

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE (1774-1776)

It was one thing to feel that the Intolerable Acts were an evil injustice. It was quite another to decide what to do about it. Views ranged from declaring independence to keeping the status quo. This lack of agreement was obvious when the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1774. Eleven colonies were represented by 55 delegates.

The **FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS** displayed the confu-

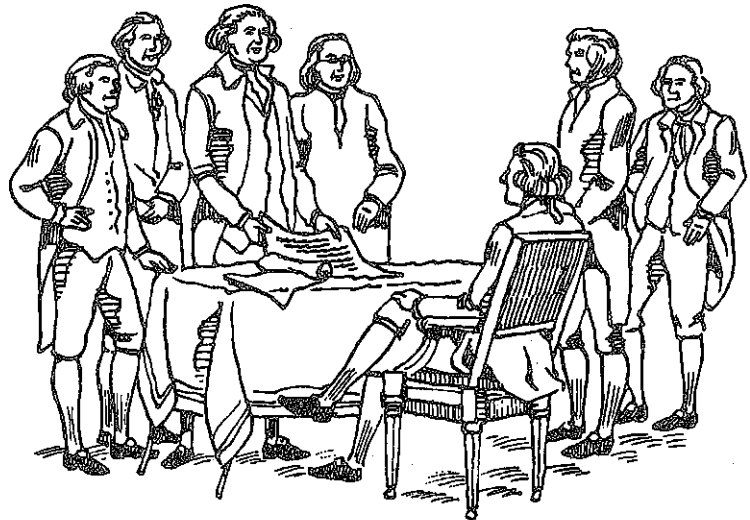
sion Americans felt about how to react to Parliament's policies. Samuel Adams wanted independence, but was advised not to mention the "i" word for fear it might cause southern delegates to leave. On the other extreme, Reverend Jonathan Boucher of Virginia accepted without question Parliament's right to govern the empire and the American colonists' duty to obey.

Arguments were frequent, but people did not travel that far just to argue. The urge to decide something was strong. Pennsylvania's Joseph Galloway proposed creating a third house of Parliament, an American "grand council," with power to approve or reject actions by Parliament before they became law in the colonies. In local matters, each colonial legislature was to still make the laws. It seemed logical, but had no appeal to Patrick Henry or Samuel Adams. Henry warned it would lead a corrupt Parliament to corrupt Americans as well. Galloway's plan was tabled.

At the Suffolk county convention in Massachusetts, resolutions had been drawn up. These were considered and adopted by the congress. Among other things, they provided that: (1) the colonists were entitled to life, liberty, and property, (2) they should enjoy all rights of other English subjects, (3) keeping a standing army in any colony without its legislature's consent was illegal, and (4) the Intolerable Acts violated the colonists' rights. In parting, Congress voted to meet in May 1775 if all problems were not solved.

THE ASSOCIATION. Congress created a committee to cut off trade with England to protest British policies that were harmful to the colonists. Any merchants trading with England would answer to the "Association," and be "universally condemned as enemies of American liberty."

LEXINGTON AND CONCORD. Tension in Massachusetts was increasing, and General Gage's efforts to keep the situation under control were in vain. Committees of Safety were running the entire colony except Boston. Militia were also drilling and gathering arms and gunpowder. On April 19, 1775, Gage sent 1,000 troops to destroy supplies reportedly gathered at Lexington and Concord. Militia units that tried to stop them were easily brushed aside, but when the redcoats tried to return to Boston, their misery began.



When signing the Declaration of Independence, delegates knew they would be risking their lives if America's attempt to break away from Britain failed.

By that time, militia had taken positions behind stone walls and fences and fired upon the king's troops all the way back. Each side blamed the other for opening fire and for committing atrocities on the wounded and dead.

OTHER ACTIONS also took place in 1775. Militia commanded by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold captured Fort Ticonderoga, "in the name of Jehovah and the Continental Congress." The guns captured there were sent by sleigh to Boston. An attack on Montreal failed. The lack of Canadian support for the American cause was obvious. In June a British army under General Howe attacked colonial defenses built on Breed's Hill. This battle (mistakenly labelled as Bunker Hill) was won by the British at high cost in casualties and only on the third charge, after the militia were out of ammunition. Howe considered it the worst battle he had ever seen.

SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS. As promised in 1774, if problems were not worked out in a year, another congress of the colonies was to be held. The Second Congress still didn't want war and expressed its loyalty to the king in the Olive Branch petition. Leaving nothing to chance, however, they voted to create a 20,000 man army and chose George Washington to lead it.

Events moved rapidly now. America learned the king had rented 30,000 German troops. Since many were from Hesse, they were all referred to as Hessians. The Iroquois of New York began to threaten frontier towns, and Americans believed the English were stirring them up. *Common Sense* was published, and its argument that an island should not rule a continent made common sense to many colonists. General William Howe (who replaced Gage) pulled troops out of Boston in the spring of 1776.

In Congress, a few still hoped problems with England could be worked out, but more were leaning toward independence. They knew the colonists could not defeat the British without help, and that help would not come unless the Americans made a clean break from England by declaring independence. On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee proposed that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states." This caused a major debate, and many delegates sent an urgent message home asking for instructions (on how to vote). Finally, on July 2, 12 colonies voted in favor of the resolution. New York's delegates had to wait a week before being told they were to vote for independence.

In June Congress had appointed a five-man committee to write a Declaration of Independence. Among the members were Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams. The committee chose 33-year-old Jefferson to do the writing. He borrowed ideas from John Locke. To summarize the Declaration: (1) governments were created to protect the citizens' life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness; (2) if government threatened those rights, the people had a right to alter or abolish the government and replace it; (3) such changes were not to be made lightly; (4) the Americans had tried to work with England, but the English government had not listened; and (5) the king had repeatedly violated American rights, leaving no choice except to declare independence.

Activity

Assume various roles at the Second Congress. There should be someone who favors independence, someone who prefers the Galloway approach, and another who favors remaining loyal to the king. Discuss whether or not to declare independence.

Name _____ Date _____

CHALLENGES

1. What was the "i" word that Samuel Adams was not to mention? Why was he told not to mention it?

2. How would Jonathan Boucher and Patrick Henry get along? Why?

3. What was Galloway's third house of Parliament to be called? What was it to do?

4. What did the First Continental Congress think was wrong with the Intolerable Acts?

5. What was the purpose of the "Association"?

6. When did trouble really begin for British troops sent to Lexington and Concord?

7. What did the attack on Montreal indicate?

8. What nickname did all German troops go by?

9. Who proposed independence?

10. Who were three members of the committee that wrote the Declaration of Independence? Underline the one actually doing the writing.

Name _____

Date _____

POINTS TO PONDER

1. If the Galloway Plan had been adopted, what would the relationship between Americans and the British government be today?

2. According to the Declaration of Independence, who had broken the unwritten "contract" between the king and his colonial subjects? How?

3. Why was signing the Declaration of Independence a decision that, if things turned out wrong, could be fatal?
