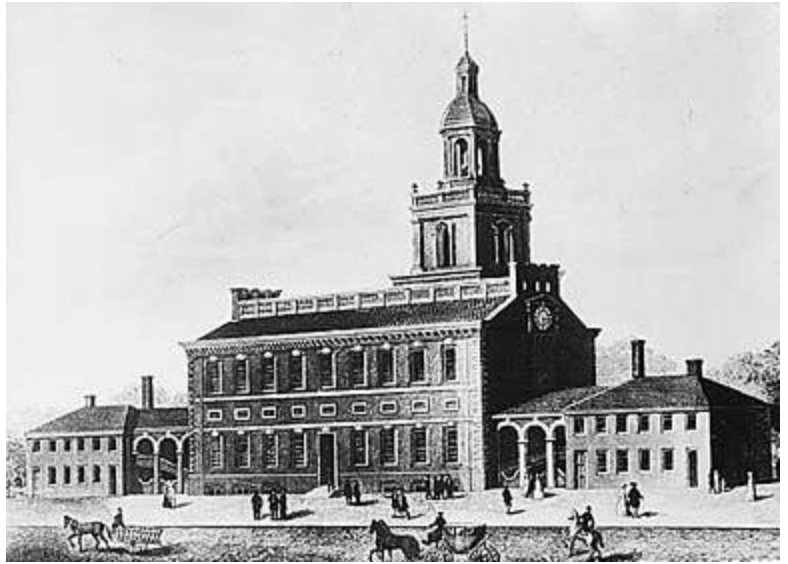


The Declaration of Independence - A New Nation

In two ways, July 4th, 1776 was not a typical day in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. First, the air in the city was cooler than usual. Second, the birth of a brand new nation was about to take place! With the approval of the Declaration of Independence on this date, the American people officially separated themselves from Britain to become their own country, where the ideas of freedom and liberty would be celebrated for generations to come.



A group of men called the Continental Congress were meeting at the Pennsylvania State House (later to be named Independence Hall) during the summer of 1776. Their job was to decide what should be done about the problems the colonists had been facing with Britain.



By this time, the first shots of the American Revolution had been fired in Massachusetts, George Washington was chosen by the Congress to lead the new Continental Army, and more battles were on the horizon. The Congress needed to define the goal of this war. Was it to restore their rights as Englishmen, or was it to break free of British rule and become an independent country? After some fierce debating, they finally decided to declare their independence. Thomas Jefferson, the tall, lanky, and intelligent Virginian delegate was chosen to draft a declaration.

For seventeen days, Jefferson quietly worked in his second-story rented room, using his portable writing desk. On June 28th, after taking suggestions from men such as John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, the declaration was ready to be put before Congress. It was then slightly edited and revised by Congress over the next few days. Then, on the relatively cool July 4th, it was officially approved, declaring Americans a free and independent people!

The Declaration of Independence, as it would be known, quickly became a world-famous document. It wasn't long, but it clearly expressed the Americans' ideas. Lines like these would forever mark this new nation as a champion for human rights and freedom,

“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.”

Word started to spread on July 5th about what Congress had done. The Declaration would be read all over towns, cities, and in the camps of the Continental Army over the next few weeks. It would provide hope and motivation to continue in the struggle for independence.

It wouldn't be until a few years later that Americans would win the Revolutionary War and officially be recognized as the United States of America, but the writing of the Declaration of Independence was a giant step in the creation of the nation that we all know today!



Response - The Declaration of Independence

What was the purpose of the Continental Congress? Where and when did they meet?

Who was chosen as the main writer of a declaration?

What did the writing of this Declaration of Independence accomplish?

There were some very important ideas written in the Declaration of Independence that would shape the new nation. Describe, in your own words, the meaning of the following lines. You may need to find definitions for the underlined words to help you!

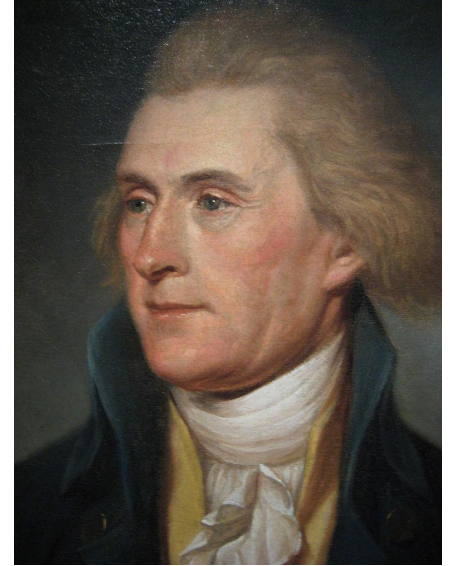
“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Itty Bitty

(The story of one little piece of paper that changed the world!)

Verse 1

Let me tell you the story 'bout an itty bitty piece of paper
How this itty bitty piece of paper would change the world
Let's get on back to the summer of 1776
To the Philadelphia City of Brotherly Love
The Continental Congress they came together
To say how old King George had done us wrong
It was here they decided to declare our independence
And they asked a man named Jefferson to write it all down
And the words he wrote will shine forever.....



Chorus

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
Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness

Life

Liberty

Pursuit of Happiness

Verse 2

The Congress they approved this Declaration
It was a cool and sunny morning on the Fourth of July
On the fifth they started sending out tons of copies
So everyone in the whole world would recognize
America is no longer ruled by Britain
We'll now be known to all as the "land of the free"
This is why that itty bitty piece of paper
Will be known throughout all of history
And the words in it will shine forever.....

