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New York 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

Born New York City. Graduated King's College (Columbia), 1765. Read law with John Morin Scott; admitted to bar, 1769; and began practice in Red Hook, Dutchess County, 1772. Member, Provincial Convention, 1775, and second Council of Safety, 1777–78. Represented Dutchess County in Assembly, 1777–81, 1787–88. State attorney general, 1777–87. Member, Hartford Convention, 1780; Confederation Congress, 1784, 1787–88; and Annapolis Convention, 1786. N.Y. commissioner to settle western lands dispute with Mass., 1786. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–93, 1813. Justice, N.Y. Supreme Court, 1794–1801. Member, commission to set boundary between Maine and New Brunswick, Canada, 1796. One of President John Adams's "midnight" judicial appointments, 1801. A founder of New-York Historical Society, 1804, and its first president, 1805–15.

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 congresses, 1776–77. Brigadier general in both militia, 1775–77, and Continental Army, 1777–83; brevet major general. Continental Army, 1783. Governor, 1777–95, 1801–4. Vice President, N.Y. Society for the Manumission of Slaves, 1785. Member, state Convention (Ulster Co.), 1788, and as president did not vote. Unsuccessful candidate for U.S. Vice President, 1788, 1792. Member, state Assembly, 1800–1801. U.S. Vice President from 1805 until his death. Candidate for U.S. President, 1808. Alleged to have written "Cato" essays during ratification debate.

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 author of "Cæsar" essays, 1787. Co-author of "Publius": *The Federalist*, 1787–88. 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 to ratify Constitution. U.S. Senator, 1798; U.S. District Judge for N.Y., 1798–1805.

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

Born New York City, Graduated King’s College (Columbia), 1764. Studied law with Benjamin Kissam in New York City; admitted to bar, 1768. Secretary of royal commission to fix boundary between N.Y. and N.J., 1773. Married Sarah Livingston, daughter of William Livingston, 1774. Member, N.Y. committee of correspondence, 1774. Delegate to Continental and Confederation congresses, 1774–76 (but absent and did not sign Declaration of Independence), 1778–79 (president), 1784. Member, Provincial Convention, 1775; Third and Fourth Provincial congresses, 1776–77, where he favored agreeing to Declaration of Independence and played major role in drafting and adoption of state constitution of 1777. Member, First Council of Safety, 1777. First chief justice, N.Y. Supreme Court, 1777–79. Appointed minister plenipotentiary to Spain, 1779. Joint commissioner for negotiating peace with Great Britain, 1782–83. Returned to U.S., July 1784. Confederation Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1784–90. President, N.Y. Society for the Manumission of Slaves, 1785–90. Co-author, “Publius”: *The Federalist*, 1787–88; author, *An Address to the People of the State of New-York*, under signature of “A Citizen of New-York,” 1788. Injured in “Doctor’s Riot” in New York City, April 1788. Member, state Convention, 1788; voted to ratify Constitution. Chief Justice, U.S., 1789–95. Unsuccessful Federalist candidate for governor, 1792. As special envoy to Great Britain, negotiated Jay Treaty, 1794. Returned to U.S., 1795. Governor, 1795–1801. Declined appointment as Chief Justice of U.S., Dec. 1800. Retired from public life to estate in Bedford, Westchester County, 1801.

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 Compo Hill, Conn., 1777. Commander of artillery at West Point, 1779–80. Brevet brigadier general, 1783. Member, state Assembly, 1784. Collector of customs for Port of N.Y., 1784–89. Actively opposed Constitution, 1787–88; chairman, N.Y. Federal Republican Committee, 1788. U.S. collector of Port of N.Y., 1789–97.

LANSING, JOHN, JR. (1754–1829) Antifederalist/Republican

Born Albany. Brother of Abraham G. Lansing. Studied law in Albany with Robert Yates and in New York City with James Duane; admitted to bar in Albany, 1775, and began practice there. Military secretary to Gen. Philip Schuyler, 1776–77. Member, state Assembly, 1780–84, 1786, 1788–89 (speaker, 1786, 1788–89); Confederation Congress, 1785; and commission to settle western land disputes with Mass., 1786. Mayor, Albany, 1786–90. Delegate, Constitutional Convention, 1787; left early and did not sign Constitution. Member, state Convention, 1788; voted against ratification of Constitution. Justice, N.Y. Supreme Court, 1790–1801 (chief justice, 1798–1801). Commissioner to settle boundary between N.Y. and Vt., 1790. Chancellor, 1801–14. He then resumed his law practice before disappearing on 12 December 1829 after leaving his New York City hotel room to mail a letter. No trace was ever found, and what happened to Lansing remains unknown.

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. Commissioner to settle western lands dispute with Mass., 1786. Appointed delegate to Annapolis Convention, 1786, but did not attend. Member, state Convention, 1788; voted to ratify Constitution. Administers oath of office to President George Washington, 30 April 1789. Unsuccessful candidate for governor, 1798. U.S. Minister to France, 1801–4 (negotiates Louisiana Purchase, 1803). Retired to his estate, Clermont, Columbia County.

McKESSON, JOHN (1734–1798) Antifederalist/Republican

Born Chester County, Pa. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 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.

OOTHOUT, 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

Born Albany. Studied with private tutor. Wealthy landowner and investor in banking, manufacturing, and transportation. Officer in British army during French and Indian War. Member, colonial Assembly, 1768–75; Provincial Convention, 1775; and Continental Congress, 1775, 1777, 1778–80. Major General, Continental Army, 1775–79. Defeated for governor, 1777, 1783. Member, state Senate, 1780–84, 1786–90, 1792–97. State surveyor general, 1781–84. Member, Council of Appointment, 1786, 1788, 1790, 1794. U.S. Senator, 1789–91, 1797–98. Father-in-law of Alexander Hamilton and Stephen Van Rensselaer.

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. Supported Aaron Burr for U.S. Vice President, 1792.

TILLINGHAST, CHARLES (1748–1795) Antifederalist/Republican

Born New York City. Distiller in New York City. Assistant Deputy Quartermaster General, Middle Department, Continental Army, during Revolution (under Hugh Hughes and Timothy Pick-

ering). Secretary, N.Y. Federal Republican Committee, 1788. Deputy collector of customs, Port of N.Y., when he died of yellow fever. John Lamb's son-in-law.

VAN CORTLANDT, PIERRE (1721–1811) Federalist/Federalist

Born New York City. Large landholder. Moved to Croton Manor, Westchester County 1749, where he managed his farms and mills. Member, colonial Assembly, 1768–75; and Second, Third, and Fourth Provincial congresses, 1775–77 (presided over drafting the state constitution, 1777). Militia colonel, 1775. President, first Council of Safety, 1777. Lieutenant Governor, 1777–95. Unsuccessful candidate for governor, 1789. Retired from public life in 1795.

VAN GAASBEEK, PETER (1754–1797) Antifederalist/Republican/Federalist

Born Kingston, Ulster County. Kingston merchant. Militia major during Revolution. County supervisor, 1787–93. Leader of Clintonians in Ulster County, but supported Burr in 1792, and then became Federalist leader in Ulster County, 1792. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1793–95.

VAN RENSSELAER, JEREMIAH (1740–1810) Antifederalist/Republican

Landholder, surveyor, and businessman. Lived in Albany. Rose to the rank of lieutenant in Continental Army during Revolution. Chair, Albany Antifederalist Committee and head of mob that burned Constitution, 1788. Member, state Assembly, 1788–89; and U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–91. President, Bank of Albany, 1798–1806. Presidential elector, 1800. Lieutenant governor, 1801–4. Brother-in-law of Philip Schuyler.

VAN RENSSELAER, STEPHEN (1764–1839) Federalist/Federalist

Born New York City. Studied at College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 1779–81; graduate, Harvard College, 1782. Married daughter of Philip Schuyler, 1783. Eighth patroon of Manor of Rensselaers; known as “The Patroon.” Moved to manor house “Watervliet” located in Albany, 1785. Militia officer, rising to rank of major general in 1801. Member, state Assembly, 1789–90, 1808–10, 1818; state Senate, 1791–95; and Council of Appointment, 1792. Unsuccessful candidate for lieutenant governor, 1792. Lieutenant governor, 1795–1801. Unsuccessful candidate for governor, 1801, 1813. Member, canal commissions, 1810–1839; state constitutional conventions, 1801, 1821; and U.S. House of Representatives, 1822–29. Founded Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy, 1824.

WILLIAMS, JOHN (1752–1806) Antifederalist/Republican/Federalist

Born Barnstable, Devonshire, England. Studied medicine and surgery. Served one year as surgeon's mate on British warship. Emigrated to America, 1773. Settled at New Perth, Charlotte County (now Salem, Washington County). Practiced medicine. Active in protecting frontier as militia colonel during Revolution. Member, all four Provincial congresses, 1775–77; state Senate, 1777–78, 1782–95; state Assembly, 1781–82; state Convention, 1788, where he voted against ratification of Constitution; Council of Appointment, 1789; and U.S. House of Representatives, 1795–99. Militia brigadier general, 1786. Married into wealth. Purchaser of confiscated Loyalist estates; large landowner and land speculator; country merchant and wholesaler; and promoter

of economic development in northeastern New York. Became Federalist chiefly over Jay Treaty, 1795.

YATES, ABRAHAM, JR. (1724–1796) Antifederalist/Republican

Born Albany. Apprenticed to shoemaker; became lawyer and wine seller. Sheriff, Albany County, 1754–59. Member, Albany Common Council, 1754–73; Provincial Convention, 1775; all four Provincial congresses, 1775–77; first and second Councils of Safety, 1777–78; Council of Appointment, 1777–78, 1784; state Senate, 1777–78, 1779–90; and Confederation Congress, 1787–88. Continental loan officer, 1777–81. Receiver, City of Albany, 1778–79. Leader of public opposition to Impost of 1783. Postmaster of Albany, 1783. Mayor, City of Albany, 1790, until his death. Presidential elector, 1792. Author of many essays signed “Rough Hewer,” “Sidney,” and “Sydney.”

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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