Biographical Gazetteer

The following sketches outline the political careers of the principal New York leaders. Their political positions are indicated (1) on the Constitution in 1787–1788; (2) in national politics after 1789.

Benson, Egbert (1746–1833)
Federalist/Federalist

Clinton, George (1739–1812)
Antifederalist/Republican
Born Little Britain, Ulster County. Served on privateer and in militia during French and Indian War. Studied law in New York City with William Smith, Jr. (who had defended John Peter Zenger); admitted to bar, 1764; and began practice in Ulster County, Clerk, Ulster County Court of Common Pleas, 1759–1812. Member, colonial Assembly. 1768–75; Continental Congress, 1775–76 (left for military duty before Declaration of Independence was signed); Provincial Convention, 1775; and Third and Fourth Provincial

Duane, James (1733–1797)

Federalist/Federalist

Born New York City. Studied law with James Alexander (who had defended John Peter Zenger); admitted to bar, 1754. Practiced in New York City. Married Maria Livingston, daughter of Robert Livingston, Jr., third lord of Livingston Manor, 1759. Land speculator in upstate N.Y. and Vt. King’s Attorney, 1767. Member, Continental and Confederation congresses, 1774–84; Provincial Convention, 1775; Third and Fourth Provincial congresses, 1776–77; and state Senate. 1782–85, 1788–90. Active role in drafting state constitution, 1777. Mayor, New York City, 1784–89. In Mayor’s Court, presides over Rutgers v. Waddington, 1784. Chosen delegate to Annapolis Convention, but did not attend, 1786. Member, state Convention, 1788; voted to ratify Constitution. U.S. District Judge for N.Y., 1789–94.

Hamilton, Alexander (1757–1804)

Federalist/Federalist

Born Nevis, Leeward Islands, British West Indies. Came to America in 1772. Entered King’s College (Columbia), 1773. Wrote pamphlets and newspaper essays favoring independence, 1774–75. Commissioned by Second Provincial Congress to command artillery company, 1776. George Washington’s aide-de-camp with rank of lieutenant colonel, 1777–81. Married Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of Philip Schuyler, 1780. Led attack on redoubt at Yorktown, 1781. Settled in Albany, studied law, and admitted to
bar, 1782. Member, Confederation Congress, 1782–83, 1788. Opened law office in New
York City, 1783. Argued case of Rutgers v. Waddington, 1784. A founder of Bank of N.Y.,
1784. Delegate to Annapolis Convention, 1786; drafted report of Convention Member,
state Assembly, 1787. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, 1787; signed Constitution
as only N.Y. delegate. Published attack on Gov. George Clinton, 21 July 1787. Possible
Member, state Convention, 1788; voted to ratify Constitution. U.S. Secretary of the
Treasury, 1789–95. Leader of Federalist Party. After retirement from Treasury, returned
to New York City to practice law; remained active in politics. Major General (second in
command) of Provisional Army raised to meet potential threat from France, 1798.
Opposed Aaron Burr’s election as U.S. Senator, 1797, as President, 1800–1801, and as
governor of N.Y., 1804. Killed in duel with Burr.

Hobart, John Sloss (1738–1805)

Federalist/Federalist

Born Fairfield, Conn. Graduated from Yale College, 1757. Resided in New York City
before moving to Huntington, Suffolk County, where he owned inherited property.
Member, New York City Sons of Liberty, 1765. Member, Suffolk County committee of
 correspondence, 1774. Member, Provincial Convention, 1775; all four Provincial
congresses, 1775–77; and first Council of Safety, 1777. Justice, N.Y. Supreme Court,
1777–98. Member, Hartford Convention, 1780. Member, state Convention, 1788; voted

Hughes, Hugh (1727–1802) Antifederalist/Republican

Born Upper Merion, Pa. Moved to New York City by 1752, where he was a currier and
tanner. Suffered severe financial reverses in 1765; thereafter kept school for a time.
Member, Sons of Liberty and a strong supporter of independence. In 1775–76
corresponded with Samuel and John Adams concerning state of politics in New York City
and surrounding area. Appointed commissary of military stores for N.Y. by Second
Provincial Congress, 1776. Deputy quartermaster general, Continental Army, with rank of colonel, 1777–78, 1780–83. Moved to Yonkers, Westchester County, c. 1785, where he rented a farm from John Lamb and tutored Lamb’s sons and others. Wrote “A Countryman” and “Expositor” newspaper essays opposing ratification of Constitution, 1787–88.

Jay, John (1745–1829)

Federalist/Federalist


Jones, Samuel (1734–1819)
Antifederalist/Federalist
Born Fort Hill, Queens County. Attended school in Hempstead and worked as merchant sailor. Studied law in New York City with William Smith, Jr. (who had defended John Peter Zenger); admitted to bar, 1760. Member, New York City committee of correspondence, 1774; Committee of One Hundred, 1775. But did not take up arms against British during Revolution; moved to Conn., then to Orange County. and finally, in 1776, to West Neck, Queens County, where he practiced law. Took oath of allegiance to state, 1786. In 1786 appointed (with Richard Varick) to codify New York laws under N.Y. constitution of 1777 (published in 1789). By end of 1786 opened a law office in New York City. Member, state Assembly, 1786–90 (Queens County); state Convention, 1788 (Queens County), where he voted to ratify Constitution; and state Senate, 1791–97. Recorder, New York City, 1789–96. State comptroller, 1797–1807. Unsuccessful candidate for state Senate, 1800, 1806. Retired from public life to his farm at Oyster Bay.

Lamb, John (1735–1800)
Antifederalist/Republican
Born New York City; son of former English criminal who had been transported to America. Manufactured mathematical instruments and then became a wine merchant. Leader, N.Y. Sons of Liberty, 1765; continued active opposition to British policy for next decade. Called before colonial Assembly in 1769 for libeling the house, but charges dismissed for lack of evidence. In response to battles of Lexington and Concord, joined Isaac Sears to seize custom house to prevent vessels from leaving N.Y. harbor. Seized military stores at Turtle Bay (in mid-Manhattan on East River), 1775. Commissioned captain in N.Y. Artillery; joined General Richard Montgomery in invasion of Canada, 1775. Wounded (lost an eye) and captured at Quebec; paroled, 1775–76. Exchanged for British prisoners; appointed colonel in Continental Artillery, 1777. Wounded again at

Lansing, John, Jr. (1754–1829)
Antifederalist/Republican

Livingston, Robert R. (1746–1813)
Federalist/Republican
Born New York City, Graduated King’s College (Columbia), 1765. Studied law with William Livingston and William Smith, Jr. (who had defended John Peter Zenger); admitted to bar in 1770; and began practice in New York City in partnership with John Jay. Recorder, New York City, 1773–75. Delegate, Continental and Confederation congresses, 1775–76, 1779–80, 1784–85 (on committee to draft Declaration of Independence). Member. Provincial Convention, 1775; Third and Fourth Provincial congresses, 1776–77 (where he helped draft state constitution); and first Council of Safety, 1777. Chancellor, 1777–1801. First Confederation Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1781–83. Member commissions to fix boundary with Mass., 1784, and Vt., 1790.

McKesson, John (1734–1798)
Antifederalist/Republican
Born Chester County, Pa. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton), 1753. Studied law and practiced in New York City. Secretary to: Provincial Convention, 1775; all four Provincial congresses, 1775–77; and first and second Councils of Safety, 1777–78. Clerk of: state Assembly, 1777–94; and state Convention, 1788.

Morris, Richard (1730–1810)
Federalist/Federalist
Born Morrisania, Westchester County (now in Bronx County). Entered Yale College in 1746, remained there briefly, but did not receive a degree until 1787. Studied law in New York City; admitted to bar, 1752. Judge, Court of Admiralty for N.Y., N.J., and Conn., 1762–75. State senator, 1778–79. Chief justice, N.Y. Supreme Court, 1779–90. Member, state Convention, 1788; absent for vote on Constitution. Upon reaching mandatory retirement age of 60, retired from Supreme Court to his estate in Scarsdale, Westchester County. Gouverneur Morris was his younger half brother.

Oothoudt, Henry (1742–1818)
Antifederalist/Republican
Member, Second Provincial Congress, 1775–76; state Assembly, 1779–80; Council of Appointment, 1781–82; and state Senate, 1781–84. Appointed surrogate, Albany County, 1782. Member, state Convention, 1788; chairman of committee of the whole; and voted against ratification of Constitution.
Schoonmaker, Cornelius C. (1745–1796)
Antifederalist/Republican
Born Shawangunk (now Wallkill), Ulster County, Surveyor and farmer. Member, state Assembly, 1777–90, 1795; state Convention, 1788, where he voted against ratification of Constitution; and U.S. House of Representatives, 1791–93.

Schuyler, Philip (1733–1804)
Federalist/Federalist

Smith, Melancton (1744–1798)
Antifederalist/Republican
Born Jamaica, Queens County. As youth clerked in store in Poughkeepsie; then became merchant and land speculator in same city. Member, First Provincial Congress, 1775. Militia captain and officer to detect Loyalist conspiracies. Sheriff, Dutchess County, 1778–81. Appointed commissioner to settle disputes between Continental Army and contractors at West Point and elsewhere, 1782. Moved to New York City about 1785, where he was a wealthy merchant and lawyer. Delegate, Confederation Congress, 1785–87; state Convention (Dutchess Co.), 1788, where he voted to ratify Constitution; and state Assembly, 1792. Close political ally and adviser of Gov. George Clinton. Supports Aaron Burr for U.S. Vice President, 1792.
Tillinghast, Charles (1748–1795)
Antifederalist/Republican

Van Cortlandt, Pierre, (1721–1811)
Federalist/Federalist

Van Gaasbeek, Peter (1754–1797)
Antifederalist/Republican/Federalist

Van Rensselaer, Jeremiah (1740–1810)
Antifederalist/Republican

Van Rensselaer, Stephen (1764–1839)

Federalist/Federalist


Williams, John (1752–1806)

Antifederalist/Republican/Federalist.


Yates, Abraham, Jr. (1724–1796) Antifederalist/Republican

Yates, Robert (1738–1801)
Antifederalist/Republican

Born Schenectady, Studied law with William Livingston; admitted to bar, 1760; and began practice in Albany. Albany alderman, 1771–75. Member, all four Provincial congresses, 1775–77. Justice, N.Y. Supreme Court, 1777–98 (chief justice, 1790–98). Delegate, Constitutional Convention, 1787, which he left early; and state Convention, 1788, where he voted against ratification of Constitution. Unsuccessful Federalist candidate for governor, 1789; unsuccessful Republican candidate for governor, 1795.

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