



The Committee of Five discuss a draft of Jefferson's work on a Declaration of Independence. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia — who had introduced the independence resolution — was called home to help attend to his sick wife and was unable to participate on the committee.

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THE COMMITTEE

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Our nation celebrates its 250th birthday on July 4 this year — never mind the fact that the 4th wasn't the *actual* day the United States officially declared its independence from Britain.

The Continental Congress appointed a committee to draft a formal declaration of independence. That work began in earnest on June 11, 1776.

HOW THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE CAME TO BE

MAY 12, 1776

Meeting in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress formally calls upon the colonies to write new state constitutions that would replace colonial constitutions.

Three days later, John Adams adds a preface that puts the resolution into context as a march to independence.

The motion becomes known as the Resolution of May 15 — even though it was issued three days before.

MAY 15

The Virginia Convention instructs its delegates to the Continental Congress to initiate a formal Declaration of Independence from Britain.

JUNE 7

Continental Congress delegate Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduces a resolution "that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states."

To make this happen, Congress appoints a committee of five — John Adams of Massachusetts, Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Robert R. Livingston of New York and Roger Sherman of Connecticut — to write a formal declaration to explain the reasons for independence.

JUNE 11

Having agreed on a general outline for the Declaration, the committee chooses Jefferson to write it. He'll work closely with Adams — forming a subcommittee of sorts — over the next few days.

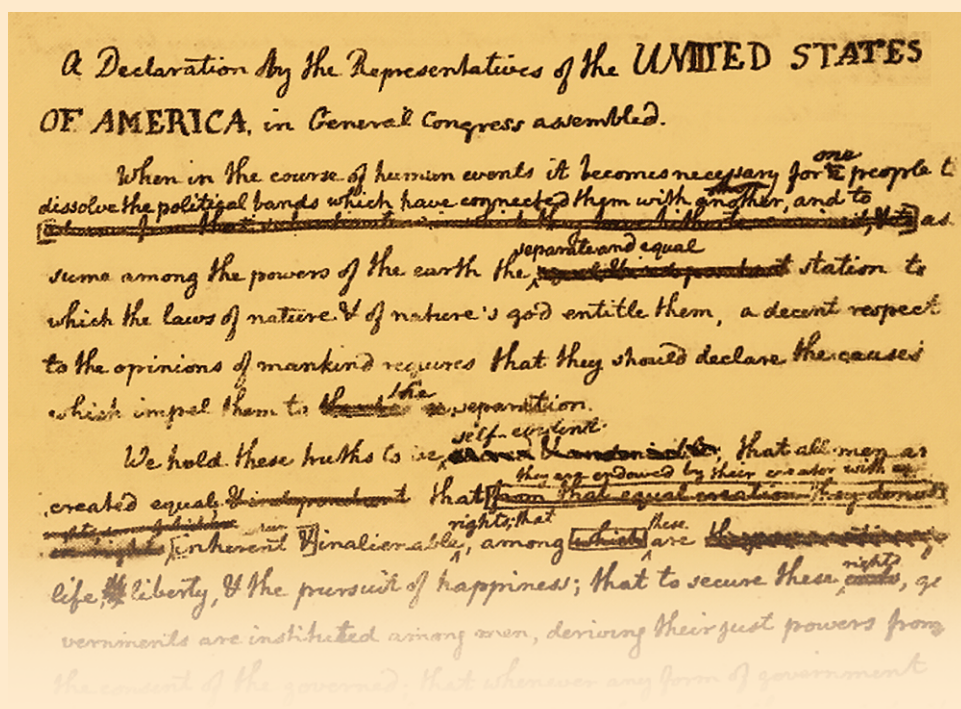
JUNE 12

The Virginia Convention has George Mason write a Declaration of Rights.

Over the next few weeks, seven other states will also issue similar declarations. Four of them — Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont — will copy portions of Mason's Virginia document.

JUNE 28-29

The Committee of Five presents Jefferson's work for Congress to review. The documents are laid out



and marked up — mostly deletions of passages. One passage, blaming King George III for the slave trade, is removed to appease delegates from South Carolina and Georgia.

The document is shortened by a fourth. Jefferson will write later that he feels like Congress has "mangled" his prose.

JULY 1

Formal debate over the Declaration begins. Congress is eager for a unanimous vote. It requires state delegations to vote among themselves and then cast a single vote.

Congress votes 9-2 in favor of adopting the Declaration, with Pennsylvania and South Carolina voting no, New York abstaining and Delaware — which has only two delegates present — tied.

JULY 2

News arrives that a British invasion fleet is approaching New York. Alarmed by this, all four New York delegates change their votes in favor of the Declaration.

Likewise, the youngest member of Congress — 16-year-old Edward Rutledge of South Carolina — talks

his brother-in-law, Thomas Middleton, to sign. This convinces the other two South Carolina delegates to sign as well.

Two Pennsylvania delegates decide that instead of voting against the Declaration, they'll abstain. This means that colony passes the resolution, 3-2.

Delaware delegate Caesar Rodney — attending to business back home in Dover — rides 80 miles on horseback to cast the vote needed to tip Delaware into supporting the Declaration.

As a result, the Continental Congress formally votes to declare independence from Britain. John Dunlap, the official printer for Congress, works through the night to typeset and print about 200 copies.

Several of the founding fathers — most notably John Adams — will claim this is the nation's true birthday. Adams writes his wife, Abigail, that July 2 "ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shews (shows), games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations (fireworks), from one end of this continent to the other from this time

forward forever more."

Without knowing what is happening back in Philadelphia that day, Gen. George Washington — overseeing defense of New York City — issues his own declaration. In his General Orders for the day, Washington writes: "Let us therefore animate and encourage each other, and show the whole world, that a free man contending for Liberty on his own ground is superior to any slavish mercenary on earth."

JULY 4

The Declaration is returned to Congress. It's believed that John Hancock — the president of the Continental Congress — adds his large signature at this time.

JULY 6

The Declaration is published in the Philadelphia Evening Post.

JULY 8

Bells are rung throughout Philadelphia to mark the first public reading of the Declaration.

Another legend will spring up that what's now called the Liberty Bell cracked because it is rung so hard celebrating the Declaration.

In fact, the bell in Philadelphia's city hall cracks much later: Historians think it may have cracked while ringing after the death of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall in 1835.

JULY 9

One of Dunlap's copies arrives at Washington's camp in New York City. With British ships anchored in the harbor and thousands of Redcoats preparing to disembark, Washington has the Declaration read to his troops.

AUG. 2

Most delegates sign the Declaration of Independence. Some delegates won't sign it until much later. Eight who sign the Declaration weren't yet members of Congress the previous month.

At least eight never sign it. John Alsop of New York, for example, feels so strongly that the colonies should remain part of Britain that he refuses to sign and resigns his seat.