

PERPETUATING AMERICA'S HERITAGE

What You Don't Know About the SAR

Two hundred twenty eight years ago this past Thursday, "the US Constitution was adopted by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. The Constitution was made to replace the failed Articles of Confederation, America's first governing document. Today, the US Constitution is the oldest functioning constitution in the free world.

During the American Revolution, the Continental Congress created the Articles of Confederation as the first governing document of the unified colonies. Over time, the Articles proved to be too weak for the government to function. The Articles gave Congress authority over trade, foreign relations and war, but it did not give Congress sufficient power to compel the states to comply.

Representatives from several states met at Annapolis, Maryland in 1786 to discuss some of the failed aspects of the Articles. They wrote a letter to Congress and the states requesting that a new convention be held to revise the Articles so the government would be strong enough to function.

Delegates converged on the Pennsylvania State House, now called Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, in May of 1787. This was the same place Congress had met during the Revolution and created the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation. The delegates present chose George Washington to serve as President of the Convention.

Right from the start, the Philadelphia Convention did away with the idea of reforming the Articles of Confederation, instead choosing to write an altogether new constitution. The delegates debated the plan for four

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months, dealing with such questions as states' rights vs. federal power, slavery, foreign affairs, the scope of presidential powers and the balance between the interests of small states and large states.

In the end, a single executive, the President, was chosen to enforce the laws of Congress, which would be made up of a lower house, the House of Representatives, with delegates apportioned by population, and an upper house, the Senate, where each state was represented equally. A Supreme Court and federal judiciary would judge all matters of controversy.

On September 17, 1787, the Congress adopted its final version of the new Constitution and 39 delegates signed the document. Over the next two years, each state held its own ratification convention and debated the merits and weaknesses of the Constitution. The Constitution required that 9 of the 13 states ratify it in order for it to become law. On June 21, 1788, New Hampshire became the 9th state to ratify and the Constitution became the law of the land.

The first Congress and the new government began meeting on March 4, 1789. George Washington would be inaugurated President in April. By the fall of that year, a bill of rights containing protections for many basic rights, such as freedom of speech, religion, assembly, the right to bear arms, and many others, was proposed for addition to the Constitution. The first ten amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, were added to the Constitution and became law on December 15, 1791.”(1)

Though the SAR was organized in 1889, it didn't receive a Congressional Charter until 1906 – that was signed by President Teddy Roosevelt, himself a member of the Empire State Society. “One of the great achievements of the SAR was its formal recognition of Constitution Day and its observance throughout the country.”(2) Compatriot David Pierson, of the New Jersey

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Society is given the credit for being the first to suggest that September 17th be made a national observance. Several State Societies had already begun observing Constitution Day prior to 1916, but it was Compatriot Pierson that advocated the idea of a national observance, and he persisted until it was formally adopted by the SAR in 1917. Not long afterwards, the New Jersey Legislature introduced a resolution to the US Congress that September 17th be designated as a national observance...thus, Constitution Day was officially established.

EXPANDED - - - - -

Over a decade ago, your national leadership had a vision and eventually coined its name...The SAR Center for Advancing America's Heritage. So,.....what is the SAR Center for Advancing America's Heritage?

In 2008 a special advisory task force composed of dozens of dedicated compatriots worked on this question with the purpose of defining the functions of The SAR Center in enough detail so that feedback could be given to the national trustees. At that time the library, the Center store, the galleries, and all educational programming were to be completed simultaneously in a single move to Main Street Louisville, Kentucky.

The task force's work ultimately divided into phases created by the pressing need of an expanded library and the required funding to complete The SAR Center. Phase I included the construction of a new library, the merchandise operation, and the space for the Genealogy Department. These functions were operational by 2010. Thus began the transition of the headquarters from Fourth Street to Main Street. Now the Sons of the American Revolution are engaged in finishing Phase II and fundraising for Phase III. With the sale of the Fourth Street property last year, all the national staff now works under the same roof on Louisville's Main Street. The remaining three functions – the Center store, galleries, and educational programming – remain in various stages of development and, unlike the

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new library; these functions are new territory for the SAR.

The SAR Center is primarily an extension of the SAR's congressional charge that is to preserve family records, teach the founding era's history and to promote patriotism. It is composed of the national headquarters or staff component, an education component and a library component. The SAR Center will be, when completely finished, the public face of the SAR.

The SAR Center is open to the public. The library already operates on selected Saturdays of every month and is open Monday through Friday except on national holidays.

Finally, The SAR Center will feature programs using multimedia techniques that are informative and engaging for local chapter use. The content for these presentations is unique to the American Revolutionary War period. Recently every state society president received two new DVDs produced by the national Outreach Education Committee and distributed by the education component of The SAR Center. These DVDs supplement a growing list of programs available for use by chapters.

Our American heritage must never ever be taken for granted. Each of us must strive to perpetuate our family history whether it is within the borders of Nevada or from The SAR Center for Advancing America's Heritage. The work is never done. Compatriots like you and I must remain vigilant in guarding the value of our heritage. Being here in fellowship listening to me is not enough, but through our collective outreach activities, each one of us can be in our own way the public face of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Thank you.

JH/19 September 2015, Signers Chapter (Las Vegas), Nevada Society

Footnotes:

1. John T. Manning, NSSAR Historian General, 2014 - 2016 (NH)
2. John St. Paul, Jr., NSSAR Historian General, 1960 - 1962 (LA)