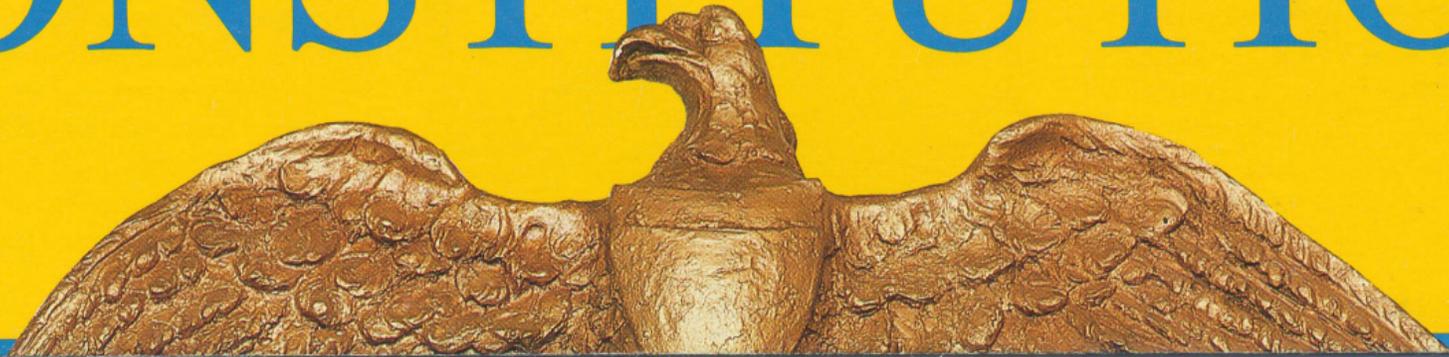


The National Parks and the

BICENTENNIAL

of the United States

CONSTITUTION



During the summer of 1787, 55 delegates from the young United States of America met in the State House in Philadelphia, the same building in which some of them had approved the Declaration of Independence 11 years before. Their inspired labors through four months of debate behind closed doors produced the U.S. Constitution, a document calculated “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” This work has proved the most successful blueprint for popular sovereignty in human history.

The delegates who met here were representatives of former British colonies which had recently fought a war to separate themselves from a government widely thought arbitrary and unresponsive. Since 1781, the 13 newly independent States, wary of strong central authority, had banded together in a loose “league of friendship” under the Articles of Confederation. It was the weakness of this alliance in resolving matters of common concern that prompted the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia. The federal government devised there by the delegates was empowered to deal authoritatively with national affairs while local matters were reserved to the States. Having experienced both tyranny and political impotence, the framers of the Constitution steered deftly between those twin evils with a brilliant system of checks and balances based on a two-house legislature, a separate executive branch, and an independent judiciary.

That men from States so diverse in land, wealth, and population could unite on such a plan was “little short of a miracle” to George Washington. John Adams, abroad as American minister to Great Britain, declared the conven-



tion “the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen.”

At least nine States had to approve the Constitution before it took effect—an outcome by no means assured. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay were especially influential in the campaign to ratify the document by publishing a series of anonymous newspaper articles, later issued as *The Federalist*. Among prominent supporters lending eloquence and prestige to the cause were Benjamin Franklin and James Wilson of Pennsylvania, Edmund Randolph and John Marshall of Virginia, and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina.

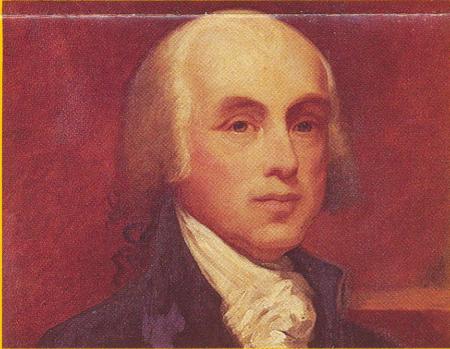
Within nine months enough States had ratified the document for the new government to go into effect. On April 6, 1789, the first Congress elected under the Constitution assembled in Federal Hall (formerly City Hall) in New York City. One of the first acts of Congress was to count the electoral votes for president and vice-president. George Washington was the unanimous choice for chief executive; John Adams won the second office. Standing on the balcony of Federal Hall before a crowd of well wishers, Washington was inaugurated on April 30.



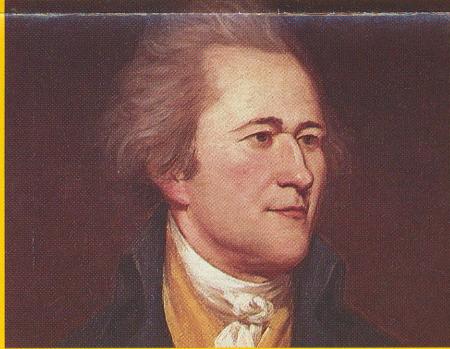
During the ratification debates, principled opponents like George Mason of Virginia expressed concern that the Constitution would create a powerful central government that might undermine the civil liberties of the people. Congress responded by passing a series of amendments, ten of which were promptly ratified by the States. Known as the Bill of Rights, they guaranteed the people such familiar rights as freedom of religion, speech, the press, and trial by jury.

The provision for amendment was one of the great strengths of the Constitution, enabling it to evolve in response to political and social changes unforeseen by the framers. Over the years, amendments altered the methods of electing the president and senators, prohibited slavery and the abridgement of civil liberties by the States, extended the ballot to blacks, women, and 18-year-olds, authorized the Federal income tax, established and later repealed Prohibition, limited the tenure of presidents, and modified the presidential succession.

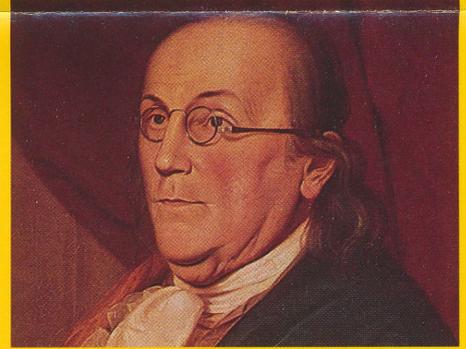
The Constitution’s broad language has also kept it a living document. It allows ample latitude for legislative and executive discretion, subject to judicial review and interpretation. From time to time, the Supreme Court has changed its view—and thus the application—of key provisions. In 1896, for example, it decided that black Americans were not denied “equal protection of the laws” under the 14th Amendment so long as their segregated facilities approximated those for whites. In 1954 the court ruled otherwise, finding “separate but equal” a violation of the equal protection requirement. Without such flexibility of interpretation, we might now be recalling the 1787 convention as only a bygone episode rather than celebrating 200 years of government under the Constitution.



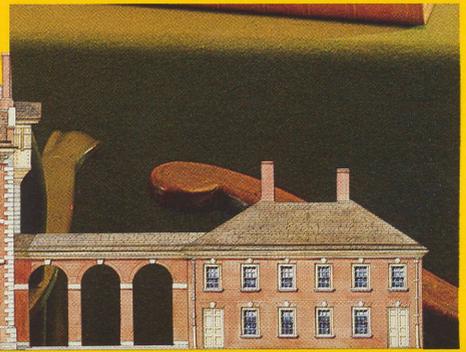
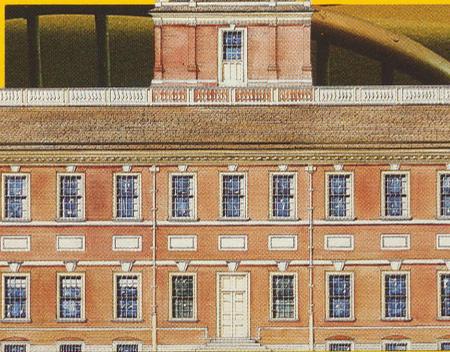
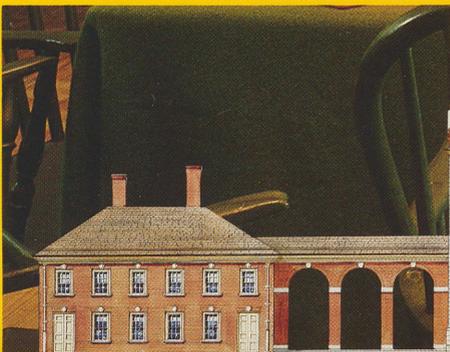
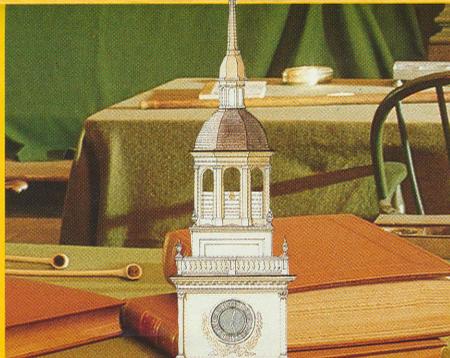
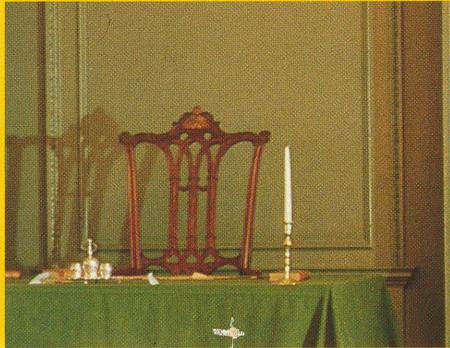
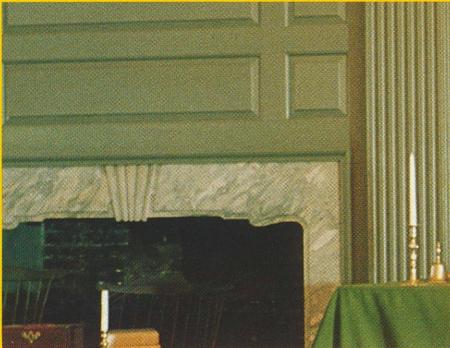
James Madison



Alexander Hamilton



Benjamin Franklin



Independence National Historical Park

We 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 Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Whereas

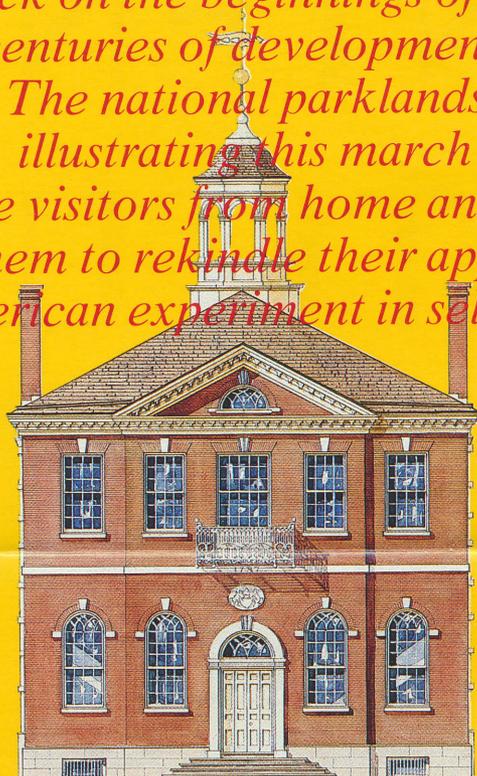
Section 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

Section 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 Indians 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 the Congress shall direct: but 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 entitled to chuse three, Massachusetts eight, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations one, Connecticut five, New York six, New Jersey four, Pennsylvania

*Anniversaries are times for recalling origins and celebrating growth.
The bicentennial of the Constitution
is a time to look back on the beginnings of our Federal system
and to reflect on two centuries of development within its framework.
The national parklands
illustrating this march
welcome visitors from home and abroad
and invite them to rekindle their appreciation of
the great American experiment in self-government.*



Congress Hall

The National Park System (a creation of the Federal Government surely unforeseen by the founders) is a good place to celebrate this bicentennial. Several parks are intimately connected with the framing and early workings of the Constitution. Others illustrate the evolution of the Constitution through amendment and judicial interpretation.

Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia is the centerpiece of this celebration. Here in Independence Hall (as the Pennsylvania State House was later called) the Constitutional Convention gave birth to the new federal charter. Visitors can see in the restored Assembly Room the "rising sun" chair from which George Washington presided and the silver inkstand used by the signers of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Federal National Memorial in New York City occupies a spot scarcely less important in the founding of the new government. While sitting in the city hall that formerly stood here, Congress under the Articles of Confederation issued the call for the 1787 convention and forwarded the completed document to the States for ratification. Old City Hall, newly enlarged, was also the first Federal capitol under the Constitution. It was here that the First Congress (as they are now numbered) met in April 1789 and that Washington first took the presidential oath of office prescribed in the Constitution. In September Congress transmitted the Bill of Rights to the States for ratification and passed the Judiciary Act, which gave substance to the Supreme Court and a system of lower courts. The present building on the site dates from 1842.

In December 1790 the scene of government shifted back to Philadelphia, designated the temporary seat of government until a permanent capital was ready. Congress convened in the

County Courthouse, adjoining Independence Hall on the west; the Supreme Court met in City Hall, the east building of the complex. Washington was inaugurated for his second term in Congress Hall, as the courthouse became known. Four years later, in 1797, John Adams took the oath of office here, beginning an unbroken line of peaceful presidential succession.

In 1800 the Federal Government moved to its new home on the Potomac. Part of the plan for the new city was an official residence for the president. Under construction since 1792, the *White House* was still unfinished when John and Abigail Adams moved in that November. Every president since has lived and worked there. While housing the family and offices of the chief executive, the house and grounds are also part of the National Park System; tours of the state rooms are regularly conducted for the public.

Among the important powers granted Congress by the Constitution is the power "To provide and maintain a Navy." One of the first naval bases under this authority was the Boston Naval Shipyard, established in 1800 and active until 1974. Today its most historic part is a unit of *Boston National Historical Park*. Here visitors can learn about the early Navy and tour the ship *U.S.S. Constitution*, which did battle in the War of 1812.

The powers of Congress "To raise and support Armies" and to call forth "the Militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions" are illustrated at numerous

historic forts and battlefields in the National Park System. Troops at Fort McHenry (named for a Maryland signer of the Constitution) repelled the British attack on Baltimore in 1814 and inspired the writing of the National Anthem, events recounted today at *Fort McHenry National Monument*. *Castle Clinton National Monument*, at the tip of Manhattan Island, displays a defensive work built 1808-11 to protect New York harbor. From 1855 to 1890 it served as the entry station for more than eight million immigrants, an illustration of the Constitution's empowerment of Congress "To establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization." Nearby Ellis Island, now part of *Statue of Liberty National Monument*, assumed this role from 1892 to 1954.

The constitutional powers of Congress "To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises" and "To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States," had great effect on Salem, Mass., where *Salem Maritime National Historic Site* interprets the old seaport. The U.S. Custom House here represents the Federal Government's major source of revenue before the Federal income tax (unconstitutional until the Sixteenth Amendment in 1913.)

The extension of civil rights through constitutional amendment, legal action, and judicial interpretation is related at several other parks. In the courthouse at *Jefferson National Expansion Memorial* in St. Louis, the slave Dred Scott sued for his freedom. The Supreme Court ruled against him in 1857, finding that Scott lacked standing to sue and that if freed on the grounds argued, his owner would be deprived of property without due process of law under the Fifth Amendment. By fueling the growing sectionalism that led to civil war four years later, the famous decision helped force a resolution of the slavery issue.



Federal Hall National Memorial, N.Y.



Montpelier, the home of James Madison



Salem Maritime National Historical Park

Mark Sexton



Fort McHenry, Baltimore



The White House, Washington, D.C.



U.S.S. Constitution, Boston



Castle Clinton National Monument, N.Y.

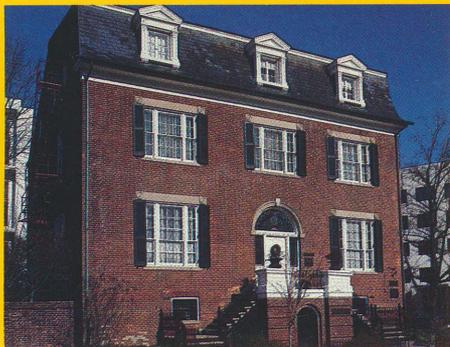


Old Courthouse, St. Louis

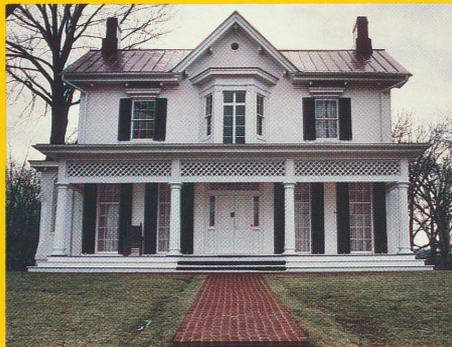


Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, N.Y.

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Sewall-Belmont House, Washington, D.C.



Frederick Douglass Home, Washington, D.C.



Martin Luther King, Jr., birthplace, Atlanta

Michael Thomas

Black citizens were promised the vote by the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. Another 50 years passed before female citizens were given this constitutional right. The long campaign for women's suffrage is commemorated at *Women's Rights National Historical Park* in Seneca Falls, New York, which includes the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and at *Sewall-Belmont House National Historic Site* in Washington, D.C., the headquarters of a leading organization behind the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Another park in Washington, the *Frederick Douglass Home*, also deserves mention. The 19th-century spokesman for black Americans honored here was equally active on behalf of women's rights.

The promise of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, intended to insure full citizenship for blacks after the Civil War, was often denied in practice. Racial segregation and discrimination were enforced by law in the South and by widespread custom elsewhere through the mid-20th century. During the 1950s and 60s, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was in the forefront of the struggle to make constitutional rights a reality for all Americans. The nonviolent demonstrations he led against segregated public facilities strongly influenced passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Today King's birthplace, church, and grave are major features of the *Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site* in Atlanta.

Through its Historic Landmarks Program, the National Park Service also recognizes many other sites of constitutional significance. The roll of landmarks include the *Maryland State House*, in which the Annapolis Convention of 1786 crystallized sentiment for the Federal Convention; the homes of 11 signers of the Constitution, including Washington's *Mount Vernon* and Madison's *Montpelier* in Virginia; the homes of several Supreme Court justices prominent in constitutional interpretation, among them John Marshall, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Louis Brandeis, and Charles Evans Hughes; and *Little Rock Central High School* in Arkansas, scene of the first major desegregation confrontation after the 1954 Supreme Court decision.

For further information:
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