Biographical Gazetteer

The following sketches outline the political careers of the principal Rhode Island leaders who participated in the process of ratifying the U.S. Constitution. Their political positions are indicated (1) on state politics from 1786–1790 (Country or Mercantile party) and (2) on the Constitution from 1787–1790 (Antifederalist or Federalist). Inclusive years suggest periods where consecutive terms in office were likely. The exception to this standard is delegates in Congress, where inclusive years reflect only delegates’ actual attendance for any portion of the years listed. Deputies and assistants, the state’s legislative representatives, served in the House of Deputies and House of Magistrates of the General Assembly, respectively.

Arnold, Peleg (1752–1820)
Country/Antifederalist

Bourne, Benjamin (1755–1808)
Mercantile/Federalist

Bowen, Jabez (1739–1815)
Mercantile/Federalist
BRADFORD, WILLIAM (1729–1808)
Mercantile/Federalist

BROWN, JOHN (1736–1803)
Mercantile/Federalist

BROWN, MOSES (1738–1836)
Mercantile/Federalist
Born, Providence, R.I., into prominent commercial family. Brother of John and Nicholas Brown. Merchant, manufacturer, and philanthropist. Apprenticed to his uncle, wealthy Providence merchant Obadiah Brown. Joined brothers in family firm. Deputy, Providence, General Assembly, 1764–72. Fundraiser and political organizer for Stephen Hopkins. Helped secure removal of College of Rhode Island (Brown University) to Providence; contributed land and money to College. Converted to Quakerism (Society of Friends), 1774, and devoted himself to social and educational reform. Fervent opponent of slavery; member of Rhode Island Abolition Society; advocated gradual manumission. Opponent-turned-supporter of Constitution; believed provision that allowed Congress to prohibit the foreign slave trade in 1808 was sound basis for future amendment to end slavery. As textile manufacturer, hired Samuel Slater to improve production based on English designs. Continued philanthropy and promoted civic projects in later years and encouraged establishment of Providence Bank, 1791, and the Providence Friends’ School (now called Moses Brown School), 1819.

C. Collins, John (1717–1795)
Country/Federalist
Signer, Articles of Confederation. Governor, 1786–90. Elected in 1786 with other paper money advocates. Cast tie-breaking vote in House of Magistrates to call state ratifying convention, January 1790; vote ended political career.

**Comstock, Job** (c. 1740–1811)
Country/Antifederalist


**Edes, Peter** (1756–1840)
Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Boston, Mass. Printer. Supporter of Revolution with father, Benjamin Edes. Worked on father’s famous patriot *Boston Gazette*, 1779–84. Began publication of *Newport Herald*, a Federalist weekly, in 1787; hostile towards paper money and Country party. His newspaper reported on all eighteen sessions of General Assembly between March 1787 and January 1790. Regular reprinting of Edes’s pieces in other American newspapers contributed to Rhode Island’s notorious reputation. Following the demise of the *Herald* in 1791 and a stint as a Boston book printer, Edes published newspapers in Augusta and Bangor, Maine, until 1817.

**Ellery, William** (1727–1820)
Mercantile/Federalist


**Fenner, Arthur, Jr.** (1745–1805)
Country/Antifederalist


**Foster, Theodore** (1732–1828)
Mercantile/Federalist


Hazard, Jonathan J. (1731–1812)
Country/Antifederalist

Hitchcock, Enos (1744–1803)
Mercantile/Federalist

Howell, David (1747–1824)
Mercantile/Federalist

Manning, James (1738–1791)
Mercantile/Federalist
Born in New Jersey. Baptist clergyman. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 1762. Minister, Baptist church, Warren, R.I., and master of Latin grammar school, 1764. President and professor of languages, College of Rhode Island (Brown University), 1765–91. Helped relocate College from Warren to Providence, 1770. Pastor,
Marchant, Henry (1741–1796)
Mercantile/Federalist

Owen, Daniel (c. 1731–1812)
Country/Antifederalist

Stanton, Joseph, Jr. (1739–c. 1822)
Country/Antifederalist

Varnum, James Mitchell (1748–1789)
Mercantile/Federalist
West, William (c. 1733–1814)
Country/Antifederalist