

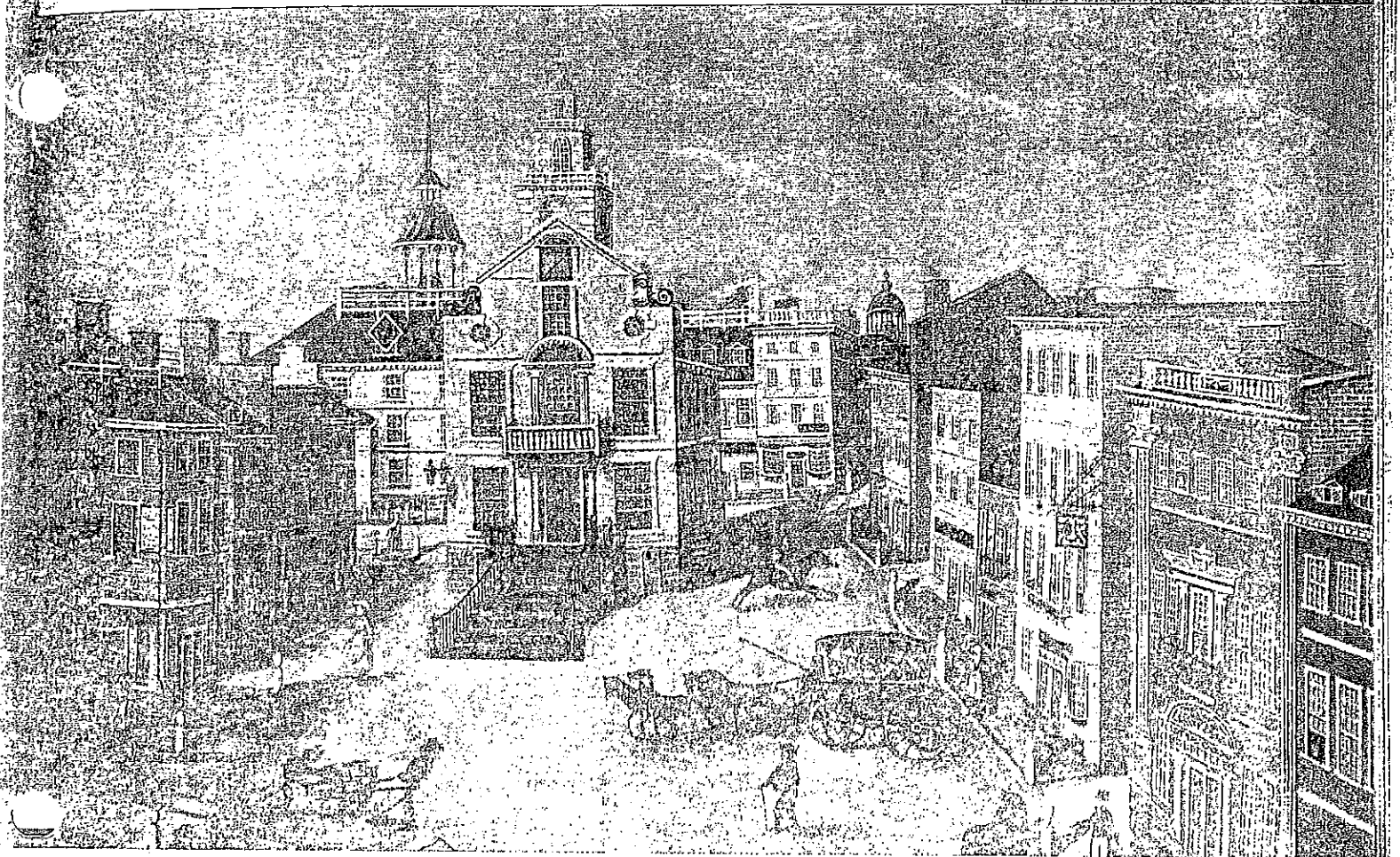
How did the states govern themselves after the Revolution?

LESSON PURPOSE

Shortly after the start of the Revolutionary War in 1775, many of the new states began to write their constitutions. In this lesson you will learn about these new state constitutions. You will explore the basic ideas on which the new governments were founded.

When you finish the lesson, you should be able to describe those basic ideas. You should also be able to explain the major differences between the Massachusetts constitution and the constitutions of the other states.

10



TERMS TO UNDERSTAND



legislative supremacy
petition
popular sovereignty
veto

What were the basic ideas about government in the state constitutions?

After the Declaration of Independence, British government in the colonies came to an end. The colonies were free and independent states. Each state would have to create a new government.

The people wanted state governments that would protect their basic rights and promote the common good. When they began to write their state constitutions they used the ideas they had learned from political philosophy. They also used what they had learned from their own experience with colonial and British government.

The ideas they included in the state constitutions were not new. Most of the ideas had been used in the governments of the colonies. The Founders tried to design their new governments with the best ideas from the past. Their experiences with these state governments would help them design the Constitution in 1787.

These are the basic ideas that the Founders included in their state constitutions.



John Hancock was a governor of Massachusetts and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. In what ways did state constitutions limit the power of the governor?

- ① **Natural rights and higher law.** The purpose of government is to protect the rights of citizens to life, liberty, and property. Each state constitution was a higher law that everyone had to obey.

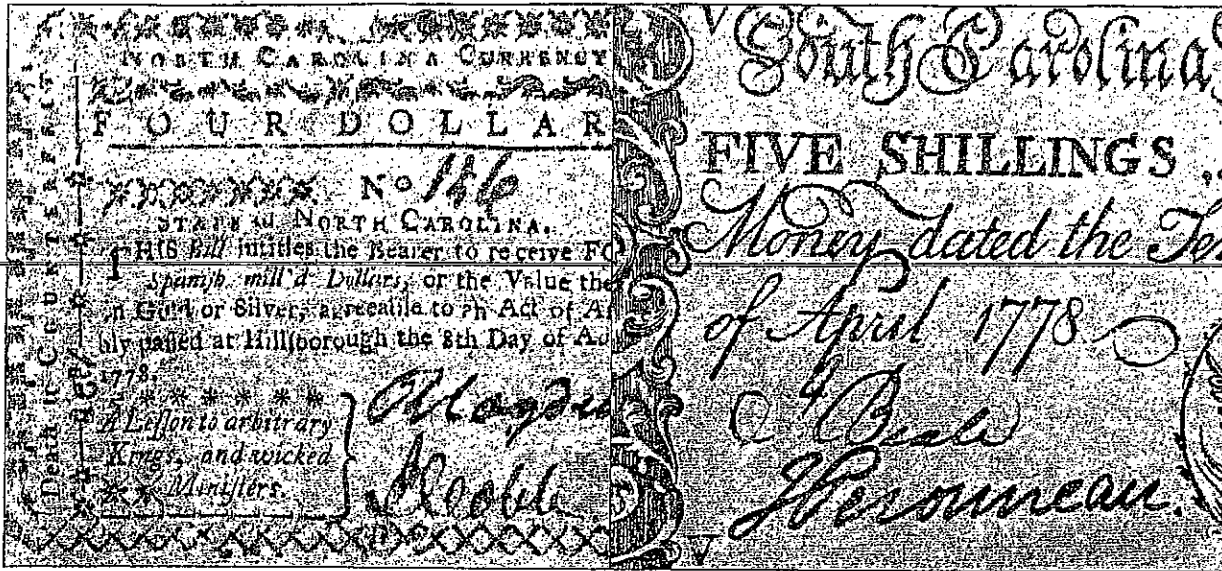
- ② **Social contract.** Each state made it clear that it believed that government is formed as a social contract. The people agreed to form a government to protect their natural rights.
- ③ **Popular sovereignty.** The term sovereign means to have the highest authority or power. **Popular sovereignty** means that the people are the highest authority. All the states adopted the idea that the people are the source of the authority of government. The people delegate their authority to government. Government gets its right to govern from the people.
- ④ **Representation.** Each state considered it very important that the legislature be made up of elected representatives of the people. In most states, the right to vote was limited to white men who owned

property. About seventy percent of the white men in America owned enough property to be able to vote. In contrast, only about ten percent were eligible to vote in Great Britain.

- ⑤ **Separation of powers.** All the states used some form of separation of powers. They divided government into legislative, executive, and judicial branches.
- ⑥ **Checks and balances.** Although the states favored a strong legislature, the constitutions did provide for some checks. Most of the checks were within the legislatures themselves. Most legislatures had two houses. Each house could check the power of the other. The people also could check the power of the legislatures. The voters could elect new representatives to both houses if they did not like the way the government was working.



Why do you think most states required people to own property in order to be eligible to vote?



Examples of money used in North Carolina (left) and South Carolina (right) after the Revolutionary War. What problems might arise if each state could print its own paper money?

- 7 **Legislative supremacy.** The majority of the states set up governments in which most of the power was given to the legislature. This system of government is known as **legislative supremacy**. The Founders believed that because the people elected the legislature, it was the most democratic branch of government. They were afraid of giving too much power to the executive branch. They remembered how the royal governors and the king had abused their power. So most of the state governors were given very limited power.

Despite checks on the power of the legislative branch the legislature had far greater power than the other two branches of government. Legislative supremacy led to some serious problems in most states.

- * State governments did not protect the property rights of some citizens.

In these states, factions—groups of people who seek to promote their own interests—gained control of the legislature. The factions were accused of making laws that benefited themselves rather than the common good. They passed laws that canceled debts and they created paper money. These laws benefited the people who owed money and hurt those who had loaned it to them.

- * The state legislatures passed laws that taxed and controlled their citizens far more than the British had done. The level of taxes during the 1780s was ten to twenty times what it had been before the Revolution.
- * Many new state laws were passed which interfered with the private lives of the citizens. Laws were passed telling people what they should eat, drink, wear, and believe.

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

10- How Did The States Govern Themselves After the Revolution?

Introductory Notes

According to the American colonists, what was wrong with the English government?

Directions- Read pages 83 – 92 of *We the People* and then complete the following

1- What do the American people want their state governments to be able to do?

A-

B-

2- Where do the American people get the ideas they use to form state governments?

A-

B-

3- Complete the matrix that follows-

Basic Ideas About the Government Found in State Constitutions

Basic Idea	Meaning in your own words
Natural Rights and Higher Law	
Social Contract	
Popular Sovereignty	
Representation	
Separation of Powers	
Checks and Balances	
Legislative Supremacy	

4- Which branch of the state governments had the most power?

5- What problems did most states have as a result of this?

A-

B-

C-