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Rhode Island 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

Born, Smithfield, R.I. Lawyer. Studied law, admitted to bar, and practiced in Smithfield. Tavern keeper in Smithfield. Deputy, Smithfield, General Assembly, 1777–78, 1782–83. Attended Congress, 1787–88. Moderator, Smithfield Town Meeting, 1787, 1796, 1798, 1801–7, 1809–16. Assistant, General Assembly, 1790–95. Twice-failed candidate for U.S. Congress, 1794, 1796. Chief justice, Superior Court of Judicature, 1796–1809, 1810–12.

BOURNE, BENJAMIN (1755–1808) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Bristol, R.I. Lawyer and merchant. Graduate, Harvard College, 1775. Studied law and developed a prominent practice in Providence. Ensign and quartermaster, R.I. militia, 1776–77. Member, R.I. Council of War, 1780–81. Deputy, Bristol, General Assembly, 1780. Clerk, House of Deputies, 1780–81, 1782–86. Deputy, Providence, General Assembly, 1787–88, 1789–90. Signed minority protest against Rhode Island's refusal to send delegates to Constitutional Convention, 1787. Member, Providence committee that drafted petition to U.S. Congress for duty exemptions, August 1789; carried petition, with Rev. James Manning, to U.S. Congress, September 1789. Voted to ratify Constitution in state Convention, May 1790. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1790–96. Judge, U.S. District Court for R.I., 1796–1801; Judge, U.S. Circuit Court for the First Circuit, 1801–2.

BOWEN, JABEZ (1739–1815) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Providence, R.I. Wealthy businessman. Connected by marriage and business to the Browns of Providence. Graduate, Yale College, 1757. Member, Providence Town Council, 1773–75, and justice of the peace, 1771–76. Militia major, then colonel, 1774–77. Justice, Superior Court

of Judicature, 1776–78, and chief justice, 1781. Member, R.I. Council of War, 1777–80, 1781–82. Deputy governor, 1778–80, 1781–86. Deputy, Providence, General Assembly, 1788–90. Appointed commissioner to Annapolis Convention, 1786, but did not attend. Voted to ratify Constitution in state Convention, May 1790. U.S. commissioner of loans, 1790–1800. Chancellor, College of Rhode Island (Brown University), 1785–1815. Began Providence Bank along with John Brown, 1791.

BRADFORD, WILLIAM (1729–1808) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Plympton, Mass. Physician and lawyer. Practiced medicine in Warren, R.I., and later moved to Bristol, where he abandoned medicine in favor of law. Admitted to the bar, 1767. Deputy, Bristol, General Assembly, 1764–66, 1768–69, 1772–75, 1778–93, 1798–1802 (speaker, 1764–66, 1780–86, 1790–93, 1798–1802). Member, R.I. Committee of Correspondence, 1773. Deputy governor, 1775–78. At the bombardment of Bristol, Bradford went aboard H.M.S. *Rose*, to negotiate a cessation of the attack. Elected to Second Continental Congress, October 1776, but declined to serve. Moved in state Convention to appoint a committee to draft amendments to the Constitution, March 1790. Voted to ratify Constitution in state Convention, May 1790. Member, U.S. Senate, 1793–97 (elected president pro tempore, July 1797); resigned, October 1797.

BROWN, JOHN (1736–1803) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Providence, R.I., into prominent commercial family. Brother of Moses and Nicholas Brown. Merchant, landholder, manufacturer, and slave trader. Withdrew from family firm in 1771, but retained interest in some industries and in trade, including slave trade. Leader of party that burned British schooner *Gaspee* in 1772. Government munitions and supplies contractor during Revolution. Along with brothers accrued considerable wealth during the Revolution. Deputy, Providence, General Assembly, 1776–78, 1779–80, 1782–84, 1786–87. Signed minority protest against Rhode Island's refusal to send delegates to Constitutional Convention, 1787. Elected to but did not attend Congress, 1784, 1785. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1799–1801. Member, Providence committee that drafted petition to Congress for duty exemptions, August 1789. Tried and acquitted for violating 1794 congressional act prohibiting slave trade from U.S. to foreign places. Instrumental in securing relocation of College of Rhode Island (Brown University) to Providence; laid cornerstone of first building on Providence campus, 1770, and served as college treasurer, 1775–1796. Began Providence Bank along with son-in-law John Francis and Jabez Bowen, 1791.

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.

COLLINS, JOHN (1717–1795) Country/Federalist

Born, Newport, R.I. Merchant. Member, Newport Committee of Correspondence by 1774. Assistant, General Assembly, 1774–78. Attended Congress, 1778–80, 1782–83. 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

Farmer. Justice of peace, East Greenwich, 1762–65, 1787–89. Deputy, East Greenwich, General Assembly, 1776–79, 1786–90. Member, R.I. Council of War, 1777–78, 1778–79. Member, Committee appointed under paper-money act of May 1786 (signed legal tender bills of credit). Collector of impost, Kent County, 1787–90. State surveyor for Port of East Greenwich, 1789–90. Voted against ratification in state Convention, May 1790. Declined appointment by President Washington as Surveyor of Port of East Greenwich, 1790. Unsuccessful candidate for U.S. House of Representatives, August 1790. Member, Providence Abolition Society.

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

Born, Newport, R.I. Lawyer. Graduate, Harvard College, 1747. Received sizeable inheritance upon his father's death, 1764, and left commerce for politics. One of the original incorporators of College of Rhode Island (Brown University), 1764. Leader of opposition to Stamp Act in Newport, 1765. Began practicing law by 1769. Clerk of House of Deputies, 1768–70. Attended Congress, 1776–85. Member, Marine Committee (later Board of Admiralty). Signer, Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation. Chief justice, Superior Court of Judicature, 1785–86. Commissioner of Continental Loan Office, 1786–90. U.S. customs collector for Newport, 1790–1820.

FENNER, ARTHUR, JR. (1745–1805) Country/Antifederalist

Born, Providence, R.I. Merchant. Brother-in-law of Theodore Foster. Member of committee charged to ensure compliance with Continental Association, 1774. Clerk, Court of Common Pleas, Providence County, 1769–89. Lieutenant, then captain, in Continental Army, 1775–77. Gubernatorial candidate on Antifederalist-Federalist coalition prox, 1790. Governor, 1790–1805.

FOSTER, THEODORE (1752–1828) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Brookfield, Mass. Lawyer, merchant, and historian. Brother-in-law of Arthur Fenner, Jr. Graduate, College of Rhode Island (Brown University), 1770. Studied law in Providence. Justice of the peace, Providence, 1773–86, 1789–90. Town clerk, Providence, 1775–87. Deputy, Providence, General Assembly, 1776–77, 1778–80, 1781–82. Assistant, General Assembly, 1787–88. Member, Providence committee that drafted petition to U.S. Congress for duty exemptions, August 1789. Appointed state naval officer for the District of Providence, September 1789. Took minutes of March 1790 session of state ratifying Convention. Appointed U.S. naval officer of Providence, June 1790 (declined). Member, U.S. Senate, 1790–1803. Member, Providence Abolition Society. Trustee of Rhode Island College (Brown University), 1794–1822. Collected source material on history of Rhode Island and helped found Rhode Island Historical Society, 1822.

HAZARD, JONATHAN J. (1731–1812) Country/Antifederalist

Lawyer. Apprenticed to tailor; abandoned apprenticeship to study law. Deputy, Charlestown, General Assembly, 1776, 1778–80, 1781–82, 1783–84, 1786–89. Adjutant/paymaster, Continental Army, 1777–78. Member, R.I. Council of War, 1778–80. Country party leader. Member, Committee appointed under paper-money act of May 1786 (signed legal tender bills of credit). Attended Congress, 1788. Deputy, South Kingstown, General Assembly, 1789–93. Member, South Kingstown, state Convention; voted against ratification, May 1790. Defeated candidate for U.S. Senate, June 1790. Moved to N.Y., 1805.

HITCHCOCK, ENOS (1744–1803) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Springfield, Mass. Congregational clergyman. Graduate, Harvard College, 1767. Installed, Second Church, Beverly, Mass., 1771. Chaplain in Continental Army, 1776–83. Resigned Beverly pulpit, 1780. Received call to First Church (also Benevolent Church), Providence, 1780; declined to continue as chaplain. Installed as pastor of Benevolent Church, 1783. Delivered Fourth of July oration to R.I. Society of the Cincinnati, 1786, and to the town of Providence, 1788. First chaplain, R.I. Society of the Cincinnati. Trustee and later fellow of College of Rhode Island (Brown University). Member, Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.

HOWELL, DAVID (1747–1824) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Morristown, N.J. Educator, lawyer, and jurist. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 1766. Studied law, admitted to the bar, and began practicing in Providence, R.I. Tutor, College of Rhode Island (Brown University), 1766–69; professor of mathematics and natural philosophy, 1769–79; fellow of College, 1773–1824; secretary of College, 1780–1806; professor of law (but did not teach), 1790–1824; and interim president of College, 1791–92.

Deputy, Providence, General Assembly, 1779–80. Justice, Court of Common Pleas, Providence County, 1780–82. Attended Congress, 1782–85. Justice, Superior Court of Judicature, 1786–87. State attorney general, 1789–90. First president, Providence Abolition Society, 1789. Appointed boundary commissioner by President Washington under Jay Treaty of 1794. Judge, U.S. District Court for R.I., 1812–24.

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, First Baptist Church, Providence, R.I., 1771–91 (America's oldest Baptist congregation). Advocated free schools and gradual emancipation of slaves. Member, Congress, 1786. Chairman, Providence committee that drafted petition to U.S. Congress for duty exemptions, August 1789; carried petition, with Benjamin Bourne, to U.S. Congress, September 1789.

MARCHANT, HENRY (1741–1796) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, Mass. Lawyer, jurist, and gentleman farmer with a large estate in South Kingstown. Studied at College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania), 1756–59; A.M., College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania), 1762. Read law under Mass. lawyer and jurist Edmund Trowbridge. Member, Newport Committee of Correspondence, 1773. State attorney general, 1771–77. Attended Congress, 1777–79. Signer, Articles of Confederation. Deputy, Newport, General Assembly, 1784–90. Assisted defense attorney James Mitchell Varnum in *Trevett v. Weeden* (1786). Signed minority protest against Rhode Island's refusal to send delegates to Constitutional Convention, 1787. Member, Newport committee that drafted petition to U.S. Congress for duty exemptions, August 1789; carried petition to U.S. Congress, September 1789. At January 1790 session of General Assembly, introduced bill that called for state ratifying convention. Voted to ratify Constitution in state Convention, May 1790. Judge, U.S. District Court for R.I., 1790–96.

OWEN, DANIEL (c. 1731–1812) Country/Antifederalist

Born, Glocester, R.I. Blacksmith. Deputy, Glocester, General Assembly, 1775–76, 1779–80, 1783–84, 1785. Assistant, General Assembly, 1781–83. Deputy governor, 1786–90. As president of state Convention did not vote on ratification, May 1790. Justice, Superior Court of Judicature, 1790–91, and chief justice, 1791–95.

STANTON, JOSEPH, JR. (1739–c. 1822) Country/Antifederalist

Born, Charlestown, R.I. Wealthy farmer. Colonel, Continental Army, 1776–77; colonel then general, R.I. militia, Kings (later Washington) County, 1779–91. Deputy, Charlestown, General Assembly, 1768–69, 1770–71, 1776–77, 1778–86, 1788–91, 1795–99 (speaker, 1788–89, 1790, 1795, 1797). Member, R.I. Council of War, 1780–81. Assistant, General Assembly, 1786–88. Voted against ratification of Constitution in state Convention, May 1790. Member, U.S. Senate, 1790–93. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1801–7.

VARNUM, JAMES MITCHELL (1748–1789) Mercantile/Federalist

Born, Dracut, Mass. Lawyer and soldier. Attended Harvard College. Graduate, College of Rhode Island (Brown University), 1769; M.A., 1772. Studied law and opened practice in East Greenwich, R.I. Initially questioned prudence of independence; persuaded otherwise by political conditions of mid-1770s. Colonel, Kentish Guards (Kent County), 1774. Colonel then brigadier general, Continental Army, 1775–79; brigadier general, R.I. militia, 1776; major general, 1779–88. Attended Congress, 1780–81, 1787. Vice president, R.I. Society of the Cincinnati, 1783–86; president, 1786–89. Defense attorney, *Trevett v. Weeden* (1786), where he expounded the theory of judicial review. Director, Ohio Company, 1787. Appointed one of first judges in the Northwest Territory, 1787; resigned due to ill health. Died, Marietta, Ohio.

WEST, WILLIAM (c. 1733–1814) Country/Antifederalist

Born, North Kingstown, R.I. Farmer and tavern keeper in Scituate. Colonel, Providence County militia, 1776–79; brigadier general, 1779–80. Member, R.I. Council of War, 1780–81. Deputy governor, 1780–81. Deputy, Scituate, General Assembly, 1761–62, 1771–72, 1773–74, 1776–77, 1779–80, 1784–86. Assistant, General Assembly, 1777–78. Justice, Superior Court of Judicature, 1787–90. Leader of Country party protesters at Providence celebration, 4 July 1788.

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