



# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

[csac.history.wisc.edu](http://csac.history.wisc.edu) > Ratification at a Glance > Massachusetts > Massachusetts  
Ratification > Significant Events and Individuals in Massachusetts Politics

## Massachusetts Biographical Gazetteer

The following sketches outline the political careers of the principal Massachusetts leaders. When known, their political positions are indicated (1) on the Constitution in 1787–1788; (2) in national politics after 1789.

### **ADAMS, JOHN (1735–1826) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Braintree. Graduated from Harvard College, 1755. Taught school and studied law with James Putnam in Worcester. Admitted to Boston bar, 1758; practiced law in that town but lived in Braintree. Married Abigail Smith of Weymouth, 1764. Drafted Braintree resolutions against Stamp Act, 1765. Moved to Boston, 1768. Helped defend British soldiers after Boston massacre, 1770. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1770. Election to Council rejected by governor, 1774. Returned to Braintree, 1774. Delegate to First Continental Congress, 1774. Represented Braintree in First Provincial Congress, 1774. Author of essays of “Novanglus,” 1775. Member, state Council, 1775. Chief justice of state Superior Court, 1775–77 (never took seat on bench). Delegate to Continental Congress, 1775–77. Author of *Thoughts on Government*, April 1776. Seconded motion in Congress for independence, June 1776; appointed to committees to prepare a declaration of independence and to plan for foreign alliances, June 1776; a leading advocate for and signer of Declaration of Independence. President, Continental Board of War, 1776–77. Appointed a commissioner to France to replace Silas Deane, 1777. Returned to U.S., 1779. Member, state constitutional convention, 1779; primary author of state constitution of 1780. Appointed minister plenipotentiary to negotiate treaties of peace and commerce with Great Britain, 1779. Appointed commissioner to negotiate treaties of amity and commerce with United Provinces (Holland), 1780. Served as a commissioner to negotiate peace treaty ending war with Great Britain, 1781–83. Minister plenipotentiary to United Provinces, 1781–88, negotiates loans with Dutch bankers. Minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain, 1785–88. Along with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson empowered to conclude commercial treaties with European and African nations, 1784. Author of three-volume *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, 1787–88. Returned to America, June 1788. Vice President of U.S., 1789–97. President of U.S., 1797–1801. Member, state constitutional convention, 1820.

### **ADAMS, SAMUEL (1722–1803) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born Boston. Graduated from Harvard College, 1740 (M.A., 1743). Tax collector of Boston, 1756–65. Drafted Massachusetts Resolves against Stamp Act, 1765. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1766–74. Revolutionary publicist and agitator. Member, three provincial con-

gresses, 1774–75, and Committee of Safety of the Provincial Congress, 1775. Delegate to Continental Congress, 1774–81; signed Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation. Member, state Council, 1775–76, 1779–80; state constitutional convention, 1779–80; and state Senate, 1781–85, 1786–88 (president, 1781–85, 1787–88). Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, despite earlier opposition to Constitution, 1788. Defeated by Fisher Ames for U.S. Representative, 1788. Lieutenant governor, 1789–93. Assumed governorship upon Governor John Hancock’s death, 1793. Governor, 1793–97; did not seek reelection, 1797.

**AUSTIN, BENJAMIN, JR. (1752–1820) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born Boston. Boston merchant, revolutionary publicist, and follower of Samuel Adams. Author of influential and controversial newspaper essays attacking legal profession under pseudonym “Honestus” (1786). Member, state Senate, 1787–88, 1789–97. Author of Antifederalist “Candidus” essays, 1787–88. Active Republican agitator and publicist, 1790s.

**BISHOP, PHANUEL (1739–1812) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born Rehoboth. Militia officer, 1775–76; drafted into Continental Army, 1777, but fined for not serving. Leader of convention movement in Bristol County, 1780s; sympathized with Shaysites. Elected to state Senate, 1787, but denied seat. Member, state House of Representatives, 1787–88, 1792–95, 1797–99; state Convention, voted against ratification, 1788. Member, state Senate, 1788–91; continued vigorous opposition to Constitution in February 1788 session. U.S. Representative, 1799–1807.

**BOWDOIN, JAMES (1726–1790) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Boston. Graduated from Harvard College, 1745. Boston merchant. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1753–56, and colonial Council, 1757–69 (rejected by governor, 1769–70), 1770–74 (rejected by governor, 1774). Named delegate to First Continental Congress, 1774, but declined to attend because of poor health. Member, state Council, 1775–78. President, state constitutional convention, 1779–80. Governor, 1785–87; defeated for reelection by John Hancock, 1787. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788.

**CUSHING, THOMAS (1725–1788) Federalist/**

Born Boston. Graduated from Harvard College, 1744. Boston merchant. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1761–1774 (speaker, 1766–74). Prominent revolutionary leader, member of three provincial congresses, 1774–75, and member, Committee of Safety, 1775. Delegate to Continental Congress, 1774–75. In early years of Revolution, built and outfitted ships for Continental Navy. Member, state Council, 1775–77, 1778–80. Delegate to Boston and Hartford conventions, 1780. Lieutenant governor, 1780 until death. Acting governor, 1785. Lost gubernatorial election to James Bowdoin, 1785, but reelected lieutenant governor. Elected commissioner to Annapolis Convention, 1786.

**CUSHING, WILLIAM (1732–1810) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Scituate. Graduated from Harvard College, 1751; M.A. from Yale College, 1753. Admitted to bar in 1755, and returned to Scituate to practice. Moved to Pownalborough, Maine, 1760,

and became justice of the peace in Lincoln County. Justice of state Superior Court of Judicature and then of state Supreme Judicial Court, 1772–89 (chief justice, 1777–89). Member, state constitutional convention, 1779–80. Vice president of state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Presidential elector, 1789. Associate justice of U.S. Supreme Court, 1789 until death. (Served as acting chief justice, 1794–95. Declined appointment as chief justice in 1796 due to poor health.)

**DALTON, TRISTRAM (1738–1817) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Newbury. Graduated from Harvard College, 1755. Read law but did not practice. Inherited large estate. Represented Newburyport in Second Provincial Congress, 1775. Operated privateers and provided clothing to Continental Army during Revolution. Member from Newburyport, state House of Representatives, 1776–77, 1782–84 (speaker, 1783–84), 1785–86; and state Senate, 1784–85, 1786–89. Elected commissioner to Annapolis Convention but resigned, 1786. Member from Newbury, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. U.S. Senator, 1789–91.

**DANA, FRANCIS (1743–1811) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Charlestown but raised in Boston. Graduated from Harvard College, 1762. Admitted to bar, 1767. Elected by Cambridge to First Provincial Congress, 1774, but did not take his seat, hoping for reconciliation with Britain. In England, 1775–76, settling father's estate. Member, state Council, 1776–77, 1778–80. Delegate to Continental Congress, 1777–78, signed Articles of Confederation. Secretary to peace commissioner John Adams, 1779–81. U.S. minister to Russia, 1780–83 (in Russia, 1781–83, but never received formally). Delegate to Congress, 1784. Associate justice, state Supreme Judicial Court, 1785–92; chief justice, 1792–1806. Elected commissioner to Annapolis Convention, 1786, and delegate to Constitutional Convention, 1787, but did not attend. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Presidential elector, 1789.

**DANE, NATHAN (1752–1835) Antifederalist/Federalist**

Born Ipswich. Graduated from Harvard College, 1778. Admitted to bar, 1782, and began practice at Beverly. Member, state House of Representatives, 1782–86, and state Senate, 1793–99. Delegate to Congress, 1785–88; primary author of Northwest Ordinance, 1787. Defeated as candidate for U.S. Senator, 1788.

**GERRY, ELBRIDGE (1744–1814) Antifederalist/Federalist; Republican**

Born Marblehead. Graduated from Harvard College, 1762. Entered family's mercantile business. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1772–74, three provincial congresses, 1774–75, and Committee of Supplies of Provincial Congress, 1775. Delegate to Congress, 1776–80, 1783–85 (elected 1780–81 but refused to serve); signed Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation; member and often president congressional Treasury Board, 1776–79. Member, state House of Representatives, 1776–77, 1780–81, 1786–87. Moved to Cambridge, 1786. Elected commissioner to Annapolis Convention but resigned, 1786. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, 1787. Refused to sign Constitution. U.S. Representative, 1789–93; and Federalist presidential elector, 1796. Along with Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and John Marshall appointed by President John Adams envoy to treat with France, 1797 (XYZ Affair). Unsuccessful Republican

candidate for governor, 1800–1803. Republican presidential elector, 1804. Governor, 1810–12 (defeated for reelection). Vice President of U.S., 1813 until death.

**GORE, CHRISTOPHER (1758–1827) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Boston. Graduated from Harvard College, 1776. Admitted to bar, 1778. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Member, state House of Representatives, 1788–90 (resigned), 1808–9. U.S. Attorney for District of Massachusetts, 1789–96. U.S. commissioner to England to settle claims under Jay Treaty, 1796–1804; and *charge d'affaires* in London, 1803–4. Member, state Senate, 1806–8. Governor, 1809–10 (defeated in 1810 and 1811). U.S. Senator, 1813–16 (resigned). Presidential elector, 1816.

**GORHAM, NATHANIEL (1738–1796) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Charlestown. Apprenticed to New London, Conn., merchant, 1753–59; returned to Charlestown as a merchant. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1771–74; first two provincial congresses, 1774–75; state Board of War, 1778–81; state constitutional convention, 1779–80; state House of Representatives, 1778–80, 1781–88 (speaker, 1781–83, 1785–86); state Senate, 1780–81, 1790–91; delegate to Congress, 1782–83, 1785–87, 1789 (president, 1786–87); and Governor's Council, 1788–90. Delegate to Boston Convention, 1780. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, chairman of Committee of the Whole, 1787, signed Constitution. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. With Oliver Phelps purchased 6,000,000 acres of land in western New York owned by Massachusetts, 1788; inability to make payments results in bankruptcy. Supervisor of revenue for District of Massachusetts, 1791–96.

**HANCOCK, JOHN (1737–1793) Federalist/Republican**

Born Braintree. Graduated from Harvard College, 1754. Wealthy Boston merchant, learned mercantile trade from his uncle Thomas Hancock in Boston and in London. His ship *Liberty* was seized by British in 1768 for smuggling, resulting in mob action and Hancock's prosecution, which was dropped in 1769. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1766–72, 1774, and colonial Council, 1772–74. Member, three provincial congresses, 1774–75 (president, first and second congresses); chairman, Committee of Safety of the Provincial Congress, 1774–75. Member, state Council, 1775–76. Delegate to Continental Congress, 1775–78 (president, 1775–77); signed Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation. Major general, Massachusetts militia; commanded state forces in unsuccessful expedition in Rhode Island, 1778. Member, state House of Representatives, 1777–80 (speaker in 1779–80); and state constitutional convention, 1779–80. Governor, 1780–85, 1787–93 (dies in office). Elected to Congress, 1785; elected president but never attended, and resigned as president, 1786. Member, state Convention, elected president, but did not attend until late in session when he introduced amendments and voted to ratify, 1788.

**KING, RUFUS (1755–1827) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Scarborough, Maine. Graduated from Harvard College, 1777. Studied law with Theophilus Parsons in Newburyport and admitted to Essex County bar in 1780. Member, state House of Representatives, 1784–86. Delegate to Congress, 1784–87. Delegate to Constitutional Conven-

tion, 1787, signed Constitution. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Moved to New York City in 1788. (Had married Mary Alsop, daughter of a wealthy New York merchant, 1786.) U.S. Senator from New York, 1789–96, 1813–25; U.S. minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain, 1796–1803, 1825–26. Federalist candidate for Vice President, 1804, 1808, and for President, 1816.

**KNOX, HENRY (1750–1806) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Boston. Worked in bookstore and then opened his own. Enlisted in militia, 1768; second in command of Boston grenadiers, 1772. Married daughter of royal secretary, 1774. Volunteer at Bunker Hill, June 1775. Rose in Continental Army from colonel in November 1775 to major-general in March 1782. Chief of Artillery and one of Washington's closest advisors. Commander-in-chief of Continental Army, 1783–84. Organized national Society of the Cincinnati, 1783, and served as its Secretary-General, 1783–99; Vice President, Massachusetts branch, 1783–85. Confederation Secretary at War, 1785–89; and U.S. Secretary of War, 1789–94.

**LINCOLN, BENJAMIN (1733–1810) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Hingham. Farmer. Member, three provincial congresses, 1774–75 (secretary, first and second congresses). Member, Committee of Supplies of Provincial Congress, 1774–75. Appointed major-general, Massachusetts militia, 1776, and major-general Continental Line, 1777. Wounded at Battle of Saratoga, 1777. Commander, Southern Department, 1777–80. Captured by British at Charleston, S.C., and exchanged, 1780. Rejoined Washington's army and accepted Cornwallis' sword at Yorktown, 1781. Confederation Secretary at War, 1781–83. Led troops suppressing Shays's Rebellion, 1786–87. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. Elected lieutenant governor, 1788. Collector of port of Boston, 1789–1809.

**NASSON, SAMUEL (1745–1800) Antifederalist/?**

Born Portsmouth, N.H. Trader in York, Maine, before Revolution. Quartermaster, ensign, and captain in Continental Army and state militia, 1775–78. In 1778 moved to Sanford, Maine, where he was a miller, trader, and farmer. Selectman, 1786–90, 1792–94, 1796–1800; town clerk, 1797–98, 1800; and justice of the peace, 1789–1800. Member, state House of Representatives, 1787–89, and state Convention, voted against ratification, 1788.

**OTIS, SAMUEL A. (1740–1814) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Barnstable. Brother of James Otis, Jr., and Mercy Warren. Graduated from Harvard College, 1759. Read law, but became Boston merchant. Member, state House of Representatives, 1776–77, 1781–83, 1784–88 (speaker in 1784–85), and state Board of War, 1776–77. Agent to procure clothing and other supplies for Continental Army, 1777–82. Member, state constitutional convention, 1779–80. Delegate to Congress, 1787–88. Secretary to U.S. Senate, 1789–1814.

**PARSONS, THEOPHILUS (1750–1813) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Newbury. Graduated from Harvard College, 1769. Read law, taught school, and admitted to bar at Falmouth, Maine, in 1774. Moved to Newburyport, 1776. Member, state constitutional convention, 1779–80; state House of Representatives, 1779–80, 1787–92; and state Convention,

voted to ratify, 1788. Moved to Boston, 1800. Chief justice, state Supreme Judicial Court, 1806 until his death.

**SEDGWICK, THEODORE (1746–1813) Federalist/Federalist**

Born West Hartford, Conn. Entered Yale College in 1761 but expelled before he graduated. Received degree dated 1765 in 1772. Read law in Great Barrington, admitted to bar, 1766, and began practice in Sheffield. Author of Sheffield Resolves protesting British policy, 1776. Aide-de-camp to General John Thomas on the invasion of Canada, 1776. Member, state House of Representatives, 1780, 1782–84, 1787–89 (speaker, 1788–89), and state Senate, 1784–86. Moved to Stockbridge, 1785. Delegate to Congress, 1785–86, 1788. Active in suppressing Shays's Rebellion. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. U.S. Representative, 1789–96, 1799–1801; and U.S. Senator, 1796–99 (replaced Caleb Strong). Associate justice, state Supreme Judicial Court, 1802 until his death.

**SINGLETERY, AMOS (1721–1806) Antifederalist/?**

Born Sutton (in that part now in Millbury). Operated gristmill, 1764–77. Justice of the peace. Town moderator, 1779, 1783, 1784, 1787. Member, second and third provincial congresses, 1775, state House of Representatives, 1775–82, 1783–86, and state Senate, 1787–91. Member, state Convention, voted against ratification, 1788.

**STRONG, CALEB (1745–1819) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Northampton. Graduated from Harvard College, 1764. Admitted to bar, 1772. Member, state House of Representatives, 1776–77, 1779–80, 1797–98, state constitutional convention, 1779–80, and state Senate, 1780–81, 1782–83, 1784–89. Delegate to Constitutional Convention, 1787, left in August. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, 1788. U.S. Senator, 1789–96 (resigned). Governor, 1800–1807, 1812–16.

**SULLIVAN, JAMES (1744–1808) Federalist/Republican**

Born Berwick, Maine. Admitted to bar, 1767; began practice in Georgetown, Maine. Moved to Biddeford, Maine, 1769. Member, three provincial congresses, 1774–75, state House of Representatives, 1775–77, 1778–79, 1783–85, and state constitutional convention, 1779–80. Associate justice, state Supreme Judicial Court, 1776–82. Moved to Groton, 1778. Moved to Boston, 1782. Elected to Congress, 1783, but did not attend. Member, governor's Council, 1787–88. Possible author of Federalist "Cassius" essays, 1787. Judge of Probate for Suffolk County, 1788–90. State attorney general, 1790–1807. After five attempts (1797–98, 1804–6), elected governor, 1807, reelected following year, and died in office.

**TAYLOR, JOHN (c. 1734–1794) Antifederalist/?**

Probably born in Townshend, Mass. Physician. Selectman, Lunenburgh, 1771–74. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1772–74. Purchased Maine plantation of Sterlington (Union), 1774. Lunenburgh delegate, second and third provincial congresses, 1775. Member, state Council, representing Maine territory between the Sagadahoc (Kennebec) River and Nova Scotia, 1775–78. During Revolution moved to Pomfret, Conn., and then to Douglass, Mass., about 1780.

Imprisoned for debt, 1784. Member, state House of Representatives, 1787–88, and state Convention, 1788, voted against ratification. Died while imprisoned for debt.

**THATCHER, GEORGE (1754–1824) Federalist/Federalist**

Born Yarmouth. Graduated from Harvard College, 1776. Admitted to bar, and began practice in York, Maine. Moved to Biddeford, Maine, 1782. Delegate to Congress, 1787–89, and U.S. Representative, 1789–1801.

**THOMPSON, SAMUEL (1735–1797) Antifederalist/?**

Resided in Brunswick, Maine. Selectman, 1768–71. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1774, three provincial congresses, 1774–75, and state House of Representatives, 1775–77. Appointed lieutenant colonel of Cumberland County militia, 1774, and brigadier general, 1776. Justice of peace, 1779–97. Moved to Topsham, Maine, 1783 or 1784. Member, state House of Representatives, 1784–88, 1790–94, 1797. Member, state Convention, voted against ratification, 1788.

**TURNER, CHARLES (1732–1818) Antifederalist/?**

Born Scituate. Graduated from Harvard College, 1752 (M.A., 1755). Minister, First Congregational Parish of Duxbury, 1755–75. Member, state House of Representatives, 1780, and state Senate, 1781–89. Member, state Convention, voted to ratify, despite opposition to Constitution, 1788. Became chaplain of fort on Castle Island, 1789. Moved to Turner, Maine, 1791.

**WARREN, JAMES (1726–1808) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born Plymouth. Graduated from Harvard College, 1745. Merchant and farmer. Married Mercy Otis, 1754. Leading Revolutionary agitator. Member, colonial House of Representatives, 1766–74, three provincial congresses, 1774–75, and state House of Representatives, 1775–78, 1779–81, 1787–88 (speaker, 1775–78, 1787–88). Paymaster General, Continental Army, 1775–76. Appointed one of three major-generals of militia, 1776. Member, Continental Navy Board, Eastern Department, 1777–81. Moved to Milton, 1781. Possible author of Antifederalist essays signed “Helvidius Priscus” and “The Republican Federalist.” Defeated as lieutenant governor, 1788. Member, governor’s Council, 1792–94.

**WARREN, MERCY (1728–1814) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born Barnstable. Sister of James Otis, Jr., and Samuel A. Otis. Married James Warren, 1754. Lived in Plymouth and Milton. Wrote *The Adulateur: A Tragedy* (1773) and *The Group* (1775), satirical attacks on colonial Governor Thomas Hutchinson and other Loyalists; two tragedies, *The Ladies of Castille* and *The Sack of Rome* (both published in 1790 in *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*); the Antifederalist *Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions* (1788); under the pseudonym “A Columbian Patriot”; and the three-volume *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805).

**WIDGERY, WILLIAM (c. 1753–1822) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born England. Emigrated to Philadelphia with parents. Moved to New Gloucester, Maine. Lieutenant on privateer during Revolution. Practiced law. Member, state House of Representatives,

1787–94, 1797–98, state Convention, voted against ratification, 1788, and state Senate, 1795–96. Selectman, 1789–90, 1794–95.

**WINTHROP, JAMES (1752–1821) Antifederalist/Republican**

Born Cambridge. Graduated from Harvard College, 1769. Librarian of Harvard, 1772–87. Appointed register of probate in Cambridge, 1775, and justice of peace, 1782. Served with troops suppressing Shays's Rebellion, 1786–87. Author of Antifederalist "Agrippa" essays and other unsigned newspaper items, 1787–88. Special judge, 1789–91, and judge, Court of Common Pleas, Middlesex County, 1791–1812.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. IV: Massachusetts [1] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1997), 432–39.