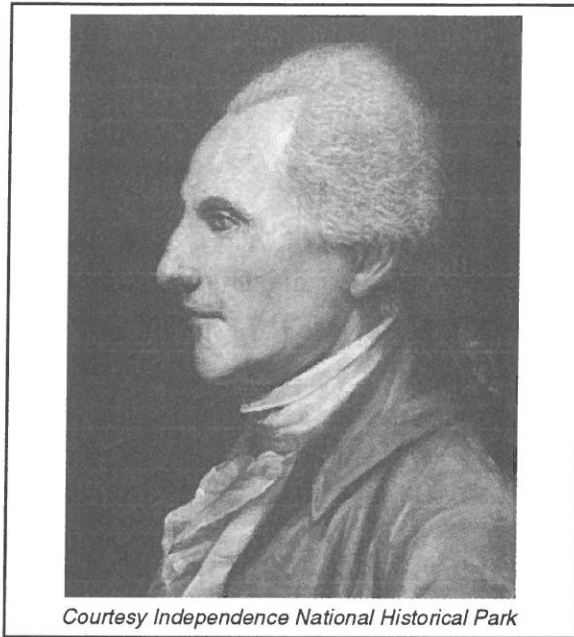


THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IS SIGNED

Events moved swiftly after General Thomas Gage arrived in Boston. Some Americans who wanted to be loyal to England, yet have more freedom, came up with ideas for developing a dominion status. That is, Parliament would have no control over them, but they would stay loyal to the king. People like Sam Adams and Patrick Henry did not like that idea. When the demands of Congress that British troops be withdrawn reached the king, he and Parliament agreed that Massachusetts was in a state of rebellion.



Courtesy Independence National Historical Park

Richard Henry Lee

The king's troops ruled in Boston, but outside the city it was the Committee of Safety that was in charge, and they were gathering guns and gunpowder, drilling their militia, and preparing for a showdown. Gage's spies told him about arms being collected at Lexington and Concord, and he sent about 700 men to destroy the supplies. Paul Revere and William Dawes rode to warn the Americans that the British were coming. Dawes escaped British patrols, but Revere was captured and held for a time.

At Lexington, and again at Concord, the militia faced the British, and after someone fired (no one is sure which side fired first), British volleys forced the inexperienced militia to leave in a hurry. The British soldiers found little in the way of ammunition or supplies to take, so they marched back to Boston. Americans attacked them all the way, and the British casualties included 73 men killed, 174 wounded.

Americans, led by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold, captured Ft. Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain, capturing the forty-two soldiers stationed there. Tensions ran high in Boston, which was now surrounded by militia. With all of these events occurring, sessions of the Second Continental Congress were tense. The decision to appoint George Washington to command the army was a big step toward separation, but delegates were still reluctant to face the big question, which was: "Are the thirteen English colonies in North America prepared to break their historic ties to the greatest empire on earth?" From that question came others. If we do try, can we win? Who might we persuade to help us? What will happen to those who sign a document declaring independence if the effort fails? The only question for which they knew the answer was the last. If they failed, the penalty for traitors included hanging (but not until dead), heads cut off, and bodies divided into four quarters.

In June 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia proposed that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and *independent* states." This caused much debate, and many members had to wait for instructions from home before they could vote. A committee was formed to draft a formal document explaining to the world the reason for their actions. It included John Adams, Ben Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. The other two left Jefferson with the job of writing it.

with the job of writing it.

Name: _____

Class: _____

RESULTS: On July 4, as Ben Franklin stood in line to sign, he commented, "We will hang together or we will hang separately." It was meant as humor, but there was a truth to it that the others all understood. To fail was to die, but honor and liberty were worth the risk.

Activities:

1. Have students read the Declaration of Independence aloud and listen for important quotes. Have them try to put the first paragraph in their own words.
2. Ask students to sign a statement that they will always do their best work, and then have them sign an agreement that if they do not, you may punish them in anyway you see fit. That should give them some of the same thoughts that the signers of the Declaration of Independence had.

Essay:

1. Read the Declaration of Independence and look for important phrases. Try to re-write them in your own words.
2. Someone in your class argues that the war had begun before the Declaration of Independence was signed. Would you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Ben Franklin said: "We will all hang together or we will hang separately." As a person standing in line to sign the document, what would that remark mean to you?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____
