

THE ROLE OF THE GEORGIA DELEGATION IN THE FEDERAL CONVENTION OF 1787

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Georgia was one of twelve states which chose delegates to the Federal Convention of 1787. Six persons were appointed, but only four attended. They were capable men, but their attendance was poor and they rarely entered the discussion or offered motions. Included were William Pierce, William Houstoun, William Few, and Abraham Baldwin, all of whom attended.

The accomplishments of the convention were marked by the actions of delegations, voting as delegations rather than as individuals. An examination of the votes of the Georgia delegation provides insight into the particular characteristics of that state and the interests and concerns of its people in 1787.

Georgia was relatively small in size and population, but its claims to vast areas in the west gave promise of rapid future growth. It was a border state, its frontiers vulnerable to attack by Spaniards and Indians. The economy was related to plantation agriculture, slave labor, and commerce, but the lifestyle and viewpoints of the older seaboard aristocracy were being challenged by newcomers from the north and abroad, as well as by the people on the frontier. Such factors help explain the votes of the Georgia delegates. They supported a strong central government which could protect the states from dangers external and internal and provide funds for internal improvements such as post roads, bridges, and canals. Yet they resisted congressional interference with the slave trade, which they regarded as a purely local matter, and wanted to require a two-thirds vote of both houses of congress to pass navigation acts. They endorsed strict citizenship, residence, and property qualifications for both electors and officeholders. Although the individual delegates often disagreed on issues, they were reasonable men, willing to make concessions in order to draft an acceptable constitution, but always sensitive to the peculiar concerns of their fellow Georgians.

*Synopsis provided by Thomas F. Armstrong.