



#4 - 1997

The Declaration Of Independence

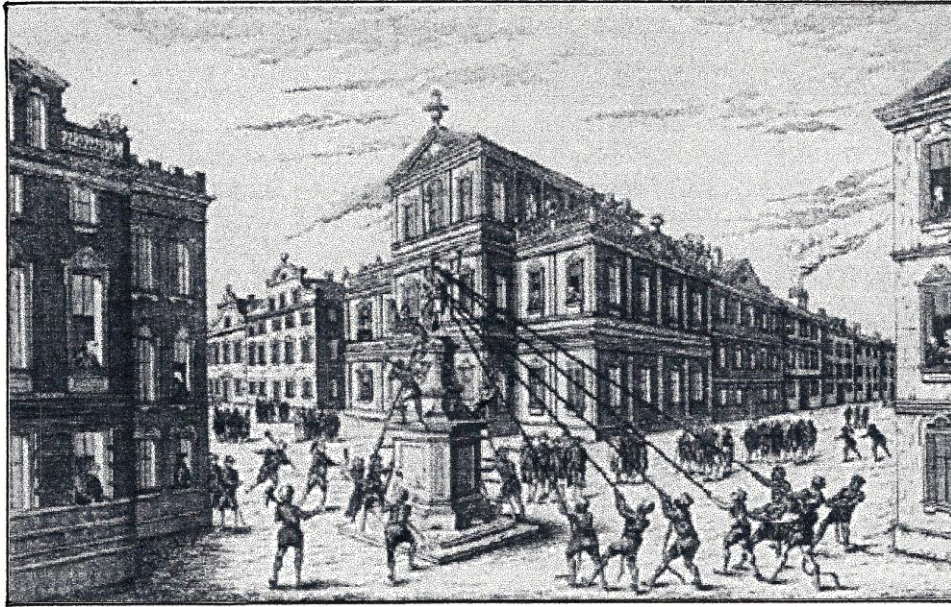
(Note: This article was presented as an address to the Blair County Chapter, SAR at its 3rd Quarterly Meeting held on 05 July, 1997.)

The first instance of an open discussion by the delegates assembled in Congress of the idea of declaring independence from Great Britain was mentioned on Monday, the 15th of January, 1776 in a letter from Samuel Adams to John Adams.

The delegates had started to call the group of colonies and provinces the *United Colonies* at some time between June 10 and June 17, 1775. Prior to that, as for example in the Plan of Association of 1774, they referred to themselves as the "several Colonies of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Three Lower Counties of Newcastle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina". Even on June 10 resolutions included the wording "the several colonies..." On the 14th of June a resolution was passed by the Congress calling for the raising of companies of expert riflemen to aid in the siege of Boston. The delegates, no doubt, adopted the title of "United Colonies" at that time in view of the fact that in order for the companies of militia to work together as a united fighting unit, the colonies alike would have to work together as a union. On Saturday, June 17 the Congress took into consideration a draft of the letter commissioning George Washington to the position of "General and Commander-in-Chief of the army of the United Colonies". Although the name was brought into common usage, the delegates to the Continental Congress continued to express their hopes of a reconciliation with the mother country. The Olive Branch Petition was an example of those hopes.

Although the idea of independence might have been discussed in private, it simply did not come up in any of the officially recorded discussions of the Congress until early 1776. The letter from Samuel Adams to John Adams noted that "A motion was made in Congress the other day, to the following purpose: That whereas we had been charged with aiming at independency, a committee should be appointed to explain to the people at large the principles and grounds of our opposition, etc." The subject had been discussed by some of the delegates but not as part of the official proceedings of the Congress. And, as noted in the first newsletter of this year, under the title of "The Olive Branch Petition", the delegates were not all of the same opinion on the subject of independence from Great Britain.

The committee that had been appointed to draft a letter to the inhabitants of the colonies in America came back to the Congress on the 13th of February, 1776. In the letter they had composed they stated that "We are accused of carrying on the War 'for the purpose of establishing an independent empire' ", but that "We disavow the intention. We declare, that what we aim at, and what we are entrusted by you to pursue, is the Defence and the re-establishment of the constitutional rights of the Colonies." The letter to the inhabitants of the American Colonies recounted certain of the sentiments that had been expressed in a letter to the inhabitants of Great Britain. In that letter the delegates to the Continental Congress stated that it was not Great Britain and her inhabitants or the King that the colonists opposed, but rather the actions of Parliament. The military actions that had recently begun to take place in New England were not to be interpreted as "aiming at independence", but instead as a defensive response to the aggressive actions initiated by



American troops in New York on 09 July, 1776 react to the reading of the Declaration of Independence by pulling down a statue of George III which stood on the Bowling Green.

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the British Parliament.

As the military actions increased, the hopes of reconciliation decreased. On June 7, 1776 the Congress moved and seconded "certain resolutions respecting independency". The first resolution stated:

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.

In its session held on Monday, 10 June, 1776, the Congress resolved,

That the Consideration of the first resolution be postponed to this day, three weeks (July 1), and in the mean while, that no time be lost, in case the Congress agree thereto, that a committee be appointed to prepare a declaration to the effect of the said first resolution, which is in these words: "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."

On the 25th of June the Congress received some encouragement from the province of Pennsylvania when "A Declaration of the deputies of Pennsylvania, met in provincial conference, was presented to Congress, and read; expressing their willingness to concur in a vote of Congress declaring the United Colonies Free and Independent States."

The first draft of the Declaration of Independence was brought before the Congress to be discussed on Friday, June 28. A vote on the declaration was not taken that day, but postponed until the following Monday for further discussion. The discussion on the declaration during Monday's session was, in the opinion of John Adams, a waste of time. In a letter he wrote to Samuel Chase on 01 July, 1776 Adams noted that:

"The vote of the Maryland Convention was laid before Congress this day, just as we were entering on the great debate; that debate took up most of the day, but it was an idle mispense of time, for nothing was said but what had been repeated and hackneyed in that room before a hundred times for six months past. In the Committee of the Whole, the question was carried in the affirmative, and reported to the House. A Colony desired it to be postponed until to morrow, when it will pass by a majority, perhaps with almost unanimity; yet I cannot promise this, because one or two gentlemen may possibly be found who will vote point blank against the known and declared sense of their constituents."

Edmund Pendleton wrote a letter to James Madison on the 25th of September, 1780 in which he recollected that the delay in passing the resolution for independence had resulted from petty quarrels between certain of the colonies.

"I am told that Maryland insists upon one of our delegates having in a manner promised when the point of declaring independence was in debate, that the back lands should be a fund for supporting the war. I have (heard) that a rhetorical expression to that purpose was used by a gentleman on that occasion. (But we) can balance that that account at least by a very serious question more in point, debated in Congress in 1775, when the delegates from Pennsylvania and Virginia proposed that a garrison of 400 men be raised and kept at common expense at Pittsburg to awe the Indians. It was warmly opposed from Maryland upon this ground, that it was a (scheme) of those two States merely to guard their own frontiers in which the others were not concerned, and therefore the expense must be incurred by the former. Their objections prevailed, the motion was rejected, and the two States raised the 200 men (each for) that service soon afterwards."

Again on Tuesday, July 2, 1776 the discussion of the resolution to declare themselves independent from Great Britain was taken up by the delegates assembled in Congress. The resolution to declare that "these United Colonies are, and, of right, ought to be, Free and Independent States..." was again entered into the official minutes of the Congress. But Mr. Benjamin Harrison reported that the committee, despite having the declaration for consideration, had not had sufficient time to "go through the same" and asked to be permitted to have more time for that consideration.

Although many current history books state that the accepted notion of July 4th being the day that Congress passed the Declaration of Independence is incorrect, and that it passed the resolution on July 2nd, the records of the proceedings of the Continental Congress note that there was still discussion on the subject on the 3rd of July. And on the 3rd of July, after discussions of various other resolutions, Mr. Harrison again requested that the discussion of the declaration be postponed. It was "Resolved, That this Congress will, to morrow, resolve itself into a committee of the whole, to take into their farther consideration, the Declaration."

On Friday, the 4th of July, Benjamin Harrison read the final draft of the Declaration of Independence to the Congress, and it was passed. It was, therefore, on the 4th of July that the delegates signed the draft as presented by Mr. Harrison. The only delegates who did not sign the Declaration were those from New York, who had not been empowered by that province's government to give either an affirmative or negative voice to the matter.

There is an interesting epilogue to this story. We tend to think that events, such as the passing and signing of the Declaration of Independence, were extra-ordinary events which stood apart from reality. They seem to have been frozen in time and not actually related to the real world. That, in and of itself, is not really a bad thing; in fact it is an essential ingredient of Patriotism. But it can be a little misleading too. Every child who is taught about the Declaration of Independence in school is shown the famous painting of the signing of the document, and the assumption is probably made that that was the only thing that the delegates to the Congress did on that day. But the journals of the Continental Congress reveal that the delegates continued right on with their work.

After the the Declaration was ordered to be authenticated and printed, and sent to the various assemblies of the colonies, the Congress engaged itself in discussions on other matters. Those other

matters included a letter received from General Washington at New York asking for more troops for the Flying Camp. A resolution was also passed that afternoon that Mr. Henry Wisner "*be empowered to fend a man, at the public expence, to Orange county, for a fample of flint ftone.*" The Congress then appointed Jasper Yeates and John Montgomery as two commissioners for Indian affairs in the middle department. One of the last items to be discussed was the establishment of a committee, composed of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, to "*bring in a device for a feal for the United States if America.*"

4th QUARTERLY MEETING

The 4th Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR is scheduled for Saturday, October 25, 1997. It will be held at the Kings Family Restaurant in Altoona, beginning at 12:00 noon. Some important topics will be discussed at this meeting, and your input and opinions would be welcomed. Please plan to attend.

Have you ever heard of a Caltrop?

The caltrop was developed and used in warfare in Europe as early as the dawn of the Bronze Age. They were brought to the American colonies by the British during the French and Indian War and used against the Indians.

The caltrop was a weapon used during the American Revolutionary War by both sides to impede the advance of enemy troops. Looking something like a bird's foot, the caltrop was described in Captain George Smith's *An Universal Military Dictionary*, (1779) as: "*a piece of iron having 4 points, all disposed in a triangular form; so that three of them always rest upon the ground and the 4th stands upwards in a perpendicular direction. Each point is 3 or 4 inches long. They are scattered over the ground and passages where the enemy is expected to march, especially cavalry, in order to embarass their progress.*" In some cases, the caltrop was modeled as a solid ball from which four sharp points, each about an inch long, protruded. They could be dropped by cavalry and no matter how they fell, at least one sharp pointed spike would aim upwards to pierce the feet of horses or men.

Constitution Day Dinner

The 1997 Constitution Day Dinner will be held on September 13 at the Altoona Ramada Inn. The dinner will begin at 12:00 noon. The meal will consist of Tenderloin Tips of Beef in Burgundy with Button Mushrooms, Dutch Noodles, Fruit Cup, Tossed Salad and Apple Crisp. An address on the subject of the Constitution will be delivered by our chapter president, E. Merle Glunt.

The cost of the dinner will be \$12.00 per person. Those wishing to attend should respond with their reservations by Wednesday, September 10, 1997 to Larry D. Smith, Treasurer, RR #1, Box 704-A, East Freedom, PA 16637. As always, you may pay at the Dinner, but please notify me of the number who will be able to attend by the 10th. You may leave a telephone message on my workplace answering machine at 224-6408 if you wish.

ADVICE TO OFFICERS, &c

In 1782 a booklet was published in England titled: *Advice To The Officers Of The British Army*, in which it was noted: "As you probably did not rise to your present distinguished rank by your own merit, it cannot reasonably be expected that you should promote others on that score. Above all, be careful never to promote an intelligent officer; a brave, chuckle-headed fellow will do full as well to execute your orders. An officer, that has an iota of knowledge above the common run, you must consider your personal enemy; for you may be sure he laughs at you and your manœuvres."