

ANTIFEDERALIST

Robert Yates

Albany City and County

Born: January 27, 1738, Schenectady

You are Robert Yates, born to Joseph and Maria Dunbar Yates on January 27, 1738, the oldest of their twelve children. You come from a well-off, but not quite wealthy, merchant family located in Schenectady, New York. You attended school in New York City, tried your hand at surveying, read law under William Livingston, then set up a legal practice of your own in Albany in 1760. Also, you married well, into the Van Ness family.

Your first foray into politics came in 1771 as city alderman. The approach of war with Britain widened the stage on which you operated. You were elected to Albany's committee of safety and to the state's Provincial Congress. You served on the committee that wrote the New York State constitution. In 1777 you were appointed justice of the state's supreme court, an office you continue to hold to this day. In time you will become chief justice of the court. You are frequently referred to as Judge Robert Yates.

Your uncle, Abraham Yates, is a major force in New York politics and champion of the Antifederalist cause. But your principal patron is Governor George Clinton. Clinton is a popular governor because he keeps taxes low and defends the sovereignty of the state against intrusions from the national government, the Continental Congress. New York, which during the war was very nationalist in its politics, is today very localist. Clinton is an Antifederalist, and so are you. In 1786 you published *Political Papers Addressed to the Advocates for a Congressional Review*, a book in which you support the Articles of Confederation and attack its critics.

With Clinton's blessing, you were unanimously chosen by the state legislature to represent New York at the Constitutional Convention last summer, along with John Lansing. There you kept careful notes of the proceedings (almost as thorough as the notes taken by James Madison), until you and Lansing left, abruptly, 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 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 John Lansing.

Again with Clinton's assistance, you were elected a delegate to the state ratifying convention representing Albany City and County. Now in Poughkeepsie, you will give hearty support to 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. Some say that you are the author of the "Brutus" essays; others say that you haven't the smarts. Are you, and have you?