The First National Government: The Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation served as the written document that established the functions of the national government of the United States after it declared independence from Great Britain. The Albany Plan, an earlier, pre-independence attempt at joining the colonies into a larger union, had failed in part because the individual colonies were concerned about losing power to another central institution. However, as the American Revolution gained momentum, many political leaders saw the advantages of a centralized government that could coordinate the Revolutionary War.

Some Continental Congress delegates had previously discussed plans for a more permanent union than the Continental Congress, whose status was temporary. Benjamin Franklin submitted his Sketch of Articles of Confederation to the Continental Congress on July 21, 1775, a year prior to the colonies declaring their independence. While some delegates, such as Thomas Jefferson, supported Franklin’s proposal, many others were strongly opposed.

On June 11, 1776, the Continental Congress resolved “that a committee be appointed to prepare and digest the form of a confederation to be entered into between these colonies.” On July 12, 1776, the first draft of the Articles of Confederation was presented to the Continental Congress. Delegates finally formulated the Articles of Confederation, in which they agreed to state-by-state voting and proportional state tax burdens based on land values, though they left the issue of state claims to western lands unresolved. The Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation on November 15, 1777.

The Articles required unanimous approval (ratification) from the states. On July 9, 1778, the following states signed the ratification of the Articles of Confederation: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina. Representatives from New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland indicated that they did not yet have the power to sign and ratify. The states of North Carolina and Georgia were not present. The states that did not ratify on July 9, 1778, signed their consent to ratification as follows:

- July 21, 1778 - North Carolina
- July 24, 1778 - Georgia
- November 26, 1778 - New Jersey
- May 5, 1779 - New Jersey
- March 1, 1781 - Delaware

References:


User Tags: American Revolution, Articles of Confederation, government, history, North Carolina History, Page, Students, Teachers, United States, Public Domain

From: LEARN NC North Carolina History: A Digital Textbook

People:
George Washington, commander of the Continental Army, worried that the Continental Congress’ inability to force states to contribute money and soldiers would make it difficult to fund war efforts during the American Revolution.

For Teachers:

- Important milestones related to the Articles of Confederation[^11]
- Policies and Problems of the Confederation Government[^24]

Primary Sources:
The Articles of Confederation opened with the words “To all to whom these Presents shall come,” not nearly as inspiring or as memorable as the “We the People” of the Constitution that replaced them.

Articles of Confederation (1777)

3 January 2018

Source URL: https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/first-national-government