

Following the Revolutionary War, the new American Government was set up under the Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation did not give the federal government enough authority to be effective. So in 1787 delegates from all the states attended a meeting known as the Constitutional Convention. Among those attending were James Madison, representing Virginia, William Paterson, representing New Jersey, and Roger Sherman, representing Connecticut. These three men contributed a great deal to the Constitution that we live under today and were highly respected by the other delegates.

James Madison was born on March 16, 1751, in Port Conway, Virginia. He graduated from the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) in 1771, where he was a diligent student of history and government. In 1780 Madison became the youngest member to join the Continental Congress. He played a major role in deliberations, advocating tariffs as the means of raising revenue, and much more. Most importantly, Madison set in motion the process that would eventually lead to the Constitutional Convention of 1787. He wrote about the problems with the Articles of Confederation in hopes of opening the eyes of congress and the states. Finally he got results (Brief). The Constitutional Convention of 1787 gave Madison the opportunity for which he had so long prepared. Success, he believed, was imperative because failure would lead to a return to monarchy or to the dissolution of the United States into several different governments. Basing his theories on the historical experiences of both ancient and modern confederacies, which, he charged, had failed because of the weakness of their central authorities, Madison arrived fully prepared to become the leading advocate of a strong central government. During the Continental Convention Madison introduced The

Virginia Plan. The Virginia Plan embodied his principal proposals, including a legislature of two houses with differing terms of office and with representation favoring the large states. He wanted the national government clothed “with positive and complete authority in all cases which require uniformity.” The upper house of the legislature was to have a veto on the state legislation, and he proposed a national executive. The new government would have the power to enforce its laws. Recognizing that so radical a change required popular approval, he proposed placing the new Constitution before the citizens in ratifying conventions created especially for that purpose. Madison’s outstanding preparation, sharp mind, and flexibility in changing situations made him the undisputed leader of the Convention; he rose to address his colleagues at Philadelphia more than 150 times. He was a member of numerous committees, most importantly the Committees on Postponed Matters and Style, and he wrote the definitive notes of the Convention’s deliberations. One delegate wrote of him, “Every person seems to acknowledge his greatness. He blends together the profound politician with the scholar. In the management of every great question he evidently took the lead in the Convention, and tho’ he cannot be called an Orator, he is a most agreeable, eloquent, and convincing Speaker...The affairs of the United States, he perhaps, has the most knowledge of, of any man in the Union.”(James)

William Paterson was born on December 24, 1745, in County Antrim, Ireland. He immigrated to America soon after. He also attended the College of New Jersey where he graduated in 1763. He then studied law under Richard Stockton, a future signer of the Declaration of Independence. Even as a young man, Paterson showed a strong

interest in national affairs and citizens' rights. As early as 1763 he discussed the philosophy of patriotism in his commencement address to his Princeton graduating class, applying the values of the Enlightenment philosophers he had studied to the special concerns of colonial society. Through the years Paterson's major interest remained in law, and in 1776 he assumed the post of attorney general of New Jersey. The responsibilities of this position grew so great that he had to decline election to the Continental Congress in 1780. When independence was won he moved to New Brunswick and resumed his law practice (Paterson). Paterson applied his legal and executive skills to the service of the country during the Revolution, the Constitutional Convention, and the formative years of the new Republic. Paterson particularly concerned himself with the question of representation in the national government. He was the father of what came to be called The New Jersey Plan. He argued with considerable force that the legal jurisdiction of the convention was limited, that the delegates were assembled not to devise a pure democratic government in which each citizen was equally represented, but a federation of independent states in which each state was equally represented. Paterson also defended the concept of states' rights at the Convention, believing that it was the will of the people to protect the powers of the states from federal encroachments. He noted that "the idea of a national government as contradistinguishing from a federal one, never entered into the mind of any of them [the people], and to the public mind we must accommodate ourselves. We have no power to go beyond the federal scheme, and if we had, the people are not ripe for any other" (William). Commenting on Paterson's influence during the proceedings, Georgia delegate William Pierce noted that Paterson was "one of those men whose powers break

in upon you, and create wonder and astonishment. He is a man of great modesty whose looks bespeak talent of no great extent, but he is a Classic, and a Lawyer, and an Orator- and of a disposition so favorable to his advancement that everyone seemed to exalt him with their praises”(William).

Roger Sherman was born on April 19, 1721, in Newton, Massachusetts. He was the son of a Newton cobbler. Destined to follow his father’s trade, Sherman received little formal education. He did although love to read. He read thoroughly about theology, history, mathematics, law, and politics. His strong personality and dedication to the work ethic led him to his success. Sherman was an active and influential member of the Continental Congress. Sherman also served on several other committees, including, the Ways and Means Committee and those that dealt with Indian affairs, war and ordinance, and the Treasury Board. This tremendous activity , combined with worry about the well-being of several sons serving in the Continental Army, began to take their toll on Sherman’s health. As early as 1777 he wrote, “I must leave Congress soon...for my constitution will not admit of so close an application to business much longer.” He did not leave, however, and fellow delegate Jeremiah Wadsworth honored his effectiveness in concluding with some irony that he was “as cunning as the Devil in managing legislation.” Toward the end of the war, Sherman was the most influential figure in Congress.(The)

Sherman played an important role at the Constitutional Convention, attending almost every session and sitting on the Committee on Postponed Matters and Styles. He was the prime mover behind the Connecticut Comprromise, which was the basis of the

Great Compromise. It finally solved the problem of representation. His plan called for the creation of a senate that gave equal representation to all states and a lower house with representation based on population. Roger Sherman's public career reflected the heritage and concerns of his native New England. He attributed his rise from humble beginnings to the twin virtues of hard work and honesty, virtues that he assiduously applied to the service of the Republic. John Adams, himself a heir to the same tradition, described Sherman as "an old Puritan, as honest as an angel and as firm in the cause of American Independence as Mount Atlas." Sherman was the only Founding Father to sign the four major documents of the era: the Articles of Association(1774); The Declaration of Independence; The Articles of Confederation; and the Constitution.(Sherman)