

## The State of Franklin

*Essential Question: How did the creation and failure of the State of Franklin reflect the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?*

Even before the Revolutionary War was over, Continental Congress had begun to plan for independence by creating a new government in a document called the Articles of Confederation. The government created by the Articles reflected the fear many leaders had of a powerful central government. The Articles of Confederation were approved by Continental Congress in 1777, but immediately ran into difficulty in getting the states to ratify the document. The main issue that held up ratification was land claims west of the Appalachians. A number of states, including Virginia and Massachusetts, claimed that their charters gave them vast areas of land west of the Appalachians. Maryland refused to ratify unless the states gave up their claims and accepted that the western lands belonged to the United States government. Eventually, Virginia gave up its claim, Maryland ratified the document and the Articles of Confederation became the first constitution of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation and the issue of western territories would continue to plague the new nation and led to the creation and failure of the State of Franklin.

Due to the Confederation government's inability to collect taxes from states, one of the most effective ways for states to pay their debts was to cede, or give up, their western land holdings to the national government. However, in 1783, North Carolina opened up its western lands for private sale. Settlers and wealthy land speculators flooded the region known today as East Tennessee. When the land was finally ceded to

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Foner and John A. Garraty editors, *The Reader's Companion to American History*. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991) *History.com*, <https://www.history.com/topics/articles-of-confederation> accessed 14 June 2018.

the national government, the settlers and speculators kept their private property rights in the region.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the settlers in the region faced numerous hardships without aid from either North Carolina's government or the national government. They built their own schools and courthouses, and defended themselves from American Indian attacks with no support. By August of 1784, many of the settlers did not feel that they owed allegiance to North Carolina, refused to pay taxes, and began speaking of forming their own independent state. The state was ultimately named Franklin in honor of Benjamin Franklin, whose support the settlers wanted to secure. In May 1785, the Confederation Congress heard William Coker's petition asking for Franklin's admission to the Union as an independent state. A vote was held but Franklin supporters failed to reach the 2/3 majority required under the Articles of Confederation, so legally Franklin remained part of North Carolina. Nevertheless, Franklin continued to act independently. The unrecognized state signed the Treaty of Dumplin Creek with the Cherokee in June 1785, establishing new territorial boundaries and opening up more land for Franklin's citizens to settle.<sup>3</sup> However, due to Franklin's lack of legal status, the treaty was unrecognized by the national government. The national government negotiated its own treaty with the Cherokee in November 1785, which established different boundaries. This created many problems for settlers who had moved onto lands they believed they could legally claim only to be told that they were illegally living on lands belonging to the Cherokee. The conflicting treaties led to intense fighting between the Cherokee and the settlers. Disagreements between the Franklin settlers themselves were an important reason for the state's failure. John Tipton, a well-known landowner in the region became

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Toomey, "State of Franklin" Tennessee Encyclopedia, March 7, 2018. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/state-of-franklin/> accessed 14 June 2018

<sup>3</sup> Bergeron, Ash and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 41.

the leader of the anti Franklin settlers in Washington County. Tipton was insulted that the popular John Sevier was chosen as Franklin's governor instead of him. In August 1786, Tipton began convincing people that they needed to give up on independence and return their loyalty to North Carolina.<sup>4</sup> In February 1788, Tipton and his small number of followers seized several of John Sevier's enslaved people as payment for North Carolina taxes while Sevier was away. When Sevier returned, he went to Tipton's farm to recover the enslaved people and a battle broke out between John Sevier's forces and Tipton's followers.<sup>5</sup> The battle was broken up by the arrival of a North Carolina militia brigade, but the fighting among the settlers continued. Though the Franklinites managed to beat back the Cherokee, the state all but collapsed as laws went un-enforced, taxes went uncollected, and courthouses failed to meet during its final 15 months of existence. The State of Franklin officially ceased to exist in June 1789 when the new United States Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation and North Carolina officially ceded its western land, including the Franklin territory, to the new federal government. The newly ceded land was quickly established as the federal Territory South of the River Ohio commonly known as the Southwest Territory.<sup>6</sup>

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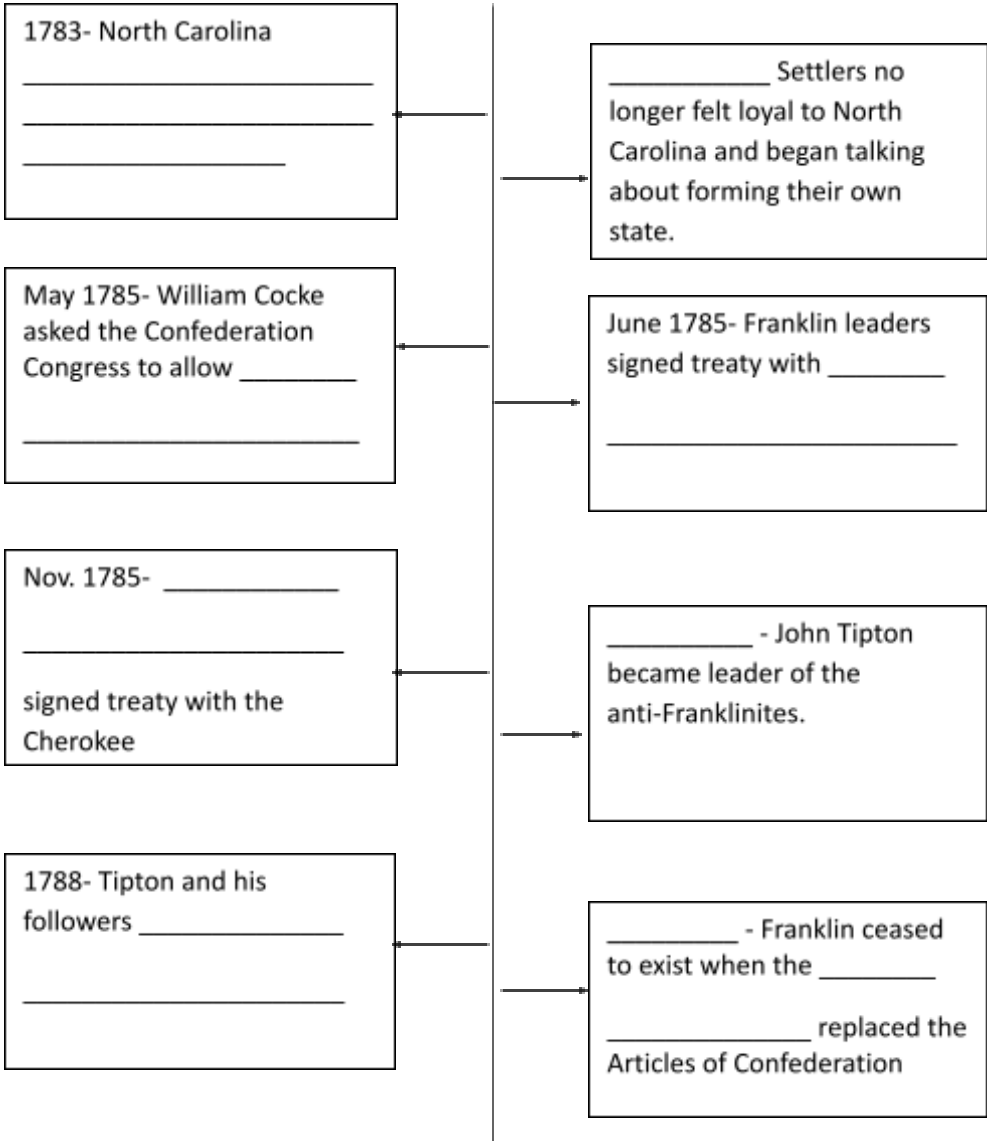
<sup>4</sup> Toomey, "State of Franklin"

<sup>5</sup> Bergeron, Ash and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Toomey, "State of Franklin"

# The State of Franklin

Complete the timeline below using information from the text. Answer the questions at the bottom of the page with at least one complete sentence.



The state of Franklin was created because \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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The state of Franklin was failed because \_\_\_\_\_  
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