



Continental Congress

In September, 1774, delegates came to Philadelphia from the thirteen colonies to discuss common problems. They met again in 1775, and selected George Washington to head the American army.

In January, 1775, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, which sold over 120,000 copies in three months. In view of the small population of the country at that time, this figure was phenomenal. He asserted in *Common Sense* that a “thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy” and that “a government of our own is a natural right.” He also stated, “The sun never shined on a cause more just. The cause of America was that of all mankind.” He continued, “No one until that time had so clearly perceived or so strikingly described the historic mission of America as the hope and asylum of free people.”

By the time the Third Continental Congress began, the population in general and a majority of the delegates in particular had changed. They were now ready to listen to arguments for independence. On

June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution, “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 . . .” This resolution was immediately seconded by John Adams.

Although discussed for several days, it was finally decided to postpone a vote on it until the first of July. Since several delegations were still not in favor of the resolution, and since it was of great importance to present a united front, the postponement was a wise decision. During this time, John Adams spent night and day talking with those who were opposed to it.

Also, a committee of five was appointed to draft a declaration in case the Lee Resolution should pass. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston were appointed to this committee. Because of his gift for writing, Thomas Jefferson was selected to write the draft. Upon Mr. Jefferson

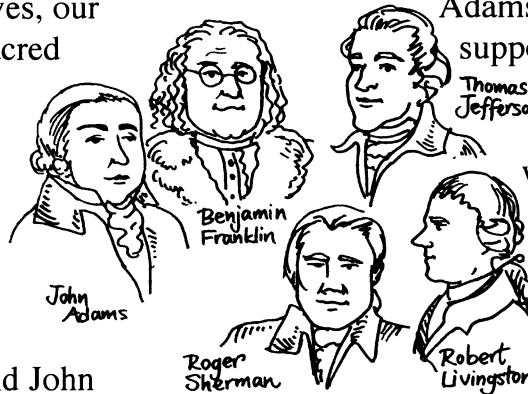




completing this document he then gave it to Mr. Franklin and Mr. Adams to review.

At that time the document's last paragraph read, "And for the support of this Declaration, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our Sacred Honor."

After reviewing the draft of the Declaration of Independence by Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, the last sentence then read, "And for the support of this declaration, *with a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence*, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our Sacred Honor." The Declaration of Independence was then submitted to Congress on June 28, 1776, the Friday



before the Lee Resolution was to be considered.

On Monday, the Lee Resolution was taken up again and John Dickinson, representing those opposed to it, spoke against it for several hours. John Adams and a few of the supporters argued for its passage. After nine hours of debate it was decided to postpone the vote until the next day, July 2nd.

The next day Benjamin Franklin made the comment to Benjamin Rush that "We have a great task before us assigned to us by Providence".

Indeed, they did! The fate of a nation hinged on the outcome and *we believe they were brought forward for such a time as this.*

Suggestions for Study

- In September of 1774, what significant event occurred?
- What was John Adams' role in the writing of and successful signing of the Declaration?
- In 1775, who was selected to head the American Army?
- Thomas Paine published a newspaper entitled 'Common Sense'. What statements did he make that inspired more colonists toward declaring freedom from England?