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Connecticut Biographical Gazetteer

The following sketches outline the political careers of the principal Connecticut leaders. When known, their political positions are indicated (1) in state politics prior to 1787; (2) on the Constitution in 1787; (3) in national politics after 1787. In several cases the terms are too limiting. Thus Roger Sherman supported both “agrarian” and “mercantile” measures before and during 1787, depending upon the issues. William Williams, Joseph Hopkins, Eliphalet Dyer, and Erastus Wolcott opposed the Constitution, but voted for it in the state Convention and hence were both “Antifederalist” and “Federalist” in 1787 (marked with asterisks in this gazetteer). Richard Law was a “Federalist” after 1789. Yet, in 1801 the Democratic-Republicans nominated him for governor, and, when he declined the nomination, they did not name another candidate to replace him.

DYER, ELIPHALET (1721–1807) Agrarian/Antifederalist*/?

Born Windham. Yale B.A. 1740, M.A. 1743. Admitted to bar, 1746. Militia officer, 1745–76. Windham County justice of peace, 1746–62, 1784–85, 1793–98. Windham delegate to House, 1747–60, 1784, 1793 (speaker, 1784). Member of Council, 1762–84. Agent for Susquehanna Company in England, 1763–64. Delegate to Stamp Act Congress, 1765. Judge of Superior Court, 1766–93 (chief judge, 1789–93). Delegate to Congress, 1774–76, 1777–80, 1782–83. Member council of safety, 1775–77, 1779–80, 1782–83. Delegate to Providence Convention, 1776–77. State counsel in Wyoming dispute before federal court at Trenton, 1782. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788.

EDWARDS, PIERPONT (1750–1826) ?/Federalist/Federalist; Democratic-Republican

Born Northampton, Mass., son of Rev. Jonathan Edwards. College of New Jersey (Princeton University) B.A. 1768. Began law practice in New Haven, 1771. New Haven delegate to House, 1777–78, 1784–85, 1787–88, 1789–90 (speaker, 1789–90). Elected to Congress, 1787–88 (attended, 1788). Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. U.S. district attorney for Connecticut, 1789–1804. Elected to U.S. House of Representatives, 1790, but declined. State’s attorney for New Haven County, 1798–1805. U.S. district judge for Connecticut, 1806–26. Delegate to state constitutional convention, 1818.

ELLSWORTH, OLIVER (1745–1807) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Windsor. College of New Jersey (Princeton University) B.A. 1766. Admitted to bar, 1771. Windsor delegate to House, 1773–75. Hartford County justice of peace, 1774–80. State’s attorney

for Hartford County, 1777–85. Delegate to Congress, 1778–83. Member council of safety, 1779. Hartford delegate to House, 1779. Delegate to Hartford Convention, 1779, to Philadelphia Convention, 1780. Member of Council, 1780–85. Judge of Superior Court, 1785–88. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, 1787 (member Committee of Detail). Author of “Landholder” essays, 1787–88. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. U.S. Senator, 1789–96. Chief Justice of U.S. 1796–1800. Peace commissioner to France, 1799–1800. Member of Council, 1802–7.

GALE, BENJAMIN (1715–1790) Agrarian/Antifederalist/?

Born Jamaica, N.Y. Yale M.A. 1733. Practiced medicine in Killingworth and operated steel mill and other businesses. New London County justice of peace, 1746–55, 1759–73. Killingworth delegate to House, 1747, 1749, 1753–57, 1759–61, 1763–71. Opposed “New Lights,” Susquehannah Company, and Sons of Liberty. Appointed examiner of doctors for militia, 1776. Wrote pamphlet advocating a state convention to draft a state constitution, 1782. Opposed Constitution, 1787. Religious, medical, and agricultural publications: *The Present State of the Colony of Connecticut Considered* (1755); *Historical Memoirs, Relating to the Practice of Inoculation for Small-pox . . .* (1765); *Observations on the Culture of Smyrna Wheat . . .* (1783); and *A Brief Essay, or, An Attempt to Prove from the Prophetick Writings of the Old and New Testament, what Period of Prophecy the Church of God is now Under* (1788).

GRISWOLD, MATTHEW (1714–1799) Mercantile/Federalist/?

Born Lyme. Admitted to bar, 1743. Militia officer, 1739–c. 1769. Lyme delegate to House, 1748, 1751, 1754–59, 1789–90. King’s attorney for New London County, 1755–65. Member of Council, 1759–69. Judge of Superior Court, 1765–84 (chief judge, 1769–84). Deputy governor, 1769–84. Member council of safety, 1775–83. Governor, 1784–86. President of state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788.

HILLHOUSE, WILLIAM (1728–1816) Agrarian/Antifederalist/?

Born Montville. Militia officer, 1754–76. New London delegate to House, 1756–57, 1758–85 (clerk, 1784). New London County justice of peace, 1759–85 (justice of quorum, 1773–84). Member council of safety, 1776–83. Delegate to New Haven Convention, 1778. Elected to Congress, 1783, 1785, but did not attend. Judge of New London County court, 1784–1807. Probate judge New London district, 1785–1809. Member of Council, 1785–1809.

HOPKINS, JOSEPH (1730–1801) Agrarian/Antifederalist*/?

Born Waterbury; silversmith. Waterbury treasurer, 1760–64. New Haven County justice of peace, 1760–1801 (justice of quorum, 1777–1801). Waterbury delegate to House, 1764–77, 1780–96. Probate judge Waterbury district, 1779–1801. Member council of safety, 1781–83. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788.

HUMPHREYS, DAVID (1752–1818) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Derby; school teacher, merchant, manufacturer, farmer, poet, diplomat. Yale B.A. 1771, M.A. 1774. Militia officer, 1776. Continental Army officer, 1777–83, became lieutenant colonel.

Member Connecticut Cincinnati. Secretary to commission for negotiating treaties of commerce with foreign powers, 1784–86. Derby delegate to House, 1786–87. Lieutenant colonel commanding Connecticut regiment raised to help suppress Shays's Rebellion, 1786–87. An author of the *Anarchiad*, 1786–87. Appointed commissioner to Southern Indians, 1789. U.S. secret agent to gather information in Europe, 1790–91. Minister resident in Portugal, 1791–97. Commissioner for Algerine affairs, 1793–96. Minister plenipotentiary to Spain, 1797–1801. Returned to America, 1802. Vice president Connecticut Cincinnati, 1803–4. Derby delegate to House, 1812–14, 1814–15. Militia brigadier general, 1813.

HUNTINGTON, SAMUEL (1731–1796) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Windham. Admitted to bar, 1754. Moved to Norwich, 1760. King's attorney for New London County, 1765–74. New London County justice of peace, 1765–75. Norwich delegate to House, 1765, 1775. Judge of Superior Court, 1773–85 (chief judge, 1784–85). Member of Council, 1775–84. Member council of safety, 1775–76, 1782–83. Delegate to Congress, 1776–81, 1783 (president, 1779–81; signed Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation). Delegate to Springfield Convention, 1777. Lieutenant governor, 1784–86. Governor, 1786–96. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788.

JOHNSON, WILLIAM SAMUEL (1727–1819) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Stratford. Yale B.A. 1744, M.A. 1747. Admitted to bar, c. 1749. Militia officer, 1753–74. Stratford delegate to House, 1761, 1765–66. Fairfield County justice of peace, 1765–66, 1776. Delegate to Stamp Act Congress, 1765. Member of Council, 1766–76, 1786–89. Colonial agent in London, 1767–71. Judge of Superior Court, 1772–74. Member Stratford committee of inspection, 1774–76. Opposed independence and defeated for reelection to Council, 1776. Refused to take oath of allegiance to Connecticut and forced to give up law practice, 1777. Arrested on suspicion of communicating with enemy, but released upon taking oath of loyalty, 1779. State counsel in Wyoming dispute before federal court at Trenton, 1782. Delegate to Congress, 1784–87. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, 1787 (chairman Committee of Style; signed Constitution). President of Columbia College, 1787–1800. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. U.S. Senator from Connecticut, 1789–91.

LAW, RICHARD (1733–1806) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist; Democratic-Republican?

Born Milford. Yale B.A. 1751. Admitted to bar, 1755. Moved to New London, 1757. New London County justice of peace, 1765–76. New London delegate to House, 1765–69, 1773–76 (clerk, 1774–76). Judge New London County court, 1773–84. Elected to Congress, 1774, 1776, 1780–84 (attended, 1777, 1781–82). Member of Council, 1776–85. Member council of safety, 1776. Delegate to Providence Convention, 1776–77. Judge of Superior Court, 1784–89 (chief judge, 1785–89). Mayor of New London, 1784–1806. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Presidential Elector, 1789. U.S. district judge for Connecticut, 1789–1806.

MITCHELL, STEPHEN MIX (1743–1835) Mercantile?/Federalist/Federalist

Born Wethersfield. Yale B.A. 1763. Admitted to bar, 1770. Wethersfield delegate to House, 1778–84 (clerk, 1782). Hartford County justice of peace, 1779–84, 1785–86, 1794–96 (justice of quo-

rum, 1779–80). Elected to Congress, 1783, 1785–88 (attended, 1785–86, 1787, 1788). Member of Council, 1784–93 (clerk, 1785–93). Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Defeated for election to U.S. House of Representatives, 1789. Judge Hartford County court, 1789–95. U.S. Senator, 1793–95. Judge of Superior Court, 1795–1807. Presidential Elector, 1800. Chief Judge of Supreme Court of Errors, 1807–14. Delegate to state constitutional convention, 1818.

PARSONS, SAMUEL HOLDEN (1737–1789) Mercantile/Federalist/

Born Lyme. Harvard B.A. 1756, M.A. 1759. Admitted to bar, 1759. Lyme delegate to House, 1762–64, 1765, 1767–74. New London County justice of peace, 1768–78. Militia officer, 1770–76. Moved to New London, 1774. Continental Army officer, 1776–82, became major general. Moved to Middletown, 1781. Member Connecticut Cincinnati (president, 1784–87). Middletown delegate to House, 1784–85. Hartford County justice of peace, 1784–85. Middlesex County justice of peace, 1785–88. Commissioner to extinguish Indian claims in Northwest, 1785. Elected director of Ohio Company, 1787. Appointed judge of Northwest Territory, 1787. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Moved to Ohio, 1788.

PERKINS, ENOCH (1760–1828) Mercantile?/Federalist/Federalist

Born Lisbon. Yale B.A. 1781. Moved to Hartford, 1786. His notes of debates in state Convention printed in Hartford newspapers, 1788. Notary public for Hartford, c. 1793–1828. Hartford County justice of peace, 1797–1818. Hartford councilman, 1798–1805, 1809–18. Hartford alderman, 1805–6, 1816–17. Hartford delegate to House, 1805–6, 1807–8, 1809. State’s attorney for Hartford County, 1809–18.

SHERMAN, ROGER (1721–1793) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Newton, Mass.; cordwainer, shopkeeper, lawyer. Moved to New Milford, Conn., 1743. Surveyor for New Haven County, 1745–52. New Milford town offices (grand jurymen, list taker, leather sealer, fence viewer, selectman, town agent), 1749–53. Surveyor for Litchfield County, 1752–58. Admitted to bar, 1754. New Milford delegate to House, 1755–56, 1758–61. Litchfield County justice of peace, 1755–61 (justice of quorum, 1759–61). Moved to New Haven, 1761. New Haven delegate to House, 1764–66. New Haven County justice of quorum, 1766–67. Member of Council, 1766–85. Judge of Superior Court, 1766–89. Delegate to Congress, 1774–81, 1783–84 (member of committee on Declaration of Rights, signed Declaration, 1774; signed Articles of Association, 1774; signed Olive Branch petition, 1775; member of committee to draft Declaration of Independence, signed Declaration, 1776; Member of committee to draft Articles of Confederation, 1776, signed Articles, 1778; signed ratification of Treaty of Paris, 1784). Delegate to Springfield Convention, 1777, to New Haven Convention, 1778, to Philadelphia Convention, 1780. Member council of safety, 1777–80, 1782. Mayor of New Haven, 1784–93. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, signed Constitution, 1787. Author of “A Countryman” and “A Citizen of New Haven” essays, 1787–88. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. New Haven County justice of peace, 1789–90. Member U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–91. U.S. Senator, 1791–93.

STRONG, JEDIDIAH (1738–1802) Mercantile/Federalist

Born Litchfield. Yale B.A. 1761. Admitted to bar, 1764. Litchfield selectman, 1770–83. Litchfield delegate to House, 1771–83, 1785–89 (clerk, 1778, 1779–80, 1781–83, 1785–86, 1787–88). Litchfield town clerk, 1773–89. Member council of safety, 1779–83. Elected to Congress, 1779, 1782–84, but did not attend. Litchfield County justice of peace, 1779–89 (justice of quorum, 1780–91). Delegate to and secretary of state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Member of Council, 1789–91. Defeated for election to U.S. House of Representatives, 1789. Arrested on wife's charge of cruelty, 1790. Council granted wife divorce, 1791, and political career ended. Died a pauper.

TRUMBULL, JONATHAN, JR. (1740–1809) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Lebanon; shopkeeper, merchant, farmer. Harvard B.A. 1759, M.A. 1762. Lebanon selectman, 1770–75. Lebanon delegate to House, 1774–75, 1779–81, 1788–89 (speaker, 1788–89). Congressional paymaster for New York department, 1775–78. Windham County justice of peace, 1776–96. Comptroller U.S. treasury, 1778–79. Secretary to General George Washington, 1781–83. Member Connecticut Cincinnati (secretary, 1783–93). Member U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–94 (speaker, 1791–93). U.S. Senator, 1795–96. Presidential Elector, 1796, 1800. Lieutenant governor, 1796–97. Governor, 1797–1809.

WADSWORTH, JAMES (1730–1817) Agrarian/Antifederalist/Democratic-Republican?

Born Durham. Yale B.A. 1748. Militia officer, 1752–79. Durham town clerk, 1756–86. Durham delegate to House, 1759–85, 1788–89 (speaker, 1784–85). New Haven County justice of peace, 1761–86, 1788–91 (justice of quorum, 1773–78). Member council of safety, 1777–82. Judge of New Haven County court, 1778–89. Delegate to Hartford Convention, 1780. Elected to Congress, 1783–86 (attended, 1784). Member of Council, 1785–88. State comptroller, 1786–88. Delegate to state Convention, voted against ratification, 1788. Defeated for election to Council, 1788. Elected to House, 1788. Reappointed judge of New Haven County court, 1789, but refused appointment because he would not take oath to support U.S. Constitution. Defeated for election to Council, 1790–94.

WADSWORTH, JEREMIAH (1743–1804) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Hartford; sea captain, merchant. Commissary of forces raised in Connecticut, 1775–77. Deputy commissary general of purchases for Continental Army, 1777–78. Commissary general for Continental Army, 1778–79. Commissary to French army, 1780–82. Member council of safety, 1780. Hartford delegate to House, 1780–81, 1785–89, 1795. Vice president Connecticut Cincinnati, 1785–87, president, 1787–93. Elected to Congress, 1787–88 (attended, 1788). Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Member U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–95. Member of Council, 1795–1801. Presidential Elector, 1796. Hartford County justice of peace and quorum, 1802–4. Stockholder Bank of North America (Philadelphia) and Hartford Woolen Manufactory. Director Bank of U.S. (New York). Underwriter Hartford and New Haven Insurance Company. President Hartford and New Haven Turnpike Corporation.

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM (1731–1811) Agrarian/Antifederalist*/?

Born Lebanon; merchant. Harvard B.A. 1751. Militia officer, 1751–76. Lebanon town clerk, 1752–96. Lebanon delegate to House, 1757–76, 1780–84 (clerk, 1766–74, 1780; speaker, 1774–75, 1781–84). Windham County justice of peace, 1759–76, 1779–84 (justice of quorum, 1769–76). Lebanon selectman, 1760–85. Judge Windham County court, 1775–1805. Probate judge Windham district, 1775–1809. Member of Council, 1776–80, 1784–1803. Delegate to Congress, 1776–77 (signed Declaration of Independence). Elected to Continental Board of War, 1777. Delegate to Hartford Convention, 1780. Elected to Congress, 1783–84, but did not attend. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788.

WOLCOTT, ERASTUS (1721–1793) Agrarian/Antifederalist*/?

Born Windsor; farmer. Hartford delegate to House, 1758–62. Militia officer, 1759–81. Hartford County justice of peace, 1760–85, 1792–93 (justice of quorum, 1773–84). East Windsor delegate to House, 1768–85 (speaker, 1776). Member council of safety, 1778–79. Probate judge East Windsor district, 1782–91. Judge Hartford County court, 1784–90. Member of Council, 1785–90. Elected to Constitutional Convention, 1787, but declined. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Defeated for election to U.S. House of Representatives, 1789. Presidential Elector, 1789. Judge of Superior Court, 1789–92.

WOLCOTT, OLIVER, SR. (1726–1797) Mercantile/Federalist/Federalist

Born Windsor. Yale B.A. 1747. Moved to Litchfield County, 1751. Sheriff Litchfield County, 1751–71. Litchfield delegate to House, 1764, 1767–68, 1770. Member of Council, 1771–86. Militia officer, 1771–79. Probate judge Litchfield district, 1772–96. Judge Litchfield County court, 1774–86. Commissioner of Indian affairs for Northern Department, 1775. Delegate to Congress, 1776–78, 1780–83 (signed Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation). Member council of safety, 1780–83. Commissioner at Treaty of Fort Stanwix, 1784–85. Lieutenant governor, 1786–96. Delegate to state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Negotiated treaty with Wyandottes who relinquished title to Western Reserve, 1789. Presidential Elector, 1789, 1792, 1796. Governor, 1796–97.

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