

We the People 200 Is Part of Philadelphia's Celebration of the Constitution's Bicentennial

A constitution is a document that states the fundamental or supreme law of a country or organization. All other laws made after a constitution is adopted must conform to the principles set forth in the constitution. The US Constitution is the oldest written constitution of a functioning government in the world.¹ It was adopted by a vote of the delegates elected to special conventions, who represented the citizens of the new nation. The Constitution cannot be changed or repealed by the national Congress, but only by a vote of three-quarters of either the state legislatures or of special conventions popularly elected for that purpose.

September 17, 1987, is the 200th anniversary of the signing of the US Constitution. Like the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence

in 1976,² the Bicentennial of the Constitution is being observed with numerous special events, both nationwide and here in Philadelphia, the city in which both the Declaration and the Constitution were created and signed. The city's tribute to the Constitution is part of a celebration called "We the People 200," which throughout the year is featuring parades, concerts, and festivals as well as exhibitions, workshops, and seminars to examine the Constitution and its legacy.

One of the highlights of the "We the People 200" program has recently occurred: a weekend celebration called "All Roads Lead to Philadelphia," held from May 22 through May 25.³ Commemorating the beginning of the Constitutional Convention, it centered around a confer-

ence of the governors of the 13 original states; the delegates discussed the "state of the states" after 200 years of republican existence. The week-end celebration also included an exhibit called "1787 Festival," which showed what life was like the year the Constitution was created, and "Born in America," a free public concert of American music. Also in May, the two-month-long "Festival of States" began at Independence Mall and Penn's Landing; the Festival gives each of the 50 states in turn a special day to showcase itself.

Other events are planned for the month of July.³ One, called the "Freedom Festival," is scheduled for Independence Day weekend and will combine tributes to the Declaration of Independence—signed on July 4, 1776—with celebrations of the Constitution. A pageant of American history with a cast of 500, called the "Spirit of America," will be presented by the US Army Band in the city's Convention Hall at the Civic Center. The Freedom Festival parade, featuring marching bands from throughout the country, will wind down the Benjamin Franklin Parkway to Independence Mall on July 3; the next day, dozens of hot-air balloons will take to the skies from the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the "Bicentennial Balloon Bash." The fourth and fifth will also be marked by "Philly's 'Freedom's Fourth' Food Festival," which will feature gastronomic creations for which the city is famous.

Another major event in July will be a ceremonial joint session of Congress that has been in-

vited to convene in Philadelphia for the first time since 1800, when the city served as the young nation's capital.

Of special interest to scientists is an exhibit by the American Philosophical Society (APS) called "Designing a Nation: Science, Technology, and the Constitution." Running from the end of April through the end of September, it deals with federal surveys and mapping expeditions, scientific exploration, and commerce and technology. It can be seen at the APS building at 105 South Fifth Street in Philadelphia.⁴

On September 17, the largest parade ever planned in the US—starting from the four cardinal points of the compass—will converge on Independence Mall to start the celebration of Constitution Day, a one-time-only national holiday. The president, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and the leadership of Congress, representing the three branches of government created by the Constitution, will gather at the Liberty Bell pavilion to lead a Constitution rally. A vast, outdoor picnic is scheduled to follow.³

For more information on these and other events in Philadelphia, write to the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1515 Market Street, Suite 2020, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102. In the US, you can also call toll-free 1-800-523-2004, extension 87.

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3. *We the People 200. Celebrate America*. Philadelphia: We the People 200, 1986. (Brochure.)
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