

Constitution Day remarks, 9/15/20

LeAnn Dean

Good evening and Welcome to the 2020 Constitution Day Celebration. I'm LeAnn Dean, director of Briggs Library and one of the University of Morris contingent who have traditionally organized this celebration in compliance with the law that mandates that all institutions that receive federal funding plan such an observance. It's more than just a matter of compliance, however. I'm also pretty proud and grateful that colleagues like Roland Guyotte of History and Tim Lindberg and Roger Rose of Political Science share their knowledge and speaking skills to make this an interesting event. I can't help but miss Mary Elizabeth Bezanson, recently retired CMR faculty who also traditionally contributed to our Constitutional celebration.

By way of introduction tonight and recognizing that we're celebrating two days ahead of Constitution Day, I decided I'd look up a little history of what was happening on September 15, 1787. This is from the book *Constitutional Journal*, edited by Jeffrey St. John.

"In the swiftly facing September light, with the clock tower of the State House striking six, exhausted majorities in all 11 state delegations today gave unanimous approval to a new constitution and ordered that a hand-drafted copy be prepared for signature within the next 48 hours. After General George Washington, as Convention President, presided over no fewer than 25 motions and votes today, three delegates candidly told the Convention why they could not sign the new constitution. Governor Edmund Randolph of Virginia, a pained and nervous expression playing across his handsome face, said he could not sign unless a second Convention were convened to correct 'the indefinite and dangerous power given by the Constitution to Congress' ... Colonel George Mason of Virginia was less equivocal. Supporting Governor Randolph in refusing to sign, the tall, white-haired statesman said he would not sign here or in Virginia. He went on to predict that the new government would end either in a monarchy or in a tyrannical aristocracy Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, in his nervous manner and with his nasal New England accent, cited 11 specific reasons why he could not sign the new constitution The Convention voted a resounding no to the proposal of a second Convention. When General Washington asked for a roll call of the States to agree to the constitution as amended, all States voted 'ay.' As the 42 delegates adjourned and streamed out of the State House in the gathering dusk, they had been sitting in the longest session of the last four months. The delegates have been in session 81 continuous days, debated for some 400 hours and voted 566 times. Their ordeal of summer statecraft has produced a 4,000-word document, consisting of 89 sentences and about 140 provisions. The delegates made their way down the cobblestone streets toward a late dinner, as word that a new constitution had been adopted floated throughout the city on an excited wave of conversation.

St. John, Jeffrey. *Constitutional Journal : a Correspondent's Report from the Convention of 1787*. Ottawa, Illinois : Jameson Books, 1987. (p. 218-2-19)