

## *The Declaration of Independence, a Chronology*

- Jan. 9, 1776:** Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* is published in Philadelphia. It sweeps the colonies like wildfire; everyone is reading and discussing Paine's arguments against the divine right of regents, a hereditary monarchy, and for independence of the colonies.
- Feb. 1, 1776:** About this date the Continental Congress reconvenes in Philadelphia and the question of whether the colonies should declare their independence is on every delegate's mind.
- July 1, 1776:** Richard Henry Lee of Virginia moves for independence. A debate of about 9 hours follows, with John Dickinson of Pennsylvania leading the opposition and John Adams of Massachusetts the chief advocate of the motion. A preliminary vote is taken. The results are 9 colonial delegations for, 2 against (Pennsylvania and South Carolina), 1 abstaining (New York) and 1 unable to vote (Delaware). A motion to postpone the vote for a day passes.
- July 2, 1776:** John Dickinson and another Pennsylvania delegate opposed to independence stay home, swinging the colony's delegation to independence, 3-2. The Congress votes to declare independence 12-0, with New York abstaining. John Adams writes wife Abigail that the day should henceforth be celebrated as "Independence Day" and a "Day of Deliverance." Congress appoints a committee charged with drawing up a declaration. It is headed by Thomas Jefferson, at Adams' insistence.
- July 3-4, 1776:** Jefferson's draft of the declaration document is the subject of debate for the session of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, and until about noon of the session of the 4<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 80 changes are made in the document's language; about one-fourth of the draft is cut from it entirely. The most important of the excisions Jefferson had included as the culmination of his charges against George III. Jefferson had written:
- He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of *infidel* powers, is the warfare of the *Christian* king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where *Men* should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. (Jefferson *Papers*, 1:318, in Will, 67; )
- July 4, 1776:** A vote on *The Declaration of Independence* is taken about noon. It passes without opposition (in that sense, unanimously), but with New York abstaining. Hence, the vote is 12-0, with one abstention.
- July 6, 1776:** The *Declaration* is published in *The Pennsylvania Evening Post* and quickly becomes the topic of excited discussion and celebration across the colonies.
- Aug. 2, 1776:** The delegates sign the official parchment copy of the *Declaration*.