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csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > The Confederation Period > Ratification of the Articles of Confederation by the States In Congress

Introduction

Ratification of the Articles of Confederation by the States

The Articles of Confederation sent to the states for their official consideration were in the form of a twenty-six page pamphlet signed by Henry Laurens, President of Congress. The pamphlet was accompanied by a letter, dated 17 November 1777, explaining the difficulties in writing the constitution, and requesting the state legislatures to authorize their delegates in Congress to be ready to ratify the Articles on 10 March 1778.

Nine states had ratified by 10 March, but some of them had also instructed their delegates to propose amendments. On that date Virginia was the only state prepared to ratify without qualification. The Maryland delegates presented their instructions and made it clear that Maryland would not ratify unless Congress were given control of western lands. The delegates from some states that had ratified had not yet received their instructions.

So few states were represented in March that Congress delayed action until 20 June, when it resolved that on 22 June the delegates would be called upon to present their instructions and powers, and that no amendments to the Articles of Confederation would be considered except those presented by a state.

Between 22 and 25 June, seven states offered amendments, but all of them were rejected by Congress. At the end of the debate on the 25th, Congress appointed a committee to draft a form of ratification to be placed at the end of the last article of the Confederation. The next day the form was approved, and the Articles were ordered engrossed on parchment. The engrossed document does not have a title, but it is endorsed: "Act of Confederation of The United States of America."

The delegates from eight of the ten states which had ratified signed the engrossed Articles on 9 July. Georgia, which had ratified on 26 February, and North Carolina, which had ratified on 25 April, were not represented on 9 July, but delegates from both states had signed by 24 July.

On 9 July Congress appointed Richard Henry Lee, Francis Dana, and Gouverneur Morris to prepare a circular letter to the three states which had not ratified. The New Jersey delegates signed on 26 November 1778 and one Delaware delegate on 22 February 1779. Maryland, the last state, refused to instruct its delegates to ratify until 2 February 1781, and they signed on 1 March 1781. Congress then declared that "the Confederation of the United States of America was completed, each and every of the Thirteen United States from New Hampshire to Georgia, both included, having adopted and confirmed and by their delegates in Congress ratified the same."

The documents in this collection are the formal acts of ratification by the states, which range all the way from legislative resolutions to formal laws, the instructions sent by the states to their

delegates in Congress, and the actions of Congress upon amendments proposed by the states. The documents are arranged in the order in which the states presented their protests, amendments, and offers to ratify to Congress, followed by the dates on which the delegates from each state signed the engrossed Articles of Confederation.

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