

21 Signing Up



Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. John Hancock (above) was the first.

It took courage to sign that Declaration. John Hancock was first to put his name down. He did it with a big, bold signature. "So the king doesn't have to put on his glasses," he is supposed to have said. (Because of that, today, when you sign a document, people sometimes call your signature a "John Hancock.")

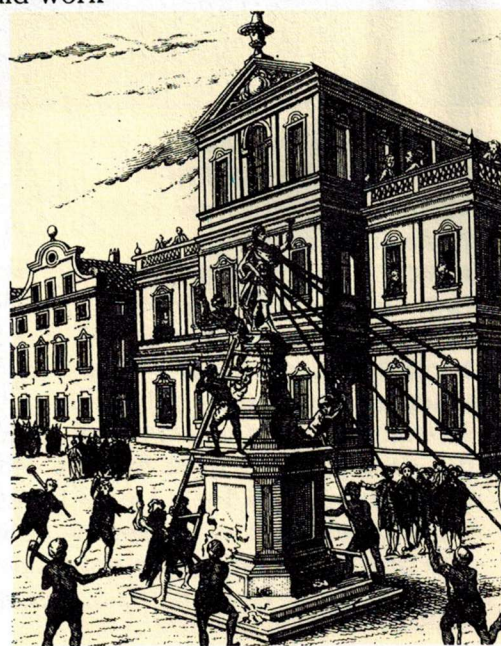
John Dickinson of Pennsylvania wouldn't sign. He believed the Declaration was foolhardy. He thought the colonists should work to gain the rights of free citizens within the British Empire. "I had rather forfeit popularity forever, than vote away the blood and happiness of my countrymen," he said. Independence! To Dickinson that was "like destroying our house in winter...before we have got another shelter." But he loved America dearly, so after he refused to sign the Declaration of Independence, he enlisted in the Continental army as a private and fought for his country. And he was right; he did lose his popularity.

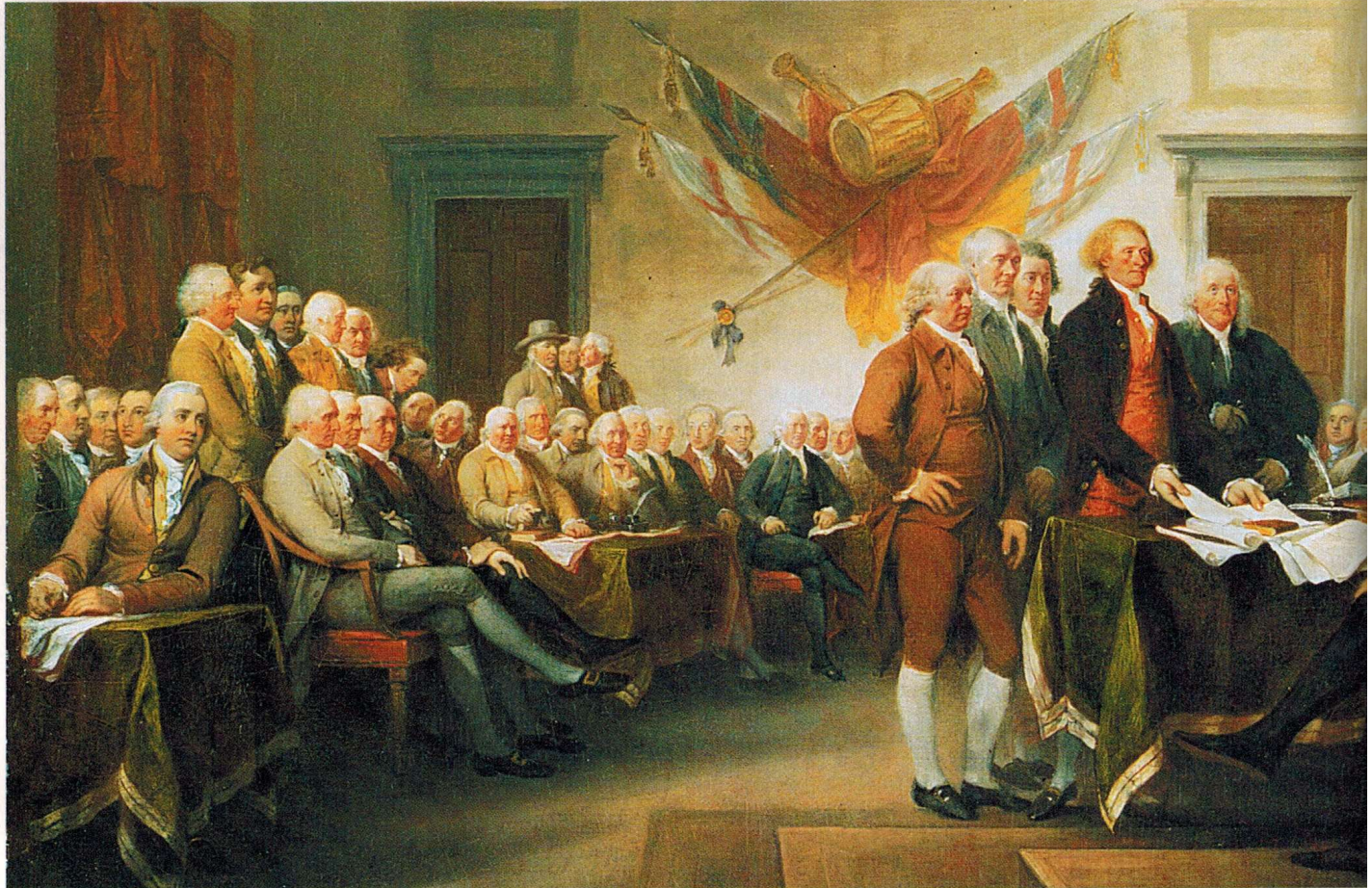
The citizens outside the red-brick Pennsylvania State House, where the delegates voted, were now screaming for independence. That didn't make it easy for the men inside. They knew they would pay with their lives if the colonial army was squashed by Britain. And all the power seemed on Great Britain's side.

When the Declaration was read in New York, a mob pulled down the statue of George III in Bowling Green. It was made of 4,000 pounds of lead, from which it was estimated that 42,000 bullets could be cast.

The Pennsylvania State House was soon to be called Independence Hall. Why?

On July 4, 1776, the Declaration was officially approved by the delegates.



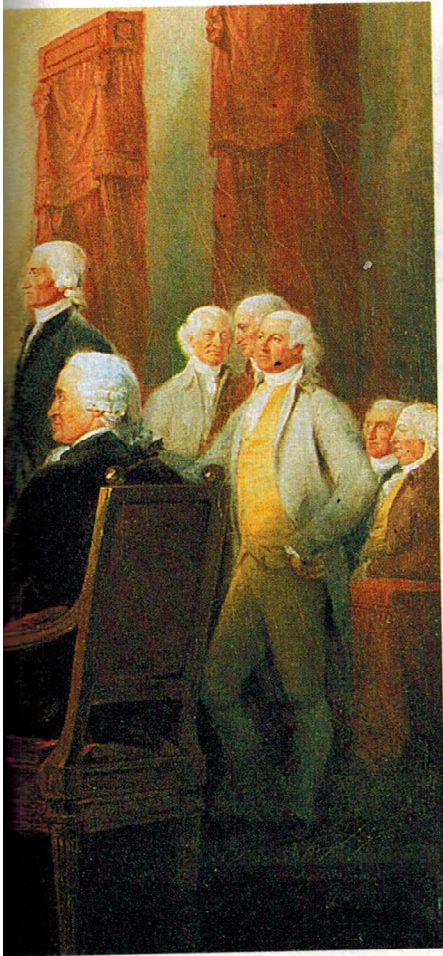


Standing by the table (left to right), John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin present the Declaration of Independence to Congress.

It was John Adams, perhaps more than anyone else, who got the delegates to sign the Declaration. Adams was a talker as well as a thinker. At the Second Continental Congress he kept talking and talking until finally he convinced the delegates.

Then John Adams wrote to his wife, Abigail:

Yesterday, the greatest question was decided which ever was debated in America, and a greater, perhaps, never was nor will be decided among men. A Resolution was passed without one dissenting Colony, "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States...." You will see, in a few days, a Declaration setting forth the causes which have impelled us to this mighty revolution, and the reasons which will justify it in the sight of God and man.



Copies of the Declaration were still warm from the printing press when they were put on coastal vessels or stuffed into saddlebags so they could be sped on their way to each of the 13 colonies. On July 9, the document reached New York and was read to General Washington's troops, who shouted hurrah and tossed their hats in the air. That night a gilded statue of George III was pulled down from its pedestal on Manhattan's Bowling Green. (The statue was soon melted and turned into bullets.)

On July 19, the Declaration arrived in Boston, and Tom Crafts, a house painter, stepped out on a small square balcony in front of the Massachusetts State House and read it aloud. "When, in the course of human events," he began in his flat New England tone. When he finished a voice rang out, "God save the American States," and the crowd cheered mightily. Two days later Abigail Adams wrote to John:

The bells rang, the privateers fired the forts and batteries, the cannon were discharged, the platoons followed, & every face appeared joyful.... After dinner the King's [coat of] Arms were taken down from the State House & every vestige of him from every place in which it appeared, & burnt.... Thus ends royal Authority in this State. And all the people shall say Amen.

An Awful Silence

Benjamin Rush was one of the first doctors in America to have an interest in psychiatry, which is the study of illnesses of the mind. After the Revolution was over, Dr. Rush remembered the "fears and sorrows and sleepless nights" of those who signed the Declaration. Here is part of what he wrote in a letter to John Adams:

Dear Old Friend.... Do you recall your memorable speech upon the day on which the vote was taken? Do you recall the pensive and awful silence which pervaded the house when we were called up, one after another, to the table of the President of Congress to subscribe what was believed by many at that time to be our own death warrants? The silence and gloom of the morning were interrupted, I well recollect, only for a moment by Colonel [Benjamin] Harrison of Virginia [who was heavy], who said to Mr. [Elbridge] Gerry [who was skinny] at the table: "I shall have a great advantage over you, Mr. Gerry, when we are all hung for what we are now doing. From the size and weight of my body I shall die in a few minutes, but from the lightness of your body you will dance in the air an hour or two before you are dead." This speech procured a transient smile, but it was soon succeeded by the solemnity with which the whole business was conducted.... Benjn. Rush

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

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. — Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all reference hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. — But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Tyranny, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. — The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. — To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. —

He has refused his assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. — He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. — He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. — He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within. — He has endeavored to prevent the Population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Strangers; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. — He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance. — He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature. — He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power. — He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: — For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: — For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: — For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: — For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury: — For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences: — For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies: — For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: — For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with powers to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. — He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us. — He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. — He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to augment the wretched crews of the British Navy, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. — He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands. — He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. — In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: — Our repeated Petitions have been answered by repeated injury. — 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. — Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. — We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. — We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. — We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. — They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. — We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the redress of our grievances, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, 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; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Boston. *Quinn Smith*
Lyman Hall
Geo. Wadsworth

John Hancock
John Adams
John Jay

Edward Rutledge

John Jay
Thomas Lynch
Arthur Middleton

John Hancock
Samuel Adams
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams
John Jay

George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Th. Jefferson
Wm. Harrison
Th. Nelson
Francis Lightfoot Lee
Carver Braxton

John Hancock
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams

James Wilson
Geo. Ross
Caspar Wistar
Th. Mifflin

John Hancock
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams

Rich. Jackson
John Dickinson
Sam. Johnston
John Hancock
John Adams
John Jay

John Hancock
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams
John Jay
John Adams

William Ellery
Proper Sherman
Sam. Huntington
Wm. Livingston
Oliver Wolcott
Mathew Thornton