Chapter I, Section 1, Article 2, of the Massachusetts Constitution (Thorpe, III, 1893–94).

15. The reference is to the second article of the Association of the First Continental Congress (20 October 1774) which states that "We will neither import nor purchase, any



slave imported after the first day of December next; after which time, we will wholly discontinue the slave trade, and will neither be concerned in it ourselves, nor will we hire our vessels, nor sell our commodities or manufactures to those who are concerned in it" (JCC, I, 77).

16. Proverbs 14:34.

17. Effrontery, impudence.

18. On 31 October 1787 Rhode Island prohibited the importation of slaves (RCS:R.I., 48–50).

19. On 6 April 1776 Congress resolved that Americans could export virtually all goods to or from anywhere in the world except the British dominions. East India tea and slaves, however, could not be imported (JCC, IV, 257–59).

20. For the Providence abolition society founded in 1789 under the leadership of David Howell and Moses Brown, see Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard, 7 May 1790, note 3 (RCS:R.I., 856). The following Convention delegates were members: Benjamin Arnold, Levi Ballou, Job Comstock, John S. Dexter, Noah Mathewson, Daniel Owen, John Sayles, James Sheldon, Joseph Stanton, Jr., and John Williams.

21. See note 18 (above).

22. The Rhode Island General Assembly passed a gradual emancipation law in February 1784 that provided that all children born to slave mothers on or after 1 March 1784 were free (Bartlett, *Records*, X, 7–8).

23. In the book of Job, Satan claimed that Job, God's faithful servant, would curse God if all his worldly gains were destroyed (Job 1:11).

24. Perhaps a reference to the Pharisees in biblical times.

25. Ecclesiastes 3:1. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

26. See note 18 (above).

27. George Hazard may be referring to the Quaker petition calling for the suppression of the slave trade which was presented to the Confederation Congress on 8 October 1783. The petition was referred to a committee, which on 8 January 1784 reported a resolution that Congress recommend "to the legislatures of the several states to enact such laws as to their wisdom may appear best calculated to compass the object of the second article of association" of 20 October 1774. The second article provided for the discontinuation of the slave trade. (See note 15 above.) The resolution was defeated the next day (JCC, XXV, 660, 660n; XXVI, 13–14; and CC:Vol. 2, 503–4).

It is also possible that Hazard is referring to the petitions from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Quakers, and the New York Yearly Meeting of Quakers presented to the U.S. House of Representatives on 11 and 12 February and the U.S. Senate on 15 February 1790. The House read them on the 12th and appointed a committee to consider them. The committee did not report until 5 March, two days after Hazard made these remarks. The Senate read the petitions on 15 February but took no action (DHFFC, VIII, 314–38).

Shortly before the meeting of the Convention, the *Providence Gazette*, 20 February 1790, reprinted—at the request of "N" ("a constant Reader" of the *Gazette*)—a 2 June 1787 memorial to the Constitutional Convention from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery which called for the abolition of the slave trade. The memorial first appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 5 March 1788 (Mfm:Pa., 489).

28. The reference is to the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.

29. The reference is to the book of Philemon, which was Paul's letter to the wealthy Philemon, a Christian slaveholder. In the letter, Paul states he is sending Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, back to him and Paul asks Philemon to forgive Onesimus. This book was used by some as evidence that the Bible did not condemn slavery.

30. Marchant is referring to Article V of the Constitution, which dealt with amending the Constitution and contained the following: "Provided that no Amendment which may be made prior to the Year One thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any Manner affect the first and fourth Clauses in the Ninth Section of the first Article," i.e., prohibiting Congress from banning the importation of slaves before 1808.

31. See note 15 (above).

32. See note 30 (above).

33. Several states passed acts prohibiting the slave trade: New York, 22 February 1788; Massachusetts, 25 March 1788; Pennsylvania, 29 March 1788; Connecticut, October 1788; and Delaware, 3 February 1789. Even North Carolina and South Carolina passed acts restricting the slave trade. In 1786 North Carolina imposed a prohibitive duty on the importation of slaves. On 4 November 1788 South Carolina prohibited the importation of Negroes until 1 January 1793 (W. E. B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* [1896; Reprint, Baton Rouge, La., 1965], 229–34).

34. See RCS:R.I., 616, note 3. For the Biblical references concerning the Year of Jubilee, see Leviticus 25:1–46; 27:17–24.

35. Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31.

36. Numbers 31:24. "And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp."

37. Leviticus 25:44–46.

38. The Southern States had twenty-nine members in the U.S. House of Representatives: Maryland (6), Virginia (10), North Carolina (5), South Carolina (5), and Georgia (3).

39. Article I, section 10, prohibits the states from exercising certain powers.

40. The reference is to Article I, section 9, clause 4: "No Capitation, or other direct, Tax shall be laid, unless in Proportion to the Census or Enumeration herein before directed to be taken."

41. William Barton's motion has not been found, but the *Newport Herald*, 11 March, states that "An alteration was proposed to the fourth clause in the 9th section, that Congress should lay no capitation tax" (immediately below).

### **Newspaper Report of Convention Proceedings, 3 March 1790**

*Newport Herald*, 11 March 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>

... WEDNESDAY—Agreeable to order, a discussion of the Constitution took place, which continued till Thursday noon; only five clauses of it were considered as objectionable.

The mode of apportioning direct taxes according to numbers (Article 1st, 3d clause of the 2d section) was objected to, as inadequate to the purposes, and unequal in its operation; but it was shown that it had been found impracticable in this small State, to estimate the value of taxable property;<sup>2</sup> that although committees had been appointed for this purpose, and large sums expended by government, the estimates reported by them had not been adopted, but an apportionment was made upon conjectural estimates, and that this difficulty would be greatly increased in fixing a rate for the Union; it was also proved from calculations, that an apportionment by numbers was as advantageous to

this State, as by the value of taxable property, and would be more so; that our proportion would not now exceed what had heretofore been assessed by Congress; and that from the probable increase of inhabitants in the Southern States, in consequence of the large tracts of unlocated lands, this proportion would be daily lessening—The investigation of this subject was so far satisfactory, that upon the report of a committee to draft amendments, the one providing for an alteration in this clause, was rejected by a majority of 6.

The remainder of the 2d and the whole of the 3d section were read, without any objections being made to any part of them, and were considered as agreed to.

An amendment was agreed to restricting of the powers of Congress, as to making or altering the times, places, and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives (Art. 1st. Sect. 4th.)—No observations were made on the remainder of this and the two following sections.

On reading the 2d and 3d clauses in the 7th section, it was proposed that the disapprobation of the President to any Bill should not take effect, provided upon the return of the Bill, it should be approved by a majority of the two Houses, instead of two thirds, as provided by said clauses; but after some debate a majority appeared to be decidedly in favor of the powers granted by the Constitution.

The 8th section, defining the powers of Congress, were read, and no objections were made.

The first clause in the 9th section occasioned a warm debate, the opposers of it considered it as countenancing the African trade, while others approbated the clause, as vesting Congress with powers which might eventually produce an abolition of it, the House were much divided; and on the report of the committee recommending an interference of Congress, as soon as may be, it was carried only by a majority of 1.<sup>3</sup>

An alteration was proposed to the fourth clause in the 9th section, that Congress should lay no capitation tax.—The remainder of the Constitution was read without any observations.

It was then moved that a committee to consist of two members from each county, be appointed to draft a Bill of Rights and Amendments, which was agreed to. . . .

1. Reprinted: *Boston Gazette*, 29 March. Other portions of this report are printed in the newspaper reports of Convention proceedings for 2 March (above) and 5–6 March (below).

2. See Convention Debates, 3 March, note 10 (RCS:R.I., 932).

3. This is number 17 of the proposed amendments to the Constitution approved by the Rhode Island Convention on 6 March (RCS:R.I., 981).

**The Rhode Island Convention**  
**Thursday**  
**4 March 1790**

**Convention Proceedings, 4 March 1790**

Thursday March 4th. The House met according to Adjournmt

The Convention then Proceeded to the further consideration of the sd. Proposed Constitution Sect.—by Sect.—~~and having~~ gone thro' the same—and the Am[en]dmen[ts]. of the several States being read—

On Motion of Dr. Willm. Bradford. that a Co[m]tee be appointed to draft am[en]dmen[ts] to be Proposed to the New Federal Constitution

Voted for the County of Newport Colo. Ray Sands, and Mr. Joshua Barker—Providence County—Stephen Steere Esqr. John Sayles Esqr.—For the County of Washington Jonathan Hazzard Esqr. and James Sheldon Esqr., Bristol Mr. Thomas Allin & Mr. Saml. Pearce Kent Mr. Pardon Mawney & Mr. Gideon Arnold & that they be assisted by the Secretary—and that they Proceed accordingly—

**Convention Debates, 4 March 1790**

The notes of the Convention debates for 4 March taken by Theodore Foster and Daniel Updike have been combined. All of Updike's notes are placed within angle brackets.

4th Day

Thursday Morning—

⟨House met accordingly—⟩

Judge STEPHEN STEERE<sup>1</sup> moves that a Committee may be appointed to draft Amendment

JOHN WILLIAMS. It will not be beneficial to appoint the Committee—The Committee will hear what the House have to say—can gain Information by it

BENJAMIN BOURNE. The Committee will be glad to hear the Debates of the House. It will not be Saving Time. The Committee will Derive advantage to hear the Debate

JOSEPH STANTON rises to support the Motion of Judge Steere—The Committee can meet at the Intervals of the Meetings—and in the Evening.

⟨Mr. STEERE moved for a co[m]tee to make am[en]d[ment] to Constitution & that it woud expedite the affair⟩

B. BOURNE. It will not save time

⟨Mr. B. BOURNE I[t] would not expedite the business—⟩

⟨—2d & thirded—⟩

ELISHA BROWN Says if We can get through before noon it will be wisest to appoint

⟨E. BROWN am willg. to postpone the apptmt. till noon—⟩

Mr. NOAH MATHEWSON<sup>2</sup> Thinks we had better appoint now—The Committee can hear what is said

GEORGE HAZARD moves that we proceed—says the Gentlemen are Reasonable Men—That we have begun the Business regularly—it will

⟨Mr. G. HAZARD it will take up time to enter upon the apptmt. Comtee now I move to read & p[r]oceed upon the next article<sup>3</sup>—⟩

WILLIAM CONGDON says if we get through the Constitution this Forenoon—moves to appoint the Committee

⟨Mr. CONGDON If we put thro the Bill this fornoon I agree [i]t will be forwarding the business—⟩

Gov. WILLIAM BRADFORD. Is immaterial whether the Committee be appointed now—or before

STEERE will agree that they be appointed any Time this forenoon—papers will [be] wanted

B. BOURNE says we have Papers transmitted by the Secretary—The Ratifications of the States &c have not been read<sup>4</sup>

JOHN SAYLES gives up the Motion for the Present agreeing that they be appointed this Forenoon—

Last Section Read<sup>5</sup>—no objections.

Second Article 1st Section read—no objections.

Second Section read.—no objections—

Third Section read—Section 4th. Read.

Article 3d. 1st Section read.—Second Section Read and so on to the End of—

⟨the Constitution being then read as far as the fifth article without objection—⟩

Col. WILLIAM BARTON says we are altogether going one Side—This Clause Article 5th<sup>6</sup> ought to be written in Letters of Gold—We ought to observe the Excellencies of the Constitution—There is a Fair Opportunity furnished Amendments provided by the States. Enlarging

⟨Colo. BARTON this fifth article ought to be wrote in Letters of Gold the corner Stone of the grand fabrick here are oppor[un]ity pointed For am[en]dmen[ts]—⟩

Gen. NATHAN MILLER calls the Gentleman to order—we are to point out the Bad Things—The Matter to be taken up at length—

⟨Genl. MILLER Calls him to order—⟩

⟨Colo. BARTON I am in order & appeals to the President⟩

PRESIDENT [DANIEL OWEN] says He does not know—

⟨President [OWEN] you are in order am willing to hear—⟩

⟨Colo. BARTON I want to hear on the bright sight [i.e., side] of the question—⟩

JONATHAN J. HAZARD says He is glad that the Gentleman has called his Attention to this Article.—notwithstanding he praises it—Hazard objects. We want a Constitution not to be altered—The Rich and powerful States will be uneasy till they alter it for their Benefit—That so far from Thinking the Clause ought to have been written in Letters of Gold—he is sorry it was ever written in Letters with Ink and is sorry that it has appeared as a Part of the Constitution

⟨J. HAZARD I should have slept away the opportu[n]ity if he had not mentioned it we are few and poor and weighs light in the Ballance—the old constitution—not to be Altered without our consent<sup>7</sup> this Constitution in favour of Oppulent State.⟩

Gen. STANTON Supports Barton But objects to the Last Clause of the Article<sup>8</sup>

⟨Genl. STANTON we cannot expect a consti[tu]tion without Amendmt.—⟩

B. BOURNE says the Last Clause is the Great Bulwark of the Privileges of this State, which cannot be altered without our Consent—enumerates the Advantages we have by Reason of the Senate—enlarges on the Benefits of Amendments and agrees with Mr. Barton in Sentiment, Though not quite in order to point out the Beauties—That his Genius and Abilities may be excercised in Pointing out the Beauties when it is taken up at Length

⟨B. BOURNE the last clause in the Article a Great benefit to this state we have there an equal Voice in choosing the Officers of the union<sup>9</sup> can the gent. Possible object to tho' a great Security to this State the facility by wch amts can be obtained by the Article an excellency in the Consti[tu]tion—and in those amts. we have an equl voice with Greatest States Thinks it a Beauty in Consti[tu]tion &c.⟩

Gen. STANTON says Mr. Bourne is not candid. He did not object to the Last Article—but only to a Clause towards the Latter part of the Clause

The Remainder read—

⟨The Consti[tu]tion being read throh.—⟩

Mr. HENRY MARCHANT moves that the Amendments recommended by Congress be read<sup>10</sup>—

—They are read accordingly—

⟨the amds were read from Congress⟩

Mr. JAMES SHELDON Thinks That every State ought to [be] precluded from making any Law respecting Religion or abridging the Rights of Conscience

(article 3d.<sup>11</sup> objected to by Mr. SHELDON—congress has no right to alter religious establish[men]t nor over our State—)

Mr. MARCHANT says it will be dangerous to attempt such a Measure—every state will

SHELDON. If it is right that Congress should not make any Laws respecting it no State ought to have the Right

B. BOURNE Says there is no Danger of an Establishment of any Mode of Religion whether we ought ~~not~~ would not appoint a Chaplin<sup>12</sup>

The Persecutions in the other States of our Ancestors was an Advantage to this state—and should they persecute them it will be a Means of Accession to this state

(B. BOURNE we are perfectly Safe no danger of our establishi[n]g any mode of Religion we have even refused the acceptg of a Chaplain. If an Establishmt take place in other State an advantage to us)

Mr. MARCHANT wishes all Men would agree not to establish any Religion—enough for us to keep it out of the General Government

B. BOURNE. Provision made by Constitution

That no Establishment shall not be made to—No Danger of any of the States taking Measure tending from the highest practice and the present General Sentiments of the World on this Subject—

all the Amendments Read—

B. BOURNE. These Amendment[s] read not to go to the Committee, but only to Shew them what has been done already towards amending the Constitution. Enquiry what states have agreed to these Amendments<sup>13</sup>

SHELDON. It was his Opinion That the Constitution and the Amendment[s] would be referred to the Committee—and that he supposed the Committee would incorporate them with their Report—

MARCHANT. It will be best that the committee report in the Manner proposed by Mr. Sheldon as it will be a Constitution Ratification by the People themselves—who are in this respect Superior to the Legislature<sup>14</sup>

B. BOURNE says that it belongs to the Legislature to Ratify them by Reason of Congress having pointed out that mode<sup>15</sup>—therefore improper for us to refer the Amendments proposed by Congress [to the committee]

J. HAZARD moves That the Amendments of New York be read.<sup>16</sup> Seconded by JAMES SHELDON

They are read—

PRESIDENT [OWEN] observes that all the Papers called for have been Read.—

Gen. STANTON moves that the Amendments proposed by North Carolina be read—Enquired for.

Mr. SHELDON says he has them in a Newspaper—They are read from the *United States Chronicle*, of Jan. 14.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. MARCHANT moves That the Amendments proposed by Massachusetts be read for the Information of the Committee—and that as the Congress have already provided for some of the Amendments—

They are read from the Pamphlet containing the Proceedings<sup>18</sup>—

SAYLES Moves That the Amendments proposed by Virginia be read<sup>19</sup>—They are read from the Copy sent to the secretary—

Gov. BRADFORD says The Gentlemen have had an opportunity of Reading the Amendment[s] in the Papers and others and much Time has been taken. Moves that the Committee be appointed—agreed to on all sides That Two from Each County be appointed

Newport: Ray Sands nominated and Mr Marchant nominated—

Moved by Mr. GEORGE CHAMPLIN That the Committee be appointed from those who are opposed to the Constitution.—

Mr. MARCHANT desires that those may be appointed who are most agreeable to this House—and who will give Satisfaction abroad.

Ray Sands nominated by Mr. Abraham Barker he nominated Mr. Burington Anthony—

Newport.	Ray Sands Joshua Barker
Providence	Judge Stephen Steere John Sayles
Washington	Jon. Hazard James Sheldon
Bristol.	Genl Miller nominated but declines says he should Thomas Allen Saml Pearce
Kent	Gideon Arnold Pardon Mawney

Committee Voted in—

Gov. BRADFORD recommends That this Committee proceed as soon as may be—

Moved That the House adjourn to 3 o'clock P. M.—

adjourned



1. Stephen Steere (1736–1816) represented Gloucester in the House of Deputies, 1767–68, 1783–85, and was a justice of the Court of Common Pleas for Providence County, 1787–96. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790. Steere died in Chenango County, N.Y., to which he had emigrated about 1797.

2. Noah Mathewson (1735–1824) represented Johnston in the House of Deputies, 1777, 1789–91, 1791–93. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

3. The reference is to Article II of the Constitution.

4. See Convention Proceedings, 2 March, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 909).

5. A reference to Article I, section 10, which prohibits the states from exercising certain powers.

6. Article V details the procedure for amending the Constitution.

7. According to Article XIII of the Articles of Confederation, amendments to the Articles needed to be approved by Congress and then ratified by all of the state legislatures (CDR, 93).

8. A reference to the last clause of Article V, which provides “that no State, without its Consent, shall be deprived of it’s equal Suffrage in the Senate.”

9. Probably a reference to the Senate’s power to confirm the President’s nomination of federal officeholders.

10. See Appendix I (below).

11. A reference to the third amendment to the Constitution proposed by Congress which became the First Amendment to the Constitution (Appendix I, below).

12. Benjamin Bourne is referring to the Rhode Island charter of 1663 which guaranteed religious freedom and prohibited an established church in the colony. Apparently, at some earlier time, the colonial or state legislature had rejected appointing a chaplain. Although the second session of the Rhode Island Convention maintained the tradition of no official chaplain, once the Convention met in the Second Baptist Church (27–29 May), it authorized prayers to begin each session. Perhaps to avoid the appearance of having an official chaplain or favored church, the Convention specified that the opening prayers be given by a minister from a different denomination each day. (See RCS:R.I., 987, 988, 989.)

13. By 4 March 1790, seven states had ratified at least ten of the twelve proposed amendments: New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Delaware, and New York. Pennsylvania ratified on 10 March. (See Patrick T. Conley and John P. Kaminski, eds., *The Bill of Rights and the States: The Colonial and Revolutionary Origins of American Liberties* [Madison, Wis., 1992], xxii.)

14. The Rhode Island Convention at both the March and May sessions recommended to the legislature that it adopt eleven of the twelve amendments to the Constitution proposed by Congress. The legislature accepted the Convention’s recommendation by ratifying eleven of the amendments on 11 June 1790, almost two weeks after the state Convention had ratified the Constitution on 29 May.

15. Congress provided that the state legislatures (rather than state conventions) should ratify the amendments.

16. On 1 November 1788 the Rhode Island legislature resolved to print copies of the New York Convention’s circular letter and its proposed amendments to the Constitution and to transmit them to the town clerks. The towns were to instruct their deputies whether the legislature should appoint delegates to a second general convention of the states proposed by the circular letter to consider amendments to the Constitution or whether their deputies should be given “such other Instructions as they may deem conducive to the public Good” (RCS:R.I., 422, 425–27n). For the texts of the circular letter and New York’s proposed amendments, see RCS:N.Y., 2326–35n, 2335–37n, or CC:818.

The three-page broadside of these documents was printed by Bennett Wheeler of the *United States Chronicle*. The documents had already been printed in the *Newport Herald*, 7, 14 August; *United States Chronicle*, 14 August; and *Providence Gazette*, 16 August.

17. On 21 November 1789 the second North Carolina Convention ratified the Constitution and two days later recommended eight amendments to the Constitution. The Convention also resolved that the state's representatives in Congress apply to Congress "and endeavour to obtain" passage of the proposed amendments. The amendments were reprinted in the *Newport Herald*, 7 January 1790, and the *United States Chronicle*, 14 January.

18. The "Pamphlet" is probably the *Debates, Resolutions and Other Proceedings, of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Convened at Boston, on the 9th of January, 1788, and Continued until the 7th of February Following, for the Purpose of Assenting to and Ratifying the Constitution Recommended by the Grand Federal Convention . . .* (Boston, 1788) (Evans 21242). The pamphlet was available for sale in mid-March 1788 and in Rhode Island its sale was advertised in the *United States Chronicle*, 27 March, and 3 and 17 April (RCS:Mass., 1132–33).

For the text of the Massachusetts amendments adopted on 6 February 1788, see RCS:Mass., 1468–71, or CC:508. All four Rhode Island newspapers reprinted the amendments. See "The Rhode Island Reprinting of the Massachusetts Convention's Amendments and Boston's Celebration of Massachusetts Ratification," 7–25 February 1788 (RCS:R.I., 96–98).

19. A copy of the Virginia Form of Ratification, which included the amendments proposed by the Virginia Convention on 27 June 1788, was sent to each state executive by Edmund Pendleton, the president of the Virginia Convention (RCS:Va., 1563). For the text of the amendments, see RCS:Va., 1550–59, or CC:790. No Rhode Island newspaper reprinted the Virginia amendments. The manuscript copy received by Rhode Island is in the Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives.

## The Rhode Island Convention Friday 5 March 1790

### Convention Proceedings, 5 March 1790

Fryday March 5th. 1790. 3 o'clock P.M.—  
The house met according to adjournment

Present, the President and all the Members heretofore present—

The report of Comtee being read, which Consisted of a bill of Rights—and a number of articles in amendmts. to the Proposed Constitution<sup>1</sup> the said amendments were taken up and debated by the House—Paragraph by Paragraph.—

House then adjourned to tomorrow 9. o'clock A.M.—

1. A smooth copy of the bill of rights as reported by the committee is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State

Archives (Mfm:R.I.). It contains the change made to article 11 of the bill of rights on 5 March (below on this page, at note 3). Daniel Updike's minutes of the Convention proceedings include part of article 12 and all of articles 13–18 (Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar).

Two copies of the amendments are in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. One is marked "The foregoing is a True Copy." The other (Mfm:R.I.) is presumably the copy of the amendments reported by the committee and has the original second amendment crossed out. (See Convention Debates [Foster], 6 March, at note 3 and note 3 [RCS:R.I., 953, 968].)

### Convention Debates (Foster), 5 March 1790

Friday After noon 3. o'clock [March] 5

This Forenoon the House met at 9 o'clock but the Committee appointed to draft Amendments not having been able to agree upon a Report—the Convention therefore adjourned to this Time—and The House being now formed and having waited Sometime sent to the Committee to know if they shall soon report—They send Word by Mr Douglass the Waiter<sup>1</sup> that they will report in 15 Minutes.—

They come into the House accordingly.—

And the Business now begins—a Time of Expectation and the House very much crowded—Generals, Colonels, Delegates &c. being obliged to Stand—The House now calling—Thus Life Passes and carries along the Tide of Time to land us in Eternity of what consequence will then be all this Parade—

The SECRETARY [DANIEL UPDIKE] reads the Report of the Committee.—

The Bill of Rights read.<sup>2</sup>—

Mr. HENRY MARCHANT moves that the Bill of Rights be discussed & finished—

The Amendments read.—

Mr. MARCHANT moves that Two Articles excepted against be read.— They are read—

Gov. JABEZ BOWEN Called for Information whether it was the Recommendation of the Committee that the Bills of Rights

MARCHANT moves an Alteration of the 11th. Article. That instead of the Words Common Law of England reported—it be altered to read as follows and hath been exercised by us and our Ancestors from the Time whereof the memory of Man is not to the Contrary<sup>3</sup>—

JOB COMSTOCK says this Business of high Importance has taken the Committee sometime to prepare the Bill of Rights—and moves that before the Bill of Rights be discussed—Moves that the Bill of Rights and Amendment[s] be Referred to the People at large to have their Opinion & Sentiments thereon—

Mr. MARCHANT Shews that the Gentleman is out of order—refers to the Vote of Mr. Sayles—that he is very apprehensive

JONATHAN J. HAZARD says that When the Amendments are made to the Bill of Rights

Gov. BOWEN seconds the Motion of Mr. Marchant that the Bill of Rights be proceeded on and finished before the Consideration of the Amendments

Voted that the Amendment proposed by Mr. Marchant be agreed to and the Report altered accordingly.

Mr. MARCHANT moves that the Bill of Rights be again read [by] Paragraphs—

They are all agreed

Mr. MARCHANT observes That the Bill of Rights being agreed to it appears agreeable to our Minds—That it contains our Professed Sentiments and is agreeable to the Constitutions of the United [States] That We ought to make the Bill of Right[s] as perfect as possible. Moves that We now have a Vote whether we approve of this Bill of Right[s]—

Mr. ANDREW WATERMAN Seconds the Motion of Mr. Comstock

COMSTOCK says that it is his Meaning that no

ELISHA [BROWN]. Clear in opinion that this be like we have gone through the Amendments—That both share the same Fate—that both go to the People together to be considered by this Bill—

Gen. NATHAN MILLER. The Bill of Rights and the Amendment[s] are distinct—But the People have sent us here to Do a particular Business—This [Declaration?] is our Business—We have Ourselves a Right to decide on this Bill<sup>4</sup>—and seconds the Motion of Mr. Marchant

J. HAZARD. Well enough to take the opinion of the House whether they approve of the Bill of Rights—But thinks it well that the Bill of Rights be referred to the People because they may propose other additional Articles

MARCHANT. It will have an odd appearance to send out this Bill of Rights to the People without it being recommended—He wishes to act with fairness and to take no Advantage—

COMSTOCK. Common for the Assembly to Refer Acts to the People before they then Pass into Laws for their Consent.<sup>5</sup>

J. HAZARD says the Vote of Approbation will not be conclusive—on the Vote upon the Amendments—It is best to Let the People know that it is

COMSTOCK. We ought to Referr the Bill

PRESIDENT [OWEN] asks how the Bill of Rights is to be sent to the People

GEORGE CHAMPLIN Begg liberty to have an Opportunity here in his Seat to express his Sentiments on the Bill—How will Mr Comstock appear when he goes home and the People ask him how he likes the Bill of Rights and he shall say that it was not Considered

J. HAZARD says that there is a Difference in sending out the Bill with a Vote of Approbation and without a [consideration]

CHAMPLIN agrees with Genl. Stanton that the Vote on the Bill be postponed till after the Consideration of the Amendments

1st. Amendment read & agreed to.

Second Article Read.—

Mr. BENJAMIN BOURNE moves that the First Article of the Amendment proposed by the Congress be read<sup>6</sup>—

Gov. BOWEN calls on the Committee for Information on their Sentiments.

MARCHANT says If we reckon  $\frac{3}{5}$ ths of all the Blacks in the southern states in proportioning the Taxes and will not allow a Representation according[ly] it will have an unfavorable appearance—wishes the Gentleman to explain

J. HAZARD. We are not so fond of the Mode of Representation as pointed out by the Constitution. We think that the Taxes ought [to] be proportioned to the States according to the estimated Votes as will appear by a [— — —]

3d. Article read and agreed to.

4th. Article read

BOURNE calls for reading again the 3d Article which is done

5th. Article read<sup>7</sup>—

Gen. MILLER calls for a second Reading of it—

J. HAZARD says the Reason why this Amendment is proposed is because there is a vast Extent of Territory—more than all the Eastern States which when they come to be settled will create a Number of states—

Gen. MILLER Would not ask for a Thing which would probably obtain—It will take half the New England States

MARCHANT has no Objection but this. When we propose Amendments merely local it excites Jealousy—the Amendment respecting the Blacks of this Kind—The southern states think it of great Consequence to them that No Innovations be made on this Policy Respecting their states—having been driving hard to obtain a Representation of them—Wishes not to hold up any thing which gives ground of uneasiness—and recommends that this do not pass as an Amendment.

J. HAZARD. It rests on this whether we value the Representation of the Blacks in the southern states of more Consequence than the Liberty of our selves

We had better let the southern states trade to Africa than to expose our own Liberty. We ought to take Care at home before we look abroad—

Mr. MARCHANT gives up the

Gov. BRADFORD calls for Reading it.

I presume if we ever adopt the Constitution in this Government it is to be before these Amendments. Asks if the Gentleman from South Kingston [Jonathan J. Hazard] can shew any Amendment proposed by any of The states so pointed against the Union as this—asks if the southern states had proposed no alteration should be made<sup>8</sup>—with the Continental—It seems that we are too Jealous—We ought to enter into the Government on a Broad Basis—Happy if the Southern States do not overrun the Eastern States. It will tend to attract their Attention to the Matter—

E. BROWN proposes that this Article remain for Consideration.

J. HAZARD Doubts not but the Honorable Gentleman from Bristol [William Bradford] means the Good of us all. The Gentlemen of the Committee liable to Errors. Wishes not to be pointed by any Manner—ought not to leave it in their Power. Obligated to a Worthy Member for a Suggestion That the Constitution when agreed to be not altered without the Consent of Eleven States.

Gov. BRADFORD had the same Ideas and intends to mention the Matter at a proper Time—this Article agreed to be postponed.

Article 6th. Read.

Gen. MILLER observes that he has no objection only to the Expense of the Ratification of the Constitution.

Article 7th, 8th & 9th & 10 Read—and no objections

Article 10th—

Mr. MARCHANT. This subject was fully Discussed before the Committee went out. Says he then observed on the Difficulties which occurred on this Matter—in the First Congress it took them six Months—The southern States were opposed to the Blacks being considered in the Rule of Apportionment<sup>9</sup>—That many members were willing that the Taxes should thus be apportioned by Numbers but absolutely refused unless the Blacks were deducted—Will it be worth While now at this Late Day [to] undertake to renew the Proposal which has been found impracticable to be carried into Execution—But now since the Southern States have been brought with great Difficulty to consent to this Mode shall we adhere to a Mode<sup>10</sup>

These Two Points—The Impracticability and how it would operate on us if practicable. The Impracticability and the Inexpedient have largely been gone into—We are Circumscribed—our Numbers will not

increase but little—The Invitations abroad will lead our Inhabitants to the Southern States—Our Wealth will encrease and our proportion of Taxes will encrease in Proportion—Wishes the Gent. would consider the Matter fully—Though there may be a small arithmetical Error in the Proportion we had better—

Mr. E. BROWN moves to have this postponed till Morning

J. HAZARD Can assure the Honorable Member that he did not make the objection for the Sake of objecting—Had the Taxes been assessed in proportion to our Freemen and the

MARCHANT. Not so well acquainted with the southern states as he is—

True that Difficulties arose on Mr. Marchant—But we had better support the Expence of making the Estimate—The Produce of Virginia Equal to the 4 New England States, New York & New Jersey—That state solus has more Negroes than all the other states—a Planter seen rides in a Coach with 4 or 5 Attendants. Drinks Wine lives Extravagantly—and therefore in Debt—lives on the Principles of the Jamaican—Bounty as Extravagance. Wishes the House could be informed—

MILLER sorry he cannot agree with the Gentleman—Confident as he is that it is now in favor of the State—we are a seaport—We Export and trade with the Produce of Connecticut & Massachusetts—Have Attempted for Years to try the other Measures—a Bad Pilot who will run twice foul of the same Rock—We have found the Rock by Experience has Candour for the Gentleman.

calls for Question

Gov. BRADFORD says if we ever come to Union it must be before we have the Amendment—has no Doubt of the Gentleman's sincerity from his taken Experience—no inconvenience to let the Matter lye—should the Gentleman hereafter go to either of the Houses of Congress—He will be confirmed by Reason of the Amendment now proposed—as Mr. Elisha Brown proposed to let it lie till Morning.—Joins in the Motion.

Art. 11th. Read. 12th. Do. [i.e., Ditto] 13th. Do. 14th Do. 15th Do. 16th. ~~17 to Lie till the Morning~~ Do. 17th. all agreed to.

18th Do.

19th. to lie on the Table.

20th. Article agreed to—The Convention adjourned

1. This was probably David Douglass of South Kingstown, who had served as a waiter (i.e., messenger) for the House of Deputies in 1779 and 1780 and was paid for his service as such (see Bartlett, *Records*, VIII, 572, and IX, 107).

2. See Mfm:R.I. for the bill of rights reported by the committee and RCS:R.I., 976–79, for the final version adopted by the Convention.

3. See the smooth copy of the bill of rights for this change (Mfm:R.I.).

4. See the act of 17 January 1790, which called a convention to consider the Constitution, and stated: “*And be it further Enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That the said Convention be and hereby is empowered, and fully authorized, finally to decide on the said Constitution, as they shall judge to be most conducive to the Interests of the People of this State: And that the said Convention cause the Result of their Deliberations and Proceedings, relative to the aforesaid Constitution, to be transmitted to the PRESIDENT of the United States of America, as soon after the Rising thereof as may be*” (RCS:R.I., 675–76n).

5. This practice was sometimes used for matters of great importance and interest to the public. See, for example, the “test act” of October 1786, the resolution of November 1788 asking the towns to instruct their deputies on how to respond to the New York circular letter, and the act of September 1789 asking the towns to instruct their deputies about the calling of a convention to consider the Constitution (RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, p. xxxii; Vol. 2, pp. 425–27n, 603–4). For more on this practice, especially during the Confederation period, see Polishook, 34–35.

6. For the text of the twelve amendments proposed by Congress on 25 September 1789, see Appendix I (below).

7. The debate concerns what becomes the 4th amendment agreed to by the Convention on 6 March (RCS:R.I., 979).

8. South Carolina, Virginia, and North Carolina all proposed amendments to the Constitution, but none of them was related to the slave-trade provision of Article V of the Constitution.

9. The reference is to the debate in the Second Continental Congress over the mode of apportioning taxes. The 12 July 1776 draft of the Articles of Confederation provided that general expenses be apportioned among the states on the basis of population, only excluding Indians not paying taxes. The Southern delegates strongly opposed counting slaves in the population totals. New Englanders insisted that slaves be included when apportioning taxes. After lengthy debate, Congress deleted the apportionment of expenses by population and replaced it with the estimated value of all lands granted to or surveyed for individuals, including the improvements made on that land, as the basis of apportioning federal expenses in the Articles of Confederation. On 15 November 1777 the Articles were sent to the states for their ratification.

It soon became evident that using land values estimated by the states was not a viable mode of apportioning expenses. In April 1783 the Confederation Congress sent to the states an amendment to the Articles of Confederation that changed the mode of apportioning expenses from land values to population counting only three-fifths of the slaves. Rhode Island and New Hampshire rejected the amendment, thereby killing it. The three-fifths ratio was incorporated into the Constitution (CDR, 54, 80, 89, 148–50).

10. The extant records of the Convention do not contain a “10th” amendment dealing with taxation. In the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Ratification of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives there is a sheet of paper containing the following amendment on taxation, which was probably the amendment number 10 debated here:

That the direct Taxes that shall be ~~assessed and levied~~ quotaed by Congress on ~~any of the States in the~~ United States shall be apportioned according to the value of the real Property

2d. that direct Taxes quotaed by Congress to the several States shall be apportioned according to the real value of the Property in the Sd states

See also *Newport Herald*, 11 March (RCS:R.I., 934–35).



**Newspaper Report of Convention Proceedings, 5 March 1790***Newport Herald, 11 March 1790 (excerpt)*<sup>1</sup>

. . . FRIDAY—the committee reported a Bill of Rights and Amendments, the report being amended, it was moved that the Bill of Rights should be approved of by the Convention; but this was objected to by the opposers of the Constitution, altho' the committee who formed them, were generally of this description, and the necessity of these rights being defined, had been frequently urged:—The Federalists openly avowed their assent to them, and their wish that they might have the sanction of the Convention; they charged their opposers with inconsistency in their conduct, that they had excited fears in the people, because the rights that were retained to them, were not declared in the Constitution, and now when they had opportunity to establish them, they refused their assent:—But no observations however just; no reflections however galling to their feeling, and degrading to their conduct, could make them deviate from a predetermined resolution, of coming to no vote upon the Bill which they had framed themselves and contended was necessary. . . .

1. Reprinted: *Boston Gazette*, 29 March. For other portions of this item, see the newspaper reports of the Convention proceedings for 2–3 March (above) and 6 March (below).

**The Rhode Island Convention**  
**Saturday**  
**6 March 1790**

**Convention Proceedings, 6 March 1790**

The House then met according to adjournme[n]t  
Present as yesterday—

---

The house then further Proceeded on the report of the Comtee the Bill of rights and Am[en]dmen]ts to the Proposed Constitution.—

---

The house adjourned to 3 oclock P.M.

---

House met accordingly—

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~~moved by Mr. Elisha Brown~~ The following Motion was made by Mr. Merchant and seconded by Mr. Bourne (viz.) “Resolved” that this Convention

**Henry Marchant: Motion to Ratify the Constitution, 6 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The following Motion was made by Mr. Marchant and seconded by Mr. Bourne viz,

Resolved “that this Convention having received amended and approved the Bill of Rights as reported by their Committee Do assent to, adopt & ratify the Constitution of the United States of America as already adopted by twelve of the United States and now in actual exercise by them—And that the Amendments reported by the said Committee and as amended and approved by this Convention be forwarded with the Ratification of the Constitution to the Congress to be recommended to be made part of the Constitution of the United States of America”—

Whereupon the previous Question was moved for and seconded, in order to bring on a Question for an Adjournment of this Convention— And the previous Question being carried—

It was then moved [by Job Comstock] that this Convention do adjourn to the — Day of — then to meet at — to decide upon the said Constitution of the United States of America, And the Adoption or Rejection thereof

To take into the further consideration the said Proposed Constitution of the united states of america

1. MS, Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar.

**Convention Debates (Urdike), 6 March 1790**

MR. MARCHANT To give then an Opportunity to do this business the most consistant with the good of our Constituents The convention also invested with Power to make such amendments as would be consistant with the good of our Constituents and who in the strong[e]st Terms express themselves to Congress themselves. They thought an adjournment necessary and a credit to try those people who are in opposition to the motion. The smallest State in the Union except one [i.e., Delaware] and the nearest the operation of the federal Government—

Made the motion for an adoption but the Previous Quest. &c. read the motion &c as at previous Session—

Mr. B. BOURNE reads the form of an Adoption he has

Mr. COMSTOCK moves for an adjournmt. and is Seconded by Mr. STEERE—

Colo[ne]l BARTON largely agt. a Postponemt.

Mr. CHAMPLIN with him—& says there was nothing said agt. the Constitution & It only now remains that we Consider the necessity of adopting it.

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We have had the Opportunity of all that the other States have done on the subject—Congress about to exclude us [from] the Union—what the Situation of this State—men who have wood to sell—&c the few [Ports?] not alone the whole county of Bristol and some Towns in the Southern part of the State we must go where our application can have its effect—when [wished?] [to] be redressed—with the assistance of the [– – –] in this State. Sure of am[en]d[men]ts being obtained—wish Gent. wou'd withdraw his motion &c.

Mr. B. BOURNE we should determine whether Mr. Combstock's motion is irregular or not—

Mr. J. HAZARD that he has a good oppinion of &c But denies they have a right to demand Money from art[icle]s [of] Confederation.

Dr. BRADFORD—wish not to bring prejudices up to view what will be the consequences provided we adjourn.

### Convention Debates (Foster), 6 March 1790

Saturday Morning—March 6.—1790—

Gov. JABEZ BOWEN called for Proceedings  
The Amendments Read.

Mr. HENRY MARCHANT and Mr. BENJAMIN BOURNE object against the clause in the Amendment which mentions the States retaining their State [courts]<sup>1</sup>—

Mr. JAMES SHELDON says that the Cause of the Amendment was the Clause in the Constitution which empowers Congress to appoint Inferior & Supreme Courts

Mr. MARCHANT explains the Nature of the Constitution

JOB COMSTOCK says the Constitution wants explanation in various Parts

Gov. BOWEN Moves that we finish the Paragraphs one by one till we get thru

Mr. MARCHANT. Will give his Sentiments but if it is the Sense of this House he will acquiesce

BOURNE Says the Gentleman moves that this Amendment be inserted from the Clause which he Reads—We are perfectly safe without any such Amendment so absurd as the one proposed

JOHN SAYLES says that Congress may by General Laws—Viz “But the Congress may by Law appoint such inferior [Courts.]”

BOURNE. Certainly this extends to the Appointment of the same [– – –].

Gov. WILLIAM BRADFORD Says that the worthy Gentleman who was last Speaking will not be responsible—but he has heard Persons repeatedly say Congress could

BOURNE Says we come here to discuss the Constitution—and ought to have it fixed right

JONATHAN J. HAZARD says Mr. Bourne is right but the People at large have an Idea that Congress have this Power—They have altered their opinion. The Amendment will quiet the Mind of the People at large—if there was no other Reason this would be Sufficient—A Government established with the Consent and Confidence of the People will be more firm

Gen. NATHAN MILLER. The Mind of the People ought to be quieted But to do that we ought not to insert Nonsense in the Constitution and wished it expunged

Gen. JOSEPH STANTON says now is the Time to quiet the Mind of the People—Much has been said against the State that we are a little Refractory State<sup>2</sup>—ought to be divided or annihilated—This will quiet them and [— — —]

COMSTOCK. It is a poor Excuse against the Amendment that other States have not moved for the same Amendment—by this Rule we should have no need [of] Amendments

B. BOURNE Moves that the Amendment be included in the Bill of Rights instead of Standing as an Amendment

J. HAZARD seconds the Motion.

COMSTOCK objects.

BRADFORD thought we agreed to let it

PRESIDENT [DANIEL OWEN] calls on the Members That if they have still any objection he would have them declared.

Gov. BRADFORD asks the Gentleman from E. Greenwich [Job Comstock] if he would sell him a Farm and give him a Deed—

PRESIDENT observes That we ought not to suffer any thing improper—because if afterwards expunged having been Referred

GEORGE CHAMPLIN observes that the President has put this Matter in a Just light.—

STANTON says the People will strike it out—

MARCHANT Says Good God—this is saying I am Beat—objected to Send

Gen. MILLER cannot consent to this.

JOHN WILLIAMS. Appears to him this Convention states the Amendment ought to come from the Place where it is and to be inserted in the Bill of Rights—

J. HAZARD. It will stand much better to be inserted in the Bill of Rights—

agreed to be inserted there.—

Second Amendment read—

Gen. MILLER says this is striking again at the Slaves

Mr. BOURNE Reads the Clause of the Bill of Rights and the Alteration is made—

Gov. BRADFORD moves that the Paragraph of the Constitution respecting the Representation—(Which is read)

The Amendment of the Bill of Rights read and agreed to.—

MARCHANT moves that the Second Amendment on the Representation be Read.<sup>3</sup>

3d. 4th. 5th. [read]

5th.

MARCHANT says it was agreed last Evening that it was agreed it should be altered to Eleven states.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. BOURNE says That this Motion will embarrass the very object we have in View—is willing that such an Amendment should take Effect some Years hence

J. HAZARD. The object of the Motion is that this should Not operate until all the Amendments proposed have become a Part of the Constitution.—

MARCHANT observes it will be best to offer a Period.

J. HAZARD Moves that the Period be fixed to the Year 1793.

The Amendment altered so as to read thus ~~without the assent of Eleven of the United States~~ after the Year 1793 without the Assent of 11th of the States heretofore united under one Confederation

Art. 6th. Read.<sup>5</sup>

BOURNE Enquires whether any other State has proposed a Similar Amendment

Mr. SAYLES replies that North Carolina has made a Similar [Amendment]<sup>6</sup>

WILLIAM BARTON Hopes he is in order and will endeavor to keep so—He was thought out of order when I [moved?] were I a Legislator I should by no means consent to this Tax. Did not mean that Congress should not have the Power because he viewed them with a Jealous Eye but he would always view them with a Watchful one

8th. 9th & 10th.<sup>7</sup> Read

BOURNE objects to it. It has been demonstrated that this could not be carried into effect—It has been shown that the Congress did all that could be done to carry—It has been shown that it would operate much against [us.] Wrong for us to raise an objection to a Measure favourable to us. It appears to Me that unless Gentlemen will suggest a Mode more Just and prudent.

Gen. MILLER. I can put a Case somewhat similar—suppose this State is 800,000 Acres of Land and suppose 200 Planters and in Virginia had 400 slaves—

The Slaves themselves pay as much as all the Whites.

COMSTOCK. It is roundly asserted can way [i.e., weigh] one side of the Question—urges the Impracticality of it—says the southern states rather than have their Slaves Numbered agreed to the Measures they recommend—not from being convinced but from a Conviction that it was most for their Interest or on Evidences—mentions this Conduct with regard to the old Continental bills. Moves that it lie till the Adjournment—

Mr. MARCHANT says the Gentleman is greatly mistaken the Facts if he has Stated—Those states did not prevail against the Northern—with regard to the old Continental Money—it has remained because Congress had not Power to carry into Execution any order Respecting—This an Argument for the Adoption of a Government which makes and Effectuates order—

It cannot be conceived that we shall encrease in Wealth more than in Numbers.

J. HAZARD says he disputes not the Facts Stated by the Gentleman with regard to all Matters before the last Congress—But Most States have neglected to redeem their Proportion of the Continental Money. Is sensible that the Expençe of taking an Estimate is more than that of the Numeration—But the Advantages will be grate—being sensible that it will make an Amazing odds to the New England States—Will blame no man for thinking different from him. [He?] must.

Gov. BOWEN. More said in this Article before they went out than on any other Matter. Did not expect that it would be reported—Relates what was before stated by him—suppose That a sum of 800,000 in proportion to this state and goes Among the—also Mentions the Impracticability.

Mr. GEORGE HAZARD Observes that if this Measure is adopted the Committee who shall be appointed by Congress will in Case of an Estimate have Reference to the Estimate heretofore taken in this State notwithstanding it has sunk 5 per Cent.—

Thinks it will operate against us—I see where they are increasing numbers while we do not increase—This Mode proposed by Congress—

Gov. BRADFORD. The Members have freed their Minds—has Gentle [men]

ELISHA BROWN. Never knew an Estimate taken otherwise than by Value—is surprised that so many worthy Gentlemen will argue against

COMSTOCK says the People are uneasy—would have them consider it—

MARCHANT. It is possible that a Gentleman should suppose it large  
PRESIDENT [OWEN]. If this state suffers by this Mode of Tax 9 others will also

Pass	32
Not	36

So it passed in the Negative

Article 11th of the Amendment

12th 13th. 14th. 15th. & 16th. 17th.

18th.

BOURNE moves that this be extended to all other officers appointed by Congress<sup>8</sup>—agreed to—

19th. Article read<sup>9</sup>—

Mr. MARCHANT says we can do no good to make such an Amendment—

Mr. BOURNE says it cannot operate till after the Year 1808—It will be necessary that every State should.

Gov. BOWEN. It is now looked upon by the Body of Friends [i.e., Quakers] throughout all the States that a great Point has been gained that such an Amendment may be made in the Year 1808—The Friends were opposed to the Constitution at First because they supposed it in some Degree countenanced the Slave Trade—It was a Matter of Difficulty in the Convention—a Delicate Subject.

STANTON Think[s] we ought to bear Testimony against such a Trade—If we do not we shall participate

BOURNE. We are not a Society of Friends to publish our Testimonials to this. The southern states conceded the Regulation.

COMSTOCK says That the Amendment does not ask for extend[ing]

E. BROWN moves to have it Read—

It is read

J. HAZARD Says he was not present in the Committee when this Amendment was [drafted]—has been informed that a Gentleman

BARTON. Sorry to rise with Different Sentiments from his Honorable Colleagues from Providence. He objected before—our Duty at all Times to declare our Sentiments respecting Freedom and Liberty—Thinks the Article allowing the Importation of Slaves wrong—That our Citizens carry on that Traffick—calls the Attention of the Convention to the Resolution of Congress<sup>10</sup>—How beautiful was that? We were then afraid of being enslaved ourselves—a Vessel soon after arrived in North

Carolina with a [cargo]<sup>11</sup>—Let us take to our Minds our Anxious Moments—In the Times of Danger we were anxious for our Tender affairs—is Sorry to hear his Honorable Friend Mr. Marchant espouse such a Cause—will not [- - -]—

Mr. MILLER. Does not rise [to] display his oratory but if he had such Sentiments ever since that Year 1776 and had Sent his Slaves to Carolinas.

Gov. BRADFORD Rises to bring this Matter to a Close. If he thought any Person in the Court House he would run out of the Court House—The Lawfulness of the Slave Trade not in Question—The Worthy Member from Newport [Henry Marchant] as much as Col. Barton—The Gentlemen from the Massachusetts were in the Convention would the Members of that Convention have ever agreed to it if this Preamble to this Amendment “That this Traffic is Disgraceful to Human Nature”—enlarges on the Impropriety of a Measure [that] can only serve to affront a [state?]. Hopes that those who vote for suppressing this Amendment

BARTON says he should not have risen if Genl. Miller had not suggested some Matters [to] acquiesce. He has brought up a Matter which he had no Business to—Suppose he had done wrong why should it be mentioned here—is willing the Matter should be enquired into—it would be disreputable if we did not agree to this Amendment as it now Stands—

SAYLES. It is said That Congress cannot take Cognizance of this Matter till the Year 1808—He agrees that this Construction may be put on the Measure—But thinks it proper

STANTON. It is apparent why it is continued by the Southern States to the Year 1808. The Power and Influence of the southern states—If the Angells should decree such a Traffick in Heaven he should

CHAMPLIN says he hopes that those who vote against the Amendment will not be considered as Friends to Slavery.—He has done much toward the Freedom of the Blacks.<sup>12</sup> He is Friend to General Liberty and the Happiness of all Men. Will offend

Mr. NOAH MATHEWSON moves to alter

E. BROWN is sorry the Attornies will advocate the Cause

Gov. BRADFORD respects Gov. Brown the very Hair of his Head—This is not the First, Second or Third Time—He abhors the Slave Trade—has as much Regard as any Man to the Liberties of the Poor and the Depressed.—This Measure promoted only for the Purpose of Party in this State—The southern States so tenacious of the Trade

B. BOURNE says he has been branded as being advocate for Slavery—Highly injured by this Reflection—He is friend to the Freedom of all Men if he could accomplish the Plan before he slept—



Gen. STANTON. This is a Material Objection to the Constitution with the People where he lives on account of the Idea—The Principle will bearing [i.e., bear] examining.—

Mr. THOMAS ALLEN.<sup>13</sup> Was one of the Committee but did not agree to this part of the Report.—

Mr. G. HAZARD Speaks largely on the Subject—we will do as little Harm as may be and as much good as may be—convinced that Congress had respect to both Parties—How unhappy should we have been if Congress had been carried away by the cries about Slavery—Should you offend them it will injure us—Wishes the House to be candid and Thoughtful on this Matter—never knew it good way to beat a Man [like] a Dog and then asks a Favor of him—

Mr. SHELDON. The Arguments have Centered on Two particulars: the Impracticability of the Measure and The Fear of offending the southern states—The Congress of 1776 resolved That They would discontinue then the Trade<sup>14</sup>—

passed by one Majority

Second Article read again.

Mr. J. HAZARD says the Mode of Representation ought not to be calculated on Slaves<sup>15</sup>—is in Favor of the Mode—

Mr. SHELDON says the Negroes are personal Property

Mr. MARCHANT observes on the Impropriety of this Article standing as it does.

J. HAZARD. The Convention having determined against the mode of apportioning the Taxes reported by the Committee deprives him of Argument

G. HAZARD Would act in Public Life as in Private on fair and Just Grounds.

Second Article to be Struck out

The 20th. Amendment of the Committee read—

There on moved that First Article of the Amendments recommended by Congress—

Gov. BRADFORD moves to pass the Bill of Rights.

Second[ed] by Mr. MARCHANT

Mr. WILLIAMS moves that it be sent to the People.

Conversation—on this Matter.

ANDREW WATERMAN Seconds the Motion of Sending the Bill of Rights—

Mr. CHAMPLIN argues in Favor of approbating the Bill of Rights previous to sending the Bill to the People—

Desultory Debates on the Propriety of Sending out the Bill of Rights previous to an Approbation of this House—

Mr. CHAMPLIN calls for a Vote after having Made sundry pertinent observations—and that it seemed as if the House were themselves afraid to declare their approbation of them—

Mr. G. HAZARD follows with Additional Arguments

COMSTOCK. This Convention undertakes to make a Bill of Rights—It is the Work of the People to make them—What is to be done—We can do no more than to refer the Bill to the People [i.e., people] and to take their opinion on the Matter.—The Gentleman has striven much about the Previous Question. Concludes by moving as before

SHELDON. It is curious to observe the Situation on This Matter—one Gentleman says it has been Received—another that it is not Received—

Mr. MARCHANT points out the absurdity of sending the Bill of Rights to the People before it is approbated by the People [i.e., House]—

(It is now 1 o'clock P.M. Saturday, March 6)

MARCHANT States how the Question

Mr. WILLIAM CONGDON moves that this Bill of Rights that this Convention

E. BROWN moves that we have the Vote whether we adjourn or not before any other Vote is passed.

Desultory [discussion] whether

Mr. MARCHANT reduces his Motion to writing.

COMSTOCK. We are an Assembly here of 70 Persons. Shall 70 Persons act on this Business to give it full Efficacy—argues that by adopting this Bill some Rights essential may be omitted—We have

adjourned to 3 o'clock P. M.

Met pursuant to Adjournment—

E. BROWN makes a Motion in Writing for referring the Bills of Rights to the Town Meetings in the 3d. Wednesday of April next—

Judge STERE moves that the Bill of Rights be received

WILLIAMS Joins in said Motion—

SAYLES confessed on all Hands that the Report of the Committee is Received—

Mr. MARCHANT moves to have it entered on the Journals that the Report is Received—

Mr. BOURNE objects to Recording that the Report is Received by itself—Because it ought also to extend to the Amendments

Gov. BRADFORD. We are now bringing up a Matter which ought to have been determined on or before any debate upon—calls for reading the Bill—Says he is in order—has no objection to an Entry being made that the Report of the Committee is Received—argues against the Motion on the Ground of Impropriety—has no objection to it being entered on the Journals.

MARCHANT. If we look into the Act by which we met we shall find why & how we met here.—we have no Legislative Power—Have no other Powers than as Trustees for the Business—we have examined the Constitution paragraph by paragraph—the Committee drew up a Bill of Rights—has no objection because we may declare that the People have such and such &c. Rights that when we adopt the Constitution it may appear that we claim such and such Rights similar to what was done by New York and may go on to give influence and the Wishes of the People—all this one connected Business—But it belongs to the Convention to finish the Business. Objects to Referring the Bill to the People they cannot consult—and Act together upon [it]. Wishes as we have gone thru the Bill of Rights and the Amendments. He has a Motion to Make. Called to Order by Mr. COMSTOCK. determined by the PRESIDENT [OWEN] that he is in order—Reads a Motion Resolved that this Convention having Received<sup>16</sup>

Motion Seconded by B. BOURNE—

COMSTOCK. They have rambled a great way round the former Matter—ought to be first heard & Determined says ~~Mr.~~

COMSTOCK moves to adjourn to a future Day

Second[ed] by ELISHA BROWN who waves the first Motion he made this Afternoon.

Gen. MILLER moves to have Mr. Comstock's Motion

Col. BARTON has come to this Convention divested of all Prejudices for or against the Constitution from some Gentlemen being so anxious that they are influenced by Prejudices—

PRESIDENT [OWEN] interrupts Col. Barton and Requests him to Speak to the Point—

Col. BARTON says the Adjournment will affect his Constituents Sensibly—The Congress have subjected the Citizens to foreign Duties and foreign Tonnage.<sup>17</sup> Calls for the Reasons why an Adjournment is moved for.

SAYLES will give the Reasons—If there is no Adjournment the Question will be adopt or Reject—wishes to mix

Gov. BRADFORD Enquires of the Worthy Gentleman how long Time will it Require to take the Sentiment of his Constituents.

Mr. SAYLES says that he does not know how long a Time

PRESIDENT [OWEN] observes that both the Gentlemen are out of Order.

Mr. MARCHANT Wishes for the Honor of the Convention that the Business be done regularly and reads a Motion

Mr. BOURNE Says it is not in the Power of this Convention to adjourn—The Act of Government points out the Business—If we have

the Power of adjournment they may adjourn to a Month or Two Months a Year or ten Years—The opinion ill founded that we may adjourn we are appointed to consider investigate & *Decide*<sup>18</sup>—our Constituents expected that it would be Decided on—If Mr. Sayles knows the Sentiments of his Constituents he knows how to vote—says if we had Power to adjourn it is inexpedient—knows not what Time or plan is intended. Congress are pressing us with their Laws—Tonnage & Duties on Us—no intercourse by Land—all Commerce thereby outlawed—Coasting Business destroyed—Fishermen [un]employed—Especially Herring Fishermen—Go to Virginia and Eastward—they take salt in great Quantities.—The United States now Raising a large Revenue—our Proportion 40,000 Dollars—are we in a way to collect our Proportion—He has enquired at the Collectors office in Providence [and] finds we shall not raise a Third Part of the Money—undoubtedly unless we Speedily accede to this Constitution & this Quota will be demanded of Us.<sup>19</sup> But if we now accede it is probable the Deficiency will not be called for.—The Governor has written a Letter by order of the Assembly assuring Congress that we should adopt the Constitution soon—you Have by a Bill passed in the upper House pledged yourself for the speedy adoption. Recites the Bill and that as you Have supported that Bill it is certain was the Sentiments of [your constituents].<sup>20</sup> Our Fishing Business, our Coasting Business, our Ferrying Business—has made a Statement of the Tonnage of the Vessels of this sort if Reckoned at 4,000 Tonnage, Number 22, and will Amount to 80,000 Dollars—only one Month will amount to 700 Dollars—They will suffer more in the Spring than in any other Season. Tonnage of Providence more than 10,000 Dollars—Post office—150 Dollars a Month which we must account for—Estimate 700 Dollars a Month Ton. 1,000 Dollars a Year for salt—other Losses the Requisitions of Congress &c 40,000 Dollars a Year all on Duties payable in Paper Money another Weighty consideration. The probable Adjournment of Congress in May—if we accede after the Adjournment there will be not Power to resort to for relief till the next Meeting of this Congress—shall add nothing further now as the Convention have no Power to adjourn

J. HAZARD says the Gentleman from Providence has objected to an adjournment because he says the Convention have not Power to adjourn—Sir if we have no authority to adjourn we have done for we have adjourned—if we can adjourn one Day we can a Week or a Fortnight—we Many concurred that the General Assembly taking up the Matter without the Consent of the People was a Matter of Complaints—This was the Reason that produced the Bill of the upper House at the last session<sup>21</sup>—Had this Bill been passed into a Law and the People had

instructed their Deputies to adopt the Constitution it then could have. We derive our Power from the People. They have a Right to be consulted—They expect the Amendments will be made and sent to them. Is extremely sorry for the Sufferings of the Merchants—But he hopes congress will continue the Exemption if we do not adjourn too long a Time so as to appear as merely being adjourned. The most Haste the Worse Speed is a Maxim.<sup>22</sup> If the Gentlemen had not been In Such Haste it would have been much better for all—The Anxiousness Shewn has alarmed the Common People—He does not mention this as Matter of Justification—He says We have a Right to adjourn and he has Instruction—

SAMUEL J. POTTER.<sup>23</sup> The only Question before us [is] whether we adjourn or not—let us keep to the Point—

E. BROWN. Several States have adjourned—North Carolina & New Hampshire<sup>24</sup>—If we apply to Congress they will continue the Indulgence as it will otherwise operate against the Federation. This will seem Hard—The People are more and more Reconciled.

Mr. JOHN DAVIS<sup>25</sup> calls on Mr. E. Brown for his Reasons why he wishes for an Adjournment

Saturday After noon on the Adjournment

Mr. COMSTOCK observes That Mr. Bourne is of quite different Sentiment from the Last sentiment. Thus it would be perfectly Safe—The convention could adjourn—Much is said about the Damage will arise—But the People must be satisfied—If it is the best Constitution yet if the People are against it what will be the Confusion? Suppose We are at Some Expence for Tonnage we had better pay that than refuse. the Confusion possibly the Result

MARCHANT Had heard that many Things had been said against the Constitution—Expected that here was the Place to Dissent—But what has been said against it—Is there any thing to look the Constitution in the [Face?]<sup>25</sup>—The Bill of Rights it is true has been agreed to—But there is not a Single Right but what was Safe by the Constitution—as Some might possibly doubt whether we [can adjourn]

Argues on the Power of Adjourning and Questions the Power of Adjourning—In New Hampshire there was an Adjournment but the same Question arose and the Adjournment took place by Agreement—Says the Common People have been whispered to—other Persons who had Points to carry have been whispered to—There has been an Adjournment—in the [United States?]<sup>25</sup>—It was said that Two or Three Days only were necessary—But this Time was not enough—Some States have debated Weeks—and the very state of North Carolina so often Referred to have only adopted the [Constitution recently]<sup>26</sup>

Two Years have elapsed—and 18 Months have elapsed since the Government was organized<sup>27</sup>—We ought to take Time—if we cannot finish it to day we ought to adjourn to Monday—We have had to see the 1,000 things the *1,000 things* said against us not True—The People in the other States are in Peace & quiet Enjoyment of their Liberties & Privileges—The Gentleman has observed that the Act of the General Assembly was only recommendatory—States the absurdity and inconsistency of Referring the Matter to the People again

Sir, It has been said that congress will continue their Indulgence—and that if they will be so hard so cruel as to refuse the Application it is best for us never to Join them—How unnecessary is this breaking then with the Respect they Deserve—observes on the Beginning of Congress and their Ready and immediate Attention to the Reported Application of the States. The First Time they give sufficient Time to consider and adopt—It is true before this Time expired the Legislature did take it up—Recites what was done and wrote to Congress assuring them that the Constitution would be adopted<sup>28</sup>—and will it not be treating them with Indignity to postpone the Adoption—(States the Improbability of Congress further indulging us—) Will congress de-range all their Measures the most necessary Affairs of the Nation to gratify us? We are trifling we sporting with the Privileges of the Means by which the People live—The People do see that the Property is depreciating—That they are depressed—What may be the Consequence he knows not—He would not contend against a short adjournment—States Inconvenience to the Farmer in Case the Constitution is not adopted—in not having a Market—He cannot have Credit—He cannot do his Business—Congress have it in Expectation to rise in May—They have before them Business of the Highest Consequence to us—If our Delegation do not arrive before the Adjournment States the Evils we shall be under—There is no other Means than a Land tax for discharging the Deficiency we shall have to make up for The Revenue—

Gov. BRADFORD Says he hoped to have [Land tax?]  
—puts him in Mind of a Story he had heard of Lord Coke who had a [Bank?]

The Question is whether we have power to adjourn—There has been no Instance but New Hampshire and there ten Members were clogged with their Instruction—They themselves moved for Liberty—& adjourned<sup>29</sup>—The Gentleman from Smithfield [i.e., John Sayles] has Said that he wants to consult his Constituents when he has said there is a Majority against this—has no Right to adjournment

Gen. MILLER is against an Adjournment. We have no Right—though we have their almighty Power—Suppose he should go home and his

Constituents. Nothing offered as a sufficient Reason for an Adjournment—could he believe the Adjournment was for an Adoption he should not be against—It is intended by some to keep this Link broken that some disturbance may happen—and it may then be said—

Cannot tell How it is possible that those who have been firm

Points out the Disadvantages to Warren—for a Number of Years past 6. or 5,000 Barrels of Herring taken up the Pawtuxet all the Barrels and Salt for the use [Boston?] if it will only Benefit Warren he [prays?] it may be indulged with the Privilege—Wishes he had the Eloquence of Demosthenes

Adjourn	41
[Not]	28 <sup>30</sup>

Gov. BRADFORD moves that the Convention adjourn to the Last Monday in March

Seconded by Mr. MARCHANT

E. BROWN moves that the Adjournment be till the Monday after the Proxing Day<sup>31</sup>—

Gov. BRADFORD obliged for the Candor of the old Gentleman—says it was a Proper season to take up the Business—The First Day of April the Indulgence [expires].<sup>32</sup> I know your Honored Attention to which if nothing is wanted but to consult their Constituents—If they go beyond the Time we may be charged—we must [not?] view this Matter on the Broad Basis of Candour—Observes on the Advantages or a [– – –] between the Merchant & Farmer. The Merchant who grew Two Specie of Grass where but one grew before

E. BROWN is against the Time sooner than that he has moved because it will cause Meetings

PRESIDENT [OWEN] says that we had better finish the

BRADFORD calls on the Gentleman who has Spent almost a Century on the Earth, whether he is not convinced in his own Mind that the Damages and inconveniences will be vastly greater—mentions Warren as Depicted by Genl. Miller

E. BROWN solemnly Declares solemnly that he acts with a Clear Conscience

[– – –]

G. HAZARD. [– – –] [– – –]

Did not the Gentleman come from North Providence with but one Eye—will it injure this man this Time—was he not moved by what Gen. Miller [said]—

Says the Man who cannot look with Two Eyes when he has them ought to have no more than one—Seconds the Motion of adjourning to the Last Monday of March—

WATERMAN moves for the 24th Day of May—

Seconded by MATHEWSON

Gen. STANTON Joins the Motion. Says the People are frightened by the Anxiety which is Shewn for the Adoption.

MARCHANT.

E. BROWN gives up his Motion for the Monday in April and joins for the 4th Monday of May

MARCHANT restates the Inconvenience of meeting in April. That the Gentleman is fascinated with the sound of Proxing Day—If the Interests of the Freemen is consulted

BOURNE says the only Question is to what Time we shall adjourn—Three Different Times have been mentioned—He mentions them—He considers the Reasons which have been given—obviates the objection that it is Hurrying the Matter—The Constitution had been published and every man has made up his Mind on the Subject<sup>33</sup>—There will be Time in the Month of March to consult the Freemen—We shall be obliged to pay 2,000 Dollars for the Delay of the Month of April—In Consequence of the Requisition made in October Last the Indulgence was limited to the 15th. of January.<sup>34</sup> Congress subjected us to foreign Tonnage & Tonnage Duties to prevent foreigners from availing themselves of the Rhode Island flag &c. The Revenue System before Congress in which all of us are Interested

G. HAZARD Certain That  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{2}{3}$  of this House consists of Members of the General Assembly<sup>35</sup>—It was the Meaning of this Assembly that the Convention should finish the Business—cannot therefore consent to the Adjournment—It was moved for that Adjournment and some of the Members were willing to acquiesce for the sake of accommodation

Can any Men think it Right thus to lengthen out the Determination of this Business after having declared that Time to Consult the People was their only object—It will have the Appearance of Trifling—

Did we not Suggest to Congress that there was the Greatest Probability—and will it not be dishonorable for us to depart—This is the Constitution of the Country—as impossible for us to avoid being under it as would be for Fish thrown upon the Land with out aid again to get to the Sea—We are held to pay our Part of the National Debt—as much as if the Lands were Mortgaged—Let me ask the Landholders respecting a Matter in Which he is interested—The Farmers defeated the 5 per Cent<sup>36</sup>—has any thing been done Since to lessen the Debt—This Interest has run on—is running on—Eating Day & Night. It must be paid—will not propriation be called for—Congress have made Arrangement for destroying it by Revenue—if we adopt the Constitution



we shall have the same Means—if we do not adopt the Constitution we shall lose the opportunity—if we suffer another Jigg to be danced will not the worst Consequence follow—Have we not seen that Direct Taxation will not Do—We have been paying six per Cent Interest on Securities which we have sold for 2/6 in the Pound<sup>37</sup>—This Mischief has [been] unfair because we must—He asks no Office neither of Congress or the States. He shall Pity those who are now thus blinded—The Time will come when they will be convinced that this Measure is necessary

Gen. MILLER was against an Adjournment—But when out sold he will Submit. But if it is the Intention to adjourn so long he and his Constituents will petition Congress to be Set to Massachusetts<sup>38</sup>—He thought it proper to mention that this was his Intention—

COMSTOCK. We have voted to Adjourn—we have a Right to take our own Time—no wonder that those who were then against the Adjournment now wish to make the Time as short as possible—We are the servants of the People. We act for them—The Constitution is the Proper Work of the People—I cannot act against their Consent—When the People have had Time to think of it it will be proper to meet again—if we adjourn to the 24th Day of May we shall have time to consult. With respect to what Genl. Miller has Said of Petition we are independent State—if do any thing

Gen. MILLER. I cannot bear to be imposed Upon by the Gentleman—Instead of consulting the sentiments of his Constituents—He persuades them to be against the Constitution

MATHEWSON says That the Matter cannot be laid before the People till their Town Meetings because we cannot order Town Meetings to be called—

MARCHANT says this Shows us that we have reason to adjourn—Seven Men may call Town Meetings<sup>39</sup>—If 7 Men cannot be found willing to call Meetings we may certainly then proceed to adopt the Constitution—

The General Assembly gave it one Month.

CHAMPLIN has not said any thing on the subject of the Adjournment because ably spoken—Was it not for Proxing Time he supposed there would be Time enough—before April—Wishes Good men may be appointed—That the Members would go home with the Dispositions of Members in New Hampshire—Mr. Bourne has Stated the Ill Consequences—in same Respect Newport must have their Wood from abroad—the Price will be doubled—calls on the Gentleman from Middletown to witness the Melancholy Situation of Newport—These People have looked up to this Convention for Relief—they have been

Patient—Prevented from carrying away the Rum, Chocolate &c manufactured in this state. Have no Staple—could formerly with Spermacy Candle, Rum, Apples, Potatoes, Cyder, Cheeses &c obtain—

Send lately to South Carolina to purchase this Produce could only send 7 Bundles of Hay—Congress will be disappointed in not finding that.

Uncertain what Measures congress will take—This were only prevented last fall from Prohibiting the Exportation of the Produce of this State—enlarges here

If the Adjournment is to the Last of March The Representation to Congress may be chose

Calls for the Vote the Last Monday of March or not—

MATHEWSON proposes the Vote the Last of March or the [First?]

MARCHANT Relies on the Candour of the President to [— — —]

WATERMAN is for laying the Business

Desultory Debate on the Mode of putting the Vote—

COMSTOCK contends for the Vote being put by the Hands—Last Monday of March or 4th Monday in May.

B. BOURNE. We have not occasion to ask for favour—we have a Right to the Vote by Yea or Nay—Shall the Adjournment be on the Last Monday of March or not—

MARCHANT

March	31
Not	38
Not by seven Majority	

Mr. CHAMPLIN moves that the Adjournment be on the Monday following the Proxing Day

J. COMSTOCK contends for the Last Monday of May—

Col. BARTON begs Gentlemen to consider the Importance of the Matter—Congress will not extend further Indulgence. It is for the Poor and the Needy that he is Solicitous—The Merchants can remain—if it is postponed—he is afraid they will repent of it. Intreats and Beseeches the Gentlemen to attend to this Matter.

Gov. BOWEN says To postpone the Matter is a Wanton Exercise of Power—He has good Authority to suppose no further Indulgence will be given<sup>40</sup>

SECRETARY [DANIEL UPDIKE] [reads] Letter of Gen. Washington

Gov. BRADFORD Moves That The Vote may be the Last Monday of April or May. Will always be Opposed to Threats—will go with his fellow Citizens. But thinks we do not Stand so secure as some think we have Enemies from North to South—will ever do all in his Power for the Good of the State—will never consent to an Application to Congress.

Hurtful to the Sovereignty of the State—Saw Mr. Sayles Smile when it was observed that he would have Time enough to consult his Constituents. The Revenue not collecting—our Debt going on—Congress Raising.

Our Trade Stopped. Our Citizens Treated with Contempt—our State Disgraced—why should it be postponed

Moved that the Vote be [taken]

Gov. BRADFORD Points out the Certain Consequences of postponing the Matter till the 4th. Monday of May.

Mr. WILLIAMS. I did not think of airing any thing on this Matter but we have been so repeatedly called on by Gentlemen who have been Candid as we and we are Candid as they. These Gentlemen have called for our Reasons—But they are hardly to be persuaded that we have any Reasons. We are Sensible of the Weight of Reasons which have been engaged—is Sorry for the Difference of Sentiment—wishes that could be [- - -] who is [- - -]—will candidly give the Reason with as much surety as he Spoke—Those who are candid will allow this. We are on the Side of the People. We are to Act for them—He is on the Side of the People. They have been repeatedly called on to give their Sentiments on this. Must—This Convention originates from the choice of the Body of the People and we know coming from them that it is the Sentiments of the Great Body of the People that this Constitution Should be rejected—It takes some time to bring the whole People to an Agreement to the Constitution. We have had Time to Do the [- - -] but if we had done it we have Reason to Judge of the Consequence—But Time till the 4th Monday of May will be little enough—If the People will consent to the Adoption he will cheerfully acquiesce in the Government even if he was of a Different opinion—But it is his Duty to be on the Side of the People

Mr. BOURNE has wanted to hear the Reason which he expected the Gentleman would [give] but he has not heard a Single Reason—He has said that We know the Body of the People are against it—that his Constituents are against it—Therefore instead of voting for an Adjournment he ought to have voted for a Rejection of the Constitution—He had rather have the Constitution rejected than be postponed to the last Monday of May

Congress will probably subject our entry to the Commerce [duty] but [- - -] [- - -]

Hopes that The Reason given will convince the Inhabitants of Foster and all the other Towns

Gov. BRADFORD says That it is Time for the worthy Member Mr. W [i.e., John Williams] to wrestle with the People of his Town to persuade

them of the absolute Necessity of the Constitution being [adopted]. That he will have the same Candor for those who advocate the Constitution as he asked for those who are against it—as those who advocate it are also on the side of the People

May [24th]	36
Not	32

Mr. CHAMPLIN

[Vote on the place of meeting]

East Greenwich	34
Newport	35

1. See amendment 3 adopted by the Convention (RCS:R.I., 979).

2. “A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island” stated: “Will Congress suffer a single refractory State to embarrass its great, necessary national measures?” (*Newport Herald*, 18 February, RCS:R.I., 726).

3. The second amendment reported to the Convention, which was not adopted, reads “There shall be one representative for every thirty thousand free inhabitants, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding all slaves and Indians, until the whole number of representatives amount to two hundred, after which, that number shall be continued or increased as Congress shall direct, but shall not be diminished.”

4. See amendment 4 adopted by the Convention (RCS:R.I., 979).

5. See amendment 5 adopted by the Convention (RCS:R.I., 979–80).

6. The first North Carolina Convention (21 July to 4 August 1788) proposed a bill of rights and twenty-six structural amendments. The fifteenth amendment, in part, states: “. . . But the judicial power of the United States shall extend to no case where the cause of action shall have originated before the ratification of this constitution, except in disputes between states about their territory; disputes between persons claiming lands under the grants of different states, and suits for debts due to the united states” (CC:821). These amendments, dated 2 August 1788, were printed several times: as a two-page broadside, as a four-page broadside (Evans 21341), in the *North Carolina Convention Journal* (Evans 21337), and in the *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North-Carolina . . .* (Evans 22037). In Rhode Island, the amendments were reprinted in the *United States Chronicle* on 18 September 1788. A copy of the two-page broadside, signed by the Convention president and secretary, which was sent to Rhode Island’s governor is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives.

7. See Convention Debates (Foster), 5 March, note 10 (RCS:R.I., 948).

8. See amendment 16 adopted by the Convention (RCS:R.I., 980).

9. See amendment 17 adopted by the Convention (RCS:R.I., 981).

10. The reference is to the second article of the Association of the First Continental Congress (20 October 1774). See Convention Debates, 3 March 1790, note 15 (above).

11. Foster seems to have written “No. Carolina,” but the reference is probably to the seizure of “a cargo of near three hundred slaves . . . sent out of the Colony [of South Carolina] . . . [under] the second article of the Association” (John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution . . .* [2 vols., Charleston, 1821], I, 182). As to North Carolina, the state had acted on the slave trade even before the First Continental Congress had adopted the Association. On 27 August 1774 the First Provincial Convention of North Carolina had resolved “That we will not import any slave or slaves, or purchase any slave or slaves, imported or brought into this Province by others, from any part of the world, after the

first day of *November* next” (Peter Force, ed., *American Archives: Fourth Series* . . . [6 vols., Washington, 1837–1846], I, 735).

12. Both George Champlin and his brother Christopher were among the leading Newport merchants who were involved in the slave trade, even as late as 1798.

13. Thomas Allen (1742–1800), a farmer, represented Warren in the House of Deputies, 1767–68, and Barrington, October 1772–77, 1781–82. (Barrington had been part of Warren until 1772.) Allen served as a militia captain and deputy quartermaster general during the Revolutionary War, as lieutenant colonel of the Bristol County militia, 1783–85, 1786–87, 1791–94, and as brigadier general of that county’s militia, 1794–1800. He voted to ratify the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

14. See Convention Debates, 3 March, note 19 (RCS:R.I., 933).

15. See note 3 (above).

16. See “Henry Marchant: Motion to Ratify the Constitution,” 6 March (RCS:R.I., 950).

17. The Collection Act of 31 July 1789 subjected Rhode Island shipping to foreign tonnage and impost duties. On 16 September 1789 and 18 February 1790 Congress exempted Rhode Island from these duties. The second exemption was set to expire on 1 April and it appeared another exemption would not be granted. See RCS:R.I., 599n, 736–37.

18. Marchant and Bourne are referring to the following provision of the act of 17 January 1790 calling the state Convention: “That the said Convention be and hereby is empowered, and fully authorized, finally to decide on the said Constitution, as they shall judge to be most conducive to the Interests of the People of this State: And that the said Convention cause the Result of their Deliberations and proceedings, relative to the afore-said Constitution, to be transmitted to the PRESIDENT of the United States of *America*, as soon after the Rising thereof as may be” (RCS:R.I., 675).

19. Rhode Island Federalists had often used the fear that Congress would force the state quickly to pay its share of the wartime debt or expenses of the new central government to convince the state’s Convention delegates to ratify the Constitution. (For example, see “A Friend to the State of Rhode-Island,” *Newport Herald*, 18 February; “A Freeholder,” *ibid.*, 25 February; and “Solon, junior,” *Providence Gazette*, 27 February [RCS:R.I., 726, 733, 746]). When Congress considered punitive action against Rhode Island to force it to join the Union, a payment to cover the state’s share of the expenses of the United States before 3 March 1789 was part of the bill that passed the Senate on 18 May 1790 (RCS:R.I., 837–55, especially p. 847). No one, however, ever suggested that because of its share of the national domain (obtained through independence) that Rhode Island should benefit from the sale of this land and thereby become a net creditor of the central government.

20. See “Rhode Island Resolution Requesting the Governor to Apply to Congress to Suspend Acts Against Rhode Island,” 17 January 1790, and Governor John Collins to President George Washington, 18 January (RCS:R.I., 676–78).

21. See “Daniel Owen’s Bill Calling Town Meetings to Give Instructions on the New Constitution,” 17 January 1790 (RCS:R.I., 673–75n).

22. A variation of the proverb: “the more Haste, the worst Speed” (John Ettliger and Ruby Day, eds., *Old English Proverbs; Collected by Nathan Bailey, 1736, Edited from His Dictionarium Britannicum or a More Compleat Universal Etymological English Dictionary* [Metuchen, N.J., and London, 1992], 681).

23. Samuel J. Potter (c. 1750–1804), a lawyer, represented South Kingstown in the House of Deputies, 1782–83, 1786–90, and was brigadier general of the Washington County militia, 1788–90. Potter was deputy governor, 1790–1803; a presidential elector,

1792, 1796; and a U.S. Senator, 1803–4. He voted against ratifying the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

24. For the adjournments of the conventions of New Hampshire (22 February 1788) and North Carolina (4 August 1788), see CC:554 and CC:821. See also “The Reception in Rhode Island of the News of the North Carolina Convention Which Refused to Ratify the Constitution,” 31 July–27 December 1788 (RCS:R.I., 373–76).

25. John Davis (1756–1846) served in the state militia during the Revolutionary War, rising from the rank of lieutenant to that of major, a title he apparently used for the rest of his life. Davis represented Little Compton in the House of Deputies, 1790–93. He voted to ratify the Constitution in the March 1788 referendum and in the state Convention on 29 May 1790.

26. North Carolina’s ratification of the Constitution at a convention in Fayetteville on 21 November 1789 was widely reported in Rhode Island. See “The Reception in Rhode Island of the News of North Carolina’s Ratification of the Constitution,” 12–17 December 1789 (RCS:R.I., 642–48n).

27. A reference to the adoption by the Confederation Congress on 13 September 1788 of an ordinance providing for the first elections of federal officers under the new Constitution. For the text of the ordinance, see CC:845. Broad­sides of the ordinance were sent to all of the state executives by Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress. (See Thomson to the Governor of Rhode Island, 13 September 1788 [Letters to the Governor, Vol. 20, R-Ar; and broadside, 13 September 1788, Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar]). The ordinance was reprinted by more than fifty newspapers nationally. In Rhode Island, it appeared in the *United States Chronicle*, 18 September; *Providence Gazette*, 20 September; and *Newport Herald*, 25 September 1788.

28. See note 20 (above).

29. On 26 February 1788, four days after the New Hampshire Convention adjourned without ratifying the Constitution, Jeremiah Libbey—the postmaster of Portsmouth—observed that eleven delegates would have voted for the Constitution had they not been instructed to vote against it (to Jeremy Belknap, 26 February, Belknap Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society). John Langdon, a prominent Federalist delegate to the New Hampshire Convention, implied that the Convention could not have adjourned without the votes of such members since the Antifederalists were absolutely opposed to an adjournment (to Rufus King, 23 February, CC:554–A).

30. For a listing of how the delegates voted, see the *Providence Gazette*, 13 March (RCS:R.I., 975–76).

31. 21 April, the day of the annual statewide election.

32. For this indulgence or exemption, see note 17 (above).

33. On 3 November 1787 the legislature had ordered the Constitution printed and copies (varying from 10 to 100) sent to each town. See RCS:R.I., 25–26, 46–47.

34. See note 17 (above).

35. Two state Convention delegates were members of the House of Magistrates, thirty-eight were members of the House of Deputies, and Convention president Daniel Owen sat in the upper house as deputy governor.

36. In November 1782 Rhode Island rejected the congressional Impost of 1781, which put an end to the efforts to ratify this amendment to the Articles of Confederation. The revenue from the five percent import duties on foreign goods was earmarked to pay the Continental debt. See RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, pp. xxviii.

37. Part of Rhode Island’s state debt had been in six percent notes, which greatly depreciated. For their redemption, see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxiii–xxxiv.

38. General Nathan Miller represented Warren, one of a cluster of three Bristol County towns (the other two were Barrington and Bristol) that were on the east side of Narragansett Bay, in close proximity to the state of Massachusetts. Thus situated, the towns

could easily be annexed to Massachusetts, of which they had been a part until February 1747. (See map on end papers of this volume.) Miller, who had opposed adjournment, died a few days before the Convention reconvened on 24 May 1790.

39. For examples of freemen requesting that a town meeting be called, see “A Freeholder,” *United States Chronicle*, 18 September 1788; Portsmouth Town Meeting, 27 February 1790; and “Providence Freemen Request Town Meeting,” 24 May 1790 (RCS:R.I., 403, 697, 888–89).

40. Bowen is perhaps referring to a letter dated 4 February 1790 that he received from Tobias Lear, one of George Washington’s secretaries. Lear wrote on behalf of the President that “The Congress of the United States have taken the matter [of renewing the exemption previously granted to Rhode Island from foreign tonnage and impost duties] into consideration, and it is to be hoped that the adoption of the Constitution by the State of Rhode Island will, after this instance, render similar applications unnecessary from that State” (RG 59, Miscellaneous Letters of the Department of State, DNA). Bowen had sent to Washington the legislature’s 17 January request for an extension, which Congress had granted on 8 February. The act extended the exemption from duties until “the first day of April next, AND NO LONGER” (RCS:R.I., 678–79, 736–37).

### **Outline of Federalist Arguments Against the Adjournment of the March Convention<sup>1</sup>**

Memodm. The Act for Caling a Convention Mentions “There full & free Investigation & *Decision*”—To decide on sd. Constitut. as they shall Judge to be *Most Conducive to the Interests of the People of this State*,”<sup>2</sup>

See, The Act for Applying to Congress for a Suspension of there Acts<sup>3</sup>—Will prove Graily Injurious &c Unless a further Suspension of them Can be Obtain’d—& Every Reason to Hope that the Accession of this State to the Fedrel Union will Soon take place—on the Almost Certain Assurance of our Joyning the Union, has produced a further Suspension—but Note the Pressedts. Letter to Gov: Bowens mentions a Hope that this State will not have Ocation to Ask Again on this *Head*<sup>4</sup>—It is very necessary These acts Sho’d be fully Shown how much it was Expect by All Abroad that we Sho’d most Certainly Joyn the Union at this Convention, Witness all the publick Newspapers & Govr. Hancocks Speech The paragraf in his Speech Shod be re’d<sup>5</sup>—

Particular Attention Shod be had to the General Letter at the End of the Constitution Signd. by Predt. Washinton mentioning the Coole Deliberation Used by that Convention & how they endeavour’d to make Such a Constitution as would *Sute All* the States as well as they Could &c<sup>6</sup>—

There may be Objections rais’d agst. An Adjournment as by the Act for Caling the Convention they was to Decide Accordg. *to the best Interest of the People of the State*—Then all the Disadvantages & losses every way are to be pointed Out, Vzt. Sum of them are the *Ruin* of the State in there Trade, & Products of the Land wch. Cannot or will not be Carried out of the State, without Paying as foreigners, it may be Com-

puted to be a very grait loss in Particulars or in Round Sums—and no maner of advantages Can arrise—If any amendments are to be Made Now is the only time—no adjournment Can be made but will Carry the Convention the present Sessions of Congress, then what will become of all the Butter, Chees, Barly, Lime &c &c & all foreign Goods Imported More than Consum'd In the State wch Cant be Carryed out by land at any rate & if by water pay a forgein Duty—The Duty Collected here will be in Paper Money<sup>7</sup> that will Not ans[we]r Congress to Pay Our part of the Publick Debt, Then how Shall we pay our part of the Publick Debt which was promised by the Letter from the State in Septemr. last to Congress<sup>8</sup>—See Several Things in sd Letter wch. Amounts to a promise that We Sho'd Joyn the Union—The amendments was Mention'd so far as done to be Approved & are since all done & Approved if any more wanted point them Out with Members to Obtain them—But the Con-stitution must be first Granted—Honourable

1. MS, Brown Papers, RPJCB. This undated memorandum is crossed out. It appears to be signed "Jno. Brown Esqr," but the signature is not that of the prominent Providence merchant John Brown.

2. See Convention Debates (Foster), 6 March, note 18 (RCS:R.I., 969).

3. For this "Act" and Governor John Collins' 18 January 1790 letter to President George Washington, see RCS:R.I., 676–78.

4. For President George Washington's 4 February letter to former Deputy Governor Jabez Bowen, see Convention Debates (Foster), 6 March, note 40 (RCS:R.I., 971).

5. A reference to Governor John Hancock's 19 January 1790 address to the Massachusetts legislature. See *Massachusetts Centinel*, 20 January (Mfm:R.I.).

6. For President of the Constitutional Convention George Washington's 17 September 1787 letter to the President of Congress, see RCS:R.I., 322–23.

7. Under the September 1789 state impost, Rhode Island was collecting the same duties as those levied by Congress. The duties could be paid in Rhode Island paper money, which was legal tender in the state. See RCS:R.I., 601–3, and Bartlett, *Records*, X, 340–55.

8. For the 19 September 1789 letter from the Rhode Island legislature to the President and both houses of Congress, see RCS:R.I., 605–7.

### Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings, Friday, 6 March 1790

*Newport Herald*, 11 March 1790<sup>1</sup>

SATURDAY—A motion was made for the ratification of the Constitution, upon which the previous question was moved, to give way for a motion of adjournment; an interesting debate ensued, in which the necessity of an immediate adoption was clearly established, from the measures of the Legislature at the last Sessions, their application to Congress, and the consequent indulgence extended to the trade of this State, but which would cease the first of April:<sup>2</sup>—The situation of the sea-port towns was represented, and their distresses in consequence of



this State not being in the Union, were pointed out in a most striking manner; on the other side it was asserted that the majority of the citizens of this State were against the Constitution, that if the members present should now act they must reject it, but they observed *that a rejection would be dangerous*, that by an adjournment they should not experience the evils, which they had reason to fear might be consequent upon a rejection, and that this would give an opportunity for further consideration; but no assurances were given by the members in opposition, that they should come together with a more favorable disposition, nor any encouragement of a change of sentiments in their constituents:—upon the question being taken for an adjournment, it was decided in the affirmative, by a majority of 9.<sup>3</sup>

A motion was then made, that the time of adjournment should be, to the fourth Monday of March instant—In support of this motion it was observed, that the indulgence of Congress ceases on the first of April, and in case of an adoption, in the present month, we shall not suffer the injuries, which would attend an adjournment to a more distant day, and that it would afford full time for taking the sentiments of their constituents—This motion was however negatived by a majority of 6<sup>4</sup>—And the last Monday of May was proposed and carried by a majority of 4.<sup>5</sup>

(Newport was fixed on as the place of meeting, by a majority of 1.<sup>6</sup>

The Convention consisted of 70 members, all of whom were present on the second day, and gave their vote on every question which was taken.

After the vote of adjournment was carried, a vote passed for referring the consideration of the Bill of Rights and Amendments, to the Freeman of the State, at their annual meeting on the third Monday of April next.)

1. Reprinted: *Boston Gazette*, 29 March; *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 31 March. The *Boston Gazette*, 15 March, reprinted the text in angle brackets, shortening the previous paragraph to “Saturday last the Convention adjourn’d to the last Monday of May, it was carried by a majority of 4.” The *Gazette’s* version was reprinted by the Newburyport, Mass., *Essex Journal*, 11 March, and *Connecticut Courant*, 22 March. The *New York Daily Advertiser*, 27 March, printed a longer summary of the *Herald’s* account (along with a summary of the proceedings for 2–3 March) (Mfm:R.I.). Other portions of this item are printed under the newspaper reports of Convention proceedings for 2–3, 5 March (above).

2. For the legislature’s “application” and the “indulgence” granted by Congress, see RCS:R.I., 676–78, 736–37.

3. Theodore Foster’s notes of Convention debates and the *Providence Gazette*, 13 March, give the vote as 41-28 (RCS:R.I., 963, 975–76).

4. Foster has the motion losing 38 to 31 (RCS:R.I., 966).

5. Foster has the motion carrying 36 to 32 (RCS:R.I., 968).

6. Foster has Newport defeating East Greenwich 35 to 34 (RCS:R.I., 968).

*Providence Gazette, 13 March 1790*<sup>1</sup>

In our last were published Minutes of the Proceedings of Convention down to Thursday Se'nnight.

On Friday, the Committee appointed to draught Amendments reported a *Bill of Rights* and Amendments to the Constitution; the former became the Subject of Discussion, and was agreed to without any material Alteration. On Saturday the Amendments reported by the Committee occupied the Attention of the Convention. Two of these were rejected; one proposed that Congress should not have the Power of appointing such Officers, within the several States, as had been usually chosen by the State Legislatures; the Object of the other was to substitute Property as a Rule for Apportionment of direct Taxes, instead of Numbers.<sup>2</sup> It was contended by the Members opposed to these Amendments, that the Constitution did not invest Congress, or the President of the United States, with the Power of appointing State Officers, and that there was no Clause which could warrant such a Construction: That the Rule of Apportionment of Taxes by Property, instead of Numbers, would eventually operate injuriously to this State: That our Proportion would be augmented, and that the Apportionment by a Valuation of Estates had been found from Experience to be impracticable. Other Arguments were adduced to shew the Impropriety of these Amendments, and the Convention were induced to strike them out of the Report of the Committee. The proposed Amendment that Congress should, as soon as may be, provide effectual Regulations to prevent the Importation of Slaves into the United States, occasioned considerable Debate. The Gentlemen who opposed it stated, that if such an Amendment could have any Effect to abolish the African Trade, they should by no Means object to its being recommended; but they contended that the Constitution itself expressly provided against any Alteration or Amendment of this Clause until the Year 1808: That it was therefore nugatory to propose an Amendment, which, consistently with the Constitution, could not obtain a Ratification. On the other Hand it was urged, that a Traffic in the human Species was so wicked in its Nature, and so inconsistent with the Spirit of a free Government, that if the proposed Amendment could not take Place, it was proper for the Convention to recommend it, as evincing their Sense respecting so infamous a Traffic. Many other Observations were made in Favour of and against this Amendment, and on the Convention being called, there appeared a Majority of one in Favour of it.

After all the Amendments had been fully considered, and finally voted (as inserted in this Day's Gazette)<sup>3</sup> Mr. Marchant moved in Form for a

Ratification of the Constitution. This Motion was seconded by Mr. B. Bourn.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Comstock immediately rose, and moved, as a previous Question, for an Adjournment. A very lengthy Debate then ensued on the Motion of Mr. Comstock. The Power of the Convention to adjourn was questioned. It was observed, that the Delegates were chosen expressly to meet at a certain Time and Place, then and there to investigate and *decide* on the Constitution: That these were the very Words of the Act of Government for calling a Convention; and the same Language was used by the several Towns in the Appointment of their Delegates: That a Power to investigate and *decide* at a certain Time, did not imply a Power to *adjourn*: That the Delegates being thus elected for the express Purpose of deciding on the Constitution, it was the Expectation of the People that the Question for its Ratification or Rejection should then be taken. However, upon the Motion for an Adjournment, it was carried in the Affirmative by a Majority of Thirteen. Governor Bradford then proposed that the Adjournment should be to the last Monday of March inst. In Favour of this Motion it was observed, that the Adjournment proposed would afford sufficient Time to lay the Bill of Rights and Amendments before the People for their Consideration, and that as this had been the ostensible Object with the Gentlemen who had voted for an Adjournment, it was hoped the Motion would be agreed to. Against an Adjournment beyond the present Month, many Reasons were urged: That Congress having been assured by the Legislature, that there was every Reason to hope that this State would *speedily* accede to the Union, they had granted us a further Exemption from the foreign Impost and Tonnage Duties: That this Indulgence would expire on the first of April, and there was not the least Probability of obtaining any further Exemption:<sup>5</sup> That the Citizens of this State employed and subsisted entirely in the fishing and coasting Business were numerous, and that the Navigation Laws of the Union must operate with such Severity on these Classes of Citizens, as would reduce them to the Alternative of starving at Home, or moving into the other States. Many other Arguments were added, shewing the numerous Disadvantages which would result from an Adjournment beyond the Time proposed; but on the Question being taken for an Adjournment to the last Monday of March, it was negatived by a Majority of seven. Mr. Andrew Waterman then moved for an Adjournment to the fourth Monday of May. Others proposed an intermediate Time, and the fourth Monday of April was mentioned; but the Motion of Mr. Waterman obtained by a Majority of five.

On the first Question for an Adjournment, the Yeas and Nays were as follow:

YEAS. Burrington Anthony, Job Durfee, Giles Slocum, Peter Barker, Gideon Arnold, Thomas Rice, Edward Hull, Ray Sands, William Congdon, Bowen Card, Jonathan J. Hazard, Samuel J. Potter, Pardon Mawney, Job Comstock, Andrew Waterman, John Sayles, James Aldrich, Nathan Bates, Stephen Steer, Joseph Stanton, jun. Thomas Hoxsie, William Nichols, William Matthewson, Benjamin Arnold of Coventry, Job Greene, Joseph Reynolds, Job Wilcox, Joshua Barker, William Peckham, James Sheldon, Thomas James, Peter Stone, Jonathan Sprague, John Brown of Hopkinton, Jesse Maxson, Noah Matthewson, William B. King, Elisha Brown, Esek Eston, William Howard, John Williams.—41.

NAYS. George Hazard, Henry Marchant, George Champlin, Peleg Clarke, George Sears, William Tripp, Jabez Bowen, Benjamin Bourn, William Barton, John I. Clark, Benjamin Arnold of Warwick, Christopher Green, Walter White, George Stillman, Benjamin Remington, Nicholas Carr, William Bradford, Shearjashub Bourn, Israel Manchester, Abraham Barker, John Davis, William Ladd, Nathan Miller, Samuel Pearce, John S. Dexter, Levi Ballou, Thomas Allen, Samuel Allen.—28.

1. Reprinted: *Newport Mercury*, 15 March; *Connecticut Norwich Packet*, 19 March; *Massachusetts Centinel*, 24 March; and *New Hampshire Spy*, 27 March.

2. For this amendment, see *Convention Debates* (Foster), 5 March, note 10 (RCS:R.I., 948).

3. Immediately below.

4. See "Henry Marchant: Motion to Ratify the Constitution," 6 March (RCS:R.I., 950).

5. See *Convention Debates* (Foster), 6 March, note 17 (RCS:R.I., 969).

### **Rhode Island Convention: Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments 6 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The BILL of RIGHTS, and AMENDMENTS to the CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, as agreed to by the CONVENTION of the State of *Rhode-Island and Providence-Plantations*, at *South-Kingstown*, in the County of *Washington*, on the *First Monday of March*, A. D. 1790.

#### DECLARATION of RIGHTS.

1. That there are certain natural rights, of which men, when they form a social compact, cannot deprive or divest their posterity—among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

2. That all power is naturally vested in and consequently derived from the people: That magistrates, therefore, are their trustees and agents, and at all times amenable to them.

3. That the powers of government may be reassumed by the people, whensoever it shall become necessary to their happiness:—That the

rights of the States respectively to nominate and appoint all State officers, and every other power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by the said Constitution clearly delegated to the Congress of the United States, or to the departments of government thereof, remain to the people of the several States, or their respective State governments, to whom they may have granted the same;—and that those clauses in the said Constitution, which declare that Congress shall not have or exercise certain powers, do not imply, that Congress is entitled to any powers not given by the said Constitution;—but such clauses are to be construed, either as exceptions to certain specified powers, or as inserted merely for greater caution.

4. That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence—and therefore all men have an equal, natural and unalienable right to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience;—and that no particular religious sect, or society, ought to be favoured or established by law, in preference to others.

5. That the legislative, executive and judiciary powers of government, should be separate and distinct;—and that the members of the two first may be restrained from oppression, by feeling and participating the public burthens, they should at fixed periods be reduced to a private station, return into the mass of the people, and the vacancies be supplied by certain and regular elections—in which all or any part of the former members to be eligible or ineligible, as the rules of the Constitution of government and the laws shall direct.

6. That elections of Representatives in the Legislature ought to be free and frequent—and all men, having sufficient evidence of permanent common interest with and attachment to the community, ought to have the right of suffrage: And no aid, charge, tax or fee, can be set, rated or levied upon the people, without their own consent, or that of their Representatives, so elected;—nor can they be bound by any law, to which they have not, in like manner, assented for the public good.

7. That all power of suspending laws, or the execution of laws, by any authority, without the consent of the Representatives of the people in the Legislature, is injurious to their rights, and ought not to be exercised.

8. That in all capital and criminal prosecutions, a man hath a right to demand the cause and nature of his accusation—to be confronted with the accusers and witnesses—to call for evidence, and be allowed

counsel in his favour—and to a fair and speedy trial by an impartial jury of his vicinage, without whose unanimous consent he cannot be found guilty (except in the government of the land and naval forces) nor can he be compelled to give evidence against himself.

9. That no freeman ought to be taken, imprisoned, or disseized of his freehold, liberties, privileges or franchises, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any manner destroyed, or deprived of his life, liberty or property, but by the trial by jury, or by the law of the land.

10. That every freeman restrained of his liberty is entitled to a remedy, to enquire into the lawfulness thereof, and to remove the same, if unlawful;—and that such remedy ought not to be denied or delayed.

11. That in controversies respecting property, and in suits between man and man, the ancient trial by jury, as hath been exercised by us and our ancestors, from the time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary, is one of the greatest securities to the rights of the people, and ought to remain sacred and inviolate.

12. That every freeman ought to obtain right and justice freely, and without sale—completely, and without denial—promptly, and without delay—and that all establishments or regulations, contravening these rights, are oppressive and unjust.

13. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel or unusual punishments inflicted.

14. That every person has a right to be secure from all unreasonable searches and seizures of his person, his papers, or his property;—and therefore that all warrants to search suspected places, or seize any person, his papers, or his property, without information upon oath, or affirmation of sufficient cause, are grievous and oppressive;—and that all general warrants (or such in which the place or person suspected are not particularly designated) are dangerous, and ought not to be granted.

15. That the people have a right peaceably to assemble together, to consult for their common good, or to instruct their Representatives;—and that every person has a right to petition, or apply to the Legislature, for redress of grievances.

16. That the people have a right to freedom of speech, and of writing and publishing their sentiments:—That freedom of the press is one of the greatest bulwarks of liberty, and ought not to be violated.

17. That the people have a right to keep and bear arms:—That a well regulated militia, including the body of the people capable of bearing arms, is the proper, natural and safe defence of a free State:—That the militia shall not be subject to martial law, except in time of war, rebellion or insurrection:—That standing armies in time of peace are

dangerous to liberty, and ought not to be kept up, except in cases of necessity;—and that at all times the military should be under strict subordination to the civil power:—That in time of peace no soldier ought to be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner—and in time of war, only by the civil magistrate, in such manner as the law directs.

18. That any person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms, ought to be exempted, upon payment of an equivalent to employ another to bear arms in his stead.

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AMENDMENTS to the CONSTITUTION of the UNITED STATES.

1. The United States shall guarantee to each State its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by this Constitution expressly delegated to the United States.

2. That Congress shall not alter, modify or interfere, in the times, places and manner, of holding elections for Senators and Representatives, or either of them, except when the Legislature of any State shall neglect, refuse, or be disabled, by invasion or rebellion, to prescribe the same;—or in case when the provision made by the States is so imperfect, as that no consequent election is had;—and then only, until the Legislature of such State shall make provision in the premises.

3. It is declared by the Convention, that the judicial power of the United States, in cases in which a State may be a party, does not extend to criminal prosecutions, or to authorize any suit by any person against a State—but, to remove all doubts or controversies respecting the same, that it be especially expressed as a part of the Constitution of the United States, that Congress shall not, directly or indirectly, either by themselves or through the judiciary, interfere with any one of the States in the redemption of paper money already emitted, and now in circulation, or in liquidating and discharging the public securities of any one State:—That each and every State shall have the exclusive right of making such laws and regulations for the before mentioned purposes, as they shall think proper.

4. That no amendments to the Constitution of the United States hereafter to be made, pursuant to the fifth article, shall take effect, or become a part of the Constitution of the United States, after the year 1793, without the consent of eleven of the States heretofore united under one Confederation.

5. That the judicial powers of the United States shall extend to no possible case, where the cause of action shall have originated before the ratification of this Constitution, except in disputes between States

about their territory—disputes between persons claiming lands under grants of different States—and debts due to the United States.

6. That no person shall be compelled to do military duty, otherwise than by voluntary enlistment, except in cases of general invasion; any thing in the second paragraph of the sixth article of the Constitution, or any law made under the Constitution, to the contrary notwithstanding.

7. That no capitation or poll-tax shall ever be laid by Congress.

8. In cases of direct taxes, Congress shall first make requisitions on the several States, to assess, levy and pay, their respective proportions of such requisitions, in such way and manner as the Legislatures of the several States shall judge best. And in case any State shall neglect or refuse to pay its proportion, pursuant to such requisition, then Congress may assess and levy such State's proportion, together with interest at the rate of six per cent. per annum, from the time prescribed in such requisition.

9. That Congress shall lay no direct taxes, without the consent of the Legislatures of three-fourths of the States in the Union.

10. That the journals of the proceedings of the Senate and House of Representatives shall be published, as soon as conveniently may be, at least once in every year, except such parts thereof, relating to treaties, alliances, or military operations, as in their judgment require secrecy.

11. That regular statements of the receipts and expenditures of all public monies shall be published at least once a year.

12. As standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, and ought not to be kept up, except in cases of necessity; and as at all times the military should be under strict subordination to the civil power—that therefore no standing army, or regular troops, shall be raised or kept up in time of peace.

13. That no monies be borrowed on the credit of the United States, without the assent of two-thirds of the Senators and Representatives present in each House.

14. That the Congress shall not declare war, without the concurrence of two-thirds of the Senators and Representatives present in each House.

15. That the words “without the consent of Congress,” in the seventh clause, in the ninth section of the first article of the Constitution, be expunged.

16. That no Judge of the Supreme Court of the United States shall hold any other office under the United States, or any of them; nor shall any officer appointed by Congress be permitted to hold any office under the appointment of any of the States.



17. As a traffic tending to establish or continue the slavery of any part of the human species, is disgraceful to the cause of liberty and humanity—that Congress shall, as soon as may be, promote and establish such laws and regulations as may effectually prevent the importation of slaves of every description into the United States.<sup>2</sup>

18. And that the amendments proposed by Congress, in March, A. D. 1789, be adopted by this Convention, except the second article therein contained.<sup>3</sup>

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*In CONVENTION, March 6, 1790.*

VOTED, That the Bill of Rights and Amendments, proposed to the Federal Constitution, be referred to the Freemen of the several towns, at their meetings on the Third Wednesday of April next, for their consideration: That one copy thereof be sent to each Town-Clerk in this State, one to each Member of the Convention, and one to each Member of the Upper and Lower Houses of Assembly; and that they be sent to the Sheriffs of the several Counties, to be distributed.

The foregoing is a true Copy.

*By Order of the Convention,*  
DANIEL UPDIKE, *Secretary.*

1. Broadside printed by John Carter (Evans 22845). The bill of rights and amendments were also reprinted in the *United States Chronicle*, 11 March; *Providence Gazette*, 13 March; *Newport Herald*, 18 March; *Newport Mercury*, 26 March; *Maryland Journal*, 2 April; and *Charleston City Gazette*, 22 April. For a discussion of the manuscript versions of the bill of rights and amendments, see *Convention Proceedings*, 5 March, note 1 (RCS:R.I., 942–43n).

2. A draft of this amendment is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. The sheet of paper also contains the names of the ten-man committee on amendments (Mfm:R.I.).

3. A reference to the twelve amendments approved by Congress on 25 September 1789 and sent to the states for their ratification by President George Washington on 2 October 1789. The second amendment provided that “No law varying the Compensations for the Services of the Senators and Representatives shall take effect, until an Election of Representatives shall have intervened” (Appendix I, below). This amendment was adopted as the Twenty-seventh Amendment in 1992.

### Private Commentary on the March Convention

**Henry Marchant to John Adams**  
**Newport, 7 March 1790<sup>1</sup>**

It is mortifying to be beat in a good Cause, without Sense or Argument; but merely by Self-Will and vile Principles—Our Convention sat

all the last Week—Our NewsPapers I suppose will give you the particulars. It was with Difficulty I could get a Motion for the main Question upon the Journalls—An Adjournment was determined upon by the Anties before they met Us, in their private Conventions:—And they held nocturnal Conventions<sup>2</sup> the whole Week, for the Purpose of carrying their own Measures;—and for settling their Arrangements for the Genl. Election—The Dep: Gov: Owens President of the Convention, did not hesitate to say out of Doors, that an Adjournment of the Convention was necessary to insure their Election—He is proposed for Govr — Collins having been their weak Fool long enough—O——s is a Man of more Subtilty—a profound Hypocrite—at the Gen: Assembly after the Vote for calling a Convention; He took me by the Hand, and altho' He had voted against it; He declared I could not more rejoice than He did—He had voted as He had done He said, because the People round Him were averse to the Measure as yet, but were coming over fast; and He had no Doubt the Constitution would be adopted as soon as the Convention met.—Yet He now came with the greatest Zeal for an Adjournment—He still holds up the Idea that it will soon be adopted—

The great Objection which had been made by one of Their Leaders—Jona. Hazzard a Delegate in the former Congress—was the mode of proportioning the Tax by Numbers;—instead of the former Method—The Word Tax,—partial Tax &c sounded in the Ears of the People, had been alarming; but when an Amendment for that Purpose was brought forward—His own Party failed Him; and we had a Majority of six for the Mode fixed by the Constitution—They were now left without any formidable Objections—We took Notice that there had been a Number of Things suggested out of Doors, which we were surprised, none would now father, or even mention—In short They were beat out of all Their strong Holds—We agreed to Their Bill of Rights, copied nearly from New York, and Their Amendments taken mostly from New York, with Their Darling Paper Money Amendment copied from our dear Sister North Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

What was now left, but that we should adopt the Constitution?—It must be sent to the People for the Consideration of the Towns!—And I expect next to hear the Amendments must be sent to Congress, to see if They will agree to adopt Them, previous to Our adopting the Constitution—And this will be the sine qua non, of many—

Their Majority when we met was twelve agt. the Constitution—Could We have brought on the Question, I presume We should have been beat by four—wheather We shall succeed in getting that four is uncertain:—They had Instructions from Their Town to vote for the Constitution, but a few Days before the Convention met; and were directed

not to vote for any Adjournment; without the greatest Necessity; and then not beyond the first of April.<sup>4</sup>—But They paid no Attention to Their Instructions—How They may yet be operated upon is uncertain—I have done giving, for I have almost lost my, Hopes of Success—Misery will fall upon the Merchantile Interest, and upon poor Newport most heavily:—Wood & Flower will rise to an extravagant Price—The Farmer will not begin to feel till next Fall, unless Congress provide otherwise—Pray Sir, what must become of Us? what more can we do, if the Constitution is not adopted at the Adjournment of the Convention the 24th. of May. And what will be the Measures of Congress in that Case?—If we adopt the Constitution The Anties hope to be able to send forward Their own Creatures;—and expect The Recommendations of Their Senators &c will be sufficient to procure Appointments to Their own peculiar Friends.

I fear Congress may adjourn, before They may be able to pass the proper Bills for collecting the Revenue &c &c should We adopt the Constitution the last of May:—For it must be sometime in June, before Our Assembly will meet to choose Senators &c—Will there be a Necessity that Our Senators &c should be appointed and be in Congress, previous to Congress's passing the necessary Bills and making all the proper Arrangements?—I wish to be advised hereon—I had the Honor to write You Sir the 19th. of Decr. and 18th. of Janry. last<sup>5</sup>—I could wish barely to know they were recd.—We want the best Advice:—What we may *fear*, what *We* may *hope*, should we fail at last—

My Family join me in Respects to Mrs. Adams and the Family—With sincere Esteem

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi. For another letter commenting on the March Convention, see Henry Sherburne to Henry Knox, 7 March (RCS:R.I., 753–54).

2. For “nocturnal conventions,” see “Glossary” (RCS:R.I., 317).

3. Recommended on 2 August 1788 by the North Carolina Convention, the 25th amendment reads: “That Congress shall not directly or indirectly, either by themselves or thro’ the judiciary, interfere with any one of the states in the redemption of paper money already emitted and now in circulation, or in liquidating and discharging the public securities of any one of the states: But each and every state shall have the exclusive right of making such laws and regulations for the above purposes as they shall think proper” (CC:821, p. 319).

For the New York amendments, see CC:818, or RCS:N.Y., 2326–35n.

4. For the instructions to ratify the Constitution and not to adjourn beyond 1 April, see the Portsmouth Town Meeting, 27 February 1790 (RCS:R.I., 699–703n). All four Portsmouth delegates voted to adjourn.

5. See Marchant to Adams, 19 December 1789 and 18 January 1790 (RCS:R.I., 649–50, 680–82n).

**VIII.**  
**THE RHODE ISLAND CONVENTION**  
**SECOND SESSION**  
**24–29 May 1790**

**Introduction**

The second session of the Rhode Island Convention assembled at the State House in Newport on Monday, 24 May 1790, but no quorum was attained. The Convention adjourned to the next day but did no business even though all seventy members were listed as present. Benjamin Bosworth, the town of Warren's replacement for General Nathan Miller, who had died in the interim, took his seat.

On Wednesday, 26 May, a motion was made to adopt the Constitution, whereupon Antifederalist Job Comstock of East Greenwich moved for an adjournment "for a Short time." Federalists questioned the propriety of the motion, but President Daniel Owen ruled that, according to the Convention's rules, all motions for adjournment were proper and took precedence over any other consideration. The vote to adjourn was defeated, probably 36 to 29. In the afternoon session the Convention read the Constitution and the bill of rights and amendments proposed by the March Convention. The Convention reconstituted the ten-man committee that had drafted the bill of rights and amendments in March and ordered it to consider additional amendments to the Constitution that might have been proposed by the towns during the Convention's three-month recess. Before adjourning for the day, the delegates agreed to reconvene at the Second Baptist Church.

On Thursday, 27 May, the Reverend Gardner Thurston opened the proceedings with prayer. The committee on amendments reported and the Convention accepted an additional amendment allowing state legislatures to recall and replace their federal senators. In the afternoon session the Convention appointed another ten-man committee to consider additional amendments and to draft a form of ratification.

The Convention adjourned to the next morning, Friday, 28 May, when the Reverend William Patten of the Second Congregational Church opened the session with prayer. The committee reported a form of ratification that included three additional amendments and recommended the deletion of the March Convention's eighteenth amendment calling for the legislature to approve eleven of the twelve amendments to the

Constitution proposed by Congress in September 1789. In place of this deleted amendment, the Convention substituted a resolution recommending that the legislature adopt eleven of Congress' twelve amendments. The Convention considered the committee's report the rest of the morning and afternoon, when, at about 5:00 P.M., one of Portsmouth's four delegates proposed a short recess until three o'clock on Saturday so that he could meet with his townsmen and apprise them of the Convention's proceedings. Although most Antifederalists opposed the motion, it was carried by a majority of eight.

During the short recess, the towns of Portsmouth and Middletown reconsidered their instructions. Portsmouth reaffirmed its previous instructions for its delegates to vote to ratify the Constitution, while Middletown instructed its delegates not to reject the Constitution or to adjourn the Convention, whereupon Antifederalist William Peckham, Jr., resigned and was replaced by Federalist Elisha Barker.

The Convention reconvened on Saturday afternoon, 29 May, with opening prayers by the Reverend William Smith of Trinity Episcopal Church. Federalist Benjamin Bourne of Providence moved that the Convention adopt the Constitution, which was seconded by his fellow townsman and Federalist Jabez Bowen. At 5:20 P.M., the delegates voted 34 to 32 to ratify the Constitution. The form of ratification included a bill of rights and recommendatory amendments. The Convention then unanimously agreed that the state legislature should adopt eleven of Congress' twelve amendments to the Constitution. The Convention unanimously thanked President Owen for his "Candor and impartiality" and ordered that 300 copies of the form of ratification with its bill of rights and recommendatory amendments be printed and distributed. After thanking the clergy who had officiated, the Convention adjourned *sine die*.

As the Convention's secretary, Daniel Updike briefly recorded the proceedings, which are found in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. Neither Updike nor Theodore Foster took notes of the debates in the May session.

On 29 May President Daniel Owen wrote to President George Washington informing him that Rhode Island had ratified the Constitution and that the state legislature would soon choose U.S. Senators. Owen also mentioned that the official form of ratification would soon be forwarded. William Barton carried Owen's letter to New York City, where Washington transmitted a copy of it to Congress on 1 June. On 9 June Owen sent the official engrossed form of ratification to Washington who received it on 15 June. The next day Washington transmitted Owen's letter and the form of ratification to both houses of Congress.

**Convention Proceedings, 24–29 May 1790****[24 May 1790]**

At a Convention began and held at Newport in the County of Newport, on the Twenty fourth day of May AD 1790. by Adjournment for the purpose of Investigating and deciding on the new Constitution proposed for the United States of America—

Delegates Present

Newport

Mr. George Champlin

Mr. Geor. Sears

from Several other Towns

Mr. John Davis

Mr. Isaac Manchester

Mr. Abraham Barker

Mr. Willm. Ladd

Mr. Jesse Maxson

Mr. Willm. Peckham

Mr. John Brown

Mr. Willm. Nichols

Mr. Walter White

Mr. George Stilman

The House *then* Adjourned to Tuesday the 25th. Inst. 10 o'clock A.M.—

**[25 May 1790]**

Tuesday 10, o'clock the Convention Met according to adjournment—  
Present—

[The names of all seventy delegates are listed here in the proceedings.]<sup>1</sup>

The President [Daniel Owen] adjourned the House to 3 o'clock P.M.—

The House met according to adjournmt.

Present as in the forenoon—

Memo[randu]m This day Mr. Benjamin Bosworth produced a certificate from the Town of Warren Certifying that he is Chosen a Member to represent sd. Town in this Convention in the room of Genl. Nathan Miller Dec[ease]d—whereupon he took his Seat—

The house *then* adjourned to 9 o'clock Tomorrow mornng—  


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**[26 May 1790]**

The house met according to adjournmt—  


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[At this point, according to the *Newport Herald*, 27 May (RCS:R.I., 1004), a motion was made to adopt the Constitution.]

moved By Mr. [Job] Combstock That this Convention do adjourn for a Short time

moved by the house that the Propriety of the Motion be determined by the President who says it is in order agreeable to the rules and orders of the house—

The Question being then put adjourn or not it passed in the Negative by Majority of Six<sup>2</sup>—  


---

The house Adjourned to 3 o'clock P.M.  


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The House then met according to adjournmt. and the constitution of the Federal Government being read.—and the Amendmts. proposed by this State<sup>3</sup> &c

Voted that the former Coĩttee from the several Counties in this State (Mr. Giles Slocum being Chose in the room of Mr. Ray Sands who is Absent)<sup>4</sup> do proceed to make such further amendmts to the Sd. Proposed Federal Constitution—as they shall think Expedient agreeable to the Instructions from the several Towns<sup>5</sup>—and that they report  


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The House then adjourned Tomorrow mornng 9. o'clock Then to meet at the Revd. Mr. Thurston's Meeting house in this Town—  


---

**[27 May 1790]**

The house Met at the Baptist Meeting house in Newport on the 27th. day of May inst. according to adjournmt.—and previous to the Opening of the business of the day the Reved. Mr. Thurston made a Prayer Suitable to the Occation<sup>6</sup>—  


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The report of the Coĩttee being received and read the following amendment was agreed on in Addition to those Amendmts. agreed to at the first Meeting of this Convention at South Kingston in March Last.—and which Amendmt. is entered on the Original Amendment accordingly—Towit,

“That the State Legislatures have Power to recall, when they think it Expedient, their Federal Senators and to send others in their Stead.”—

---

The house then adjournd to 3 o clock P.M.—

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Thursday 3 o clock P.M. the House Met according to adjournmt.  
Present as in the forenoon—

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Thursday 3. o Clock P.M.—

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The House being called—Voted that there be a comtee to draft such further Amendmts to the Federal Constitution as they shall think necessary, and also the filling up and Completing the bill ratifying the form of the Adoption of the Federal Constitution—and that the Comtee Consist of Two from each County; towit, from Newport, Mr. Geor. Champlin Mr. Burrington Anthony, from Providence Mr. Benja Bourne & Mr. Stephen Steere. Washington Mr. Jona. J Hazzard & Mr. George Stilman—Bristol Mr. Shearjashub Bourne Mr. Benjamin Boseard [i.e., Bosworth] Kent Mr. Benjamin Arnold and Mr. Chrstr. Greene<sup>7</sup>—and that they report as soon as may be—

---

The house then adjournd to 10. o clock Tomorrow Morng—

---

**[28 May 1790]**

Fryday Morning 10. o Clock May 28th. 1790.

The house then met according to adjournmt.  
Present as Yesterday—

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The business of the day being Preceeded by an Elegant and Concise address to the Deity by the revd. Mr. Patton<sup>8</sup>—

The House then took up the report of their Comitte<sup>9</sup>—

---

Which being read and received ordered The three articles of ~~amendmt.~~ reported by the comtee in addition to those Amendmts already made be added to the Amendmts. & Ingrosed—Towit

⟨1st. That Congress have Power to Establish a uniform Rule of Inhabitancy or settlmt. of the Poor of the United States throughout the United States.

2d. That Congress erect no Company with exclusive Advantages of Commerce—



3d. That when Two Members shall call for the Ayes & Nays to be taken on any Question they shall be entered on the Journals of the Respective Houses—

And the Comtee further report that the Eighteenth Article of the Amendmts as agreed to by the Convention in South Kingston<sup>10</sup> be expunged, and that in Stead thereof a resolution pass the Convention for recommending the amendments agreed to by Congress in March 1789<sup>11</sup>—except the second article thereof to the Legislature of this State for their ratification pursuant to the fifth Article of the Constitution—

And the Comtee further report that the form of Ratification be agreeable to the one which they here with Present)

Signed by Comtee—

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The House then Adjourned to 3. o clock P.M.

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Three o clock P.M. The house Then met according to Adjournmt. and proceed to the debates as in the forenoon on the Federal Constitution in the General—

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The house then Voted to Adjourn to Saturday ~~Morning~~ Afternoon 3 o clock P.M.—

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**[29 May 1790]**

Saturday 3 o clock P.M. The house then met according to adjournmt—

Present as yesterday—

The Revd. Mr. Willm. Smith made a Prayer suitable to the Occasion<sup>12</sup>—

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Memo[randu]m This day Mr. Elisha Barker Produced a Certificate from the Town of Middleton Certifying that he is chosen a Member to represent said Town of Middleton in this Convention in the room of Willm. Peckham Junr. who has resigned—Whereupon he took his seat.<sup>13</sup>

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Mr. [Benjamin] Bourne then Moved for the Grand Question of adopting or rejecting the Federal Govermt—which was Seconded by Govr. [Jabez] Bowen—

The Questn. being then put at 20 minuets Past five P.M.—it Passed in the Affirmative—Thirty four Members Voting for the adoption and Thirty Two against it<sup>14</sup>—

---

Vote that the Bill Ratifying and adopting the Federal Constitution with the Amendments that were approved Reported by the Committee be & the same is approved by this Convention<sup>15</sup>

---

It is Resolved Unanimously that the Amendmts, agreed to by Congress in March 1789—and Proposed to the Legislatures of the Several States except the Second Article thereof be recommended by this Convention to the Legislature of this State for their ratification Pursuant to the fifth Article of the Constitution of the United States.<sup>16</sup>—

---

It is voted Unanimously that the thanks of this Convention be Presented to the President [Daniel Owen], for the Candor and impartiality with which he has discharged the Office of President—

Resolved that Three hundred Copies of the ratification of the Constitution of the united States of America by the Convention of this State including the bill of Rights, and the amendments be Printed, that one copy be sent to each Member of this Convention one to each Town clerk, and one to each of the Upper and Lower houses of Assembly for the Genl. Information of the People—(and that they be sent to the Sheriffs of the different Counties to be distributed.)<sup>17</sup>—

It is voted that the Thanks of the Convention be Presented to the Revd. Clergy who have Officiated at this Convention for their Attendance & good Offices—

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The Convention then adjourned sine die—

1. In addition to the proceedings, two manuscript lists of the delegates at the Convention in Newport are in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. Despite being listed as present, Ray Sands and Edward Hull of New Shoreham probably did not attend the May session of the Convention.

2. The following item is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives:

That the Legality of [the] Motion of Mr. Combstock for an Ajournment of this Convention be determined by the President—who says it is in order—agreeable to the rules & orders of the house—The Question being the[n] put whether adjourn or not—being put it passed in the Negative by Majority of Six[.]

For this possible vote against adjournment, see “Convention Roll Call Vote on Adjournment, 26 May 1790, and on Ratification, 29 May 1790” (RCS:R.I., 994–96). The *Newport Herald*, 27 May, indicated that there was a majority of nine against adjournment (RCS:R.I., 1004).

3. For the bill of rights and amendments proposed by the Convention at its March session, see RCS:R.I., 976–81.

4. For the committee appointed on 4 March, see RCS:R.I., 936, 940.

5. See “Town Meetings Consider Rhode Island Convention Bill of Rights and Proposed Amendments,” 21 April (RCS:R.I., 830–36).

6. The Second Baptist Church, founded in 1656, was built in 1706–7 (and enlarged in 1725) and was located on North Baptist and Farewell streets in Newport. The Reverend Gardner Thurston (1721–1802) served as its pastor from 1759 until 1801. For a one-page acoustic printed in Newport in 1791 spelling out “Gardner Thurston,” see Evans 46106.

7. Only Hazard and Steere had served on the previous ten-man committee that drafted the Convention’s bill of rights and amendments in March.

8. The Reverend William Patten (1763–1839) served as pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Newport from 1786 until 1833.

9. Three reports of the committee are in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. Two of the reports list only two amendments. The first amendment deals with recalling U.S. Senators (amendment 18 in the form of ratification) and is marked “voted & passed.” The second amendment, marked “expunged” or “not Passed,” reads: “That the Direct Taxes Quotaed by Congress to the Several States shall be apportioned according to the real Value of ~~the Property in the Several States~~ all Lands within each State granted to, or surveyed for any Person, or such Lands and the Buildings and Improvements thereon shall be Estimated according to such mode as the united States in Congress assembled shall from time to time direct & appoint.” One of these two reports is endorsed: “reported May 27th. 1790.” The third report includes three amendments (numbers 19–21 in the form of ratification), the recommendation to expunge and replace amendment 18 proposed by the March Convention, and a paragraph on reporting the form of ratification. The text in angle brackets that appears in the Convention Proceedings below the hairline is from this third report. The report was signed by all ten members of the committee.

10. For the eighteenth amendment proposed by the first session of the Rhode Island Convention on 6 March, see RCS:R.I., 981.

11. Congress proposed twelve amendments to the Constitution on 25 September 1789. (See Appendix I, below.) The date “March 1789” refers to the scheduled opening of Congress’ session on 4 March 1789. For Rhode Island’s adoption of eleven of the twelve amendments, see “The Rhode Island General Assembly,” 7–12 June (RCS:R.I., 1041–42).

12. The Reverend William Smith (1754–1821) was rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Newport from 1789 until 1797.

13. See the Middletown Meeting, 29 May 1790 (immediately below).

14. See “Convention Roll Call Votes on Adjournment, 26 May 1790, and on Ratification, 29 May 1790” (RCS:R.I., 994–96).

15. For the committee report, see “Rhode Island Form of Ratification and Amendments,” 29 May 1790, note 1 (RCS:R.I., 1003n).

16. A draft of this resolution is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. See also note 9 (above).

17. The draft of this resolution is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. The resolution was moved by John Williams of Foster. The text in angle brackets reads in the draft: “and they be destributed by the Sheriffs of the Several Counties.”

### **Middletown Town Meeting, 29 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

⟨At a Town Meeting held in Middletown May 29th AD 1790⟩—Especially Called by order of the Town Council Joseph Peabody Esqr. Moderator—

Voted that the Instructions here to fore given to the Deligates respecting the proposed Constitution be recalled<sup>2</sup>

(Voted that the Deligates of this Town be and they hereby are Instructed to use their Influence & Votes in the Convention now Seting at Newport for the Adoption of the Constitution which hath been Already Adopted by Twelve States)

William Peckham Jr. appeared in Town Meeting this day and Resigned his office as a Deligate in the State Convention now seting at Newport. And the Meeting Accepted of his Resignation and Voted that Elisha Barker be appointed a Deligate in the sted of the said William Peckham Jur who Resigned—

1. MS, Town Meetings, 1743–1808, Vol. 1, Town Hall, Middletown, R.I. The text in angle brackets is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. It is “A true Extract taken from Record” as witnessed by town clerk Elisha Allen.

2. For the previous Middletown instructions adopted on 21 April 1790, see RCS:R.I., 832.

### **Portsmouth: Instructions to Convention Delegates, 29 May 1790**

*Town Meeting, 29 May 1790 (excerpts)*<sup>1</sup>

At a Town Meeting of the Freemen of Portsmouth held at the house of Elisha Coggeshalls this 29th Day of May 1790.

The Warrant being Read

Voted & Giles Lawton jur Esqr. is Chosen Moderator . . .

Voted that the following Instructions be given to the Delegates of this Town in the State Convention in order to Govern their Conduct in said Convention, which are as follows to wit—

[The instructions appear at this point. For the copy sent to the Convention, see immediately below.]

Voted that this Meeting be Dissolved

Thereby Certify that the above is a true copy of the Proceedings of the above said Town Meeting—

Witness Abram. Anthony jr Town Clerk

*Instructions, 29 May 1790*<sup>2</sup>

At a Town Meeting of the Freemen of Portsmouth held at the House of Elisha Coggeshall this 29th. Day of May 1790—legally convened—& expressly called at this Time, for the Purpose of obtaining the final & decisive Opinion of the Town respecting the adoption or Rejection of the New Constitution proposed by Congress<sup>3</sup> for the Government of the United States; now under Consideration of the State Convention.

And also for taking into further Consideration the Instructions which were given by this Town to their Delegates in said State Convention held at South Kingston—& which were afterwards ratify'd & confirmed and again directed to be considered by their Delegates as the Sentiments of the Town with regard to the Line of Conduct which ought to be pursued when at the Meeting or the Adjournment of said Convention to be held at Newport.<sup>4</sup>

It was voted and resolved—That it is the Opinion of this Town, that it will be for the Benefit & Interest of the Freemen thereof, as well as of the good People of this State in general, that the said New Constitution proposed as aforesaid—should be adopted & ratify'd & in the Manner recommended by Congress. And that any Delay in ratifying & acceding to the same either by an adjournment or Rejection thereof—will in its Consequences be very injurious to this State & particularly so to the Interests of the Town of Portsmouth.—

Voted and resolved That the Instructions given by this Town to their Delegates as aforesaid were then and We now consider & declare them to be the Sentiments of a Majority of the Freemen assembled at this Town Meeting and they are hereby once more confirmed & recommended strongly to their Delegates—expressly with the Design that they may Influence & regulate their Conduct in the Weighty & momentous Question now before them in Convention—so that after their Declarations they may not have to say<sup>5</sup>—that it was done innocently<sup>6</sup> or for want of better Information on the Subject should they vote for or occasion any longer Delay of an Adoption by the Part which they may take therein—But should they obstinately persist in Measures opposed to the declared & repeated Sentiments of the Town—then the good People thereof do & will hold themselves clear of the evil Consequences & Destruction which must ensue to the State at large on Such D[e]lay or Rejection—by having thus acted their Part as far as in them lays to advert & prevent those Evils—which a stoppage of Trade & an Intercourse with our Sister States must occasion & which undoubtedly will take place should this State withdraw from the general Union by not acceding at this present Sitting of the Convention to the New Constitution proposed for their Consideration & *Decission* upon.—

We therefore now order & direct (as far as in us lays)—that the Delegates for this Town do for us & in the Name of the Town of Portsmouth ratify & accede to, in the present Meeting of the Convention the aforesaid Constitution & that they do not agree to any other or further adjournment but bring the Decission thereon to as speedy a Conclusion as possible.—

Voted & resolved that one Copy of the Proceedings of this Town Meeting be delivered to Burrington Anthony Esqr. for the Use of our Delegates & that Samuel Elam<sup>7</sup> be appointed to deliver another Copy to the President of the Convention in order that our Sentiments on that Head may be more generally Known & the Town Clerk is ordered to certify the same.

A true Copy of the Proceeding of the above Town Meeting

Witness Abram Anthony jr Town Clk.

1. MS, Town Meeting Records, 1786–1835, Vol. 2, Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Portsmouth, R.I. The Town Meeting Records contain the original version of the instructions. Two additional copies were made. See note 2.

2. MS, Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution, R-Ar. Two copies of these instructions, each with different capitalization, punctuation, and placement of a couple of phrases are in this collection. Presumably the two copies of the instructions were delivered to Burrington Anthony and given to Samuel Elam to be delivered to the Convention president. (See the last paragraph of the instructions.) See notes 5 and 6 (below) for significant differences between these two copies and the version in the Town Meeting Records.

3. Congress did not propose the new Constitution. On 28 September 1787 Congress sent the Constitution to the states without approbation, proposing that the state legislatures comply with the resolution of the Constitutional Convention in calling state conventions to consider ratifying the Constitution (see CC:95).

4. For the instructions given to the Portsmouth Convention delegates on 27 February and 26 April 1790, see RCS:R.I., 699–703n, 833–34.

5. In the Town Meeting Records version the following appears after the word say: “should they vote for, or Occasion any longer Delay of an adoption by the part which they may take therein.”

6. This word is “ignorantly” in the Town Meetings Records version.

7. For Elam, see RCS:R.I., 703, note 6.

### Convention Roll Call Votes on Adjournment, 26 May 1790, and on Ratification, 29 May 1790<sup>1</sup>

#### List of Delegates

##### The President

Newport	A	George Haszard Esqr.	A
	A	Henry Marchant Esqr.	A
	A	George Champlin Esqr.	A
	A	Peleg Clarke	A
	A.	Mr. William Tripp	A
	A	George Sears Esqr.	A
Providence	A.	Jabez Bowen Esqr.	A.
	A.	Benjamin Bourne Esqr.	A.
	A	Col. William Barton	A
	A.	John I. Clark Esqr.	A.

Portsmouth	A	Mr. Burrington Anthony	A
	A	Mr. Job Durfee.	—
	A.	Mr. Giles Slocum	N.
	A	Mr. Peter Barker.	A.
Warwick	N.	Thomas Rice junr. Esqr.	N.
	N	Mr. Gideon Arnold	N.
	A.	Mr. Benjamin Arnold junr.	A
	A	Mr. Christopher Greene junr.	A.
Westerly	A.	Capt. Walter White	A.
	A.	George Stilman Esqr.	A.
Newshoreham <sup>2</sup>		Edward Hull Esqr.	
		Ray Sands Esqr.	
No. Kingston	N	William Congdon Esqr.	N
	N.	Bowen Card Esqr.	N
South Kingston	A.	Samuel J. Potter Esqr.	N.
	A.	Jona. J. Haszard.	N.
East Greenwich	N	Mr. Pardon Mawney	N.
	N	Job Comstock Esqr.	N.
Jamestown	N	Captn. Benjamin Remington	A
	A	Mr. Nicholas Carr	A
Smithfield		John Sayles Esqr.	N.
	N	Andrew Waterman Esqr.	N.
Scituate	N.	Captn. James Aldrich	N.
	N.	Mr. Nathan Bates	N.
Gloucester		Honble. <del>Daniel Owen Esqr.</del>	
	N.	Stephen Steere Esqr.	N
Charlestown	A.	Thomas Hoxsie Esqr.	N.
	A.	Joseph Stanton junr. Esqr.	N.
West Greenwich	N	Mr. William Matthewson	N.
	N.	William Nichols Esqr.	N
Coventry	N.	Benjamin Arnold Esqr.	N
	N.	Lieutt. Job Greene	N
Exeter	N.	Mr. Joseph Reynolds	N
	N.	Captn. Job Willcox	N
Middleto[w]n	N.	Joshua Barker Esqr.	A
		Elisha Barker	A.
	A.	Mr. William Peckham junr.	
Bristol	A.	William Bradford Esqr.	A.
	A	Shearjashub Bourne Esqr.	A
Tiverton	A	Mr. Isaac Manchester	A.
	A.	Mr. Abraham Barker	A.

Little Compton	A.	Captn. William Ladd	A.
	A.	Captn. John Davis	A.
Warren	A.	Benjamin Bosworth Esqr.	A
		<del>Nathan Miller Esqr.</del>	
	A.	Mr. Samuel Pearce	A
Cumberland	A	John S. Dexter	A
	A	Levi Ballou Esqr.	A
Richmond	N	James Sheldon Esqr.	N.
	N	Mr. Thomas James.	N.
Cranston		Peter Stone Esqr.	N
	N.	Jonathan Sprague junr. Esqr.	N.
Hopkinton	N.	Mr. John Brown	A.
	N.	Col. Jesse Maxson.	A.
Johnston	N	Noah Matthewson Esqr.	N
	N	Mr. William B. King	N.
No. Providence	N	Elisha Brown Esqr.	N
	N.	Mr. Eseck Esten.	N
Barrington	A	Col. Thomas Allen	A
	A.	Samuel Allen Esqr.	A.
Foster	N.	Captn. William Howard	N
	N	John Williams Esqr.	N
		Honble. Danl. Owen Esqr. President—	
		& Danl. Updike Secy.—	

1. MS, Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts, Mss 9003, 3:130, RHi. The annotation that precedes the names of the delegates appears to be on the 26 May vote to adjourn. An “A” indicates a vote against adjournment, while an “N” indicates a vote in favor of adjournment. The 36 to 29 vote yields a majority of seven against adjournment. The Convention Proceedings (RCS:R.I., 987) give the majority as six while the *Newport Herald*, 27 May (RCS:R.I., 1004), put the majority at nine against adjournment. The annotation that follows the names of the delegates is on the vote to ratify the Constitution in which an “A” indicates a vote to adopt the Constitution and an “N” indicates a vote against ratification. The final vote on ratification was 34 to 32. No annotation appears for those delegates who did not vote.

2. The names of the New Shoreham delegates “Captn. Edwd. Hull” and “Col. Ray Sands” were also written in the margin and then crossed out. Hull and Sands probably did not attend the May session of the Convention.

### Rhode Island Form of Ratification and Amendments, 29 May 1790<sup>1</sup>

[The United States Constitution with the names of the signers and the 17 September 1787 resolutions of the Constitutional Convention appear here. See RCS:R.I., 322–34, for the text.]

Ratification of the Constitution by the Convention of the  
State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations.



WE THE DELEGATES OF THE PEOPLE of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, duly elected and met in Convention, having maturely considered the Constitution for the United States of America, agreed to on the seventeenth day of September, in the Year one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven, by the Convention then assembled at Philadelphia, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (a Copy whereof precedes these presents) and having also seriously and deliberately considered the present situation of this State, do declare and make known:

1st. That there are certain natural rights, of which men when they form a social compact, cannot deprive or divest their posterity, among which are the enjoyment of Life and Liberty, with the means of acquiring, possessing and protecting Property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

2d. That all power is naturally vested in, and consequently derived from the people; that magistrates therefore are their trustees and agents, and at all times amenable to them.

3d. That the powers of government may be reassumed by the people, whensoever it shall become necessary to their happiness.—That the rights of the States respectively, to nominate and appoint all state Officers, and every other power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by the said constitution clearly delegated to the Congress of the United States or to the departments of government thereof, remain to the people of the several states, or their respective State Governments to whom they may have granted the same, and that those clauses in the said constitution which declare that Congress shall not have or exercise certain powers, do not imply, that Congress is entitled to any powers not given by the said constitution, but such clauses are to be construed as exceptions to certain specified powers, or as inserted merely for greater caution.

4th. That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, and not by force or violence, and therefore all men, have an equal, natural and unalienable right to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience, and that no particular religious sect or society ought to be favoured, or established by law in preference to others.

5th. That the legislative, executive and judiciary powers of government, should be separate and distinct, and that the members of the two first may be restrained from oppression, by feeling and participating the publick burthens, they should at fixed periods be reduced to a private station, return into the mass of the people, and the vacancies

be supplied by certain and regular elections, in which all or any part of the former members, to be eligible or ineligible, as the rules of the constitution of government and the laws shall direct.

6th. That elections of representatives in legislature ought to be free and frequent, and all men having sufficient evidence of permanent common interest with, and attachment to the community ought to have the right of suffrage, and no aid, charge, tax or fee can be set, rated or levied upon the people without their own consent or that of their representatives so elected, nor can they be bound by any law, to which they have not in like manner assented for the publick good.

7th. That all power of suspending laws or the execution of laws, by any authority without the consent of the representatives of the people in the legislature, is injurious to their rights, and ought not to be exercised.

8th. That in all capital and criminal prosecutions, a man hath a right to demand the cause and nature of his accusation, to be confronted with the accusers and witnesses, to call for evidence and be allowed counsel in his favour, and to a fair and speedy trial by an impartial jury of his vicinage, without whose unanimous consent he cannot be found guilty, (except in the government of the land and naval forces) nor can he be compelled to give evidence against himself.

9th. That no freeman ought to be taken, imprisoned or disseized of his freehold, liberties, privileges, or franchises, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any manner destroyed or deprived of his life, liberty or property but by the trial by jury, or by the law of the land.

10th. That every freeman restrained of his liberty, is intitled to a remedy, to enquire into the lawfulness thereof, and to remove the same if unlawful, and that such remedy ought not to be denied or delayed.

11th. That in controversies respecting property, and in suits between man and man the antient trial by jury, as hath been exercised by us and our ancestors, from the time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary, is one of the greatest securities to the rights of the people, and ought to remain sacred and inviolate.

12th. That every freeman ought to obtain right and justice, freely and without sale, completely and without denial, promptly and without delay, and that all establishments or regulations contravening these rights, are oppressive and unjust.

13th. That excessive bail ought not to be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel or unusual punishment inflicted.

14th. That every person has a right to be secure from all unreasonable searches and seizures of his person, his papers or his property, and therefore that all warrants to search suspected places or seize any person,

his papers or his property, without information upon oath, or affirmation of sufficient cause, are grievous and oppressive, and that all general warrants (or such in which the place or person suspected, are not particularly designated,) are dangerous, and ought not to be granted.

15th. That the people have a right peaceably to assemble together, to consult for their common good, or to instruct their representatives, and that every person has a right to petition or apply to the legislature for redress of grievances.

16th. That the people have a right to freedom of speech and of writing, and publishing their sentiments, that freedom of the press is one of the greatest bulwarks of liberty, and ought not to be violated.

17th. That the people have a right to keep and bear arms, that a well regulated militia, including the body of the people capable of bearing arms, is the proper, natural and safe defence of a free state; that the militia shall not be subject to martial law except in time of war, rebellion or insurrection; that standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, and ought not to be kept up, except in cases of necessity, and that at all times the military should be under strict subordination to the civil power; that in time of peace no soldier ought to be quartered in any house, without the consent of the owner, and in time of war, only by the civil magistrate, in such manner as the law directs.

18th. That any person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms, ought to be exempted, upon payment of an equivalent, to employ another to bear arms in his stead.

UNDER THESE IMPRESSIONS, and declaring, that the rights aforesaid cannot be abridged or violated, and that the explanations aforesaid, are consistent with the said constitution, and in confidence that the amendments hereafter mentioned, will receive an early and mature consideration, and conformably to the fifth article of said constitution, speedily become a part thereof. WE the said delegates, in the name, and in the behalf of the PEOPLE of the STATE OF RHODE-ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE-PLANTATIONS, do by these Presents, assent to and ratify the said CONSTITUTION. In full confidence nevertheless, that until the amendments hereafter proposed and undermentioned shall be agreed to and ratified, pursuant to the aforesaid fifth article, the militia of this state will not be continued in service out of this State for a longer term than six weeks, without the consent of the legislature thereof; That the Congress will not make or alter any regulation in this State, respecting the times, places and manner of holding elections for senators or representatives, unless the legislature of this state shall neglect, or refuse to make laws or regulations for the purpose, or from any circumstance be incapable of making the same; and that in those cases, such power

will only be exercised, until the legislature of this State shall make provision in the Premises, that the Congress will not lay direct taxes within this State, but when the monies arising from the impost, Tonnage and Excise shall be insufficient for the publick exigencies, nor until the Congress shall have first made a requisition upon this State to assess, levy and pay the amount of such requisition, made agreeable to the census fixed in the said constitution, in such way and manner, as the legislature of this State shall judge best, and that the Congress will not lay any capitation or poll tax.

DONE IN CONVENTION, at Newport in the County of Newport, in the STATE OF RHODE-ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE-PLANTATIONS, the twenty ninth day of May, in the Year of our LORD one thousand seven hundred and ninety, and in the fourteenth Year of the Independence of the United States of America.

By order of the Convention,

Daniel Owen President

Attest, Daniel Updike Secty

AND THE CONVENTION, do in the name and behalf of the PEOPLE of the STATE OF RHODE-ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS, enjoin it upon their Senators and Representative or Representatives, which may be elected to represent this State in Congress, to exert all their influence, and use all reasonable means to obtain a ratification of the following Amendments to the said Constitution, in the manner prescribed therein, and in all laws to be passed by the Congress in the mean time, to conform to the spirit of the said amendments, as far as the constitution will admit.

#### AMENDMENTS.

1st. The United States shall guarantee to each State its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every power, jurisdiction and right which is not by this constitution expressly delegated to the United States.

2d. That Congress shall not alter, modify or interfere in the times, places or manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives or either of them, except when the legislature of any state shall neglect, refuse or be disabled by invasion or rebellion to prescribe the same; or in case when the provision made by the states, is so imperfect as that no consequent election is had, and then only until the legislature of such state, shall make provision in the premises.

3d. It is declared by the Convention, that the judicial power of the United States in cases in which a state may be a party, does not extend to criminal prosecutions, or to authorize any suit by any person against a state; but to remove all doubts or controversies respecting the same, that it be especially expressed as a part of the constitution of the United

States, that Congress shall not directly or indirectly, either by themselves or through the judiciary, interfere with any one of the states, in the redemption of paper money already emitted and now in circulation, or in liquidating or discharging the publick securities of any one state, that each and every state shall have the exclusive right of making such laws and regulations for the before mentioned purpose, as they shall think proper.

4th. That no amendments to the constitution of the United States hereafter to be made, pursuant to the fifth article, shall take effect, or become a part of the constitution of the United States after the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety three, without the consent of eleven of the states heretofore united under one confederation.

5th. That the judicial powers of the United States shall extend to no possible case, where the cause of action shall have originated before the ratification of this constitution, except in disputes between states about their territory, disputes between persons claiming lands under grants of different states, and debts due to the United States.

6th. That no person shall be compelled to do military duty, otherwise than by voluntary enlistment, except in cases of general invasion, any thing in the second paragraph of the sixth article of the constitution, or any law made under the constitution to the contrary notwithstanding.

7th. That no capitation or poll-tax shall ever be laid by Congress.

8th. In cases of direct taxes, Congress shall first make requisitions on the several states to assess, levy and pay their respective proportions of such requisitions, in such way and manner, as the legislatures of the several states shall judge best; and in case any state shall neglect or refuse to pay its proportion pursuant to such requisition, then Congress may assess and levy such state's proportion, together with interest at the rate of six per cent. per annum, from the time prescribed in such requisition.

9th. That Congress shall lay no direct taxes, without the consent of the legislatures of three fourths of the states in the Union.

10th. That the journals of the proceedings of the Senate and house of Representatives shall be published as soon as conveniently may be, at least once in every year, except such parts thereof relating to treaties, alliances or military operations, as in their judgment require secrecy.

11th. That regular statements of the receipts and expenditures of all publick monies, shall be published at least once a year.

12th. As standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty and ought not to be kept up, except in cases of necessity; and as at all times the military should be under strict subordination to the civil power,

that therefore no standing army, or regular troops shall be raised, or kept up in time of peace.

13th. That no monies be borrowed on the credit of the United States without the assent of two thirds of the Senators and Representatives present in each house.

14th. That the Congress shall not declare war, without the concurrence of two thirds of the Senators and Representatives present in each house.

15th. That the words “without the consent of Congress” in the seventh clause in the ninth section of the first article of the constitution be expunged.

16th. That no judge of the supreme court of the United States, shall hold any other office under the United States, or any of them, nor shall any officer appointed by Congress, or by the President and Senate of the United States, be permitted to hold any office under the appointment of any of the states.

17th. As a traffick tending to establish or continue the slavery of any part of the human species, is disgraceful to the cause of liberty and humanity, that Congress shall, as soon as may be, promote and establish such laws and regulations, as may effectually prevent the importation of slaves of every description into the United States.

18th. That the State Legislatures have power to recall, when they think it expedient, their federal senators, and to send others in their stead.

19th. That Congress have power to establish a uniform rule of inhabitancy, or settlement of the poor of the different States throughout the United States.

20th. That Congress erect no company with exclusive advantages of commerce.

21st. That when two members shall move or call for the ayes and nays on any question, they shall be entered on the journals of the houses respectively.

DONE in Convention at Newport in the County of Newport in the STATE OF RHODE-ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS, the twenty ninth day of May, in the year of our LORD one thousand seven hundred and ninety, and the fourteenth year of the independence of the United States of America.

By order of the Convention.

Daniel Owen President.

Attest Daniel Updike Secty

1. Engrossed MS, RG 11, Certificates of Ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights . . . , 1787–92, DNA. On 11 June 1790 the legislature approved payment of £48

paper money for John Grelea for “drafting and engrossing” the official form of ratification sent to President George Washington. The National Archives has a second copy of the form of ratification in RG 360, Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789, “Ratifications of the Constitution,” 1786–1791 (Bankson’s Journal). This copy omits the Constitution.

The official manuscript retained copy, which includes the Constitution and the Constitutional Convention’s resolutions of 17 September 1787, is in the Rhode Island State Archives. On 12 June 1790 the legislature approved payment of £48 paper money to William Engs for this copy. An incomplete smooth copy, lacking most of the fourth amendment and all of the remaining amendments, is in the volume labeled Papers Relating to the Adoption of the Constitution at the Rhode Island State Archives. Finally, what appears to be the working copy of the committee that drafted the form of ratification is also in the same collection. This version includes the first three of the four new amendments (Nos. 18–21) that were added by the committee and approved by the Convention.

Three broadside versions of the form of ratification were printed. John Carter of the *Providence Gazette* struck an abbreviated one-page version dated “Monday, May 31, 1790” and entitled “RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS united to the Great AMERICAN FAMILY” (Evans 22847). Carter included three original introductory paragraphs and a final original paragraph, which appear in Part IX under 31 May (RCS:R.I., 1017). Between these original items, Carter printed the paragraphs that prefaced the Convention’s bill of rights and proposed amendments. Within square brackets at the correct location, Carter indicated that he had omitted the Convention’s bill of rights and proposed amendments that he had printed in the *Providence Gazette* on 13 March. The broadside then included the four new amendments approved on 27 and 28 May and the three resolutions adopted by the Convention: (1) recommending that the state legislature approve eleven of Congress’ twelve amendments to the Constitution, (2) thanking President Daniel Owen, and (3) thanking the officiating clergy.

The Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 3 June, reprinted the text of the form of ratification from John Carter’s broadside immediately after the *Chronicle*’s poem “THE AMERICAN UNION COMPLETED” that is accompanied by an illustration of thirteen pillars (RCS:R.I., 1031–32n). The Carter version of the form of ratification was reprinted at least fifteen additional times by out-of-state newspapers by 23 June: Vt. (1), Mass. (3), Conn. (3), N.Y. (1), Pa. (5), Del. (1), Md. (1). Nine reprintings omitted all or most of the four original paragraphs that preceded or followed the form of ratification. See RCS:R.I., 1017, for the reprintings of these original paragraphs.

The Convention’s order that 300 copies of the form of ratification be printed for distribution was filled by Peter Edes of the *Newport Herald*. Edes probably first struck a broadside that contained only twenty of the twenty-one amendments adopted by the Convention (Evans 22848). He then published a four-page broadside that contained the U.S. Constitution on pages 1 and 2 and the form of ratification on page 3. Page 4 was blank (Evans 22849). This broadside contained all twenty-one of the amendments. Edes submitted a bill of £7.10.0 specie for printing the broadside, and, at its September 1790 session, the General Assembly authorized payment to Edes of £112.10.0 in Rhode Island paper money.

Two versions of the form of ratification (without the Constitution and the 17 September 1787 resolutions of the Constitutional Convention) were reprinted in the newspapers. The *Newport Herald*, 31 May 1790; New York *Daily Advertiser*, 8 June; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 10 June; Annapolis *Maryland Gazette*, 17 June; and *Carlisle Gazette*, 23 June, reprinted the form without the twenty-first amendment. All twenty-one amendments appear in the forms reprinted by the *Newport Herald*, 3 June; *United States Chronicle*, 3 June; and *Providence*

*Gazette*, 5 June. The *New York Journal*, 11 June, printed the twenty-amendment form of ratification along with the four additional amendments (which included the twenty-first amendment) and the three resolutions that first appeared in John Carter's broadside. The *Providence Gazette* and the *Newport Herald's* versions also contain the Convention's resolution ordering the printing and distribution of 300 copies of the form of ratification. The *United States Chronicle's* version was headed "FEDERAL EDIFICE COMPLETED, BY THE ERECTION OF THE RHODE-ISLAND PILLAR."

### Newspaper Reports of Convention Proceedings, 24–29 May 1790

*Newport Herald*, 27 May 1790<sup>1</sup>

#### CONSTITUTION.

On Monday last, the CONVENTION OF THIS STATE, assembled at the State House in this town, pursuant to their adjournment;—some of the members being absent, no business was done 'till Wednesday, when the instructions which had been given by some of the towns were read;—A motion was then made, for the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights and Amendments, as reported by the Convention at their former meeting,—the Amendments to be recommendatory;—before a discussion of this took place, a motion was made for an adjournment, this was objected to as not in order;—the President being called on to determine it, gave his opinion, that by the Rule of the Convention, a motion for adjournment, superceded all others, and was therefore in order.—After some debates, the question for an adjournment was taken and it was lost by a majority of 9;<sup>2</sup> the motion for an Adoption, &c. was then taken up, the Constitution of the United States read;—after which, the Convention adjourned to this day at 9 o'clock, at the Rev. Mr. Thurston's Meeting House, who is requested to address the Throne of Grace<sup>3</sup> by prayer, upon the opening of the Convention there.

It is expected that the GRAND QUESTION will be decided this day.

ADOPT or REJECT, that is the question.

Whether it is better, to make one Star in the bright Constellation, and reciprocate light, or like the small meteor, blaze but a moment, and then go to that *Bourn*,<sup>4</sup> from whence nations, as well as travellers ne'er return.<sup>5</sup>

By the Adoption we have nothing to lose, but every thing to gain;—By a Rejection we stab Commerce at its vitals, force the Farmer to hide the fruits of his labour in a napkin,<sup>6</sup> and leave our Government like an *isolated* Column, tottering at the smallest breeze, and exposed to be thrown from its base, by every tempest.

1. The *Salem Gazette*, 1 June, reprinted the first two paragraphs. The *Providence Gazette*, 29 May (Mfm:R.I.), and the *United States Chronicle*, 3 June, reprinted the first paragraph



with some paraphrasing. The *Providence Gazette* altered the next two lines to read: “The grand Question, ‘ADOPT or REJECT,’ it is expected will be this Day determined favourably for the Honor and Interest of the State.” The *Newport Mercury*, 31 May, reprinted the *Providence Gazette*’s version, but after the reference to “the Rev. Mr. Thurston’s Meeting-House” concluded with “where the Debates were continued from Day to Day until Saturday Afternoon, when the momentous Question ‘ADOPT or REJECT’ was taken, and carried for an Adoption by a Majority of Two.”

2. The Convention Proceedings, 26 May (RCS:R.I., 987, at note 2), give the majority as six. Other newspaper accounts, all probably derived from the *Herald*’s account, put the majority at nine.

3. Hebrews 4:16. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

4. “Bourn” meant destination or goal.

5. Hamlet, Act III, scene 1, lines 78–79.

6. See Luke 19:20.

*New York Journal*, 1 June 1790<sup>1</sup>

*Of RHODE-ISLAND.*

By Capt. Peterson, who left Newport at eight o’clock on Monday morning, we have the authentic intelligence, that on Saturday evening the Convention of Rhode-Island adopted the Constitution of the United States, by a majority of two.

That on Thursday, after much debate, and great agitation, the question was put for an adjournment, and lost by a majority of 18.

We also learn, that on Thursday afternoon, several of the minority declared, that if they could obtain instructions from their constituents to vote for the constitution, they would do it; in consequence of which the town of Portsmouth, and one other town [i.e., Middletown], who sent six members between them, convened, and instructed their delegates to vote for it; and that on the grand question being taken, four of them voted for it, one against it, and the sixth absented himself!

1. Reprinted: *Pennsylvania Packet*, 4 June. The second and third paragraphs were reprinted in the *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 5 June; *Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal*, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and *Carlisle Gazette*, 9 June.

*Providence United States Chronicle*, 3 June 1790

The CONVENTION, elected by the Freemen of this State, for the Purpose of “investigating and deciding” on the Constitution of the United States, convened at Newport on Monday, the 24th Ultimo, agreeable to Adjournment.

[At this point the *Chronicle* reprinted a variation of the first paragraph of the *Newport Herald*’s report of convention proceedings (RCS:R.I., 1004).]

Thursday and until Friday Afternoon, the Attention of the Convention was taken up by different Speakers for and against the Adoption. About 5 o'Clock on Friday [28 May], a Motion was made by one of the Members from Portsmouth, that the Convention should adjourn to the next Day, 3 o'Clock, P. M. as he wished for Liberty to go Home and state to his Constituents the Situation of Affairs—this was objected to by the Gentlemen who opposed the Adoption—it was however finally carried by a Majority of 8; and the Convention adjourned.

On Saturday 3 o'Clock, the Convention met, and the Deputies from Portsmouth produced Instructions from their Town to vote for the Adoption—a Town-Meeting having been held since the Adjournment.<sup>1</sup>—The Deputies from Middletown also produced Instructions from their Constituents to vote for the Adoption—a Town Meeting having also been held there.<sup>2</sup>

At 20 Minutes past Five, P. M. the Question, “*Shall the Constitution of the United States be adopted or not?*” was put, and determined as follows, viz.

[The yeas and nays for the roll call appear here.]<sup>3</sup>

1. See “Portsmouth: Instructions to Convention Delegates,” 29 May 1790 (RCS:R.I., 992–94).

2. See Middletown Town Meeting, 29 May 1790 (RCS:R.I., 991–92).

3. The names of the delegates who voted yea and nay do not appear in Daniel Updike’s minutes of the Convention Proceedings. For the vote, see “Convention Roll Call Votes on Adjournment, 26 May 1790, and on Ratification, 29 May 1790” (RCS:R.I., 994–96).

**President of Convention Daniel Owen  
to President George Washington, Newport, 29 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I have the pleasing satisfaction of informing your Excellency, that the Constitution of the United States of America, was this day ratified and adopted by the Convention of the People of this State, agreeable to the recommendations, of the General Convention assembled at Philadelphia, and the consequent resolution of Congress thereon.

The Lower House of the General Assembly of this State, at their session the former part of this month, past a resolution, requesting his Excellency the Governor, in case the Constitution should be adopted by the Convention, to call the Assembly together by warrant, as soon after the Adoption as might be, for the special purpose of electing the Senators, and taking measures for a Representation of this State in Congress:<sup>2</sup>—I can therefore assure your Excellency, that in the course of a few days, not to exceed sixteen, the Legislature will be assembled, either by special warrant, or pursuant to their Adjournment on the second monday of June, when I have not the least doubt, the Senators

will be immediately appointed, and the State represented in Congress, agreeable to the Constitution, as soon as the Elections can be accomplished.

The Ratification of the Constitution, will be made out and forwarded by way of the Post Office, with all possible expedition.<sup>3</sup>

Colo William Barton, who was a member of the Convention, will have the honor of delivering this letter.

With the highest sentiments of Esteem & Respect, I have the honor of being, Your Excellency's Most Obedient Servant

1. RC, RG 11, Certificates of Ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights . . . , 1787–92, DNA. A copy of this letter is in RG 46, First Congress, 1789–91, Records of Legislative Proceedings, President's Messages, DNA. Owen's letter, delivered by William Barton, was printed (with changes in capitalization and punctuation) in the *New York Daily Gazette*, 2 June. It was reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 12 June; *United States Chronicle*, 24 June; and in nine other newspapers by 15 June: Mass. (1), N.Y. (2), Pa. (5), Md. (1). President Washington directed one of his secretaries, Tobias Lear, to make a copy of Owen's letter for Congress (see House Journal, 1 June [RCS:R.I., 854–55]). For a criticism of Owen for not sending the official form of ratification to President Washington at this time, see Henry Marchant to John Adams, 7 June (RCS:R.I., 1039). Washington responded to Owen on 19 June (RCS:R.I., 1009).

2. For the resolution of the House of Deputies, see RCS:R.I., 856–57.

3. Owen sent the official form of ratification to Washington with a letter dated 9 June (below). Washington received the letter and the form of ratification on 15 June.

**Governor Arthur Fenner to President George Washington  
Providence, 31 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

In a Letter which I had the Honour of writing to your Excellency on the 20th Instant,<sup>2</sup> I informed you that I then expected that the Constitution of the United States of America, would be very soon Ratified and adopted by the Convention of this State, and that your Excellency should have the Earliest information of the Result of the proceedings of the Convention immediately after their rising. I now have the high satisfaction of informing your Excellency that agreeable to my expectations, the new National Constitution of the United States was, on Saturday last Ratified, and Adopted by the Convention of this State, at Newport, pursuant to the Recommendation of Congress in consequence of the proceedings of the General Convention of Philadelphia.—Permit me sincerely to congratulate your Excellency on this highly interesting and auspicious Event which Unites all the States under one General Government, and raises Our Reputation as a Nation in the Estimation of the World at large. I have issued Warrants for convening the Legislature at Newport on Monday next for the purpose of appointing the Senators and taking measures for a Representation of the State as soon as Possible in Congress agreeable to the Constitution

I expect that the Senators who may be elected will give attendance in Congress immediately without any delay after their appointment allowing time only for their going to New-York. As the Organization of the Federal Government, within this State, in it's connection with the Union is a matter of great importance to the State, as well as to the Public at large, and may be more satisfactory to all Parties, if done when the State is Represented, your Excellency will excuse me for expressing a wish, in behalf of the State that none of the Revenue or other Officers may be appointed, until the State is Represented in Congress, at least in the Senate, which I have the strongest reason to expect will be in the Course of a few Days. The President of the Convention has informed me that the Ratification of the Constitution will be forwarded by the Post on Tuesday next.—

I have the Honõr of being with great Regard your Excellency's most Obedient Servt.

1. RC, RG 11, Certificates of Ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights . . . , 1787–92, DNA.

2. For Fenner to Washington, 20 May, see RCS:R.I., 872–76n.

**President of Convention Daniel Owen  
to President George Washington, Newport, 9 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I had on the 29th Ulto<sup>2</sup> the Satisfaction of addressing you after the Ratification of the Constitution of the United States of America by the Convention of this State. I have now the Honor of Inclosing the Ratification as then agreed upon by the Convention of the People of this State; the Legislature is now in Session in this Town, an Appointment of Senators will undoubtedly take place in the present Week, and from what appears to be the sense of the Legislature, it may be expected that the Gentlemen who may be appointed will Immediately proceed to take their seats in the Senate of the United States. I have the Honor to be with great Respect, Sir, Your obedt. humble Servant

1. RC, Washington Papers, DLC. This letter and the Rhode Island form of ratification were received by President Washington on the evening of 15 June.

On 16 June President Washington notified the Senate and the House of Representatives that he had received Owen's letter of 9 June with Rhode Island's form of ratification and that he had ordered his secretary to lay a copy of each before them (DHFFC, I, 355–62; III, 462).

Governor Arthur Fenner and six other Rhode Islanders wrote to President Washington on 10 June requesting that Daniel Owen be appointed U.S. district judge for Rhode Island. The letter described Owen as having “long been employed in Public Trusts which he has discharged with integrity and General Approbation. He is now one of the Justices of the [Rhode Island] Supreme Court[.] His Established Reputation as a Gentleman of Abilities, Virtue and Honour possessing the Confidence and Esteem of the People of this

State, who have repeatedly chosen him to the Office of Deputy Governor which he resigned at the late Election lead us to suppose that his Appointment to the Office of District Judge for this State would give very general Satisfaction to the People at large of this State” (Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 507–8). However, Federalist Henry Marchant, not Owen, received the appointment.

2. See Owen to Washington, 29 May (above).

**President George Washington to President of Convention  
Daniel Owen, New York, 19 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I have delayed acknowledging the receipt of your letter of the 29th of may, which contained official information of the adoption and ratification of the Constitution of the United States of America by the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, until the form of the ratification should be received, which, together with your letter accompanying it, got to my hands but a few days ago; and I take this opportunity of offering you my sincere congratulations upon this event, which unites under one general Government all the branches of the great American family;—and I doubt not but it will prove as auspicious to the good people of your State as it is pleasing to other parts of the Union.

1. RC, Miscellaneous Rhode Island Manuscripts, Accession Number A54982, John Hay Library, Brown University. The letterbook copy is in the Washington Papers, DLC. For Owen’s letters to Washington, see 29 May and 9 June (both above). Owen sent Rhode Island’s official form of ratification with the 9 June letter.

## Convention Expenses

The Convention delegates were paid by each town in the same manner as their deputies to the General Assembly. The amount was determined by the town meeting. Records for payments to delegates have been found for ten of Rhode Island's thirty towns. The dates given below indicate when the town meetings authorized the payments. The state legislature voted to pay the Convention president and secretary, the two men who prepared the official forms of ratification, and Peter Edes for printing broadsides of the form of ratification. These payments appear in the General Assembly Schedules for the June 1790 (Evans 22837, pp. 3, 13, 15, 16) and September 1790 (Evans 22838, p. 15) sessions in the manuscript journals of the House of Magistrates for both sessions, and in Accounts Allowed, 1790, at the Rhode Island State Archives.

In addition to the expenses printed below, on 22 May 1790, Warren authorized payment of four shillings to John Brown for "Warning Town Meeting to adopt or Reject the Constitution."

### Town Payments to Convention Delegates

#### FOSTER

31 May 1790: William Howard and John Williams 5s L.M. per day "for the Number of days Charged in their accounts presented to this Meeting for their Expences in attending the State Convention in March Last."

#### GLOUCESTER

8 November 1790: Daniel Owen £3.4.4 "Lawful Money" for "his Expences While Attending the State Convention as per Acct."

#### HOPKINTON

9 November 1790: Jesse Maxson £4.4 L.M. "being in full for his attending the State Convention at Newport 14 Days in March last."

7 December 1790: John Brown £4.4 L.M. "being for 14 Days attending the Convention & going to and from the Same."

#### LITTLE COMPTON<sup>1</sup>

31 August 1790: John Davis £7.16 "for attending the Convention seven Days: and attending the General Assembly at May and June Sessions 1790."

#### MIDDLETOWN

20 April 1791: William Peckham, Jr. £36 paper money for attending the Convention twelve days—seven days in March and five days in May—at £3 paper money per day.

25 May 1791: Joshua Barker £39 paper money "for his attending the State Convention 1790." 25 May 1791: William Peckham, Jr. "Ac[coun]t for his attendence on the Convention be Transferred into Silver money at the rate of Eighteen paper Dollars for one Silver Dollar."

## NORTH PROVIDENCE

7 June 1790: Esek Easton £2.16.0—£1.11.6 for “serving as a Deligate in the State Convention in March Nine Days at 3/6 pr. day” and £1.4.6 for “Seven Days Servis in June [i.e., May] at the State Convention at Newport at 3/6 pr. day.”

PORTSMOUTH<sup>2</sup>

21 April 1790: Burrington Anthony, Job Durfee, Giles Slocum, and Peter Barker each £2.8 for eight days at South Kingstown Convention at six shillings per day.

31 August 1790: Giles Slocum £1.16 “for his servis in attending State Convention at Newport as a Deligate for this Town six Days at six Shillings pr day.”

18 October 1790: Burrington Anthony £1.10 for five days attendance at the state Convention at Newport at six shillings per day.

13 November 1790: Peter Barker £1.10 for five days attendance at the state Convention at Newport.

20 April 1791: Job Durfee £1.10 for five days attendance at the state Convention.

## SCITUATE

31 August 1790: Nathan Bates £1.1 “hard money” for “Expences” at state Convention at Newport.

## TIVERTON

21 February 1791: Isaac Manchester £6.14 “Lawfull Silver money for attending the Conventions &c. as pr. acct.”

20 April 1791: Abraham Barker £8.0.10 “Silver Money for attend[ing] Conventions at Washington and Newport and Sundry other Services to the present time as pr. acct.”

## WEST GREENWICH

18 October 1790: William Nicholas and William Matteson each £1.16 for six days attendance at the state Convention at South Kingstown and six days at Newport.

1. On 21 April 1790 Little Compton voted to pay John Davis £7.10 for serving in the House of Deputies at the October 1789 and January 1790 sessions and in the March Convention. The town also voted to pay Davis “Interest for all the Money voted him . . . untill Paid” (RCS:R.I., 831).

2. On 8 February 1790 the town meeting voted to pay its delegates one dollar a day for attending the State Convention in March. On 27 February the town meeting repealed the previously agreed upon compensation of “a hard Dollar a Day” and substituted forty shillings of paper money (RCS:R.I., 697, 703n).

### State Payment of Convention Expenses

PETER EDES

7 June 1790: Submitted bill for £7.10 sterling for paper and printing 300 copies of the U.S. Constitution and the Rhode Island form of ratification at 6d per copy. General Assembly orders payment of £112.10.0 in paper money, 11 September 1790.

WILLIAM ENGS OF NEWPORT

£48 paper money for transcribing the Constitution and the retained copy of the form of ratification with the amendments proposed by Rhode Island on thirteen large sheets of paper, 12 June 1790.

JOHN GRELEA OF NEWPORT

£48 paper money for drafting and

engrossing the Constitution and form of ratification sent to President George Washington, 11 June 1790.

DANIEL OWEN

£60 paper money for his time, expenses, and hiring a horse to go to Newport to obtain two copies of the state form of ratification, 12 June 1790.

DANIEL UPDIKE

£82.10.0 "for Parchment and Paper by him provided as Secretary of the Convention lately held in Newport, and for his Services as Clerk of the Lower House at the present Session," 12 June 1790.



**IX.**  
**THE AFTERMATH OF RATIFICATION**  
**IN RHODE ISLAND**  
**29 May–20 November 1790**

**Introduction**

The Rhode Island post-ratification documents in Part IX consist of private letters, newspaper items, a broadside, a diary, town meetings, and legislative records. Most of the letters were written by Rhode Islanders, with nine from Newport and five from Providence. All but one of the seven other letters came from New York City. In individual letters, two French diplomats stationed in New York City provided analyses of the meaning of Rhode Island's final ratification of the Constitution. The newspaper items printed below, most of them reports, came from newspapers published primarily in Providence (11), Newport (6), Boston (4), and New York City (3). A broadside printed in Providence gave news of Rhode Island's ratification and a diary entry described President George Washington's visit to Rhode Island in August 1790. Accounts of two town meetings and actions by three legislative sessions are printed here.

A wide variety of topics are considered in the documents printed in Part IX. These include: reports of Rhode Island's ratification of the Constitution on 29 May 1790; celebrations of Rhode Island ratification in East Greenwich, Providence, and Warren; ongoing private and public commentaries, even some satirical ones, on the meaning of the Constitution and its projected impact; an illustration showing the erection of Rhode Island as the thirteenth pillar to the new federal dome, thus completing the ratification of the Constitution by the thirteen states; correspondence seeking appointments for Rhode Islanders to offices under the new central government; the state legislature's election of two U.S. Senators and providing for the election of the state's first U.S. Representative and its adoption of eleven of the twelve amendments to the Constitution proposed by the U.S. Congress in September 1789; the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers' Address to President George Washington and his response; newspaper and private descriptions of Washington's visit to Newport and Providence in August 1790; and the state legislature's address to Washington and the president's response.

When President Washington visited Newport and Providence, several diverse groups addressed him in writing and he responded by letter to each of them. The groups were (1) the clergy of Newport, consisting

of the pastors of seven churches, (2) the freemen of Newport, whose address was approved by the Newport town meeting, (3) the Hebrew congregation of Newport, (4) the Masons of King David's Lodge, Newport, (5) the inhabitants of Providence, whose address was approved by the Providence town meeting, and (6) the Corporation of Rhode Island College. The members of the Society of the Cincinnati in Providence addressed the president verbally and he responded likewise. These addresses, and Washington's responses to them, were printed in several newspapers.

**Henry Marchant to John Adams**  
**Newport, 29 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Most respected Friend

'tis done,—'tis done—The Constitution this Day was adopted by Our State Convention, by a Majority of two—Never were Days of more anxiety, Labor and Assiduity, Hope and Fear, than the last six—It is a happy Circumstance that the Convention was adjourned to this Town, where we had the largest federal Interest, and little Influence of the Country Anties—The late Act passed by the Senate of Congress was an Instrument which we weilded with much Success and Execution:<sup>2</sup>—Nothing could be more timely—It would take a Quire of Paper to give You the entertaining particulars of this Week:—But I know not how soon an Opportunity may offer to New York—Therefore to Business

Congress may soon rise, and may find it necessary to make the Acts proper to the Introduction of this State into the Union, before Our Members may be able to reach Congress—Our Assembly will sit three Weeks from next Monday: The Senators may be chosen then; The Representative cannot be, till some Weeks after.—I have therefore inclosed You the Revennue Act of this State; passed as nearly as possible to that of Congress<sup>3</sup>—Here you will find all the Ports marked out and well described, and every Thing necessary for forming Your Acts or Bills—Names for Officers I dare say have gone forward in Abundance long ago; and are in the Care and Charge of one Member or another.—But if Satisfaction cannot yet be had on that Subject, or not untill Congress should rise,—The Act may provide for this State, That the President have the intire Power of Appointment; at any Rate untill Congress meet again—

I don't know but I am impertinent in this Business:—but my Wish is to advance the publick Weal, and to give every Aid in my Power, that the Wheels of Government, and Revennue may be in Motion—What is well You may retain; you have been used to refine;—The Dross You may throw away.<sup>4</sup>—

Upon this happy Occasion I congratulate You Sir,—And thro' You Sir, I desire to congratulate the President, Our fœderal Head and Father;—Congress and all well Wishers to the building up Our grand fœderal Cause and Government—With sincere Respects to Mrs. Adams, Compts. to the Family and all Friends, without Time to add; having come this Moment out of Convention, and amidst the din & Noise of Bells, Huzzas and Guns, I am most respectfully Your devoted Friend & Servt.

P.S. Amidst my hurry I had forgot to acknowledge the Honor done me by Yours of the 20th. of March,<sup>5</sup> which would have been answerd before, but that I was tired of Conjectures, and wish'd for something substantial to communicate—Part of Yours will hereafter require further Attention—

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi. Adams received this letter on 31 May and responded on 1 June (below).

2. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June 1790 (RCS:R.I., 837–55).

3. See "An Act for levying and collecting certain duties and imposts within this state," (Bartlett, *Records*, X, 340–54). This law was printed in the General Assembly Schedule, September 1789 Session (Providence, 1789) (Evans 22104, pp. 5–25) and as a twenty-two page pamphlet (Evans 22108). Both imprints were made by Bennett Wheeler, the printer of the *United States Chronicle*.

4. See Proverbs 25:4 and Malachi 3:3.

5. See Adams to Marchant, 20 March 1790 (RCS:R.I., 791–93).

### **Jeremiah Olney to Philip Schuyler Newport, 29 May 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I am happy to inform you that my fears Communicated to you in my last Letter Respecting the Result of the Deliberations of our Convention, on the Subject of the New Constitution are at an end, the Convention having this day adopted Said Constitution by a Majority of Two Votes—Much in the form as was don[e] by the State Convention of New York, permitt me my Dear Friend to Congratulate you on this Happy event, our Genl. Assembly are to Convene on the Second monday in June Next when the Senators will be Chosen who will go forward Immediately to Congress—I propose my Intension is to be in New York—perhaps the appointment of the Revenue officers will not be Made untill the arrival of our Senators. but Shoud it take place before, permitt me Dr. Sir to Request your Interest with the President, infavour of my appointment to the Office of Collector for the District of Providence &c.<sup>2</sup> the appointment I have from the President to pay the Invalids on the 5th of June next prevents my going Immediately on to

New York, however I hope to Compleat this business & have the pleasure of Seeing you by the 15th or 20th of June—Colo. Barton takes passage in the Packett that Sailes this Evening for New York, he has An intention of opposing me as Collector, I mention this that you & my Friends may be prepared to Counteract him<sup>3</sup>—

1. FC, Shepley Library, RHi. Schuyler (1733–1804), one of New York's most prominent Federalist leaders, was a wealthy Albany County landowner and entrepreneur. Relieved of his command shortly before the Battle of Saratoga, he had been a controversial major general in the Continental Army during the Revolution. As one of New York's first U.S. Senators, he created a political controversy in New York by retaining his seat in the state senate, continuing to serve on the powerful council of appointment, and providing advice to his son-in-law Alexander Hamilton, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury.

2. Olney was appointed collector for the district of Providence.

3. William Barton, who was appointed surveyor at Providence, carried convention President Daniel Owen's letter to President Washington, 29 May (RCS:R.I., 1006–7). In 1789, Barton had declined the appointment as one of the judges of the Northwest Territory.

### **East Greenwich Celebrates Rhode Island Ratification 30 May, 5 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

*East-Greenwich, June 7, 1790.*

As soon as the much wished for intelligence of the Ratification of the Constitution, was announced in this town, notwithstanding its being Sunday [30 May], the inhabitants assembled and manifested their joy by a discharge of 13 cannon.

After which they spent the evening sociably in mutual congratulations and on Saturday last [5 June] they met and dined together in the federal grove, and spent the afternoon in festivity and social mirth; at sunset a discharge of 13 cannon from the hill was made, when the Company repaired to Capt. Arnold's, where they drank the following toasts:

- 1st. United States of America.
2. The Constitution and Government under which we are United.
3. The President, Vice-President, and Congress of the United States.
4. State of Rhode-Island.
5. The Convention that completed the American Union.
6. The National Assembly of France.
7. Agriculture and Commerce.
8. Industry and Economy.
9. Coalition of Parties.
10. Relief for the Distressed.<sup>2</sup>
11. May we have Government for our Protection, Liberty for our Companion, and Wisdom for our Guide.

12. May the American Fair cement the Federal Union.
13. Constitutional Liberty throughout the World.

1. Printed: *Newport Herald*, 17 June.
2. See "Glossary," RCS:R.I., 319.

### **Rhode Island Ratification Announced in Providence 31 May 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS united to the Great *AMERICAN FAMILY*.

\*\*\*\*\*

PROVIDENCE, *Monday, May 31, 1790.*

Saturday Night, at Eleven o'Clock, an Express arrived in Town from Newport, with the important Intelligence, that the CONVENTION OF THIS STATE had ratified the CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES.

The Question, "*Shall the Constitution be adopted, or not?*" was taken on Saturday, about Five o'Clock, P. M.—when the Affirmative was carried by a Majority of *Two*, Thirty-four Members voting for, and Thirty-two against it.

This pleasing and most interesting Event was immediately announced here by the Ringing of Bells, and firing two federal Salutes—one from the Artillery on Federal Hill—and another from the Ship Warren, Capt. [Pardon] Sheldon, lately arrived from India. . . .

Yesterday Evening the Delegates for this Town arrived from Newport, and on their landing were welcomed by a Discharge of Thirteen Cannon.—Some further Demonstrations of Joy are expected to take Place.

1. These four paragraphs appeared in John Carter's broadside printing of the form of ratification (Evans 22847). (See RCS:R.I., 996–1004n, for the form of ratification.) They were reprinted in Carter's *Providence Gazette* on 5 June, and in full or in part in nine other newspapers by 19 June: Mass. (2), Conn. (3), N.Y. (1), Pa. (2), Del. (1). The *United States Chronicle*, 3 June, summarized these paragraphs (see below).

### **John Adams to Henry Marchant New York, 1 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Your obliging Letter of the 29. Ult.<sup>2</sup> was brought to me Yesterday at my house, and as there happened to be a few Friends with me, we joined in Wishing Happiness and Prosperity to Rhode Island with great Cordiality. This morning the President did me the honour of a Visit and I had the Pleasure of congratulating him on this pleasing Event and presenting to him your affectionate Respects.

Congress I conjecture will wait the Arrival of your Senators, before they pass any Act.

My hopes of the Blessings of Liberty from this Government, are much increased Since Yesterday. United We Stand but divided We fall. Join or die. these were our Maxims, twenty five or thirty years ago,<sup>3</sup> and they are neither less true nor less important now than they were then.

The renovation of that Union, which has acquired such renown in the World, by tryumphing over Such formidable Ennemies, and by Spreading the Principles which are like to produce a compleat Revolution both in Religion and Government in most parts of Europe; cannot fail to restore respectability to the American Name, and procure Us Consideration among nations.

I earnestly wish to see your Senators here and your Representative in the other house and I cannot but hope that you will be one of the former.

With Sincere Esteem I am dear Sir your Friend and Servant

1. RC, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Special Collections, Wellesley College Library, Wellesley, Mass. On the same day Adams wrote to Englishman Thomas Brand-Hollis that "Rhode Island is to become one of us on the 29th May" (John Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis* . . . [London, 1808], 36).

2. See above.

3. "Join, or Die" was the caption of an illustration created by Benjamin Franklin that first appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 9 May 1754. The second motto comes from "A Song" that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and *Pennsylvania Journal* on 7 July 1768.

### **William Ellery to John Adams Newport, 1 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The grand question is decided. The Constitution was adopted last saturday by a majority of two.—On this auspicious event I most heartily salute you.

The ratification will in a few days be transmitted to the President, and I presume federal Officers will be soon appointed for this State.—I am greatly obliged to you for the interest you have taken in my views and wishes, and hope that it will be continued, and extended as far as is consistent with the rule you have prescribed to yourself.

I had been informed that the President in his appointments paid a regard to the old Law adage,<sup>2</sup> and therefore I gave you a strong hint that the characters of the Collector [John Wanton] and the other custom house officers for *this* district are objectionable.—I wish that the offices of the United States may be filled with respectable characters, and I think I may venture to say that any office I may be honoured with will be discharged with fidelity.—

Some of the Antifedl. Delegates after the Constitution was adopted declared that upon their return home they would use their influence with their Constituents to reconcile them to the New Government.<sup>3</sup>

I hope that they will, and that peace, order and happiness may be restored to and established in this distressed, distracted State.—

With great esteem I am, Sir Yr. most obedt. servt.

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi. On the same day Ellery informed Alexander Hamilton: “The New Constitution was last Saturday adopted by the Convention of this State by a majority of two voices.—On this happy event I salute you” (Ellery Letterbook, 1786–1794, RNHi).

2. Ellery is perhaps referring to the common law adage “possession is nine-tenths of the law.” Ellery was appointed collector at Newport.

3. In making this declaration, the Rhode Island Antifederalist delegates followed the well-publicized and praised actions taken by Antifederalist delegates in the Massachusetts Convention (RCS:Mass., 1645–57).

### **Antoine de la Forest to Comte de la Luzerne**

**New York, 1 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The new American union has finally just been completed by the accession of Rhode Island to the Constitution of the United States. Last January the Federalists of that state had managed to call a convention to convene the following March. It was not expected that that convention could be brought to the desired ratification in its first session; it was not surprising to see it adjourn from 6 March to 24 May, while restricting itself to drafting a declaration of rights, with a list of 18 articles of amendment, and without turning its attention to the main question. But Congress affected to look upon these multiple refusals in a serious light. In spite of the small importance of Rhode Island, Congress seemed concerned not to allow one of the members of the American Confederation to stand aside in the new order of things and become an independent foreign state. Its maritime situation and a long habit of smuggling facilitated deceptions detrimental to the revenue of the United States; complaints became frequent and in addition the northern states were angry to be deprived of the representation in Congress of a neighbor which has the same general interests as they do. The Senate instructed a committee to make a report on suitable measures for the United States to take in this regard. The Committee presented a Bill with the effect of prohibiting the importation by land or by water of any Rhode Island food or merchandize, closing the ports of the union to its ships, forbidding all communication with the ports of that insubordinate state by ships of the Union, and authorizing the President of the United States to ask it for a partial payment of 25,000

dollars toward the debts of the old Confederation. This Bill passed the Senate, was sent to the House of Representatives, received a first reading there and carefully managed delays gave the Convention of Rhode Island time to assemble again on 24 May.<sup>2</sup> The ratification of the Constitution was decided on by a majority of only *two votes* on the 29th. The projected Bill of rights is annexed to it, as are the 18 articles of amendment; but in a purely recommendatory manner.

1. RC (Tr), Affaires Étrangères, Correspondance Consulaires, BI 910, New York, ff. 302–3, Archives Nationales, Paris, France.

2. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (RCS:R.I., 837–55).

**Louis-Guillaume Otto to Comte de Montmorin  
New York, 1 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The plan of which I had the honor to inform you in my Dispatch No. 22<sup>2</sup> has at last been accomplished. The Northern Senators who have long desired to have a more considerable advantage and who have regarded with indignation the aversion of Rhodeislanders for the new American Government, succeeded in having a Bill passed to cut off on 1 July next all communication with the small state of Rhodeisland by land and by water on pain of seizing the ships, wagons, and goods, a monetary fine and imprisonment. This Bill in addition authorizes the President of the United States to ask Rhodeisland for the payment of its quota of the public debt.<sup>3</sup> A measure this vigorous at the moment when the federal Government is still in its infancy astonished the public; only five Senators opposed it; they thought that the Congress had not the least right to use force against a state which conformed so strictly to the articles of the old confederation and that committed no other wrong than that of not relishing the innovations that Congress wished to introduce; that this force could produce a much different effect than that which they appeared to allow and that, far from intimidating it, could fortify and even justify that State in its opposition; that besides threats of this type must be followed by a coming to blows, that the poverty and the exhaustion of the public treasury could render illusory and that before thinking of subduing it would be necessary to assure oneself of the means of taking it on effectively but even supposing the possibility of success the measure would still be unjust in itself and would dishonor from the start a Government founded on equity and on the voluntary consent of the people.—The Dissident Senators accordingly asked that their protest be inserted in the Journals, but the majority opposed that and delivered the Bill to the House of Repre-



sentatives. That House affected to consider the Bill as threatening and postponed the discussion until the fifteenth in order to leave the Rhodeislanders time to ward off the blow that was aimed toward them. In the interval the Convention of Rhodeisland which had already adjourned re-assembled in the greatest consternation and ratified the Constitution almost without debate by a majority of only 34 against 32.—This new victory gained by Northerners is useful for the Confederation in that it reunites the 13 Republics that previously composed the body politic of the United States, but it infinitely displeases the Southern States, which will henceforward have two more votes against them in the Senate and whose interests were already too neglected by Congress. It is certain that, from another angle, Rhodeisland had no time to lose; Newport and Providence, the principal towns of that State, had already authorized their Delegates to treat separately with Congress in order to yield to the Confederation.<sup>4</sup>

This ratification, Sir, finally completes the new government of the United States and makes it a more formidable body than it was under the old system. From this moment on the United States can be considered as an homogeneous nation, which receives its laws and its impetus from a common center, and is no longer, as before, a Congress of Delegates without power and without force, but a Government of three well organized branches whose powers are clearly defined by a *written* Constitution, which gives it a great superiority over the English one. It is true that there remain here yet, as in some federal Monarchies, separate Bodies whose pretensions embarrass the supreme power, I speak of the Legislatures of the individual States. The Americans regret, too late, not having thought to make a new division of their territory at the beginning of the revolution, a measure so happily taken and executed in France in order to destroy the little tyrants and the local prejudices of the different districts. The moment has passed, the individual Legislatures, so jealous of their independence and even of their Sovereignty, will prevent this government from expanding in a way that without them, it would not fail to make in a few years.

It is as a result of that jealousy that even Rhodeisland proposed amendments and appended them to its ratification of the new Constitution. These amendments number about 20, of which I have the honor, Sir, to submit to you the most important:—"The United States will guarantee the Sovereignty of each individual State and all the powers which are not expressly delegated by the Constitution.—The Congress will not interfere in any way with the redemption of paper money currently in circulation in any State.—The judicial power of Congress will not extend to criminal cases against a state, nor to claims of a particular

individual against a State.—The consent of eleven States is necessary to introduce a new article into the Constitution. The Congress will not impose any poll tax. It will not impose any direct tax without the consent of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the individual Legislatures. It will not maintain a standing army in time of peace.—It will not make any loan without the consent of two thirds of the two Houses. It will prohibit as soon as possible the importation of slaves. The Legislature will be able to recall their Senators when they think fitting.”<sup>5</sup>—This last amendment, Sir, would be the most dangerous to allow because it would damage the liberty of debate in the Senate, but the amendments of Rhodeisland will be like those proposed by the other states, one looks upon them simply as the means, which were employed to gain a majority in the Conventions and the Congress will always be sufficiently occupied to have a valid pretext not to take them into consideration. Besides there is always in Congress a faction strong enough to prevent the extension of powers which are assigned to it by the Constitution and although it is generally agreed to brush aside all deliberation on amendments to the Constitution it acts in a manner which leaves questions undecided, which have some connection with them. When the Government takes on a certain stability it will be easier to return to amendments and experience will shed more light on such a delicate question.

1. MS Copy (Tr), Henry Adams Transcripts, French State Papers, Moustier and Otto, 1790–91, DLC. The original letter is in *Correspondance Politique, États-Unis*, Vol. 35, ff. 102, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris. This dispatch, No. 29, was received on 25 September.

2. See Otto to Montmorin, 13 March (RCS:R.I., 763).

3. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June (RCS:R.I., 837–55).

4. See “Providence: Instructions to Town’s Delegates to the State Convention,” 24 May (RCS:R.I., 889).

5. See “Rhode Island Form of Ratification and Amendments,” 29 May (RCS:R.I., 996–1004n).

### **Theodore Sedgwick to Theodore Foster**

**New York, 1 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . You will now please to accept my most cordial congratulations on the happy result of your convention. Every true american will partake in your joy.—

Permit me, sir, to suggest the great importance of having your state represented in senate at as early a period as may be. . . .

1. RC, Foster Papers, RHi. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1668.

**Newport Town Meeting, 1 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Resolved that the thanks of the Town be given to their Delegates in Convention for the faithful and Successful discharge of the Important trust reposed in them. . . .

1. MS, Newport Town Records (Proceedings), Vol. 1, 1779–1816, RNHi. Printed in the *Newport Herald*, 3 June, and *Newport Mercury*, 5 June.

**Boston Herald of Freedom, 1 June 1790**

*THE FEDERAL DOME COMPLETED, OR,  
THE THIRTEENTH PILLAR REARED*

By a gentleman from Providence, who arrived on Sunday evening, we have information, THAT the Convention of the State of Rhode-Island, ADOPTED THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION last Saturday, at 6 o'clock, P. M. And that great demonstrations of Joy were exhibited on the occasion at Providence.

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over ONE SINNER that *repenteth*, more than over NINETY and NINE JUST persons which need no repentance.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Luke 15:7

**New York Daily Advertiser, 1 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

ADOPTION

*Of the CONSTITUTION by RHODE ISLAND*

*Yesterday afternoon arrived Sloop Rambler, Capt. [Joseph] Carey, from Newport, Rhode-Island, who left that place on Sunday Morning last [30 May].*

By the arrival of Capt. Carey, we have received the authentic information, that the CONVENTION of RHODE ISLAND did, on Saturday last, adopt the *Constitution of the United States* by a majority of TWO. The Yeas were THIRTY FOUR—the Nays THIRTY TWO.

In the above vessel came passenger Col. [William] BARTON, one of the members of the convention, with dispatches for the PRESIDENT of the United States.

It is expected the Governor of Rhode Island will immediately convene the legislature of that state, in order that they may proceed to the choice of two Senators to the Congress of the United States.

1. Reprinted in twelve newspapers by 16 June: Mass. (1), N.Y. (1), N.J. (1), Pa. (7), Md. (1), Va. (1), and also as the lower half of a broadside (Evans 22986) printed by Dunlap and Claypoole, the printers of the *Pennsylvania Packet*. The reprintings in the *New York Gazette of the United States*, 2 June, and the Stockbridge, Mass., *Western Star*, 8 June,

contain an additional paragraph at the end stating that "In consequence of this event a Federal salute was fired from the battery in this city [New York]." This sentence, slightly modified, was also reprinted in the *Newport Mercury*, 21 June.

The *Carlisle Gazette*, Philadelphia *Freeman's Journal*, and *Pennsylvania Gazette*, all 9 June, combined their reprintings of the first three paragraphs of this item with two paragraphs reprinted from the *New York Journal*, 1 June (RCS:R.I., 1005). The *State Gazette of North Carolina*, 18 June, summarized this information (Mfm:R.I.).

### Warren Celebrates Rhode Island Ratification, 2 June 1790<sup>1</sup>

*Warren, June 4, 1790.*

On Wednesday the 2d Instant the Inhabitants of this Town met at the House of Ebenezer Cole, Esq; to testify their Approbation of the Adoption of the federal Constitution by this State, accompanied by some Friends from the neighbouring Towns of Barrington, Swanzey and Rehoboth.<sup>2</sup> The Morning was ushered in by the Discharge of Thirteen Cannon, all the Vessels in the Harbour being dressed with Colours—at One o'Clock a Procession was formed, and proceeded to the Common, where Thirteen Cannon were discharged. The Company returned in like Order, and partook of an elegant Dinner.—At Three o'Clock, Thirteen Cannon were discharged, and the following Toasts drank, each Toast being honoured by the Discharge of a Cannon, viz.

1. The United States of America.—2. The President of the United States.—3. The Vice-President of the United States.—4. The Senate of the United States.—5. The Representatives in Congress.—6. The Convention of the State of Rhode-Island.—7. The Commerce of the United States.—8. Agriculture.—9. The faithful and illustrious Allies of the United States throughout the World.—10. The fair Daughters of America.—11. The Friends of the Union.—12. Peace and Plenty.—13. May every American be safe under his own Vine and Fig-Tree.<sup>3</sup>

The Remainder of the Day was spent in the most agreeable Conviviality.

1. Printed: *Providence Gazette*, 5 June.

2. Swanzey and Rehoboth were Massachusetts towns adjacent to Warren.

3. Micah 4:4.

### Massachusetts Centinel, 2 June 1790<sup>1</sup>

*RHODE-ISLAND.*

The *Convention of Rhode-Island*, met at Newport, on *Monday* the 24th ult. On *Wednesday* a question for an adjournment to a distant day, was taken, and negatived by a majority of 9. The next day the Convention met at the Rev. Mr. THURSTON'S Meeting-House, and continued the

discussion of the CONSTITUTION, *Amendments*, &c. until *Saturday* evening, 6 o'clock, when the question of RATIFICATION was put—and PASSED by a MAJORITY of *Two*. Thus the FEDERAL DOME is rendered still more complete—and an instance exhibited to the world of the intire change of the Government of a great Nation, in the time of Peace, without bloodshed, or civil commotion.

1. Reprinted: *New Hampshire Gazette*, 3 June; *New Hampshire Gazetteer*, 4 June.

**Governor Arthur Fenner to Governor John Hancock  
Providence, 3 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I have the satisfaction of informing your Excellency that the Constitution of the United States of America agreed to on the 17th Day of September AD 1787 by the General Convention then Assembled in Philadelphia was Ratified and Adopted, by the Convention of the People of this State, on Saturday last, conformity to the mode recommended by the Philadelphia Convention and the Consequent Resolution of Congress, passed September 28th 1787. The form of the Ratification of this State your Excellency will find in the United States Chronicle of this day which I have inclosed.

It has happened that this State has been the last to adopt the New Constitution but I hope it will in future as it has heretofore been with the foremost in Patriotism, in Friendship and Sisterly Affection.

All the States in the Union have one Cause, the Preservation of their common Liberties and the promotion of the Tranquility and Happiness of the whole Empire in which all the Individuals who compose it are interested—It will be with great pleasure that I shall take charge of any Matters your Excellency may at any time wish to have communicated to the Legislature of this State through my Hands Any such communication shall meet with the earliest and most respectful Attention.

That the Goodness of Almighty GOD that has so remarkably appeared in our favour on many Occasions may long continue to the People of these States the Blessings of Peace Tranquillity & Happiness arising from a wise, a just and a prudent Administration of the General Government founded on the Broad and Solid Basis of the affection of the People arising from a conviction that their Good is the Object of those in Public Employ—That Maxims tending to promote and Establish the confidence of the People in the Government and in those they have or shall select to Administer it, may prevail in every part of the Empire. And that your Excellency may long Live to see the prosperity & Happiness of our Country meeting the just reward

of Gratitude and confidence due to your constant Exertions for the common Good are the sincere Wishes of your Excellencys most Obedient and humble Servant

1. RC, Manuscripts, RPJCB. The letter was read to the Massachusetts legislature on 8 June (*Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 June). Hancock (1737–1793), a wealthy Boston merchant, was a delegate to the Continental Congress, 1775–78, where he signed the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation. He was governor of Massachusetts, 1780–85, 1787–93, and president of the state Convention where he voted to ratify the Constitution in February 1788.

**David Howell to Thomas Jefferson**  
**Providence, 3 June 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

Although I may not be among the foremost, I assure you I am among the most sincere in Congratulating you at once, on your return to your native Country, and, on your appointment to the place of Secretary of State.

Since the adoption of the Federal Constitution by this State I can inform my friends that I am alive and make mention of the place where I live with more pleasure, than I could before—for, indeed, life would be scarcely worth having if one should be condemned to Spend it under such a Government as we have lately experienced.

After my return home from three successive Years service in Congress, for which I received the thanks of our Legislature, an arrearage was acknowledged as due to me of near Two Thousand Dollars, this they have confiscated, together with other securities, because I refused to take their paper money *at par* in payment.<sup>2</sup>

I was also under the necessity of resigning my seat in our Superior Court to avoid a more mortifying event, on account of the general concurrence of the people in the execution of their paper money system. In confidence of your friendship, of which you was pleased to give me sufficient proofs in the course of our residence at Anapolis,<sup>3</sup> I have presumed to mark to your address, a Packet of pamphlets;<sup>4</sup> I pray you to send them to the several Gentlemen whose names are written on them.

I send these pamphlets as well to honour the memory of my departed friend, the [writer?]<sup>5</sup> as to furnish my acquaintance, who are yet in Life, and in power with Evidence of the part I have acted, while honoured with Judicial power, against the paper money laws of this State.

Having accidentally heard that the President of the United States did me the hoñor to enquire into my present political character and flattering myself that he might be prompted by other motives than mere curiosity, I have also enclosed the U.S. Chronicle of February 25. 1790

containing some of my sentiments under the signature of *Solon Junior*, Both the papers in this Town contain other peices under the same signature,—as such peices are hastily written and seldom copied, they cannot be correct. In the Providence Gazette of May 22d Ult. enclosed, you will also see a piece under the signature of *a Farmer*. I Live on a Farm, in fact, in the vicinity of this Town. In the same Gazette of April 17 Ult. you will also see two peices written by me just before our late Election, these may explain to you the reason why I was opposed as attorney General and beat by an Antifederalist of no abilities.<sup>6</sup>

Although I had been honōred with a seat in some of our Courts ever since the revolution and addicted myself to the study of Law I had no thoughts of descending to the practice, 'till reduced, by the operation of iniquitous Laws, to the necessity of seeking a livelihood from it . . .

Our General Assembly will be in Session next week when our senators will be chosen to proceed to take their seats, and measures taken for the Election of our Representative. There [will] be a number of Candidates—all Decided Federalists and opposers of Paper money will probably [be] excluded from our Election. Our present Governor is a man of good abilities and I hope it will be one of his objects to moderate the heat of party. It will give you pleasure to Learn that our college is in a flourishing Condition, and that the College fund in the hands of our Legislature are confiscated private property. *Beneficium magnum quod me non occidisi*—as Tully says<sup>7</sup>

With every sentiment of esteem and friendship, I am, dear sir,  
Your most Obedient, and very humble Servant.

P.S. I have, as yet written thus freely to no other Gentleman. I observe that my Clerk in directing the pamphlet to Mr. Adams has stiled me *his friend*; as in the directions to all the other Gentlemen, to whom I have the honōr to be personally known; will you please to communicate the substance of this letter to him—proof that [I am?] his friend, he may see in the Journals of Congress.

1. RC, RG 59, Department of State, Misc. Letters, DNA. Printed: Boyd, XVI, 451–54n.

2. For the “confiscation” of public securities when creditors refused payment in depreciated paper money, see the “Introduction” (RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, xxxiii).

3. Howell and Jefferson served together in Congress when it met in Annapolis in 1784.

4. The pamphlets were *The Case, Trevett against Weeden . . .* (Providence, 1787) (Evans 20825) by James Mitchell Varnum.

5. Varnum, who had served as a judge in the Northwest Territory, died in Marietta, Ohio, in 1789.

6. For Howell's "*Solon Junior*" essays, see RCS:R.I., 347–48n, 352–54, 377–79n, 386–88, 399–400, 737–40n, 744–47n, 750–51n. For "*a Farmer*," see RCS:R.I., 882–85. For the two election items, see RCS:R.I., 783–86, 790–91.

7. Latin: There you did not kill me, a great favor, truly. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Second Oration Against Mark Antony*, 44 B.C.

### Newport Herald, 3 June 1790<sup>1</sup>

NEWPORT, MAY 29, 1790.

This day will form a memorable *ÆRA* in the United States of America: On *this day* was perfected the Arch on which rests the grand fabric, A FREE AND EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT: On *this day* was closed the link of that chain which unites Thirteen States: To the world *this day* will be memorable, as it exhibits an instance unparalleled in ancient or modern times, of a people rising from a state of anarchy, to liberty and order, without the horrors of a civil war, and forming a government not by public faction nor private ambition, but by a liberal and intelligent investigation.

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#### CONVENTION.

At 5 o'clock, P.M. the question for adopting the Constitution of the United States was called for, and upon taking the Yeas and Nays, it was carried in the affirmative by a majority of TWO, there being 34 Yeas, and 32 Nays.—The Yeas and Nays were as follow:

[For the Yeas and Nays, see RCS:R.I., 994–96.]

The majority would have been much larger had not many of the members been restricted by instructions, as they were fully convinced of the propriety of an adoption, and if it had been compatible with the public good to have adjourned the decision for a short period only, we have every reason to believe, that those instructions, in many instances, would have been changed; but as there was a majority for the question, and the situation of the State extremely critical, it was deemed necessary to take it.<sup>2</sup>

The President of the Convention hath great merit for his impartiality and decision; and the Members, for their candor and moderation. The unanimous vote of thanks from the latter to the former is an honorable memorial to both.

The Convention by a resolution also expressed their thanks to the Reverend the Clergy, who had officiated before them.

Every demonstration of joy was manifested by the citizens that the late hour of the day would admit—past animosities were forgotten—and congratulations and thanks re-echoed from all.



The citizens of these United States *have fought a good fight*, in effecting a revolution which hath enlightened Europe, as well as given freedom to themselves; and *have kept the faith*,<sup>3</sup> in establishing a Constitution so favorable to civil and religious liberty,—But they have yet more to do, not only to watch over their rulers, in order that government may be well administered, but every member of the community ought to watch over himself, that he may observe inviolate the laws which are, or may be constitutionally made; for public virtue is the palladium of liberty, it is the ark of the Constitution.—Athens and Sparta were invincible while virtue was the characteristic of the people; but when corruption had polluted the mass, they were deaf to that eloquence, the breath of which once inspired them, and regardless of danger, until ruin burst upon them.—When Brutus and a band of patriots wrested tyranny from the hand of Cæsar, the people no longer possessed the virtue of the ancient Romans,—to them liberty ceased to be a boon.—History is replete with examples which sanction it as a truth, that the invasions of rights are always preceded by a general depravation of morals.—Let the citizens of these United States therefore, *press forward*, to attain greater perfection in public virtue,—Let them when reciting to their children the sorrows and troubles they have passed through, in establishing a free and permanent Government, impress on their minds by example, as well as by precept, the necessity and advantage of Religion and Morality.

The Hon. General Assembly of this State are summoned by warrant from his Excellency the Governor, to meet in this town on Monday next<sup>4</sup>—when the Senators will be appointed, and measures taken for the appointment of a Representative to the Congress of the United States.

1. The first paragraph was reprinted nine times by 21 July: Mass. (2), N.Y. (1), Pa. (4), Del. (1), S.C. (1). Eight of these newspapers reprinted from one to five of the subsequent paragraphs by 21 July: Mass. (2), N.Y. (1), Pa. (3), Del. (1), S.C. (1).

2. The *Providence Gazette*, 5 June, described the majority in similar terms:

Many more Members of the Convention were convinced of the Propriety of an Adoption of the Constitution, and the Majority would, it appears, have been much larger, had not a Number of the Members been restricted by Instructions. Had it been compatible with the public Good to have adjourned the Decision for a short Time only, those Instructions would undoubtedly have been reversed; but as there was a Majority for an Adoption, and the Situation of the State extremely critical, it was deemed expedient to take the Question.—The President of the Convention distinguished himself for his Impartiality and Decision, as did the Members for their Candour and Moderation.—The latter voted their Thanks to the

former, unanimously, in a Manner highly honourable to both.—The Convention also expressed their Thanks to the Reverend Clergy who had officiated before them.

3. 2 Timothy 4:7. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

4. A slight variation of this sentence was printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 3 June, and then reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 5 June.

### **Providence United States Chronicle, 3 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The important Intelligence was received in this Town, by Express, about 11 o’Clock, the same Evening—and was immediately announced by Federal Salutes, from the Warren, Indiaman, and from the Artillery Park, on Federal Hill—and the Ringing of the Bells.<sup>2</sup>

On the Arrival of the Delegates to the Convention from this Town, on Sunday Evening, they were saluted by a Federal Discharge of Cannon.

On Tuesday, at Sunrise, 13 Cannon was discharged by the United Company of Train of Artillery, commanded by Col. [Daniel] Tillinghast, which appeared in Uniform on the Occasion—The Salute was repeated at 12 o’Clock.—After which the Company, with several other Gentlemen repaired to the Colonel’s, where an elegant Entertainment was prepared for them. After Dinner the following Toasts were drank, viz.

1. The President of the United States. 2. The Senate and Representatives of the United States. 3. The Governor and Company. 4. The Rhode-Island Convention, that compleated the Union of America. 5. May the Union last till Years shall cease to Roll. 6. Peace at Home, and Reputation abroad. 7. May the Groans of the Distressed be no more heard. 8. May America forever honour the Men who have led her to her present happy Situation. 9. Agriculture, Manufactures, and Commerce. 10. The Encouragers of useful Arts. 11. The Abolition of Party. 12. May the good of the Whole be the grand Object. 13. May private Virtue be the Road to public Honor.

At 3 o’Clock the Salute was repeated.—After which a Procession, with Drums beating and Colours flying, marched thro’ the Streets. And 13 Cannon closed the Day. In the Evening Messrs. Brown and France’s<sup>3</sup> Ship, the WARREN, lately from India, was superbly illuminated—and a Number of beautiful Rockets were let off from the Great Bridge, by the Artillery.

1. This account of the Providence celebration was largely reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 5 June.

2. The information in this paragraph was taken from the broadside printed by John Carter on 31 May (above).

3. A reference to the mercantile firm Brown & Francis.

**Boston Independent Chronicle, 3 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

THE AMERICAN UNION COMPLETED.

'TIS done! 'tis finished! guardian UNION binds,  
 In *voluntary* bands, a Nation's minds:  
 Behold the DOME compleat, the PILLARS rise—  
 Earth for the BASIS, for the ARCH the skies!  
 Now the *new* world shall mighty scenes unfold;  
 Shall rise th' imperial Rival of the *old*;—  
 And *Roman Freedom* tread the Western Soil,  
 And a new *Athens* in the *Desert* smile.

O happy land!—O ever-sacred Dome  
 Where PEACE and INDEPENDENCE own their home:  
 COMMERCE and TILLAGE, hail the Queen of *Marts*  
 Th' *Asylum* of the world, the residence of ARTS.



BOSTON, THURSDAY, JUNE 3.

*By a gentleman who arrived in town yesterday, from Providence, we are favoured with a Hand-Bill, printed in that town, containing the Ratification of the Federal Constitution by the State of Rhode-Island; which, as we conceive to be highly interesting, we present the public.*

[At this point the *Independent Chronicle* reprinted material from John Carter's 31 May broadside (RCS:R.I., 1017).]

1. The poem was reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 5 June; *Newport Mercury*, 14 June; and eight other newspapers by 17 July: N.Y. (1), N.J. (1), Pa. (3), Md. (1), N.C. (1), S.C. (1). The *Gazette's* reprinting of the poem was prefaced: "On Occasion of the happy Accession of this State to the general Government, the Boston Independent Chronicle of Thursday displays the Thirteen emblematical Pillars, preceded by the following sentimental and we hope *prophetic* Lines." The pillars illustration is unique. No other newspaper carried an illustration showing thirteen pillars. No reprintings of the *Chronicle's* pillars have been located.

**President George Washington to Governor Arthur Fenner  
New York, 4 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

In acknowledging the receipt of your Excellency's letter of the 20th of May,<sup>2</sup> I cannot forbear to congratulate you and the people of your State upon the happy event which has since taken place by the adoption and ratification of the Constitution of the United States by the Convention of Rhode Island.—

Having now attained the desireable object of uniting under one general Government all those States which were originally confederated, we have a right to expect, with the blessing of a divine providence, that our Country will afford us all those domestic enjoyments of which a free people only can boast—and at the same time secure that respectability abroad which she is entitled to by nature and from circumstances.— Since the bond of Union is now complete, and we once more consider ourselves as one family, it is much to be hoped that reproaches will cease and prejudices be done away; for we should all remember that we are members of that community upon whose general success depends our particular and individual welfare;—and, therefore, if we mean to support the Liberty and Independence which it has cost us so much blood and treasure to establish, we must drive far away the dæmon of party spirit and local reproach.

I should be deficient in politeness as well as sensibility was I to close this without acknowledging the impression which the great personal regard and warm wishes for my individual felicity expressed in your Letter has made on me.

1. FC, Washington Papers, DLC. A draft of this letter is in RG 59, Department of State, Misc. Letters, DNA.

2. For Fenner's letter, see RCS:R.I., 872–76n.

**Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers:  
Address to President George Washington, Providence, 4 June 1790**

The address of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers (agreed to unanimously at a meeting on 4 June) and President Washington's

response were printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 15 July, from which these transcriptions are taken. They were reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 17 July, and the *Newport Mercury*, 19 July. A draft of the address and the recipient's copy of Washington's reply is in the Rhode Island Historical Society. Letterbook copies of both documents are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. The newspaper versions differ from the manuscripts only in capitalization and punctuation. The draft of the address has a paragraph crossed out that became part of a resolution on smuggling adopted by the Association that was printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 15 July. The crossed-out paragraph reads: "Convinced of the great Importance of a due Collection of the Revenue, and of the Necessity of every possible Guard to prevent Fraud and Collusion therein, the Association have unanimously adopted a solemn Resolution, to do all in their Power, collectively and individually, to support and enforce the Laws respecting the same."

Theodore Foster, one of Rhode Island's U.S. Senators, sent a copy of the address to President Washington with his letter of 26 June. The manuscript version was delivered in person by Foster either on 28 June or perhaps at a dinner hosted by Washington on 1 July (*United States Chronicle*, 15 July; Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 556–59n).

The Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers was chartered in 1789 to promote home manufacturers, to cement the mechanic interest, and to raise a fund to support distressed mechanics. Foster indicated that the Association consisted "of about Two Hundred of the Respectable Citizens" of Providence (*ibid.*, 557).

### *The Address, 4 June 1790*

THE ADDRESS OF THE PROVIDENCE ASSOCIATION OF MECHANICS AND MANUFACTURERS TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SIR, The happy Period has at length arrived, when we can with Propriety join our Fellow-Citizens of the other States in congratulating you, as Chief Magistrate of united America. Altho the Progress of this State to our present Situation has been slow and timid, it is some Consolation, that our Accession has completed the Federal Union.

Pleased with the Establishment of a firm Government, we are happy in thus having it in our Power to express our Sentiments of Regard and Attachment to the President of the Union, and our Determination, as far as in us lies, to support the Constitution and Laws of the United States.

The Mechanics and Manufacturers of this Town feel a Confidence in the Wisdom and Patriotism of the Legislature of the United States,—that they will do all in their Power to promote the Manufactures, as well as the Agriculture and Commerce of our Country;—this Confidence is greatly strengthened by the Consideration that you, Sir, are at the Head of it.

In full Expectation that under a mild and beneficent Administration of the Government, we shall be enabled to lead quiet and peaceable Lives, and enjoy the Fruits of our honest Industry<sup>1</sup>—with grateful Hearts for past favours, we join the Millions of America, in fervent Prayers to the Disposer of all Events, for your Health and Happiness; and that your important Life may long be spared, to rule a free, virtuous and happy Nation.

*Providence, June 4, 1790.*

Signed by order and in Behalf of the Association

CHARLES KEENE, *President*.<sup>2</sup>

*Attest, BENNETT WHEELER, Sec'y.*<sup>3</sup>

1. See Ecclesiastes 5:18–20.

2. Keene (1732–1794), a blacksmith, was a charter member of the association and its first vice president. He was elected president in 1790. Keene had fought in the Battle of Rhode Island (1778) as a militia captain and eventually rose to the rank of major. He represented Providence in the House of Deputies in 1780–81, 1784–86, and he served on the town council for six years.

3. For Wheeler, the printer of the *United States Chronicle*, see RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, lii–liv.

*President George Washington's Response*

*New York, c. 1 July 1790*

TO THE ASSOCIATION OF MECHANICS AND MANUFACTURERS  
OF PROVIDENCE.

GENTLEMEN, The Accession of the State of Rhode-Island to the general Government, which has again completed our Union, is, indeed, an Event that affords me singular Satisfaction. For your favourable Sentiments respecting myself, as well as for your Determination to support the Constitution and Laws of the United States, I return you my Thanks.

In full Expectation that your Confidence in the Wisdom and Patriotism of the national Legislature will not be disappointed; and that they will do all in their Power to promote the Manufactures, Agriculture and Commerce of this Country; I assure you, Gentlemen, I shall always heartily concur in all such judicious Measures as may seem calculated to enable the good People of united America to lead quiet and peaceable Lives, in the Enjoyment of the Fruits of their honest Industry.

**Connecticut Gazette, 4 June 1790 (excerpt)**<sup>1</sup>

MARINE LIST,

Kept by THOMAS ALLEN, at the CITY COFFEE-HOUSE,  
NEW-LONDON

... *Wednesday*, [June] 2. Lowry morning, wind N.

Arrived at New-York, THE STATE OF RHODE-ISLAND, and there safe moored in the UNION, two fathom only!—A NARROW BY, FAITH, JACK!—(English language, just rub and go.) . . .

1. Reprinted in the *Newport Herald*, 10 June; *United States Chronicle*, 17 June; and in nine other newspapers by 25 June: N.H. (1), Mass. (1), Conn. (2), N.Y. (3), Pa. (1), Del. (1).

**John Trumbull to John Adams**  
**Hartford, 5 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . Since I began writing we have the news of the accession of Rhode-Island to the Union. I hope it may prove a just subject of congratulation, but fear their members will join you full fraught with State politics, & a tolerable infusion of Antifederalism. The real friends to an efficient Government are so few, that we have reason to dread any accession to the number of its opposers.

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1717–19. Trumbull (1750–1831), a graduate of Yale College (1767), a Hartford, Conn., lawyer, and a poet (one of the “Connecticut Wits”), had studied law with John Adams in 1773–74. In 1790 he was state’s attorney for Hartford County.

**William Vernon to Jeremiah Wadsworth**  
**Newport, 5 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I was honored with your answer respecting a sum of money, that I received at Parr; emitted by your State [i.e., Connecticut] in 1780—adviseing me to hold it untill, your Genl. Assembly should provide for the Payment thereof; or; an efficient Government was established, and some mode prescribed for Liquidating State debts, accumulated by the War.—That happy moment hath taken place, and should esteem it, as a fresh instance of your friendship, in further adviseing me, what measures to pursue, in obtaining payment for the principal of upwards of £1100—& Ten years interest thereon.

Our long refractory State has, at length, by the unremitted assiduity of the minor & patriotick part of the Inhabitants, effected the Adoption of the Constitution, in Convention, on the 29 Ulto; by the small majority of Two only; that gave inexpressible pleasure, to the Persons of property, and a fatal stab, to Paper-Money robbers and Legislators.—You will doubtless see many applicants for Offices, under the Genl. Government; some that have no pretences either, from their attachment to the Constitution, or their merits: others perhaps, supported by the recommendations of the Merchants & Traders of the state; which in my humble opinion, ought to have little weight or consideration in the appointment; for this well known reason; that is even proverbial,

as to the state of Rhode Island. viz That smuggling is justifiable, because the Penalty warrants the measure, for the rescue by seizure—upon this principle, many instances might be given, where Legislators, that have passed Revenue Laws, have openly, saved more than half their Duties on importation of Goods—Therefore, it cannot be inconsistent with their interest to recommend Persons for Revenue officers that, perhaps may connive at frauds—

If a firm zealous attachment, a steady uniform perseverance, in the service of the United states, thro' the War. If sustaining the Loss of great property in the cause;—If integrity, probity, disinterested, impartial views in serveing the American revenue, is a recommendation to Office—No Man; stands fairer then Doctr. David Olyphant; whom the Inhabitants of Newport, can have no objection too—being a respectable Free-holder for some Years—

I am perswaded Sir, from those and other motives, that I have not mentioned, he will merit your Interest, in the appointment of Collector for the Port of Newport—

1. RC, Wadsworth Correspondence, Connecticut Historical Society. For another account of merchants and smuggling, see Moses Brown to George Washington, 6 June (Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 482–84).

### **Providence Gazette, 5 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . On Tuesday [1 June] the Inhabitants of this Town very generally and cordially united in celebrating the Adoption of the Constitution, which has completed the Thirteenth Arch of the “rais'd Empire,” uniting *all* the States under A FREE AND EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT, after a liberal and intelligent Investigation.

At Sunrise the United Company of the Train of Artillery, commanded by Colonel [Daniel] Tillinghast, appeared in Uniform, and discharged Thirteen Cannon. A similar Discharge was repeated at Noon—after which the Company, with a Number of other Gentlemen, repaired to the Colonel's House, where a handsome Entertainment had been prepared for them. After Dinner the following Toasts were drank, viz.

[For the thirteen toasts, see the *United States Chronicle*, 3 June (above).]

At Three o'Clock a Discharge of Thirteen Cannon was repeated.—A Procession of respectable Citizens, like a *Band of Brothers*,<sup>2</sup> then marched, with great Order and Regularity, through the Streets, accompanied by martial Music, and displaying the Banners of *Union, Freedom and Independence*.—In the Evening the Ship WARREN was most ingeniously illuminated, and made a very splendid Appearance; and a Variety of handsome Fireworks, prepared by the Company of Artillery, closed the *public Exhibitions* on this truly memorable Occasion.



The next Evening a Ball was given to the fair Daughters of Freedom. His Excellency the Governor has issued his Warrant for specially convening the General Assembly of this State, at Newport, on Monday next [7 June]; when Senators will be appointed to the national Legislature. These, we are informed, will immediately proceed to the Seat of general Government.

On Occasion of the happy Accession of this State to the general Government, the Boston Independent Chronicle of Thursday displays the Thirteen emblematical Pillars, preceded by the following sentimental and we hope *prophetic* Lines:

[See Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 3 June (above).]

1. Seven paragraphs have been omitted here, six of which had been previously printed. Four paragraphs had appeared in John Carter's broadside of 31 May (above). Two paragraphs (the yeas and nays on the vote to ratify the Constitution) were previously printed in the *Newport Herald*, 3 June. For the seventh omitted paragraph, see *ibid.*, note 2.

2. William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act IV, scene III, line 60.

### William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington Newport, 7 June 1790<sup>1</sup>

By some bad conduct of the Post master at Little Rest your letter of the 22d. of May did not come to hand timely enough to be answered in my last of the 1st. of June.—This is not the first time that he has been guilty of mal-conduct.—It has been repeated, and the Post-master of this town has complained of it, but he is still continued in office.—

I am happy to find that there is so much harmony in Congress. Little bickerings will some times take place in all public bodies; and a warm debate now and then like a conflict clarifies and gives a spring to the mind, as a tempest doth to the air.—By a vessel lately from N. York we are told that your house by a majority of ten had voted for an adjournment to Philadelphia. Will this produce an Assumption of the State Debt?—Shall you have time this Session to do any thing with the copper coinage?—We are plagued with coppers of various stamps various weights and of various adulterated metal.—In short we are so glutted with them that a penny will purchase four of them.<sup>2</sup>—In the course of five or six weeks much business may be done;—especially as Congress will be soon aided by our Senators.—We shall not have a Representative chosen for this Session.—

Our Genl. Assembly sits this day by special vocation.—By the best information I can obtain the famous Jonathan Hazard of South kings-town & Theodore Foster of Providence will be appointed Senators. The last is a Fed, and brother in law to our Governour; and probably by

that connection, and his own political principles will get in.—The Antis will have one of their kidney; and Jonathan I think will make the largest vote. They are strong enough to chuse whom they please.—By the Constitution the members of the Legislature must take the fœderal Oath before they can proceed to business.—It will tickle me to see some of the ——s gnaw the file.—In general they will make no bones of it. But there are some of them who will look confounded sour on the occasion.—I have inquired about the state of the minds of the country party since the adoption of the Constitution, and by what I can find they are composed.—I don't doubt but that in a short time they will become good Feds.—From the members of the Genl. Assembly I shall be able to obtain the best information in this respect.—

I have said so much about myself in former letters, and am [justly?] confident of your friendship, that I shall only beg leave to mention now that the time will soon arrive when my fate will be determined.—

My friend The Hoñble Henry Marchant is proposed for District Judge in this State.—I don't know whether you are acquainted with his character or not. Father Sherman is.<sup>3</sup>—He was several times a Delegate to Congress under the late Confederation.—has long practiced and is well versed in law, and, which is saying a great deal of a lawyer, is an honest man.—In a word he i[s] [in] every way qualified to fill that office with reputation.—Your influence in his favour will be well bestowed and will ad[d] to the obligations you have already conferred upon

Your friend & humble servant

P. S. When the public debt is funded a sort of District Loan Off[ice]rs may be appointed to receive subscriptions &c and I may be possibly be thought of as a suitable person to be a Loan Offr., in that event.—If it should be in contemplation to appoint such officers, and it should be thought that such an office might be agreeable to me it might operate against my views of the Collectorship. To prevent this I would inform you and desire you would inform Mr. [Oliver] Ellsworth, and Mr. Sherman that such an appointment would not suit me, one half so well as that of the Collectorship.—

Present my regards to Col. [George] Partridge, [Abiel] Foster, [Abraham] Baldwin, [Elbridge] Gerry &c &c &c, and tell them that now standing on federal ground, and clapping my wings I most heartily salute them.—

The Ratification of the Constitution will be presented to the President by our Senator.—

Yrs. as above—

I have taken the liberty to inclose three Letters, One to the Vice-President, One to Mr. Ellsworth, and One to Mr. Sherman. Please to

inform Mr. [Rufus] King that I received his letter by Capt. Cahoon this instant (June 8th) after I had sealed my letter to him, and that I have not time to write another.—That our Senators will be chosen this week, and will I suppose proceed to Congress immediately.

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Endorsed: "Answered July 2d."

2. For a previous discussion of copper coinage, see Ellery to Huntington, 10 August 1789 (RCS:R.L., 567–68).

3. A reference to Roger Sherman.

**Henry Marchant to John Adams**  
**Newport, 7 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

having been very ill with the Influenza, during the whole Time & long before the Convention sat; I retired immediately upon the Question's being determined, not doubting but as a Packet was going the next Morning Mr. Owens the President of the Convention would see the Ratification completed and forwarded by Her—I was astonished to find however, that He has contented Himself with sending a bare Letter of Advice *officially* however to the President of the United States;<sup>2</sup> and had left the Town without completing the Business; when two Hours more might have been sufficient—I suspect it was a political Delay, and under a Conception that possibly Congress might immediately proceed to the Choice of Officers &c And that therefore the Ratification should not go on till the Assembly was called, so that the Senators might go on at the same Time, and that the Anties might have the Influence of their Senators to assist them in Appointments<sup>3</sup>—The Anties were much broke in their Ranks, and I fear the Feds will break as much. Anties apply to Feds, and Feds to Anties for Help & Assistance and Recommendations for Offices—The Gentlemen who have been in the Army form a Line and take and offer Aid I conceive as they judge needfull—The Assembly are called to meet this Day—By tomorrow Night I presume the Members will be generally in—I expect all will be Confusion amongst the various Interests till this Business is over and settled—In the midst of all this, I hope the good tried old Whigs and true Foederalists who have spent Nights and Days in the arduous Task, will not be forgot, or sacrificed to Anties, or those who have merely stood by, waiting for the moment, to snap at a Prize I shall say but little as to myself;—save that I find Dr. [William] Bradford pushes hard for the Place as I hear of District Judge; and I suppose has some of the Gentlemen of Providence, especially of the millitary Line to espouse his Nomination—How far His Pretensions will be made good by such Aids I know not—I have wrote a Letter to the President as You seemed to

suggest that Idea to me when I had the Pleasure of seeing You at New York—I have taken the Liberty to inclose it to your Excellency's Care; with a Copy, submitted to Your Perusal<sup>4</sup>—If You think it better, or as well, to suppress it, I beg in Friendship, You will not hesitate to do it:—If otherwise, I wish it may be deliverd or sent in that Way You shall think proper—Upon Your Friendship I entirely rely, having made no other Application, altho' I have been informed, my Name has been mentioned by Numbers within and without Congress: And I flatter myself that here in this State, I have the general Wishes—Till within a few Days I have scarcely heard any other Person mentioned for District Judge—

I can't but feel anxious for Our old Friend Mr. Ellery, altho' I cannot conceive the Pretensions of any of the three or four Characters I have heard mentioned as Candidates for the Office of Collector for Newport are comparable to those of Mr. Ellery—He seems to think it possible it may be thought, the Loan Office hereafter may be brought up again; and that some may suggest that Mr. Ellery may be placed there.—But Mr. Ellery has no Idea that it will ever be considerable as to Profit; and hopes His Friends will support his Application for the Collectors Place—His long tryed Services in this State, and in Congress, His Integrity, Family, Character and Sufferings, cannot I think be forgot.—I will pledge myself that in the Eyes & Wishes of the People here He is unrivalled. . . .

Your sincere Friend, most obedient and very humble Servt.

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi. Printed: DHFFE, IV, 420–22n. The last paragraph of the letter, not printed here, deals with nominations for several different federal offices.

2. For Owen's letter to President Washington advising him that Rhode Island had ratified the Constitution, see Owen to Washington, 29 May (RCS:R.I., 1006–7). Owen transmitted the official form of ratification with his letter to Washington of 9 June (RCS:R.I., 1008–9n).

3. This opinion was also expressed by Jeremiah Olney in a letter to Alexander Hamilton, 7 June, in which Olney sought Hamilton's support to obtain the nomination for the position of collector of customs for Providence. Olney wrote: "the president of our late Convention (with the advice of the Governor) means to Keep back the Ratification untill about the time the Senators go forward, as they Wish to have all the *Ante* Revenue officers of the State reappointed & expect the Senators will Influence the President In the nomination of these *Bitter & Uniform* opposers of the Constitution." See DHFFE, IV, 422–23n. Olney received the position.

4. For Marchant's letter to Washington, 7 June, see Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 488–90n. The original manuscript is in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, while the copy sent to Adams is in the Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

### Oliver Ellsworth to Abigail Ellsworth New York, 7 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>

. . . Rhode Island is at length brought into the Union, & by a pretty bold measure taken in Congress which would have exposed me to some

censure had it not produced the effect which I expected it would & which in fact it has done.<sup>2</sup> But all is well that ends well.<sup>3</sup> The Constitution is now adopted by all the States, and I have much satisfaction & perhaps some vanity in seeing at length a great work finished for which I have long labored incessantly.

With love to all the children, I am Your affectionate friend,

1. Copy, Bancroft Collection, Oliver Ellsworth Transcripts, New York Public Library. There is a typescript in an Oliver Ellsworth Folder, MS 74109, Connecticut Historical Society. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1739. Ellsworth (1745–1807), a lawyer, was a delegate to Congress, 1778–83, and a judge of the Connecticut Superior Court, 1785–88. He left the Constitutional Convention of 1787 early to attend court and did not sign the Constitution. He wrote the “Landholder” essays in support of the Constitution (CC:230), and in January 1788 he voted to ratify the Constitution in the Connecticut Convention. He was elected a U.S. Senator in 1789. Ellsworth became the third Chief Justice of the United States in 1796. In 1772 he married Abigail Wolcott (1755–1818) of East Windsor.

2. Ellsworth is referring to the Senate bill stopping trade with Rhode Island. See “Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island,” 28 April–1 June 1790 (RCS:R.I., 837–55).

3. The title of a play by William Shakespeare.

**Editors’ Note**  
**The Rhode Island General Assembly**  
**Newport, 7–12 June 1790**

At the end of its regular May session, the House of Deputies requested that Governor Arthur Fenner issue warrants calling a special session of the legislature to meet after the May session of the state Convention. If the Convention ratified the Constitution, the legislature would need to implement it.

In response to the governor’s warrants, the legislature convened in Newport on 7 June. When both houses attained quorums, Governor Fenner addressed the legislature. On 10 June the governor, the other state officeholders, and the members of both houses took the required oath to support the Constitution. On 12 June the legislature passed an act providing for the election of two U.S. Senators and a single U.S. Representative. On the same day, in a well-orchestrated political maneuver, two Antifederalist candidates were paired against each other while two Federalists were paired off. Antifederalist Joseph Stanton, Jr., defeated Jonathan J. Hazard, while Federalist Theodore Foster (Governor Fenner’s brother-in-law) defeated Jabez Bowen. The legislature loaned money to the victorious candidates so that they could proceed to Congress as quickly as possible. The election of the state’s single U.S. Representative was scheduled for 31 August.

The legislature attended to other business as well. Accepting the state Convention’s recommendation, the legislature on 11 June adopted

eleven of Congress' twelve proposed amendments to the Constitution. (The second amendment dealing with compensation for members of Congress was not adopted. See Appendix I [below].) On 12 June the legislature requested that the governor issue a proclamation requiring the state's executive and judicial officers to take oaths or affirmations to support the Constitution. On 14 June the governor issued such a proclamation that was printed in all four of the state's newspapers and as a broadside. The legislature also passed an act incorporating the Providence Society for the Abolition of Slavery.

For the legislature's action on oaths, adopting the amendments proposed by Congress, and incorporating the Abolition Society, see Bartlett, *Records*, X, 380, 381–85, 387. For the governor's proclamation on oaths, see Evans 22844. For Rhode Island's adoption of its election law and the election of two senators and one representative, see DHFFE, IV, 408–46. See also John P. Kaminski, "Political Sacrifice and Demise—John Collins and Jonathan J. Hazard, 1786–1790," *Rhode Island History*, 35 (1976), 90–98.

### **Henry Marchant to Sarah Marchant**

**Newport, 9 June 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . I sincerely congratulate my dear Child upon the Adoption of the Constitution. We had, an anxious, arduous & distressing Week—nor were we much encouraged in Success till within a few Hours of the Question's being taken—For when we met at the begining of the Week they were twelve majority against us, as sure as the Question had then been taken—But two Members of the Whole Convention were absent, and those on Our Side<sup>2</sup>—Let Heaven be praised—And may we with greatful Hearts, make a prudent & wise Use of this Blessing—The Assembly are now met on a special Call, to choose Senators, and all is Parliamenteering—Parties split and divide—Who shall be is the Question. . . .

I am my dear Child Your most affectionate Father

1. RC, Marchant Papers, RHi. Sarah Marchant (1767–1833) was Henry Marchant's daughter. The letter was addressed to her in Norwich, Conn.

2. Probably a reference to Ray Sands and Edward Hull of New Shoreham, both of whom most likely did not attend the May session of the state Convention.

### **Massachusetts Centinel, 9 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The adoption of the federal Constitution by Rhode-Island, has dif-fused general joy throughout that State—and the Federal Members of

the Convention have been received by their constituents with every mark of honour and respect.

1. Reprinted: *New Hampshire Gazette*, 10 June.

### **Providence United States Chronicle, 10 June 1790**

By Accounts from New-York we learn, That the Account of the Adoption of the Federal Constitution by this State, was received at New-York in 42 Hours after the Vote was passed in the Convention.—A Bill was read in Congress on Monday last, for dividing this State into Districts for the Collection of the Revenue, and for extending the Laws of the United States to this State.<sup>1</sup>

1. For the Rhode Island Act of 14 June 1790 (introduced by Representative Theodore Sedgwick on 2 June), see DHFFC, VI, 1798–1803.

### **John Brown to John Adams Providence, 11 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

After Congratulateing You on the Happy Event of this State's Adopting the New Constitution which had they have known their True Interest would have beene the First in the Union, Suffer us to Recommend to Your Favour and promotion to the Respective offices of Collector, Navil Officer and Survayer of this District all of whome being Gentlemen of Good Carrectors and in Every Respect proper persons to Secure the Whole Revenew and will I Dare Say Collect it and pay it in to the Order of Congress—With as Much Vigilance and punctuallity as Any Officers in the Union, Many Excertions will be made by our Antie Administration to Git the Appointment of their Friends, I Suppose the Genl. Assembly Now Seting at Newport has this Day Chose the Senniters but have Not heard who they are we hope for one Federal but the Majority is Against us in both Houses, Very Grait pains & Every other Excertion was made by the Federals to Git the Two Majority in the Convention for the Adoption and had it Not have beene for the Rod Which was prepaired in Your House which was to Scourge us on the 1st. of July we Should Not have Succeeded with that Convention<sup>2</sup>

We hear the Low House Yesterday Swollowd a Very Bitter Pill by only Three Majority I mean that of Each Member being held to Give Oath to Support the New Constitution. What the Upper House did with it We know not, but its Said the Gover[nor] is Very Sick.

I hope this will find You with Mrs. Adams and Son in perfect Helth with the Rest of Your Family I am Dr. Sr. with Every Sentiment of Esteeme & Regard Your obt. Humble Servt.

[P. S.] The Gentlemen Recommended for the Renew officers hear  
are Col[one]l Jeremiah Olney

Col[one]l Wm. Peck

Majr. Wm. Allen

all of whome have Served the Country with Grait Reputation.

1. RC, Adams Papers, MHi.

2. See "Congress Considers a Bill to Prohibit Commerce with Rhode Island," 28 April–1 June (RCS:R.I., 837–55).

**John Brown and John Francis to George Washington  
Providence, 11 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

We are happy in the Late Event of this States becoming one of the Union, tho at this late Hour, Had the People beene So Fortunate as to have known their True Interest No one State would have Adopted the New Constitution Sooner than this.

Grait Excertions have beene made and Very Large Sacrifice's of Property by the Federals of this Place to Change the Pollicy of this Government which for this Four Years Last past have beene Constantly Apposeing the Adoption of the New Constitution and of Course have done Very Grait Injustice with their Paper Money, and we Sincerely Hope that none of those Carrectors may be promoted to Aney Office by Congress, Maney things we Doubt not has beene and will be Said by Letter or Otherwise frome the Principle Carrectors Among the Anties, theirby if Possable to Induce a beleave in the President, that Some of their Friends are Intituled to Promotion, but we Hope Such Deception will not have its Desined Influence, as We Now Assure You that Every Member of the Convention who was in the Least under the Influence of the Anties of this Town, Voted & used all their Influence Against the Adoption, and a Negative Vote would have passed had it not beene for the *Very* Grait Excertions of the Fedderels in Gaining the Votes of Portsmouth & Middletown<sup>2</sup> which was Quite Remote from the Influence of the Anties of this Town, we now haveing So brite a Prospect before us, of Justice and Equity being Substituted by Law, in Lue of Fraud and Injustice being promoted Under the Culler of Law, We Begg Leave to take the Libberty of Recommending a Core of Honest Faithfull and Vigilent Custome House Officers for this Department Such as will Cause Every Copper of the Renew that Shall become due by the Laws of Congress to be punktually paid into the Treasury of the United States, Collo. Jeremiah Olney, Collo. William Peck, and Majr. William Allin we think are all of them Gentlemen who are Deserving of the Publick Condidence [i.e., Confidence] and will do Full Justice



to their Appointment Should they be so Happpy as to Receive the Presidents Sanction for the Collector, Navel Officer and Survayor, of this District, In full Confidence that this will be Recd. in the Same Friendly Mannor in which its Wrote and with a Conviction that we have Nothing at Hart but the Promotion and True wellfair of the General Government we also take the Liberty of Recommending Govr. Wm. Bradford as the Most Desearveing and Suteable Gentleman in this State for the Appointment of District Judge and we hope & Doubt not of his Receiving also the Smiles of the President—

We are Dr. Sr. with the Graitest Respect and Esteeme Your Most Obt. Most Humble Servts.

1. RC, Washington Papers, DLC.

2. See the Portsmouth and Middletown town meetings, 29 May (RCS:R.I., 991–94). The delegates were Federalist Elisha Barker who replaced Antifederalist William Peckham, Jr., in Middletown and Antifederalists Burrington Anthony, Peter Barker, and Job Durfee in Portsmouth. Anthony and Peter Barker voted to ratify the Constitution and Durfee did not vote. Portsmouth's fourth and richest delegate, Giles Slocum, voted against ratification.

### **William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington Newport, 12 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

The Genl. Assembly, after idling away a whole week, have just now chosen Senators;—the act directing the mode of chusing the Representative, will not admit of our having a Representative in Congress this Session.—Our Senators were requested by the Assembly to procede on to Congress as soon as possible, and they both declared that they would be ready to go on the last of next week; so that you may expect that they will take their seats by the middle of the week after.—They will I presume be both against the removal of Congress to Philadelphia; but they will be against the Assumption of the State debts.

Our Senators are William [i.e., Joseph] Stanton of Charlestown, and Theodore Foster of Providence.—The first is a violent paper-money man, and was an obstinate Anti to the last, the other is a Fed and a modest, ingenious man.—The first was opposed by Jonathan Hazard who was prima conductor of the paper money system, and, until a few months ago, as bitter an Anti as Stanton; but finding that the Constitution must be adopted sooner or later, and desirous of being a Senator he became a trimmer.—He thought he was sure, in consequence of his long and faithful services, of the Antis, and hoped by a moderate conduct to gain the Feds over to his interest;—but by his trimming he incurred the enmity of his old friends, and the Feds were not strong enough to give him any effectual aid if they were disposed

to do it.—The last was opposed by Mr. Bowen who was formerly Deputy Governour, and is a staunch, warm Fed.—Mr. Foster by being brother in law to our present Governour, and a moderate man had the voices of the Antis with him, and so carried the election.—All things considered the election has turned out as well as could be expected.—Mr. Stanton will oppose an Assumption of the State Debt; because it will be agreeable to the party who put him in, as well as his own opinion, and his instructions, and Mr. Foster I believe will be guided by his instructions.—

During the Session the Genl. Assembly passed an Act incorporating a society for the Abolition of Slavery similar to the Act passed not long since by the Legislature of Pennsylvania.—

The principal part of the Session was taken up upon this question whether the members of the Assembly were obliged by the Constitution and the Act of Congress made conformably thereto to take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States previously to their proceeding to business, This took up two days. The Feds contended earnestly for it,—the Antis did not object to it absolutely;—but either because it was a disagreeable pill, or because they had not arranged the business of the election, or both, they insisted that it might be put off to the next Session, and they did not chuse to have the Oath crowded down their throats.—However they finally yielded, and all the members of both houses swallowed it.—Much time too was employed about the act directing the mode of chusing Senators and the Representative; especially that part of it which respected the choice of the latter.—I have not time to give you an account of the debate on this subject.—The Feds desirous that the people might be represented in the present Session of Congress wished that the Act might be so constructed that the Candidate who had the largest number of votes in his favour should be the Representative,—the Antis contended that he ought to have the majority of all the votes,—that if no one of the candidates had that majority at the first voting in Town-Meetings, there should be another trial, and if the election was not then decided in that manner, that the two who had the greatest number of votes should be returned to another meeting of the towns as the sole subjects of choice;—and that the first voting for Representative should be at the Town Meetings to be held on the last week in August, when we chuse Deputies for the last half of the year.—The Antis succeeded; and therefore it was that I said that our mode of chusing our Representative would not admit of our having a Representative in Congress at their present Session.—

This will be handed to you by Mr. Walter Channing of this town who is a good Fed, and a sensibly worthy man and my friend, and therefore

permit me to recommend him to your notice.—Don't forget me—I know you won't.—

I am in great haste for I expect Mr. Channing will sail this night,  
Your friend & servant

1. RC, Letters of William Ellery, R-Ar. Ellery indicated that the letter was written “in the morning.” Endorsed: “Answered July 2d.”

## Peter

### Providence Gazette, 12 June 1790<sup>1</sup>

*The following came to Hand too late for our last Week's Gazette.*

Mr. CARTER, (Last Saturday evening, as some boys were, in a small boat, fishing near Totawamscot rocks, at the mouth of Pawtuxet river,<sup>2</sup> a fine plump SALMON, weighing exactly *Thirteen Pounds*, leaped from the river into the boat.—As the circumstance was rather uncommon for a fish of its own accord to spring from its native element into a boat, on the boys' return it occasioned some conversation in the neighbourhood: But what were the sensations excited the next day, when the news of the adoption of the Constitution arrived, and on comparing the *time*, it appeared that the *very time* that the salmon leaped into the boat was the *moment* that the *President* announced to the Convention at Newport, that by their votes *they had ratified the Constitution!*)—Could these circumstances have happened in the days of Augustus Cæsar, they would have been written in golden letters, and enrolled in the capitol.—I, Sir, have been an *anti* since the Constitution first appeared, because I have been told that it would endanger the liberties and prosperity of our *children*; but when I find an invisible agency condescending *almost* to work miracles in contradiction of this opinion, “I give it to the winds.”<sup>3</sup> *I am converted—I am no longer an Anti—from this day I will support the New Government, by every proper means, with all my faculties.*

*Pawtuxet, June 1, 1790.*

1. Reprinted in the *Newport Mercury*, 21 June, and in eight other newspapers by 6 September: Vt. (1), Mass. (3), Conn. (1), N.Y. (1), Pa. (1), N.C. (1). The *Salem Gazette*, 22 June, reprinted only the text in angle brackets. The Boston *Columbian Centinel*, 23 June, prefaced its reprinting: “*The following though it may partake of something of the wonderful we are assured is a fact—and therefore inserted.*” The Stockbridge, Mass., *Western Star*, 6 July, reprinted the *Centinel's* prefatory sentence and on 13 July printed a response (Mfm:R.I.). The Newburyport, Mass., *Essex Journal*, 23 June, summarized the item. The *Pennsylvania Packet*, 5 July, reprinted the summary.

2. In 1790 the Pawtuxet River was the boundary between the towns of Cranston and Warwick. It empties into the Providence River at the village of Pawtuxet.

3. “Give to the Winds Thy Fears” is a line in a hymn written by Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676) and translated from German into English by John Wesley (*Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1739).

**Providence Gazette, 12 June 1790**

*Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman at New-York to  
his Friend in this Town, dated the 6th Instant.*

“The Accession of Rhode-Island to the Union is a most propitious Event—it completes a great and glorious Work, and will open the Way to such a Revolution in that State, as will, I trust, obliterate all Remembrance of former Times.”

**New York Daily Advertiser, 12 June 1790<sup>1</sup>***RHODE-ISLAND CONVERSION.*

Too proud to think of foreign aid,  
And hostile to all federal bands,  
She, like a coy unwilling maid,  
Was long averse to joining hands—  
    A queen amidst the wat’ry waste,  
    No Baker’s dozen was her taste.

A state or two had thought it best  
With calm content to bear the loss—  
“But, sister *Rhoda*, (cry’d the rest)  
What makes you so confounded cross?  
    We fear you have some scheme in view,  
    Come—do as other people do:

Your STAR, bewilder’d in the shade,  
With much ado, the world can see:  
Your little paws were never made  
To box with twelve such hags as *we*,  
    Who once enrag’d, united rose,  
    And gave *John Bull* a bloody nose.”

This argument avail’d the most—  
Her friendship now we may depend on,  
Nor will we *Rhoda* (so long lost)  
In any circumstance abandon—  
    No longer now the ocean’s sport,  
    *We’ll moor her safe in freedom’s port.*  
June 11.

1. Reprinted in the *United States Chronicle*, 22 July, and in seven other newspapers by 27 July: Vt. (1), Mass. (4), Conn. (1), N.C. (1).

**Jabez Bowen to George Washington**  
**Newport, 13 June 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

It affords me the greatest pleasure that I can Congratulate your Excellency on the accession of the State of Rhode-Island to the Federal Union, more especially as it compleats the great Fabrick, and that it has been effected without the sheading of Blood, an Event that must give the greatest pleasure to every Friend to Humanity.

Our General Assembly have been in Session for the purpose of Choosing Senators. My Name was made use of for one of them, but the Antefederal Intrest prevailed. Joseph Stanton and Theodore Foster Esqrs. are the two Gentmen Elected The former has been much oposed to the General Government. The latter always Friendly. hope they may be able to do good in their stations.

As the Offices for Collecting the Revennu[e] will soon be appointed and that of Navel officer will be vacant by Mr. Fosters being Elected a Senator. I have to Request your Excellen[c]y that you will be pleased to appoint my Son, Oliver Bowen [(]now about Twenty Two Years of Age) to that office. . . .

As we are now all one Family hope your Excellency will make us a Visit in the Recess of Congress ours is a fine Healthy Climate and will tend to Establish your Health and prolong that Life so Dear to us all—  
 With the most perfect Esteem

1. RC, Washington Papers, DLC. Printed: Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, V, 516–17.

**Theodore Foster to Dwight Foster**  
**Providence, 17 June 1790<sup>1</sup>**

My Dear Brother

I Received your kind Congratulations on the Adoption and Ratification of the National Constitution by this State which you communicated in a very Laconic Epistle by Brother Peregrine—Accept mine for yours in Return.—This Event compleats a Revolution in Favour of Government as astonishing as any mentioned in History exhibiting the American Character in a more respectable Point of View than that of most other Nations in that their Coolness Prudence and Wisdom have erected a Fabrick of Government on the Broad and Solid Foundation of the Public Liberty in a General Election of the People at Large so curiously compacted as that the Vox Populi may be heard and attended to in every Part of the Magnificent Dome, in such a Manner as

to be productive of the General Good without the Confusion ever attendant on Perfect Democracy—A Form of Government which one of your Massachusetts Representatives has Justly compared to a Volcano which conceals the Fiery Materials of its own Destruction.<sup>2</sup>—The New Constitution knits and weaves the States together by a firm and Strong Web but it leaves them so much of Seperate Independency as that they Serve as a Controuling Balance upon each other and upon the whole United productive and preservative of the General Liberty of every part of the Empire and of all the Individuals that compose it.—May Gracious Providence grant that Halcyon Days of Peace Tranquillity and Happiness may arise and be enjoyed by our Dear Country under a Wise, a Just, and a Prudent Admenistration of the General Government—May that Almighty Power whose Goodness has so remarkably overruled all things for the General Good of our Country direct the Councils of the Union to the Adoption of such Measures as shall promote Secure and insure the Liberty Happiness & Safety of all the People who are worthy of those best Blessings of Heaven.—

I have become more interested in the Adoption of the Constitution than I expected. I have not Time to give you an History of the Circumstances and Causes which led to my Nomination as a Senator to represent this State in Congress. But Such a Nomination did take Place and was Successful on the Part of those who brought it forward—The Governor issued his Warrants for convening the General Assembly for the Special Purpose of appointing the Senators and taking measures for a Representation of this State on Congress. They met on Monday last Week at Newport—A Number of Candidates appeared in the Different Parts of the State.—Those most talked of were George Champlin in the County of Newport—Jonathan Hazzard and Joseph Stanton in the County of Washington—Job Comstock and Thomas Holden in the County of Kent and Daniel Owen Peleg Arnold Benjamin Bourne Jabez Bowen and my self in the County of Providence—

The Election finally fell on Me and I expect to Morrow or Next Day *Deo volente*<sup>3</sup> to Set out for New York. To which Place I wish you would send a Letter for your Friend and Affectionate Brother who wishes you your Lady and Family and our Hond. Mother All Health Joy and Happiness

1. RC, Dwight Foster Papers, MHi. Endorsed as “Favoured by our/brothr. Peregrine.”

2. See Massachusetts congressman Fisher Ames’s speech in the state Convention on 15 January 1788, in which he declared that “A democracy is a volcano, which conceals the fiery materials of its own destruction” (RCS:Mass., 1192).

3. Latin: God willing.

**Philanthropos****Newport Herald, 17 June 1790***To the INHABITANTS of the STATE of RHODE-ISLAND, &c.*

*Friends and Fellow-Citizens*, I have formerly exerted my slender abilities to induce you to adopt the Constitution of the United States.—By the blessing of kind Providence on the unremitting endeavors of the Federalists that happy event is at length accomplished.—Accept of my sincere congratulations, and permit me to offer to your consideration some of the reflections which have passed in my mind on this interesting occasion.

It is natural, at this period, to reflect upon the evils we have escaped, and to contemplate the advantages which may result from our re-union with our Sister States;—and my regard for you impels me to communicate my sentiments.

It is not my aim to gain your attention by studied language, and I would not wish to burthen it by too particular an enumeration.

It may be sufficient to observe that by adopting the Constitution we have escaped that distress and misery which would have attended our exclusion from all intercourse with the United States,—that jealousy, discord and division which would have ensued the application to Congress which, on the non-adoption of the Constitution, the inhabitants of the sea-port towns would have been compelled to make,—and from those evils which must at times take place in a government which has not sufficient checks to control a disposition to break through the sacred ties of contracts, and to trample upon the natural and social rights of man;—that by becoming a member of the Union our properties, our liberties and our lives are rendered safe,—a market is opened to our productions and manufactures among our Sister States,—our commerce with foreign nations is secured and will probably be enlarged,—we are admitted to the benefits of the carrying trade,—a spring is given to agriculture and the mechanic arts, and a door of hope unfolded to the poor, who, for want of employment, have long suffered the deepest distress,—we are assured of protection against external invasion, and internal tumult, and entitled to all the privileges, the advantages, and honors which the most liberal Constitution on earth can bestow.

These are in general the evils we have escaped, and these the benefits and prospects which offer themselves to our contemplation.

But, my friends and fellow-citizens, none of us I trust will conceive, that, in consequence of our acceding to the New Government, riches will immediately flow in upon the State,—I venture to make this cautionary remark; because I recollect that, on the peace which established

our Independence, many inconsiderately expected that they should at once become opulent and happy.

Good government it is true, has a strong tendency to make the subjects of it honest, industrious and wealthy;—and the general government of the Union promises greater blessings than I have mentioned; but be it remembered that although much depends upon the government we live under, yet much depends upon ourselves.—We have a large debt to pay;—it will take time to discharge it, and for commerce to rise, revive and flourish. Rome was not built in a day.—By industry, commerce and economy alone can we expect to emerge, and disengage ourselves from our present embarrassments, and by them, under the auspices of the New Government, and the smiles of Heaven, we may not only gradually recover, but rise superior to our former situation.

But this State must not expect ever to rival in opulence many of her Sister States. Neither our climate, nor our soil, nor extent, will admit the capital staples with which the middle and the Southern States abound.—We can never be a wealthy State; but happiness doth not consist in riches: It lies in the mean between poverty and riches; and of this golden mean we may be possessed.

Our climate is healthy—our soil affords excellent pasturage—and we can raise cattle, horses, sheep and swine of the largest size and the most profitable breed.—Our fields will yield large crops of Indian corn, rye, barley, oats, flax, hemp, and of every species of vegetables. We have evinced that we can make cheese equal to that of Cheshire, and I make no doubt that we can in that manufacture rival either Gloucester or Parma.

If our climate is not favorable to the vine, it is friendly to apple and pear trees,—we can make cyder, of the first quality—we may by cultivating the pear tree make excellent perry, and these liquors are better adapted to the constitutions of the inhabitants of this State, than wine.—In short, by industry we may acquire from our own State a principal part of the necessaries of life.—Our ship-builders can build vessels of the best construction—our seamen are active and hardy—and our merchants, who are diligent and enterprising, may, by the sale of the surplusage of our wares and productions, and by the carrying trade, furnish us with such of the commodities of other States and Countries as we may want, and with specie for a medium of trade.—Thus, altho' we may not expect to obtain great wealth, we may yet enjoy the conveniences and perhaps some of the delicacies of life;—and if we can get rid of that party spirit which hath rent the State in twain, and excited variances among even the nearest connexions, we may be a happy people.



By adopting the Constitution two great causes of dissention are removed,—the disputes about that are now at an end, and paper money, the root of political and moral evil, is extirpated. Indeed there is now no fuel to feed the flame of animosity.—If we should still quarrel with one another, our contentions must spring from a sourness of temper, and a vile habit acquired by former feuds,—to harbor which would be destructive to mutual happiness, and a disgrace to human nature.

If we consult our duty and our interest we shall study the things which make for peace, and whereby one may edify another,—lay aside all party distinctions—embrace each other as brethren—consider ourselves as members of the great family of the United States, and exert ourselves to promote its highest interest. By conducting in this manner we shall become mild, sociable and benevolent, and effectually promote our own interest. It is the command of our Creator that we love one another,<sup>1</sup> and by his establishment genuine self love and social are the same.

Wherefore, my friends and fellow-citizens, let us like rational and sociable beings, encourage agriculture, commerce, mechanic arts and economy, and cultivate the principles of truth and justice, love and friendship.—Hereby we shall become a respectable, happy people,—hereby we shall regain the esteem of mankind, and, without which it is impossible for any society to flourish, the favor of HIM in whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

1. For example, see John 13:34–35.

### Providence United States Chronicle, 1 July 1790

*Extract of a letter from a Gentleman at New-York,  
to his Friend in this Town, dated June 10.*

“I am much obliged by your esteemed Favor, of the 1st Current, with the agreeable Information, that the State of Rhode-Island had adopted the Constitution of the United States.

“This happy and much-wished for Event makes these States again one Family,—possessing every Advantage necessary to render the Nation highly respectable, and the People the happiest upon Earth.—I hope we shall continue as an Example to the Nations of Europe,<sup>1</sup>—not only to encourage them to assert and recover their Liberties, but to guide them to proper Ideas of equal Government—in which the Tyranny of the Monarch, and the Madness of Democracy, are duly balanced—so that the Passions of Men shall be directed to serve the true Interest of Mankind.”

1. George Washington similarly wrote that the adoption of the Constitution by Rhode Island would complete “the Union of the States” and would “enable us to make a fair experiment of a Constitution which was framed solely with a view to promote the happiness of a people. Its effects hitherto have equalled the expectations of its most sanguine friends; and there can remain no reasonable doubts of its producing those consequences which were expected from an equal and efficient Government.—

“Should the conduct of the Americans, while promoting their own happiness, influence the feelings of other nations, and thereby render a service to mankind, they will receive a double pleasure” (to Comte de Ségur, 1 July, Abbot, *Washington, Presidential Series*, VI, 2).

### **Celebration of the Fourth of July in Shippensburg, Pa. 5 July 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

SHIPPENSBURG, July 6th.

Yesterday a number of the inhabitants of this town convened on Mount Pleasant at the head of Federal Spring to celebrate the Anniversary of American Independence; where the following Toasts were drank, viz. . . .

3. The Constitution of the United States—May its effects be salutary, and the administration under it so mild, that neither we nor our posterity may ever wish for a change. . . .

7. The State of Rhode Island—may her former errors teach her a better mode of conduct in future. . . .

1. Printed: *Carlisle Gazette*, 7 July. Reprinted: Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 15 July; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 19 July; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 21 July.

## **President George Washington Visits Rhode Island 15–19 August 1790**

When President George Washington toured the New England states in October and November 1789 he avoided Rhode Island because it had not yet ratified the Constitution. Washington, wishing to visit Rhode Island after it ratified on 29 May 1790, traveled there after Congress adjourned on 12 August. Nine men accompanied him: New York Governor George Clinton, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice John Blair, Rhode Island Senator Theodore Foster, U.S. Representatives Nicholas Gilman of New Hampshire and William Loughton Smith of South Carolina, and three of Washington’s secretaries—David Humphreys, William Jackson, and Thomas Nelson, Jr.

The presidential entourage left New York City on Sunday morning, 15 August, aboard the packet *Hancock*, which was under the command of Captain James Brown, and arrived in Newport at 10:00 A.M. on Tuesday, 17 August. As the packet entered the harbor, there was a cannon salute to the president from Fort Washington, the wharf, and several vessels anchored in the harbor. A

distinguished committee from the town, including the clergy, welcomed the president and his entourage. The presidential party, followed by a large procession of town folks, was escorted to their lodgings, where several prominent inhabitants were introduced to the president by Henry Marchant, the recently appointed federal district judge for Rhode Island. After a walk around the town, Washington returned to his lodgings around 4:00 P.M., at which time another procession accompanied him to the deputies' chamber in the State House where about eighty people enjoyed dinner and toasts. After dinner, the president again strolled about the town, stopped for a glass of wine at Judge Marchant's house, and then retired to his lodgings for the night.

After breakfast on Wednesday, the 18th, the president received addresses from the town of Newport, the clergy, the Freemasons, and the Hebrew congregation, to which he responded. At 9:00 A.M., another long procession accompanied the presidential entourage to the wharf, where they embarked on a seven-hour sail to Providence. Welcomed by Governor Arthur Fenner and the salute of cannon and the ringing of bells, the president's party was escorted to their lodgings by a large formal procession that included uniformed militia and music. The procession "exceeded any thing of the Kind before exhibited in this Town." After it arrived at Daggett's Tavern, the president's company dined informally. As they readied for bed, word arrived that the president was invited to the green of the College of Rhode Island, where students had illuminated the building. Although it was an unpleasant evening with some rain and the president rarely went out at night, he accepted the invitation.

Thursday, the 19th, started out cold and rainy. By 9:00 A.M., it had cleared and the president walked about the town until 1:00 P.M., stopping at several homes for wine or punch, visiting the college library and museum, and inspecting a large ship being constructed on stocks. After returning to his lodgings and changing clothes, he received addresses from the Society of the Cincinnati, the college, and the town of Providence. The group then walked to the town hall where they enjoyed dinner with 200 guests followed by toasts "drank under Discharges of Cannon." After the festivities, the presidential party was escorted to the wharf where they embarked on a two-day cruise back to New York City.

### **Newport Herald, 19 August 1790<sup>1</sup>**

On Tuesday last [17 August], at 10 o'clock, A. M. the President of the United States arrived in this Town, attended by his Excellency George Clinton, Esq; Governor of the State of New-york.

Hon. Mr. Jefferson, Secretary of the United States for the Department of State.

Hon. Mr. Blair, one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Hon. Mr. Foster, a Senator in Congress, from the State of Rhode-Island.

Hon. Mr. Smith, one of the Representatives in Congress from the State of South-Carolina.

Hon. Mr. Gilman, one of the Representatives in Congress from the State of New-hampshire.

Col. Humphry, Major Jackson, Mr Nelson.

Upon the packet heaving in sight, the standard of the State was hoisted at Fort Washington, the bells rang, and the shipping displayed their colours; when the packet came abreast the fort 13 cannon were discharged; and at the President's landing 13 more, which was returned from several vessels in the harbor.—A large and respectable committee from the town, and the Reverend Clergy, received the President on the wharf, and with the citizens, in procession, escorted him to his lodgings: the committee, in behalf of the citizens, then gave an invitation to the President and the gentlemen who accompanied him, to partake of a public dinner, which he was pleased to accept.—At 4 o'clock, P. M. the committee waited upon the President and escorted him to the State-House, where he was received by the managers of the ceremony, who conducted him to the Council-Chamber, where the clergy and other citizens were convened.—At 5 o'clock they were ushered into the Representatives' Chamber, where was provided a very elegant dinner—the room was emblematically decorated.

After dinner the following TOASTS were drank—13 cannon were discharged at the 1st and 13th Toasts, and one to each other.

1. The United States.

2. The State we are in, and Prosperity to it.

*This was given by the President.*

3. Our great and good Ally [i.e., France].

4. Prosperity to the Constitution of America.

5. May Wisdom guide, and may the general Good be the great Object of the Council of the United States.

6. May the Virtues of her citizens equal their Valor and Wisdom.

7. May they be as zealous in support of the present Government, as they were in the Defence of their Liberties.

8. *May the Last be the First.*

9. The Memory of the deceased Patriots and Heroes of our Country.

10. The fair Daughters of America,

11. Agriculture, Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce.

12. The Cause of Liberty.

*After the 12th Toast the President withdrew, when the gentlemen arose and drank as the*

13. THE MAN WE LOVE.

The greatest decency was observed, and the highest harmony prevailed.

The President in the morning and after dinner, walked in several parts of the town, to the great satisfaction of the people, who looked with unceasing pleasure on THE MAN.

On Wednesday morning the committee from the town, the Rev. Clergy, and the Society of Free Masons, respectively presented Addresses to the President.

*ADDRESS FROM THE TOWN.*<sup>2</sup>

*To the PRESIDENT of the United States of America.*

SIR, Impressed with the liveliest sentiments of gratitude and affection, the citizens of Newport salute you on your arrival in this State, and wish to express their joy on this interesting occasion.

The present circumstances of this town forbid some of those demonstrations of gratitude and respect, which the citizens of our sister States have displayed on a similar occasion; yet we rejoice in this opportunity of tendering ⟨to your Excellency⟩ the richest offering which a free people can make—hearts sincerely devoted to you, and to the government over which you preside.

We anticipate with pleasing expectation the happy period when, under the auspicious government of the United States, our languishing commerce shall revive, and our losses be repaired—when commerce at large shall expand her wings in every quarter of the globe, and arts, manufactures and agriculture be carried to the highest pitch of improvement.

May kind Providence long continue your invaluable life, and in the progressive advancement of the United States, in opulence, order and felicity, may you realize the most glorious prospect which humanity can exhibit to an enlightened and benevolent legislator; and when you shall cease to be mortal, may you be associated to the most perfect society in the realms above, and receive that retribution for your disinterested and extensive services, which the JUDGE of all the earth will bestow on the friends of piety, virtue and mankind.

⟨Done at a meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Newport held the 16th day of August AD 1790⟩

By Order,

H. MARCHANT, Moderator.

⟨Peleg Barker junior Town Clerk⟩

*THE ANSWER.*

*To the FREEMEN of the Town of Newport.*

GENTLEMEN, I receive with emotions of satisfaction the kind address of the citizens of Newport on my arrival in this State.

Although I am not ignorant how much the worthy inhabitants of this town have been injured in their circumstances by their patriotic sufferings and services;<sup>3</sup> yet I must be allowed to say, that nothing on their part has been wanting to convince me of their affection to myself, and attachment to the government over which I am appointed to preside.

I request, gentlemen, you will be persuaded that I take a due interest in your particular situation; and that I join with you in anticipating the happy period, when, in our country at large, commerce, arts, manufactures and agriculture, shall attain the highest degree of improvement.

My expressions would but faintly communicate my feelings, should I enlarge beyond the proper limits of an answer to your address, in evincing my sensibility of your affectionate wishes for my felicity in the present and future state of existence.—It will be a better proof of my zeal for the prosperity of the inhabitants of this town, and their fellow-citizens of this State, to lose no opportunity of attending to the advancement of their interests, in combination with the general welfare of the community.—This I shall do with unfeigned satisfaction.—And may all the happiness be theirs, which can result, in their social character, from the uniform practice of industry, virtue, fraternal kindness, and universal philanthropy.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

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*ADDRESS FROM THE CLERGY.<sup>4</sup>*

To GEORGE WASHINGTON, *President of the United States of America.*  
*The Address of the Clergy of the town of Newport, in the State of Rhode-Island.*

SIR, With salutations of the most cordial esteem and regard, permit us the Clergy of (the Town of) Newport, to approach your person, intreating your acceptance of our voice in conjunction with that of our fellow-citizens, to hail you welcome to Rhode-Island.

Shielded by Omnipotence, during a tedious and unnatural war,—wise, as a messenger sent from Heaven, in conducting the councils of the cabinet—and, under many embarrassments, directing the operations of the field; Divine Providence crown'd your temples with unfading laurels, and put into your hand the peacefully-waving olive-branch. Long may you live, Sir, highly favored of GOD and beloved of men, to preside in the grand council of our nation, which, we trust, will not cease to supplicate Heaven, that its select and divine influences may descend and rest upon you, endowing you with “grace, wisdom, and understanding,” to go out and in before this numerous and free people; to preside over whom Divine Providence hath raised you up.

And therefore,—before GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all the families both in heaven and earth are named, according to the law of our office, and in bounden duty,—we bow our knee—beseeching him to grant you every temporal and spiritual blessing—and that, of the plentitude of his grace, all the families of these wide extended realms, may enjoy, under an equal and judicious administration of government, peace and prosperity, with all the blessings attendant on civil and religious liberty.

SAMUEL HOPKINS, *Pastor of the 1st Congregational Church.*

GARDNER THURSTON, *Pastor of the 2d Baptist Church.*

FREDERICK SMITH, *Pastor of the United Brethren.*

WILLIAM BLISS, *Pastor of the Sabbatarian Baptist Church.*

WILLIAM SMITH, *Rector of Trinity Church.*

MICHAEL EDDY, *Pastor of the 1st Baptist Church.*

WILLIAM PATTEN, *Pastor of the 2d Congregational Church.*

*Newport, Aug. 17, 1790.*

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THE ANSWER.

*To the CLERGY of the town of Newport, in the State of Rhode-Island.*

GENTLEMEN, The salutations of the Clergy of the town of Newport, on my arrival in the State of Rhode-Island, are rendered the more acceptable, on account of the liberal sentiments and just ideas which they are known to entertain respecting civil and religious liberty.

I am inexpressibly happy, that, by the smiles of Divine Providence, my weak but well-meant<sup>5</sup> endeavors to serve my country, have hitherto been crowned with so much success, and apparently give<sup>6</sup> such satisfaction to those in whose cause they were exerted. The same benignant influence, together with the concurrent support of all real friends to their country; will still be necessary to enable me to be in any degree useful to this numerous and free people; over whom I am called to preside.

Wherefore I return you, Gentlemen, my hearty thanks for your solemn invocation of Almighty GOD, that every temporal and spiritual blessing may be dispensed to me; and that, under my administration, the families of these States may enjoy peace and prosperity, with all the blessings attendant on civil and religious liberty.—In the participation of which blessings may you have an ample share.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

At 9 o'clock, A. M. the President, escorted in the same manner as at his landing, embarked on board the packet for Providence—As the packet passed the Fort, he was again saluted with 13 cannon.<sup>7</sup>

The State-House chamber in which the President was entertained, not being sufficiently large to accommodate all who wished to join in the festivity of the day, a number of young gentlemen met at Mrs. Hamilton's, where, after partaking of an elegant dinner, they drank the following Toasts; viz.

1. The illustrious President of the United States.
2. The Honorable the Congress.
3. The King of France.
4. The State of Rhode-Island.
5. The Honorable Committee of the Town of Newport.
6. May we never bear the Yoke of Oppression.
7. The Charitable Clergy.
8. Disappointment to the Abolition Society.
9. May the Rhode-Island African Fleet flourish.
10. The American Fair.
11. All the Sons of Freedom.
12. May the sincere Heart never know Distress.
13. May Peace and Prosperity ever flourish in the Land of America.

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Mr. Jacob Isaacks, of this town, has made such further improvements in extracting fresh water from ocean water, as to take nine and one half parts of fresh water from ten of ocean water, so as to answer either for land or sea for all the common and culinary purposes of fountain or river water.

Mr. Isaacks presented a bottle of water extracted by him to his Excellency the President of the United States, who was pleased to express himself highly satisfied therewith.

1. An errata in the 26 August issue of the *Newport Herald* corrected two mistakes in the original printing. See notes 3 and 6 (below). The *Newport Mercury*, 23 August, reprinted the account up to footnote 7. The *Mercury* also included the address of the Freemasons and Washington's response to them after Washington's response to the address of the clergy. For the Freemasons' address, see immediately below.

2. The address of the town and Washington's reply were also reprinted in the *United States Chronicle*, 16 September, and *Providence Gazette*, 18 September. Letterbook copies of the address and reply are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. The text in angle brackets is from the letterbook copy.

3. Originally "circumstances," but changed to "services" in an errata in the *Herald's* 26 August issue. This is probably a reference to Newport's occupation by the British from 8 December 1776 to 25 October 1779.

4. The address of the clergy and Washington's reply were also reprinted in the *United States Chronicle*, 16 September, and *Providence Gazette*, 18 September. Letterbook copies are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. The text in angle brackets is from the letterbook copy.



5. In the letterbook copy “honest” instead of “well-meant.”  
 6. Originally “gives,” but changed to “give” in an errata in the *Herald's* 26 August issue.  
 7. The *Newport Mercury's* reprinting ends here. See note 1 (above).

**President George Washington and the Address from the  
Newport Society of Freemasons<sup>1</sup>**

*ADDRESS from the Society of FREEMASONS.*

To GEORGE WASHINGTON, *President of the United States of America.*

We the Master, Wardens, and Brethren, of King David's Lodge, in Newport, Rhode-Island, joyfully embrace this Opportunity, to *greet* you as a Brother,<sup>2</sup> and to *hail* you welcome to Rhode-Island. We exult in the Thought, that as Masonry has always been patronised by the Wise, the Good, and the Great, so hath it stood, and ever will stand, as its Fixtures are on the immutable Pillars of Faith, Hope, and Charity.—With unspeakable Pleasure, we gratulate you as filling the Presidential Chair, with the Applause of a numerous and enlightened People—whilst, at the same Time, we felicitate Ourselves in the Honour done the Brotherhood, by your many exemplary Virtues and Emanations of Goodness proceeding from a Heart worthy of possessing the ancient Mysteries of our Craft, being persuaded that the Wisdom and Grace with which Heaven has endowed you, will ever *Square* all your Thoughts, Words, and Actions by the eternal Laws of Honour, Equity, and Truth; so as to promote the Advancement of all good Works, your own Happiness, and that of Mankind—Permit us, then, illustrious Brother, cordially to salute you, with *Three Times Three*, and to add our fervent Supplications, that the Sovereign Architect of the Universe, may always *en-compass* you with his holy Protection.

MOSES SEIXAS, Master, }  
 HENRY SHERBURNE, } *Committee.*

*Newport, August 17th, 1790.*

*By Order,*

WILLIAM LITTLEFIELD, *Sec'ry.*

*THE ANSWER.*

*To the Master, Wardens, and Brethren of King David's Lodge,  
in Newport, Rhode-Island.*

GENTLEMEN, I receive the Welcome which you give me to Rhode Island with Pleasure—and I acknowledge my Obligations for the flattering Expressions of Regard contained in your Address with grateful Sincerity.

Being persuaded that a just Application of the Principles, on which the masonic Fraternity is founded, must be promotive of private Virtue and public Prosperity, I shall always be happy to advance the Interest of the Society, and to be considered by them as a deserving Brother—My best Wishes, Gentlemen, are offered for your individual Happiness.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

1. Printed: *Newport Mercury*, 23 August. Reprinted: *Newport Herald*, 26 August; *United States Chronicle*, 16 September; and *Providence Gazette*, 18 September. The recipient's copy and a letterbook copy of the address are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. The recipient's copy of Washington's reply is in the Boston Athenaeum. A letterbook copy is in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

2. Washington had been a Mason since the 1750s.

### President George Washington and the Address of the Newport Hebrew Congregation<sup>1</sup>

#### AN ADDRESS.

*To the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA.*

Sir, Permit the Children of the Stock of Abraham<sup>2</sup> to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person and merits—and to join with our fellow-citizens in welcoming you to Newport.

With pleasure we reflect on those days—those days of difficulty and danger, when the GOD of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword<sup>3</sup>—shielded your head in the day of battle:—And we rejoice to think, that the same spirit, who rested in the bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel, enabling him to preside over the provinces of the Babylonish Empire,<sup>4</sup> rests, and ever will rest, upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of CHIEF MAGISTRATE in these States.

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty Disposer of all events) behold a Government, erected by the MAJESTY OF THE PEOPLE—a Government which to bigotry gives no sanction—to persecution no assistance; but generously affording to ALL liberty of conscience, and immunities of citizenship—deeming every one, of whatever nation, tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental machine.<sup>5</sup> This so ample and extensive Federal Union, whose basis is philanthropy, mutual confidence, and public virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great GOD, who ruleth in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, doing whatsoever seemeth him good.

For all the blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great Preserver of men—beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life; and when, like Joshua, full of days and full of honor,<sup>6</sup> you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality.

*Done and signed by order of the Hebrew Congregation, in Newport, Rhode-Island, August 17, 1790.*

MOSES SEIXAS, Warden.

THE PRESIDENT'S ANSWER.

*To the HEBREW CONGREGATION in Newport, Rhode-Island.*

GENTLEMEN, While I receive with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past, is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and a happy people.

The citizens of the United States of America, have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. ALL possess alike liberty of conscience, and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction—to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow, that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good-will of the other inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.<sup>7</sup> May the Father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in

our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

1. Printed: *Newport Herald*, 9 September. Reprinted: *Providence Gazette*, 18 September; *United States Chronicle*, 23 September. The recipient's copy of the address is in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. The recipient's copy of Washington's reply is held by B'nai B'rith, Washington, D.C. Letterbook copies of both documents are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

2. See Acts 13:26.

3. See Psalms 144:10.

4. See Daniel 2:48.

5. Rhode Island still prevented Jews from holding public office in the state (RCS:R.I., 549n). The U.S. Constitution eliminated the religious test for federal officeholders.

6. Joshua died at the age of 110 (Joshua 24:29).

7. Micah 4:4.

### **Providence Town Meeting, 16 August 1790 (excerpts)<sup>1</sup>**

At a Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of Providence legally warned & assembled on Monday the sixteenth Day of August AD. 1790.

The Honble Jabez Bowen Esqr. Moderator. . . .

Resolved, That Henry Ward Esqr., Doctr. Enos Hitchcox, Welcome Arnold, David Howell, and Benjamin Bourne Esqr. be and they are hereby appointed a Committee to draught and Present an Address to the President of the United States expressive of the singular Pleasure and Satisfaction which the Inhabitants of Providence feel on his Visit to this Place, of their Sense of the Honor done them by his Presence, congratulating him on his Accession to the Presidency and of their perfect Satisfaction in his Appointment to the important Trust and in the Integrity, Prudence, and Ability displayed by him in the Discharge of the Duties of his High Station &c.

And it is further Resolved, That Joseph Nightingale, Ephraim Bowen Jur., William Russell, Ebenezer Thompson and John Dorrance Esqrs. be and they are hereby appointed a Committee to point out the proper Arrangements for the Reception of the President of the United States in a Manner suitable to his high Dignity and expressive of the great Respect and Veneration which the Inhabitants of Providence entertain for his Character; That the said Comm. procure the necessary Powder for the Occasion and in Case the State will not pay for the same this Town will and that the said Committees make at the Adjournment<sup>2</sup> . . .

1. MS, Town Records, City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Providence, R.I. The committee submitted its draft address to the town meeting on 17 August, whereupon "the said Report having been duly considered, It is thereupon Resolved, That the same be accepted: That a Copy thereof be made and Signed by the Moderator and attested by the

Clerk and presented by the said Comm. to the President of the United States” (*ibid.*). At the annual town meeting held on 31 August, the president’s answer was presented to the town (*ibid.*).

2. At its October session the legislature paid John Ward and Company £307.2.6 in paper money (£20.9.6 in specie) for powder used to salute the President upon his arrival in Providence. The legislature also paid several persons £384 in paper money (£25.12 in specie) for the powder used in Newport (General Assembly Schedule, October Session [Providence, 1790] [Evans 22839], 17–18).

### Providence United States Chronicle, 19 August 1790<sup>1</sup>

Yesterday, about 4 o’Clock, P. M. arrived from New-York, in the Packet Hancock, Capt. [James] Brown, THE PRESIDENT of the United States, with his Suite—accompanied by his Excellency Gov. Clinton, of New-York, the Hon. Thomas Jefferson, Esq. Secretary of State, the Hon. Theodore Foster, Esq. one of the Senators from this State;—Judge Blair, Mr. Smith, of South-Carolina, and Mr. Gilman, of New-Hampshire, Members of Congress.—A Procession was formed agreeable to a previous Arrangement, and THE PRESIDENT escorted to his Lodgings at Mr. Daggett’s, in the following Order, viz.

#### ORDER OF PROCESSION.<sup>2</sup>

The United<sup>3</sup> Company of Train of Artillery, in Uniform,  
 commanded by Col. [Daniel] Tillinghast,  
 (The Band of Music.)  
 The Constables of the Town, with their Wands,  
 The Deputy Sheriffs,  
 The Town-Clerk,  
 The Town-Council,  
 Committee of Arrangements,  
 High Sheriff of the County,  
 Marshal of Rhode-Island District,  
 Council of State,  
 Secretary of State,  
 His Excellency Governor Fenner,  
 THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,  
 His Suite,  
 His Excellency Governor Clinton, of New-York,  
 Hon. Mr. Jefferson, Secretary of State,  
 Hon. Theodore Foster, and Judge Blair,  
 Mr. Smith, of South-Carolina, and Mr. Gilman, of New-Hampshire,  
 Members of the General Assembly of the State,  
 Town-Treasurer,  
 Justices of the Peace,

The Corporation of the College,  
 Rev. Clergy,  
 Physicians,  
 Lawyers,  
 Merchants and Shopkeepers,

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⟨The Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers,  
 in the following Order, viz.  
 The President and Vice-President,  
 The Committee of Correspondence,  
 The Committee for advising and assisting the Widows and Orphans  
 of deceased Members,  
 The Members of the Association according to Seniority of Age,  
 The Treasurer and Secretary.  
 Their new and elegant Standard (a Present from the Vice-President)  
 was displayed in the Center.⟩<sup>4</sup>

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⟨Revenue Officers.⟩  
 The Society of Cincinnati,<sup>5</sup>  
 Gentlemen Strangers, &c.  
 Masters of Vessels,  
 &c. &c. &c.  
 ⟨Tutors of the College.  
 The Students.  
 School-Masters.  
 Scholars under their Tuition.  
 Apprentices.  
 Sailors.  
 Boys.⟩

On THE PRESIDENT's landing a Federal Salute was fired, and the Bells in Town rang a joyful Peal.—The Salute was reiterated on his Arrival at Mr. Daggett's.

The general Attendance of almost every Inhabitant of the Town in the Procession, together with the brilliant Appearance of the Ladies at the Windows and Doors of the Houses, evinced in the most sensible Manner their Pleasure on this happy Occasion.—In the Evening the College-Edifice was splendidly illuminated.

1. The *Providence Gazette*, 21 August, also printed this account substituting two different paragraphs for the last two printed here and adding much new material (immediately below). Reprinted: *New York Daily Advertiser*, 26 August.

2. On 17 August John Carter printed a broadside entitled "Order of Procession, To be observed on the Arrival of the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES" (Evans 45936).

Significant differences between the broadside and the *Providence Gazette* are placed in angle brackets and in footnotes 3–5 (below). After listing the procession the broadside concludes:

*N. B.* The Signal for the Arrival of the PRESIDENT in the River, will be the Discharge of a Cannon from *Federal-Hill*, when the Citizens, &c. are requested to repair to the lower Wharff at the South End of the Town, and form themselves agreeably to the above Arrangement.

General *Thayer*, Col. *John Whipple*, Deacon *Greene*, Deacon *Nightingale*, Major *Spurr*, Major *Tyler*, Capt. *Paul Allen*, and Mr. *Jacob Whitman, jun.* are appointed, by the Committee of Arrangements, to form and superintend the Procession.

On the PRESIDENT's landing, the Sextons are to ring the Bells of the several Places of Worship.

*Providence, August 17, 1790.*

3. The broadside prints "Independent" instead of "United" and also omits "in Uniform."

4. In the broadside the text here in angle brackets is simply "Society of Mechanics and Manufacturers."

5. The broadside renders this line as "Officers of the late Army." The *Providence Gazette* printing adds "with the Standards of the late Rhode-Island Regiment" to the version printed in the *United States Chronicle*.

### **Providence Gazette, 21 August 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

. . . The Arrival of Capt. [James] Brown at the Entrance of the Harbour was announced by the Discharge of a Cannon from Federal-Hill, when the Procession was formed at the South End of the Town. On the President's landing, he was welcomed by a federal Discharge of Cannon, and the Ringing of Bells. The Concourse of People was prodigious. The Procession was conducted with great Decorum, and exceeded any thing of the Kind before exhibited in this Town.

All Ages, Classes and Sexes, were full of Sensibility on this joyful Occasion.—The brilliant Appearance of the Ladies from the Windows was politely noticed by the President, and gave Animation to the Scene.—On the President's Arrival at Mr. Daggett's, another federal Salute took Place, and after three Cheers the People retired.—On the Evening of the same Day, the President and many others took a Walk on the College Green, to view the Illumination of that Edifice, which was done by the Students, and made a most splendid Appearance.

{On Thursday, in the Forenoon, the President, accompanied by {his Excellency Governor Fenner} the Gentlemen who came Passengers with him, and many of the Citizens, walked through the principal Streets, to view the Town, in the Course of which they were escorted to the College by the Students, and by Dr. [James] Manning introduced into the College Library and Museum, and afterwards went on board a large Indiaman on the Stocks, belonging to Messrs. Brown and Francis.

At Three o'Clock an elegant Entertainment was served in the Court-House for upwards of Two Hundred Persons—and the following Toasts were drank under Discharges of Cannon, viz.

1. The Congress of the United States.
2. The President of the United States.
3. The Governor and State of Rhode-Island.
4. The King and National Assembly of France.
5. The Marquis de la Fayette.
6. The fair Daughters of America.
7. An effectual Establishment of public Faith and private Credit.
8. Prosperity to Commerce, Manufactures and Agriculture.
9. The Memory of those who have gallantly fallen in Defence of American Liberty.
10. May Literature always find Patrons in those, who possess Power in the United States.
11. Faithfulness in the Collection, and Economy in the Expenditures of the National Revenue.
12. May just national Views absorb local and particular Interests.
13. Freedom, Peace and Plenty, to all Mankind.

At the Close of the above Toasts, the President gave “The Town of Providence”—rose from Table, and went immediately on board Capt. Brown's Packet for Departure. He was attended by a very numerous Procession—which returned to Governor Fenner's, and after three Cheers dispersed in good Order.

It may be proper to remark, that no untoward Accident took Place—that every Countenance indicated the most Heart-felt Joy, and that we have Reason to believe the President was perfectly satisfied with his Reception.)

{We learn, that THE PRESIDENT of the United States, with his Suite, and the other Gentlemen who accompanied him on a Visit to this State, arrived at New-York on Saturday Afternoon last, in the Hancock Packet, Capt. James Brown.}

(The following Addresses were presented on Thursday:

*To the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES.*

SIR, We the Inhabitants of Providence<sup>2</sup> beg Leave to offer you our Congratulations, on your safe Arrival in this Place.

We are sensibly affected by the Honour conferred on the State, and on us in particular, in the present Visit: And be assured, Sir, we shall think ourselves peculiarly happy, if, by our utmost Attentions, it can be made agreeable to you.

We gladly seize this first Opportunity to express the most sincere Satisfaction in your Election to the Presidency of the United States.—The unbiassed Voice of a great Nation, which unanimously called you



to that important Trust, is an Event, of which the Annals of History afford no Example; nor will future Time see it followed, unless the most transcendent Merit and the clearest Fame should be united in the same Person.

As General of the Armies of the United States, and as their President, we are attached to you by every Motive of Gratitude and Affection.—To the Conduct and Magnanimity of her Commander in Chief, uniformly displayed in the Course of a long and arduous War, America is indebted, under the Smiles of Heaven, for her Freedom and Independence: And the consummate Prudence and Ability, manifested in the Exercise of the Powers delegated to the President of the United States, exhibit to the World a Character of no less Celebrity in the Cabinet than in the Field.

From our most excellent Constitution, and the benign Influence of those Virtues which characterize your Administration, we entertain the most pleasing Hopes of the Extension of Commerce, the Encouragement of Agriculture and Manufactures, and of the Establishment of public Faith, and private Credit; and that the Liberties of America will be transmitted to very late Posterity.

We ardently pray that a Life so conducive to the Welfare of Millions may be long protracted; and that, when the fatal Shaft shall be sped which will deprive America of her great Benefactor, you may ascend those Regions where only exalted Virtue will be fully rewarded.

*Done in Town-Meeting, legally assembled, this seventeenth Day of August, A. D. 1790, and in the fifteenth Year of Independence.*

Signed, at the Request of the Town, by

JABEZ BOWEN, Moderator.

DANIEL COOKE, Town-Clerk.

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The PRESIDENT'S ANSWER.

*To the INHABITANTS of PROVIDENCE.*

GENTLEMEN, The Congratulations which you offer me upon my Arrival in this Place, are received with no small Degree of Pleasure.—For your Attentions, and Endeavours to render the Town agreeable to me, and for your Expressions of Satisfaction at my Election to the Presidency of the United States, I return you my warmest Thanks.

My Sensibility is highly excited, by your ardent Declarations of Attachment to my Person, and the Constitution.

As, under the Smiles of Heaven, America is indebted for Freedom and Independence rather to the joint Exertions of the Citizens of the several States, in which it may be your Boast to have borne no inconsiderable Share, than to the Conduct of her Commander in Chief,—so is she indebted for their Support rather to a Continuation of those

Exertions, than to the Prudence and Ability manifested in the Exercise of the Powers delegated to the President of the United States.

Your Hopes of the Extension of Commerce, the Encouragement of Agriculture and Manufactures, and the Establishment of public Faith, as reared upon our Constitution, are well founded; and it is my earnest Wish that you may extensively enjoy the Benefits arising from them.

I thank you, Gentlemen, for your Prayer for my future Welfare, and offer up my best Wishes for your individual and collective Happiness.

G. WASHINGTON.

*To the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA.*

*The ADDRESS of the CORPORATION of RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE.*<sup>3</sup>

SIR, Though among the last to congratulate you on your Advancement to that dignified and important Station to which the unanimous Voice of a grateful Country has called you, the Corporation of Rhode-Island College claim to be among the first in Warmth of Affection for your Person, and in Esteem for your public Character. In placing you at the Head of the United States, Regard was had no less to the Influence of your Example over the Morals of the People, than to your Talents in the Administration of Government. Happy are we to observe, that similar Motives have influenced your Conduct in filling the lower Offices in the executive Department. We most devoutly venerate that superintending Providence, which, in the Course of Events propitious to this Country, has called you forth to establish, after having defended, our Rights and Liberties.

Agitated in the Hour of doubtful Conflict, exulting in your Victories, we watched your Footsteps with the most anxious Solitude. Our fervent Supplications to Heaven, that you might be furnished with that Wisdom and Prudence necessary to guide us to Freedom and Independence, have been heard, and most graciously answered.

For the Preservation of this Freedom, one great Object still demands our peculiar Attention—the Education of our Youth. Your Sentiments, Sir, on this Subject, “that Knowledge is in every Country the surest Basis of public Happiness,”<sup>4</sup> and the strongest Barrier against the intruding Hand of Despotism, as they perfectly accord with those of the most celebrated Characters that ever adorned Human Nature, so they leave no Room to apprehend you will refuse the Wreath with which the Guardians of Literature, here, would entwine your Brow.

By restoring your Health, and protracting your Life, so dear to this Country, Divine Providence has, in a late Instance, furnished to Millions Matter of Thanksgiving and Praise.<sup>5</sup>

That you may long remain on Earth a Blessing to Mankind, and the Support of your Country; that you may afterwards receive the Rewards

of Virtue, by having the Approbation of GOD, is our most sincere Desire, and fervent Supplication.

*Signed, by Order of the Corporation,*

JABEZ BOWEN, *Chancellor.*

JAMES MANNING, *President.*

DAVID HOWELL, *Secretary.*

*Providence, August 19. 1790.*

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The PRESIDENT'S ANSWER.

*To the CORPORATION of RHODE-ISLAND COLLEGE.*

GENTLEMEN, The Circumstances which have, until this Time, prevented you from offering your Congratulations on my Advancement to the Station I hold in the Government of the United States, do not diminish the Pleasure I feel in receiving this flattering Proof of your Affection and Esteem;—for which I request you will accept my Thanks.

In repeating thus publicly my Sense of the Zeal you displayed for the Success of the Cause of your Country, I only add a single Suffrage to the general Testimony, which all who were acquainted with you in the most critical and doubtful Moments of our Struggle for Liberty and Independence, have constantly borne in your Favour.

While I cannot remain insensible to the Indulgence with which you regard the Influence of my Example, and the Tenor of my Conduct, I rejoice in having so favourable an Opportunity of felicitating the State of Rhode-Island on the Co-operation I am sure to find in the Measures adopted by the Guardians of Literature in this Place, for improving the Morals of the rising Generation, and inculcating upon their Minds Principles peculiarly calculated for the Preservation of our Rights and Liberties.—You may rely on whatever Protection I may be able to afford, in so important an Object as the Education of our Youth.

I will not conclude, Gentlemen, by expressing my Acknowledgments for the tender Manner in which you mention the Restoration of my Health on a late Occasion; and with ardent Wishes that Heaven may prosper the literary Institution under your Care, in giving you the best of its Blessings in this World, as well as in the World to come.—

G. WASHINGTON.)

The Members of the Society of the Cincinnati who were in Town waited upon the President on Thursday, and by his Permission were introduced by Col. [Jeremiah] Olney, who verbally addressed him to the following Purport:

“SIR, I have the Honour to wait upon your Excellency, with the Members of the Cincinnati of the State of Rhode-Island, assembled on this

happy Occasion, to pay their Respects to you in Person, and to congratulate you on your safe Arrival in this Town; wishing you the Enjoyment of Health, and Prosperity in the Government over which you preside.—As many of the Gentlemen have not the Honour of a personal Acquaintance with your Excellency, with your Permission, Sir, I will introduce them.”

To which the President was pleased to reply, “It gives me great Pleasure to see so many of my old military Companions on the present Occasion, and I shall be happy to take them by the Hand.” After a particular Introduction, the President expressed his most sincere Wishes for their Health and Prosperity.

1. The beginning of this item is virtually identical to the account printed in the *United States Chronicle*, 19 August (immediately above). The *New York Journal*, 27 August, reprinted the *Providence Gazette*'s entire account, and the *Newport Mercury*, 23 August, reprinted the account up to the addresses presented to the president. The *United States Chronicle*, 26 August, continued its account of Washington's visit by printing the text in angle brackets. The *Chronicle* added the material in braces. The *Newport Herald*, 26 August, reprinted the town and college's addresses and Washington's responses.

2. The recipient's copy of the town's address is in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress and that of Washington's reply is at the Rhode Island Historical Society. Letterbook copies of both documents are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

3. A retained copy of the college's address and the recipient's copy of Washington's reply are in the Brown University Miscellaneous Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University. Letterbook copies of both documents are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

4. Quoted from President Washington's first annual message to Congress, 8 January 1790. Washington went on to ask whether support for education “will be best promoted by affording aids to Seminaries of Learning already established,—by the institution of a national University,—or by any other expedient” (DHFFC, I, 217).

5. For Washington's illness in the spring of 1790, see John Adams to William Ellery, 19 May, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 871).

### **William Loughton Smith Diary** **15–19 August 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

Journey to Rhode Island—Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, &ca.  
August 1790.

Being at New York, as a Member of the House of Represes. in Congress, which adjurnd on the 12th. August & having Some leisure I resolved to make a Tour into the back parts of the State of New York, & into some parts of Massachusetts & Connecticut. The day after we ad-journed, viz. friday the 13th. the President of the United States, General Washington, who had on that morning resolved to pay a Visit to the State of Rhode Island, in consiquence of their accession to the Union, did me the honor to invite me to be of his Party; I could not decline

so acceptable an invitation, & accordingly sat off with his Company on Sunday morning the 15th. on board a Rhode Island Packet. We arrived at Newport Tuesday morning after an agreeable passage—as we entered the Harbour, a salute was fired from the fort & some peices on the Wharves; at our landing, we were received by the principal inhabitants of the Town & the Clergy who forming a procession, escorted us thro a considerable concourse of citizens to the lodgings which had been prepared for us; the most respectable inhabts. were then severaly presented to the President by Mr Merchant, Judge of the District Court. The President then took a walk around the Town & the heights above it, accompanied by the Gentln of the party & a large number of gentn. of Newport. We returned to our Lodgings & at 4 OClock the gentn. waited again on the President & we all marched in procession to the Town hall or State House where while dinner was serving up, a number of gentlemen were presented. The dinner was well dressed & conducted with great regularity & decency; the company consisted of about 80 persons: after dinner, some good Toasts were drank; among others, the following, “may the last be first,[”] in allusion to R. Island being the last State which ratified the Constitutn.—the Presidt. gave the Town of Newpt. & as soon as he withdrew, Judge Merchant gave “the man we love”, which the compy. drank standing. The Company then followed the President in another walk which he took round the Town: he passed by Judge M’s & drank a glass of wine & then went to his Lodgings, which closed the business of the day.—I slept in the room with Govr. Clinton

Wednesday 18th.—Immedy. after breakfast, addresses were presented by the Clergy & the Town of Newport—that of the latter by a Committee the Chairman of which Judge Marchant began to read the address but before he had proceeded far, he was so agitated he was obliged to resign it to Col. Sherbet,<sup>2</sup> who read it very composedly. We then formed another long procession down to the wharf & embarked for Providence. On our way thro the main Street in Newport the President desired Mr Nelson, one of the gentn. of his family (a relation of Mrs Washington’s)<sup>3</sup> to step into a store & buy a pair of gloves for him; Mr N. in vain applied to the Mistress of the Store, who would not stir from the window, where she stood with her eyes rivetted on the President, after having first hastily thrown a bundle of gloves on the Counter; the delay occasioned by the Ladys refusal to assist in finding a proper pair of gloves induced the Presidt. to enter the Shop where he provided himself with gloves to the great gratification of the above Lady, who had little idea that the gloves were wanted for him. We had a tedious passage to Providence, being 7 hours in performing it. The same Salute

took place as at Newport, but the Procession up to the Tavern<sup>4</sup> was more solemn & conducted with much greater formality, having Troops & music. The Governor of the State was so zealous in his respect that he jumped aboard the Packet as soon as She got to the Wharf to welcome the President to Providence. The President with the Govr. of the State on his right-hand & Mr Forster a Senator in Congress from R. Island on his left moved in the first ranks—then followed, Govr. Clinton Mr Jefferson (the Secretary of State for the Un. St.) Mr Blair (a Judge of the Supreme federal Cot.) myself & the three Gentlemen of the President's family, viz, Col. Humphreys, Major Jackson & Mr Nelson—who formed the party.—afterwards followed the principal inhabitants. of Providence & some from Newport, & other citizens making a long file—preceded by some Troops & music—the doors & windows for the length of a mile were all crowded with Ladies & spectators—when arrived at the Tavern (Daggets) the President stood at the Door, & the Troops & Procession passed & saluted—in the procession, were three negro scrapers making a horrible music. we then sat down to a family dinner—after Tea, just as the President was taking leave to go to bed, he was informed by Col. [William] Peck, (Marshal of the District, who had Sailed with us from N. York) that the Students of the College had illuminated it & would be highly flattered at the President's going to see it, which he politely agreed to do, tho he never goes out at night & it then rained a little & was a disagreeable night. We now made a nocturnal procession to the College, which indeed was worth seeing, being very splendidly illuminated—I slept that night at Mr Clark's,<sup>5</sup> a merchant who has lately built a handsome house & is a man of property—his house was struck with Lightning a few weeks ago but is repaired—he treated me with much civility, having offered me a bed immedy on my arrival, tho I had never seen him before.—

Thursday morning began with heavy rain & cold easterly wind: it cleared at 9 & then the President accompd. as before, began a walk which continued till one OClock, & compleatly fatigued the company which formed his Escort. He walked all round the Town, visited all the apartmts. of the College, went on the roof to view the beautiful & extensive prospect—walked to the place where a large Indiaman of 900 Tons was on the Stocks, went onboard her, returned to Town, stopt & drank wine & punch at Mr Clarkes, Mr Browns,<sup>6</sup> Govr. Fenner's & Govr. Bowen's, & then returned home—as soon as he was dressed, he received the addresses of the Cincinnati the Rhode Island College & the Town of Providence—& then went immedy. to dinner at the Town-hall—The dinner consisted of 200 persons—an immense crowd surrounded the Hall—after dinner several Toasts were drank—the Second was “the Presidt. of the U.S—at which the whole Compy. within

& without gave three Huzzas & a long clapping of hands: the Presidt. then rose & drank the Health of all the Company. He aftd. gave the Town of Providence among other Toasts, these were given, the King & National Assy. of France; several french gentlemen who sat together then rose & bowed—“faithfulness in the collection & economy in the expenditure of the public revenue”—& “the establisht. of public credit & private faith.”—Cannon was fired at each Toast—at the conclusion of the Toasts, the President rose & accompanied by his Suite & the whole company, with a considerable crowd of citizens walked down to the wharf & embarked for New York.

I took [the] chaise at the same moment for Warwick & reached Manchester’s Tavern that night about 12 miles, over a very stony; rugged & disagreeable road:—This part of the State of Rhode Island is the most barren & unpeopled—the country very rocky & the people as uncultivated as the country—they are generally antifederal & ignorant & dislike any govt. which calls on them for taxes—indeed they seem to care very little what govt. prevails or whether there is any at all & would prefer that which required the least taxes. It is here remarkable that much use is made of wooden fences tho the country abounds with Stones very convenient for Stone walls, while as I advanced into a better country stone walls were more in use tho the country was much less Stony; this is owing to the poverty of the former who are unable to bestow the labor necessary for stone walls. Notwithstanding the roads were extremely disagreeable & fatiguing, yet the prospects were pleasant; distant hills & woods & occasionally a rapid Stream, & now & then Some well cultivated fields enlivened the Scene; to this was added very fine weather so that my Journey to Hartford was a very pleasant one. I left Manchester’s Tavn. early on friday morning on my way to Norwich. My Landlord complained bitterly of Taxes. he said he paid about fifteen pounds lawful money a year; that his farm consisted of about 200 acres one half only of which was improved & that he could barely make a living.—The Land certainly required great labour as it appeared nearly covered with stones & the road to Provide. is so bad as to render the transportation of produce very inconvenient & expensive. . . .

1. MS, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia. Smith’s account was edited by Albert Matthews and published in the *Proceedings* of the Massachusetts Historical Society, LI (1917–1918), 20–88.

2. Probably Henry Sherburne.

3. Thomas Nelson, Jr.

4. Abner Daggett’s tavern was on Benefit Street diagonally across the street from the rear entrance to the Providence statehouse.

5. John Innes Clark (c. 1745–1808), a wealthy merchant of the firm of Clark and Nightingale.

6. Probably John Brown.

**New York Daily Advertiser, 26 August 1790<sup>1</sup>***The President's Visit to Rhode Island.*

On Sunday morning the 16th instant, the President of the United States embarked for Newport, on a visit to the state of Rhode Island, accompanied by Governor Clinton, Mr. Jefferson, Secretary of State; the Hon. Judge Blair, Mr. Smith, of South Carolina, and three gentlemen of his family. The President arrived at Newport at eight o'clock on Tuesday morning, at which time he was welcomed to the state by a salute from the fort. From the landing place he was attended to his lodgings by the principal inhabitants of the town, who were severally presented to him. He then walked round the town, and surveyed the various beautiful prospects from the eminences above it.

At four o'clock, he was waited on by the most respectable citizens of the place, who conducted him to the Town Hall, where a very elegant dinner was provided, and several federal toasts drank. After dinner he took another walk, accompanied by a large number of gentlemen.

On Wednesday morning at 9 o'clock the President and his company embarked for Providence, where they arrived early in the afternoon. The governor of the state, and all the principal inhabitants received the President at the wharf, and formed a grand procession through the main street to Daggett's Tavern, where he lodged. At night the college was beautifully illuminated, and made a very brilliant appearance. The next morning the President took a very extensive round, visited the College, and also went to see the fine Indiaman building by Mr. Brown, and afterwards every part of the town and its environs. At three o'clock, he sat down to a superb entertainment at the Town-Hall, and at five the same afternoon embarked for this city, where he arrived on Sunday, after a short and agreeable passage of 24 hours.

Many excellent toasts were drank at Newport and Providence, particularly at Newport, "May the last be first"—and, at Providence, "Faithfulness in the collection and œconomy in expenditure of the public revenue."—Addresses were presented at Newport from the clergy and the town, and at Providence from the Cincinnati, the college and the town.

This visit was as gratifying to the citizens as it was unexpected. All classes vied with each other in demonstrations of joy, respect and admiration: The pleasing affability and gracious manners of the President, and his polite attention to the great number of citizens who were successively presented to him, added, if possible, to that love which was felt before. When he withdrew from table at Newport, the company ris-



ing, drank the following toast—*The man we love!*—and never was a toast drank with more sincerity—When “the *President of the United States*” was given at Providence, the huzzas, plaudits, and shouts of the company within and without the town hall continued for some time. There never was, perhaps, a greater exhibition of sincere public happiness than upon this occasion; every individual thought he beheld a friend and patron; a father or a brother after a long absence; and, on his part, the President seemed to feel the joy of a father on the return of the prodigal son. We have little room to doubt that his visit to the state of Rhode-Island will be productive of happy effects, for whatever aversion the citizens of that state may have hitherto had to the new government, they must now feel a confidence in the administration of one who possesses their universal esteem, and of whose virtues and patriotism they have upon numerous occasions had the strongest pledges.

1. Reprinted: Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, 27 August; *Pennsylvania Packet*, 28 August.

## A Soldier

### Providence United States Chronicle, 2 September 1790

#### AN ODE, ON THE ARRIVAL OF THE PRESIDENT *of the* UNITED STATES AT PROVIDENCE.

##### I.

He comes! the guardian Chief moves on,  
Rejoice and hail great WASHINGTON!  
Let Freeman swell the Trump of Fame,  
And prattling Infants lisp his Name.<sup>1</sup>

##### II.

He comes! let Seraphs grasp the Lyre,  
And fill the World with heav'nly Fire—  
Let Cherubs tune the Hymn of Love,  
And Songs rehearse thro' every Grove.

##### III.

Let Lutes assume the pleasing Strain,  
And aged Sires their Notes regain—  
Let Children listen to the Song,  
And mingle with the festive Throng.

##### IV.

Behold him on the ambient Tide,  
Where Sons of Neptune constant glide—  
The Croud admire Columbia's Son,  
And loud exclaim—'tis WASHINGTON!

## V.

He comes! the bell'wing Cannons say,  
 And Peals announce the welcome Day—  
 Yon rising Mount<sup>(a)</sup> is clad in Smiles,  
 The lighted Torch the Night beguiles.

## VI.

He comes! and Joy is scatter'd round,  
 The Rocks and Hills the Songs rebound—  
 For once we quaff the flowing Bowl,  
 While Maxims wise the Scene controul.<sup>(b)</sup>

## VII.

The Day is big with lab'ring Thought,  
 Great GREEN,<sup>2</sup> alas! in vain is sought—  
 For Death, too soon, has wing'd his Flight,  
 And lock'd his Form in endless Night.

## VIII.

Cold is the Arm, his Country's Shield—  
 The Heart by firmest Courage steel'd—  
 Cold lies the Chief, the Good, the Brave,  
 In the dark Mansions of the Grave.

## IX.

But Joy to see the Hero nigh,  
 Bade Transport dance in ev'ry Eye—  
 And tho' much Love to GREEN he bore,  
 One Sigh he gave—and sigh'd no more.

## X.

In lyric Strains the Songs combine,  
 And Angels aid the tuneful Nine—  
 Propitious Smiles from Heav'n descend,  
 And Earth and Skies in Rapture blend.

## XI.

Illustrious Chief I accept these Lays,  
 May Peace unclouded gild thy Days—  
 Hush'd is the Din of War's Alarms,  
 And mute the Blast—to Arms! to Arms!

## XII.

Hark! the shrill Music greets the Skies,  
 And gloomy Melancholy dies—  
 The waking Instruments inspire  
 A gen'rous—patriotic Fire.

## XIII.

Music can charm the hardest Heart,  
 And Peace to ev'ry Breast impart—

Music can all our Cares controul,  
And lull to rest the tortur'd Soul.

XIV.

Ye Bards invite the Gods below,  
And fire a World with sacred Glow—  
Ye Gods descend, the Wreath is done,  
And twine it round great WASHINGTON!

A SOLDIER.

*Taunton, August 20th. 1790.*

- (a) *Alluding to the Illumination of the College.*<sup>3</sup>  
(b) *Alluding to the Toasts at the public Dinner.*<sup>4</sup>

1. See *Massachusetts Centinel*, 10 November 1787 (CC:252, at note 2 and note 2).
2. General Nathanael Greene (see RCS:R.I., 296, note 6).
3. See *Providence Gazette*, 21 August 1790, and William Loughton Smith Diary, 15–19 August (RCS:R.I., 1067, 1074).
4. See *Providence Gazette*, 21 August (RCS:R.I., 1068).

## **Rhode Island Legislature and George Washington 30 October–20 November 1790**

The Rhode Island legislature was not in session when President George Washington visited Newport and Providence between 15 and 19 August 1790. On 30 October the legislature adopted an address to the president and ordered the secretary to transmit a fair copy to Washington that was signed by the governor and speaker of the House of Deputies. The president responded on 20 November, and his letter was laid before the General Assembly at its February 1791 session.

### **Rhode Island Legislature to President George Washington Bristol, 30 October 1790<sup>1</sup>**

At this earliest stated Meeting of the Legislature,<sup>2</sup> since the Accession of this State completed the Federal Union, we cannot omit to express our Congratulations on your Election, by the free Suffrages of the Citizens of this great confederated Republic, to the Office of Chief Magistrate thereof.

The Citizens of this State, be assured, Sir, participate largely in the general Joy, that the United States, in Time of Peace, still remain under the fostering Hand that led them successfully through a long and arduous War.

Attached as we have been to the Rights and Liberties of Mankind, from the first Settlements made on these Shores, we cannot fail to cooperate, in all just Measures, to secure them to the People of these

Countries, now happily united under an efficient and well-balanced Federal Government.

In promoting to Places of Trust and Emolument, in the Executive Department, the wisest and best Men, you have pursued the Example of the People in the Election of the National Legislature.

Under such a Constitution, and such an Administration, we cannot but flatter ourselves with the Hope of Prosperity in our Commerce, Agriculture and Manufactures, and of the Establishment of our public Credit, and National Character.

With a grateful Warmth of Affection, permit us to recognize our Sensibility of the particular Honor of your late Visit to this State. While at the same Time we offer up our Praises to Almighty GOD, by whose kind Providence you had then been recently restored to Health.<sup>3</sup> That he may still have you under his Holy Keeping; and, after a very long and useful Life, confer on you the Rewards of Virtue, is our fervent Prayer.

*Signed, in behalf of the Legislature, by*

1. Printed: General Assembly Schedule, October 1790 Session (Providence, 1790) (Evans 22839), 7–8. The undated recipient's copy, signed by Governor Arthur Fenner and Speaker of the House of Deputies Welcome Arnold, is in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. A letterbook copy is in the same collection.

2. The legislature had met by adjournment in early September 1790.

3. For Washington's illness in the spring of 1790, see John Adams to William Ellery, 19 May, note 4 (RCS:R.I., 871).

### **President George Washington to the Rhode Island Legislature Mount Vernon, 20 November 1790<sup>1</sup>**

Gentlemen,

While I acknowledge, with grateful sincerity, my personal obligations to the Legislature of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations for the very flattering manner in which they convey their congratulations on my election to the chief magistracy of our confederated republic, and for the approbation they are pleased to express of my public conduct it affords me peculiar pleasure to observe that the completion of our Union, by the accession of your State, gives a strong assurance of permanent political happiness to the people of America.

A change in the national constitution, conformed to experience and the circumstances of our country, has been most happily effected by the influence of reason alone—in this change the liberty of the citizen continues unimpaired, while the energy of government is so encreased as to promise full protection to all the pursuits of science and industry—together with the firm establishment of public credit, and the vindication of our national character.

It remains with the people themselves to preserve and promote the great advantages of their political and natural situation—nor ought a doubt to be entertained that men, who so well understand the value of social happiness, will ever cease to appreciate the blessings of a free, equal, and efficient government.

In expressing my sensibility for the interest you take in the restoration of my health, I recall, with pleasure, the remembrance of those civilities which I experienced in my late visit to your State.

My best wishes are offered, Gentlemen, for the prosperity of your Constituents, and for your individual happiness.

1. Printed: General Assembly Schedule, February 1791 Session ([Providence, 1791]) (Evans 23733), 3. The undated recipient's copy, signed by Washington, is in the Rhode Island Historical Society. It was enclosed in a 20 November 1790 cover letter to Governor Arthur Fenner. Letterbook copies of both letters are in the Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

**Appendix I**  
**Amendments to the Constitution**  
**Proposed by U.S. Congress**  
**25 September 1789**

When adopting the Constitution, several state conventions recommended that the first federal Congress propose amendments to the Constitution that would be submitted to the states for ratification. On 8 June 1789 U.S. Representative James Madison of Virginia proposed amendments to the Constitution. The House of Representatives carefully considered the various amendments proposed before approving seventeen on 24 August, which were based on those originally proposed by Madison. The Senate tightened the wording and reduced the number to twelve. The House accepted most of the Senate's changes, and on 25 September Congress approved twelve amendments. President George Washington sent engrossed manuscript copies of the amendments to all thirteen states on 2 October. (For Washington's letter to Rhode Island Governor John Collins, see RCS:R.I., 614.)

On 15 October the Rhode Island legislature ordered the amendments printed and distributed to the towns for consideration in town meetings on 19 October (RCS:R.I., 618–19). The version of the amendments printed here comes from the official broadside printed by Bennett Wheeler (Evans 22202). The *United States Chronicle*, 22 October; *Providence Gazette*, 24 October; and *Newport Mercury*, 28 October, reprinted the amendments. The engrossed manuscript copy sent by President Washington to Rhode Island is in the Rhode Island State Archives.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,

Begun and held at the City of NEW-YORK, on Wednesday, the Fourth of MARCH, One Thousand Seven Hundred Eighty-nine.

The Conventions of a Number of the States having, at the Time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a Desire, in Order to prevent Misconstruction or Abuse of its Powers, that further declaratory and restrictive Clauses should be added: And as extending the Ground of public Confidence in the Government will best insure the beneficent Ends of its Institution,

RESOLVED, by the Senate, and House of Representatives, of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, Two Thirds of both Houses concurring, That the following Articles be proposed to the Legislatures of the several States as Amendments to the Constitution of the United States: All, or any of, which Articles, when ratified by Three-Fourths of the said Legislatures, to be valid to all Intents and Purposes as Part of the said Constitution, viz.

Articles in Addition to, and Amendment of, the Constitution of the United States of America, proposed by Congress, and ratified by the

Legislatures of the several States, pursuant to the Fifth Article of the original Constitution.

*Article the First.*—After the First Enumeration, required by the First Article of the Constitution, there shall be One Representative for every Thirty Thousand, until the Number shall amount to One Hundred; after which the Proportion shall be so regulated by Congress that there shall not be less than One Hundred Representatives, nor less than One Representative for every Forty Thousand Persons, until the Number of Representatives shall amount to Two Hundred, after which the Proportion shall be so regulated by Congress, that there shall not be less than Two Hundred Representatives, nor more than one Representative for every Fifty Thousand Persons.

*Article the Second.*—No Law varying the Compensations for the Services of the Senators and Representatives shall take Effect, until an Election of Representatives shall have intervened.

*Article the Third.*—Congress shall make no Law respecting the Establishment of Religion, or prohibiting the free Exercise thereof; or abridging the Freedom of Speech, or of the Press, or to the Right of the People peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a Redress of Grievances.

*Article the Fourth.*—A well regulated Militia being necessary to the Security of a free State, the Right of the People to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed.

*Article the Fifth.*—No Soldier shall, in Time of Peace, be quartered in any House without the Consent of the Owner, nor, in Time of War, but in a Manner to be prescribed by Law.

*Article the Sixth.*—The Right of the People to be secure in their Persons, Houses, Papers, and Effects, against unreasonable Searches and Seizures shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable Cause supported by Oath, or Affirmation, and particularly describing the Place to be searched, and the Persons or Things to be seized.

*Article the Seventh.*—No Person shall be held to answer for a Capital, or otherwise Infamous Crime, unless on a Presentment or Indictment of a Grand Jury; except in Cases arising in the Land or Naval Forces; or in the Militia, when in actual Service in Time of War or public Danger: Nor shall any Person be subject for the same Offence to be Twice put in Jeopardy of Life or Limb; nor shall be compelled, in any Criminal Case, to be a Witness against himself; nor be deprived of Life, Liberty or Property, without due Process of Law: Nor shall private Property be taken for public Use without just Compensation.

*Article the Eighth.*—In all Criminal Prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the Right to a speedy and public Trial, by an impartial Jury of the State and District wherein the Crime shall have been committed, which District shall have been previously ascertained by Law; and to be informed of the Nature and Cause of the Accusation; to be confronted with the Witnesses against him; to have compulsory Process for obtaining Witnesses in his Favour; and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his Defence.

*Article the Ninth.*—In Suits at Common Law, where the Value in Controversy shall exceed Twenty Dollars, the Right of Trial by Jury shall be preserved, and no Fact tried by a Jury shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the Rules of the Common Law.

*Article the Tenth.*—Excessive Bail shall not be required; nor excessive Fines imposed; nor cruel and unusual Punishments inflicted.

*Article the Eleventh.*—The Enumeration in the Constitution of certain Rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the People.

*Article the Twelfth.*—The Powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively or to the People.

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS MUHLENBERG,

*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

JOHN ADAMS,

*Vice-President of the United States, and  
President of the Senate.*

Attest, JOHN BECKLEY, *Clerk of the House of Representatives.*

SAM. A. OTIS, *Secretary of the Senate.*



## Addendum

The four items printed here were located after the Rhode Island volumes were typeset but before the index was completed.

### Samuel Nightingale: Memo Concerning Expenses Incurred for Fourth of July 1788 Celebration in Providence

Providence celebrated the anniversary of American independence on 4 July 1788 with a procession of 5,000 to 6,000 persons and a feast for many of them (RCS:R.I., 285–308n). Printed here is Samuel Nightingale's account of the expenses incurred for the dinner. Nightingale (1741–1814), a Connecticut native, was a Providence merchant who invested in the East India and coastal trade and also operated a store in Providence. He was town treasurer, 1797–1814, and a deacon in the First Congregational Church. The manuscript is in the Samuel Nightingale II Papers (part of the Nightingale-Jenckes Papers), MSS 558, sg 2, at the Rhode Island Historical Society. For clarity, some abbreviations have been spelled out. For a facsimile of the document, see Mfm:RI.

#### Memo of Sundries Recd for the Federal Celebration of 4th July 1788

of Mr. [Ezra] Hubbard $3\frac{1}{6}$ doz Plates lost @ 4/ if cash	£0.12.8
of Mr. [Joseph] Hewes $\frac{3}{4}$ doz Plates ditto @ 4/6 ditto	3.4 $\frac{1}{2}$
of Mr. John Brown $1\frac{1}{3}$ doz Plates @ 4/6	£0.6
of ditto 1 Cream Colored Dish	9
	6.9
of Wm. Barker 40 wooden Bowles	£1.0
Delivered ditto 1 Loaf Sugar 11 <sup>lb</sup> @1/	11
	9
of Messrs. Hoppin & Snow Knives & Forcks } Ballance due to them as per Their Acct }	1.19.2 $\frac{3}{4}$
of Aaron Peck 25 Milk Pans	15
of Mr. C[yprian] Sterry 54 Cream Colored Cups lost @ 1/doz	4.6
Laborers paid in Cash by S Nightingale	
To Cleaning Knives & Forcks, Plates, Dishes, Cups & Bowles &c. Before Dinner	£0.5
Cleaning ditto after Dinner	6.6
To paid 3 Men to Tend Table &c besides the } Three Men S.N. [Samuel Nightingale] Subscribed } to Hire @ 3/6 }	.10.6
	1.2
	£5.12.6 $\frac{1}{4}$

Sundry Articles for the Entertainment at Providence July 4<sup>th</sup> 1788. viz:

Recd. of Mr. Hubbard	57 Doz white Stone Plates		
Returned to ditto	<u>53<math>\frac{1}{4}</math> doz of ditto</u>		
	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ Doz lost	@ 4/	£0.15
Returned to ditto	<u>7 more</u>		
	5 $\frac{1}{6}$ doz		
Recd. of Mr. Hewes	20 Doz Cream Colored Plates		
Returned to ditto	<u>19 Doz &amp; 1 of ditto</u>		
	11 Plates wanting @ 4/6 doz		0.4.1 $\frac{1}{2}$
ditto to ditto	<u>2</u>		
	9 Plates wanting—		
Recd of Mr. John Brown	4 $\frac{1}{2}$ Doz Cream Colored Plates	}	6
Returned to ditto	<u>3<math>\frac{1}{6}</math> Doz of Ditto</u>		
	1 $\frac{1}{3}$ Doz lost @ 4/6		
Recd of Mr. John Brown	3 Cream Colored Dishes—	}	0.0.9
Returned to ditto	<u>2 — of ditto</u>		
	1 Lost 9d		
Recd of Mr. Hewes	18 Cream Colored Dishes	}	0.0.0
Returned to ditto	18 ditto—		
Recd of Mr. Jos[eph] Comstock	6 Small Earthan Milk Pans	}	0.0.0
Returned to ditto	6 ditto—		
Bot of Wm. Barker	40 Wooden Bowles		
Returned to the Vendue	<u>33 Ditto—</u>		
	7 lost	@ 6d	0.3.6
Bot of Messrs. Hoppen & Snow	108 Doz Knives & Forcks	}	5.3.4
Returned to ditto	<u>76 Doz ditto &amp; 11 Knives</u>		
	31 Doz lost		

Bot	of Mr. J[eremiah] F. Jenkins	27 Round Earthan Bristol Dishes	}	2.9
	Delivered to be Vendued	24 of Ditto		
		<hr/> 3 Lost @ 11d		
Bot	of Aaron Peck of Mr. J. F. Jenkins	25 [Earthan Milk Pans] 39 Earthan Milk Pans	}	7.6
	Delivered to be Vendued	<hr/> 64 54		
		<hr/> 10 lost @ 9d		
Bot	of Mr. C. Sterry	72 Cream Colored Cups—	}	4.6
	Returned to ditto	<hr/> 18 ditto—		
		<hr/> 54 lost @ 1/doz		
				£7.7.5 $\frac{1}{2}$

Left at Vendue Room for Sale  
 8 Plates & 1 Cream Colored Dish Damaged  
 Salt more than half Bushel  
 Vinegar

Sum Brot Forward				£7.7.5 $\frac{1}{2}$
Bot	of Mr. J. F. Jenkins	24 Dble Handle Porringers—	}	7.6
	Returned to Vendue Room	<hr/> 4 ditto		
		<hr/> 20 Lost @ 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d		
Borrowed of Mr. Hubbard		1 Stone Pott—	}	0.0.0
	Returned to ditto	1 ditto		
Hired the Plates Dishes Plates Earthan Pans and Wooden Bowles washed & Knives & Forcks Before Dinner for			}	0.5
Washing ditto after Dinner				
Cash paid to 6 Men Tending on Table &c the 4 July			}	10.6
Deduct	<hr/> 3 Hired on my own Acct— 3 @ 3/6			
				£8.16.11 $\frac{1}{2}$

**Philadelphia American Museum, August 1788<sup>1</sup>***A fair bargain.*

As Satan was taking and airing one day,  
 Columbia's fair genius fell plump in his way,  
 Array'd like a goddess, and blooming as May:  
 "Vile Monster," said she, "you oppose me in vain,  
 My people shall surely their wishes obtain;  
 You can but perplex us, and so mark the end on't,  
 For, sooner or later, they'll be independent."  
 "What you say," quoth the fiend, "I confess is too true:  
 But why not allow the poor devil his due?  
 Give me *one* of your states, and the rest shall be free  
 To follow their fate, unmolested by me."  
 ("Agreed," said the lady, "if that's all you want,  
 Here take and enjoy it—it is my Vermont."  
 "Oh! ho!" exclaim'd Satan, "how gen'rous you're grown,  
 So kindly to give—what's already my own!  
 So thank you for nothing, fair lady, I trow,  
 The devil is not to be bamboozled so.  
 Come—down with your dust—you know what I mean  
 I must have at least *one* of your fav'rite *thirteen*." )  
 A tear in her eye, and a sigh from her breast,  
 The doubts and the fears of the genius confest;  
 But while she was puzzled, unable to find  
 Which state might with ease be to Satan resign'd,  
 The five per cent. impost-law popt in her mind.  
 This settled the point—she look'd up with a smile, and  
 Presented his fiendship the state of Rhode Island.  
 He seiz'd the fair prize—cram'd it into his pocket,  
 And darted away in a blaze, like a rocket.

1. This poem first appeared in the April 1787 issue of the Philadelphia *Columbian Magazine* (first advertised for sale in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, 1 May). The poem was reprinted in the *Providence Gazette*, 26 May, and the *Newport Herald*, 31 May, and in nineteen other newspapers by 22 August 1787: Vt. (2), Mass. (5), Conn. (3), N.Y. (3), Pa. (2), Del. (1), Va. (2), S.C. (1). Since Rhode Island, along with North Carolina, had not ratified the Constitution by August 1788, the *American Museum* reprinted the poem in its August 1788 issue that appeared in early September. Just before the meeting of the second session of the Rhode Island Convention, the *New Hampshire Recorder*, 20 May 1790, reprinted the poem, omitting the eight lines in angle brackets.

The poem is directed at Rhode Island, which had rejected the Impost of 1781 on 1 November 1782, thereby defeating the amendment to the Articles of Confederation (RCS:R.I., Vol. 1, p. xxviii). The *Columbian Magazine* indicated that the poem was "Written in the Year 1782." *The Beauties of Poetry, British and American . . .* (Philadelphia, 1791)

(Evans 23246, pp. 198–99) indicated that Francis Hopkinson was the author of “A Fair Bargain.” Hopkinson, a noted poet, was managing the *Columbian Magazine* when “A fair bargain” appeared (Boyd, XI, 289).

**Fisher Ames to Welcome Arnold**  
**New York, 20 February 1790<sup>1</sup>**

I ought before this date to have expressed my gratitude for your esteemed favour by the mail—Please to accept my apology for my neglect—For several weeks public business here has required an unre-mitted attention, and I have not supposed that any thing which I could communicate would be earlier news than you get regularly by the post I cannot, however, at this time forbear to express the degree in which I feel myself interested in the proceedings of your approaching Convention—*I shall* rejoice to see the forms of the Union completed—and if the measures of this Session of Congress should terminate in a prudent and honourable provision for public credit I shall dismiss any fears for the permanency and tranquility of the Government—It will be our fault if we are not the most prosperous and respectable people in the world—and Rhode Island has good cause to expect a full share of the blessings of such a Govt.—I understand, however, that the passions which have hitherto resisted the spirit of union have not subsided, and that a majority of Antifeds will meet in Convention I hear this with regret—If argument can have effect, I shall expect the adoption. But I fear that it will be as it has been before—and that a dead majority will resist reason and public good with silent obstinacy—Considerations drawn from the power of the united States by restrictive acts to hamper the industry & trade of your state would not be regarded—But the plan of the Secretary<sup>2</sup> affords an Argument more upon a level with their views—The scheme of adjusting acct. between the U.S. & individual states presents to your people a solid & very alluring advantage. It is equally beneficial to creditor states who will now get their due, & to debtor states who will get their debts paid for them by the U.S. I do not allude to the assumption of the state debts—tho’ that is connected with the subject—but to the Supposititious statement of such acct. Rhode Island I suppose will prove a Creditor & may expect that this will procure an annual sum from the public Treasury sufficient to pay the expences of civil Govt. and to save your people from taxes on that score—Nor have they cause to fear direct assessments by the U.S. For it cannot be expected that the landed interest, which predominates in Congress, will abuse this source of taxation—nor is it easy to devise a mode, according to the rules of the constitution, which will admit of excessive impositions—If for instance a tax of so much per acre should

be imposed, your state would pay less than any state in the Union, the land being in proportion to other property more valuable than that of any other state—I suppose that you will sit in Convention—I wish you all imaginable success, and am with sentiments of respect & esteem. [P.S.] I ought to have observed that I have not the least expectation that a land tax will be laid

1. RC, Rhode Island Manuscripts, John Hay Library, Brown University. Docketed as “rec’d 3 March. 1790.”

2. For Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton’s 14 January 1790 Report on Public Credit, see DHFFC, V, 743–823.

**Thomas Thatcher to George Thatcher**  
**Yarmouth, Mass., 15 April 1790 (excerpt)<sup>1</sup>**

Dear Brother

. . . The whole profits of Mr. Otises Office<sup>2</sup> is very small I assure you—And what he gets the greater part comes out of Yarmouth and is very distressing to the poor fishermen—There is about 40 Sails that fishes from this town—They have always the greater part of them been supplied with Salt & Stors from Providence—Now the Charge of clearing & Entering together with 6 Cents per Bushel Duties on Salt is very discouraging—& more so if the State of Rhode Island should come into the union before the fishermen can export the fish that they shall catch this summer there & recieve the bounty I think for the fishermen of this town to pay [6?] Cents a Bushel on 8 or 9000 Bushels of Salt—Or if Rhod Island comes into the union before Next December to loose it will wholly brake up the business in this place—It has already put a Stop to a number of vessel

You may Say that if Rhod Island comes into the union that the West Indian will take off all the fish with other Foreign ports—But that is no help to us we are not Able to Ship fish to any foreign port except it be to Rhod Island—And as we are obligd to pay duties on Salt brought from thence I think it would be well for the fishermen to have Some consideration Some way or other if that State Should come into the union before the Salt that is brought from thence this spring can be wet & the effects carried back & the bounty, which I think is 5 Cents per Quin[ta]l Can be Recievd<sup>3</sup>—I am no way concernd in the fishery—& what little business I do will wholly stop as soon as Rhod Island comes into the union therefore dont write partially—But feelingly in behalf of my poor Towns men—I am Sensible that no general Law can work for the good of every Individual in A Continent as large as this—but this I will venture to Say that there is not a Tow[n] in the

Union According to what the Town is worth that is so much distrest by the Duties As the Town of Yarmouth—Especially on Salt & Mollasses—

1. RC, George Thatcher Papers, Boston Public Library. Printed: DHFFC, XIX, 1235–37. Thomas Thatcher (1757–1806), George's younger brother, was a school teacher. He had been a militia private and sergeant during the Revolution and was a town selectman in Yarmouth, 1789–1804.

2. Joseph Otis was the federal collector at Barnstable.

3. The Impost Act of 4 July 1789 levied a duty of six cents a bushel on salt imported from any foreign port or place. The act also provided for a bounty of five cents on every quintal of dried fish “in lieu of a drawback of the duties imposed on the importation of the Salt” used to dry the fish (DHFFC, V, 941, 942).

## Errata

- Vol. 1, p. xii—Fourteenth line should be “27 March–27 December 1788”
- Vol. 1, p. lxxix, and Vol. 2, p. xxxi—The entry for 4 May 1776 should begin: “Legislature renounces allegiance to King George III and”
- Vol. 1, p. lxxii, and Vol. 2, p. xxxiv—The entry for 6 March 1790 should read: “Convention sends bill of rights and proposed amendments”
- Vol. 1, p. lxxiii, and Vol. 2, p. xxxv—The entry for 21 April–1 May 1790 should read: “R.I.’s bill of rights and proposed amendments”
- p. 21—At the end of the top paragraph on the page add: “A draft of this letter is in Letters Sent by the Governor, Vol. 4, no. 74, R-Ar.”
- p. 23—Add this new paragraph at the end of footnote one: “Other manuscript copies of the protest are in Letters Sent by the Governor, Vol. 4, no. 74, R-Ar, and Rhode Island Records, Vol. 13, pp. 413–14, R-Ar. The protest was also printed in the General Assembly Schedule, September 1787 session (Providence, 1787) (Evans 20684), 14–15.”
- p. 63—In the fourth line after December add: “and *Pennsylvania Packet*, 14 December,”
- p. 65—In the second paragraph of footnote 1, RCS:Pa., 216–23, instead of 215–23.
- p. 152—“Thomas Allen” instead of “Thomas Alten,” “Matthew Allen” instead of “Matthew Alten,” “Joseph Allen” instead of “Joseph Alten.”
- p. 153—“Samuel Allen” instead of “Samuel Alten.”
- p. 156—“Daniel Commins” instead of “Daniel Commin.”
- p. 161—“Jeremiah Amesberry” instead of “Jeremiah Amsbury.”
- p. 165—“Samuel Gorton” instead of “Samuel Gorten.”
- p. 168—“Asabel Stone” instead of “Asahel Stone.”
- p. 188—“John Allen” instead of “John Aliu.”
- p. 202—“Jabes Ralph” instead of “Jabez Relph.”
- p. 209—“Michael Macomber” instead of “Mihael Macomber.”
- p. 211—“Nathan Bardine” instead of “Nathan Barton.”
- p. 215—“James Converse” instead of “James Convis.”
- p. 280—Line 5 should be “an annual income [i.e., interest] of £99,000.”
- p. 313—In the William Ellery biographical entry, line 5: Ellery attended Congress in “1776–80, 1781–82, 1783–85” not “1776–85.”
- p. 594—“Robt. N: Auchmerty” instead of “Robt. N: Amchmerty” and “Moses Seixas” instead of “Moses Seikas.”
- p. 607—Add the following in footnote one at the end of the first paragraph: “The *New York Journal*, 7 May 1790, reprinted the letter from the Montego Bay, Jamaica, *Cornwall Chronicle* of 21 November 1789 (which had reprinted it from the *Newport Mercury*).”



# Rhode Island Cumulative Index

## Explanatory Note

This cumulative index covers Volumes XXIV–XXVI of *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*. Because these three Rhode Island volumes are paginated continuously, volume numbers do not appear in this index. Volume XXIV consists of pages i–lxxxii, 1–335; Volume XXV, 336–708; Volume XXVI, 709–1092.

The names of Rhode Islanders in this index are followed by their town of residence placed in parentheses. Those not from Rhode Island are identified by their state or country of residence. In addition to the place of residence, delegates to the Rhode Island Convention are indicated by their vote on the Constitution: those who voted in favor of ratification by a “Y” and those who voted against ratification by an “N.” The five Antifederalists who voted in favor of ratification are indicated by a “Y” followed by a superscript “A” (Y<sup>A</sup>). Delegates who did not vote are indicated by an “A.” Within entries for individual Rhode Islanders and the entries for each of the state’s thirty towns, page numbers followed by an asterisk (\*) indicate the vote on the 24 March 1788 referendum on the Constitution in which almost 3,000 men participated.

The names listed in the March 1788 referendum present some typographical problems. Each town assigned the recording of names to one individual. Often names were misspelled. In rare cases, first names were omitted and only titles or occupations were included (Squire Franklin, Colonel Briggs, or George Sisson Blacksmith). Presumably these “titles” distinguish between men with the same first and last names. Where two men with the same name from the same town voted (and the scribe indicated that one of them was the “son of – –”) this index indicates that distinction. (For freemanship status of propertyless eldest sons, see the introduction to the Rhode Island referendum [p. 152].) Generally the names listed in the towns for the referendum have not been changed. Sometimes the spelling of names was incorrect or so illegible that errors in transcription occurred. Attempts have been made in the index to correct them. (See the errata for a list of misspelled names.) Cross-references from incorrect spellings to correct spellings have been provided when necessary. Where two plausibly correct spellings of the same name exist, the alternate is placed in parentheses. The U.S. Census for 1790 for Rhode Island has been helpful in adjudicating spellings, but it too has its own peculiarities.

To aid the reader, compilations of similar items have been grouped under a common main entry. Such compilations are listed below. In addition to the grouping under Pseudonyms, individual pseudonymous items printed in these three volumes are indexed separately in alphabetical order. When known, the author's name is placed in parentheses after the pseudonym. Some entries in this index are so unusual that they deserve to be highlighted. The reader should be particularly aware of these entries which are listed below.

## COMPILATIONS

Biblical References	Newspapers
Broadsides, Pamphlets, and Books	Petitions
Celebrations	Poetry
Classical Antiquity	Political and Legal Writers and
Governments, Ancient and	Writings
Modern	Pseudonyms
Literary References	Ratification, Prospects for

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**Rhode Island Freemen Vote on the Constitution  
Referendum Results by Town, 24 March 1788**

Town	Yeas	Nays
Barrington	9	34
Bristol	26	23
Charlestown	6	51
Coventry	0	180
Cranston	0	101
Cumberland	10	113
East Greenwich	2	91
Exeter	6	142
Foster	0	177
Glocester	9	228
Hopkinton	33	95
Jamestown	5	11
Johnston	2	79
Little Compton	63	57
Middletown	6	40
Newport	1	10
New Shoreham	0	32
North Kingstown	2	160
North Providence	0	48
Portsmouth	12	60
Providence	0	1
Richmond	1	68
Scituate	0	156
Smithfield	2	158
South Kingstown	1	125
Tiverton	23	92
Warren	2	41
Warwick	3	140
Westerly	12	56
West Greenwich	<u>2</u>	<u>145</u>
Total	238	2,714

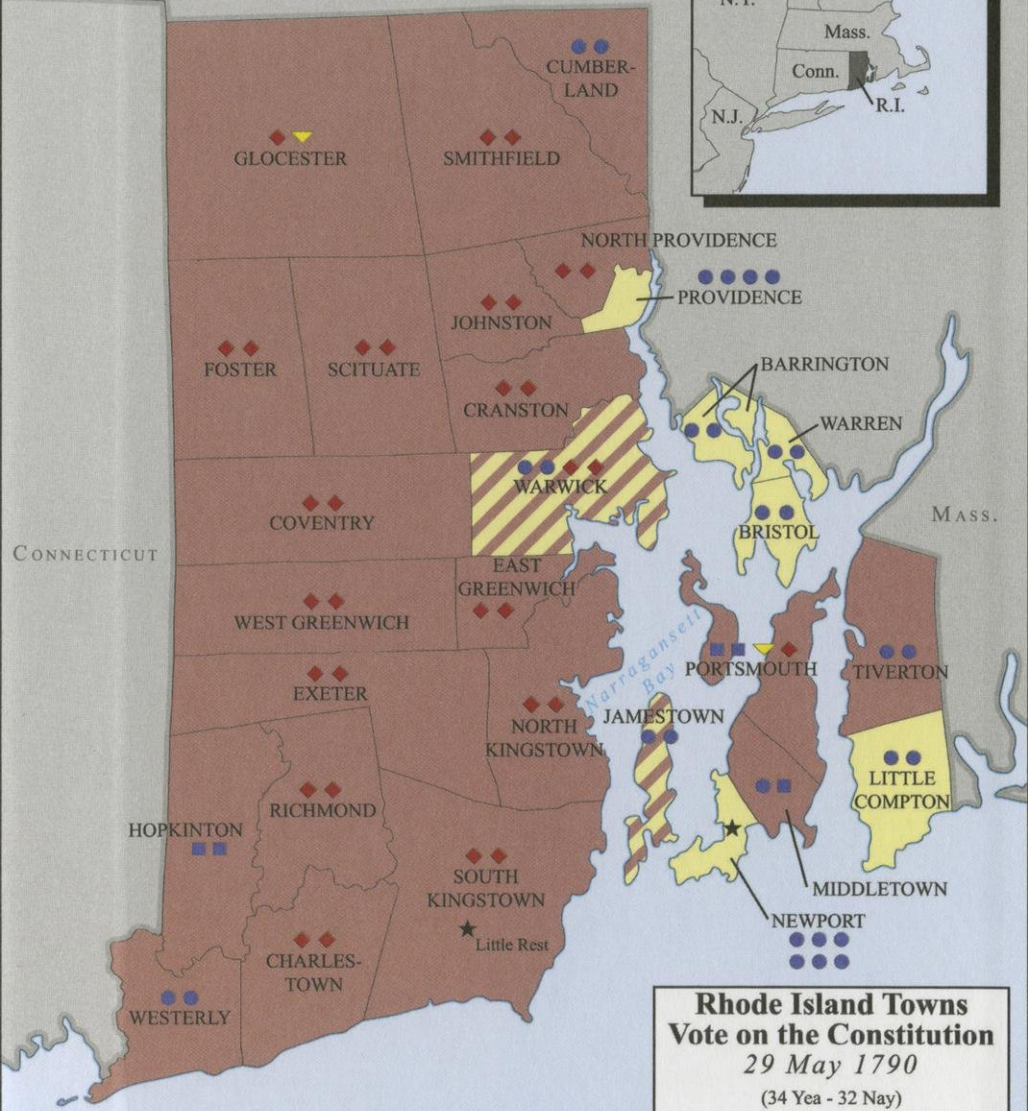
REFERENDUM: Until 17 January 1790, the Rhode Island legislature repeatedly refused to submit the Constitution to the consideration of a state convention. Instead the legislature provided for a state-wide referendum that was held in town meetings on 24 March 1788. Freemen voted ye or nay on the Constitution and their votes were recorded and sent to the legislature where they were tabulated. Federalists, most obviously in Newport and Providence, boycotted the referendum.



MAP: Red-colored towns generally opposed the Constitution, while cream-colored towns supported it. Warwick and Jamestown were more closely divided. With a sizable majority in the state Convention at the time of the final vote, Antifederalists “allowed” ratification to take place when five of their delegates voted in favor of the Constitution and four did not vote. One Antifederalist delegate was replaced by a Federalist on the day of the vote.



MASSACHUSETTS



CONNECTICUT

MASS.

Narragansett Bay

Atlantic Ocean



**Rhode Island Towns  
Vote on the Constitution**

29 May 1790

(34 Yea - 32 Nay)

- Federalists voting Yea 29
- Antifederalists voting Yea 5
- ◆ Antifederalists voting Nay 32
- ▼ Antifederalists not voting 4
- Antifederalist Towns
- Federalist Towns
- Divided Towns
- ★ Convention Meeting Place

0 5 Miles



Kingstown, an Antifederalist stronghold. After debating the Constitution for almost a week, the delegates proposed a bill of rights and other amendments to the Constitution before adjourning to reassemble in Newport on 24 May 1790. Because the first federal Congress threatened Rhode Island with draconian commercial sanctions, Antifederalist leaders manipulated the Convention vote so that the Constitution was ratified on 29 May 1790 by a vote of 34 to 32.

This volume, the final of three on Rhode Island, contains the public and private debates over the Constitution from 20 January through 29 May 1790, which includes the two parties' efforts to win the annual spring election for state officeholders, Congress' effort to pass punitive legislation directed at Rhode Island, and the town meetings of 21 April called to consider the bill of rights and proposed amendments adopted by the March session of the state Convention. Parts VII and VIII cover the March and May sessions of the state Convention. The documents for the March session feature the cryptic but informative notes of debates taken by Convention secretary Daniel Updike and Convention observer Theodore Foster of Providence. The volume ends with the aftermath of ratification in Rhode Island consisting of documents from 29 May through 20 November 1790, including reports of Rhode Island's ratification, brief accounts of celebrations of that event, private commentaries, and a significant group of documents describing President George Washington's visit to Newport and Providence in August.

The volume also has a three-color map on the endpapers that demonstrates how Antifederalists, despite a sizable majority of delegates, "allowed" ratification to take place. Additional editorial apparatus includes both a general ratification and a Rhode Island chronology and a listing of Rhode Island officeholders. The back matter includes an appendix containing the twelve amendments adopted by Congress in September 1789 and sent to the states for ratification, an addendum of four documents that project editors became aware of toward the completion of the current volume, and the cumulative index for all three Rhode Island volumes.

#### THE EDITORS

JOHN P. KAMINSKI and GASPARE J. SALADINO have been editing *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* since 1970. CHARLES H. SCHOENLEBER joined the staff in 1987. RICHARD LEFFLER served as editor from 1973 to 2009. JONATHAN M. REID and MARGARET R. FLAMINGO have worked with the project for five and four years, respectively. JOHANNA E. LANNÉR-CUSIN and DAVID P. FIELDS are in their second year with the project. TIMOTHY D. MOORE joined the project in 2010. PATRICK T. CONLEY, the foremost historian of Rhode Island, has read the manuscript and offered valuable and insightful advice on Rhode Island history.



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