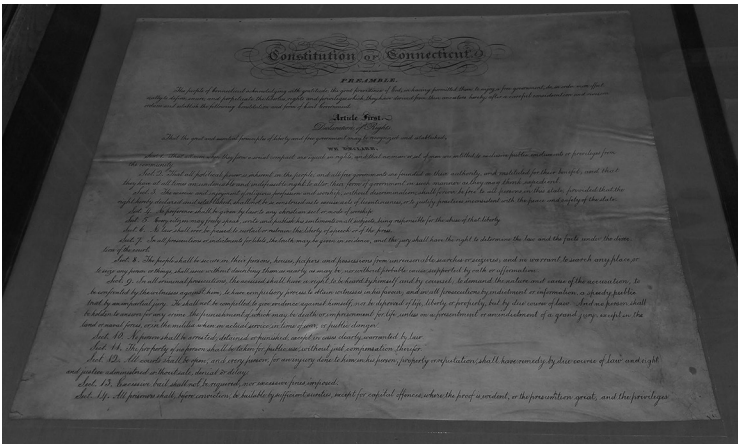




The Fundamental Orders, the original founding document of Connecticut, on display at the Museum of Connecticut History. Photograph courtesy of Adam Levesque.



Connecticut's 1818 Constitution, also on display at the Museum of Connecticut History, begins with Article 1 declaring twenty-one rights of all men in our state. Photograph courtesy of Mary Tursi.

A Step toward Equality: The 200th Anniversary of Connecticut’s 1818 Constitution

2018 marks the bicentennial of the creation of Connecticut’s 1818 Constitution. This remarkable document is at once a reflection of the strength of the Fundamental Orders, a representation of the social and electoral struggles of its times, and a fascinating commentary on our history as a state in the 200 years since. The final document is a result of hard-fought yet civil debates about the core values of our state in the same way that the federal Constitution is a reflection of similar debates about the values of our nation.

To understand the 1818 Constitution, it is important to know the history of the governing documents of our state. In 1639, representatives from the settlements of Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor met to decide how this new colony was to be governed. While commonly referred to as a charter at the time, the Fundamental Orders have since been recognized by many as the earliest written constitution ever created by the residents of a defined area of land. In this publication, the 1639 “charter” has traditionally been referred to as the first constitution of Connecticut. This document boldly renounced the laws of England. An official charter was granted by England in 1662, but many Connecticut colonists saw this as a formality. Following the Declaration of Independence and the enactment of the United States Constitution, our state saw no urgency in adopting a new constitution—a departure from most other newly-minted states likely due to our own founders’ declaration of independence via this document over 130 years earlier.

In the nearly 180 years until the call of the 1818 constitutional convention, several laws were enacted, the result of which was the incremental affirmation of the Congregational Church’s entwinement with the official government of the State of Connecticut—something that seems to go against the very grain of the religious freedom that our founders sought. Similarly, a series of laws restricted access to voting while forcing non-Congregationalists to pay taxes to support the Congregational Church. Surely, those opposed to these laws must have been reminded of the old Boston Tea Party slogan, “No taxation without representation.”

By the early 1800s, the Federalist Party was firmly ensconced as the ruling party of our state. The party was also widely and openly associated

with the Congregational Church. Nationally, the Democratic-Republican Party was the dominant challenging party. Our state's brand of this new party, officially referred to as the Toleration Party, first met in New Haven in early 1816. In April of 1817, Toleration Party members celebrated the election of Governor Oliver Wolcott, Jr., a former Federalist and a Congregationalist, and Lieutenant Governor Jonathan Ingersoll, a Democratic-Republican and Episcopalian. The Toleration Party also seized control of the General Assembly. Party members largely consisted of Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists and other small religious sects. It is likely, based on population information about our state at the time, that some members of the Jewish faith were also Toleration Party members.

In early 1818, following the victorious April reelection of Governor Wolcott, the Toleration Party addressed one of their chief campaign trail arguments for victory: The General Assembly called for a new constitutional convention. After being elected to serve as one of the members of the convention from Litchfield, Governor Wolcott was then elected president of the convention. Former Federalist Governor John Treadwell was also elected as a member of the convention from Farmington.

The purposes of the convention are well-illustrated by its members' debates and the resulting changes to our state's constitution. Separation of church and state was a fundamental argument for holding this convention and much of the debate—both at the convention and in the public—centered on this concern. The 1818 Constitution successfully accomplished this separation, further establishing religious equality among Christians. Originally drafted language used the word “religious” but Governor Treadwell made a motion to change the word to “Christian,” thus limiting important religious freedoms to non-Christians.

Another essential issue to the members of the convention was judicial independence. Under the prior constitution, an executive branch and a legislative branch of government had been firmly and separately established in line with the principle of equal branches of government, along with checks and balances. Each was granted a large degree of autonomy to perform its defined roles. Conversely, the judicial branch existed but was seen as too strongly tied to the governor. The new constitution importantly ended the ability to appeal a decision issued by the judicial branch to the governor.

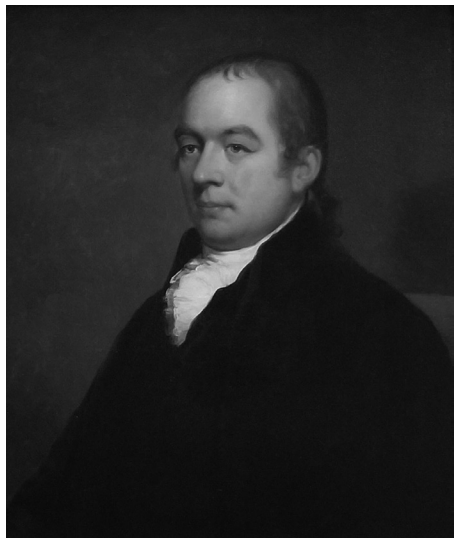


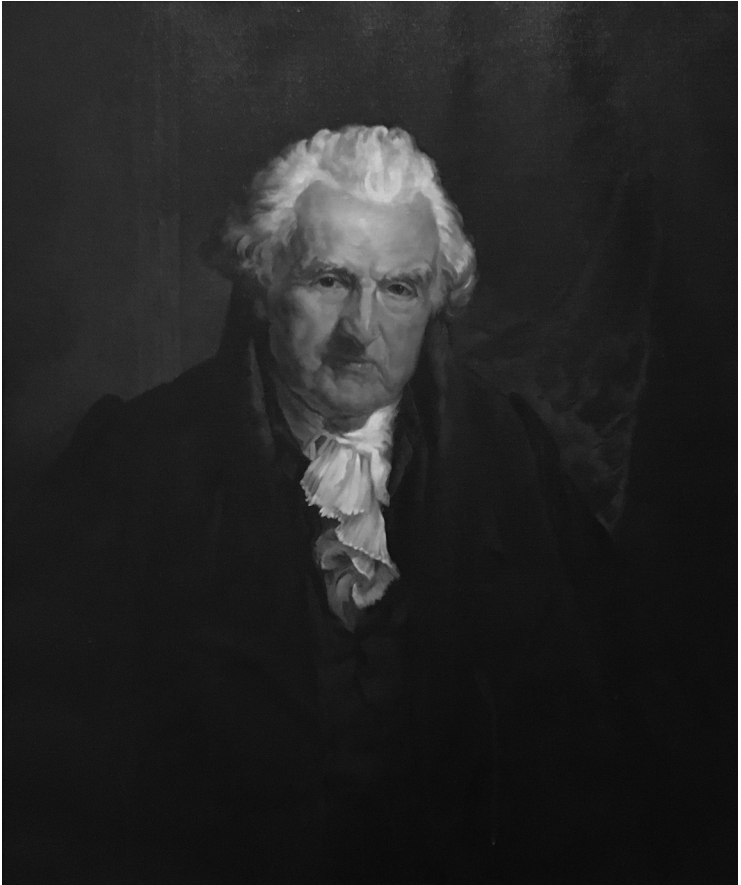
Oliver Wolcott Jr. served as our nation's second Secretary of the Treasury under President Washington prior to becoming Connecticut's governor in 1817. His father, Governor Oliver Wolcott Sr., was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. This official portrait is on display in the Museum of Connecticut History.

Photograph courtesy of Gayathry Sunil

Convention delegate John Treadwell (Governor 1809-1811) in his official portrait on display at the Museum of Connecticut History.

Photograph courtesy of Amara McNeil





Born in Wethersfield, Stephen Mix Mitchell was elected to the state House of Representatives (1778-1784) before serving as a member of Connecticut's 1788 constitutional convention to ratify the federal Constitution. He later served as a United States Senator before eventually being named Chief Justice of Connecticut's Supreme Court (1807-1814). This portrait of Justice Mitchell hangs in the hall outside the Supreme Court in Hartford.

Photograph courtesy of Christopher Wolf.

The third major concern at the convention involved expanding suffrage. At one point during the substantial debate on voting rights, Judge Stephen Mix Mitchell of Wethersfield made an unsuccessful motion to remove the words “white male” from the definition of who should be able to vote. Far-reaching for its time, should the motion have succeeded, Connecticut would have been the first state to grant suffrage to people of any race or gender—over 50 years before the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution would be ratified and over 100 years before the 19th Amendment would be adopted. Though this radical idea did not succeed, the 1818 Constitution did establish universal suffrage for white males, removing property ownership requirements. Minorities and women still faced a long fight for parity in the state and in the nation on this front.

The authors of the 1818 Constitution gathered throughout the late-summer days of August and early September with many competing ideas but with one important common goal: the preservation of the first-ever written constitutional government while adapting that document to the changing population of our state. As more immigrants followed the Puritans in a quest for a better life, the faces and needs of our citizens changed. The members of the convention openly grappled with the expansion of suffrage and religious freedom for all, as well as with racial and gender equality, long before the nation as a whole would confront such concerns.

With this dedication, we honor all who served as members of the 1818 constitutional convention and who crafted this historic document. We also honor all the people of Connecticut who fought for the convention to take place, as well as those who continued the fight to fulfill dreams that were debated but not transformed into law 200 years ago. On the bicentennial of the creation of this historic document, in honor of those who worked to create it and those who have preserved its history, meaning and purpose, I dedicate the 2018 State Register and Manual to the 1818 Constitution of the State of Connecticut.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise W. Merrill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "M".

Denise W. Merrill
Secretary of the State



The Beth Israel Synagogue was originally constructed in 1876 at 21 Charter Oak Avenue in Hartford. Designed in the Romanesque revival style by architect George Keller, the large open interior was able to house up to 600 people in wooden pews. In 1936, the congregation moved the synagogue to its present home at 701 Farmington Avenue in West Hartford (pictured above). The Hartford location, known as Connecticut's oldest synagogue building, now houses the Charter Oak Cultural Center.

Photograph courtesy of Kristen Bartlett.

Religious Freedom in Connecticut

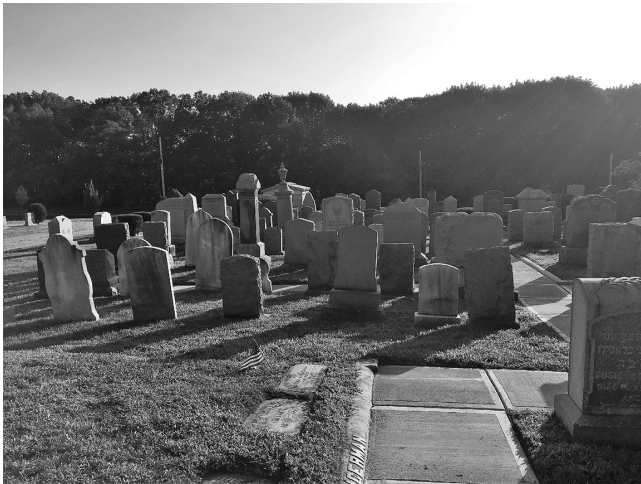
June 6, 2018 marked the 175th anniversary of the expansion of religious freedom to Jewish residents of Connecticut. Generally thought of as a tolerant and progressive state, Connecticut's journey to religious freedom for all was not a short one. Thomas Hooker and the other founders of our state came to New England in pursuit of religious freedom from their home country. Yet when drafting the Fundamental Orders, our founders joined what would become the Congregational Church and our new state government in a way that later forced non-Congregationalists to pay taxes to support the Congregational Church. The members of the 1818 Constitutional Convention sought to rectify this—both by separating church and state and by attempting to expand religious freedom to all, regardless of denomination.

Despite the fact that one primary purpose of the 1818 convention was to achieve religious freedom for non-Congregationalists, Governor John Treadwell made a successful last-minute motion to substitute the word “religious” with the word “Christian,” thus limiting the extension of the freedom of assembly for religion to non-Congregationalist Christians only. The Toleration Party members of the convention, consisting largely of Episcopalians, Methodists, Quakers and Baptists, had proposed language that would include their Jewish neighbors but were unsuccessful in this attempt. While Jewish citizens could hold public office, they were not allowed to participate in any type of public worship and could not own land as a congregation. Instead, they were forced to gather in private homes to worship, much like Hooker's Puritan brethren were forced to gather in cellars back in England in order to practice their right to freedom of religious assembly.

Historical accounts tell of the first Jewish immigrants to Connecticut arriving around 1659, less than thirty years after the Pilgrims made their famous 1620 voyage to Massachusetts. The first group of Jewish immigrants to the New World consisted of about twenty-three Sephardics from Spain and Portugal by way of Brazil who settled on the island that was then New Amsterdam and is now known as Manhattan. The original settlers arrived on the island in 1654 and within about five years, some had moved to Hartford. In 1722, New Haven public records reflect several families

Gerson Fox, founder of G. Fox & Co., served as treasurer of Congregation Beth Israel in 1876. He also helped form the Ararat Lodge in Hartford—affiliated with the National Bnai Brith lodge in New York City, the lodge was a gathering place for its members. Members helped each other as well as the community around them. Practices, which later became part of Blue Cross, included unemployment compensation, sick benefits and life insurance.

(Gerson Fox, 1850-1860, oil on canvas in gilt gesso frame; gift of Dorothy B. Koopman, 2005.140.1, the Connecticut Historical Society.)



Congregation Mishkan Israel's cemetery is located in the Westville section of New Haven. Aside from establishing Connecticut's first Jewish cemetery, the congregation later established the first free Hebrew school in Connecticut.

Photograph courtesy of Brendan Howroyd.

of Spanish-Jewish origin and by the end of the eighteenth century, the American population consisted of over 3000 Jewish residents.

The second influx of Jewish immigrants to Connecticut occurred beginning in 1840 with many German-Jewish families arriving in Hartford. The efforts of the Hartford group to acquire land for a synagogue coincided with the efforts of the New Haven-based Congregation Mishkan Israel to acquire land in what would become a culmination of religious freedom history in our state: In early 1843, New Haven-Bavarian immigrant Louis Rothschild authored a petition to the General Assembly based on the New Haven congregation's desire to own a cemetery for its members. At about the same time in Hartford, Congregation Beth Israel received a grant of five thousand dollars to build a synagogue.

The "Petition by Louis Rothschild and Others for Certain Religious Freedoms" was cosigned by Ira Merwin, a Christian, in an effort to boost its chances of acceptance. The petition sought equal protections under the law for people of the Jewish faith as enjoyed by those of Christian faiths. Signed by Governor Chauncey F. Cleveland 175 years ago, An Act in Addition to an Act Relating to Religious Societies and Congregations read:

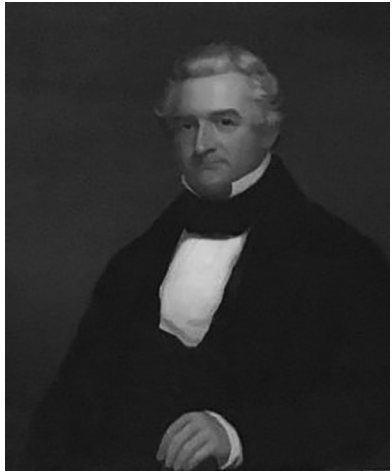
"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened, that Jews who may desire to unite and form religious societies, shall have the same rights, powers and privileges which are given to Christians of every denomination by the act to which this is in addition, and the several acts in addition thereto and alteration thereof."

Congregation Mishkan Israel established its cemetery, which remains in use today. Congregation Beth Israel built the first synagogue in Connecticut which, after eventually moving to West Hartford, continues to be a thriving congregation.

Although the 1843 statute extended religious freedom to those who practice Judaism, it did not extend this freedom to other non-Christians. This last extension of religious freedom would wait until 1965 to become fully realized. In the preceding and intervening times, other non-Christians have called Connecticut home. Colonists encountered Native Americans when they settled along the Connecticut River and sought to manage this population in various ways, one of which was to educate them in the ways of and to convert them to Christianity. Other methods consisted of displacement, enslavement and slaughter through both government-sanctioned bounty and the orchestration of tribal infighting. The other signifi-

Born in Canterbury, Chauncey Fitch Cleveland was a teacher and attorney before being elected to Connecticut's House of Representatives in 1826. He served as Speaker of the House until 1838 before being elected governor. Cleveland later served in the United States Congress. Ten years later, he was re-elected to the state House, where he again served as speaker beginning in 1863. This official portrait is on display in the Museum of Connecticut History.

Photograph courtesy of Lindsey Foster.



Secretary of the State Denise Merrill and other state officials honor Connecticut immigrants each April in a ceremony at the State Capitol. Honorees are recognized for their contributions to the state.

cant non-Christian population of Connecticut in 1843 consisted of African slaves. Perhaps the first example of unwilling immigrants to our country, this group was targeted in a similar method: Christians worked to convert them after overpowering and transplanting them.

In 1965, Connecticut held its third constitutional convention. The necessity of this was driven by a United States Supreme Court decision related to the apportionment of representatives to the United States Congress. However, during these proceedings, the members of the convention also wisely chose to establish the right of all religions, Christian or non-Christian, to congregate. By this time, our state had welcomed large groups of immigrants of varied religions from Asia, Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and more, so this modernization of the Constitution was both non-controversial and welcome by Connecticut citizens.

Our state is often thought of as progressive in nature while conversely being referred to as the land of steady habits. The history of religious freedom in Connecticut is an excellent reflection of this contradiction. Although 2018 is the 175th anniversary of the first non-Christians in our state establishing the freedom of religious assembly, it also took over 120 additional years before all non-Christians gained the same rights by way of the 1965 convention.

The story of religious freedom in Connecticut is complex. Though we are a state founded upon the belief in this fundamental value, we have historically been quite conservative in our governing structure and in our laws in this regard. Today, we are a state that reflects our citizens' faces, cultures and beliefs. We have overcome circumstances to embrace religious freedom for all. In remembrance of the 175th anniversary of the successful petition and passage of a law ensuring religious freedom for Jewish citizens, and of the subsequent acquisition of religious freedom for all non-Christians, I dedicate the 2018 State Register and Manual to Connecticut's attainment of religious freedom for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denise W. Merrill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "M".

Denise W. Merrill
Secretary of the State