

# Miracle at



# Philadelphia

*It seems to me, then, little short of a miracle, that the Delegates from so many different States...different in their manners, circumstances, and prejudices should unite in forming a system of national Government.*

GEORGE WASHINGTON TO LAFAYETTE

In secret sessions in the Assembly Room of Independence Hall in 1787, 55 men from 12 states listened and debated the interrelated issues, drawing from their experiences and their knowledge of history and political theory. In many cases they compromised an initial position of individual interest for their larger goal of creating a new government united, strong, and under law.

The delegates invented a unique system based upon fundamental law, one which is now the longest lasting written constitution in the world. They created a strong national government of three co-equal, coordinated branches with checks and balances to help insure individual freedoms.

The power was not granted from a government to the people, but was extraordinarily granted directly by the people to the government which they had created.

The Constitution belongs to all of us, and it will continue to work to the extent that we are familiar with its provisions and how it evolves to fit a changing society. It also demands that each of us assume responsibility as the problems we must solve through our elected representatives become more complex. If the Constitution is to continue to work, each of us must learn about and care about the issues we face, and must influence the choice of solutions.

Let us all join this year in studying the fascinating and extremely important story of the creation and continuation of the United States Constitution presented in this premier exhibition, and in various media and forums throughout this nation.

## The United States Constitutional Convention Bicentennial Exhibition

September 17, 1986–December 31, 1987

At the Second Bank of the United States Independence National Historical Park

Open 9–5 every day; until 6, April 1–November 1, 1987



Second Bank of the United States

*We are all the trustees of those freedoms, and as such, it is our solemn duty to pass them on unimpaired to those who follow us... This Constitutional Bicentennial is a history and civics lesson for us all.*

CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN E. BURGER

## INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Nearly everyone who comes to Independence National Historical Park visits the Liberty Bell. But in 1987 attention will be focused on the story that unfolded inside the Assembly Room, in what is now called Independence Hall, where delegates to the Constitutional Convention held session nearly 200 years ago. This room was familiar to most delegates, since it served for many years as the meeting place for the Continental Congress; when the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 and when the Articles of Confederation were finally ratified in 1781.

The first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, were officially added to the Constitution while the first United States Congress met in Congress Hall. The United States Supreme Court met in Old City Hall when it handed down its first decision.

Housing **Miracle at Philadelphia** within the Park creates a unique opportunity for visitors both to see a documentary history of the Constitution and to visit the actual sites where so much history was made.

Located on 42 acres in the center of Philadelphia, the Park includes 40 buildings which date before or shortly after 1800 and many modern buildings designed to meet the needs of the millions who visit each year.



Independence Hall Tower

## VISIT RELATED CONSTITUTIONAL EXHIBITIONS AT COLLEAGUE INSTITUTIONS

The Library Company of Philadelphia 1314 Locust St.

**The Delegates' Library: The Intellectual Heritage of the Constitutional Era**

May 15, 1987–October 9, 1987

analyzes the sources of ideas that influenced the thinking of the Constitution's creators. Books and materials available to the Convention's delegates and listed in the 1789 Library Company catalog will illustrate the range of the intellectual influences, from the Classical, English, Scottish, and Continental traditions to American political writings. Growing rapidly since its founding in 1731 to become the largest resource then available, the Library Company offered its collections to the members of the Constitutional Convention and the government of the new nation. Today its holdings of Revolutionary and Federal period literature constitute a collection of national importance.

The Friends of Independence National Historical Park

313 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106

The Friends of INHP is a non-profit organization founded in 1972 to help conserve, develop, and interpret Independence Park and its extraordinary national heritage. Through individual and corporate donations, the Friends provide volunteer guides, lectures, historical performances, concerts, and symposia; and aid in acquisition of important documents, furnishings and portraits to augment the collections of INHP. Major projects of the Friends include: Welcome Park, Philadelphia Open House, Moravian Garden, the Tea Garden, a Museum Internship, publication of various guidebooks and materials, and most recently, coordinating **Miracle at Philadelphia**.

## VISIT RELATED EXHIBITIONS AT INDEPENDENCE PARK

**A Promise of Permanency: The United States Constitution After 200 Years**

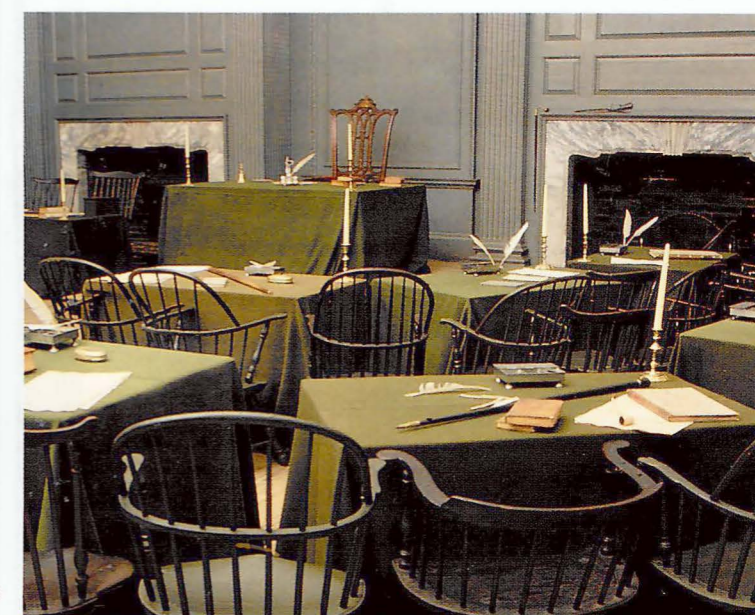
May 1987–May 1992 Visitor Center, 3rd and Chestnut

uses interactive computer programs to address the durability and continuing relevance of the Constitution. Funded by Bell of Pennsylvania.

**The Magna Carta**

May 1987–December 1987 Old City Hall, 5th and Chestnut

exhibits an original of this precursor in the struggle for individual freedoms, as confirmed by King Edward I in 1297, plus a short film explaining the Charter's legacy. Funded by Electronic Data Systems and the Magna Carta Foundation of Philadelphia.



The Assembly Room, site of the Constitutional Convention

The American Philosophical Society 105 South Fifth St.

**Designing a Nation: Science, Technology, and the Nation**

April 30, 1987–September 30, 1987

illustrates the relationships of science and government in the formative era of the Constitution. The internal improvements initiated under the new government depended on inventive and scientific capabilities to expand the frontier, aid navigation, and advance commerce and industry. The American Philosophical Society, founded in 1769, is the oldest learned society in the United States. It served the young republic as a national academy of science, a library, and a museum. Today its collections are especially rich in the writings of men of science, such as the Society's presidents, Franklin and Jefferson, whose work will be described in the exhibition.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania 1300 Locust St.

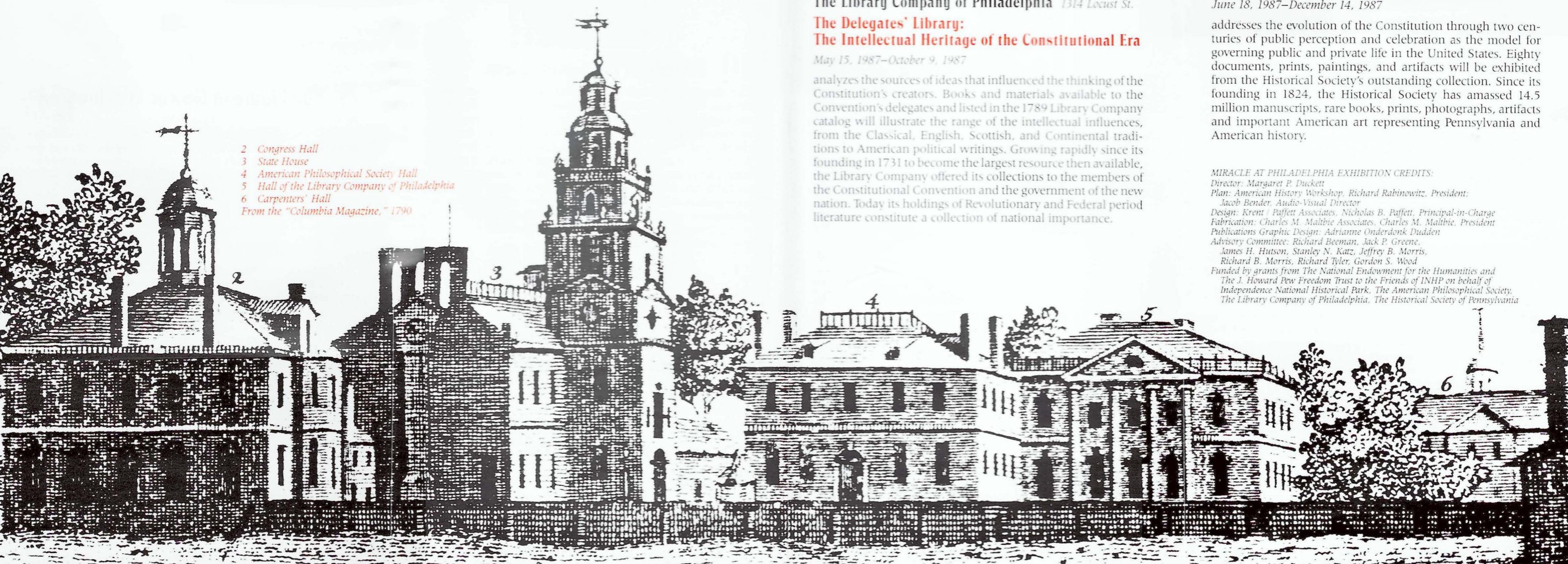
**A More Perfect Union: The American People and Their Constitution**

June 18, 1987–December 14, 1987

addresses the evolution of the Constitution through two centuries of public perception and celebration as the model for governing public and private life in the United States. Eighty documents, prints, paintings, and artifacts will be exhibited from the Historical Society's outstanding collection. Since its founding in 1824, the Historical Society has amassed 14.5 million manuscripts, rare books, prints, photographs, artifacts and important American art representing Pennsylvania and American history.

MIRACLE AT PHILADELPHIA EXHIBITION CREDITS:

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The Library Company of Philadelphia, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania



- 2 Congress Hall
  - 3 State House
  - 4 American Philosophical Society Hall
  - 5 Hall of the Library Company of Philadelphia
  - 6 Carpenters' Hall
- From the "Columbia Magazine," 1790



to form a more perfect Union...

## 1 The Revolution Ends

With the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, the American War for Independence was won. The wartime alliance of the thirteen states led to a limited and weak national government under the Articles of Confederation. There was no executive. Congress depended on irregular payments from the states. A handful of frustrated men handled the foreign affairs, the finances, and the army of the new nation.

## 2 The Disunited States

Each state had its own government to issue money, levy taxes, regulate trade. Most Americans turned their attention to local matters: restoring their farms and shops; picking up stakes and moving to Vermont, Maine, Kentucky, or Tennessee or to the growing seaport cities; seeking out new markets in the Orient and continental Europe. As after every war, the economic adjustments were difficult. Inflation, heavy private and public debts, old grudges weighed against the new expectations of independence and prosperity. State legislatures were split by conflicts over debtor relief and the demand for paper money.

## 3 The Nationalists' Alarm

Many of the leaders of the revolutionary struggle grew alarmed by the events of the 1780s. Congress, unable to find a permanent home or a steady source of revenue, was a national laughing-stock. Abroad, Nationalists like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were humiliated by American weakness. Merchantmen flying the Stars and Stripes were being hijacked in the Mediterranean by the Barbary pirates. Without a navy, or the money to ransom hostages, the United States was powerless to respond. The British limited and taxed trade with the young republic, and refused to yield its frontier forts. Spain closed the Mississippi to American trade. At home, Nationalists like James Madison, John Jay, Alexander Hamilton and Henry Knox were distressed by the factionalism of state legislatures and the pressure for paper money. Armed mobs forcefully prevented courts from seizing debtors' land in several states; and in Massachusetts, Shays' Rebellion threatened civil war. Only a new and strong national government, these men thought, could save American independence and local order. In letters, pamphlets and newspaper articles, they argued for a constitutional convention. Finally, in Philadelphia in May, 1787, 55 delegates from every state but Rhode Island convened. Vital to their success was the presence of George Washington, reluctantly called out of retirement to lend his heroic stature to the creation of a new American republic.

## 4 Madison's Notes

The Convention met at Independence Hall, then the Pennsylvania State House, for four months, its proceedings kept secret from the public. Only through the notes taken daily by James Madison can we learn what happened during the Constitutional Convention. Unpublished for more than forty years, these notes are among the most important manuscript records in all of American history.

## 5 The Great Compromise

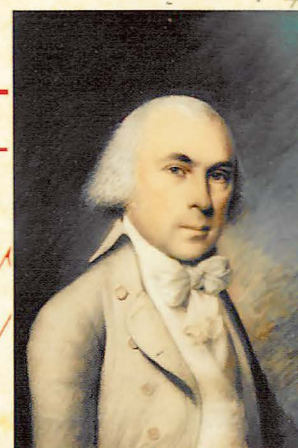
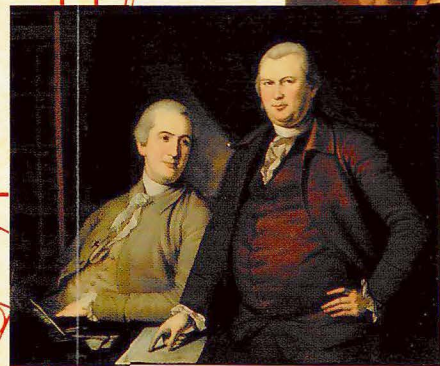
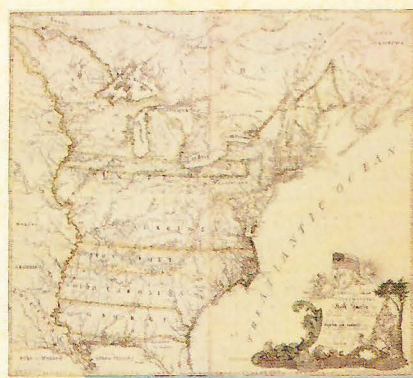
The first hurdle faced by the Convention was the composition of the new federal Congress. Virginians Edmund Randolph and James Madison argued for a powerful legislature apportioned according to state population. New Jerseyan William Patterson countered with a plan preserving the equality of the small states in a weaker national Congress. After two months of sometimes bitter debate, the Connecticut delegation suggested a compromise: a two-house legislature, with a House of Representatives apportioned by population and a Senate with two seats for each state. Once the compromise had been accepted, the delegates knew that their work would be successful; a new government of expanded (but explicitly limited) powers would come out of the Convention.

## 6 Sectional Compromise

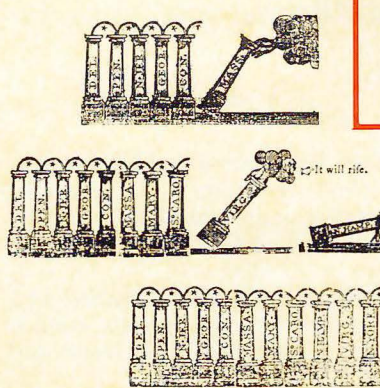
Most of the delegates were Nationalists, but they also represented the interests of their regions. Northerners wanted to give the federal government the power to regulate trade and tax imports. Southerners wanted to preserve their agricultural economy, based on slave labor. The two sides compromised for the sake of union. Congress could pass commercial laws, but it could not abolish the slave trade for twenty years. Slaves were to be counted as three-fifths of free citizens for the purposes of congressional apportionment, and the Constitution allowed slaveowners to capture fugitives across state lines. The Convention was but the first in a long series of futile compromises between North and South over the next 80 years; only after a bloody civil war in 1861-65 and Constitutional Amendments would the slaves begin to gain their rights as free men and women.

## 7 The Delegates to Philadelphia

The 55 men who came to Philadelphia were well-acquainted with one another. Many had been together at Princeton or Yale, in business affairs, in military service or the Continental Congress. While the Convention absorbed much of their time in Philadelphia, America's largest city offered them opportunities for scientific and literary conversation, for country walks and fishing, even for shopping. After the Convention, many of the delegates went on to important roles in the new nation—two as President, one as Vice President, four as Cabinet officers, and many others in Congress, the courts, and state offices.



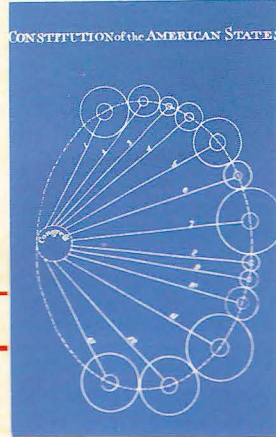
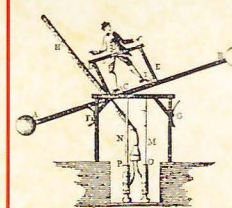
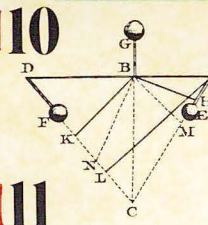
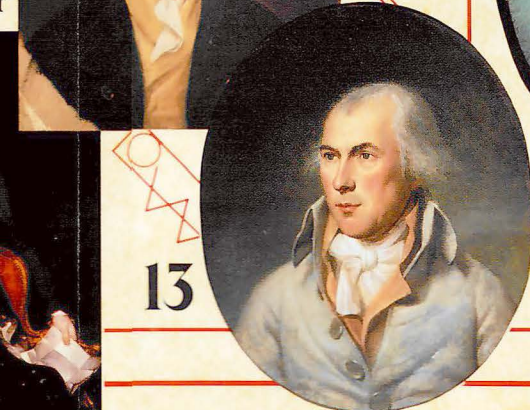
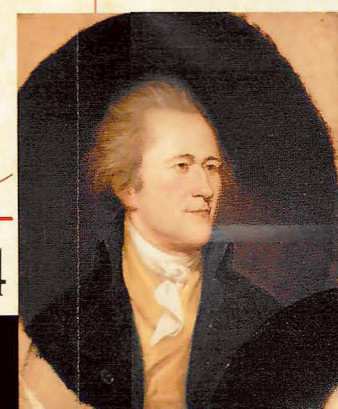
Miracle at Philadelphia



## 14 200 Years of the Constitution

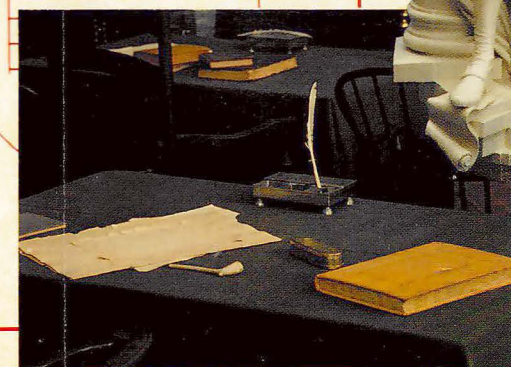
The United States Constitution is one of the shortest written charters in the world, and yet it has proved capable of adapting to the remarkable growth of the nation since 1787. For 200 years, through twenty-six amendments and thousands of court rulings, Americans have accepted Benjamin Franklin's challenge: "You have a republic," he is supposed to have said, "if you can keep it." In every night's news, there are dozens of reminders of how the work of the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia has impacted "for ourselves and our posterity" as the third century opens.

PHOTO CREDITS: American History Workshop, American Philosophical Society, Thomas Gilcrease Institute of History and Art, Independence National Historical Park, Library Company of Philadelphia, Library of Congress, Print Collection, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, New Jersey Historical Society, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts



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## 12 Signing the Constitution

81-year-old Benjamin Franklin capped his long career of public service by urging his fellow delegates to sign the completed Constitution. 39 of the 42 delegates remaining in Philadelphia signed. For Franklin, this was proof that the emblem on the back of the presiding officer's chair was a "rising, not a setting sun." Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts and two Virginians, Edmund Randolph and George Mason, who was particularly upset by the absence of a bill of rights, refused to sign.

## 13 Ratifying the Constitution

The Constitution was submitted to popular conventions in all 13 states in the first national political campaign. Madison, Hamilton and Jay wrote the "Federalist Papers" to argue for the new system of government. In many states, there were powerful voices and even a majority of public opinion against the Constitution. The Anti-Federalists, as they were called, waged especially vigorous battles in strong states like Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, though they were defeated in one state after another. Delaware ratified first, and New Hampshire's vote in July, 1788, guaranteed ratification. The assent of Virginia and New York soon afterward made the new government practical. North Carolina and Rhode Island did not join the Union until after Washington had become President. As a result of the ratification campaign, the Federalists agreed to attach the Bill of Rights to the Constitution. These first ten amendments were adopted in 1791.

## 10 Powers of the Government

The delegates thought of political systems as mechanical devices. The three branches of government—the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary—were rigidly separated. The powers of Congress and the President were carefully limited by checks and balances. According to the "supreme law of the land," every American would henceforth be a citizen both of a state and of the federal government. A new Supreme Court would be the final interpreter of the Constitution. These ideas were remarkable innovations for their time, creating a national government unlike any in the world, and they are all enshrined in the Constitution which is now the oldest written charter of government in the world's history.

## 11 Drafts of the Constitution

The Convention entrusted the details of writing the Constitution to several committees. James Wilson of Pennsylvania wrote the first draft by August 7, which was printed in secrecy and used by the delegates for their debate and revision. Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania was chiefly responsible for the concise final draft of September 12. He was the author of the familiar Preamble, crisply setting forth the purposes of the new American government.

## 8 The Figure of George Washington

As President of the Convention, Washington took a small part in the Convention debates. But he was crucial to the Constitution's success. He was widely expected to fill the office of the President created by the Convention. He transmitted the completed Constitution to Congress, asking that it be sent to the states for ratification.

## 9 A Summer of Debate

The Constitution was the result of four months of vigorous debate. Every issue could be re-opened for discussion. The delegates voted more than 20 times, for example, on the question of how the president should be elected. If chosen by Congress, as some suggested, the election would result in "intrigue, cabal and corruption." But if the president were elected by the people directly, he might become a popular tyrant. How could the electoral system prevent both evils?

for ourselves and our posterity