

4th of July History

Independence Day



July 4th, known as both the Fourth of July and Independence Day, is a national holiday commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In the mid 1700s England's Empire in the New World consisted of thirteen colonies under the rule of King George III, 3000 miles away. Although they were British citizens, the colonists did not have a say in Parliament and were becoming increasingly frustrated with the

taxes imposed by England. This is commonly referred to as "Taxation without Representation."



Their dissatisfaction became evident with a protest known as the "Boston Tea



Party." In 1773, England levied a tax on tea sold in the colonies by India Company Tea. Several Bostonians, including Samuel Adams, dressed up as Indians and dumped a cargo of the tea into the Massachusetts Bay. Concerned about the unrest, King George sent troops to help contain the rebellion.

Unhappy with British rule, the 13 colonies set up a committee of delegates to represent them. The First Continental Congress met in September of 1774 in Philadelphia. They drafted a list of grievances against England, taking the first steps toward independence.



The unofficial start of the War for Independence occurred on April 19, 1775 with the "shot heard round the world." The Redcoats marched through the night of April 18, 1775, reaching Lexington near dawn. The

colonists were waiting, trained to be "ready in a minute." It's unclear which side fired first, but very shortly eight colonists were dead. The British continued on to Concord and were met by the Minutemen at the North Bridge. The Redcoats were outnumbered and were forced to retreat back to Boston. For the next eight years the Revolutionary war raged on.



In the meantime the second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. In June 1776, the Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee, introduced a motion calling for the



colonies' independence. After some debate, Congress postponed the vote on Lee's resolution. Instead, a committee was formed to compose a formal declaration of

independence. Headed by Thomas Jefferson, the committee included John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston and Roger Sherman.

On July 2, 1776 the Second Continental Congress voted in favor of Lee's resolution of independence. After some debate and revision, on July 4, 1776 the Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence, which had been written primarily by Thomas Jefferson. John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, was the first to sign the document. And although the signing of the Declaration was not completed until August, the 4th of July has been accepted as the official anniversary of United States independence.



In the days following July 4th, the document was read publicly and people



celebrated with cheering and the ringing of bells whenever they heard it. The first Independence Day celebration took place July 4, 1777 in Philadelphia. Bells rang, ships fired guns, and candles and firecrackers were lit.

By the early 1800s the traditions of parades, picnics, and fireworks were established as the way to celebrate America's birthday. In 1870, the U.S. Congress made July 4th a federal holiday.

