

Dates to Remember

April 19, 1775

The Revolutionary War begins with shots fired at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts.

June 7, 1776

Richard Henry Lee introduces a motion in a meeting of the Continental Congress that the United States is and should be declared free from ties to Great Britain. Delegates disagree about the wisdom of this idea, which comes to be called the “Lee Resolution.” Eventually, the Congress appoints a Committee of Five to draft a Declaration of Independence for consideration.

June 11, 1776

John Adams convenes the Committee of Five to draft a Declaration of Independence. The five members of the committee are John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman. The committee chooses Jefferson to write the first draft.

Two days in mid-June, 1776

Jefferson writes the first draft of the Declaration. He said later that he never meant to say things that “had never been said before.” Instead, he tries to capture “the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent.”

July 2, 1776

The Continental Congress votes to declare independence from Great Britain, formally adopting the Lee Resolution. The next day John Adams writes in a letter to his wife that, “The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. . . . 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.”

July 3, 1776

The Continental Congress begins debating and editing the draft Declaration, eventually making 86 edits and cutting the length by about a fourth.

July 4, 1776

The Continental Congress approves the final draft of the Declaration, formalizing what had already been decided on July 2. Congress hires printer John Dunlap to print copies of the Declaration to be distributed throughout the colonies.

July 5, 1776

Dunlap delivers his 200 copies of the Declaration (which are now called “Dunlap Broad­sides”). One copy is officially entered into the Congressional Journal and the other copies are distributed throughout the colonies.

July 6, 1776

The Pennsylvania Evening Post becomes the first newspaper to reprint the whole Declaration, but news of the July 2 decision to declare independence has already been widely reported and various celebrations and discussions are already taking place throughout the colonies.

July 8, 1776

The Declaration is read publicly to the people of Philadelphia. Around this time, Congress gets around to sending a copy of the Declaration to its emissary in Europe to be distributed to the various European governments. However, the original letter is lost and the Declaration isn’t formally delivered to Great Britain and the rest of Europe until November, when news of the Declaration had already reached Europe.

The Declaration of Independence: Dates to Remember *(Continued)*

July 9, 1776

New York finally approves the Declaration. It is the last of the 13 colonies to do so.

July 19, 1776

The Continental Congress decides to have an “engrossed” copy of the Declaration made, meaning a clean, readable, handwritten copy on parchment. Timothy Matlack, who was the assistant to the Secretary of Congress, probably makes the copy. (This is the copy now housed at the National Archives.)

August 2, 1776

Those delegates who had voted in favor of independence and who are in attendance that day sign the engrossed copy of the Declaration. Fifty delegates sign on this day. Six more will sign later.



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