

Massachusetts Centinel

The *Massachusetts Centinel* was published in Boston on Wednesdays and Saturdays by Benjamin Russell (1761–1845). Russell, a native of Boston, had been apprenticed to Isaiah Thomas—the dean of late eighteenth-century American printers—from 1780 to 1781. After two years as a journeyman printer, Russell and William Warden published the first issue of the *Centinel* on 24 March 1784. After Warden’s death, Russell became sole editor on 22 March 1786.

Russell was an early advocate of increasing the powers of the central government. While the Constitutional Convention sat, the *Centinel* was filled with articles that advocated strengthening Congress. After the Convention adjourned, Russell supported the new Constitution by writing articles and short editorial statements that filled the *Centinel* and by participating in local politics, particularly as a leader of the Boston mechanics. His publication of the Constitution included a preface: “The following highly interesting and important communication we received late last evening by the post—an ardent desire to gratify the patrons of the Centinel, and the publick in general, induced the Editor to strain a nerve that it might appear this day; and although *lengthy* he is happy in publishing the whole entire, for their entertainment.” An example of his partisanship is his comment upon publishing “New England”—an answer to the Antifederalist *Letters from the Federal Farmer*: “If the foregoing doth not operate a damper indeed, to the (*anti*-) Federal Farmer’s letters, chicanery and falshood are invincible to justice and truth.”

The *Centinel* specialized in the brief article that, in vigorous and colorful language, extolled the Constitution or scored its critics. In early October 1787, Russell announced that no Antifederalist essay would be published in the *Centinel* unless the author left his name to be made public if requested. Within a month, however, Russell, succumbing to criticism, discarded this policy. He attended the Massachusetts convention and took notes of the debates, which were published in the *Centinel*. No other printer celebrated the ratification of the Constitution more originally than Russell. On 16 January 1788, a week after Connecticut had ratified, Russell printed an illustration of five pillars, each representing a state that had ratified the Constitution. Each time a state ratified, he added another pillar. Russell’s originality and partisanship made the *Centinel* one of the most often reprinted newspapers in America.

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