

THE BATTLE AFTER THE WAR:
HOW THE MEN OF VIRGINIA AND MASSACHUSETTS WENT FROM ALLIES TO
POLITICAL ADVERSARIES WHILE FORGING A NEW REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT:

Before the American Revolution, Massachusetts and Virginia unified following the Coercive Acts of 1774. Four men, Patrick Henry, George Mason, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock forged political alliances and friendships with one another as independence was declared and the United States became free of Great Britain. In the years following the Revolution, the Articles of Confederation failed, and the Union was threatened without a strong centralized government. Following the Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia and the creation of the U.S. Constitution, these four men went from political allies and friends to foes. **As the Constitution made its way to Virginia and Massachusetts to be ratified, Adams and Hancock voted in favor after their**

reluctance to accept it. Meanwhile in Virginia, Henry and Mason remained proponents of the Constitution and fought to prevent ratification. Through the course of the ratification conventions, each man saw the republic differently than the other resulting in them going from allies to foes

Keywords:

George Mason, Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Articles of Confederation, U.S. Constitution, Ratification, Massachusetts, Virginia, Revolutionary, Liberty, Dissent, State Conventions, Founding Father, Republic, Old Revolutionary

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When the war for American independence with Britain ended, the newly formed United States entered into years of turbulent peace time, often looking to Virginia and Massachusetts for political leadership. From the eve of the Revolution through the start of the constitutional conventions of 1787 and 1788, men in Virginia and Massachusetts had aligned themselves as a combined force that other states looked to for guidance and support. Their leaders formed a political alliance following the Coercive Acts of 1774 through the leadership of four individuals: George Mason and Patrick Henry of Virginia, and Samuel Adams and John Hancock of Massachusetts. These four men were influential in the roles they played by bringing their respective states together and guiding them through the hardest of times as war raged on. Each contributed to writing the first pieces of legislation and laws in their new states and helped lay the groundwork for the creation of the federal republic. George Mason was revered as one of the wisest and most articulate men of his time and respected for his contributions to both the Virginia Declaration of Rights as well as the Virginia Constitution. Patrick Henry was one of the greatest orators and served as the first and sixth post-colonial Governor of Virginia. In Massachusetts, Samuel Adams was the long-respected voice of Boston and ardent champion of the people's liberties. Then there was John Hancock, the former President of the Continental Congress and sometime-Governor of Massachusetts. While these men rallied around one another during the Revolution, they began to shift ideologies as the United States entered into peacetime. Their emerging political divisions threatened all they had worked for once these men no longer looked to collective action but instead pursued separate ambitions – and these grew far greater than they once had been. These leaders began to shift their allegiances elsewhere as the Articles of Confederation's flaws grew visible, and it became evident that they needed to be amended.

A response to the Articles came with the Annapolis Convention in September 1786; however, Mason, Henry, Adams, and Hancock were not in attendance. As a result of this failed convention, a second convention was called in May 1787 to have adequate representation – during this time, only George Mason chose to attend the Convention in Philadelphia. What transpired in Philadelphia resulted in the creation of the United States Constitution – this ultimately severed the former bond these four men shared as they each saw the Constitution differently. **When the Constitution made it to the Massachusetts Ratification Convention in January 1788, Adams initially opposed it as he feared the proposed centralized government held too much power. After weeks of debate, Adams and Hancock were persuaded to vote in favor of ratification, with the promise of a bill of rights being adopted into it. However, in Virginia, Henry and Mason stood in strong opposition against voting to ratify the Constitution. They shared the same concerns that threatened the liberties of the people through an aristocratic government and no bill of rights to ensure the liberties of the people would be protected.** These four men saw America through the darkest times and helped to create the foundations for a new republic; however, the friendships and ideologies they once shared were not enough to hold them together as they each saw the Constitution from separate perspectives. Mason, Henry, Hancock, and Adams came together in 1774 to unify their respective colonies and by 1788, their friendships dissipated following the Constitution. Passion drove these men and they each believed that their stances during their respective conventions was in the best interest of the people.

Amending the Articles of Confederation

During and after the War for Independence, the United States was under the governance of the Continental Congress which adhered to the Articles of Confederation. When these Articles were written in 1777, and finally ratified in 1781, they were to hold the Union together after declaring independence from Britain. However, when the war ended, the Articles became outdated and left Congress with insufficient power to govern the states. With such limited powers, Congress was restricted as to how they could regulate interstate and foreign commerce, without the powers to directly tax the people, and lacking authority to create a national currency.¹ Currency became a problem especially within the states as the production of paper money was being manufactured in abundant amounts which created issues like inflation and unchecked spending. Due to a limited amount of silver and gold reserve, paper money had nothing to back its value through mass production. As a result of Congress not having the power to adequately tax and essentially no value to back the paper money, the national debt increased in the United States. Without having any real powers to delegate, the Articles were seen as a failure as the Union was unable to survive without a centralized government. When the Annapolis Convention convened in September 1786, the representatives from each of the thirteen states would be able to unanimously amend the Articles. Though only eight states accepted their invitations to meet in Annapolis, only five states arrived that consisting of twelve delegates in total. Of these twelve, three of the most prominent men in attendance were James Madison of Virginia, Alexander Hamilton of New

¹ John R. Vile, *The Writing and Ratification of the U.S. Constitution: Practical Virtue in Action* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2012), 9.

York, and John Dickinson of Delaware.² They came together to discuss the failures of the Articles, particularly the issues of interstate commerce and commercial navigation in the Chesapeake Bay and on the Potomac River.

They also planned to discuss the creation of a more effective government – one that would be able to tax the people accordingly, enforce laws, and prevent the states from creating their own currencies. Despite the convention in Annapolis fixing the faults in the articles, the delegates that arrived from New Jersey proposed a second convention that would convene in Philadelphia the following May. Representation from all thirteen states almost guaranteed that the Articles would be amended through the creation of a stronger centralized government.³ Planning a convention so far in advance; it would allow for representatives to be elected to attend Philadelphia and give them ample time to prepare for travel accommodations. On November 6, 1786, James Madison⁴ proposed a bill that would elect men from the Commonwealth of Virginia to gather in Philadelphia that following May. Appointees would be selected by Legislatures to meet at the convention, these elected few would “meet their fellow brethren of the other states in establishing a federal Government.”⁵ Based on his contributions to drafting the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Virginia Constitution, George Mason was elected to attend the Philadelphia convention. Along with Mason, Patrick Henry was also sought after as a delegate to attend alongside his friend to

² Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 33.

³ Rakove, *Original Meanings*, 33.

⁴ James Madison of Virginia became one of the most influential leaders at the Philadelphia Convention in 1787. Madison was also a protégé of Thomas Jefferson, both Madison and Jefferson would regularly communicate through letters while Jefferson was in London and Paris. Madison also had a fractured relationship with Patrick Henry and later George Mason in the months leading up to the Virginia Ratification Convention.

⁵ *The Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, J.C.A. Stagg, editor. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2010.

amend the Articles. However, Henry declined to attend based on his distrust of the intentions to amend the Articles. In Massachusetts, former President of the Continental Congress and sometime-Governor John Hancock's presence was requested – though he declined due to ongoing health issues. Unlike Hancock, Samuel Adams was not asked to join his fellow Bostonians in Philadelphia and remained behind to await news of the changes in the Articles. Perhaps this was prudent as Adams too had his doubts about the intentions of the men going to Philadelphia and what might result from their meeting. Ultimately, what took place during the summer months of 1787 impacted the lives of Henry, Mason, Hancock, and Adams as they no longer collectively shared the same beliefs and shifted their thoughts to advance themselves.

Convention of 1787: The Drafting of the Constitution

When the convention convened in Philadelphia in 1787, men from each of the thirteen states arrived with the sole intention of amending the Articles of Confederation. What transpired throughout that summer was the drafting of a new constitution that would create a more centralized government capable of holding together the Union. Being that George Mason accepted his seat at the convention, he played a prominent role in the drafting of the Constitution.

On the morning of May 29th, the Virginia Plan was introduced at the convention by Edmund Randolph.⁶ As stated at the beginning of the Plan, “the Articles of Confederation out to be ... corrected and enlarged.”⁷ Rather than amending the Articles, the delegates learned that the Virginia Plan had been written to completely dissolve the Articles and to create a centralized government. Mason initially supported the Virginia Plan and that “with a proper degree of coolness, Liberality, and Candor,” a central government could be established and would reserve “to the state legislatures a sufficient portion of power for promoting and securing the prosperity and happiness of their respective citizens.”⁸ Though Mason supported the Plan and the creation of a more unified government, he remained cautious of how strong a new government would become. As the summer months moved

⁶ Edmund Randolph was from Virginia and served a long life in politics. Randolph was the seventh Governor of Virginia, he was an aide-de-camp for George Washington and was famously known for his role at the Convention of 1787. Though the Virginia Plan was written by James Madison, it was presented by Randolph being that he was the Governor of Virginia at the time, and since Virginia was considered one of the most populous and powerful states it was only right, he delivered the plan. Richard Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, (New York: Random House, 2009), 86.

⁷ Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, 88.

⁸ Jeff Broadwater, *George Mason, Forgotten Founder*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 160

along, the rifts between the men were more evident and there was a clear division among them.

Up until the final two weeks of the Convention, Mason had agreed with the Constitution, his contributions helped to make it resemble the Virginia Constitution he drafted in 1776. However, he saw the Constitution stood as a threat to both the liberties of the people and the republic.⁹ Of the many concerns Mason had, he saw direct fault in the establishment of the Senate. Mason felt that the Senate should have no part in electing a president, “[c]onsidering the powers of the President & those of the Senate, if a coalition should be established between these two branches, they will be able to subvert the Constitution.”¹⁰ Mason argued that the only time the Senate should be involved in the election of a president was if there was a tie in the electoral college and they would have to break it. Mason was suspicious of the Senate because he feared that they would be given too much power in picking a president that would align with their ideas. According to Mason, “It has been wittily observed, that the constitution has married the president and the senate – has made them man and wife,” and that he believed “the consequence that generally results from marriage will happen here. They will be continually supporting and aiding each other. They will always consider their interests as united.”¹¹ Not only did he have distrust for the Senate, but he also feared that too much power vested in the presidency would prove to be dangerous as well. Mason was concerned that if given too much unchecked power to command in person without any restraint, he make bad use out of it. He also conceived that a president

⁹ Though Mason had many grievances about the Constitution and spoke out against them in Philadelphia, he addressed them more at the Virginia Convention in June 1788.

¹⁰ George Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, ed. Robert A. Rutland, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970. 978.

¹¹ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 1095-96.

“ought not to have the power of pardoning, because he may frequently pardon crimes which he advised by himself.”¹² For Mason, he believed that unchecked and unlimited power given to the president and the Senate would corrupt them both, and therefore preventative measures needed to be put into place. He wanted to select a privy council made up of six representatives, two from the northern states, two from the middle states, and the final two comprised from the southern quarters of the Union.¹³ The council would help prevent the President and Senate from making decisions that would negatively impact the people they were elected to serve, it would also balance out the Executive Branch. However, the proposal of a Council did not pass, and? Mason declared, “that in rejecting a Council to the President we were about to try an experiment on which the most despotic Governments had never ventured.”¹⁴ His idea to create this Council would have served as a way to keep a bad President in check and be a relief to a good one. Mason also saw that as time moved forward, the Convention strayed farther away from modeling the United States after Virginia, an idea that Mason was not ready to let go of. He saw dangerous loopholes in the Constitution everywhere where delegates had cobbled up compromises to meet the requirements of various regions in the nation.¹⁵ Mason felt that men had compromised their integrity to conform with the Constitution so they could further advance their political careers. He saw “that Aristocracy which was probably in the contemplation of some among us,” given “the present state of American morals and manners,”¹⁶ Mason grew so distraught over the almost-

¹² Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 1097.

¹³ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 978.

¹⁴ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 979.

¹⁵ Brent Tarter, “George Mason and the Conservation of Liberty.” *The Virginia Magazine and Biography*, 99, no. 3 (1991): 292.

¹⁶ Broadwater, *George Mason*, 188-89.

finalized Constitution that he reportedly declared he “would sooner chop off his right hand than put it to the constitution as it now stands.”¹⁷ Ever so dramatic and full of fire, Mason stood true to his word and refused to move forward with signing the Constitution, especially without those in attendance at the Convention adding a bill of rights to it. Mason chose to leave Philadelphia as a dissenter and return to Virginia where he could gain allies for his cause. The Constitution faced an uphill battle as it was prepared to make its way to the Virginia and Massachusetts Conventions in 1788. [curious: where did he derive the idea of a Council? Was it based on the Governor’s Council/Privy Council?]

Massachusetts Takes the Floor

When Congress agreed to send the Constitution back to the states to vote for or against it in September 1787, the discussions on who to send to discuss and vote on the Constitution began. In Massachusetts, a name that came to mind was none other than Samuel Adams – even though he had not attended either the Annapolis or Philadelphia conventions. As he was widely known for being outspoken and critical of what he disagreed with, it was important for the Federalists, as supporters of the Constitution soon came to be called, to know where Adams stood when it came to the Constitution. During the years of the

¹⁷ James Madison, *The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*. ed. Gaillard Hunt and James Brown Scott. (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 500.

Revolution, Adams was a rabble-rouser and a favorite among the people; however, after the war ended, his presence in the political arena had grown cold along with his reputation. Adams faced a recent fall from political grace that can be attributed to a rift in friendship with John Hancock – for years, they were never far from one another however; and as Hancock’s popularity grew, Sam’s decreased. This decrease of clout among the people resulted in Adams not being consulted at either convention prior to the Massachusetts Convention. Not only did Adams have to accept that his political ideologies were no longer respected or in demand, but he also had to face character attacks by the men he once saw as political friends. As he would see during the convention, Christopher Gore saw Adams as an opposition to the Constitution and questioned the role of Adams at the convention. Along with Gore, the nephew of Samuel Adams’ closest friend before the Revolution started, James Otis’¹⁸ nephew, Harris Gray Otis accused Adams of being a “rigid republican” and a “baleful comet” as well as a “son of sedition.”¹⁹ It was easy for Otis to attack Adams as he was viewed as an ‘Old Revolutionary’ who never moved past his glory days – his time as a championed friend of the people had dissipated as his opinions became irrelevant. Adams never allowed the personal attacks made against him to deter his ideals and quest to ensure liberties remained. For years, Adams’ reputation was called into question under the rule of Great Britain, and he would not allow the men of Boston to change his outlook. It was

¹⁸ James Otis was an ‘Old Revolutionary’ and friend of Sam Adams. Otis was known for being an advocate of liberty and has been attributed as being one of the leaders of Boston to push toward independence against Great Britain. According to John Adams, Otis along with Samuel Adams and John Hancock were the leaders of the American Revolution and without them, a break from England may not have happened. John Adams, “James Otis, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock, *Tributes to These as Three Principal Movers and Agents of the American Revolution*.” Internet Archive, 1907, <https://archive.org/details/jamesotissamuella00adam/page/9/mode/1up>.

¹⁹ John C. Miller, *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 366.

important for Adams to keep Boston as pure as he could, he did not want to usher in the sinful manners that Harris Gray Otis seemed to have wanted. As much as he knew times were changing, he tried his best to maintain an ‘Old Puritan’ feel to Boston like in the days of John Winthrop.²⁰ He wanted to keep as much corruption and sinful behaviors away so that Boston would not be lost.²¹ This way of thinking was detrimental to the legacy of Samuel Adams as it showed him as a man unwilling to accept change and conform to new ways of thinking. This was especially true when it came time to elect the first Governor of Massachusetts – a position that Adams believed he would be picked for. However, to his dismay, Adams lost [wording unclear] to John Hancock. As he continued to ‘live’ in the past, it further hurt his reputation and displaced him from the political arena he longed to be a part of.

As much as Adams wanted to remain in a 1776 world, his outlook on rebellions changed drastically as Shays’s Rebellion broke out in Western Massachusetts. His view on the rebellion was one of discontent as he believed that Daniel Shays should be punished for the uprisings he created throughout Massachusetts. This was not the ‘Old Revolutionary’ that Adams once was, he was a man who was notorious for hosting public effigies in the streets of the men he opposed as being dangerous to liberty. As the people of Massachusetts grew distressed by Shays Rebellion, the way Adams approached it looked hypocritical to question the revolt being that he was a man notorious for rebelling against authority and engaging in similar acts of rebellion. It also called into question how much Adams had changed, here was

²⁰ Winthrop was the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

²¹ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 362.

a man who wanted Boston to remain the same as it was in 1775, but he called for the hanging of Daniel Shays.

As much as Adams wanted to end rebellions, he viewed altering the Articles of Confederation as a bad idea. When the Articles were drafted in 1777, Adams contributed greatly to drafting the document, so in his mind, there was nothing written within that needed to be amended to give the government more power. Adams warned that if the Articles were to be amended or altered in any way, it would “endanger the hard-won liberties of the Revolution through the artifices of the many.”²² What he meant was that the men who looked to change the Articles would do so for their political favor and gain, and as a result, it would usher in a new wave of tyranny. If there were to be any changes made to the part, he would agree with the control that Congress would have over trade.²³ In 1783, Great Britain had violated an agreement in place that allowed for the United States to conduct trade, Britain instead violated the American’s abilities to trade without restrictions. If Congress had more power, it would be able to enforce how trade was conducted in America. What Adams did not consider was how this control given to Congress would negatively impact the Southern states and their exportation of trade.²⁴ In the eyes of Adams, anything outside of this recommendation was seen as “petit politicians” who wished to decrease the powers of the states and make Congress at Philadelphia an overweening sovereign.”²⁵ It was the personal motivation of those in attendance in Philadelphia that wanted to alter the Articles – however, this was an effort Addams disagreed with. To him, when it came to the discussions of state

²² Miller, *Sam Adams*, 374.

²³ Miller, *Sam Adams* 374.

²⁴ The authority of Congress to oversee the control of trade was a concern of George Mason’s he believed that Northern representation would control trade and it would negatively impact the men in the South.

²⁵ Miller, *Sam Adams* 375.

sovereignty in the Articles it was balanced – or so Adams thought. He saw that the Articles had given the right amount of ‘control’ to Congress when it came to governing the states. This power vested within them prevented the government from infringing on the rights of both the individual states and the people within. In the mind of Adams, the “best government was one that played the least part in men’s daily affairs.” Adams would soon take the position as a proponent of the Constitution based on his beliefs that a strong government would usher in tyranny. This frightened Adams and other old revolutionaries like him.

Adams remained tightlipped on his opinions. this was unlike him. however, due to his exclusion from both Annapolis and Philadelphia, he hoped to be considered for the Massachusetts Ratifying Convention. Letters had been written to Adams from his friends, including fellow Bostonian Elbridge Gerry and Richard Henry Lee²⁶ discussing their concerns regarding the Constitution. Adams was hesitant to respond to these letters. Because the newspapers became a battleground for Federalists versus anti-Federalists, it was in the best interest of to remain quiet for the time being. All while remaining idle, Christopher Gore and Rufus King of Massachusetts²⁷ faithfully checked the local newspapers for what they called signs of “that pen dipped in venom.”²⁸ The last thing anyone on the Federalist side wanted was for Adams to turn to write in the newspaper and convince men to vote against

²⁶ Elbridge Gerry served as a Massachusetts delegate in Philadelphia, however, due to his decision to dissent, Gerry refused to sign his name to the Constitution. Gerry followed in the footsteps of Virginians George Mason and Edmund Randolph in being opposed to the Constitution. Richard Henry Lee was a long-time friend and confidant of Adams. They were both parts of the Committees of Correspondence and helped to inform one another of the events that were taking place in both Virginia and Massachusetts. Lee was invited to attend both the Annapolis and Philadelphia Conventions, however, he declined both. Lee also sat on the Congress of Confederation and was against the Constitution believing it gave too much power to the central government. When the Virginia Ratification Convention convened in June 1788, Lee once again refused to attend the convention, rather he focused on writing in the papers under the pseudonym ‘Federal Farmer.’

²⁷ Gore and King didn’t trust Samuel Adams and looked at him as a threat to the foundations of the republic. King plays a pivotal role later in the Massachusetts Convention when it came to allying with John Hancock.

²⁸ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 377.

ratification. After Adams secured his seat at the Massachusetts Convention, a banquet was held for the Boston delegates, it was at this time that Adams spoke publicly for the first time about the Constitution. He was “open & decided” against it, he argued that “such a Govt. could not pervade the United States” and a “large number of amendments must be made before liberty was properly safeguarded.”²⁹ Adams looked at the Constitution as a document he could not support at that moment, and major changes needed to be made before he supported it. Selecting Adams to join the Massachusetts Convention was important to the Federalist cause due to them being able to not only watch Adams closely and monitor what little political influence remained with him. It would also allow them the opportunity to find a way to potentially flip Adams to their side without making him an enemy.

Conversations outside of the State House began to take place in secret at the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston. Three hundred and eighty of Boston’s tradesmen had gathered there to discuss putting forward five resolutions that ultimately supported the Constitution. These resolutions were aimed at Samuel Adams and John Hancock and stated that only Boston delegates who “exert their utmost ability to promote the adoption of the proposed frame of government in all its parts or alterations, will truly represent the feelings, wishes, and desires of their constituents.”³⁰ If the people desired to have the Constitution as their new government it was the duty of these men to push it forward – for it was the desires of the people that mattered most. Adams, when presented with the resolutions considered them and became more open to listening to arguments on both sides of ratification. The reasons for Adams’s change of heart towards the debate were unclear. It most likely had to do with the

²⁹ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 377-78.

³⁰ Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution 1787-1788*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2010), 164.

death of his only son and the emotional toll it took on him. Following the death of his son, both the mood and conversation of Adams has been recorded as him becoming, “withdrawn” and “silent” to the death of his son.³¹ Whether it was the death of his son or the meeting at the Green Dragon, the doubts put forward by the Federalists began to take hold of Adams as he was tampered with.³² It could have been the promise by the Federalists that they would adopt amendments to the Constitution in the future or they played on the emotional state of Adams, either way, he left the Green Dragon to return to the State House as a changed man.³³ Throughout the conference Adams was no longer the man he was when he first got elected, he went into the Convention with doubts about a strong centralized government and by the end, he opened up to listening to both sides of the argument. This was not the same Samuel Adams who took to the Philadelphia floors during the Revolution, he started to change. He felt great pressure mounting from both the Federalists and anti-Federalists by the time a vote was called to take place.

On January 31, Adams accepted the Constitution, he saw that the artisans and mechanics of Boston were all in favor of ratification, and if the people accepted it who was Adams to stand in the way of their liberties. He agreed to ratify in large part because he believed that the proposed amendments would help to remove any doubts some had about the Constitution, his included. Between February 1-2, he went through each amendment carefully to show how they protected the rights of the people. Though some changes were

³¹ John K. Alexander, *Samuel Adams: The Life of an American Revolutionary*, (Lanham, Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2011), 284.

³² Miller, *Sam Adams*, 381.

³³ As the Federalists were meeting with Adams, they were simultaneously meeting with Hancock at his home hoping to persuade him to vote for the Constitution.

made, Adams put himself behind the Constitution in the hopes that those who looked at him for leadership would do the same thing.³⁴

However, to his dismay, his decision to vote in favor of the Constitution caused turmoil with some of his old friends as they viewed Adams as a ‘turncoat’ – a man who turned his back on his old revolutionary ways. Due to Adams either destroying his correspondence or them being lost over time, evidence for how he felt in 1788 no longer exists, therefore it has made it impossible know what exactly changed his mind to vote in favor of ratification. He stood true to his principles and pushed for the adoption of amendments that clearly defined the rights of the people, but by the time the Convention ended, his reasons for voting in favor showed a real change in Adams. What cause this change during the Massachusetts Convention is unknown, he went into the convention as an opponent yet by the time they voted, he agreed to do so. Whether it was as result of his spirit being broken due to his son’s death or he truly believed that the amendment he wanted would be adopted, Adams changed. The man who was known for being loud and abrasive was not the man in attendance at the State House in Boston, Adams sided with the Federalists and went against the Antifederalists.

Despite his vote in the end, and how he was perceived by his friends, he declared to Richard Henry Lee³⁵ in August 1789 that he was an “Anti-Federalist.”³⁶ After the Constitution had been ratified, and the dust had cleared among the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, Samuel Adams wrote to his friend Richard Henry Lee declaring his stance as an “Anti-Federalist.”

³⁴ Maier, *Ratification*, 198.

³⁵ Lee was disappointed in Adams and how he had caved into the Federalists at the Massachusetts Convention. John L. Wakelyn, *Birth of the Bill of Rights: Encyclopedia of the AntiFederalists*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 5.

³⁶ Wakelyn, *Birth of the Bill of Rights*, 5.

Adams stood in opposition of the aristocracy that the Constitution initially represented, and that despite his voting for it, he would continue to “keep the seeds of Aristocracy from tainting the Constitution.”³⁷ Adams wanted his friend to know that his decision to vote in favor of the Constitution never changed who he was, and that though he disagreed with several aspects of the document itself, he saw in the end that it would be in the best interest of the United States at that time to vote ‘yes.’ Despite his decision to vote in favor of ratification, he believed himself to be an Anti-Federalist at heart who was against an oppressive government and tyranny.³⁸ Adams tried to maintain who he once was but found it inevitable as times had changed, he no longer lived in the world of the ‘Old Revolutionaries.’

John Hancock’s Personal Victory

John Hancock’s reputation never faded after the Revolution like that of Samuel Adams. The popularity of Hancock only increased as he was well-liked, respected, and trusted by the people of Boston. Hancock found himself serving as Governor of Massachusetts from time to time, and when he stepped away from the political office, he continued to remain active in the political arena. It was no secret that Hancock suffered from health ailments, one of his major issues resulted from painful flare-ups of gout. Though Hancock was unable to attend either the Annapolis and Philadelphia Conventions due to his health, he was still asked to attend the Massachusetts Ratification Convention in January 1788. Because he was

³⁷ Alexander, *Samuel Adams*, 278.

³⁸ Along with Adams telling Lee about who he believed himself to be, he also told Lee, “I earnestly wish some Amendments may be judiciously, and deliberately made without partial or local considerations,” Samuel Adams, *Writings of Samuel Adams IV: 1778-1802*, ed. Harry Alonzo Cushing, (New York: Octagon Books, Inc, 1968), 334. At the time that Samuel Adams wrote to Richard Henry Lee, it was well over a year and a half since the Massachusetts Convention and the amendments that Adams suggested were never incorporated.

bedridden, however, Hancock's first public appearance at the convention was on January 30, twenty-two days after it began.³⁹ Despite his not being present throughout the convention, his opinion was still held in high regard as it was believed he could make or break the chances of ratifying the Constitution. Even though he was not present at a great part of the convention, he was fortunate to remain caught up on what was taking place between the Federalists and antiFederalists. Though he faced pain from gout, Hancock's decision not to attend the Convention was done so as part of a strategic plan he had to remain "neutral." Hancock was known for his vanity and being a man of pride – he was believed to be a man of opportunity and one to care more for his reputation than that of the peoples.⁴⁰ It happened to look coincidental that during the same time as the Massachusetts Convention, Hancock happened to have a painful gout flareup which prevented him from attending the convention outside of a handful of times.

When the Constitution arrived in Boston, the people along with Hancock were anxious to read it. On October 18, 1787, Hancock handed the Constitution to a joint session in the Massachusetts legislature, and it was decided six days later that a convention would be called to meet on January 9, 1788, at the State House to debate whether or not to ratify.⁴¹ Not long after the convention was decided upon, the newspapers began publishing letters from those who supported the Constitution and those who did not. As the newspapers were flooded with grievances, Hancock's personal opinion of the Constitution was never known and remained a secret throughout the convention. His decision to not speak up just yet

³⁹ Michael J. Faber, "The Federal Union Paradigm of 1788: Three Anti-Federalists Who Changed Their Minds." *American Political Thought*, 4, no.4, (2015): 538.

⁴⁰ This was particularly expressed by people like Mercy Otis Warren who was vocal in her disapproval of Hancock.

⁴¹ Maier, *Ratification*, 155.

worried those who supported ratification. The only comment Hancock made on the Constitution was that “it was not within the duties of his office to decide upon this momentous affair.”⁴² At the time he presented the Constitution he believed that it was not his place to comment on such an important issue when he knew nothing much about it.

His decision to remain quiet on the issues at hand made the Federalists uncomfortable, especially since they knew how much influence Hancock had over the people in Massachusetts. The Federalists, Christopher Gore, and Rufus King, in particular, knew that Hancock had no real hostility towards the Constitution. Rather he was skeptical and that made them feel uneasy.⁴³ Because no one knew Hancock’s true feelings regarding the upcoming Convention, the Federalists decided they had to find a way to ensure that Hancock would fall in line with their ideals and principles and not his own.⁴⁴ Hancock was a people pleaser and because he had both the trust and loyalty of the people, the Federalists would use this in their favor. Hancock was selected to serve as the President of the Massachusetts Convention— this decision was made not only so they could watch Hancock closely, but they knew how important being in ‘control’ was to Hancock. His motivation to rise to the top politically was no secret to the Federalists, or the people. Hancock’s desire to be a leader and fulfill his legacy would motivate him to pick the ‘winning’ side.⁴⁵ After Hancock was placed in the position of President of the Massachusetts Convention, his attendance record was non-

⁴² Maier, *Ratification*, 159.

⁴³ Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, 386.

⁴⁴ There was still doubt in the minds of the Federalists that despite the rift in friendship between Hancock and Samuel Adams that there would be enough of a pull from Adams that he would be able to convince Hancock to agree with him. The threat of reunification between Hancock and Adams threatened the Federalists and they couldn’t have Adams swaying Hancock.

⁴⁵ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 380.

existent as he remained home throughout much of the convention. It can be argued that the time Hancock spent at home was more for his reasons rather than caused by his gout.

Hancock's absence could be seen as a political ploy created by him to gain not only attention but for him to have such great influence over the convention without even being there. It was recalled that Hancock remained home to monitor "which party in the Convention would triumph."⁴⁶ Just like during the Revolution, Hancock was a man of vanity and cared a great deal about building his legacy, and because of this, he did not want to be remembered in history for being on the losing side. In return of Hancock's aligning himself with the Federalists, he cut a hard deal that demanded James Bowdoin and his supporters to back Hancock's next gubernatorial election.⁴⁷ Hancock wanted to be given something in return for his support and backing of the Constitution, and at the time this was the support of his fellow Massachusetts delegates in the gubernatorial election. When Hancock requested this, he was unaware of the plans Rufus King had by "promising" Hancock the role of first President of the United States if Virginia failed to vote in favor of ratification. Hancock, though he considered himself a "man of the people" was first and foremost a man for himself. For as long as he remained at home in his sick room watching how the "wind was blowing" regarding his health, he could return to the Convention declaring victory for the winning side. In Hancock's mind, there was "nothing more fatal than not to be on the winning side."⁴⁸ During his time away from the Convention, Hancock found himself falling more in line with anti-Federalist ideas. but he knew Massachusetts had a strong Federalist

⁴⁶ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 380.

⁴⁷ Maier, *Ratification*, 194-95.

⁴⁸ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 380.

strong-hold and the last thing Hancock wanted to do was go along with the losing side. Regardless of Hancock taking to his sick chamber for a great deal of the Convention, Federalists like Rufus King made it a point to regularly ‘check in’ on Hancock, as well as keep him up to date with daily conversations. Federalists knew how important Hancock’s reputation was to him and therefore they were shrewdly gauging his weaknesses.⁴⁹ By going to Hancock’s home, they were able to have private conversations that were not recorded and documented in notes. During their time together, King was able to entice Hancock into the ways he could benefit if he voted in favor of the Constitution. If Hancock was able to persuade the anti-Federalists, Sam Adams included, the Federalists would support Hancock as becoming the President of the United States.⁵⁰ The backhanded deal that was made in the sick chamber of Hancock represented a side of him that people like Mercy Otis Warren warned the people of Boston about.⁵¹ Hancock was presented with the opportunity of becoming the first President and he did not want to lose his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of achieving this position. Hancock remained concerned about his legacy and it showed in his decision to align himself with the Federalists for his personal gain. Ultimately what Hancock

⁴⁹ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 381.

⁵⁰ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 381.

⁵¹ Mercy Otis Warren was the sister of late the James Otis and the wife of Joseph Warren. Mercy was known for being outspoken during the Revolution, and for her distrust of the Constitution. Years earlier, Mercy wrote to Sam Adams about Hancock’s behaviors, “we have seen a man without abilities idolized by the multitude and fame on the wing to crown the head of imbecility,” she continued, “we have seen people trifling with the privilege of *election*,” and “throwing away the glorious opportunity of establishing liberty and independence on the establishing basis of virtue,” she finished her attack on Hancock with, “we have heard them trumpet the praises of their idol of straw, and sing of sacrifices he never had the courage to make.” Gregory Nobles, “‘Yet the Old Republicans Still Persevere:’ Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and the Crisis of Popular Leadership in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1775-1790” in eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Arnold, *The Transforming Hand of Revolution: Reconsidering the American Revolution as a Social Movement* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 268.

chose was the aristocratic political ideologies that worried men like Samuel Adams but putting his needs and wants over the liberties of the people.

After weeks of being absent from the Massachusetts Convention, John Hancock finally made an appearance. On the morning of January 30, he was carried into the Convention wrapped in a flannel blanket.⁵² The dramatic entrance made by Hancock helped garner sympathy for him as he appeared to both Federalists and AntiFederalists as a man so sick who left his chambers to push the Constitution to ratification because it served his people. Not only did Hancock want to win over the people by virtue signaling, but also because he wanted his name to be attributed to the Constitution being ratified. When he finally got situated at the head of the Convention he made his first speech to the delegates, “All the arguments against as well as for the Constitution have been debated upon with so much learning and ability, that the subject is quite exhausted.”⁵³ There was no more discussing what needed to be changed or left alone, the time had come to an end, and it was now time to put the Constitution to a vote. In one final attempt to get everyone to vote in favor of ratification, Hancock proposed nine amendments to be added later to the Constitution.⁵⁴ These additional nine amendments would indeed be incorporated into the Bill of Rights, and these helped gain additional votes to ratify. That afternoon on February 6, the voting was complete, one hundred and eighty-seven voted in favor while one hundred and sixty-eight voted no – the Constitution was passed in Massachusetts. John Hancock did not change who he was following the Revolution, he continued to be a crowd pleaser conformed to the Federation period. He allowed his mind to be made up by political promises – even

⁵² Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*.

⁵³ Maier, *Ratification*, 206.

⁵⁴ Maier, *Ratification*, 200.

ones that were never filled, as when guaranteed by Rufus King that he would become the first President of the United States if he voted in favor of ratification.⁵⁵ Though this never happened, Hancock's ideals were the same as they had been, he believed in the liberties of the people for as long as he was the man handing out those rights to them.

All Eyes Turn to Virginia

After Massachusetts voted to ratify the Constitution, the second most anticipated debate took place in Virginia. When it came to the Virginians, their reputations were well-known for being heated and passionate when it came to advocating for the liberties of the people. For months both Federalists and antiFederalists took to the newspapers to air their grievances, as they continued to write unanimously in the papers it only contributed to the animosities that came full circle on the debate floor in Richmond. It came as no surprise that Patrick Henry was elected to serve at the Virginia Ratification Convention, unlike Samuel Adams and John Hancock, how Henry felt about the Constitution was no secret. Being that Henry refused to accept a seat at the Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia he did not influence what was incorporated into the Constitution. Henry's friend George Washington had written to him about the Constitution and even included in his letter a copy of it so he could become better acquainted with it.⁵⁶ Henry's long-awaited response was seen as both frightening and

⁵⁵ Miller, *Sam Adams*, 381.

⁵⁶ Washington had hoped that by personally sending the *Constitution* to Henry that he would be more receptive to it and would become an ally of the document. Not only did Washington hope for this but he also relied on his friendship with Henry to serve as a favor to him and help them to move forward with ratifying in Virginia.

promising as his silence could have been seen as him being in agreeance to ratify it.

However, how Henry responded to Washington on October 19 had the opposite effect. “I have to lament that I cannot bring my Mind to accord with the proposed Constitution,” wrote, “The Concern I feel on this account is really greater than I am able to express.” He took his response even further, “Perhaps mature Reflection may furnish me Reasons to change my present Sentiments into a conformity with the Opinions of those personages for whom I have the highest Reverence.”⁵⁷ At the time Henry received a copy of the Constitution from George Washington, he had not been able to fully comprehend what he had read, and therefore needed more time in processing the information. What Henry had read was written by not only his fellow political colleagues, but these were men he considered to be his friends, so he held what they wrote in the highest regard. He felt it was unjust to respond so quickly to Washington and felt in time he would be able to better explain his support or opposition to the Constitution. His choice to remain ‘neutral’ and essentially mute served as a crushing blow to the friends of the Constitution, for they knew the power Patrick Henry exerted over the Virginian politics.⁵⁸ The longer Henry remained silent and didn’t speak on the Constitution worried the Federalists as they feared what his true thoughts were. The Federalists knew the political power Henry had in Virginia, and they knew he would gain supporters no matter what stance he took on ratification of the Constitution. In true Henry

⁵⁷ *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. <https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-02-08-02-0001-0053> [accessed 24 Oct 2022]

⁵⁸ Lori Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution: Virginians Debate the Constitution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2016.), 38.

fashion the more he thought about the Constitution the more he distrusted it, especially those who were pushing to have it ratified so quickly. Finally, the time had come for Henry to speak out and his response caused chaos in Virginia.

Henry's decision to stonewall his opposition was a strategic move on his behalf, he knew that if he had spoken too soon it would squander his element of surprise against the Federalists. Henry wanted to keep the Federalists in suspense of his views that way it gave him the advantage by not allowing the opposing side time to gather a rebuttal to his disagreements. When the Continental Congress called upon Virginia in October 1787, all eyes turned to the delegates and whether or not they would call a convention to debate the Constitution. When they called on Virginia it was just six days after Henry's opinions were announced, and the Federalists expected Henry to block a convention from taking place. Much to their dismay Henry then agreed that a convention was exactly what needed to take place in Virginia. He proclaimed it transcended our powers to decide on the Constitution; that it must go before a Convention."⁵⁹ Henry would not allow his opponents to get the better of him, he needed to maintain the illusion he was in control, and this won over the support of both Federalists and Anti-Federalists alike. Since they agreed, the next decision to make was when would the Virginia Convention take place and who would be elected to serve as delegates. When the decision to host the convention the following June in Richmond was decided, it gave Anti-Federalists the hope that the men in support of the Constitution like George Washington would see the errors and fatal flaws in the document.⁶⁰ Henry wanted them to understand that rushing to ratify the Constitution was not only wrong,

⁵⁹ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 41.

⁶⁰ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 46,

but it was dangerous as it threatened the direct liberties of the people. If given more time and written with clear and distinct rights to prevent a tyrannical government from being ushered in, then Henry may be able to get on board with it. But as Henry saw it, it was flawed and written by men who threatened to undo the Revolution.

As the Virginia Convention was weeks away from opening up, the AntiFederalists were dealt a rather large blow when the *Federalist Papers* were published and released in book form. Both the newspaper in Norfolk and the Portsmouth Journal advertised them as a way to gather attention in the hopes readers would purchase a copy.⁶¹ Newspapers were more favorable to the Federalists and were receptive to publishing in favor of them. Within weeks of the *Papers* being released, quite a few Virginians had become familiarized with volume one and Publius.⁶² Not only did Henry have to deal with the *Federalist Papers* being published, but a Federalist Edward Carrington⁶³ also began to spread rumors about Henry. The rumor Carrington began to spread was that Henry's intention behind opposing the Constitution was that he wanted to break up the Union and divide it into three separate confederacies.⁶⁴ Because Henry's letters have been either lost or destroyed, there was nothing to substantiate this claim made by Carrington other than it was only used to discredit Henry going into the Virginia Convention. Henry had become accustomed to the attacks against his character, this was nothing new to him as he had been dealing with it for several years, especially at the hands of other Virginians.⁶⁵ Just like the Federalists had done to

⁶¹ Maier, *Ratification*, 257.

⁶² Maier, *Ratification*, 257.

⁶³ Carrington was a statesman from Virginia who rose to political stature for his contributions during the Revolution when he was a lieutenant colonel of the Continental Army.

⁶⁴ Maier, *Ratification*, 231.

⁶⁵ In 1776, Patrick Henry was successful in his attempt to prevent James Madison and Thomas Jefferson from amending the *Virginia Constitution* – this was something that neither Madison nor Jefferson forgot. On

George Mason in the newspapers, they wanted to call Henry's character into question and alienate him from his political allies. Henry chose to channel his focus elsewhere and not waste his time and energy focused on newspaper gossip, but rather he spent the next several months leading up to June preparing himself for Richmond. For as long as he remained true to the people and did all he could to prevent ratification, Henry's character could never be questioned.

On June 4, Henry's first time on the Convention floor he immediately called into question the legitimacy of the Constitution. Henry accused the men in Philadelphia of violating their sole charge and only lawful purpose of their gathering: to revise the Articles of Confederation.⁶⁶ The men in Philadelphia he argued had no right to even declare the Articles null and void, they were sent to that convention to amend them. His accusation of the legitimacy of the Constitution immediately sparked a counterargument from Edmund Pendleton⁶⁷ who declared that "we are not to consider whether the Federal Convention exceeded their powers," but rather they were "sent to determine whether this Government should be a proper one."⁶⁸ Henry knew they were there to discuss whether or not to ratify, however, his stance was that this should have never come to Richmond based on the illegitimacy of the Constitution being produced in the first place. Henry was against what took place in Philadelphia, and this was one of the main reasons he declined his invitation to

December 8, 1784, Jefferson wrote a letter to Madison, stating "While Mr. Henry lives, another bad constitution would be formed and saddled forever on us. What we have to do I think is devoutly to pray for his death." "From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 8 December 1784," *Founders Online*, National Archives, [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 7, 2 March 1784–25 February 1785, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953,

⁶⁶ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 103.

⁶⁷ Pendleton was another statesman from Virginia, he and Henry never liked one another and though they both came from humble beginnings they couldn't be more different.

⁶⁸ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 103.

the Convention. To Henry, he “smelled a rat” early on and had a feeling what would take place during the summer of 1787 would come at the expense of the people so that a few men could exceed their authority and gain power. Henry argued that the Constitution was not only wrong from its opening phrase, but it was fruit from a poisonous tree.⁶⁹ After questioning the validity of the Constitution and declaring it dangerous, Henry withdrew his motion and took back to his seat. From that moment forward, Henry felt that he was in control and saw the Federalists as having an uphill battle from there on out.⁷⁰ The next day, Henry proclaimed himself to be “the servant of the people of this Commonwealth” and a guardian of “their rights, liberty, and happiness.”⁷¹ He felt an obligation to serve his constituents to the best of his abilities and that no matter what took place during his time in Richmond he would do his best to serve the people.

On June 12, Henry brought forward his main objections to the Constitution which then Madison responded to. To Henry, the tyranny of Philadelphia would usher in the same tyranny that were in place under George III. Henry brought up how important the adoption of a bill of rights would be to the Constitution, and how it had played an essential role in England after the Glorious Revolution. The Bill of Rights limited the powers and authority of the King, and it would do the same thing in the United States – it would limit the infringement of rights by the central government. Henry argued that there was nothing stated in the Constitution as it stood that ensured trial by jury, freedom of the press, and most

⁶⁹ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 105.

⁷⁰ Despite Henry’s confidence, James Madison had been recording notes and writing a letter to George Washington explaining that both Henry and George Mason had come into the Convention as allies, yet their agendas were different. Madison said that Henry’s opening statements contradicted Mason’s strategy.

⁷¹ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 105.

importantly religious freedoms.⁷² There was also the question of how to properly tax the people and would all thirteen states agree with this. Henry had concerns about the overreaching authority of Northern members and how it would impact the South, and whether or not taxation would be oppressive in the South.⁷³ Henry's concerns were too much government overreach, an unfair form of taxation, and giving too much power to Northern states. He was also concerned with the threat to religious freedom, nothing allowed for the people to openly worship their faith of choice, trial by juries was just as important, and finally the right to speak freely against government without punishment. Henry believed these all to be basic human rights, ones that should be written so the government could never cross them. Madison's rebuttal to Henry's claims came that religion was not guarded and that "no Bill of Rights would ever secure religion."⁷⁴ No matter what was said, Henry would never agree to the Constitution – he detested it and believed that every Virginian should feel the same way as he. After weeks of exhausting debate, Henry was no more successful at the end of the convention in his attempts to argue the Constitution was illegitimate than as he was at the start. After being convinced by Mason to help him put forward suggested amendments to limit the power of the government, Henry willingly agreed. If he were not able to stop the Constitution, he would try his best to ensure the rights of the people were protected. Henry worked alongside George Mason in drafting a series of amendments that would be presented to the convention in hopes of adding them to the Constitution. These amendments would be written to ensure that the rights of the people were not infringed upon

⁷² Discussion of religion and the rights to practice freely at the Virginia Convention was not the first time Madison and Henry had disagreements over religious rights and worship.

⁷³ Patrick Henry, *The Essential Debate on the Constitution: Federalist and AntiFederalist Speeches and Writings*. ed. Robert J. Allison and Bernard Bailyn. (New York: The Library of America, 2018), 353-368.

⁷⁴ James Madison, *The Essential Debate on the Constitution*, 369.

and would enhance the protection of the Constitution to further limit the control of the government. With his decision to draft these amendments, one of the final questions and battles at the Virginia Convention was whether or not the delegates would approve these subsequent amendments. Pendleton had called for supporters of the Constitution to introduce a set of resolutions that called to adopt the Constitution but also to consider the amendments. This was a vote that Henry came to second, however, the vote was defeated with eighty in favor and eighty-eight opposed on June 28. Henry's final words at the convention after his defeat were, "I will be a peaceable citizen. My head, my hand, and my heart, shall be at liberty to retrieve the loss of liberty and remove the defects of that system in a constitutional way."⁷⁵ Despite losing, Henry pushed forward and did what was expected of him – to be a man who was true to his country and to continue to faithfully serve the people.

George Mason's Objections

Before he departed from Philadelphia, George Mason wrote his objections to the Constitution in his *Objections to This Constitution of Government*, describing his discontent with the Constitution. These objections were the personal thoughts and concerns of Mason and were to be for the eyes of his closest friends only, two of the men being Richard Henry

⁷⁵ Beeman, *Plain, Honest, Men*, 400.

Lee and George Washington. His first grievance was the lack of a “Declaration of Rights,” and that the “Declaration of Rights in the separate States are no security. Nor are the people secured even in the enjoyment of the benefit of the common law.”⁷⁶ Mason believed that without the rights of the people being clearly defined they would be impeded by the government. He also wrote about his issues with the Senate and how much power they would be allotted under the Constitution. These fears coincided with the powers given to the President of the United States, these concerns were addressed on the floor of the Old State House in Philadelphia. Mason also had an issue with Congress being able to grant monopolies in trade and commerce.⁷⁷ Being that Mason relied heavily on trade especially when it came to selling his tobacco, he became concerned about the authority Congress would have over trade. And finally, nothing in the Constitution was written that “preserved the liberty of the press, trial by jury in civil causes; nor standing armies in time of peace.”⁷⁸ Before the Revolution began, the suspension of trial by jury among peers and military troops constantly present created tensions and danger in Boston and Mason was determined to prevent this from happening again. Without the incorporation of a declaration of rights, the Constitution would do nothing to prevent another aristocratic takeover and bring the same tyrannical government they had while under the rule of the Crown. Mason wanted to prevent this from happening again and that was why he wrote the *Objections to This Constitution of Government*. What happened next with his objections was not what Mason expected, he soon learned that his once political allies had become his foes.

⁷⁶ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 991.

⁷⁷ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 992.

⁷⁸ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 993.

Out of both courtesy and friendship, Mason sent a copy of his “Objections” to George Washington; however, he learned that Washington was not receptive to receiving them. Not long after they made their way to Washington, they wound up in the hands of his secretary Tobias Lear.⁷⁹ Not long after he sent his *Objections*, his writings landed into the hands of Washington’s secretary Lear, and they were published in the *Virginia Journal*. The publication of Mason’s work was seen as a betrayal when Washington allowed Lear to publish Mason’s personal feelings in the paper. Not long after the publication of Mason’s writings, an Anti-Federalist essay written by “Philanthropos” appeared in the *Virginia Journal* in Alexandria on December 6, 1787. This essay was written in response to Mason’s “Objections” being published in the newspaper by “Brutus.” In defense of Mason’s stance, it was written that “Col. Mason’s wise and judicious objections – are grievances, the very idea of which is enough to make every honest citizen exclaim in the language of Cato, O Liberty, O my Country!” and “Our present constitution, with a few additional powers to Congress, seems better calculated to preserve our rights and defend our liberties of the citizens, than the one proposed, without proper amendments.”⁸⁰ What Mason had written in his “Objections” was to point out that without the adoption of amendments, the proposed Constitution did not clearly define the protection of individual rights. The newspapers in Virginia became extremely hostile towards Anti-Federalists and Mason learned this firsthand. What Washington and Lear attempted to do by publishing Mason’s personal feelings on the Constitution was destroy his reputation and call his character into question. A false rumor

⁷⁹ Lear served as a personal secretary to George Washington and found himself on the side of the Federalists. In the newspapers, Lear used the pseudonym ‘Brutus’ to attack Mason and other Anti-Federalists.

⁸⁰ Philanthropos, *The Antifederalist Papers*, ed. Morton Borden, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1965), 17.

regarding Mason's behaviors in Philadelphia also was published in the *Virginia Journal* – it was written that he was “obnoxious” and “reprobated in this Country.”⁸¹ The newspaper served as a means for both Anti-Federalists and Federalists to publish their thoughts and attacks against one another using pseudonyms, so their true identities remained unknown. The mudslinging and publications that were released about Mason had harmed him, those who were his once friends⁸² and even his neighbors began to look at him differently. They also never looked at Mason as a man who was so concerned with the preservation of liberty and ensuring that the rights of the people were upheld. Rather these were personal attacks made against him to help the Federalists build a larger group of supporters because they were threatened by the support Mason once carried.⁸³ For several months, the fighting between Philanthropos and Brutus continued in the newspaper as the correspondence between Mason and Washington went from their parlors to the newspapers.⁸⁴ What Mason experienced in the months leading up to the Richmond Convention was just a glimpse of what he could expect once the debating began. Regardless of the personal attacks and his fellow Virginians no longer seeking his wisdom, Mason remained true to his stance and never changed trajectories.

⁸¹ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 35.

⁸² George Mason suffered fractured relationships with George Washington and even James Madison. These two men looked up to Mason for years and respected his work and valued his friendship until the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. When Mason left Philadelphia, his relationship was fractured with Washington and these two men never recovered, this was evident when Washington allowed his secretary Tobias Lear to publish his *Objections* in the *Virginia Journal* in 1787.

⁸³ Mason's most erratic behavior moments came at the end of the Philadelphia Convention when he declared he would “sooner chop off his right hand than put it to the Constitution.” Being that the Convention was to remain a secret from the public no notes were supposed to be recorded, however, Madison recorded almost every conversation and moment at the Convention. Therefore, if Mason had acted in such an out-of-character way, Madison would have it recorded in his private notes.

⁸⁴ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 37.

When the time finally came for the men to make their way to Richmond, George Mason reluctantly left his home at Gunston Hall for the final time. Before he left, he wrote to his friend Thomas Jefferson about the upcoming convention and to express concerns.⁸⁵ In his letter, he expressed his thoughts on the dangers of a new standing army, the power Congress held to determine state elections, and that “corruption was guaranteed to afflict high-ranking federal officials.” If all three of these were adopted, the centralized authority would have “too much power concentrated in too few hands was too dangerous to abide.”⁸⁶ Mason was so against strong centralized government out of fear that it would bring tyranny, Mason feared that Philadelphia would usher in the same tyrannical rulers as before the Revolution.⁸⁷ When Mason arrived in Richmond, he and his friend Patrick Henry formed a partnership, these two men found themselves arguing against the same issues proposed in the Constitution that it would strengthen their arguments by working together. On June 3, Mason made his way to the Convention floor where he suggested that the delegates work clause-to-clause through every part of the Constitution – this way they could “freely and fully investigate this important subject.”⁸⁸ This suggestion made by Mason was so that he and other Anti-Federalists would be able to control the conversation and keep the opposing side on their toes. However, to the dismay of Mason, he found that James Madison agreed with him. Because Madison contributed to writing a large part of the Constitution, the choice to break down the Constitution section by section only helped him. Not to mention, Madison and the

⁸⁵ Though Jefferson was serving as a U.S. ambassador in France, Jefferson remained close friends with Mason and even shared in his desire to preserve the liberties and rights of the people.

⁸⁶ Mason, *The Papers of George Mason Volume III. 1787-1792*, 1045.

⁸⁷ This fear that Mason had about the threat of a tyrannical government being ushered in from Philadelphia was similar to the fears Samuel Adams felt about government.

⁸⁸ Glover, *The Fate of the Revolution*, 102.

other Federalists had several months to prepare themselves for Richmond and what they might expect from their opponents.

Mason never wanted to revert to the Articles. he knew they were flawed beyond repair, but rather he thought that by proposing to add amendments to the Constitution it would be its best hope for being efficient. This was not the first time that amendments had been recommended to be added: Massachusetts and South Carolina motioned for them to be added as well. He wanted the Constitution amended so that it would sharply define the line between the general and state governments and prevent “that dangerous clashing of interest and power, which must as it now stands, terminate in the destruction of one or the other.”⁸⁹ If such amendments were adopted into the Constitution, Mason would find himself in agreement with it, but until then he would remain a proponent to ratifying. This came as a shock to men like Madison who thought Mason would have taken the approach of his friend Patrick Henry, however, both Mason and Henry took very different approaches to their arguments. Near the end of the Convention, Mason had the opportunity to suggest amendments as a prior condition to ratification. Mason was fortunate enough to convince Henry to follow along with him and help to draft these proposed amendments to be heard and considered. Of the amendments put forward, it was that it would have to “require the consent of two-thirds of the members of Congress for the passage of Navigation laws, and the imposed conditions on the ability of the federal government to impose direct taxes.”⁹⁰ Mason wanted to make sure that the rights of the states were protected, and that the central government could not impose more restrictions on one state over the other. Though Mason

⁸⁹ Maier, *Ratification*, 262.

⁹⁰ Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men*, 396-398.

worked diligently to create a set of amendments, they were not accepted when they were put to a vote at the end of the Convention. During his time in Richmond, Mason's sole intention was to work to adopt amendments to the Constitution, so liberties were clearly defined. When he was unsuccessful in his attempts, he returned to Gunston Hall to live out the remainder of his life never serving another day in public office.

Conclusion: From Allies to Foes

Political, religious, personal liberties and economic prosperities were the ambitions that drove men such as Henry, Adams, Hancock, and Mason to set aside their differences and become a unifying force during the years of the Revolution. However, by June 1788 - only five years after the peace that capped the American's unprecedented victory over Great Britain - they found themselves on opposing sides of the ratification of the Constitution. Henry and Adams in particular saw no reason to do away with the Articles of Confederation, despite a few flaws, as they were confident it was upholding the United States well enough. In their eyes, the Constitution had been written without explicitly stating the rights of the people; thus, there was nothing written to prevent an aristocratic government from forming and ushering in the same tyranny they had fought to remove. Going into their state conventions, Henry, Mason, Hancock, and Adams were all in agreeance that a bill of rights needed to be adopted into the Constitution that ensured the people had the right to religious freedoms, freedom of the press, and protect them from a wave of tyranny sweeping in from Philadelphia. At the start of the Massachusetts convention, Federalists were worried about how Adams and Hancock would vote and knew that they needed to intervene with their decisions in the best way they could. When it came to John Hancock, the Federalists knew he chased vanity and legacy, and that through persuasion of becoming President of the United States, they would be able to ensure his support. Hancock became the first political foe of these men. He chose to put aside the well-being of the people to gain power and favors by

assuring that he had the guarantee of the Federalists in the never gubernatorial election. Not only did he get the assurance of becoming the next Governor of Massachusetts, but his voting for the Constitution placed his name among the choices of becoming President of the United States. In the case of Samuel Adams, why he chose to vote for ratification remains unclear, whether he truly believed that amendments would be adopted, or it was the death of his son, he broke from his 'Old Revolutionary' persona to move into the republic era through his vote. Finally, unlike Massachusetts, Virginians Patrick Henry and George Mason never changed who they were or how they felt about the Constitution. Their names and reputations were destroyed in the newspapers, and they were mocked at and ridiculed for opposing the Federalists, yet they remained true to their cause; protecting the liberties of the states. Henry and Mason saw those who voted for ratification as betraying the Revolution and threatening to undo all they had fought for and achieved. While the war succeeded in bringing these four men together, the creation of the Republic created political ramifications that saw these forgotten Founding Fathers turn from allies to foe.

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