

The Great Vermont

On January 6, 1791 **delegates** from towns all over Vermont met in Bennington. They were there to decide whether or not to ratify the United States Constitution. By ratifying the Constitution Vermonters would be agreeing to live by its laws and to become a part of the United States of America.

The meeting was called to order. The Constitution was read aloud twice so that delegates would understand what they were voting for. Then the debate opened. Anyone could say what he wanted to about the subject.

Nathaniel Chipman from Rutland asked to speak. He was an **influential** lawyer and he wanted Vermont to become part of the United States.

Chipman told the delegates that they were about to make an important decision. "The first thing that strikes the mind, is the narrow limits of our territory," he said. Vermont was small and bordered by the Canada to the north and by states on all other sides. Remember, the idea of a single nation, the United States, was new. Each state was **jealous** of the others. What if another state should decide to take over Vermont? Chipman asked. Would Vermont have to fight? If a dispute arose between Vermont and the United States, who would settle it? If Vermont were part of the United States, Chipman said, the central government would help with these problems.

Also, Vermont, by itself, had few resources, such as money and people. How could Vermont afford to build roads?

Chipman felt that the United States government would be strong enough to make laws for the common good. And it was a **flexible** government, he said. People could change or amend its laws if need be.



Statehood Debate

Daniel Buck of Norwich asked to speak next. He had lost his arm fighting for Vermont at the Battle of Bennington. He wanted to keep Vermont separate. For him, Vermont's small size was not a problem. It was a **virtue**. Because Vermont was small, its laws were simple and easy to understand. He compared Vermont's government to a machine. It was "so small that everyone could look and see how the wheels moved." Vermonters knew and understood their government.

Buck feared that as part of the United States, Vermonters would lose their individual rights. The federal government, which was far away, would make the laws. Buck believed that goodness and honesty were found in the everyday people of Vermont. He wanted them to rule themselves.

Both Chipman and Buck gave the assembly a lot to think about. Would they vote for joining the United States or would they stay a republic and go their own way? Of course, we know today how it turned out. The tally was 105 for joining the Union and 4 for staying a republic. Nathaniel Chipman's side had won.

Nathaniel Chipman was elected a delegate to present the Vermont decision to the United States Congress in Philadelphia. There, on March 4, 1791, he saw Congress accept Vermont as the fourteenth state.

VOCABULARY

delegates - representatives

influential - important

jealous - distrustful

flexible - easy to change

virtue - a good thing



Courtesy of National Life of Vermont