



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > The Creation and Ratification of the Bill of Rights > Events Related to the Creation and Ratification of the Bill of Rights > The Harrisburg Convention Attempts to Amend the Constitution

Introduction: The Harrisburg Convention Attempts to Amend the Constitution

Antifederalist opposition to the Constitution in Pennsylvania persisted even after its ratification by the state Convention on 12 December 1787. In January 1788, Philadelphia Antifederalist leaders drafted and circulated petitions requesting (1) that the state Assembly censure the Pennsylvania delegates to the Constitutional Convention for exceeding their authority, (2) that ratification of the Constitution by the state Convention “not be confirmed,” and (3) that the Pennsylvania delegates in the Confederation Congress be instructed that the Constitution not be “adopted in the said United States.” The petitions were printed in the Pennsylvania *Carlisle Gazette* and the Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer* and possibly as a broadside. The Assembly received and tabled petitions from six counties signed by 6,005 people. Seven other petitions from Northumberland County arrived after the Assembly adjourned.

Opposition to the Constitution persisted. When news of the ninth and tenth state ratifications reached Carlisle in Cumberland County, Antifederalists from several townships met and agreed to send a circular letter to the other counties asking that they send delegates to a convention to meet at Harrisburg on 3 September to propose amendments to the Constitution and to nominate candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives. Thirty-seven delegates from thirteen counties and the city of Philadelphia attended the Convention. They resolved that Pennsylvanians should acquiesce in the adoption of the Constitution but that amendments were essential to safeguard liberty. The Convention approved twelve amendments to the Constitution to be sent to the Assembly in the form of a petition. The Convention ordered that its proceedings be published; they were printed in the Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer* and *Pennsylvania Packet* on 15 September and widely reprinted throughout the country. There is no record that the Assembly received the petition or amendments.

This grouping contains documents from 3 July through 9 October 1788 that deal with the efforts to call a convention, the Convention proceedings, and reaction to the Convention’s actions.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XXXIX: Bill of Rights [3] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2023), 163–64.