

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

A Brief History of Independence

“But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people.”

—John Adams, 1818¹

Page | 1

Though the Continental Congress declared independence from Great Britain on July 2, 1776, the road to American sovereignty neither began nor ended there. Years of protest, negotiation, and even military battles preceded Congress’ declaration; years more of hard-fought war would be waged before that declaration became a political reality. To understand Independence Day in America, one must necessarily understand the historical context in which independence arose and was won.

Early Unrest

At the very beginning of October 1765, the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations (commonly known as the Board of Trade) wrote to King George III, warning him of what “appears to us to be the first instance of a general congress, appointed by the assemblies of the [American] colonies without authority of the crown.” This gathering, the Lords continued, was a “dangerous tendency in itself,” and “more especially so, when taken for the purposes expressed”: to “induce, the rest of your Majesty’s colonies in America, to join in a general congress . . . independent of the other branches of the legislature, and without any previous application to your Majesty, to consider and deliberate upon the acts of the parliament of this kingdom.”² And that, in a nutshell, is exactly what the Stamp Act Congress did.

¹ John Adams, Letter to H. Niles, February 13, 1818. See below.

² Representation of the Lords Commissions for Trade and Plantations, Letter to King George III, October 1, 1765, in *The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, Vol. XVI, 1765–71 (London: T. C. Hansard, 1813), 121–22.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Meeting in New York City, the Stamp Act Congress, with representatives from nine of the 13 British colonies in America,³ did indeed discuss acts of the British Parliament—in particular, the Stamp Act of 1765, a direct tax levied on the American colonies in an effort to raise revenue following the conclusion of the French and Indian War. In the resulting Declaration of Rights and Grievances, the Congress declared “that it is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted rights of Englishmen, that no taxes should be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives.” For the American colonists, such local representation could only take place in the colonies—not in Great Britain—and therefore only taxes passed by colonial legislatures would be considered legitimate.⁴

Page | 2

Writers such as John Adams, then a young lawyer in Boston, also took to the pages of local newspapers, encouraging Americans to “dare to read, think, speak and write . . . [and] let it be known that British liberties are not the grants of princes or parliaments.”⁵ John Dickinson, a future Continental Congressman and delegate to the Constitutional Convention, urged his compatriots to boycott British stamped goods: “Think, oh! Think of the endless Miseries you *must* entail upon yourselves, and your Country, by touching the pestilential Cargoes that have been sent to you. . . . To receive them is Death—is worse than Death—it is *slavery!*”⁶

Although the British Parliament did not officially accept or recognize the Stamp Act Congress’s petition—or the body that created it—it did repeal the Stamp Act in March 1766, primarily because the colonial boycotts of British goods were so damaging to British trade. The same day it repealed the law, however, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act, formally declaring that the colonies were subordinate to the British government and that “parliament assembled, had, hath, and of right ought to have, full

³ Virginia and Georgia were unable to send delegates because their colonial governors prevented the state assemblies from meeting; New Hampshire was handling a financial crisis, and was later prevented by the governor from calling their legislative body into session; and efforts in North Carolina to choose representation were unsuccessful after the legislative session was suspended by the lieutenant governor.

⁴ Declaration of Rights and Grievances, October 19, 1765, available at <http://tah.ashbrook.org/library/document/resolutions-of-the-stamp-act-congress/>.

⁵ John Adams, “A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law,” *Boston Gazette*, August 12, 1765, available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=43>.

⁶ John Dickinson, “Address on the Stamp Act,” November 1765, reprinted in the *New York Gazette*, December 5, 1765, available in *The Writings of John Dickinson*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1895), 204.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and peoples of America . . . in all cases whatsoever.”⁷

The following year, Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, a group of laws creating another set of taxes on the colonists. They also established new means of implementing the taxes, such as the use of jury-less admiralty courts to prosecute smugglers and an American Customs Board, located in Boston, to enforce the laws. British troops were sent to keep order in Boston, where much of the enforcement efforts were targeted.

Page | 3

Tensions between the colonists and the British mounted during this period, and Patriot groups such as the Sons of Liberty sprung up in towns across the colonies, especially in New England. Protesters took to the streets of cities, hanging in effigy government officials or tax collectors and, in some cases, destroying their homes and offices and threatening them with acts of violence.⁸ On March 5, 1770, a group of eight British soldiers fired into a hostile crowd at the Boston Custom House, killing five men. The “Bloody Massacre,” as a famous engraving by Paul Revere called the event, became a rallying cry for colonists increasingly frustrated with what they deemed a tyrannical British government.⁹

Three years after the Boston Massacre, another event on the road to independence occurred in the same city: the Boston Tea Party. Earlier that year Parliament had passed the Tea Act, changing the regulations for how British tea was imported and sold in North America. By making the tea cheaper, British lawmakers hoped that the colonists would purchase the legal tea (instead of the cheaper, smuggled version that was more popular) and, in so doing, assent to the taxes on the tea still in effect from the Townshend Acts—and thus to Parliament’s power to tax the colonists.

Still sounding the refrain of “no taxation without representation,” the colonists continued their boycott on British tea, in some cases sending the East India Company ships full of tea right back across the Atlantic. On the evening of December 16, 1773, members of the Sons of Liberty, some dressed as American Indians, boarded the three tea

⁷ The Declaratory Act of 1766, available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/declaratory_act_1766.asp.

⁸ On August 26, 1765, for example, a mob of angry protestors destroyed the house of Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson.

⁹ See “The Fruits of Arbitrary Power, or the Bloody Massacre,” a print by Paul Revere, based on a design by Henry Pelham, published March 28, 1770, www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661777/.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

ships in the Boston harbor and dumped all 342 chests of tea in the water. The British reaction was swift: Parliament passed what became known in America as the Intolerable Acts or the Coercive Acts, a group of laws that closed the Boston port until the city paid for all the destroyed tea, brought much of the Massachusetts government under direct British control, limited the number of town meetings in the state to one per year, allowed British officials to be tried in Britain for crimes they were accused of committing in the colonies, and gave more authority to colonial governors to quarter British troops in the colonies.

Page | 4

The First Continental Congress

Even though the worst of the Coercive Acts was aimed only at Boston and Massachusetts, they still drew the ire of leaders throughout the colonies who, in the words of a resolution passed by former members of the (dissolved) Virginia House of Burgesses, viewed “an attack, made on one of our sister colonies . . . [as] an attack made on all British America.”¹⁰ In June 1774, a town meeting in Philadelphia issued a similar decree, declaring that they considered “our brethren at Boston as suffering the common cause of America” and called for a congress with representatives from each of the colonies to convene and discuss the matter further.¹¹ Similar shows of support were passed in other colonies.¹²

On September 5, 1774, 56 delegates from 12 American colonies met together in Philadelphia at Carpenters’ Hall to discuss a united reaction to the British policies. (Georgia did not send representatives.) Among the delegates were John and Samuel Adams from Massachusetts; John Jay and Philip Livingston from New York; John Dickinson and Joseph Galloway from Pennsylvania; Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, George Washington, and Peyton Randolph (who was chosen president of the gathering) from Virginia; and Edward and John Rutledge from South Carolina. John Adams described the gathering as “a school of political prophets” and “a nursery of American

¹⁰ Virginia resolution, signed by 89 former members of the Virginia House of Burgesses (which the governor had dissolved) on May 27, 1774, available in Jesse Ames Spencer, *History of the United States of America*, Vol. 1 (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1896), 397.

¹¹ Proceedings of the Inhabitants of Philadelphia, June 18, 1774, available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/proc_in_pa_1774.asp.

¹² See, for example, the Proceedings of Farmington, Connecticut, on the Boston Port Act, May 19, 1774, available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/proc_farm_ct_1774.asp.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

statesmen”,¹³ and noted that “[h]ere are Fortunes, Abilities, Learning, Eloquence, Acuteness equal to any I ever met with [in] my Life. Here is a Diversity of Religions[,] Educations, Manners, Interests, Such as it would Seem almost impossible to unite in any one Plan of Conduct.”¹⁴

Page | 5

For the most part, though, unite they did. Even though the First Continental Congress was, as Adams later recorded, “about one third Tories, one third timid, and one third true Blue [or Patriot],”¹⁵ the majority of the participants were able to agree on a list of declarations and resolves that a) reaffirmed the colonists’ rights as Englishmen—including the protection of life, liberty, and property and the right to representation; b) listed specific acts of Parliament that were “violations of the rights of the colonists” and called for their repeal; and c) created an agreement among most of the colonies to boycott British goods until the Coercive Acts were repealed.¹⁶ The Congress also arranged for a second continental congress to meet the following May if the relationship with Britain had not improved.

The Second Continental Congress

By May 1775, circumstances had certainly not improved. The British Parliament had not been receptive to the complaints of the First Continental Congress, and in April open hostilities had erupted near the towns of Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, when groups of Patriot militiamen engaged British regulars who had been sent to search for and seize colonial supplies.¹⁷ This battle, and the ensuing American siege of British-controlled Boston, in effect began the Revolutionary War.

When members of the Second Continental Congress came to Philadelphia in the spring, they were greeted by three regiments of Continental soldiers that had already formed and were using the city’s common areas to drill. Many of the members from the first congress returned for the second iteration, but some new members were also

¹³ John Adams, Letter to James Warren, June 25, 1774, in *Papers of John Adams*, Vol. 2, eds. Robert J. Taylor, Mary Jo-Kline, Gregg L. Lint, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), available at www.masshist.org/publications/apde/browseVol.php?series=pja&vol=2.

¹⁴ John Adams, Letter to William Tudor, September 29, 1774, in *Papers of John Adams*.

¹⁵ John Adams, Letter to Benjamin Rush, March 19, 1812, in *Old Family Letters*, ed. Alexander Biddle (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1892), 373.

¹⁶ Read The Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress, passed on October 14, 1774. See below.

¹⁷ See Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Concord Hymn,” below.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

present—notably among them Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and John Hancock of Massachusetts, the latter of whom took Peyton Randolph’s place as president of the convention when Randolph was called back to the Virginia House of Burgesses. A young Virginian—then age 32—by the name of Thomas Jefferson was sent to replace Randolph.

Page | 6

Congress’ first order of business was to provide direction and coordination to the war effort, which heretofore had been conducted by disparate militias in the different colonies. In June, Congress officially created the Continental Army, appointed George Washington as its commander in chief, and sent the new general to meet his army, which was conducting the Siege of Boston.¹⁸

Next, the congressmen turned their attention to their relationship with Britain. While some—Adams’ “true blue”—saw independence as inevitable, others held out hope that Britain and her colonies might still reconcile. At the urging of John Dickinson, Congress adopted the Olive Branch Petition, declaring that the congressmen would “use all the means in [their] power . . . for stopping the further effusion of blood, and for averting the impending calamities that threaten the British Empire” and asking King George III to do the same.¹⁹ At the same time that Congress was seeking reconciliation with Great Britain, though, it also passed the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, providing a defense of its war preparations, noting that “we shall lay [our arms] down again when hostilities shall cease on the part of the aggressors.”²⁰ The message to Britain was clear: however much the American colonists wished to be reunited with Britain, they would only do so if Britain changed her ways and viewed them as the full British subjects they considered themselves.

The Road to Independence

On August 23, 1775—ten days after William Penn arrived in England carrying the Olive Branch Petition, which the king refused to accept—King George III issued a proclamation declaring that the colonists in North America were in a state of open rebellion and calling on all British subjects “to disclose and make known all traitorous

¹⁸ Learn more about George Washington’s generalship of the war at www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/celebrating-george-washington.

¹⁹ Read the Olive Branch Petition, adopted on July 8, 1775, here: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_07-08-75.asp.

²⁰ The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, adopted on July 6, 1775. See below.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

conspiracies and attempts” against the British crown.²¹ The following February, Congress learned that Parliament had passed a bill prohibiting trade with the colonies and declaring as traitors—punishable by death by hanging—all Americans who did not submit unconditionally to British rule. To make matters worse, there were also rumors—later found to be true—that an army of hired German mercenaries were on their way, accompanied by an armada of the British Navy, to North America. It was, to say the least, not the response Dickinson and his comrades were hoping for.

Page | 7

Throughout the spring of 1776, Congress took action that brought them ever closer to a permanent break with Britain, even as members continued to hold out hope that declaring independence would not be necessary. In February and March, Congress halted all exports to Britain and dispatched Connecticut delegate Silas Deane to appraise the “disposition” of France as a potential ally; Benjamin Franklin was sent to Montreal to convince the Canadians to join the American cause. On March 23, a week after voting to disarm all Tories in the colonies, Congress permitted the outfitting of privateers to prey on British ships. In April, shortly after the Continental Army had forced the British to vacate Boston by placing cannon on the overlooking Dorchester Heights, Congress opened American ports to trade with any nation but Britain.

By May, the clamor of war was brought home for the congressmen meeting in Philadelphia, when the sounds of cannon fire from two British ships trying to run American blockades on the Delaware River echoed through the city. Soon after, Congress passed a resolution recommending that each colony establish its own government and no longer be reliant on that of Great Britain. Along with the resolution was passed a preamble, written primarily by John Adams, which declared that since “the whole force of [Great Britain], aided by foreign mercenaries, is to be exerted for the destruction of the good people of these colonies . . . it is necessary that the exercise of every kind of authority under the said crown should be totally suppressed” in America.²² This act, Delaware’s Caesar Rodney wrote, even “the cool considerate men think . . . amounts to a declaration of independence.”²³

²¹ King George III, A Proclamation, by The King, for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition, August 23, 1775. See below.

²² Resolves and Recommendations of Congress, passed May 10, 1776, available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=2419>.

²³ David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 109.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Finally, on June 7, just a few weeks after the Virginia convention in Williamsburg had voted to instruct their delegates in Congress to vote for independence, Richard Henry Lee rose to speak and put forward a motion for independence:

Resolved, 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.

Page | 8

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances.

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.²⁴

John Adams seconded the motion, and debate began the following day. John Dickinson (Pennsylvania), James Wilson (Pennsylvania), Robert Livingston (New York), and Edward Rutledge (South Carolina) spoke against the motion, concerned that their constituents were still not ready for the declaration. On June 10, the voting on the motion was delayed for 20 days to allow delegates to send for instructions from their colonies. In the meantime, a committee was appointed to draft a declaration of independence.

Declaring Independence

Serving on the Committee of Five to draft the declaration were John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson was chosen to pen the first draft. (John Adams would later recall that he had suggested this arrangement, providing the following reasons to Jefferson: “Reason first: you are a Virginian and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second: I am obnoxious, suspected and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason third: You can write ten times better than I can.” Jefferson recalled no such exchange.²⁵)

Jefferson was, as it turned out, the right man for the job. Born into the Virginia aristocracy, he owned over 10,000 acres of land and had, at the age of 25, already begun

²⁴ Read Lee’s Resolutions at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/lee.asp.

²⁵ John Adams, Letter to Timothy Pickering, August 6, 1822, available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=2081>.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

his lifelong project of perfecting his home Monticello (“little mountain”), which he designed in the style of the 16th-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio. Tall, lanky, and extremely well-educated (a polymath learned in the classics and law, as well as in mathematics, sciences, horticulture, architecture, and half a dozen languages), Jefferson was known for his quiet and gracious demeanor, as well as his skills as both a fine horseman and violinist. He also, John Adams recorded, carried “the reputation of a masterly pen” for his *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, a tract he had written in 1774.²⁶

Page | 9

Working alone in his room, Jefferson drew on his previous work, as well as the long line of American writing by leaders such as George Mason, whose declaration of rights for Virginia had recently been published in Philadelphia, and James Wilson, who had declared in 1774 that “all men are, by nature, equal and free.”²⁷ These works, of course, drew on even older ones by British natural rights thinkers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, Francis Hutcheson and David Hume, and Henry St. John Bolingbroke, among many others. Jefferson would later write that his draft was “neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment . . . [but] was intended to be an expression of the American mind.”²⁸

The Committee of Five approved of Jefferson’s framework, made some alterations to the language (replacing, for instance, the “sacred and undeniable” truths with “self-evident” ones), and then presented the declaration to Congress on June 28. For the next two days, Congress debated the declaration, then tabled the draft and returned to debate Lee’s original motion for independence on July 1.

John Dickinson made one last plea against declaring independence, encouraging Congress to at least finalize the Articles of Confederation—which he and 12 others on the committee had been preparing—and secure foreign allies before breaking all ties with Britain. John Adams responded with what historian David McCullough would deem “the most powerful and important speech heard in the Congress since it first convened,”

²⁶ John Adams, *Autobiography*, available at www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=A1_24.

Read Jefferson’s *Summary Rights* at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffsumm.asp.

²⁷ James Wilson, “Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament,” 1774, in *Collected Works of James Wilson*, eds. Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), available at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/2072/156335>. Read Mason’s Virginia Declaration of Rights at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=26>.

²⁸ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825, available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=3>.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

urging Congress to recognize that the country was, as he had recently written to a friend, “in the very midst of revolution, the most complete, unexpected, and remarkable of any in the history of the world.”²⁹ The war for independence, he related, was already at hand. In all, debate lasted nine hours, and then a vote was taken in which Pennsylvania and South Carolina voted “no,” New York, lacking instructions from home, abstained, and Delaware was divided. At the request of South Carolina’s Edward Rutledge, the final vote was delayed until the following day. That night, word was received that a hundred new British ships had just arrived off the coast of New York.

Page | 10

On the morning of July 2, the atmosphere in some of the delegations had changed. John Dickinson and Robert Morris were voluntarily absent, allowing Pennsylvania to change its vote in favor of independence. Caesar Rodney had ridden 80 miles through the night to attend the vote, providing the crucial tie-breaking vote in favor of independence in his Delaware contingent. And South Carolina, recognizing the need for a unanimous vote, changed sides to also vote “yes.” The lone holdout was New York, which continued to abstain. Lee’s motion passed 12-0-1. America had declared independence.

For the rest of the afternoon and the following morning, the congressmen turned their attention to Jefferson’s proposed declaration. In all, they made more than 80 changes to the draft—most of them minor changes of word choice, but some, like the excision of Jefferson’s paragraph on the slave trade, more substantial. Despite Adams’ defense of the original language (the drafter would later write that “[Adams] supported the declaration with zeal & ability, fighting fearlessly for every word of it”³⁰), about a quarter of the declaration was expunged, including Jefferson’s concluding indictment against the British people themselves, who had betrayed the “common blood” cause of the colonists and by so doing “given the last stab to agonizing affection.”³¹

On July 4, debate on the declaration was closed shortly before noon and the vote was taken. As with the vote two days previous, 12 colonies voted in favor of the motion, and one—New York—abstained. John Hancock, the president of the congress, and Charles Thomson, the secretary, affixed their signatures to the document, and then it was sent off for printing. It wouldn’t be until August that most of the other congressmen would sign

²⁹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 127.

³⁰ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, August 30, 1823, available at <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-print-02-02-02-0027>.

³¹ Draft of the Declaration of Independence, available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=4>.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

the document by which they mutually pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Writing in his biography of John Adams, David McCullough captures the spirit of the day:

Whether Benjamin Franklin quipped “We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall hang separately” is impossible to know, just as there is no way to confirm the much-repeated story that the diminutive John Hancock wrote his name large so that the King might read it without his spectacles. But the stories endured because they were in character, like the remark attributed to Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island. Hopkins, who suffered from palsy, is said to have observed, on completing his spidery signature, “My hand trembles, but my heart does not.”³²

Page | 11

Securing Independence

As the signers of the Declaration knew, declaring independence from Great Britain was a far cry from actually securing it. To do that, the American states would have to win a war against one of the most powerful militaries in the world—and then create a system of self-governance that would safeguard them against homegrown versions of the very tyranny they were wishing to escape.

By the fall of 1776, more than 32,000 British and Hessian soldiers were ashore on Staten Island, and they were supported by a fleet, under the command of Admiral Richard Howe, that rivaled any in the world. Certainly this expedition—the largest and most expensive overseas deployment in British history—more than matched the Continental military, consisting of (at most) 20,000 poorly trained and underequipped troops and not a single ship of war. Unsurprisingly, Washington and his men lost city after city in New York and in New Jersey to the advancing British. By the time the Continentals set up camp that winter, Washington’s force had dwindled to about 7,600 men—and many of those planned on leaving at the end of the year when their enlistments were up. These truly were, as Thomas Paine wrote that year, “the times that try men’s souls.”³³ It was only due to Washington’s (successful) gamble of crossing the Delaware River and surprising the Hessian army on Christmas night that his army, rejuvenated by their victory, lived to fight another day.

³² McCullough, *John Adams*, 138.

³³ Thomas Paine, *The Crisis* No. 1, December 23, 1776. See below.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

The situation in Congress was no less dire. Congressmen, worn out by the stress and long hours required of running a war and creating a new government, regularly got sick and had to leave Philadelphia. In the summer of 1776, for instance, John Adams wrote that his mind had turned “weak as water” and that he had “already tempted [his constitution] beyond prudence and safety.”³⁴

Page | 12

Still, all was not lost. In October 1777, Continental Generals Horatio Gates and Benedict Arnold won an important victory at the Battle of Saratoga. British General John Burgoyne surrendered his army, giving the French hope enough in the American cause that they entered the war and openly allied with the Americans. The next month, the Continental Congress—now meeting in York, Pennsylvania, having been forced to flee Philadelphia—passed the Articles of Confederation and sent them to the states for ratification. Virginia ratified the Articles in December of that year, while Maryland would wait until the spring of 1781 to do so.

With France now actively involved in the war, the British presence in the Americas was split since they also had to defend their colonies in the Indies and elsewhere. In 1781, accompanied by the French General the Comte de Rochambeau and a young Marquis de Lafayette, the Continental Army once more pursued the British in New York, setting out on what would become known as the Yorktown campaign. Aided also by the Comte de Grasse and his fleet of French warships near the Chesapeake Bay, Washington set siege to the British encampment at Yorktown. On October 17, the British, under the command of Lord Cornwallis, surrendered. Though no one knew it at the time, the battle marked the end of open hostilities.

Two years later, in September 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, officially bringing the war to an end. The American colonies were at last the free and independent states they had declared themselves to be that fateful July day in 1776.

³⁴ McCullough, *John Adams*, 144.