

Constitution Day

Observed Every September 17th

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

“Constitution Day (or Citizenship Day) is an American federal observance that recognizes the ratification of the United States Constitution and those who have become U.S. citizens. It is observed on September 17, the day the U.S. Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution in 1787.

The law establishing the holiday was created in 2004 with the passage of an amendment by Senator Robert Byrd to the Omnibus spending bill of 2004. Before this law was enacted, the holiday was known as "Citizenship Day". In addition to renaming the holiday "Constitution Day and Citizenship Day," the act mandates that all publicly funded educational institutions provide educational programming on the history of the American Constitution on that day. In May 2005, the United States Department of Education announced the enactment of this law and that it would apply to any school receiving federal funds of any kind.”

On September 17, 1787, forty-two of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention held their final meeting. Only one item of business occupied the agenda that day, to sign the Constitution of the United States of America.

Since May 25, 1787, the 55 delegates had gathered almost daily in the State House (Independence Hall) in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. By the middle of June, it became apparent to the delegates that to merely amend the Articles of Confederation would not be sufficient. Instead, they would write an entirely new document designed to clearly define and separate the powers of the central government, the powers of the states, the rights of the people and how the representatives of the people should be elected.

After being signed in September of 1787, Congress sent printed copies of the Constitution to the state legislatures for ratification. In the months that followed, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay would write the Federalist Papers in support, while Patrick Henry, Elbridge Gerry, and George Mason would organize the opposition to the new Constitution. By June 21, 1788, nine states had approved the Constitution, finally forming "a more perfect Union." No matter how much we argue about the details of its meaning today, in the opinion of many, the Constitution signed in Philadelphia on September 17, 1787 represents the greatest expression of statesmanship and compromise ever written. In just four hand-written pages, the Constitution gives us no less than the owners' manual to the greatest form of government the world has ever known.

CONSTITUTION FAST FACTS

- The U.S. Constitution was written in the same Pennsylvania State House where the Declaration of Independence was signed and where George Washington received his commission as Commander of the Continental Army. Now called Independence Hall, the building still stands today on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, directly across from the National Constitution Center.
- Written in 1787, the Constitution was signed on September 17th. But it wasn't until 1788 that it was ratified by the necessary nine states.
- The U.S. Constitution was prepared in secret, behind locked doors that were guarded by sentries.
- Some of the original framers and many delegates in the state ratifying conventions were very troubled that the original Constitution lacked a description of individual rights. In 1791, Americans added a list of rights to the Constitution. The first ten amendments became known as The Bill of Rights.
- Of the 55 delegates attending the Constitutional Convention, 39 signed and 3 delegates dissented. Two of America's "founding fathers" didn't sign the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson was representing his country in France and John Adams was doing the same in Great Britain.
- Established on November 26, 1789, the first national "Thanksgiving Day" was originally created by George Washington as a way of "giving thanks" for the Constitution.
- Of the written national constitutions, the U.S. Constitution is the oldest and shortest.
- At 81, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania was the oldest delegate at the Constitutional Convention and at 26, Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey was the youngest.
- The original Constitution is on display at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, it was moved to Fort Knox for safekeeping.
- More than 11,000 amendments have been introduced in Congress. Thirty-three have gone to the states to be ratified, and twenty-seven have received the necessary approval from the states to actually become amendments to the Constitution.

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