



Ratifying the Bill of Rights . . . in 1939

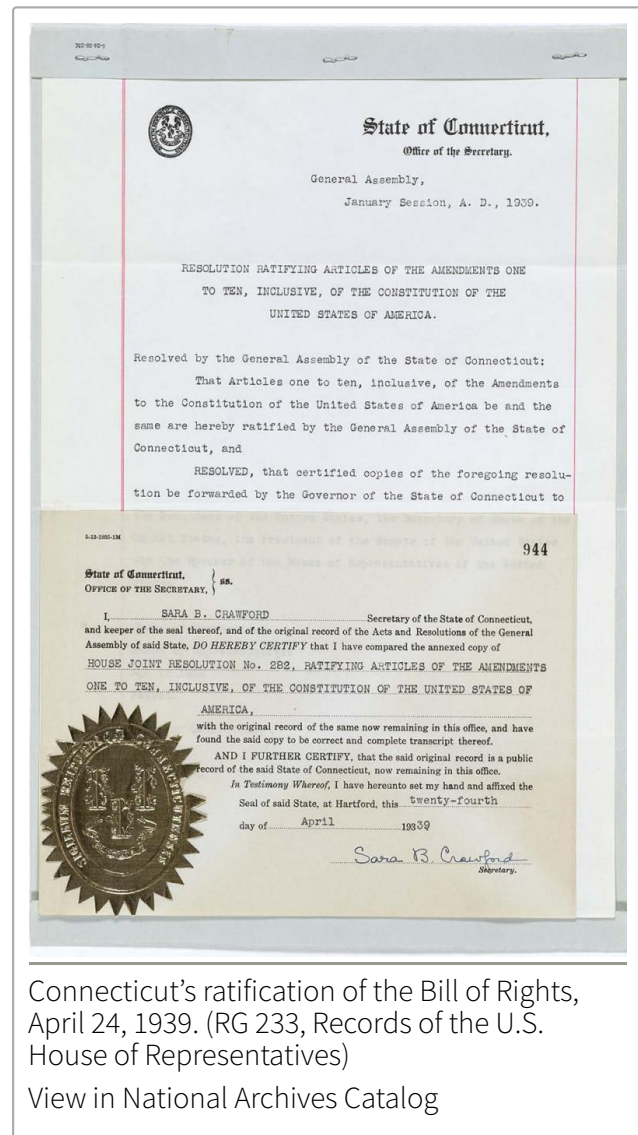
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On December 15 we observe the 225th anniversary of the ratification of the Bill of Rights. One-by-one, from 1789 to 1791, the states ratified 10 amendments to the nation's new Constitution. The process had begun when the First Federal Congress sent the states 12 proposed amendments, via a joint resolution passed on September 25, 1789, for their consideration. When Virginia became the 11th state to ratify the amendments on December 15, 1791, amendments 3 through 12 became part of the Constitution, and these first 10 amendments were thereafter known as our Bill of Rights.

One might think that 1791 was the end of the story of the ratification of the Bill of Rights, but there is a footnote: three states ratified the first 10 amendments a century and a half later, in 1939.

Once the Bill of Rights was ratified by three-fourths of the states in 1791, it became part of the law of the land, and there was no legal need for any further ratifications. At the time Virginia ratified, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Georgia had not sent their approvals to Congress.

In 1939, the 150th anniversary of Congressional approval of the amendments, all three states symbolically ratified the Bill of Rights.



Connecticut's ratification of the Bill of Rights, April 24, 1939. (RG 233, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives)

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