

ALL MEN ARE BORN FREE AND EQUAL

MASSACHUSETTS CONSTITUTION WILL BE USED TO END SLAVERY IN THE STATE

By our civil rights editor

October 25, 1780

THE MASSACHUSETTS Constitution came into effect today, declaring that all men are born “free and equal.” Many believe the new constitution effectively abolishes slavery, making it illegal. But women still do not have the right to vote.

The Revolutionary War continues to grind on, but after the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the creation of the United States, the American colonies set about writing their own constitutions as free and independent states.

The Massachusetts Constitution is the basic governing document of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This new state replaces the Province of Massachusetts Bay, a royal colony formed nearly a century ago.

The old province included the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Plymouth Colony from the time of the Puritans and Pilgrims. Maine will remain part of Massachusetts, at least for the time being.

The constitution’s principal author has been Massachusetts lawyer and patriot John Adams, who was a signer of the U.S. Declaration of Independence.



THE Massachusetts State House in Boston was completed in 1798 and has served as the seat of state government ever since. Designed by Charles Bulfinch, the state capitol building was constructed to take over from the Old State House, the scene of the Boston Massacre. Later, its dome will be gilded in gold leaf. A “Sacred Cod”—a wood-crafted symbol of the fishing industry—hung in the Old State House and today one hangs over the House of Representatives chamber in the “new” State House. In 1933, Massachusetts politicians were sent reeling after the theft of the Sacred Cod. Harvard students were suspected of being behind the prank, and it was eventually returned.

He built a reputation for respect for the law when he defended British soldiers’ role in the Boston Massacre.

The Massachusetts Constitution was approved in June after a special convention was called, attended by representatives from towns across Massachusetts. The constitution states that under a “social compact” citizens agree

to be governed by laws designed for the “common good.”

The Commonwealth, it says, is “a free, sovereign, and independent state,” with three branches of government.

They include a state governor, independent judiciary, and state legislature elected by the people, called the General Court of Massachusetts. It also officially

recognizes Harvard as a university.

Legal experts are predicting that a court battle over the future of slavery in the state will intensify. Making use of the constitution, enslaved people are expected to bring legal actions to win their freedom. But some owners are likely to try and get around the law by keeping slaves as indentured servants.