

FIRST

CONSTITUTION OF NEW JERSEY.

ADOPTED JULY 2, 1776.

WHEREAS all the constitutional authority ever possessed by the kings of Great Britain over these colonies, or their other dominions, was, by compact, derived from the people, and held of them for the common interest of the whole society; allegiance and protection are, in the nature of things, reciprocal ties, each equally depending upon the other, and liable to be dissolved by the other's being refused or withdrawn. *And whereas*, George the third, king of Great Britain, has refused protection to the good people of these colonies; and, by assenting to sundry acts of the British parliament, attempted to subject them to the absolute dominion of that body; and has also made war upon them in the most cruel and unnatural manner, for no other cause than asserting their just rights; all civil authority under him is necessarily at an end, and a dissolution of government in each colony has consequently taken place.

Preamble.

And whereas, in the present deplorable situation of these colonies, exposed to the fury of a cruel and relentless enemy, some form of government is absolutely necessary, not only for the preservation of good order, but also the more effectually to unite the people, and enable them to exert their whole force in their own necessary defense; and as the honorable the continental congress, the supreme council of the American colonies, has advised such of the colonies as have not yet gone into the measure, to adopt for themselves respectively such government, as shall best conduce to their own happiness and safety, and the well-being of America in general; we, the representatives of the colony of New Jersey, having been elected by all the counties in the freest manner, and in congress assembled, have, after mature deliberation, agreed upon a set of charter rights, and the form of a constitution in manner following, videlicet:

I. That the government of this province shall be vested in a governor, legislative council, and general assembly.

Government, in whom vested.

II. That the said legislative council and assembly shall be chosen, for the first time, on the second Tuesday of August next; the members whereof shall be the same in number and qualifications as is hereinafter mentioned; and shall be and remain vested with all the powers and authority to be held by any future legislative council and assembly of this colony, until the second Tuesday in October, which will be in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven.

Time of election of the first legislature.

III. That on the said second Tuesday in October, yearly and every year forever (with the privilege of adjourning from day to day as occasion may require), the counties shall severally choose one person to be a member of the legislative council of this colony, who shall be and have been, for one whole year next before the election, an inhabitant and freeholder in the county in which he is chosen, and worth at least one thousand pounds, proclamation money, of real and personal estate within the same county; that, at the same time, each county shall also choose three members of assembly; *provided*, that no person shall be entitled to a seat in the said

Time of annual elections of members for subsequent legislatures; their number and qualifications.

When to meet.	assembly, unless he be and have been, for one whole year next before the election, an inhabitant of the county he is to represent, and worth five hundred pounds, proclamaion money, in real and personal estate in the same county ; that, on the second Tuesday next after the day of election, the council and assembly shall separately meet ; and that the consent of both houses shall be necessary to every law, provided, that seven shall be a quorum of the council for doing business ; and that no law shall pass, unless there be a majority of all the representatives of each body personally present and agreeing thereto ; <i>provided, always,</i> that if a majority of the representatives of this province, in council and general assembly convened, shall, at any time or times hereafter, judge it equitable and proper to add to or diminish the number or proportion of the members of the assembly for any county or counties in this colony, then, and in such case, the same may, on the principles of more equal representation, be lawfully done, anything in this charter to the contrary notwithstanding ; so that the whole number of representatives in assembly shall not, at any time, be less than thirty-nine.
The legislature empowered to equalize the representation.	
Qualifications of electors for members of the legislature.	IV. That all inhabitants of this colony, of full age, who are worth fifty pounds, proclamaion money, clear estate in the same, and have resided within the county, in which they claim a vote, for twelve months immediately preceding the election, shall be entitled to vote for representatives in council and assembly ; and also for all other public officers that shall be elected by the people of the county at large.
Powers of the general assembly.	V. That the assembly, when met, shall have power to choose a speaker, and other their officers ; to be judges of the qualifications and elections of their own members ; sit upon their own adjournments ; prepare bills to be passed into laws ; and to empower their speaker to convene them, whenever any extraordinary occurrence shall render it necessary.
Powers of the legislative council.	VI. That the council shall also have power to prepare bills to pass into laws, and have other like powers as the assembly, and in all respects be a free and independent branch of the legislature of this colony ; save only, that they shall not prepare or alter any money bill, which shall be the privilege of the assembly ; that the council shall, from time to time, be convened by the governor or vice president, but must be convened at all times when the assembly sits ; for which purpose, the speaker of the house of assembly shall always, immediately after an adjournment, give notice to the governor, or vice president, of the time and place to which the house is adjourned.
Governor, how to be chosen.	VII. That the council and assembly, jointly, at their first meeting, after each annual election, shall, by a majority of votes, elect some fit person, within the colony, to be a governor for one year, who shall be constant-president of the council, and have a casting vote in their proceedings ; and that the council, themselves, shall choose a vice president, who shall act as such in the absence of the governor.
Powers of the governor.	VIII. That the governor, or, in his absence, the vice president of the council, shall have the supreme executive power, be chancellor of the colony, and act as captain-general and commander-in-chief of all the militia, and other military force in this colony ; and that any three or more of the council shall, at all times, be a privy council to advise the governor in all cases where he may find it necessary to consult them ; and that the governor be ordinary or surrogate-general.
Privy council ; their number, and of whom to consist.	
Court of appeals, how composed, and their powers.	IX. That the governor and council (seven whereof shall be a quorum) be the court of appeals in the last resort in all causes of law as heretofore ; and that they possess the power of granting pardons to criminals after condemnation, in all cases of treason, felony or other offenses.
Militia officers, how to be chosen.	X. That captains, and all other inferior officers of the militia, shall be chosen by the companies in the respective counties ; but field and general officers, by the council and assembly.
Great seal, by whom made.	XI. That the council and assembly shall have power to make the great seal of this colony, which shall be kept by the governor, or in his absence, by the vice president of the council, to be used by them as occasion may require ; and it shall be called the great seal of the colony of New Jersey.

XII. That the judges of the supreme court shall continue in office for seven years, the judges of the inferior court of common pleas in the several counties, justices of the peace, clerks of the supreme court, clerks of the inferior courts of common pleas and quarter sessions, the attorney-general and provincial secretary shall continue in office for five years, and the provincial treasurer shall continue in office for one year; and that they shall be severally appointed by the council and assembly in manner aforesaid, and commissioned by the governor, or, in his absence, by the vice president of the council; *provided always*, that the said officers severally shall be capable of being re-appointed at the end of the terms severally before limited; and that any of the said officers shall be liable to be dismissed, when adjudged guilty of misbehavior by the council, on an impeachment of the assembly.

Judges, attorney-general, secretary, treasurer and clerks, how appointed, and their duration in office.

Capable of being re-appointed, and liable to be dismissed for misbehavior.

XIII. That the inhabitants of each county, qualified to vote as aforesaid, shall, at the time and place of electing their representatives, annually elect one sheriff, and one or more coroners; and that they may re-elect the same person to such offices, until he shall have served three years, but no longer; after which three years shall elapse before the same person is capable of being elected again. When the election is certified to the governor or vice president, under the hands of six freeholders of the county for which they were elected, they shall be immediately commissioned to serve in their respective offices.

Sheriffs and coroners, when and by whom to be elected.

XIV. That the townships, at their annual town meetings for electing other officers, shall choose constables for the districts respectively; and also three or more judicious freeholders of good character, to hear and finally determine all appeals relative to unjust assessments in cases of public taxation; which commissioners of appeal shall, for that purpose sit at some suitable time or times to be by them appointed, and made known to the people by advertisements.

Constables and commissioners of appeal in cases of taxation, how to be chosen.

XV. That the laws of this colony shall begin in the following style, viz.: *Be it enacted, by the Council and General Assembly of this colony, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same.* That all commissions, granted by the governor or vice president, shall run thus: "The colony of New Jersey to A. B., &c., greeting;" and that all writs shall likewise run in the name of the colony; and that all indictments shall conclude in the following manner, viz.: "Against the peace of this colony, the government and dignity of the same."

Style of laws.

Commissions and writs, how to run.

Indictments, how to conclude.

XVI. That all criminals shall be admitted to the same privileges of witnesses and counsel, as their prosecutors are or shall be entitled to.

Criminals, their privileges.

XVII. That the estates of such persons as shall destroy their own lives shall not, for that offense, be forfeited; but shall descend in the same manner as they would have done had such persons died in a natural way; nor shall any article, which may occasion accidentally the death of any one, be henceforth deemed a deodand, and in anywise forfeited on account of such misfortune.

Estates of persons destroying themselves not to be forfeited, but to descend.

XVIII. That no person shall ever within this colony be deprived of the inestimable privilege of worshiping Almighty God in a manner agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience; nor under any pretense whatsoever, compelled to attend any place of worship, contrary to his own faith and judgment; nor shall any person within this colony, ever be obliged to pay tithes, taxes or any other rates, for the purpose of building or repairing any church or churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right, or has deliberately or voluntarily engaged himself to perform.

Free exercise of religion.

XIX. That there shall be no establishment of any one religious sect in this province in preference to another; and that no protestant inhabitant of this colony shall be denied the enjoyment of any civil right, merely on account of his religious principles; but that all persons, professing a belief in the faith of any protestant sect, who shall demean themselves peaceably under the government as hereby established, shall be capable of being elected into any office of profit or trust, or being a member of either

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branch of the legislature, and shall fully and freely enjoy every privilege and immunity enjoyed by others their fellow-subjects.

What officers shall be excluded from holding seats in the general assembly.

XX. That the legislative department of this colony may, as much as possible, be preserved from all suspicion of corruption, none of the judges of the supreme or other court, sheriffs, or any other person or persons possessed of any post of profit under the government, other than justices of the peace, shall be entitled to a seat in the assembly; but that, on his being elected and taking his seat, his office or post shall be considered as vacant.

What legislative acts to be in force.

XXI. That all the laws of this province, contained in the edition lately published by Mr. Allinson, shall be and remain in full force until altered by the legislature of this colony (such only excepted as are incompatible with this charter), and shall be, according as heretofore, regarded in all respects by all civil officers, and others, the good people of this province.

Common and statute law of England, how far to be in force.

XXII. That the common law of England, as well as so much of the statute law, as have been heretofore practiced in this colony, shall still remain in force, until they shall be altered by a future law of the legislature; such parts only excepted, as are repugnant to the rights and privileges contained in this charter; and that the inestimable right of trial by jury shall remain confirmed, as a part of the law of this colony, without repeal, forever.

Trial by jury confirmed.

Oath to be taken by the members of the legislature.

XXIII. That every person, who shall be elected as aforesaid, to be a member of the legislative council, or house of assembly, shall, previous to his taking his seat in council or assembly, take the following oath or affirmation, viz.: "I, A. B., do solemnly declare, that as a member of the legislative council or assembly (as the case may be) of the colony of New Jersey, I will not assent to any law, vote, or proceeding, which shall appear to me injurious to the public welfare of said colony; nor that shall annul or repeal that part of the third section in the charter of this colony, which establishes, that the elections of members of the legislative council and assembly shall be annual; nor that part of the twenty-second section in said charter, respecting the trial by jury; nor that shall annul, repeal, or alter any part or parts of the eighteenth or nineteenth sections of the same." And any person or persons, who shall be elected as aforesaid, is hereby empowered to administer to the said members the said oath or affirmation.

Proviso.

Provided always, and it is the true intent and meaning of this congress, that if a reconciliation between Great Britain and these colonies should take place, and the latter be again taken under the protection and government of the crown of Great Britain, this charter shall be null and void, otherwise to remain firm and inviolable.

In Provincial Congress, New Jersey,
Burlington, July 2d, 1776.

By order of congress,

SAMUEL TUCKER, *President.*

Extract from the minutes.

WILLIAM PATERSON, *Secretary.*