

THE DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE  
RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

*Ratification of the Constitution by the States*

**CONFEDERATION  
CONGRESS**

*Supplemental Documents*



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## **Introduction**

The literal transcriptions of the four newspaper items in this supplement augment the debate over the implementation of the Constitution by the Confederation Congress that appears in Volume XXIX.

## Symbols

### Cross-references to Volumes of

#### *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*

- Mfm      References to the 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:Cong. 2.” “Mfm” is also used in the running headers as an aide to the reader, and are especially helpful in multipage documents.
- 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:Cong., 2.”



## Documents

### 1. Pennsylvania Packet, 25 August 1788<sup>1</sup>

The anxiety which pervades the union on the subject of the federal constitution, and the surprise excited by Congress delaying to announce its ratification, and to direct the election and convention of the legislature, render a communication of the enclosed extracts from the journals of that honorable body highly interesting to the citizens of the United States—Hence it appears that such a diversity of opinion as, to a mind uninformed of the debates, is truly astonishing, has prevailed in Congress on the question where the federal legislature should convene.

Without presuming to decide on the causes which have concurred to create this distraction in the great council of the union, we may be allowed, with unfeigned deference to the wisdom of that respectable assembly, to express our surprise that under the recommendation of the federal convention,<sup>2</sup> which breathes no other sentiment than accommodation and mutual concession, a single difficulty should have arisen to obstruct the obvious interests of confederated America—To this object, paramount to all others, should all local prejudices, and (but that it is impossible they can exist) we would add personal considerations, be sacrificed, since there cannot remain a doubt in the mind of any man, whose thoughts are ruled by political probity and directed by common sense, that, in questions of national import, the general welfare ought forever to predominate.

Let it be asked, then, of any person uninterested in the event, where the seat of a government which is to direct the measures of a wide extended empire should be fixed?—he would answer without hesitation, “*If it is intended that the government should diffuse equal influence, and maintain equal authority through all its parts, place the seat of it as near to the geographical centre of the country as may consist with the national population*”—This is the answer which common sense would dictate, and improved reason confirm—it is the answer that would be given by the plain peasant and the refined civilian.

Whence, then, the difficulty of determining on the place where the federal legislature should convene?—a variety of situations, combining the great requisites, present themselves—Philadelphia, Lancaster, and Baltimore, are mentioned in the journals of Congress.

If Philadelphia is less central in a geographical view than Baltimore, it is more so as to national population—this appears by the constitution, which assigns to the states on each side of Pennsylvania an equal number of senators, and nearly an equal number of representatives—but if the local centricity is considered as meriting a preference, then let *the candid unbiassed vote of the Pennsylvania delegation* which appears on the journals of Congress, be adopted, and the government commence its operations at Baltimore—this will be to do substantial justice.

Admitting New-York to possess every other advantage and convenience—supposing her to equal Philadelphia, Lancaster, or Baltimore, in every other point of accommodation and facility, yet the objection that she is placed in a corner

of the union, eccentric either as to national territory or population, is conclusive, and cannot, without a sacrifice of every federal opinion, be supervened.—To establish this assertion, it is only necessary to observe, that the states, on one side of New-York (supposing the union complete as to thirteen) will send *eight senators* and *seventeen representatives* to the federal legislature, while the states on the other side will send *sixteen senators* and *forty two representatives*—and superadded to this extreme disparity of members, which marks the difference of population, the inequality of territorial pretension is still greater—a vote therefore to convene the government in so eccentric a position, cannot appear to the impartial mind as the result of either reason or *true* policy: and will not be likely to conciliate that spirit of harmony and concession, which ought to mark the first acts of federal legislation.

May that wisdom, which points to the true interests of the union, direct the determination of Congress on this important occasion.

1. Reprinted: *New York Morning Post*, 30 August; *Massachusetts Gazette*, 5 September; *Boston Gazette*, 8 September. For a response, see the *Pennsylvania Packet*, 6 September (RSC: Congress supplement, 3 below).

2. A reference to the second resolution of the Constitutional Convention dated 17 September 1787 that provided that once nine state conventions had ratified the Constitution, Congress should fix a day for the election of presidential electors, a day on which the electors would meet in their own states and cast their ballots for the president, and “the time and place for commencing proceedings under this Constitution” (CC:76).

## 2. Pennsylvania Packet, 6 September 1788

It seems a great hardship upon the people of the United States, says a correspondent, that so great a majority as voted for Philadelphia should not determine the residence of Congress—New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina having 1,480,000 people, according to the statement of the federal Convention, voted for Philadelphia; and Massachusetts, New-York, New-Jersey and South Carolina, having only 920,000 people, were for New-York—Delaware and Georgia were divided.

## 3. Pennsylvania Packet, 6 September 1788<sup>1</sup>

We cannot, says a correspondent, but wonder at the want of reflection in the writer of a New-York paragraph of August 30,<sup>2</sup> who complains that Congress have not determined the question of the residence of the new government, though a ninth state has adopted the Constitution above two months. Surely this gentleman will not complain *as a New Yorker*, that Congress delayed *for many weeks* to determine the matter, when New-York was not in a capacity to be fixed on, or even put in nomination. How indelicate is the personal part relative to the Southern Delegate!—This writer tells us, that *the sufferings* of New York ought to influence Congress to fix the government there. Upon that principle it should go to New-Jersey. But does he remember, that half the ships and cargoes belonging to Philadelphia, that were captured in the war, would rebuild all they lost? Our greater proportion of voluntary public loans, now reduced three-fourths in value, would also rebuild it. But they have been amply repaid for this

loss, by the confrication of a great number of the most capital city-estates. Pennsylvania, he says, wishes to become the arbitress of the United States. This we deny and despise. Let New York remember, how firmly she refused to make *common cause* even with her sister states, by refusing the impost;—and let the worthy citizens of Connecticut and New Jersey remember, how safe it would be for New York, with such an unjust spirit, to become the arbitress of America. The dispositions of this state are, and *always* have been, national. When Boston suffered before the war, Pennsylvania subscribed to their relief. When the South Carolinians were exiled, Pennsylvania subscribed for their poor, and lent to their rich citizens—How much did New York do on these two occasions? They did not furnish in gifts, or loans, a tenth penny. When our Philosophical Society, our Bank, our Manufacturing Society, &c. were established, all America were publicly and heartily invited to partake. Our little societies have offered premiums for inventions, improvements, and new articles of produce to the citizens of the most distant states. Our spirit has always been federal, both before and since the revolution, as is well known.

Let it not be supposed we wish to take up a contention with New York. We know there is and ever will be a jealousy. Let us, however, rather make it a *generous emulation* than a little contemptible jealousy, unworthy of the good citizens of that metropolis, and unworthy of us. The meeting of the new Congress must rest upon solid arguments, of which *the people at large* are able to judge, and will think for themselves. Our correspondent would only humbly observe to the gentlemen of the present Congress, that it will be an unpleasant thing to any patriot, and an unhappy thing for *the new Union*, if their determination should not coincide with *the sentiments and wishes of the people*.

1. For a response, see the New York *Independent Journal*, 13 September (immediately below).

2. New York *Independent Journal*, 30 August (RCS:Congress, 64–65).

#### 4. New York Independent Journal, 13 September 1788

The writer of a paragraph in our Journal of the 30th ultimo,<sup>1</sup> having seen some strictures upon it in a Philadelphia paper of the 6th inst.<sup>2</sup> accusing him of a want of reflection, and of stating the pretensions of New-York to the seat of government in an unfair manner,—observes in reply, that tho' a *New-Yorker* he never wished the affairs of the union to be impeded or obstructed to gratify the *pride, vanity* or *selfishness* of any *single* state or *city* whatever; such a consideration ought never to have a place in the mind of a real federalist or true patriot; and altho' a partiality for the place in which we live may be very pardonable when kept within proper bounds, yet it becomes highly reprehensible when carried to such a height as to defeat measures evidently for the general good, and thereby preventing the operations of a government to which the citizens of America look up, for their future happiness and protection.—Congress in the year 1784 resolved that they would hold their sessions in the city of New-York until suitable buildings should be erected for their reception, at such place as they should fix upon for a federal town;<sup>3</sup> this resolve we may suppose was not passed without mature deliberation, and is still in full force; and although several attempts have

been made to remove Congress since that period, yet they have always been unsuccessful, and on the New Question there still appears a respectable majority in our favour. From these circumstances we may reasonably infer that the voice of the union is for this city, notwithstanding the Philadelphia writer's assertions to the contrary: and on investigation we cannot find that any political writers in the United States, *except the Pennsylvanians*, have even expressed a wish that the seat of government should be changed: hence we may conclude that the conduct of Pennsylvania, instead of receiving the approbation of the other states, will deservedly merit their censure for protracting the determination of Congress on a matter of such immense importance, in which every sincere friend to his country is so deeply interested.

1. New York *Independent Journal*, 30 August (RCS:Congress, 64–65).
2. *Pennsylvania Packet*, 6 September (immediately above).
3. For the resolution of 24 December 1784, see *Journals of the Continental Congress*, XXVII, 704.

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