

THE BIRTH OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Articles of Confederation

During the Revolutionary War, the United Colonies needed a document to govern the lands then struggling to be free from England's rule. The Articles of Confederation became the first national constitution of the United States in March of 1781.

The Articles of Confederation established a government organized around a Congress. Each of the thirteen states would only have one vote regardless of size or population. For a law to pass, nine of the thirteen states had to agree.

The Congress had the power to declare war, make peace, and make treaties. It could also coin and borrow money, create post offices, admit new states, and create an army and navy.

On the other hand, the Congress could not tax, and it could not control or interfere with trade between the individual states.

There was no one person who was in charge of this new government. Because they feared the return of tyranny, the founding fathers were very cautious not to create a new "king"—that was exactly why they had separated from England. So, as a result, there was no executive to carry out the laws passed by Congress. Ultimately, this lack of a leader caused much confusion.

The Articles of Confederation created a loose friendship between the thirteen states. This loose friendship was enough to win the War for Independence and keep the states together as one country. But without an executive, the power to tax, and the ability to regulate trade, the Congress could not function effectively. Many Americans felt the Articles of Confederation needed to be revised.

By 1786, more problems were beginning to surface. A convention of five of the thirteen states, called the Annapolis Convention, met at Annapolis, Maryland, in September 1786. They met to study the trade problem. There was not enough representation to make any big decisions, so the delegates led by Alexander Hamilton (New York) and James Madison (Virginia) called for another convention to begin in May 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In February of that year, Congress agreed with the delegates and stated the convention would have the "sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation."



Revolutionary War Soldiers