

John Williams

Washington County

Born: September 1752, Barnstable, England

You stand high in the community despite the relative shallowness of your American roots, having immigrated only in 1773. You are John Williams, born in Barnstable, England, in September 1752. Perhaps medical skill explains your quick rise to prominence. You studied medicine and surgery at St. Thomas Hospital, London, following which you served one year as a surgeon's mate on an English man-of-war. After arriving in America, you settled in Salem, Washington County, New York, though called at the time New Perth, Charlotte County. You set up a medical practice, and by 1775 your success was such that your neighbors elected you their delegate to the Provincial Congress, an extra-legal assembly that supplanted the defunct colonial assembly and prepared the ground for state government. There were four of these congresses over two years, and you were elected to all of them. During the war you served as surgeon for the state militia and (as of 1776) as colonel of the Charlotte County regiment. Simultaneous with military service, you were a state senator in 1777 and 1778.

After the war you returned to the legislature, first as a member of the assembly (1781–82) and then again as a member of the senate (1782–85). You were appointed to the first board of regents of the University of the State of New York in 1784, joining Lewis Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. You retained your military commission, and in 1786 you were promoted to brigadier general of the militia.

You now have been elected a delegate to the New York State Ratifying Convention, convened in Poughkeepsie to accept or reject the Constitution drafted the previous summer. You are a man of local feelings, and so your politics are Antifederalist. At the convention you will give hearty support to Governor George Clinton, the Antifederalist party leader, and to Melancton Smith, the party lieutenant, as they, and others of your party, endeavor to defeat the Constitution or secure amendments thereto.