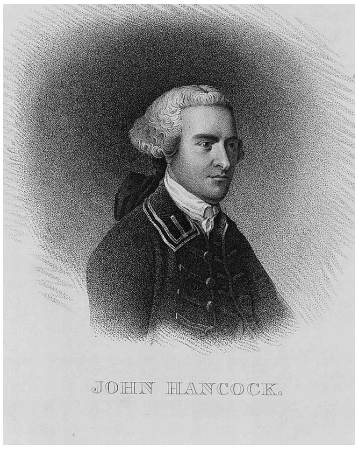
John Hancock

MASSACHUSETTS'S FIRST STATE GOVERNOR

Name: _____ Date: _____



John Hancock • 1737-1793

Historical portrait
Library of Congress / NPS

More than a signature

John Hancock is famous for the bold signature beneath the Declaration of Independence. In 1776, he signed as president of the Continental Congress, the assembly representing the colonies. This position was different from being president of the United States. His signature became a symbol of independence, but his public service continued long after the document was signed.

Hancock was a wealthy Boston **merchant**, a person who buys and sells goods. He inherited his uncle's business and opposed British taxes. His money and influence helped support the revolutionary movement. [A]

A new state, a new kind of leader

On **October 25, 1780**, Hancock took office as the first governor under the Massachusetts Constitution. Massachusetts had colonial governors before him. His election marked a new stage: leading a commonwealth under a written plan of government. He served from **1780 to 1785** and again from **1787 until his death in 1793**. [B, C]

Power with limits

The constitution divided authority among legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Hancock led the executive branch. He could approve bills or reject them with a **veto**. However, a two-thirds vote in each legislative chamber could override his rejection. This system placed limits on the governor: even a popular leader could not control every decision. [D]

1776
Signs the Declaration

1780
Becomes governor

1787
Returns as governor

1793
Dies while in office

Sources A-D and image credits appear on page 2. Timeline spacing is not to scale.

Leadership & its limits

READ • WEIGH EVIDENCE • DISCUSS

Name: _____ Date: _____

Keeping order and offering mercy

After returning to office in 1787, Hancock faced the aftermath of **Shays' Rebellion**, an armed uprising against the state government. His proclamation offered **clemency**, or official mercy, to many participants who pledged loyalty to the commonwealth. Some leaders were excluded from that offer. This decision raises a question: How can a government defend its laws while helping a divided community recover? [E]

Who had a voice?

The new government promised rights, but political participation was limited. Voting rules required men to be at least 21 and meet property qualifications. Women could not vote. Studying Hancock's era means examining both the creation of elected government and the people excluded from choosing its leaders. [D, F]

THINK Why is "the first governor under the state constitution" more precise than "the first person to govern Massachusetts"?

My evidence is _____

PAIR Which mattered more for protecting people: limits on a governor's power or who could vote? Explain both views.

I think _____ because _____. My partner thinks _____.

SHARE State one achievement and one limitation of government in Hancock's time. Use evidence from the reading.

One achievement was _____. One limitation was _____.

SOURCES & IMAGE CREDITS • Click a title to open the source.

A. National Park Service: John Hancock
B. Mass.gov: John Adams and government
C. U.S. House: Hancock biography
D. Commonwealth Museum: 1780 Constitution
E. STCC: Hancock's 1787 clemency proclamation
F. Commonwealth Museum: Voting rights

Portrait: Library of Congress via NPS. Seal: Massachusetts Design System. Educational publication.