



Rare signed ratification copy of the U.S. Constitution, recently discovered in North Carolina, heads to auction

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Image Credit: Brunk Auctions

Asheville, NC An incredibly rare, original printed archetype of the United States Constitution, signed by Secretary of Congress Charles Thomson, will be auctioned on September 28, 2024, in Asheville, North Carolina. The auction will begin with a starting bid of \$1 million, without reserve. It is expected to sell for much more.

This revolutionary document is one of only eight known surviving signed ratification copies of the United States Constitution, and the only known in private hands. The last and only other recorded sale of a similar document was in 1891.

The ratification copy of the Constitution will be sold at Brunk Auctions on September 28, the 237th anniversary of the day Congress passed the ratification resolution.

Drafted in Philadelphia and signed by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, the proposed Constitution was delivered on September 18, 1787 to the Confederation Congress that was then meeting in New York on the site that is now the Federal Hall National Memorial at 26 Wall Street. On September 28, Congress resolved to send it to the states for ratification. To that end, Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, ordered 100 copies of the printed archetype, only a fraction of which he signed for sending to the legislatures of the 13 original states. It is that resolution, along with Thomson's signature, that makes the present copy an official ratification edition of the Constitution.

This incredibly rare document was discovered in 2022 at Hayes Farm, a 184-acre plantation in Edenton, North Carolina. The property was purchased in 1765 by Samuel Johnston, who served as governor of North Carolina from 1787-1789 and presided over the state's two ratification conventions. In 1865, it was acquired by the Wood family, who lived in and preserved it for seven generations. The document was found inside an old filing cabinet in 2022 when the house was being evaluated and prepared for sale to North Carolina for conservation and transformation into a public historic site.

Previously, most of the books, documents and artifacts from the home were donated to North Carolina, and a recreation of the Hayes Library was built at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

According to auctioneer Andrew Brunk, “James Madison wrote that the Constitution ‘was nothing more than a draft of a plan, nothing but a dead letter, until life and validity were breathed into it by the voice of the people, speaking through several State Conventions.’” Brunk added, “this simple looking version is what started breathing life into the Constitution.”

Seth Kaller, a renowned historic document expert who is collaborating with Brunk on the sale, said that “This is a unique opportunity to own a cornerstone of our democracy, particularly at this time in our nation’s history. It also reminds us of the crucial role New York played in the founding of America.”

Kaller was involved in bidding on the Constitutional Convention printing that Sotheby’s sold on November 18, 2021 for \$43.2 million to Ken Griffin, founder and CEO of Citadel, LLC. In 1988, that same document had sold for \$165,000. According to Kaller, “The ratification copy now up for auction is rarer and arguably more significant, but the consignor gave Brunk the luxury of selling it without reserve, with a starting bid of \$1,000,000. The market will decide what the Constitution is worth to us today.”

The public will be able to view the document on Friday, September 13 from 1:00 – 4:30 PM at Federal Hall National Memorial at 26 Wall Street in New York, the location where the Confederation Congress met in September of 1787 and resolved to send the Constitution to the States for ratification.

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