

John Lansing Jr.

Albany City and County

Born: January 30, 1754, Albany

Your ancestors trace back to the first Dutch settlers of New York. You are John Lansing Jr., son of Gerrit Jacob Lansing and Jannetje Waters Lansing. You own a vast estate in the Hudson River Valley. Born January 30, 1754, in Albany, New York, you were educated locally, read law, and were admitted to the bar in 1775. For two years during the war (1776–77), you served as military secretary to General Philip Schuyler. Afterward, your attention turned toward politics, and you added to your résumé New York assemblyman, six terms (1780–84, 1786, 1788); speaker of the assembly, two terms (1786, 1788); and mayor of Albany, continuously since 1786. Twice you represented New York at the Continental Congress, the years you were not in the assembly.

The mayor of Albany is an appointive office, with the appointment power lodged in the governor and a council. Governor George Clinton is your patron, and you are his loyal follower. He arranged for your election to the Constitutional Convention, along with Robert Yates, another obliging follower. He could not prevent the election of arch-nationalist Alexander Hamilton, however, but then the two of you, voting in unison and against him, minimized his effectiveness. In frustration, Hamilton left the convention early. You and Yates left at about the same time, in early July, appalled that the convention was ignoring its instructions to amend the Articles of Confederation. It was instead, you thought, writing a new constitution, for a consolidated government, and you wanted to report back to Clinton and begin organizing Antifederalist opposition to ratification. Your report took the form of a letter to the governor written with your colleague Robert Yates.

As the current speaker of the assembly, it was no trick getting yourself elected a delegate to the state ratifying convention. Indeed, you received the highest number of votes in Albany County. In Poughkeepsie, you will work with Governor Clinton, the Antifederalist party leader, and with Melancton Smith, the party lieutenant, as they, and others of your party, endeavor to defeat the Constitution or secure amendments thereto.