

Melancton Smith

Dutchess County

Party Lieutenant

Born: May 7, 1744, Jamaica, Long Island

You are Melancton Smith, one of the country's foremost proponents of the Antifederalist cause. But so careful have you been in protecting your anonymity, that no one knows for certain if you are the author who goes by "Brutus," "The Federal Farmer," and/or "A Plebeian." Probably you are. In any event, you will show your worth at the state ratifying convention, where you will serve as the party's lieutenant, assisting Governor George Clinton.

You were born May 7, 1744, in the Jamaica area of Long Island, New York. You had no college training, only homeschooling by your parents. The family moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, where you became a merchant. It was through church work that you first made your mark, as you helped organize the Washington Hollow Presbyterian Church.

When war came, you were quick to take sides—and a patriot were you, through and through. You served in the first New York Provincial Congress (there were four between 1775, when British governance ended, and 1777, when American governance began, under a new state constitution). Following the outbreak of fighting at Lexington and Concord (April 1775), you joined the Dutchess County Rangers, which would become a line regiment of the Continental Army. For six months in 1777 you were a spy catcher, a member of the county commission for "inquiring into, detecting and defeating all conspiracies . . . against the liberties of America." You arrested and interrogated loyalists and profited from the sale of their confiscated lands. Meanwhile, you were the sheriff of Dutchess County for the duration of the war.

You moved to New York City in 1785. Your mercantile business flourished, and your standing in society was sufficiently high that you were among the thirty-two founders of the New York Manumission Society, dedicated to the abolition of slavery in the state, though complete abolition would not come for several decades. From 1785 to 1787, you were a delegate to the Continental Congress, your only national service. At the New York State Ratifying Convention, you are an Antifederalist delegate representing Dutchess County. You ran in Dutchess, though living in New York, because New York was Federalist territory, and no Antifederalist had a chance of success in New York. (For example, Governor Clinton ran there and in Ulster but received only 134 votes in New York; the last of the successful Federalist candidates received 2,651 votes.)