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How Famous Declaration Was Adopted

INDEPENDENCE day this year witnesses the unique spectacle of the Stars and Stripes and the flag of Great Britain intertwined in a bond of friendship, the United States allied with her old mother country in fighting the world battles of democracy. In that memorable document which was proclaimed to the inhabitants of the original thirteen colonies 142 years ago is a sentence which seems fitting now as an indictment of the European monarch against whom America is at war. It is this:

Our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.

And then follows this severe arraignment of George III, the last of the English kings who maintained the divine right of rule:

A prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Prior to the Revolutionary struggle the sentiment in all the colonies for ten years and more from the time of the first Stamp Act troubles was strongly against a severance of relations with the parent country. Paul Revere's ride and the battles of Lexington and Concord in April, 1775, memorable as those events are as the forerunners of the great conflict, failed to arouse any widespread enthusiasm for independence. It is even significant to note that just a year before the Declaration of Independence was unanimously approved by all of the thirteen colonies the Continental congress that had appointed Washington commander in chief of the army, drew up, July 6, 1775, a declaration of the causes for taking up arms in which it was said:

We mean not to dissolve that union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us and which we sincerely wish to see restored.

Even Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, two months after the battle of Bunker Hill wrote that he was "looking with fondness toward a reconciliation with Great Britain."

A few far-sighted leaders like Benjamin Franklin, Samuel and John Adams and Patrick Henry had felt at a comparatively early date that a break was inevitable.

The historic declaration of the citizens of Mecklenburg county, North Carolina, in May, 1775, was one of several local events indicating that public opinion was tending toward independence, but not until the appearance of Thomas Paine's stirring pamphlet, "Common Sense," early in January, 1776, was there any appreciable public sentiment in its favor. In the plain language of the day it presented the facts so simply that all could understand. This "phenomenon," as John Adams styled Paine, suddenly found himself transformed from obscurity to fame. The Pennsylvania legislature voted him \$2,500, and a Southern legis-



Thomas Jefferson.

lator suggested that a statue of Paine in gold would not be too high an honor. **Richard Henry Lee's Resolution.**

Things moved rapidly in the colonies after that, and Richard Henry Lee of Virginia rose in the Continental congress at Philadelphia, June 7, 1776, and presented his famous resolutions which led to the Declaration of Independence. The resolutions, in Lee's handwriting, and now one of the treasured papers in the library of congress, were:

Resolved, That these United Colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved;

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign alliances;

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective colonies for their consideration and approbation.

Here, in fact, was the Declaration of Independence in a nutshell, proposed by one of the most eminent men of the most influential colony at that time and promptly seconded by John Adams of Massachusetts. It was deemed wise to order the secretary to omit their names from the journal. The next day congress went into a committee of

A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Draft of the First Words of the Declaration of Independence, in Thomas Jefferson's Handwriting, Which Established Democracy in America.

the whole to discuss the resolutions. The delegates from Pennsylvania, New York and one or two other colonies objected on the ground that the middle colonies were not yet ready for so radical a step, although personally expressing a friendly attitude.

Delegates Hesitated.
Unanimous action by all the colonies on so momentous a question was regarded by congress as of paramount importance. Some of the delegates had not been instructed to go so far as voting for independence, New York and New Jersey being among them. The majority had been authorized to take any action that might be deemed wise, Virginia having gone so far as actually to instruct her delegates to propose a declaration of independence to congress, and Richard Henry Lee was simply obeying the legislative voice of his colony when he presented his resolutions.

June 10 congress postponed final consideration for three weeks, and on the following day appointed a committee of five to draw up the declaration. Richard Henry Lee, as the proposer of the plan, would surely have been on the committee and, possibly, its chairman, had he not in the meantime been hurriedly summoned home by the illness of his wife. But for that Lee might have been the author of the declaration instead of his younger Virginia colleague, Thomas Jefferson, then but thirty-three years old.

Jefferson had brought to congress the reputation for wielding a facile pen, and in the balloting for the committee he received a majority of votes and became its chairman. The others were John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Roger Sherman of Connecticut and Robert R. Livingston of New York.

Honor Given Jefferson.
How did Jefferson come to be selected to write the Declaration, "the one American state paper, as has been said, that has reached to supreme distinction in the world and that seems likely to last as long as American civilization lasts"?

The most interesting account is given by John Adams, who says that he and Thomas Jefferson were designated by the committee to prepare the rough minutes in a proper form. Mr. Jefferson first proposed that Adams prepare the draft of the Declaration. Adams declined, giving, as he says in his autobiography, the following reasons:

(1) That he was a Virginian and I a Massachusettsian. (2) That he was a Southern man and I a Northern one. (3) That I had been so obnoxious for my early and constant zeal in promoting the measure that every draft of mine would undergo a more severe scrutiny and criticism in congress than one of his composition. (4) And lastly, and that would be reason enough if there were no other, I had a great opinion of the elegance of his pen and none at all of my own. I therefore insisted that no hesitation should be made on his part. He accordingly took the minutes and in a day or two produced to me his draft.

As Jefferson Wrote It.
Jefferson says that the entire committee urged him to make the draft. He showed it first to Franklin and Adams "because they were the two members of whose judgments and amendments I wished most to have the benefit." They made a few minor alterations in their handwriting. This original draft was given by Jefferson to Richard Henry Lee, the dean of the Virginia delegation, and in 1825 his grandson presented it to the American Philosophical society of Philadelphia.

Jefferson, having made another copy, with the changes suggested, presented it to the committee, which reported it unaltered to congress. July 1 Philadelphia was on the quiver of expectation, and contemporary accounts have left us a stirring picture of the eagerness with which the citizens awaited definite news of the most important act which the colonists had been called upon to decide in the long chain of disputes with the mother country. On the following day, when the formal vote of congress was taken, the resolutions were approved by twelve colonies—all except New York. The original colonies, therefore, became the United States of America on July 2, 1776. The next two days were spent in discussing the draft of the Declaration as drawn by Jefferson. The debate was animated, but when it was all over the draft was adopted with surprisingly few changes, a tribute to the ability with which the author had expressed to the world the causes which had made it necessary for "one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another."

Unanimously Adopted.
The Declaration of Independence was then unanimously adopted by the twelve colonies, whose delegates were

instructed to vote in its favor, on July 4, which thenceforth became the recognized birthday of the new nation.

The old bell ringer of Philadelphia, who had been patiently waiting for the news in the steeple of the historic statehouse, was the first to peal out the message of American independence on the bell ever since honored as the Liberty Bell. No longer was there any doubt that public opinion was ready for the step, for, as the news spread, it was everywhere received with exultation.

Word came to George Washington July 9, at his headquarters in New York, that the Declaration was ratified and it was at once read to the soldiers and citizens. On the same day the New York assembly, in session at White Plains, gave its formal vote for independence, and the thirteen colonies were then united in their common cause.

John Hancock, president of the congress, was the only member who signed the declaration on July 4. An engrossed copy on parchment was ordered for all the delegates to sign. This was completed August 2 and signed by 54



John Adams.

delegates. Two others signed later, Thomas McKean of Delaware, who was absent with his regiment in August, and Matthew Thornton of New Hampshire, who was not elected to congress until the fall, but was permitted to sign the document in November, making the total number of the famous "signers" 56.

The Two Most Famous Signers.
Of all the signers, Jefferson and Adams bear a deeper personal relation to the declaration than any others. Adams was its most vigorous supporter in congress and Jefferson bears testimony to his valuable aid. In after years both received the highest honors that the citizens could bestow. They were permitted to witness the growth of their country for half a century from the first Independence day. The day of their death, July 4, 1826, was the fiftieth anniversary of the memorable Fourth of July. It was the most remarkable coincidence ever recorded in American history. Jefferson was eighty-three years old and John Adams ninety-one years.

The 56 signers were distributed among the 13 states in the following proportion: Pennsylvania, 9; Virginia, 7; Massachusetts, 5; New Jersey, 5; Connecticut, 4; Maryland, 4; New York, 4; South Carolina, 4; New Hampshire, 3; Delaware, 3; Georgia, 3; North Carolina, 3; Rhode Island, 2.



French People Our True Friends.
The true and controlling reason why the government of Louis XVI intervened in our war of independence was the enthusiasm of the French people for the cause of liberty. Considerations of material advantage were entirely secondary. Public opinion forced the hand of an unwilling and hesitating government, and placed at our disposal the economic, military and naval resources of the country.

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