



Benjamin Franklin

The Story of the DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE By Ida M. Tarbell



Thomas Jefferson

(Copyright by the S. S. McClure company.)

[The portraits of the signers of the Declaration of Independence in this article are believed to be the most complete ever published. The best portrait of each signer has been selected. Portraits of all the signers save two were made. The exceptions are John Morton and Caesar Rodney. Of the former there is no authentic portrait, and the latter, owing to that notable fact, the autographs are facsimiles of those on the engraved copy of the Declaration of Independence now in the library of the state department, Washington.]

THE Continental congress was very busy in the spring of 1776. Its daily sessions were taken up with the reading of letters from the generals of its army, accepting new companies of militia, directing battalions and gunpowder toward this or that province, disarming people who persisted in refusing to fight Great Britain, ordering cannon cast, buying saltpeter, imprisoning the suspected, voting money for rations and forage, establishing hospitals, forbidding trade with England—in short, with the carrying on of a vigorous war against a country to which it still officially acknowledged allegiance.

This condition of affairs had existed for more than a year. Occasionally, it is true, congress had suspended the tidings long enough to protest that the colonies were not rebels, only "petitioners in arms" bent on setting right their wrongs, but the futility of its petitions and prayers had gradually worn out the patience and hope of even the most loyal of the members. When congress came together in the spring of 1776 it was to consider a resolution calling upon the colonies to form independent governments. The temper which had carried this revolutionary measure had not subsided when the news reached Philadelphia that the colonial legislature of Virginia had instructed its delegates to congress to bring in a resolution declaring the united colonies free and independent.

It was on June 7 that Richard Henry Lee, the spokesman of the Virginia delegation, arose in congress. He had been ordered, he said, by the unanimous vote of the members of the council of Virginia to present the following resolution:

"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; that all political connection between them and Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved."

Two other resolutions followed, contingent upon the first, but it is not necessary to consider them here.

Lee had not taken his seat before there was a "second" to his motion. It came from John Adams of Massachusetts. A more welcome task could not have fallen to a man than this to John Adams. A patriot by choice from the day in 1761 when he first heard James Otis' famous speech against the writs of assistance, he had for years sacrificed business, family, health, peace of mind, to the American cause. He was one of the few who from the first believed that separation was the only outcome of the contention with Great Britain. From the time he entered the first congress of the colonies, in 1774, he had boldly and incessantly advocated independence.

To see that congress felt it was playing with fire in considering Mr. Lee's resolution one has only to examine the journal of its proceedings for June 7, 1776. So hazardous was the matter regarded for those taking the initiative that in recording the resolutions neither their substance nor Mr. Lee's and Mr. Adams' names are mentioned. "Certain resolutions," says the journal, "being moved and seconded, resolved that the consideration of them be deferred until tomorrow morning and that the members be enjoined to attend promptly at 10 o'clock in order to take the same into consideration." They debated all the next day, Saturday, and again all day Monday on the question. Who spoke and what was said are not certainly known, as the journal has no record of John Adams and his son's Sam, Roger Sherman, Oliver Wolcott, R. H. Lee, George Wythe—these were undoubtedly the great speakers for separation.

The chief opponent, Mr. Adams' leading antagonist, was John Dickinson of Pennsylvania. Dickinson at this time was a man forty-four years of age, three years older than Adams, a gentleman who had had as good an education as the colonies afforded and had followed it by a term in the Temple, London.

From the beginning of the trouble with England he had opposed her on the ground that her acts were contrary to English law.

It was Dickinson, then, who, when the debate began on Lee's motion, was first on his feet. His most practical arguments were that such a declaration was premature, that the colonies should wait at least until they had perfected their military arrangements and secured if possible the aid of France, with which country they were then negotiating. The names of all who followed Dickinson we do not know, but among them were able and loyal men—John Jay, James Wilson, James Duane, Robert R. Livingston, Edward Rutledge—but it was evident from the beginning of the debate that they were in the minority. The delegates of seven colonies—four in New England, three in the south—were either instructed to vote for independence or leaned toward it. Those of six colonies—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and South Carolina—were opposed to the resolution. In such a matter unanimity was of the utmost importance, and after a three days' debate it was decided to postpone a final vote until the first day of July, and in

order that no time be lost a committee was appointed to prepare a declaration suitable to lay before the world, stating the grievances which drove them to separate from Great Britain. The immortal Committee.

This committee was appointed by ballot on June 11 and consisted, according to the journal, of the following gentlemen: Mr. Jefferson, Mr. J. Adams, Mr. Franklin, Mr. Sherman and Mr. R. R. Livingston.

Naturally one would expect to find at the head of this committee Mr. Lee, who had presented the resolution that he was not given the place seems to be due to one of those nice little matters of state politics which had quite as much influence with the "fathers" as they have today. Mr. Richard Henry Lee was not beloved by his colleagues from Virginia, and Mr. Jefferson was sent up to rival and supplant him. So says John Adams. Unquestionably state politics had something to do with the choice of Jefferson, though, as a matter of fact Lee would have been prevented from serving even if he had been appointed, because of the illness of his wife, which called him away from Philadelphia just about this time.

Jefferson was a comparatively new man in congress. He was thirty-three years of age at the time and had been a member less than a year. Even in this time he had not been at all prominent in the debates of congress. John Adams said that during the whole time he sat with him in congress he never heard him utter three sentences together. But, if silent in debate, Jefferson had shown himself "prompt, frank, explicit and decisive" upon committees and in conversation and was looked upon by all of the

and that this complaint and that, had been uttered here or there. This controversy was hottest in 1819, when the Mecklenburg declaration, said to have been passed by Mecklenburg county, N. C., in May, 1775, was discovered.

Jefferson at once declared to Adams that he believed the document spurious and brought forth a long array of reasons to support his belief. The matter became a subject of partisan controversy. The legislature of North Carolina took it up and in 1831 published a pamphlet to prove that a declaration of independence was made in Mecklenburg county more than a year before Jefferson wrote his.

Jefferson's Labor.

So well did Jefferson do his work that when he submitted it to Adams and Franklin, before handing it over to the committee, they made only a few corrections. Jefferson then wrote out what he calls a "fair copy" and turned it over to the committee of five. They found it so good that they changed not a word of it, and on the 28th of June the document was laid before congress.

While Jefferson in his little room at the corner of Market and Seventh streets was laboring over the Declaration of the country from one end to the other was busy discussing the subject in the states where the sentiment for independence was strong—that is, in New England and the south—the excitement was great, and the colonial congresses, Sons of Liberty, committees and town meetings worked with renewed energy, the excitement penetrating to the most remote settlements. Heavy pressure was brought on the colonies which up to this time had been against separation by the discussions in newspapers and pamphlets and by the debates in assemblies, conventions, committees of safety and of inspection and in town and county meetings. The whole people soon became familiar with the question, and their councils began to feel the effect of the popular agitation,

He was the "colossus of that debate," said Jefferson afterward. The entire day of July 1 was spent on the question, and at night congress was still unwilling to take a final vote and so adjourned the decision until the 2d. The night was spent in excited work. Four colonies—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and South Carolina—still held back, but before congress assembled the next morning a majority for the resolution had been secured in each delegation excepting that of New York [each colony had one vote in the Continental congress, a majority of the delegation of the colony deciding what that should be; New York withheld her vote entirely on the 2d], so that when the vote was finally taken twelve colonies were ready to declare that "these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent."

As a matter of fact, the passing of Mr. Lee's resolution effected the separation of the colonies from Great Britain, and the 2d of July is really Independence day. It was this day John Adams wrote his wife on July 3 that future generations would celebrate. "The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America," he wrote. "I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forevermore."

But it was on July 4 that the document which makes the formal expression of independence was adopted. That formal Declaration came before the house immediately after the adoption of Lee's resolution and was taken up clause by clause for debate. The members after their two days' struggle were not in any mood to deal

with the "colossus of that debate," said Jefferson afterward. The entire day of July 1 was spent on the question, and at night congress was still unwilling to take a final vote and so adjourned the decision until the 2d. The night was spent in excited work. Four colonies—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and South Carolina—still held back, but before congress assembled the next morning a majority for the resolution had been secured in each delegation excepting that of New York [each colony had one vote in the Continental congress, a majority of the delegation of the colony deciding what that should be; New York withheld her vote entirely on the 2d], so that when the vote was finally taken twelve colonies were ready to declare that "these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent."

As a matter of fact, the passing of Mr. Lee's resolution effected the separation of the colonies from Great Britain, and the 2d of July is really Independence day. It was this day John Adams wrote his wife on July 3 that future generations would celebrate. "The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America," he wrote. "I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forevermore."

But it was on July 4 that the document which makes the formal expression of independence was adopted. That formal Declaration came before the house immediately after the adoption of Lee's resolution and was taken up clause by clause for debate. The members after their two days' struggle were not in any mood to deal

and the reader, John Nixon, was cheered to the echo. After the ceremony the crowd turned its attention to the king's coat of arms, which was suspended over the doorway in the courtroom of the statehouse, tearing it down and taking it out and burning it. In many places the reading of the Declaration, which had been ordered by congress, was attended by similar acts of destruction. Thus in New York the Sons of Freedom tore down an equestrian statue of George III, which stood on Bowling Green and returned the monument over to the authorities with the order: to run the lead into bullets. In Baltimore "the effigy of our late king" was carted through the town and committed to the flames amidst the acclamation of hundreds," the records say. In Savannah in August at the reading there was a great procession, almost the whole town turning out to enter an effigy of his majesty King George III.

As a whole, the demonstrations were not noisy or destructive. The army, which might have been expected to indulge in some vindictive performances, received the news quietly, and in many cases the people seemed to feel deeply the solemnity of the step which congress had taken and to have rightly concluded that prayers were more appropriate to the occasion than the tearing down of statues. The only colony which had refused to vote for Lee's resolution on the 2d was New York. No sooner had the vote been taken than the delegates from that state sent a letter posthaste, asking what was to be their line of action thereafter. On July 9 the provincial congress of New York, which was in session at White Plains, replied that "the reasons assigned by the Continental congress for declaring the united colonies free and independent state are cogent and convincing, and that, while we lament the cruel necessity which has rendered that measure unavoidable, we approve the same and will at the risk of our lives and fortunes join with the other colonies in supporting it." Congress was now unanimous on independence.

On Aug. 2 a committee appointed on July 15 to prepare an engrossed copy of the Declaration for signing laid it before congress. Many of the men who had fought over it on the 4th of July were still present, but in the meantime many new delegates had come to Philadelphia, so that there were a number present who had had nothing to do with the original act of adoption. Just what happened at the signing we do not know any more than we know the details of the debate in the critical days when it was under consideration. One thing is certain, however. Serious as this matter of signing really was, nobody hesitated. "Give me liberty or give me death!" was no mere phrase for these men. They had weighed its grim meaning and deliberately accepted the alternative. They even took up with jests the matter of putting their names to a document which, if the colonies were defeated, would surely send them all to the gallows. "There—John Bull may read my name without spectacles," said John Hancock as he made the big flourish with which we are so familiar from facsimiles of the Declaration. "We must be unanimous," he said again. "There must be no pulling different ways; we must all hang together." And Franklin replied, "We must indeed all hang together or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." "There go a few millions," said one of the members as John Carroll of Carrollton, then the richest man of the colonies, put his name to the Declaration.

The great charter of freedom was now complete, and while its makers were struggling to prove that it was something more than rhetoric the document itself followed the dangerous wanderings of the Continental congress. In 1789, when that body made way for the first federal congress, the Declaration was confined to the state department of the new government. It had a companion now, the constitution of the United States—a noble proof that the sentiment of independence which had brought it into existence, far from being a barren enthusiasm, capable only of eloquent declamation, was a vital force which could raise armies, win battles, starve and freeze and still have life and courage to devise and put into operation a great government.

As the years went on the veneration of the people for the Declaration of Independence grew. The demand to see the document, to read its text and examine its signatures steadily increased with this feeling of reverence. The government naturally sought to satisfy this desire, but unhappily in doing so it allowed great harm to come to the original. Early in the century the ink was faded and the parchment injured in securing a facsimile for making a copperplate. Still further injury was done when it was placed on exhibition in a strong light in 1849. It remained thus exposed until some of the signatures had entirely vanished. Finally, in 1894, the state department realized that in carelessness good nature it was allowing the great charter to fade away. Steps were at once taken to preserve it. It was carefully covered and placed in a drawer in a steel case specially prepared for its reception and a facsimile hung in its place it once occupied. At the same time steps were taken to preserve the original copyplate by having electrotype copies made, so that the original might be put into a fireproof safe. The document itself is thus finally protected. The great truths for which it stands are not so easily preserved. The eternal watchfulness of those who love liberty for its own sake is that which will secure the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. The exercise of this vigilance is the supreme and enduring concern of the nation.

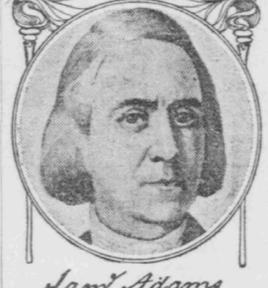
The First Ship Subsidy.
About the first ship subsidy ever known was that given by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain to Columbus when he sailed west for the Indies and found America.



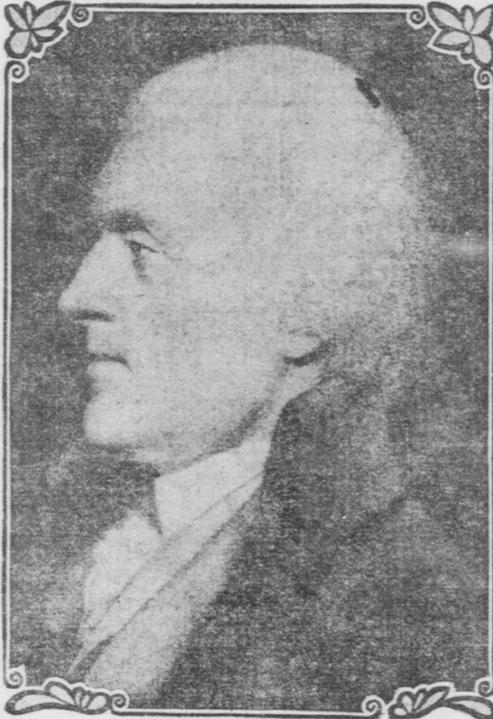
John Hancock



Nathaniel Morrus



Saml Adams



Th. Jefferson



John Adams



Richard Henry Lee



Benj. Franklin

older members, searching for young talent, as one of the most promising young men Virginia had sent up. Particularly he was well regarded for his abilities as a writer.

On the first meeting of the committee there seems to have been a little discussion about who really should do the writing. Adams says he and Jefferson were selected by the committee, but that he insisted that Jefferson himself do it. Jefferson denies this and says that the committee pressed him alone to undertake the draft. The slight discrepancy in the memory of the two honorable gentlemen is of no importance. It was Mr. Jefferson who wrote the Declaration.

He was living at the time the task was given him in a house rather on the outskirts of Philadelphia, chosen purposely because the neighborhood was quiet. Here he had rented a second floor and was accustomed to work whenever congress was not in session. On coming up to Philadelphia on this trip one of his first tasks had been to go to a carpenter and give him a plan of a desk he wanted made—a most characteristic thing for him to do, for Jefferson was a man who insisted on planning everything which he was to use, whether a private house, a public building in Washington, his furniture or his own tomb. The desk was fourteen inches long by ten in breadth and three in height, and it was on this that through the long June days he labored on the declaration.

It must be conceded by one who reads the contemporary literature of the revolution that the gist of the document which he produced was in everybody's mouth. What Jefferson did was to voice in the favorite English style of the day the spirit of independence abroad and to state formally the different grievances of the thirteen colonies as a justification of revolution. It was a great document, because it expressed more completely than had yet been done a universal conviction and because of the genius for selection which it showed. In no sense was it an invention. Years afterward, when its fame had grown, critics of Jefferson began to sneer at the Declaration of Independence as not original and point out that this phrase

was not only the councils at home besieged by the advocates of independence—letters, resolutions and petitions were showered on the delegates in congress. The delegates of Pennsylvania had been strictly ordered to reject any proposition for independence, but the Radical party of the colony had before this taken matters into its own hands and by an interesting revolution quite worthy of the French patriots of 1792 they succeeded in overpowering the regular assembly and forwarded a message to congress favoring independence. New Jersey, too, sent new delegates instructed for the resolution if they "thought it necessary or expedient." On June 11 William Whipple wrote back to New Hampshire that there had been a great change in the sentiment of congress since his arrival, and on June 25 Elbridge Gerry wrote to his friend James Warren, in Boston, that it appeared to him there was not even a doubt of any colony in the country excepting New York and Maryland.

As the first day of July approached the excitement in congress increased. Although we have no records of the debate, it is evident that in the intervals between reading reports from the army and voting money for gunpowder and cannon the two parties were exercising their utmost influence for and against the Declaration. The numbers for independence were gradually creeping up, and every change of front became a matter of the most dramatic interest.

The resolution was brought to vote on the first day of July, some fifty-one members being present in congress. That it would have a majority was certain, but something more than a majority was necessary everybody felt. On the morning of the 1st, just as congress was about to enter on the debate, the hearts of John Adams and his associates were made glad by the arrival of delegates from Maryland, instructed to give a unanimous vote. Matters looked so propitious that Adams wanted the vote taken at once, but New Jersey was unwilling. She had given her delegates permission to support independence if they thought it expedient; they had arrived only on the 28th, and very naturally they wanted to hear the arguments. So, to Adams' disgust, the debate began again.

Never was Adams more powerful than in this final debate on Lee's resolution. He was the "colossus of that debate," said Jefferson afterward. The entire day of July 1 was spent on the question, and at night congress was still unwilling to take a final vote and so adjourned the decision until the 2d. The night was spent in excited work. Four colonies—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and South Carolina—still held back, but before congress assembled the next morning a majority for the resolution had been secured in each delegation excepting that of New York [each colony had one vote in the Continental congress, a majority of the delegation of the colony deciding what that should be; New York withheld her vote entirely on the 2d], so that when the vote was finally taken twelve colonies were ready to declare that "these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent."

As the first day of July approached the excitement in congress increased. Although we have no records of the debate, it is evident that in the intervals between reading reports from the army and voting money for gunpowder and cannon the two parties were exercising their utmost influence for and against the Declaration. The numbers for independence were gradually creeping up, and every change of front became a matter of the most dramatic interest.

The resolution was brought to vote on the first day of July, some fifty-one members being present in congress. That it would have a majority was certain, but something more than a majority was necessary everybody felt. On the morning of the 1st, just as congress was about to enter on the debate, the hearts of John Adams and his associates were made glad by the arrival of delegates from Maryland, instructed to give a unanimous vote. Matters looked so propitious that Adams wanted the vote taken at once, but New Jersey was unwilling. She had given her delegates permission to support independence if they thought it expedient; they had arrived only on the 28th, and very naturally they wanted to hear the arguments. So, to Adams' disgust, the debate began again.

Never was Adams more powerful than in this final debate on Lee's resolution. He was the "colossus of that debate," said Jefferson afterward. The entire day of July 1 was spent on the question, and at night congress was still unwilling to take a final vote and so adjourned the decision until the 2d. The night was spent in excited work. Four colonies—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and South Carolina—still held back, but before congress assembled the next morning a majority for the resolution had been secured in each delegation excepting that of New York [each colony had one vote in the Continental congress, a majority of the delegation of the colony deciding what that should be; New York withheld her vote entirely on the 2d], so that when the vote was finally taken twelve colonies were ready to declare that "these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent."

Never was Adams more powerful than in this final debate on Lee's resolution. He was the "colossus of that debate," said Jefferson afterward. The entire day of July 1 was spent on the question, and at night congress was still unwilling to take a final vote and so adjourned the decision until the 2d. The night was spent in excited work. Four colonies—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and South Carolina—still held back, but before congress assembled the next morning a majority for the resolution had been secured in each delegation excepting that of New York [each colony had one vote in the Continental congress, a majority of the delegation of the colony deciding what that should be; New York withheld her vote entirely on the 2d], so that when the vote was finally taken twelve colonies were ready to declare that "these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent."

afterward. "He resided eighty miles from the city and arrived just as congress met."

It was probably late in the afternoon when, according to the journal, the vote was taken and the Declaration was "agreed to." Forty out of fifty members present are supposed to have voted for it, including one member from New York—Henry Wisner. The document was then ordered "authenticated and printed." It is improbable that there was any signing on that day, excepting that by John Hancock, the president, and Charles Thompson, the secretary. Their names were put to the copy which Mr. Jefferson had presented, but no others, as indeed would have been unwise. It was most important that the document have a unanimous approval if possible. By a little waiting and maneuvering it seemed pretty certain to the wiser members of congress that this unanimity could be secured.

Not Generally Signed on the Fourth.

Not only was there no general signing of the Declaration of Independence on the 4th of July, 1776, but tradition has invested the day with other dramatic features which unhappily are false. It is a pity not to believe, as most of us were taught, that while the debate was under way—

There was tumult in the city. In the quaint old Quaker town—a pity not to be able to tell the story of the gray haired bell ringer, sitting with one hand ready on the clapper of his bell until he hears a young voice crying: "Bring, grandpa ring! Oh, ring for liberty!" As a matter of fact, the meetings of congress were held behind closed doors, and while it was well known in the coffee houses of the city that Mr. Lee's resolution had been voted on favorably, and no doubt, too, that a formal declaration embodying it was under consideration, no crowds surrounded Independence hall that day. There was no small boy, no sounding of the Liberty bell.

Indeed, it was not until July 6 that the Declaration appeared in the Pennsylvania Packet. On the 8th it was read in the statehouse yard. The patriots turned out in a great crowd.



John Jay



John Adams



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay



John Jay