

A printed broadside of the United States Bill of Rights

Broadside. *Congress of the United States, begun and held at the city of New-York, on Wednesday, the fourth of March, one thousand seven hundred eighty-nine: The conventions of a number of the states having, at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added ... Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives ... that the following articles be proposed to the legislatures of the several states as amendments to the Constitution ... [Providence, R.I.]:* Printed by Bennett Wheeler, 1789. 15 5/8 inches x 12 1/4 inches (397 mm x 311 mm), 1 leaf.

This folio broadside was one of several printed during the term of the Continental Congress and the period surrounding the Constitutional Convention of 1787. The broadsides illustrate the evolution the United States government from a legislative body united in a war of resistance to an intricate system of checks and balances, and they include announcements of congressional actions, drafts of legislation, committee reports, and final versions of legislation or treaties. Between 1774 and 1789, the thirteen colonies united against Great Britain as the Continental Congress. With the motion for independence in 1776, Richard Henry Lee proposed a plan for union among the thirteen states; the Articles of Confederation were adopted a year later by Congress and ratified by the states in 1781; Congress then became “The United States in Congress Assembled.”

In 1787 every state but Rhode Island sent delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation into a new Constitution. The Convention proposed the establishment of a strong national government and the new Constitution met with a great deal of resistance; it was eventually ratified by the necessary number of states (nine), replacing the Articles of Confederation as the framework of the United States government on 21 June 1788. New Hampshire was the ninth state to ratify the new Constitution; preceding New Hampshire were Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, and South

Carolina, Virginia and New York ratified shortly after New Hampshire, followed by North Carolina in November 1789.

Rhode Island was last to ratify, not joining the Union until May 1790. The broadside presented here was printed in October 1789 for distribution among Rhode Island cities and towns to determine whether a convention should be called for the purpose of the adoption of the new Constitution. Henry Ward, Rhode Island's secretary of state, engaged Providence printer Bennett Wheeler to print one hundred fifty copies with one copy "ordered to be forward to each town clerk of the various towns for consideration of the Freemen at the town meetings to be held on Monday next." [Volume 10, Rhode Island Colonial Records]

The twelve articles are printed in two columns. Followed by: "State of Rhode-Island, and Providence-Plantations. In General Assembly, October Session, A.D. 1789. It is Voted and Resolved, That the Secretary be directed to cause to be printed One Hundred and Fifty Copies of the Amendments ... And that One Copy thereof be sent to each Town-Clerk ..." Signed: "A true Copy: Witness, HENRY WARD, Sec'ry."

[Charles Evans 22202]

This rare copy of the Bill of Rights is in The Warnock Library.

Octavo code: **bilrgh**