

John Rutledge

Adapted from http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_founding_fathers_south_carolina.html

Background

John Rutledge, elder brother of Edward Rutledge, signer of the Declaration of Independence, was born into a large family at or near Charleston, South Carolina, in 1739.

In 1774, Rutledge was sent to the First Continental Congress, where he pursued a moderate course. After spending the next year in the Second Continental Congress, he returned to South Carolina and helped reorganize its government. In 1776 he served on the committee of safety and took part in the writing of the state constitution. That year, he also became president of the lower house of the legislature, a post he held until 1778. During this period, the new government met many stern tests.

In 1778, the conservative Rutledge, disapproving of democratic revisions in the state constitution, resigned his position. The next year, however, he was elected as governor. It was a difficult time. The British were invading South Carolina, and the military situation was desperate. Early in 1780, by which time the legislature had adjourned, Charleston was besieged. In May it fell, the American army was captured, and the British confiscated Rutledge's property. He ultimately escaped to North Carolina and set about attempting to rally forces to recover South Carolina. In 1781, aided by Gen. Nathanael Greene and a new Continental Army force, he reestablished the government. In January 1782 he resigned the governorship and took a seat in the lower house of the legislature. He never recouped the financial losses he suffered during the war.

In 1782-83, Rutledge was a delegate to the Continental Congress. He next sat on the state chancery court (1784) and again in the lower house of the legislature (1784-90). One of the most influential delegates at the Constitutional Convention, where he maintained a moderate nationalist stance and chaired the Committee of Detail, he attended all the sessions, spoke often and effectively, and served on five committees. Like his fellow South Carolina delegates, he vigorously advocated southern interests.

Document

Excerpted from James Madison's Notes on the Constitutional Convention

Rutledge

Mr. RUTLEDGE did not see how the importation of slaves could be encouraged by this Section. He was not apprehensive of insurrections and would readily exempt the other States from the obligation to protect the Southern against them. -- Religion & humanity had nothing to do with this question. Interest alone is the governing principle with nations. The true question at present is whether the Southn. States shall or shall not be parties to the Union. If the Northern States consult their interest, they will not oppose the increase of Slaves which will increase the commodities of which they will become the carriers.