

Reading 1: “Rogue Island”: Rhode Island: The last state to ratify the Constitution.

In 1781, Rhode Island began acquiring nicknames.

By 1781 Rhode Island was referred to in newspapers as “Rogue Island”. Rogue Island was still used to refer to Rhode Island at the Constitutional Convention in 1781 when it refused to send delegates. The press war started when Rhode Island vetoed an act passed by Congress under the Articles of Confederation and its general refusal to attend Articles of Confederation Congressional meetings making it impossible to amend the Articles.

Ironically, Rhode Island was key to making of the Constitution it strongly opposed. In 1786, Rhode Island elected to a national government.

Rhode Island printed so much paper currency it made the paper currency nearly worthless. It became a national symbol of one of the major weaknesses of the Articles. No state was more reviled than Rhode Island at the Constitutional Convention in 1787--the only no-show.

The Rhode Island’s state legislature rejected 11 attempts to ratify the Constitution from September 1787 and January 1790.

Congress met for the first time in March 1789 without Rhode Island; that next September the Governor of Rhode Island wrote to Congress stating the people of Rhode Island were still bound to the principles of the old Confederation. The governor stated the people wanted “further checks and securities” limiting federal power, before “they could adopt it.”

By 1790, Congress had lost patience with “Rogue Island”. Congress threatened to treat Rhode Island as a foreign nation. The Governor pleaded with Congress not to treat them as a foreign country and asked for an extension to the ratification. Rhode Island merchants pushed for the new Constitution out of fear to import taxes and blockades to their shipping industry. Congress extended the ratification deadline to January.

When the January deadline arrived, representatives from Rhode Island convinced Congress to extend the deadline again to March so it could hold another ratifying convention.

Congress acted when the March convention did not ratify the Constitution. In early May 1790, the Senate passed a bill to prohibit commercial trade with Rhode Island.

Rhode Island finally ratified the Constitution on May 29, 1790, by a vote of 34 to 32.

Rhode Island proposed eighteen human rights and twenty-one amendments with its ratification. They proposed banning poll taxes (taxes to vote), a military draft, slavery, and for the states to retain the ability to print paper money.

In August 1790, “Rogue Island’s” only representative to Congress arrived—18 months late.

Did Rhode Island deserve to be called “Rogue Island”?



Why did Rhode Island object to the new Constitution?

How did Congress force Rhode Island to ratify the Constitution?