WORDS on PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

1776
A Musical Play

Music and Lyrics by Sherman Edwards
Book by Peter Stone
Based on a concept by Sherman Edwards
Directed by Frank Galati

The Geary Theater
September 11–October 6, 2013

WORDS ON PLAYS VOL. XX, NO. 1

Dan Rubin
Editor

Elizabeth Brodersen
Director of Education

Michael Paller
Resident Dramaturg

Cait Robinson, Shannon Stockwell
Publications Fellows

Made possible by
Bingham McCutchen, Deloitte, The Kimball Foundation,
The Michelson Family Foundation, The Moca Foundation,
National Corporate Theatre Fund, The San Francisco Foundation,
The Sato Foundation, and Union Bank Foundation

© 2013 AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER, A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
# Table of Contents

1. Overview of 1776

6. 1776 at A.C.T.
   A Director’s Introduction
   *by Frank Galati*

11. On Wigs and Waistcoats
    An Interview with 1776 Costume Designer
    Mara Blumenfeld
    *by Dan Rubin*

18. Creating Cultural Memory
    Edwards, Stone, and 1776
    *by Cait Robinson*

24. Historical Note by the Authors
    *by Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards*

33. A Country Towards Revolution
    Historical Context for 1776
    *by Cait Robinson*

47. “Cultivating the Sensations of Freedom”
    The Arts and the Revolution
    *by Michael Paller*

51. 1776 Character Biographies
    *by Dan Rubin*

66. A 1776 Glossary

72. Questions to Consider / For Further Information . . .

---

**COVER** Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, by John Trumbull (1819) (Library of Congress)

**OPPOSITE** Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776, by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris (1863–1930) (Library of Congress)
Bernie Yvon (left), who played John Hancock, and Jeff Parker, who played John Dickinson, in the 2012 Asolo Repertory Theatre production of 1776 (courtesy Asolo Repertory Theatre)
Overview of 1776


Characters and Cast of 1776 (in order of speaking)

John Adams (Massachusetts) ................. John Hickok
Abigail Adams .................................. Abby Mueller
Benjamin Franklin (Pennsylvania) .......... Andrew Boyer
Richard Henry Lee (Virginia) .............. Ryan Drummond
Andrew McNair ................................. Steve Hendrickson
Dr. Lyman Hall (Georgia) ..................... Richard Farrell
Stephen Hopkins (Rhode Island) .......... Dan Hiatt
Edward Rutledge (South Carolina) ....... Jarrod Zimmerman
Col. Thomas McKean (Delaware) .......... Alex Shafer
Caesar Rodney (Delaware) .................. Jerry Lloyd
John Dickinson (Pennsylvania) ........... Jeff Parker
James Wilson (Pennsylvania) ............... Bernard Balbot
John Hancock .................................. Ian Simpson
Charles Thomson .............................. Noel Anthony
Thomas Jefferson (Virginia) ............... Brandon Dahlquist
Dr. Josiah Bartlett (New Hampshire) .... David Ledingham
George Read (Delaware) ..................... Mark Farrell
Roger Sherman (Connecticut) ............... Keith Pinto
Lewis Morris (New York) .................... Morgan Mackay
Samuel Chase (Maryland) .................... Colin Thomson
Joseph Hewes (North Carolina) .......... Benjamin Pither
Rev. John Witherspoon (New Jersey) ... Ian Leonard
Robert Livingston (New York) ............. Dillon Heape
Martha Jefferson .............................. Andrea Prestinario
The Courier ..................................... Zach Kenney
Leather Apron .................................. Justin Travis Buchs
Setting of 1776

The action takes place between May 8 and July 4, 1776, in Philadelphia, during the Second Continental Congress, in the anteroom and main chamber of the Pennsylvania State House—as well as certain reaches of John Adams’s mind.

Synopsis

Act I

May 8, 1776, is a sweltering day in Philadelphia. The Second Continental Congress, the governing body of the thirteen colonies (unsanctioned by the British Crown), is in session, and Massachusetts delegate John Adams is once again enumerating his many grievances against King George III as he tries to convince his deadlocked colleagues to declare America’s independence. The other delegates (who cannot even agree on whether or not to open a window) have heard his rant before, and they have had enough. In the song “Sit Down, John,” they tell him in no uncertain terms to shut up.

After voicing his frustration with the inaction of his colleagues in the song “Piddle, Twiddle,” Adams finds comfort in his correspondence with his politically savvy wife, Abigail, who remains home in Boston tending to their children and estate. Somewhat soothed by their duet “Till Then,” he seeks the advice of the cunning Pennsylvania delegate Benjamin Franklin, who suggests that, because the members of Congress do not like Adams personally, they might find the idea of independence more palatable were it presented by someone less abrasive.

Although reluctant to take a backseat, Adams agrees—which is fortunate because Franklin has already begun the process of manipulating Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee into playing the role. When Lee arrives on the scene, he explains to the two men that his illustrious family history makes him perfect for the job, celebrating his lineage in the song “The Lees of Old Virginia.” Lee rushes home to convince his colony’s government to formally authorize the Virginia delegation to support independence.

When Congress reconvenes on June 7, Dr. Lyman Hall, a new delegate from Georgia, arrives. He is immediately questioned by pro-separation delegate Stephen Hopkins (from Rhode Island) and pro-reconciliation delegate Edward Rutledge (from South Carolina) about his stance on independence. He is again pressed for his opinions with the arrival of the divided Delaware delegation—Caesar Rodney, Col. Thomas McKean, and George Read.

Awaiting Lee’s return, Adam has kept quiet on the issue of independence for the last month. Pennsylvania delegate John Dickinson, the strongest opponent of independence, comments on this, but Adams manages to keep his composure as Dickinson needles him. President John Hancock calls Congress into session. The quiet Virginian Thomas Jefferson reports the official temperature (it is still hot!), and Secretary Charles Thomson reads a bleak letter from Commander George Washington about the impending battle
against the British for New York. Then, making a grand entrance, Lee returns and makes his resolution that the colonies should be independent states.

Dickinson moves that consideration of the resolution be postponed, but he is voted down (barely): after months of obstructionism, an official debate on the matter of American independence from Britain can finally take place. An intense battle erupts between Dickinson and Adams and their respective factions, until the separatist Rodney collapses gravely ill. Dr. Hall examines him and recommends that Rodney excuse himself. Dickinson calls for a recount, knowing that Rodney’s absence means that Delaware won’t vote for independence. Before the vote can take place, however, the extremely late delegate from New Jersey, Rev. John Witherspoon, arrives: New Jersey will vote for independence, he declares.

In yet another attempt to thwart progress, Dickinson proposes that any decision on independence must be unanimous; to Adams’s horror, the resolution passes. Knowing that unanimity is impossible with this group (they still can’t decide whether to open a window!), he quickly moves to postpone the vote, saying that a written declaration of independence is first necessary to articulate their reasons for wanting separation.

With another split vote, Congress barely approves the move and selects a Declaration Committee to write the document. The committee consists of Adams, Franklin, Connecticut delegate Roger Sherman, New York delegate Robert Livingston, and a very reluctant Jefferson, who is eager to return home to his young, lonesome wife, Martha. Despite Jefferson’s reluctance, the other men appoint him to write the declaration (decided in the song “But, Mr. Adams—”) because of his eloquence in his 1775 pamphlet, *The Necessity of Taking Up Arms*.
Jefferson begrudgingly relents and begins to write, but over the following week he produces nothing usable. He misses his bride to the point of distraction. To resolve this dilemma, Adams sends for Martha, and when she arrives the happy couple retires to the bedroom posthaste. Suddenly lonesome for his own wife, Adams begins a correspondence with Abigail; the two sing the heartfelt duet “Yours, Yours, Yours.” The next day, Martha explains that, despite Jefferson’s quiet demeanor, he is a very passionate violin player. She sings “He Plays the Violin” to a rapt Adams and Franklin. The first act ends when Jefferson retrieves his wife and they return to their bedroom.

Act II

It is now June 22. As Jefferson continues composing the declaration, Adams and Franklin work on persuading the other delegates, rallying support for their cause. Dreary reports from Commander Washington worry some of their colleagues, so they take the War Committee to New Brunswick to review the troops and prove that things are not as bad as Washington makes them out to be.

With the liberal contingent away, Dickinson leads his fellow conservatives in the self-congratulatory song “Cool, Cool Considerate Men.” After they leave the hall, congressional custodian Andrew McNair, his assistant Leather Apron, and the Courier discuss the realities of how British oppression is affecting ordinary people. They sing the haunting “Momma, Look Sharp,” about a mother looking for her dead son.

A week later on June 28, Adams and Franklin return with good news from New Brunswick as Secretary Thomson reads the new Declaration of Independence to Congress. Just as they finish singing “The Egg,” in which Adams and Franklin tell Jefferson they think his masterpiece will give birth to a new nation, the delegates erupt with a series of changes they would like made before the Declaration is signed. Over days of compromise, Jefferson agrees to all of the recommended edits, but draws the line when Dickinson asks him to refrain from calling George III a tyrant.

On July 1, the delegates address the Declaration’s greatest obstacle: the document calls for an end of the institution of slavery. Rutledge passionately opposes the abolition of slavery, which is “a cherished way of life” in South Carolina. When Hopkins calls slavery “a stinking business,” Rutledge sings about the hypocrisy of the North, which also benefits from slavery, in “Molasses to Rum.” With the South threatening to vote against independence, putting the colonies’ future in the balance, Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin agree to delete the passage to win the necessary support of the Carolinas.

The delegates vote, with each colony registering a “yea” for independence. The final vote is cast by Pennsylania representative James Wilson, representing the tie breaker between Franklin and Dickinson. While personally against separating from Britain, he votes “yea” because he does not want to be remembered as “the man who prevented American independence.” The play ends as one by one all the delegates except Dickinson gather to sign the Declaration of Independence. In the background, as the curtain falls, the Liberty Bell rings loudly.
1776 MUSICAL NUMBERS

Act I. Scene 1.
“Overture” ................................................. Orchestra
“Sit Down, John” ....................................... Adams and the Congress
“Piddle, Twiddle” ....................................... Adams
“Till Then” ............................................... Adams and Abigail

Scene 2
“The Lees of Old Virginia” ...................... Lee, Franklin, and Adams

Scene 3
“But, Mr. Adams—” ............................ Adams, Franklin, Jefferson,
Sherman, and Livingston

Scene 4
“Yours, Yours, Yours” .......................... Adams and Abigail
“He Plays the Violin” ............................... Martha, Franklin, and Adams

Act II. Scene 5.
“Cool, Cool Considerate Men” .............. Dickinson and the Conservatives
“Momma, Look Sharp” ............................ Courier, McNair, and Leather Apron

Scene 6
“The Egg” .............................................. Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson

Scene 7
“Molasses to Rum” ............................... Rutledge
“Compliments” ....................................... Abigail
“Is Anybody There?” .............................. Adams and Thomson
r776 at A.C.T.
A Director's Introduction
By Frank Galati

Presented to the cast of 1776 and the A.C.T. staff on the first day of rehearsal.

There are twenty-six people in the cast of 1776. Nine members of the company here at A.C.T. appeared in the show at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota and seventeen members of the company here are new to this production. I know I speak for everyone involved with the Asolo production when I say how genuinely thrilled we are to be in your company, to have some old friends and some new friends here to create this Second Continental Congress. This fabulous opportunity to work together has been made possible by two great theaters and two visionary artistic directors: Michael Edwards and Carey Perloff.

Yes, this show is as timely now as it has ever been; and, yes, it is an American musical theater classic that has not been produced here in some years; and, yes, it may strike a deep chord with San Francisco audiences, but it is still a courageous choice and a deeply thoughtful and very, very expensive one. The story of the creation of the Declaration of Independence may be risky to tell, because it’s a story we think we know. But the surprise of 1776 the musical is its scholarship, its wit and efficiency, its dramaturgical confidence and velocity. Great tunes, high drama, and also high comedy are the modality of this musical, and we have a cast brilliantly equipped to play it with passion, intelligence, and consummate artistry.

“In Congress July 4, 1776, the unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America . . . .” So begins our primal text. We declare ourselves free and independent Americans and for the first time we are unanimous. We speak with one voice. For the first time, America speaks in the first-person plural. “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

We provide that consent—or deny it—by our vote. It is by “yea” and by “nay” that democracy works, and no matter how bitterly divided our house may be over issues or candidates, we believe in democracy and hold firm the ideals of our Founding Fathers and Mothers.
It is also by “yea” and by “nay” that the musical play 1776 is made. The chamber of the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, where the action takes place, is dominated by a large tally board where the delegates’ “yeas” and “nays” are recorded. The drama intensifies with each vote cast. Thirteen colonies: six vote “yea” for independence. Six vote “nay.” One colony abstains—and the story is so artful in this musical telling that, as well as we feel we know the outcome, we feel at the eleventh hour that it simply can’t happen. And then it does, as we knew it would, and the congressional chamber becomes the delivery room for the birth of a new nation.

There have been a couple of excellent books on the making of the Declaration of Independence published since performances began at the Asolo last fall. One was reviewed June 30 in the New York Times by historian Andrew Cayton. His review begins: “If you know the musical 1776, you know the plot of Joseph J. Ellis’s breezy new book. It’s a stirring and conventional story. A handful of famous men struggle to create a republic against insurmountable odds.” The title of the book is Revolutionary Summer: The Birth of American Independence. The other volume, also in bookstores in July of this year, is Our Lives, Our Fortunes, and Our Sacred Honor: The Forging of American Independence, 1774–1776, by Richard R. Beeman.

Many of us have found the writings of David McCullough on the period of the Revolutionary War enormously illuminating—both his biography of John Adams and his volume titled 1776 are brilliant works of American history. Both Ellis and Beeman...

Of course, none of these books were available when the musical *1776* was created, making the compression and economy of storytelling in this Broadway show all the more remarkable. The authors of the musical depended mostly on primary source material: letters, diaries, and journals. Not many musicals have been fashioned from the raw materials of history. This one is rare indeed.

As the title of Maier’s book suggests, the Declaration of Independence has become, over the years, our nation’s sacred text. It is, along with our Constitution and Bill of Rights, American scripture. The National Archives refers to the documents as “The Charters of Freedom.” Professor Maier describes the shrine in which they are now kept: an airtight thermopane container “with an electronic device to detect helium loss. . . . The Declaration is the shrine’s centerpiece, held above the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in what looks like a tabernacle, or perhaps a monstrance, the device used to display the host on special days of adoration. The Constitution and Bill of Rights are spread out beneath, on the altar’s surface.”

If that display seems over the top, it is certainly matched by the way contemporary historians talk about what Beeman calls “America’s most cherished document.” He goes on to say: “It succeeds masterfully in laying out the reasons for America’s audacious decision to break all ties of constitutional and emotional connection with the king and the empire over which he ruled. But the Declaration of Independence does more than that—in its eloquent preamble it lays out an idealistic . . . vision of America’s future, as a country committed to the principle of equality and to the protection of mankind’s ‘unalienable’ rights.” In analyzing the importance of the summer of our nation’s birth, Professor Beeman remains firmly hyperbolic:

The first four days of July 1776 would prove not only to be among the most significant in all of American history, but in the history of the Western world. The Americans’ decision for independence, and their subsequent defense of that action in the Declaration of Independence, would set in motion a string of ideas—that of political self-determination, of the people as the ultimate source of government power, and, perhaps most important, of the fundamental equality of all mankind—that continues to play out even today.

Professor Beeman observes that “generations of Americans [would come] to see the writing of the Declaration of Independence as the single most important literary task ever undertaken in all of America’s history.”

But the excitement about the Declaration of Independence itself was fueled by the revolutionary spirit that prevailed before it was written. There is little doubt that every voting delegate in the Second Continental Congress had by July of ’76 read the recently published pamphlet of Tom Paine titled *Common Sense*. In one of his most stirring passages, Paine writes, “We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now.
The birthday of a new world is at hand.” What is inscribed on the tablets held by the Statue of Liberty? “July 4, 1776.”

John Adams himself predicted the celebrations that would mark that anniversary (though he meant July 2nd not the 4th): “[It] will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. I am apt to believe,” Adams wrote, “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 forever more.”

Eighty-seven years later, in 1863, Abraham Lincoln began his most famous speech with the narrative of our country’s birth: “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Lincoln’s address at Gettysburg was just ten sentences, but they are carved in our hearts. One hundred years after Lincoln’s address, Martin Luther King, Jr., began his most important speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with these echoing words: “Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation.”

That was the opening of the “I Have a Dream” speech, August 1963, 50 years ago. Now in 2013, as Americans continue to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, a black American is in his second term as president of the United States, and we have the opportunity to share in telling the story of the birth of our nation, a delivery that might not have happened. Thomas Jefferson’s first draft of the Declaration of Independence included a resounding denunciation of “this assemblage of horrors” that is the institution of slavery. The crisis of the action in the musical 1776 is located in the culminating argument about the slavery clause between John Adams and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina. The bitterly ironic song “Molasses to Rum” is the eye of the storm; of its calm Rutledge sings, “O what a beautiful waltz.” Here is the fulcrum point. This is where Adams crosses the Rubicon and reaches a point of no return. Here our Founding Fathers postpone the debate about slavery and doom the nation to a catastrophic Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln’s own agenda was based on Jefferson’s self-evident truths. Lincoln drew from Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin, as modern presidents have drawn from Lincoln. One presidential scholar writes:

[Lincoln] like no man before or since understood the deliberative function of our democracy and the limits of such deliberation. We remember him for the firmness and depth of his convictions—his unyielding opposition to slavery and his determination that a house divided could not stand. . . . Lincoln advanced his principles through the framework of our democracy, through speeches and debate, through the reasoned arguments that might appeal to the better angels of our nature. It was his humility that allowed him . . . to resist the temptation to
demonize the fathers and sons who did battle on the other side, or to diminish the horror of war, no matter how just it might be. The blood of slaves reminds us that our pragmatism can sometimes be moral cowardice.

Those are the words of Barack Obama (2006), and they are the refutation of the argument of Edward Rutledge in 1776. But onstage, 1776 is not a history lesson; it is a musical play that, against all odds, became a Broadway smash hit and won the 1969 Tony Award for Best Musical, beating out both Hair and Promises, Promises.

The show's bookwriter, Peter Stone, was approached by composer Sherman Edwards in 1967 with “the idea of a musical about the Founding Fathers.” Stone later recalled: “It sounded like maybe the worst idea that had ever been proposed for a musical. For starters, it had a terrible title—on a par with Oklahoma! and Hamlet.” But what the show had going for it, to quote musical theater scholar Marc Kirkeby, were “memorable songs, a remarkable book—the show is funny, never pedantic, full of vivid roles—and big, big performances.”

Today, 44 years after opening on Broadway, 1776 remains a one-of-a-kind work of sophistication without irony, corn without camp, and history without apology. Today the show reintroduces A.C.T. audiences to America's Founding Fathers and Mothers in musical mode. We meet Ben Franklin, John and Abigail Adams, Thomas and Martha Jefferson, Edward Rutledge, John Dickinson—in all, 20 delegates to the Continental Congress—plus a common soldier who sings one of the most heartbreaking ballads in all musical theater. This gallery of living portraits—of conflicting points of view, values, and ideals—is our family tree. When the curtain goes up at The Geary this fall, audiences will meet the women and men who are the progenitors of the American character.

I saw 1776 the week it opened on Broadway back in 1969. When I was in college in the Midwest, some friends and I would travel to New York on spring break and see shows. It was the golden age of the Broadway musical, but it was also the period that marked the birth of the most important and influential theater company in the nation: American Conservatory Theater. On one of those spring trips, in an old hotel lobby in the Village, I saw William Ball’s historic and shattering production of Pirandello’s masterpiece, Six Characters in Search of an Author. It was my first encounter with theatrical genius, and I can honestly say it changed my life. And here we are in the William Ball Rehearsal Room.

To be working here in this great city, both the destination and the destiny of A.C.T., is one of the great thrills of my theatrical life. I am indebted to Michael Edwards at Asolo Rep in Sarasota for giving me the chance to work on 1776—but the miracle of being in this great city, and the thrill of bringing this wonderful musical to the people of San Francisco, for this I owe my very deepest thanks to the amazing and truly inspiring Carey Perloff—and to the artists and audiences here at A.C.T.
A.C.T.’s first production of the 2013–14 season benefits from Asolo Repertory Theatre’s commitment to excellence. In preparation for its 2012 production of 1776, Asolo Rep’s costume shop did something remarkable: it built costumes and wigs for an entire period piece—one with 26 actors. (The only exception is the uniform for the Courier, which was created by a man who specializes in making costumes for historical reenactments.) Typically theaters supplement newly built costumes with pieces they rent or pull from what they have in stock, but Asolo, following the renderings of designer Mara Blumenfeld, created everything for 1776, down to period-appropriate shirts. Now these garments are enjoying a second life on A.C.T.’s Geary stage.

Blumenfeld, a Chicago-based designer, is an ensemble member of the famous Lookingglass Theatre Company and has previously designed works directed by directors Frank Galati and Mary Zimmerman to the Bay Area. She gave us a glimpse into the process of preparing this battalion of eighteenth-century outfits.

In colonial America, portraiture was hugely popular, so there are a number of historical paintings for many of the figures in 1776. Did you refer to them as the basis for your designs, or did you look at styles of that era more generally?

Some of both. With the historical figures who are better known, like Jefferson and Franklin and Adams, there are a lot of images that are in the public consciousness. People have an image in their heads of what Ben Franklin looked like, what Jefferson looked like, and we wanted to honor that to some degree. For the less-well-known figures, there is portraiture of all of them, but they’re not necessarily as imprinted in our public consciousness, so we felt like we could take more liberties.

In terms of the casting that Frank did, not everyone was age appropriate—they weren’t the age that the historical figures would have been at the time of the drafting and signing of the Declaration. So, for these characters, it was about trying to strike a balance between honoring the historical figures and the period and also coming up with a look—not just in terms of costumes, but in terms of wigs and style that also made sense for the individual actor.
I actually grew up in Philadelphia, and I had not been back to Independence Hall since probably my first-grade field trip. So last summer [2012] when I was back home visiting my family, my mom and I went, because I thought it would be great for research. It was really cool to be in the congressional chamber and realize how tiny it is. You think, “No wonder they were all so hot all the time!” You think about all these men in these eighteenth-century suits in this tiny little room, and you think about how miserable it must have been.

A block away, what was once the Second Bank of the United States has been converted into a portrait gallery, so I went and took a ton of pictures, and that was great research, too. I also did general research on eighteenth-century fashion. I think the big challenge of the piece is, with the exception of a few characters like the custodian and Leather Apron and the Courier, who’s in uniform, you have men who are all basically wearing the same garments. It’s like today: a man’s suit is a man’s suit. You’ve got your shirt, your tie, your jacket, and your pants. In the 1700s, you’ve got your shirt, your waistcoat, your breeches, and your coat.

Where the individuality comes in is in the choice of fabric and the level of detail and ornamentation—how flashy they are versus how modest they are. That’s where the real fun comes in with each of these figures. There’s actually a very specific stage direction that says, “As we look around the room, we see a difference from the more somber, puritanical northern colonies, to the flashier southern colonies,” so Frank and I really tried to look at who these men were historically and where they’re from geographically. We also looked at what the script tells you. Who are the real peacocks? Who are the more modest figures?

Costume sketch for Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania (costume sketches by Mara Blumenfeld)
So you designed character by character, rather than “conservative” delegates versus “liberal” delegates?
Obviously there are groupings, like the guys who perform “Cool, Cool Considerate Men” together. I was looking at them individually but then also at the big numbers in the show, wanting a particular group of men—like Dickinson and all of his conservatives—to make a pleasing visual composition when they sing that big number.

Even though temporally 1776 takes place over a period of weeks, because of the nature of the piece, the actors all just wear one costume. It’s not like they’re changing clothes every time the day changes. They all have one iconic look that they wear, and then it’s a question of when they have their coat on, when their coat is off, and how they’re wearing their clothes over the course of the piece. There are so many guys on the stage that it’s helpful to have visual markers to keep track of everybody. It’s very similar to doing a Shakespeare play, because you’ve got twenty-four guys and two girls. The ladies are easy to identify, because there are only two of them and they’re very different from each other, but when you have all of these guys in a room together, you have this whole composition to think about.

Was it more fun replicating the famous images of Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson or going after the figures that no one really knows about, like Roger Sherman?
Both. There’s something really fun about the iconic guys, because the challenge of them is achieving that look. With the less-well-known guys, you do have more liberty. What we know about Roger Sherman is that he was very modest. He was laughed at when he first came to Congress because his clothes were so simple and humble. There are fun, interesting anecdotal details about

Costume sketch for John Dickinson of Pennsylvania
all of them. John Hancock was a huge clothes horse—a big peacock—and so Frank and I made the choice to put him in red: this rich, burgundy, cranberry red. Also, from a practical standpoint, he’s situated the most upstage, and he’s sitting behind the president’s desk, so we wanted him in something that would pop so that you didn’t lose him against all that beautiful dark wood of the set.

The set for *1776* is not at all a re-creation of Independence Hall. It pays homage to it, and architecturally there’s a lot of accuracy to it, but the color and the wood treatment are completely different from what they are in real life. Frank was interested in making it a very masculine space. The real Independence Hall has this weird pale, greenish-gray whitewash, which is lovely when you see it in person, but Frank wanted something that was richer and deeper and warmer. So the room in the set is not at all accurate to what that space actually is, but it captures an emotional feeling that is essential to what Frank was going for. We had to keep this beautiful, rich wood tone in mind when we were thinking about the colors of the clothes and what was going to look aesthetically pleasing against that backdrop.

**After creating the same silhouette for so many men, were the women’s costumes a welcome change of pace?**

It’s always nice to get to do big, pretty, girly-girl dresses. But these two women are really interesting, too, because you have two very different women in terms of who they were and what their backgrounds were. You have Abigail, who is a housewife, working on a farm, keeping up the family, all on her own, while John Adams is in Philadelphia, so we wanted something that was much earthier for her. Her costume is still really beautiful, but in a very different way from

Costume sketch for Edward Rutledge of South Carolina
Martha’s. Martha is this southern rose, and she’s in these beautiful pinks and creams and silks—she’s the young blushing bride. So if you’re only going to have two women, it is really fun to have two women who are very different, each beautiful in her own way.

We are using a number of costumes that were built for the Asolo production, but I understand that we are building all new wigs. What’s the difference between designing a costume and designing a wig?

Particularly in this piece, the two are closely related, because wigs were such a huge part of that period. Pretty much everybody in the show is wigged. In Florida there were only two guys that we didn’t wig, and that’s because they already came with long hair that was great for the period. Even with that, we had to decide, “Are they wigged to make it look like it’s their own hair, long and pulled back in a ponytail? Or are they wearing obvious, hard-fronted, powdered wigs—more like what we think of as a judge-style wig?”

Some of that decision had to do with the age of the character or the actor. Sometimes it had to do with their individual look. Some of it had to do with what we know historically about the character. That’s why the wigs tie into the costumes. Some of those southern gentlemen, who are clearly the big fancy peacocks, have a powdered, hard-fronted wig. For some of the younger guys, their wigs look like their own hair with a natural hairline, but tied back in a ponytail. All of those choices, again, depended on what we know about the character—and on which characters we wanted to feel more artificial and which ones we wanted to feel more accessible.
There’s a lot of talk in the play about how hot it is. What did eighteenth-century etiquette allow men to do in terms of rolling up their shirt sleeves, unbuttoning, etc.?

First of all, they’re not among women most of the time. When they are among women, they’re all in their coats. Basically, they just suffered. It was what you did. It’s not comfortable.

But in the scenes where it’s just the guys, and they’re alone in the chamber, some of the men do take their coats off. That’s also a character choice. Who allows himself to get comfortable? Who allows propriety to win out over comfort? The heat is conveyed in what the actors are doing to play it and sell it—and frankly it’s not that much work because it is hot onstage. I tried to be mindful and not make life completely miserable for the actors, but those coats are heavy! There was no way around it. You put on a high collar and a heavy coat and a wig, you sweat. There’s not a whole lot of acting involved.

You built 26 costumes for this show! Do you have a favorite?

It’s a hard question to answer, because they’re all your creations. From a pure eye-candy standpoint, I love Martha’s dress. But the men—it’s hard to pick one out.

What I love about the men’s costumes, more than any individual one, is how they act as a whole group. As the play progresses and we see different combinations of people, I love watching how the stage picture changes depending on who’s onstage and
where they are onstage. I love the trio of the three main guys, Franklin and Adams and Jefferson. I love the grouping of the conservatives.

So it’s more about how the whole ensemble operates as a unit. It’s like conducting a little orchestra, and each of those men is a different voice, a different instrument. My hope is that the audience appreciates each of them as individuals who are part of a larger whole. It’s such a great piece, because every person gets their own individual moment to shine.

**1776 Scenic Designer Russell Metheny**

**On the Balance between Historical Accuracy and Theatrical Fancy**

For Frank Galati the set was all about the musculaity of the show and the environment. He wanted it to be masculine so that when Abigail Adams and Martha Jefferson entered this world there would be a strong contrasting energy. He also wanted it to be about *that* summer and the oppressive heat.

I researched Philadelphia’s Independence Hall, as well as the House and Senate halls in the Capitol today. Independence Hall is gray/white with tall windows and a pine floor. The House and Senate are dark woods and marbles, tiered seating, and no windows to speak of. The timeless nature of the musical needed to be in a space that feels both then and now.

I reinterpreted the windows to louvered [slatted] walls for the light to play through and intensify the interior summer light. Light pouring through the louvers gives a heightened theatrical sense of heat. I went with the dark wood to allow for the weight of the history of the event and to nod to the Congress of today—and to allow the lighting design to have a freedom of visual expression atmospherically. (The model itself remained a white model for some reason. I did dimensional stained paint elevations for this design.)

Frank also wanted the entire event to take place in the hall, eliminating the physical scenes outside of it. This brought the sky vista into the design, allowing for the John and Abigail Adams correspondence scenes to have a more immediate, elevated sensation—and for emotional atmosphere when Frank desired a particular song to soar and take the audience into a personal place, a world outside the hall, a young country in turbulence, and a moment when history was being made by the hour, day, and month.

It was very important to balance historical accuracy and the audiences’ personal imagination. So the tables are historically correct, except for their size and the number of them. Same with the furniture, with some variety for character. The moldings are close to the original moldings in the room, but the show deck is tiered for theatrical sightline clarity, and the rest is invented.

For me, design is truly about performance in the end. Historical accuracy is in the bones of it; the rest is an invention through the music, text, the director’s vision, and the performances.
Sherman Edwards had two lifelong loves: music and history. Born in 1919 in New York City, he majored in history at New York University but spent his evenings moonlighting as a pianist for local bars and radio programs. He joined the Air Force after graduation and later found work as a history teacher in New York’s public schools. He continued to play piano, however, and eventually found success with some of the top swing bands of the day, performing alongside Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, and Benny Goodman.

Edwards’s success as a pianist led him to composing pop songs. He had several hits, including “Brokenhearted Melody” for Sarah Vaughan, “See You in September,” “Wonderful, Wonderful,” and “Dungaree Doll.” Yet Edwards never considered pop music an artistic calling. “I was a child of the Depression,” he explains, “and you had to go where the money was. . . . It was simply at the time I was doing it and knowing full well that someday I’d be doing something else.” While working on the score for an Elvis Presley film, Edwards decided that “someday” had arrived. He had grown increasingly curious about pursuing a vastly different kind of project, one inspired by his background in history: a musical about the Declaration of Independence.

With both pop music and teaching behind him, Edwards devoted himself to his new brainchild. “There are gamblers and gamblers,” he said of the decision. “I was gambling my family and my life and my money—and my morale. And morale is more important than money.” The betting was steep: he had dabbled in acting, but Edwards was fundamentally a songwriter. He had no idea how to create plot or develop character. Realizing his deficiency, he searched for a playwright. Much to his surprise and frustration, none of the writers he approached wanted any part of the project. The idea was absurd, they told him: the Declaration of Independence was simply not musical material.

Unwilling to give up, Edwards wrote the libretto himself. He spent the greater half of the 1950s on research, culling material from libraries all over the East Coast, and dedicated another two years to penning 1776. But presenting the project to producers brought on a fresh wave of disappointment. In addition to the old criticism of his concept, the Vietnam War spurred new objections: American patriotism was out, producers informed him. No one would lay down money to celebrate the birth of what was by then a deeply troubled nation.
Composer Sherman Edwards (photo by Don Hunstein)
The few producers actually willing to take a chance on Edwards’s concept all shared what he considered an unacceptable caveat: his libretto would have to be rewritten. Among those who expressed this opinion was Stuart Ostrow, the protégé of composer and lyricist Frank Loesser. Ostrow, who would go on to produce the premieres of *M. Butterfly*, *Pippin*, and *La bête*, had unconventional tastes for his day, and he saw in *1776* a rebelliousness of spirit that would suit the late 1960s perfectly. Despite Edwards’s reservations, Ostrow contacted writer Peter Stone.

Stone was born in 1930, the son of a screenwriter and a silent-film producer. He was a graduate of Bard College with a master’s degree from Yale School of Drama, and, like Ostrow, he had been mentored by Loesser. He won an Emmy for a 1962 episode of the courtroom drama *The Defenders* and secured his standing in Hollywood with the screenplay for the 1963 film *Charade*, starring Audrey Hepburn and Cary Grant. In 1965, he won an Academy Award for the film *Father Goose*. Stone’s success on Broadway was more modest: his 1961 *Kean*, starring Alfred Drake, was a flop, and 1965’s *Skyscraper* managed only a respectable run after getting panned during previews.

Nonetheless, he was keen to return to Broadway—but not with *1776*. Edwards had already approached Stone with the concept several years before, and the writer had flatly turned him down, apparently without even hearing the music. When the project resurfaced, this time championed by Ostrow, Stone considered simply ignoring the producer’s phone calls. Ostrow’s enthusiasm, however, was catching, and so were Edwards’s music and lyrics, which Stone appreciated for their irreverent humor. The three men agreed that Stone would rewrite the libretto.

Edwards had assembled an entire private library of research on the Declaration of Independence and its signers, and Stone used the composer’s thoroughness to full advantage. He was chagrined to discover that, despite having excelled in his high school and college history courses, he “didn’t know a great deal about [the Declaration of Independence]. . . . I also knew about five names that had been signed. I didn’t know who anybody else was. I didn’t know what was going on at the time.”

The Continental Congress kept limited records, so the writer cobbled together fragments of primary sources—personal letters, diary entries, newspaper columns, public records—with his own invention to create dialogue and characters. Modern-day historians’ accounts of our first congressmen frustrated him: “They had cardboard-ized all of these characters and they weren’t human,” he recalled in a 1997 interview. “They were mythic.” Stone and Edwards hoped to scale the Founding Fathers back to human proportions, idiosyncrasies and all. “These men had blood and guts, foibles and frustrations—they had everything you could imagine,” Edwards told an interviewer. “However, they were human. They were as lusty and bawdy, as serious, as frivolous as anyone else.”

Central though historical authenticity was to *1776*, it quickly proved limiting. “God writes lousy theater,” the two creators explain in their authors’ note in the play’s first printed edition. “In other words, reality is seldom artistic, orderly, or dramatically satisfying; life rarely provides a sound second act, and its climaxes usually have not been adequately prepared for.” They resolved to create a compromise: a play that was mostly
fact embellished with a few fictional elements—as the Wall Street Journal’s review of the original production called it, “a semi-documentary.” “I believe I captured the essence of who and what our Founding Fathers were,” Edwards told radio host Mike Whorf in the 1970s. “I put [the words] in their mouths, but they just might have said them.”

Even with its concessions to dramatic structure, Edwards and Stone’s final product was highly atypical Broadway fare. New York’s experimental theaters were flourishing, but Broadway remained something of an anachronism, doggedly churning out musicals stuck in the 1940s and ’50s in terms of form and content. “Imitation of Rodgers and Hammerstein had become universal,” writes musical theater historian Laura MacDonald, “a formula audiences expected and producers provided.” But 1776 had none of the expected staples: no stars, no show-stopping choreography, no chorus girls, and no intermission. By the time it reached Broadway, the script had only seven scenes, many of which featured long stretches of dialogue unpunctuated by song.

Out-of-town tryouts were not successful. Audience turnout was poor, and reviewers were skeptical that 1776 could ever find success in New York. Variety’s review of the run in New Haven, Connecticut, worried: “1776 is just about as far removed from the current trend in musicals as it is possible to be. That can be either its ultimate pinnacle of success or its nemesis.” New York Times reviewer Walter Kerr predicted the play was “going to be just too young and green and naïve . . . for the sophisticated commerce of Broadway.”

If Edwards and Stone found the lukewarm response painful, they also made good use of it. Before the show opened on Broadway, the script underwent several significant changes. In Washington, D.C., Edwards penned the song “The Egg,” which describes the debate over the United States’s national bird, a reference to the production’s already-designed logo of an eaglet hatching from a Union Jack–printed shell. Stone removed two scenes showing Adams, Franklin, and Samuel Chase’s journey to New Brunswick “in the interest of the overall length of the play and because they were basically cinematic in concept.”

By the time the shorter, more streamlined 1776 opened at the 46th Street Theatre on March 16, 1969, Stone was convinced that the play and Broadway were ready for each other. “We’re in a period of groping in this country,” he told the New York Times. “We’re trying to find out if and where we went wrong. I think our show is going to help.”

Audiences and critics agreed. The critics’ preview received adulatory reviews, with Kerr proclaiming 1776 as lively and engaging as “a hockey game.” The success was due in part to Ostrow’s deft marketing, which avoided positioning the play as a celebration of America’s founding. “It is my conviction that patriotism has to be discovered by the audience and not waved by the management,” he wrote to the coproducers of the national tour. Instead, MacDonald writes, Ostrow hoped to present “a means for audiences to engage with history in the making. . . . 1776 offered ticket buyers the opportunity to witness the historical event and create their own cultural memory.”

Edwards and Stone’s musical ran for 1,217 performances, winning the 1969 Tony and New York Drama Critics Circle awards for best musical; Edwards received a Tony for his music and lyrics. The play enjoyed two national tours and a London production with
a British cast in 1970 before finally closing on February 13, 1972. It was released as a film, for which Stone penned the screenplay, the same year.

After *1776* debuted, Edwards spoke of his passion for the musical to a reporter, saying, “I got so I could do nothing else.” It was a prophetic remark: *1776* was both the pinnacle and the end of his musical career. In the late 1970s, he began to tinker with a second concept, based on the last days of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II, but it was not to be. The composer suffered a fatal heart attack in March 1981. He was 61 years old.

His first major onstage success, *1776* cemented Stone’s prominence as a librettist and screenwriter. He went on to win two Tony Awards (for *Woman of the Year*, starring Lauren Bacall, in 1981, and for *Titanic* in 1997), making him one of but a handful of writers to earn an Emmy, a Tony, and an Academy Award. He was working on several unfinished books, including *Curtains* with Fred Ebb and John Kander, when he succumbed to pulmonary fibrosis in April 2003 at the age of 73. The book for *Curtains* was completed by Rupert Holmes, and the musical premiered on Broadway in 2007.

**Sources**


---

**Nixon and 1776**

Though less overt in its social commentary than its 1969 Broadway neighbor *Hair*, *1776* was not immune to the tumultuous political era into which it was born. After its success at the Tony Awards, the production was invited to the White House in the spring of 1970—the first Broadway musical ever to be staged in the president’s home. It was an honor, but not one that everyone was eager to accept.

The Kent State Massacre and the deployment of U.S. troops to Cambodia made producer Stuart Ostrow uneasy, both personally and professionally. He was no Nixon supporter, and he worried that being associated too closely with the controversial president might damage *1776*’s Broadway run. Actor Howard Da Silva, who played Benjamin Franklin, also had objections. He had received an invitation from Nixon once before, in 1947, under unhappier circumstances: to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Da Silva’s silence earned him a spot on the Hollywood blacklist for more than a decade. Many other *1776* actors were active union members, including William Daniels (John Adams) and Paul Hecht (John Dickinson), respectively the current and future presidents of the Screen Actors Guild. They harbored no great affection for Nixon, and Hecht recalls a “very heavy discussion about whether we should even go.”
 Shortly after the invitation went out, a White House representative requested that two of the musical's numbers be cut. On the chopping block were “Cool, Cool Considerate Men,” which describes the conservative congressmen steering the nation “ever to the right, never to the left,” and “Momma, Look Sharp,” a dialogue between a dying soldier and his mother.

The 1776 team suspected the president hoped to censor any songs that might be perceived as personal criticism. “The opponents of independence were very much involved in commerce and profits, so they were very much allied to modern conservatives,” says librettist Peter Stone. “Nixon didn’t want Americans to be reminded of this as he faced reelection in 1972.” The production went forward after Ostrow denied the White House’s request, but the actors remembered the slight—“Let’s just say the cast performed [‘Cool, Cool Considerate Men’] with additional verve,” remembers director Peter H. Hunt. “I was sitting right next to Nixon, and even I was getting nervous.”

Ostrow was nervous, too, for reasons of his own. A national tour and a London production were about to open, and press seemed increasingly given to portraying 1776 as President Nixon’s pet musical. Ostrow decided to make his dissent known: on June 15, 1970, the day before the London opening, he placed a full-page ad with the musical’s logo in the New York Times supporting the McGovern Amendment, which would have ended the Vietnam War. His actions had the intended effect: an angered investor threatened to sue, the scandal grabbed headlines, and ticket sales soared. Echoing the ad’s sentiment were the programs for the national tour and London production, which featured an article by Stone comparing Kent State to the Boston Massacre.

By the time the film version of 1776 was produced in 1972, Nixon was embroiled in the Watergate scandal. But, to Hunt’s great surprise, the president had not forgotten about 1776. Nixon apparently felt that the Republican Party could not afford any more bad press, however indirect.

The film’s producer, Jack L. Warner, a personal friend of Nixon, asked Stone and Hunt to cut portions of the screenplay he considered “too liberal,” particularly “Cool, Cool Considerate Men.” He always deferred, however, when the writer and director refused. When Stone remarked on his habit, Warner cryptically replied, “He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.”

The producer’s meaning would not become clear until 1776 was in postproduction. With the film’s director in Europe on a long-overdue honeymoon, Warner told editor Florence Williamson to excise “Cool, Cool Considerate Men” and to shred the offending negatives, saying, “I don’t want history second-guessing me on this.”

When Hunt returned and discovered Warner’s deceit, he was furious. “I asked him, ‘Jack, how could you do this?’ and he said, ‘With a pair of scissors,’” the director remembers.

Unbeknownst to Hunt, however, he had a secret ally in Williamson. Although she cut the song from the film, instead of destroying the negatives, she secretly filed them in storage, where they were discovered in 2001. A director’s cut version of the film was released the following year.
Historical Note by the Authors

By Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards

This essay first appeared in Penguin Books’s 1976 publication of 1776.

The first question we are asked by those who have seen—or read—1776 is invariably: “Is it true? Did it really happen that way?”

The answer is: Yes.

Certainly a few changes have been made in order to fulfill basic dramatic tenets. To quote a European dramatist friend of ours, “God writes lousy theater.” In other words, reality is seldom artistic, orderly, or dramatically satisfying; life rarely provides a sound second act, and its climaxes usually have not been adequately prepared for. Therefore, in historical drama, a number of small licenses are almost always taken with strictest fact, and those in 1776 are enumerated in this addendum. But none of them, either separately or in accumulation, has done anything to alter the historical truth of the characters, the times, or the events of American independence.

First, however, let us list those elements of our play that have been taken, unchanged and unadorned, from documented fact.

The weather in Philadelphia that late spring and early summer of 1776 was unusually hot and humid, resulting in a bumper crop of horseflies incubated in the stable next door to the State House (now Independence Hall).

John Adams was indeed “obnoxious and disliked”—the description is his own.

Benjamin Franklin, the oldest member of the Congress, suffered from gout in his later years and often “drowsed” in public.

Thomas Jefferson, the junior member of the Virginia delegation, was entrusted with the daily weather report.

Rhode Island’s Stephen Hopkins, known to his colleagues as “Old Grape and Guts” because of his fondness for distilled refreshment, always wore his round, black wide-brimmed Quaker’s hat in the chamber.

Portly Samuel Chase, the gourmand from Maryland (pronounced Mary-land in those times), was referred to (behind his back, of course) as “Bacon-Face.”

Connecticut’s Roger Sherman always sat apart from his fellow congressmen, sipping coffee from a saucer-like bowl.

Caesar Rodney of Delaware, suffering from skin cancer, never appeared in public without a green scarf wrapped around his face.
The dress of the congressmen graduated from the liberal greens, golds, brocades, and laces of the conservative Southerners, to the conservative browns, blacks, mean cloth, and plain linen of the radical New Englanders.

The only two known employees of the Congress were Charles Thomson, secretary, who kept no minutes of the debates (recording only those motions which were passed), and Andrew McNair, custodian and bell-ringer.

A motion concerning Congress’s liability for a certain Mr. Melchior Meng’s dead mule was debated and approved prior to the motion on independence.

Ben Franklin’s illegitimate son William was royal governor of New Jersey until he was arrested, in June 1776, and exiled to Connecticut.

The New York delegation abstained on many votes, including the final vote on independence (that tally being recorded by Mr. Thomson as twelve for, none against, and one abstaining), though later the New York legislature (the members of which “speak very fast and very loud and nobody pays any attention to anybody else, with the result that nothing ever gets done”) approved the action after the fact.

George Washington’s dispatches arrived on an average of three a day, and almost all of them were “gloomy” to the point of despair.

The strength of the armed forces under Washington’s command was as dismal as he reported. On May 12, 1776, for instance, the duty roster of the Continental Army listed:

- Commissioned officers .................. 589
- Non-commissioned officers .......... 722
- Present & fit for duty ................... 6,641
- Sick but present ....................... 547
- Sick but absent ....................... 352
- On furlough .............................. 66
- On command [A.W.O.L.] .............. 1,122

This was the total strength of the American army.
Edward Rutledge of South Carolina, the youngest member of the Congress, was the leading proponent of individual rights for individual states.

The committee to “manage” the Declaration of Independence consisted of five congressmen: Adams, Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston (of New York—he wasn’t available to sign the Declaration, but he obligingly sent his cousin, Philip, to affix the powerful family name), and Jefferson. The fifth member had originally been Richard Lee, the offerer of the motion of independence, but he subsequently declined in order to return to Virginia, where he had been proposed for governor of that “country” (as Virginians referred to their colony). None of the five members of this committee wanted the assignment of actually writing the Declaration, and all of them begged off for one personal reason or another. But Jefferson, whom Adams accused of being the finest writer in Congress, possessing “a happy talent for composition and a remarkable felicity of expression,” was finally persuaded. Later he recalled that the purpose of the Declaration had been “to place before mankind the common sense of the subject in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent.”

Jefferson was, besides being an author, lawyer, farmer, architect, and statesman, a fine violinist. His wife, Martha, a young, beautiful widow of 24 when they married, was often praised for her “uncommon singing voice.” (She died ten years after their wedding, a full nineteen years before Jefferson inhabited the White House, and he never remarried. The Martha Jefferson who is often listed as First Lady was their daughter.)

Jefferson, during those early years in Congress, was not a loquacious man. Adams remembered him as “the most silent man in Congress. . . . I never heard him utter three sentences together.”

Adams knew he would not receive his proper due from posterity. He wrote that “the whole history of this Revolution will be to lie, from beginning to end.” And, equally, he knew that Franklin was the stuff of which national legends are built. They would certify that “Franklin did this, Franklin did that, Franklin did some other damned thing. . . . Franklin smote the ground and out sprang George Washington, fully grown and on his horse. . . . Franklin then electrified him with his miraculous lightning rod and the three of them—Franklin, Washington, and the horse—conducted the entire Revolution by themselves.”

The seemingly endless list of congressional committees (and their redundant titles) spoken by Secretary Thomson at the beginning of Scene 5 are all taken from his own report as it appears in the “Journal of Congress.”

The Declaration of Independence was debated by the Congress for three full days. It underwent 86 separate changes (and withstood scores of others, including an amendment calling for clear and sovereign “fishing rights”) and the deletion of over 400 words, including a strong condemnation of that “peculiar institution” slavery (accusing King George III of waging “cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere”), which called for its abolition.
This paragraph was removed to placate and appease the southern colonies and to hold them in the Union.

Jefferson, though a slaveholder himself, declared that “nothing is more certainly written in the Book of Fate than that this people shall be free.” And further: “The rights of human nature are deeply wounded by this infamous practice.”

The deadlock existing within the Delaware delegation was finally and melodramatically broken by the arrival of the mortally ill Caesar Rodney, who, in great pain, had ridden all night from Dover, a distance of some 80 miles, arriving just in time to save the motion on independence from being defeated. His sacrifice was all the more remarkable in view of the fact that by voting for the motion he was abandoning forever all hope of receiving the competent medical treatment of his illness that was available in England; he had become a traitor with a price on his head.

When the motion on independence had passed, John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, the leader of the anti–independence forces (desiring reconciliation with England), refused to sign the Declaration, a document he felt he could not endorse. But, asserting a fidelity to America, he left the Congress to enlist in the Continental Army as a private—though he was entitled to a commission—and served courageously with the Delaware Militia. Some years later he was appointed to the Constitutional Convention, representing Delaware, and returned to Philadelphia to contribute greatly to the writing of that extraordinary document, the United States Constitution.

All these historical facts appear in the play. But there are, as has been stated, many other instances where changes were effected. In all cases, however, we believe they were the result of sound dramatic decisions which were aesthetically, as well as historically, justified.

These changes can be divided into five categories: things altered, things surmised, things added, things deleted, and things rearranged. Following are examples of all five categories, plus the reasons for the changes.

**Things Altered**

Of the two main alterations that were made, one was in the interest of dramatic construction, the other for the purpose of preserving dramatic unity.

First, the Declaration, though reported back to Congress for amendments and revisions prior to the vote on independence on July 2, was not actually debated and approved until after that vote. However, had this schedule been preserved in the play, the audience’s interest in the debate would already have been spent.

Second, the Declaration was not signed on July 4, 1776, the date it was proclaimed to the citizenry of the thirteen colonies. It was actually signed over a period of several months, many of the signers having not been present at the time of its ratification. The greatest number signed on August 2, but one, Matthew Thornton of New Hampshire, did not even enter Congress until November 4, and the name of Colonel Thomas McKean of Delaware, probably the last to sign, had not yet appeared on the document...
by the middle of January 1777. It seems fairly obvious, however, that the depiction of a July 4 signing, like the famous Pine-Savage engraving of this non-event, provides the occasion with form and allows the proper emotional punctuation to the entire spectacle.

**Things Surmised**

Because Secretary Thomson did not keep a proper record of the debates in Congress, and because other chronicles are incomplete in certain key areas, a small number of educated suppositions had to be made in order to complete the story. These were based on consistencies of character, ends logically connected to means, and the absence of other possible explanations.

It is unknown, for instance, whether Richard Henry Lee was persuaded to go to the Virginia House of Burgesses in order to secure a motion for independence that could be introduced in Congress, or if he volunteered on his own. Certainly Adams was getting nowhere with his own efforts; he had, on 23 separate occasions, introduced the subject of independence to his fellows in Congress, and each time it had failed to be considered. It was also true that whenever an issue needed respectability, the influence of a Virginian was brought to bear. (Virginia was the first colony, and its citizens were regarded as a sort of American aristocracy, an honor that was not betrayed by their leaders. The Virginian Washington was given command of the army, and the Virginian Jefferson was given the assignment of writing the Declaration.) Certainly Franklin would have delighted in appealing to Lee’s vanity and deflating Adams’s ego at one and the same time, as Scene 2 of the play suggests. But the actual sequence of these events is unknown.

And when Lee returned from Virginia (in Scene 3), a transcript of the debate in Congress on his motion for independence was never recorded. But the positions of individual congressmen are known, and it was possible to glean phrases, attitudes, and convictions from the many letters, memoirs, and other papers that exist in abundance, in order to reconstruct a likely facsimile of this debate. (Stick fights, such as the one occurring between Adams and Dickinson in this scene, were common during congressional debate, and though there is no report of this particular one, the sight of the two antagonists whacking away at each other certainly would have surprised no one.)

Similarly, a record of the debate on the Declaration was never kept. But in this case there was even more to go on. Jefferson himself, in his autobiography, provided two versions of the document—as originally written and as finally approved. Who was responsible for each individual change is not known, but in most instances convincing conclusions are not too hard to draw. McKean, a proud Scot, surely would have objected to the charge of “Scotch & foreign mercenaries [sent] to invade and deluge us in blood.” And John Witherspoon of New Jersey, a clergyman and the congressional chaplain, no doubt would have supported the addition of the phrase “with a firm Reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence,” which had not been present in Jefferson’s original draft. Also, Edward Rutledge must be charged with leading the fight against the condemnation of slavery, being the chief proponent of that practice in Congress. And
the exchange between Jefferson and Dickinson, occurring in our version of this debate, includes lines written by Jefferson on other occasions, most notably: “The right to be free comes from Nature.”

The conversion of James Wilson of Pennsylvania from the “nay” to the “yea” column at the last minute (in Scene 7) is an event without any surviving explanation. All that is definitely known is that Wilson, a former law student of Dickinson’s and certainly under his influence in Congress, as his previous voting record testifies, suddenly changed his position on independence and, as a result, is generally credited with casting the vote that decided this issue. But why? A logical solution to this mystery was found when we imagined one fear he might have possessed that would have been stronger than his fear of Dickinson’s wrath—the fear of going down in history as the man who singlehandedly prevented American independence. Such a position would have been totally consistent with his well-known penchant for caution.

The final logical conjecture we made concerned the discrepancy between the appearance of the word “inalienable” in Jefferson’s version of the Declaration and its reappearance as “unalienable” in the printed copy that is now in universal use. This could have been a misprint, but it might, too, have been the result of interference by Adams (he had written it as “unalienable” in a copy of the Declaration he had drafted in his own hand), who believed that this seldom-used spelling was correct. There is no doubt that the meddlesome “Massachusettensian,” a Harvard graduate, was not above speaking to Mr. Dunlap, the printer.

It is also consistent with both men’s behavior that Adams and Jefferson should have disagreed on this matter, as they did on most. They were to become bitter enemies for much of their lives, only to make up when they had both survived to extreme old age. Both lived long enough to be invited (by Adams’s son, John Quincy, who was then occupying the White House) to the 50th-anniversary celebration of the Declaration of Independence. But on that very date, July 4, 1826, exactly a half-century later to the day, both of these gigantic figures, Jefferson at 83, Adams at 91—each believing and finding solace in the thought that the other was attending the jubilee—died. Surely this was one of the greatest coincidences in all history and one which never would be believed if included in a play.

**Things Added**

The three instances of elements that were added to the story of American independence were created in the interest of satisfying the musical-comedy form. Again, it must be stressed that none of them interferes with historic truth in any way.

The first concerns Martha Jefferson’s visit to Philadelphia in Scene 4. While it is true that Jefferson missed her to distraction, more than enough to effect an unscheduled reunion, it is believed that he journeyed to Virginia to see her. The license of having her come to see him, at Adams’s instigation, stemmed from our desire to show something of the young Jefferson’s personal life without destroying the unity of setting.
Second, in Scene 5 of the play, Adams, Franklin, and Chase are shown leaving for New Brunswick, New Jersey, for an inspection of the military. This particular trip did not actually take place, though a similar one was made to New York after the vote on independence, during which Adams and Franklin had to share a single bed in an inn. Originally the New Jersey junket was included in the play, represented by two separate scenes (one in an inn, showing the sleeping arrangements mentioned, the other on the military training grounds, showing inspection of “a ragtag collection of provincial militiamen and irregulars” who could do nothing right until a flock of ducks flew by; the men’s hunger molded them into a smoothly operating unit). These scenes were removed, however, during the out-of-town tryout, in the interests of the overall length of the play and because they were basically cinemagraphic in concept. Needless to say, both should appear in the filmed version of 1776.

And third, the account of General Washington’s dusty young courier, at the end of Scene 5, of a battle he had witnessed, while an actual description of the village green during and after the Battle of Lexington, is a wholly constructed moment, designed to illustrate the feelings and experiences of the Americans outside Congress, who were deeply influenced by the decisions made inside the Congress.

One further note: The tally board used throughout the play to record each vote did not exist in the actual chamber in Philadelphia. It has been included in order to clarify the positions of the thirteen colonies at any given moment, a device allowing the audience to follow the parliamentary action without confusion.

Things Deleted

Certain elements that are historically true have been left out of or removed from the play for one of three separate reasons.

The first of these was the embarrassment of riches; there are just too many choice bits of information to include in one, two, or even a dozen plays. The fact that Franklin often entered the congressional chamber in a sedan chair carried by convicts, for instance; or that, on several occasions, Indians in full regalia would appear before the Congress, petitioning for one thing or another, and accompanied by their interpreter, a full-blooded Indian who spoke with a flawless Oxford accent.

Then there was the advisability of cutting down on the number of congressmen appearing in the play in the interests of preserving clarity and preventing overcrowding. There is, after all, a limit to an audience’s ability to assimilate (and keep separate) a large number of characters, as well as the physical limits of any given stage production. For this reason several of the lesser-known (and least-contributory) congressmen were eliminated altogether, and in a few cases two or more were combined into a single character. James Wilson, for example, contains a few of the qualities of his fellow Pennsylvanian John Morton. And John Adams is, at times, a composite of himself and his cousin Sam Adams, also of Massachusetts.
But by far the most frustrating reason for deleting a historical fact was that the audiences would never have believed it. The best example of this is John Adams’s reply (it was actually Cousin Sam who said it) to Franklin’s willingness to drop the anti-slavery clause from the Declaration. “Mark me, Franklin,” he now says in Scene 7, “if we give in on this issue, posterity will never forgive us.” But the complete line, spoken in July 1776, was, “If we give in on this issue, there will be trouble a hundred years hence; posterity will never forgive us.” And audiences would never forgive us. For who could blame them for believing that the phrase was the author’s invention, stemming from the eternal wisdom of hindsight? After all, the astonishing prediction missed by only a few years.

Things Rearranged

Some historical data have been edited dramatically without altering their validity or factuality.

The first example of this would be the play’s treatment of Adams’s relationship with his wife, Abigail. Two separate theatrical conventions have been employed; the selection and conversion of sections of their actual letters, written to each other during this period of their separation, into dialogue; and the placing of them in close physical proximity though they remain, in reality, over 300 miles apart. The notion for this last device sprang, oddly, from a line in one of these same letters: Adams was complaining about their continued separation and finally pleaded, “Oh, if I could only annihilate time and space!” (The description of scenes, at the beginning of the play, defines these meetings by listing the area of dramatic action as “certain reaches of John Adams’s mind.”)

The exchanges, spoken and sung, between John and Abigail Adams are, as has been stated, the result of distributing, as dialogue, sections and phrases from various letters. The list of their children’s diseases, the constant requests for “saltpetre for gunpowder” (and the counter-request for pins), the use of the tender salutation “Dearest friend,” the catalogue of Abigail’s faults, the news of the farm in Braintree failing—even certain song lyrics transferred intact (“I live like a nun in a cloister” and “Write to me with sentimental effusion”)—all these were edited and rearranged in an attempt to establish a dramatically satisfying relationship.

This same process was used to construct George Washington’s dispatches from the field. Literally dozens were selected, from which individual lines were borrowed and then patched together in order to form the five communiqués that now appear in the play. Therefore, though the dispatches as now constructed were not written by the commander-in-chief, each sentence within them is either an actual quotation (“O how I wish I had never seen the Continental Army! I would have done better to retire to the back country and live in a wigwam”) or paraphrase, or comes from a firsthand report (the final line of the last dispatch, “But dear God! what brave men I shall lose before this business ends!” was spoken by Washington in the presence of his adjutant, who later reported it).
And finally, John Adams’s extraordinary prophecy, made on July 3, 1776, describing the way Independence Day would be celebrated by future generations of Americans and written in a letter to his wife on that date, has been paraphrased and adapted into lyric form for the song “Is Anybody There?” sung by Adams in Scene 7. The original lines are:

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 illumination, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward for evermore.

You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration and support and defend these States. Yet, through all the gloom, I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means. And that posterity will triumph in that day’s transaction, even although we should rue it, which I trust God we shall not.

We have attempted, in the paragraphs above, to answer the question, “Is it true?” What we cannot answer, however, is how such a question could possibly be asked so often by Americans. What they want to know is whether or not the story of their political origin, the telling of their national legend, is correct as presented. Don’t they know? Haven’t they ever heard it before? And if not, why not? As we say, it’s a question we cannot answer.

There are those who would claim that the schools just don’t teach it, and we would have trouble disagreeing with them. The authors of 1776 are both products of the American public-school system—one from the West Coast, the other from the East. Both were better than average students with a deeper-than-average curiosity about American history. But neither of them was given any more than a perfunctory review of the major events, a roster of a few cardboard characters, and a certain number of jingoistic conclusions.

But what of the arguments, the precedents, the compromises, the personalities, the regional disputes, the perseverance, the courage, the sacrifices, the expediencies? What of the similarities between those times and these (states rights versus federal rights; property rights versus human rights; privileged rights versus civil rights) and the differences (if any)? What of the lessons of the past applied to the problems of the future, for what society can plan a future without an intimate knowledge of its own past?

It is presumptuous of us to assume that 1776 will be able to fill even a portion of this lamentable void (though doubtless no small portion of its success is due to the “new” information it offers); the crime is that it should even have to. The United States owes its citizens, at the very least, an educational system that describes, defines, and explains our own existence.
A Country Towards Revolution

Historical Context for 1776

By Cait Robinson

When Great Britain first entwined its history with that of the Americas in the late sixteenth century, mercantilism was the dominant economic model in Europe. It was a demanding gospel, one that extolled the virtues of competition rather than cooperation, of colonial expansion over domestic concerns. Wealth, it preached, was dependent on precious metals. Wealth was therefore finite, and the key to national survival was stockpiling as much of it as possible. Importing was bad business, because it diverted wealth to other nations. Colonies, on the other hand, dangled the promise of economic self-sufficiency: a government could trade with itself and keep profits from leaving the national treasury. Like the other major European monarchs of the day, Queen Elizabeth I was a believer.

By 1588, Elizabeth was also a competitor. Spanish King Phillip II’s naval supremacy had been rocked by his armada’s failed invasion of England, and it seemed that the northern expansion of his impressive holdings in South and Central America would be slowed, if not halted altogether. Britain, whose only existing American colony, Roanoke, disappeared mysteriously between 1587 and 1590, could now make a serious bid for North America’s eastern coast. It did so in 1607 with the establishment of Jamestown, Virginia. Plymouth, Massachusetts, followed in 1620.

In the 125 years after Jamestown was founded, Britain established or captured a total of 13 colonies in America: Virginia (1607), Massachusetts (1620), New Hampshire (1623), Maryland (1634), Connecticut (1635), Rhode Island (1636), Delaware (1638), North Carolina (1653), New York (1664), New Jersey (1664), Pennsylvania (1682), South Carolina (1670), and Georgia (1732). Though they provided several valuable exports—principally tobacco, sugar, rice, and raw materials like iron and lumber—the colonies were largely dependent on imports from the mother country and the West Indies, creating a steady market for British goods. As an added bonus, the significant merchant fleet necessary to maintain this closed system bolstered Great Britain’s naval power.

War was the wrench in the mercantile machine. America was anything but uncontested territory: Native American, Spanish, Dutch, and French forces all laid aggressive and unremitting claims to the land. From the moment Britain gained a foothold, land was won and lost, treaties were made and broken, and blood was shed on both sides of the
Atlantic over territory in the New World. Impressive though Great Britain’s military power was, such sustained conflict taxed the kingdom’s resources significantly. In 1754, after a skirmish between a French party and a colonial militia led by a 22-year-old lieutenant colonel named George Washington, the French and Indian War erupted over land in the Ohio River Valley and quickly distinguished itself as Britain’s priciest and most daunting undertaking to date. The conflict spread to European soil with a British declaration of war on France in 1756, then expanded to Spain and its colonies in Cuba and the West Indies. The 1763 Treaty of Paris awarded Great Britain all French territory east of the Mississippi River (except New Orleans), but the victory was a bitter one: the British Crown was now deeply in debt. In 1763, to the chagrin of countless land-hungry pioneers (Washington included), the Crown issued a proclamation that forbade any new settlement past the Appalachian divide because it did not have capital enough to support the soldiers and garrisons required to protect its people as they pushed westward.

**Taxation without Representation**

As the American colonies continued to drain Great Britain’s coffers, George Grenville, first lord of the treasury, proposed they might also alleviate the deficits they were creating. To that end, Grenville designed the 1764 Sugar Act (also called the American Revenue Act), a revamping of a series of largely ineffective laws passed between 1660 and 1673 “for raising a further revenue within your Majesty’s dominions in America.” The earlier acts were intended to establish select legal British trade monopolies in the colonies and enact duties on refined sugar and molasses imported from the West Indies. Their lax enforcement, however, allowed colonial smuggling to flourish. Grenville’s Sugar Act would tighten the colonists’ loose leash, and the taxes collected—which also extended to coffee, wine, indigo, and certain textiles—would subsidize Britain’s financial recovery. Those who violated the new law were subject to fines, property seizures, and jail time, doled out at juryless trials.

The Sugar Act had a companion: the 1764 Currency Act, which removed from circulation all paper money printed in the colonies. America’s role as a market for West Indian and British exports had the unintended side effect of constantly drawing currency back to London, leaving a shortage abroad. In order to do business, the colonists had printed bills of credit of their own design, each with individual values, expiration dates, and appearances. In addition to the confusion caused by their irregularity, the bills tended to depreciate rapidly in the postwar depression, which unsettled British merchants. Parliament hoped the Currency Act would standardize and strengthen British currency; in reality, it increased the colonies’ already significant trade deficit.

The Sugar and Currency Acts raised constitutional as well as economic issues. Previously, the colonies had been governed mainly by elected local legislatures loyal to Great Britain. Interference from London was rare. Britain’s 1688 Bill of Rights stated that citizens should not be taxed without representation in Parliament; since the colonists had no such representatives, many felt Parliament’s new legislation was
unconstitutional. This opinion was most fervent in Boston and New York, where merchants organized boycotts of British imports to demonstrate their capacity for self-sufficiency. Meanwhile, Boston delegates urged the Massachusetts legislature to petition Parliament and King George III. The protests were enough to gain a group of colonial representatives an audience with Grenville in February 1765, during which they reaffirmed the colonies’ loyalty to the Crown and invoked their constitutional right to be taxed only by a representative body. Grenville, however, was unmoved.

**Direct Taxation**

The lord of the treasury forged ahead, directing Secretary of the Treasury Thomas Whately to draft the Stamp Act, which levied taxes on all commercial and legal papers, newspapers, pamphlets, cards, almanacs, and dice. The steep new fees were to be paid directly to London, not to local governing bodies. This was the first time in colonial history that Parliament had enacted direct taxation, and it seemed to deliberately flout the colonists’ petition to Grenville. Like the Sugar Act, it also had a companion, which was received as an insult added to the Stamp Act injury: the Quartering Act required the colonies to house and feed all British soldiers stationed there.

If Grenville's choice to ignore his petitioners was naïve, his insistence on provoking them further was downright foolhardy. Merchants were the target of the Sugar Act and also the main objectors to the Currency Act. The Stamp Act was a third blow, but it added to the ranks of the injured highly influential members of colonial society: bankers, lawyers, land owners, publishers, and ship builders. When news of the legislation, which was scheduled to go into effect in November 1765, reached the colonies in May, the response was swift, intelligent, and tailored to hit Britain where it was weak.

Led by the Virginia House of Burgesses, several colonial legislatures adopted resolutions in protest of the laws. Massachusetts circulated a call for a unified response, and by October, twenty-seven delegates from nine colonies had convened in New York to form the Stamp Act Congress, responsible for drafting a formal set of resolutions and conveying it to the king. More significantly, the Congress also laid plans to impose an official nonimportation embargo on British goods.

The working-class colonists supplemented their representatives’ formal actions with public protests, many of which turned violent. At the forefront of the mobs were the Sons of Liberty, a number of loosely organized militia. In Boston, they burned houses and hanged effigies of British officials; in New York, mobs harassed troops and looted houses. Fearing for their lives, tax officials throughout the colonies resigned or went into hiding, and international trade—the colonies’ vital function in the British economy—ground to a halt.

In the face of colonial anger and a growing opposition from suffering London artisans and merchants, the Stamp Act was repealed in March 1766. Parliament did not relish the appearance of weakness, so to reassert British authority, the repeal was accompanied by the Declaratory Act. The new law officially granted Parliament the
right to legislate the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.” Despite its vast implications, it was largely dismissed in America as a final attempt at saving face. The colonists relaxed their boycotts on British goods and celebrated their victory with a new collective spirit—an asset that would prove essential a decade later.

The Townshend Acts

The rejoicing was short-lived. In June and July 1767, Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend penned a series of laws attempting to make good on the Declaratory Act’s promise and raise the revenue Grenville’s laws had failed to supply. The Suspending Act punished the New York assembly, which had continued to resist the Quartering Act, by disbanding it. The Commissioner of Customs Act established an elaborate machinery of customs collection, including a new Boston-based board of commissioners. Most objectionable of all was the Revenue Act, sometimes called the Townshend Duties, which imposed a new series of direct taxes on a wide range of imports, including lead, glass, paint, paper, and, most notably, tea. The new tea tax was created to offset the Indemnity Act, which removed duties on imported tea in England, allowing it to be exported more cheaply to the colonies. Its aim was to prop up the floundering East India Company and undercut the Dutch smugglers who had cornered the American market with their low prices.

Resistance was powerful, if not particularly well organized. Many colonists surmised (incorrectly) that the new laws were a continuation, not a replacement, of Grenville’s strategy—evidence of a long-term plan to gradually strip the colonies of their rights and place their citizens in servitude. Panicked and outraged, many rioted, attacking and intimidating British troops and customs agents and destroying property. Merchants evaded their taxes and renewed their boycotts. One of the few unifying voices was that of Pennsylvanian lawyer John Dickinson, whose pamphlet *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* articulated colonial objections to Parliament’s interference with internal affairs. Reprinted by newspapers, Dickinson’s essays urged organized cooperation between the colonies. “The cause of one,” he wrote, “is the cause of all.”

As in the past, Boston was the center of anti-British activity. In 1768, the Massachusetts Assembly raised Dickinson’s rallying cry in a circular letter to its “sister colonies,” urging another unified response against Great Britain and sharing the resistance tactics it currently employed. The missive did not impress British Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Hillsborough, who demanded that the assembly rescind the letter. When the majority of representatives refused, Hillsborough ordered Massachusetts Royal Governor Francis Bernard to dissolve the assembly and to install British troops in Boston to keep the peace. The secretary of state warned the other governors that the same action would be expected of them if their assemblies approved the letter. Bernard’s tactics only fed the colony’s reputation as a martyr, however, and galvanized the other colonies to adopt its boycotts and resolutions. In 1769, the Virginia House of Burgesses was dissolved by its royal governor for supporting Massachusetts.
Adoption of the Resolution Calling for Independence from England, July 2, 1776; originally proposed by Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee (National Archives and Records Administration). Lee’s resolution reads:

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.

Below the fold, you can see the vote tally and the words, “The resolution for independancy agreed to July 2, 1776.”
IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. — Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that most deformations of popular Governments are produced by slow and silent combinations; but when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is the Right of every Subject to revolt.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the Right of Representation in the Legislature, a Right in which they were天生 equal to the white citizens of this Country.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his demands.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly for opposing with manly firmness his arbitrary measures.

He has called together additional forces for the exclusive use of the state of Great Britain.

He has refused for a long time, after such Dissolution, to cause the Imposition of Taxes or public Bills to be assessed, levied, and paid, under authority of law.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the support of the Public Credit.

He has made large Inroads into Public Credit.

He has maintained hostile Ayriers, no fault of his own.

He has refused his Assent to Laws for the safety of the Country.

He has call'd in the Assistants of his Officers, to act of their own discretion, and without the control of his Chambers.

He has created a number of temporary Senates, to fill up the vacancies by such temporary Assents of his Chambers.

He has obstructed the Passage of many important Laws.

He has subject'd the people to② the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that purpose forcing our Migrant People back, and sending them beyond the Seas.

He has erected a thousand Regulations of深入推进, and enforced his Proclamations, and Associations, without the Consent of the Legislature.

He has disbanded the Army after Experience of their Inefficiency and Unpopularity.

He has refused his Assent to Funds.

He has maintained forces above a number usual in Time of Peace.

He has called for the sum of March from all parts of the State, and on no lawful增添, nor in consequence of any emergency.

He has refused his Assent to Laws for the relief of War wounded, and for the support of Public Credit.

He has encouraged a abettor of the same descriptions to so far extend their Measures to weighted his Suspension of Administration.

He has used his power to destroy and diminution us, in the mean time, means for withstanding and repelling such intrusions.

He has call'd in his own forces, and opposed the force of the state to redress these grievances.

He has refrained from the 17th of July, 1776.

He has call'd in his own forces, and opposed the force of the state to redress these grievances.

He has refrained from the 17th of July, 1776.
Highlighted above is the passage objecting to the institution of slavery in Jefferson’s original draft of the Declaration of Independence. It reads:

[The king] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of distant people, who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce; and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.
In 1770, Lord North was elected prime minister. His leadership, combined with the now-significant extent of the American nonimportation agreements, led to the repeal of the Quartering and Townshend Acts—except for the symbolic duty on tea, for, explained King George, “I am clear that there must always be one tax to keep up the right.” The decision came just as tensions in Boston reached a fever pitch—on March 5, 1770, the day a group of British soldiers opened fire on a group of antagonistic protesters, killing five. The skirmish, widely publicized by Boston radical Samuel Adams as the Boston Massacre, would become a symbol of British oppression for years to come.

The Somerset Case

After the repeal of the Townshend Acts, the predominant feeling in the colonies was one of relief. The various nonimportation agreements dissolved, and a semblance of stability settled in. Though rumblings of resistance continued among radicals in Boston, they received less sympathy than in the past; despite the violence exchanged, most colonists still considered themselves loyal Brits who had fought for and won their constitutional rights. Actual secession was on the lips of a very few.

In the midst of the calm, however, a British judge issued a ruling that, while it made no mention of law in the colonies, would drive them ever closer to revolution. In 1772, Lord Mansfield, chief justice of England’s highest common law court, declared in *Somerset v. Stewart* that slaves could not be forcibly detained in England for the purpose of sale overseas. The decision did not apply outside of England’s borders, but southern slave owners did not fail to note its significance. It was the first legal chink in slavery’s armor, which both British and American newspapers correctly identified as the precedent that would eventually dismantle the British slave trade (though the process would not be complete for more than 100 years). The terms of the Declaratory Act were still ringing in the colonists’ ears—if slavery was limited or abolished in Great Britain, its colonies would almost certainly be forced to follow suit.

Slavery set the southern colonies apart from their northern neighbors, despite their history of cooperation against the British. Though it had existed in America since 1619, and was a legal and regulated institution in all 13 colonies by 1700, the “peculiar institution” was most entrenched in the economies of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Tobacco and rice were the major industries there, and landowners depended on large-scale slave labor to maintain their plantations. The slave populations grew large enough to rival—and in some areas, outnumber—the population of whites, who lived in terror of rebellion. These fears had already been substantiated in 1739 and 1740, when three bloody uprisings left more than 100 people dead in South Carolina. Thus, while South Carolina, Maryland, and Georgia had all endorsed Massachusetts’s circulatory letter, they always stopped short of advocating actual revolution, lest it prove instructional to their slave population.

The North was not hampered by a fear of revolt. Agriculture there was limited to small farms, making large-scale slave labor financially impractical (though keeping
small numbers of slaves for domestic purposes was common). The ethics of slavery divided New Englanders—abolitionists balked at the slaves’ harsh living conditions and unequal treatment, but Massachusetts and Rhode Island traders regularly carried human cargo from West Africa to destinations in the West Indies. Others reaped its benefits more indirectly by making rum from West Indian sugar. The rum, along with various other exports, was sent to Africa to be traded for slaves, who were in turn shipped to the West Indies to work the sugar plantations there. Of the 13 American colonies, only Pennsylvania, whose largely Quaker population abstained from participating in the slave trade, stood apart.

Despite the legal blow Somerset dealt the slave trade, it was met with none of the pyrotechnics that had characterized the reactions to the colonial tax laws. The ruling had the subtler effect of nudging the southern colonies’ allegiance further from the Crown. The uncertain future of slavery in England would make it an essential bargaining chip in future negotiations for independence. When the First Continental Congress convened in 1774, the South’s cooperation against Great Britain was contingent upon John Adams’s promise to defend slavery, an oath he would be forced to make good on in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.

The Boston Tea Party

What looked like peace in 1770 was in fact only a pause. In 1773, Parliament once again interfered with the colonies’ taxation with the Tea Act, which rearranged tax regulations to grant a full colonial trade monopoly to the still-struggling East India Company. The company would be able to sell its products directly to individual buyers, cutting out American merchants who made their profits by buying tea in bulk and auctioning off small amounts. Deprived of their livelihood, colonists were furious. The East India Company’s low prices were nothing more than bait, they insisted, designed to lure colonists into submitting to Parliament’s taxes.

Resistance to the Tea Act was centered in New York, Charleston, Philadelphia, and Boston. The first three cities successfully secured the resignation of local tea agents or pressured them into canceling orders, but Royal Governor of Massachusetts Thomas Hutchinson was determined to win the power struggle with Boston once and for all. At his insistence, three East India Company ships docked in Boston Harbor in November.

The colonists resolved to boycott their cargo. Hutchinson hoped he might outlast them and ordered the ships to remain in the harbor until the taxes on their wares were paid. Bostonians rallied in protest on December 16, 1773, and that night a group of 60 men, thinly disguised as Mohawk Indians, boarded the ships and dumped the £18,000 worth of tea into the ocean.

The Intolerable and Quebec Acts

The Boston Tea Party, as the act of defiance would become known, inspired admiration and imitation throughout the colonies, but it also generated shock and indignation.
Many colonists drew the line at destroying third-party property, and they found Boston’s actions embarrassing for their backhandedness, if not their excessive flamboyance.

Parliament, on its end, was bent on making an example of its most unruly city, and failed to take notice or advantage of the doubt and alienation the incident inspired. It passed a series of acts known in America as the Intolerable Acts (also the Coercive Acts) in the spring of 1774. The new legislation closed Boston’s harbor until restitution for the destroyed tea was paid, placed the Massachusetts Bay Colony under martial law, dissolved all representative assemblies, and granted legal immunity to the royal officials stationed there. The laws were designed to isolate and humiliate Massachusetts, but they had the opposite effect. If the Boston Tea Party caused the upstart colony to lose the sympathy of its fellows, Britain’s militant overreaction reinstated it free of charge.

On the heels of the crackdown in Massachusetts, Parliament also passed two other laws that spelled out the necessity of intercolony cooperation. The Quebec Act awarded the French Catholic territory between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to the governor of Quebec and extended the province’s borders west and south to the rivers’ junction (now Cairo, Illinois). The attempt to court the goodwill of French Catholics horrified British colonists, who saw it as an attack on Protestantism and their right to westward expansion. They were still reeling when London delivered a second blow: a new and stricter version of the Quartering Act that forced the colonies to house British soldiers in their private homes and taverns.
The First Continental Congress

On September 5, 1774, at the urging of leaders in Virginia and Massachusetts, the First Continental Congress convened secretly in Philadelphia to draft a formal response to the Intolerable Acts. The congress was composed of 56 representatives from 12 colonies; only Georgia, as the youngest colony and the most dependent on its royal governor and British troops for defense against Native American tribes, did not attend. Virginian Peyton Randolph, well known for his moderate and cautious views, was unanimously elected president, and each colony was granted one vote, regardless of its size or wealth. Though largely practical in nature (the exact population and holdings of each colony were unknown), this measure set the precedent of placing each colony on equal footing.

For almost two months, the Congress debated its options. Massachusetts’s delegates advocated pursuing independence, while the southern colonies hoped that Parliament might still be persuaded to see the error of its ways and restore the colonies’ freedom. In mid October, the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, penned by Massachusetts delegate John Adams, was adopted, asserting the colonists’ natural rights to life, liberty, property, assembly, and trial by jury—a notable departure from earlier language that had emphasized their constitutional rights as British subjects. On these grounds, the Congress issued a petition to the king to rescind the Intolerable Acts and the remaining Parliamentary taxation laws.

In addition to its symbolic resolutions and petition, the Congress took a number of concrete measures to demonstrate its seriousness. It officially promoted the formation and training of militias, granted each colony the right to its own treasury and legislature, and created a three-part plan to economically pressure Parliament to heed its demands. Dubbed the Continental Association, the strategy would entail a colony-wide nonimportation agreement, followed by nonconsumption agreements, and would end in September (after the exportation of the rice harvest) with nonexportation. If Parliament had not addressed the delegates’ concerns by May 1775, they would reconvene.

Concord and Lexington

They did not have long to wait for a reaction: on November 30, 1774, King George III delivered a speech to Parliament condemning the colonists of Massachusetts for their continued resistance to the Intolerable Acts and for encouraging rebellion in their fellow colonies. In response, the colony’s secret Provincial Congress began to organize and oversee militias. On February 1, 1775, its members, including John Hancock and Samuel Adams, gathered in Cambridge to officially prepare for war. Eight days later, Parliament declared the entire colony of Massachusetts in rebellion.

It followed this declaration with the New England Restraining Act. Designed to starve the region out of its nonimportation agreement, the law forbade New Englanders from trading with all nations other than Great Britain and the British West Indies and from fishing in the North Atlantic. When Parliament learned that colonies outside of
New England had agreed to join the Continental Association, the ban was extended to include New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina.

Despite the swarms of British soldiers occupying every street in Boston, Massachusetts Royal Governor Thomas Gage grew concerned about the city’s mounting agitation. He knew the Provincial Congress and its militias existed; if he could not capture their members, he could at least disarm them. On the evening of April 18, a troop of 700 British soldiers left Boston for Concord to destroy the weapons stored there. The Provincial Congress, however, had already established a system of alarm riders and rapid-response units, called minutemen. When the march towards Concord was discovered, a group of riders—most famously Paul Revere—stole out of Boston and sounded the alarm throughout the countryside. The British soldiers were met at Lexington, where they vastly outnumbered the 77 minutemen. It remains unknown which side fired the first shot, but the ensuing battle left eight colonists dead and the British advancing on Concord. There the minutemen successfully forced the enemy to retreat to Boston. The march back was not a peaceful one; the colonists dogged the soldiers, firing on them from concealed spots along the road and killing 230.

The Second Continental Congress

“The shot heard ’round the world,” as Ralph Waldo Emerson dubbed Lexington’s unclaimed first bullet, tipped the scales irrevocably towards revolution. To prevent further British forays into the countryside, a motley crew of Massachusetts colonists surrounded Boston on April 19, intending to drive the British out by siege. Though headed by Massachusetts’s Provincial Council, they received support from all over New England and New York in the form of both personnel and supplies.

The need for a second Continental Congress was abundantly clear. Once again convening in Philadelphia, representatives from all 13 colonies elected John Hancock of Massachusetts their president. Their next order of business was to take over command of the forces that had converged upon Boston, which they renamed the Continental Army, and appoint Washington their commander-in-chief. Before Washington could assume his post, however, the first major battle of the American Revolution occurred
At Bunker Hill outside of Boston on June 17. An unsuccessful effort to block British expansion outside the besieged city, the battle was nonetheless an important victory for the colonists, who sustained far fewer casualties than their supposedly superior enemy. Bunker Hill provided the first hint that they might be successful in a bid for independence.

Though the colonies were obviously at war, the Continental Congress remained divided on the issue of secession, and its actions reflected this schism. In their march toward revolution, the delegates solicited enlistment and funds from their constituents, printed paper currency, began to court international allies (particularly England’s old enemies, France and Spain), and reopened ports to other nations in defiance of British law. Mere weeks later, led by vocal reconciliation advocate John Dickinson, they drafted the Olive Branch Petition, asking George III for a compromise in policy and reasserting America’s loyalty to the Crown. The king refused to receive it, and declared the colonies in a state of “open and avowed rebellion” on August 23, 1775. By the end of the year, the thirteen colonies were banned from conducting trade.

The Point of No Return

On January 9, 1776, British-born Pennsylvanian Thomas Paine published his 50-page pamphlet Common Sense in Philadelphia. Written in direct and accessible language, it was highly critical of both the king and the colonists who remained allegiant to him and advocated for independence in terms that foreshadowed the language of the Declaration of Independence. Within a few months, Common Sense had sold 500,000 copies and pushed colonial opinion vastly in favor of revolution.

In March, after a year of siege, the British were forced to abandon Boston. They set sail for Halifax, where Washington suspected they would plan an attack on New York City. As the Continental Army flocked to defend the central port city, Congress received the news it had long been hoping for: France and Spain had agreed to back their cause with munitions and funds. The break with Britain was now irreconcilable; there was no possible excuse for delay. On June 9, as a massive fleet of British warships was assembling in New York Harbor, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee asked the Second Continental Congress for an official statement of America’s independence.

Sources
“Cultivating the Sensations of Freedom”

The Arts and the Revolution

By Michael Paller

Banned in Boston—and Elsewhere

Abigail Adams loved to read plays, especially Shakespeare’s. She couldn’t see them, though, since while her husband, John, was agitating for freedom and independence from Britain, the theater was banned in Boston, as it had been since 1750. The city fathers abhorred the actors’ alleged bad moral character and feared that the taint would spread to an audience wasting its time watching fictions.

John was also fond of Shakespeare. As a young man, this close observer of people asked in his diary for insight like the playwright’s, writing, “Let me search for the clue which led great Shakespeare into the labyrinth of human nature.” When he arrived in Philadelphia in September 1774 as a delegate to the First Continental Congress, he could have seen plays for the first time in his life—had he hurried. In October, after denying that Parliament had the right to legislate for the colonies and pledging not to import or consume British goods, the Congress banned the performance of plays throughout the colonies, along with horse racing, cock fighting, and “all kinds of gaming.”

Until then, if you lived in the South and wanted to see theater, you could, if you lived in the places played by the American Company of Comedians, the one theater company that existed in the colonies. George Washington, a theater enthusiast throughout his life, saw them perform several times in Williamsburg and Annapolis. For a time, they thrived in Charleston, South Carolina. The farther north they went, however, the more hostile their reception and more tenuous their existence. In 1762, they were banned from performing in Rhode Island; their theater in New York was destroyed in a riot in 1766 by the Sons of Liberty, an often violent mob determined to drive the British and their colonial sympathizers from the colonies. They declared it immoral to perform plays at a time when the poor were without food.

In Philadelphia that year, the company managed to open a new theater despite an outraged Quaker community that appealed to the governor to shut it down, citing the likelihood of it subverting “the Good order, morals & Prosperity” of the town. But it was
the congressional ban that was the last straw for the company. The Comedians departed for Jamaica in the fall of 1774, not to return until 1785.

Music As Propaganda

The other arts, however, thrived—particularly when they proved themselves useful. Music was always popular in the colonies, especially singing. In the summer of 1768, John Dickinson, who would clash with Adams over independence, wrote “The Liberty Song,” with a few verses supplied by Richard Henry Lee’s brother Arthur. Dickinson intended, the historian Kenneth Silverman writes, to encourage “the swelling mood of determined unity” in the face of rising British provocation. Dickinson noted that songs could make powerful propaganda, and singing in unison a song about unity helped drive home the political message. A revised, milder version (Dickinson decided that the first was “rather too bold”) swept through the colonies, sung in defiance of the Townshend Acts, which levied new taxes on tea, glass, paper, and other goods. A year later, the Boston contingent of the Sons of Liberty sang it 350 strong. “This,” Adams wrote, “is cultivating the Sensations of Freedom.”

One reason why the Sons of Liberty so impressed Adams and others with their singing was the widespread existence in New England of singing schools, which trained congregants in the new, somewhat more complex hymns being sung in Congregational churches: music for use as much as for beauty. The skills learned in these schools branched out from church services to other events, including the conversion of Native Americans to Protestantism. On one such occasion, 60 of them performed “The Psalmody Both at the Beginning & Close of the [ceremony] in three parts with Great Exactness,” as well as “An Anthem in Indian.”

As the country moved closer to open rebellion, musicians wrote songs for the troops to sing, including “Yankee Doodle.” Americans adopted the British marching song first as a jeer at the British after their defeat at Lexington and Concord; by early 1776, it acquired more or less the familiar words, which raised the spirits of the Continental troops that played and sang it. The war provided many opportunities to make music useful. The Continental Army trained its own musicians to play the fife, drums, and other martial instruments, and a new industry arose to supply them.

Painting for Use

The situation was similar in art. Before the war, artists traveled from town to town painting portraits, which, in the days before photography, provided clients with useful likenesses. Making a living was perilous. Early in his career, the intrepid Charles Willson Peale was often just one step ahead of the sheriff. In 1765, £900 in debt, he was forced to temporarily abandon his pregnant wife and flee from Annapolis to Boston. By 1776, though, he’d sufficiently established himself in Philadelphia that Congress commissioned him to paint a portrait (the first of many) of George Washington. Throughout the war, Peale combined his artistic talents and patriotic feelings, serving well and long in the
army, painting as he went. He commanded a band of militia when Washington crossed
the Delaware; in the brutal winter of 1777, he was with the army at Valley Forge, where
he managed to paint miniatures of at least 40 officers and Washington again, and made
copies of an earlier portrait of the general that he sold to soldiers and officers.

Like Peale, the young artist John Trumbull didn’t separate his political feelings and
artistic work. Trumbull served as an aide-de-camp to Washington, eventually became
a colonel, and spent his life alternating between painting and government service. His
series of paintings of the American Revolution and its leading figures, including the
famous Declaration of Independence, which inspired the final moments of 1776, were
painted from memory between 1817 and 1824 on a commission from Congress—in the
days when the notion of direct congressional support of the arts was considered not
only possible but desirable, as a means of creating a national identity through the visual
commemoration of important military and political events.

Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson Design a Seal

After visiting Peale’s Philadelphia studio and admiring the artist’s handiwork at painting
and sculpture, John Adams wished for “the tranquility of mind” for “these elegant and
ingenious arts of painting, sculpture, statuary, architecture, and music.” In an emerging
nation where arts were valued according to their utility, Adams was no Philistine.
According to David McCullough, he was a devout reader, especially of Greek and
Roman histories, and rarely went anywhere without a book, which was likely to be
Cervantes, Swift, or Shakespeare.

Adams had a chance to put his artistic talents to work when he, Benjamin Franklin,
and Thomas Jefferson were appointed on July 4, 1776, to design, in Adams’s words, “a
Great Seal for the confederated states.” Franklin had some experience in graphics; in 1754
he designed the famous “join or die” image of a snake cut into segments, representing
the need for the often fractious colonies to unite. The committee, so successful in
creating a Declaration of Independence, had less luck with visual imagery. Their design,
submitted in August, was tabled by Congress. It wasn’t until 1782 that a seal was devised
that Congress liked, based on a design by Charles Thomson, the congressional secretary.

Encore for the American Company

When the country’s first theater troupe returned to America with a newly shortened
name, they found a country that was only slowly getting over its anti–theatrical
prejudices. While the theater ban passed by Congress in 1774 lapsed with the adoption of
the Articles of Confederation in 1781, local bans sprang up, and the players were hardly
welcome everywhere they went. Still, in April 1787, in New York City, the American
Company staged The Contrast, a comedy of manners in which simple American
straightforwardness outwits continental duplicity. It was the first truly American play,
featuring truly American characters, by an American playwright, Royall Tyler. A month
later, they played Philadelphia during the Constitutional Convention—until the state
The legislature again banned theater there at the end of August. Apparently, the lawmakers were unimpressed that George Washington had attended three times.

The legislature finally lifted its ban on March 2, 1789, the day that the new Congress met in New York to count the votes that elected Washington president. That seemed to be the cue for other cities. Though the bans fell slowly, by 1794 even Boston gave in. Abigail Adams could finally see a play in her hometown.

Choosing the Eagle

On July 4, 1776, the Congress determined the new country needed an official seal and designated Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson to design one. The men had no knowledge of heraldry and sought the advice of artist Pierre Eugène du Simitière (who created the seals of Delaware and New Jersey). On August 13, they presented their proposal; Congress was unimpressed. The only portions it accepted were the eye of providence and the statement “E pluribus unum.”

The American bald eagle was not introduced as an important element in the design until 1782. Secretary Charles Thomson’s final design made the bird the emblem’s centerpiece.

Benjamin Franklin expressed his disapproval of the decision to adopt the eagle in a 1784 letter to his daughter, Sally: “For my own part I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen the Representative of our Country. He is a Bird of bad moral Character. He does not get his Living honestly. You may have seen him perched on some dead Tree near the River, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the Labour of the Fishing Hawk; and when that diligent Bird has at length taken a Fish, and is bearing it to his Nest for the Support of his Mate and young Ones, the Bald Eagle pursues him and takes it from him.”

Fortunately, perhaps, the centerpiece did not present a very good likeness of the bird: “I am on this account not displeased that the Figure is not known as a Bald Eagle, but looks more like a Turkey. For the Truth the Turkey is in Comparison a much more respectable Bird, and withal a true original Native of America. . . . He is besides, though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage, and would not hesitate to attack a Grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his Farm Yard with a red Coat on.” Franklin also made an interesting argument that the rattlesnake appropriately embodied the “temper and conduct of America.”
1776 Character Biographies

By Dan Rubin

Members of the Second Continental Congress

VIRGINIA (Founded by the London Company in 1607)

Thomas Jefferson (April 13, 1743–July 4, 1826; birthplace: Shadwell, VA)

Jefferson's involvement with revolutionary politics began when he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1769. Just 26 years old, he was not a vocal member, but rather he concentrated his efforts on committee work and writing. Before traveling to Philadelphia to join the Second Continental Congress in 1775, Jefferson codified his thoughts about self-governance and the rights of a people in an article called “A Summary View of the Rights of British America.” It was one of the most influential essays of the era. John Adams noted his colleague’s “reputation for literature, science, and a happy talent of composition.” In addition to these skills, Jefferson was a careful observer of weather. He would record the temperature twice a day, when he first woke in the morning and again at around 4 p.m.

At first, his congressional colleagues did not support the anti-British tone of the documents he drafted, but by summer 1776 the mood had shifted and he was selected to write the Declaration of Independence. In June 1779, he succeeded Patrick Henry as governor of Virginia, but two years later he concluded that the state needed a military leader at the helm. Jefferson retired to Monticello, but the death of his wife, Martha, in September 1782 threw him into a depression that, according to his eldest daughter, he might never have recovered from had he not reentered public service. He was appointed the country’s first secretary of state, under George Washington. He was sharply critical of the authoritarian form the executive branch was taking under the Federalist administration, putting him at odds with fellow cabinet members John Adams and Alexander Hamilton. He resigned in 1793 to form the Democrat-Republican Party. He lost his bid for president in 1796 to John Adams and served as his vice president.
Jefferson took over the presidency in 1801, serving two terms and playing a deciding role in the formation of the character of the American presidency. After retiring from office in 1808, Jefferson helped found the University of Virginia. Struggling with debt, he also started the Library of Congress when he sold the government his personal library.

Richard Henry Lee (January 20, 1732–June 19, 1794; birthplace: Westmoreland County, VA)

Born to a politically active aristocratic “first family” in Virginia, Richard Henry Lee attended private school in England, returning to Virginia in 1751 during the French and Indian War. In 1757, he was appointed his county’s justice of the peace, and he was soon elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. He was an early ally of Patrick Henry and was among those radical members of the Burgesses who met at the Raleigh tavern when the House was dissolved by the royal governor. In 1774, he was elected to attend the First Continental Congress, where he was praised for his oratory skills. He offered the resolution for independence in June 1776, and he served in Congress throughout the Revolutionary War. He was elected its president in 1783.

Massachusetts (Founded in 1620 by the Pilgrims)

John Adams (October 30, 1735–July 4, 1826; birthplace: Braintree, MA.)

Adams became a prominent public figure as a result of his activities opposing the Stamp Act, in response to which he wrote and published a popular article titled “Essay on the Canon and Feudal Law.” He married Abigail Smith on October 25, 1764, and moved to Boston. He achieved recognition as a lawyer by defending John Hancock, whom the British charged with smuggling. In 1770, interestingly, he represented the British soldiers charged with murder in the Boston Massacre. Despite incurring some public hostility for this, he was elected to the Massachusetts Assembly in 1770 and was picked to represent the colony at the First Continental Congress in 1774.

A very active member of Congress, Adams served on as many as 90 committees and chaired 25 during the Second Continental Congress. He was known as a master of compromise and debate—but also for his impatience. In 1775, he nominated Virginia delegate George Washington to be commander-in-chief of the colonial armies (to the chagrin of Hancock, who wanted the commission). He was a fierce advocate for the Declaration of Independence drafted by Thomas Jefferson. After it was adopted, Congress appointed him ambassador to France. In 1781, he participated with Benjamin Franklin in developing the Treaty of Peace with Great Britain, which ended the Revolutionary War in 1783.
Adams was elected vice president of the United States under George Washington in 1789 and became a leader in the Federalist Party; he was elected president in 1796. As a Federalist, he was at odds with Thomas Jefferson and the Republican Party. The struggle was over the nature of the executive office and the extents of federal power over state governments and individual citizens. The discord between Adams and Jefferson surfaced many times during their presidencies. Adams retired from politics at the end of his term in 1801. He died on July 4, 1826, incidentally within hours of the death of Thomas Jefferson.

---

**John Adams on Thomas Jefferson**

**In a Letter to Timothy Pickering, 1822**

You inquire why so young a man as Mr. Jefferson was placed at the head of the committee for preparing a Declaration of Independence? I answer: It was the Frankfort advice, to place Virginia at the head of everything. Mr. Richard Henry Lee might be gone to Virginia, to his sick family, for aught I know, but that was not the reason of Mr. Jefferson's appointment. There were three committees appointed at the same time, one for the Declaration of Independence, another for preparing articles of confederation, and another for preparing a treaty to be proposed to France. Mr. Lee was chosen for the Committee of Confederation, and it was not thought convenient that the same person should be upon both. Mr. Jefferson came into Congress in June 1775 and brought with him a reputation for literature, science, and happy talent of composition. Writings of his were handed about, remarkable for the peculiar felicity of expression. Though a silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, frank, explicit, and decisive upon committees and in conversation—not even Samuel Adams was more so—that he soon seized upon my heart; and upon this occasion I gave him my vote, and did all in my power to procure the votes of others. I think he had one more vote than any other, and that placed him at the head of the committee. I had the next highest number, and that placed me the second. The committee met, discussed the subject, and then appointed Mr. Jefferson and me to make the draft, I suppose because we were the two first on the list.

The subcommittee met. Jefferson proposed to me to make the draft. I said, “I will not,” “You should do it.” “Oh! no.” “Why will you not? You ought to do it.” “I will not.” “Why?” “Reasons enough.” “What can be your reasons?” “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.” “Well,” said Jefferson, “if you are decided, I will do as well as I can.” “Very well. When you have drawn it up, we will have a meeting.”
John Hancock (January 12, 1737–October 8, 1793; birthplace: Braintree, MA)

John Hancock was orphaned as a child and adopted by a wealthy childless uncle. When this uncle died in 1763, Hancock inherited his merchant/shipping firm—and what was said to be the greatest body of wealth in New England. He aligned himself with other merchants in protesting the Stamp Act in 1765. In 1766, he was elected to the Boston Assembly, but he did not consider himself part of the revolution until British customs officials charged him with smuggling and seized his sloop Liberty in 1768. The ensuing riots forced the officials to flee for their lives. John Adams led Hancock's legal defense, and Hancock became a hero of the patriotic movement.

In 1774, Hancock was elected president of the First Provincial Congress of Massachusetts, which made him a target when the British decided to march on Lexington and Concord to seize ammunition caches in April 1775. Around this time, Hancock was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he assumed the position of president in 1776 and oversaw the signing of the Declaration of Independence; as president, his was the first signature. In fact, only he and Charles Thomson, the secretary of Congress, signed the broadside copy of the Declaration printed the night of its adoption and disseminated to the public the following day. Legend has it that he signed his name large so that “King George could read it without his glasses”—but it is only a legend.

New Hampshire (Founded by Captain John Mason in 1623)

Dr. Josiah Bartlett (November 21, 1729–May 19, 1795; birthplace: Amesbury, MA)

Josiah Bartlett was a well-reputed physician in Kingston, New Hampshire, when he became involved in politics. Elected to the Colonial Legislature in 1665, he refused to bow to pressure from the royal governor, and he was an active advocate against British oppression. He was elected to represent New Hampshire in the First Continental Congress in 1774, but he stayed home after arsonists (possibly Royalists) burned his house down. He started attending Congress once his house was rebuilt. In 1776, he voted for separation from Great Britain and was the second signatory of the Declaration of Independence. He was reelected to Congress in 1777, but he was too exhausted to attend; after 1779 he refused reelection because of fatigue. He did, however, lend his medical expertise to the New Hampshire Militia and Continental troops and participated in the ratification of the Articles of Confederation.
MARYLAND (Founded by Lord Baltimore in 1634)

Samuel Chase (April 17, 1741–June 19, 1811; birthplace: Princess Anne, MD)

Early in his career as a lawyer in Annapolis, Maryland, Samuel Chase became involved with the Sons of Liberty, protesting (sometimes violently) against the Stamp Act. In 1774, he took part in his colony’s Committee of Correspondence and was elected to serve as a delegate in the Continental Congress. He advocated for the embargo on trade with Great Britain, promoted the confederation of the colonies, and journeyed to Montreal to try to negotiate a union with Canada in 1776. When he returned to Congress from that failed venture in June 1776, he discovered that his colony did not yet support Lee’s resolution on independence, so during the resolution’s postponement he rushed home and spent two weeks campaigning for the cause. On July 1, Maryland voted for separation from Britain.

CONNECTICUT (Founded in 1635 by Massachusetts colonists)

Roger Sherman (April 19, 1721–July 23, 1793; birthplace: Newton, MA)

As he says in 1776, Roger Sherman was indeed a cobbler early in life before becoming a lawyer, judge, and politician. Although opposed to extremism, Sherman joined the fight against Britain, supporting nonimportation measures and leading the New Haven Committee of Correspondence. After an early career in provincial politics, he was elected to represent Connecticut at the First Continental Congress in 1774. He was known for his pragmatism and principles, serving on numerous committees, including the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. He remained in Congress through the Revolutionary War. In 1787, despite being on the edge of insolvency because of wartime losses, he attended the Constitutional Convention, where according to James Madison’s notes, he gave 138 speeches. Representing Connecticut, the 61 year old defended the rights of smaller states and was a strong advocate for the Connecticut Compromise, which broke the deadlock between the large and small states over representation. Sherman is one of just two men who signed the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution.
RHODE ISLAND (Founded by Roger Williams in 1636)

Stephen Hopkins (March 7, 1707–July 13, 1785; birthplace: Providence, RI)

Stephen Hopkins earned his living as a farmer and surveyor in Scituate, Rhode Island, before entering local politics in 1731. In 1742, he moved to Providence, built up a mercantile-shipping firm with his brother, and broadened his political activities, including ten years as governor. In 1762, he wrote the widely circulated article “The Rights of the Colonies Examined,” which criticized taxation of Americans by the British Parliament and recommended colonial home rule.

Hopkins attended the First Continental Congress in 1774, the same year he authored a bill prohibiting the importation of slaves into Rhode Island—one of the earliest anti-slavery laws in the country. He was the second-oldest signatory of the Declaration of Independence, reputed to have said of his tremulous signature, “My hand trembles, but my heart does not!”

Although his nickname in 1776 is “Old Grape and Guts,” Hopkins was praised by the real John Adams in his autobiography for the wise judgment he displayed while serving on the Naval Committee from 1774 to 1778. Of this Adams wrote: “His Custom was to drink nothing all day nor till Eight O Clock, in the Evening, and then his Beveredge was Jamaica Spirit and Water. It gave him Wit, Humour, Anecdotes, Science and Learning. . . . Hopkins never drank to excess, but all he drank was immediately not only converted into Wit, Sense, Knowledge and good humour, but inspired Us all with similar qualities.”

DELaware (Founded by the New Sweden Company in 1638)

Col. Thomas McKean (March 19, 1734–June 24, 1817; birthplace: New London, PA)

Thomas McKean, whose parents were Ulster-Scots, devoted his life to political engagement, holding numerous offices across three colonies during his long career. Beginning in 1774, he attended the Continental Congress, where he served on the national council throughout the Revolutionary War. When the Second Continental Congress voted on independence in 1776, McKean was responsible for breaking the Delaware tie. On July 1, when the first vote took place, McKean and Delaware delegate George Read were deadlocked. McKean sent an urgent dispatch to fellow delegate Caesar Rodney, who was away on military matters. Rodney rushed to Philadelphia to cast his vote for independence.
George Read (September 18, 1733–September 21, 1798; birthplace: North East, MD)

George Read established a successful law practice in New Castle, Delaware, and in 1763 he was appointed the Crown’s attorney general for the Three Lower Counties (present-day Delaware). Despite his employment by the British government, Read supported nonimportation measures and peaceful protests, and in 1764 he joined the Delaware Committee of Correspondence. He resigned as attorney general when he was elected to the First Continental Congress in 1774. Like his friend John Dickinson, Read was interested in protecting colonial rights but was wary of extremism and believed reconciliation with England was desirable and possible. He voted against Richard Henry Lee’s resolution for independence on July 2, 1776—making him the only signer of the Declaration of Independence to do so.

Caesar Rodney (October 7, 1728–June 29, 1784; birthplace: Dover, DE)

Caesar Rodney was a leading patriot in his colony, a member of the Stamp Act Congress, a formative member of the Delaware Committee of Correspondence, a leader in the colonial militia, and a delegate to the Continental Congress from its formation until 1777. After 1771 he was bothered by a cancerous growth on his face, which he covered with a green silk veil, but that is not why he was absent for the initial vote on independence, as 1776 suggests. In June 1776, as brigadier general of his colony’s militia, Rodney was investigating Loyalist agitations in Sussex County, Delaware. Upon receiving a letter from Thomas McKean on July 1 informing him that George Read had voted against independence, Rodney rode 80 miles through a thunderstorm to Philadelphia to ensure his colony’s support of independence. He did not seek medical help for his cancer until 1781; he died three years later.
NORTH CAROLINA (Founded as Carolina by Virginian colonists in 1653; separated from South Carolina in 1729)

Joseph Hewes (January 23, 1730–November 10, 1779; birthplace: Princeton, NJ)

Joseph Hewes amassed a fortune with his shipping business in the thriving seaport of Edenton, North Carolina. He was elected to the Provincial Assembly in 1766 and served there until it was dissolved by the royal governor in 1775, at which time Hewes joined the Second Continental Congress. In Congress he was known as a tireless worker in committee and the leading expert on maritime concerns. Hewes vigorously supported nonimportation measures despite the personal financial loss they meant for him, yet he was initially opposed to separation from Great Britain. Despite instructions from the colonial Assembly to vote for independence should it be proposed, Hewes opposed Richard Henry Lee's June 7 independence resolution. Only during the ensuing debate did he finally come around: John Adams reported, “He started suddenly upright and lifting up both his hands to Heaven, as if he had been in a trance, cried out, ‘It is done! And I will abide by it.’”

SOUTH CAROLINA (Founded as Carolina by Virginian colonists in 1653; separated from North Carolina in 1729)


In 1773, lawyer Edward Rutledge won acclaim in Charleston, South Carolina, by obtaining the release of newspaper publisher Thomas Powell, who had been imprisoned by the Crown for printing an article critical of the Loyalist colonial government. The following year, Rutledge was elected to the First Continental Congress. During the Second Continental Congress, he led the moderates in delaying Richard Henry Lee's proposal on national independence, even though he believed separation was inevitable. He wanted to delay, however, until the colonies established a strong confederation and nurtured foreign allegiances. He remained stubborn on July 1, when the first congressional vote on independence was taken, but realizing the resolution would be carried with or without his colony’s support, he convinced his fellow delegates to reverse their position for the sake of unanimity.
NEW YORK (Founded by the Dutch as New Netherland in 1624; became a British colony in 1664)

Lewis Morris (April 8, 1726–January 22, 1798; birthplace: Morrisania [Bronx County], NY)

A farmer in the pro-Loyalist county of Lower Westchester, New York, Lewis Morris was appointed a judge of the Court of Admiralty in 1760 by the Crown, but he became increasingly critical of Britain. He was appointed to the Second Continental Congress, where he served on committees for the defense of New York, for provisioning colonial forces, and for Indian Affairs. These tasks carried him throughout New England during the first few years of the war. He also served as a brigadier general in the New York Militia, which meant he was often absent from Congress during most of 1776, including the July debates about the Declaration of Independence. The colony of New York was divided on the issue of independence, in part because the British military had a strong presence there and the officers had strong connections with prominent families. The colony’s delegates were therefore not authorized to vote for or against independence. Morris, however, traveled to Philadelphia to sign the Declaration. It is said that when his brother warned him against making the trip, he responded, “Damn the consequences, give me the pen!” His estate was one of the earliest destroyed in the Revolutionary War.

Robert Livingston (November 27, 1746–February 26, 1813; birthplace: New York City, NY)

Robert Livingston, a prominent New York lawyer, became politically active during the Stamp Act revolts. He served in the Second Continental Congress alongside his brother Philip Livingston (also a New York delegate), and in 1776 he was on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. Uncertainty surrounds why he was selected for this duty. His descendant Edwin Manor Livingston wrote in his 1910 history of the family: “Probably, it was thought advisable by the irreconcilables in the Continental Congress to have a delegate from the important, but doubtful, Colony of New York, on this Committee—and that Robert R. Livingston the youngest delegate should be chosen, was, probably, not only owing to his having been the spokesman for his colony, but also in the desire to have the powerful Livingston family committed to this irrevocable step.” Livingston was called home to his duties at the Provincial Assembly before he could sign the Declaration; Philip, however, did sign it.
NEW JERSEY (Founded by Lord Berkeley of Stratton and Sir George Carteret in 1664)

Rev. John Witherspoon (February 5, 1723–November 15, 1794; birthplace: Gifford, Scotland)

When the board of the College of New Jersey (Princeton University) decided it needed a first-rate scholar to serve as its first president in 1768, they convinced John Witherspoon to move to New Jersey from Scotland; under his leadership, the institution flourished. Witherspoon accepted appointments to the committees of Correspondence and Safety in early 1776, and he was elected to the Second Continental Congress in time to vote in favor of Richard Henry Lee's resolution for independence. In response to a member who argued that the country was not yet ripe for such a declaration, Witherspoon famously objected that the country “was not only ripe for the measure, but in danger of rotting for the want of it.” In 1776, the line is delivered by John Adams.

PENNSYLVANIA (Founded by William Penn in 1682)

John Dickinson (November 13, 1732–February 14, 1808; birthplace: Talbot County, MD)

John Dickinson, “Penman of the Revolution,” was opposed to independence throughout his impressive political career. He was born to a prosperous farming family in Maryland and he studied law at the prestigious Middle Temple of London. When he returned to the colonies, he became the leading conservative voice. His defense of Pennsylvania’s proprietary governor against the faction led by Benjamin Franklin hurt his popularity but earned him respect for his integrity. Nevertheless, he lost his legislative seat in 1764.

As the struggle between the colonies and Britain intensified, Dickinson emerged at the forefront of revolutionary thinkers. He played a key role in the debates over the Stamp Act (1765). He wrote essays urging Americans to seek the repeal of the act by pressuring British merchants. Accordingly, the Pennsylvania legislature appointed him a delegate to the Stamp Act Congress, whose resolutions he drafted. In 1767–68 Dickinson wrote a series of articles that came to be known collectively as Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania. They attacked British taxation policy and urged resistance to unjust laws, but also emphasized the possibility of a peaceful resolution. (These essays were published in London in 1768 by Franklin.) Responding to the
Townshend Duties, Dickinson championed rigorous colonial resistance in the form of nonimportation and nonexportation agreements.

In 1771, Dickinson returned to the Pennsylvania legislature and drafted a petition to the king that was unanimously approved. Because of his continued opposition to the use of force, however, he again lost much of his popularity by 1774. He particularly resented the tactics of New England leaders. He chaired the Philadelphia Committee of Correspondence and briefly sat on the First Continental Congress, and throughout 1775 he continued to work for peace. In the Second Continental Congress, his opposition to separation from Great Britain left him in the minority. He voted against the Declaration of Independence and refused to sign it. Nevertheless, he entered the military during the Revolutionary War.

Benjamin Franklin (January 17, 1706–April 17, 1790; birthplace: Boston, MA)

Benjamin Franklin was an important player in the printing industry, most famous during his lifetime for his annual Poor Richard’s Almanac (1733–58), which enjoyed a popularity second only to the Bible. He also found time to pursue interests in science and politics. He lived in England from 1757 to 1762 and again from 1764 to 1775, becoming a celebrated spokesman in London for American rights. He argued against unfair taxation while assuring the British ministry and public of colonial loyalty, always working toward reconciliation. For this reason, in the colonies he was often accused of being too much an Englishman, while in Britain he was accused of being too much an American.

Franklin’s opinions about peacefully resolving the problems between Britain and the colonies changed with the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord. He returned to Philadelphia on May 5, 1775, and was elected to the Continental Congress the next day. He was appointed (with John Dickinson) in November 1775 to a committee to carry on a secret correspondence with the friends of America “in Great Britain, Ireland, and other parts of the world.” In April 1776 he went to Montreal with Samuel Chase to gain the cooperation of Canada. Immediately after his return from Montreal, he served as a member of the Committee of Five appointed to draw up the Declaration of Independence, but he took little part in drafting the document. As 1776 suggests, Franklin did suffer from gout. In a humorous dialogue with his gout written in 1780, he asks his tormentor, “What have I done to merit these cruel sufferings?” “Many things,” his gout replies. “You have ate and drank too freely, and too much indulged those legs of yours in their indolence.”
James Wilson (September 14, 1742–August 28, 1798; birthplace: Carskerdo, Scotland)

James Wilson emigrated to the American colonies from Scotland during the Stamp Act conflict. He studied law under John Dickinson before moving to the Scotch-Irish settlement of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he specialized in land law and often borrowed unwisely. In 1774, Wilson was elected a member of the local Committee of Correspondence and wrote a pamphlet titled *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*, in which he argued that Parliament had no authority to pass laws for the colonies—but did not go so far as to deny colonial allegiance to the Crown. In 1775, Wilson was elected to the Continental Congress, where he passionately called for separation from Britain. Pennsylvania, however, was divided on the issue, and Wilson refused to vote against the will of his constituents. He joined the moderates in delaying the 1776 vote on independence for three weeks so he could consult with people back home. When it came time to vote in July, he was able to affirm Pennsylvania's wish for independence.

GEORGIA (Founded by James Oglethorpe in 1732)

Dr. Lyman Hall (April 12, 1724–October 19, 1790; birthplace: Willingford [New Haven County], CT)

New England doctor Lyman Hall established a medical practice in a settlement of New England Puritans in Dorchester, South Carolina, just outside of Charleston; he then joined other residents in relocating to St. John's Parish along the Georgia coast. The allegiance of the residents of St. John's Parish to New England set them apart from the rest of the colony when trouble with Great Britain erupted in the 1760s. Georgia was the youngest and poorest colony, the most remote, and the most sparsely settled; it felt little impact from the parliamentary policies that rankled others in the North. Hall and his band of revolutionaries were unpopular with the ruling Georgia aristocracy, which at first refused to send delegates to the Continental Congress but finally agreed after St. John's Parish decided independently to send Hall to Philadelphia.
Other Characters in 1776

Abigail Adams (née Smith) (November 11, 1744–October 28, 1818; birthplace: Weymouth, MA)

Abigail Adams learned to read and write at home in the extensive libraries of her father and maternal grandfather; she took a special interest in philosophy, theology, Shakespeare, the classics, ancient history, government, and law. She became a mother at the age of 20 and shared the management of household finances and farming with her husband, John, while he practiced law in Boston. When John left for Congress in 1774, Abigail remained at home, prompting a lifelong correspondence that now serves as a rich archive of the Revolutionary and Federal eras. In 1775, Abigail was appointed by the Massachusetts Colony General Court to question Massachusetts women who were charged with remaining loyal to the British and working against the independence movement. As the Second Continental Congress debated the Declaration of Independence, she pressed her husband to use the creation of a new government as an opportunity to make the legal status of women equal to that of men. She also championed the emancipation of slaves.

From 1797 to 1801, Abigail served as First Lady. After the capital moved from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., she became the first First Lady to live in the White House. A tireless supporter of her husband’s administration who made no attempt to hide her contempt for the anti-Federalists loyal to Thomas Jefferson, she became a popular target of ridicule. By the time Adams lost his bid for a second term, Abigail was ready to leave politics, writing that she was “sick, sick, sick of public life.”

Martha Jefferson (née Wayles) (October 19, 1748–September 6, 1782; birthplace: Charles City County, VA)

Martha Jefferson was a talented musician, skilled on the harpsichord and pianoforte; she often played duets with her husband, Thomas, who played the violin. Music is said to have been an important part of their courtship. During their ten years of marriage, she bore six children; only two daughters, Martha and Mary, survived to adulthood. Martha herself lived only four months after the birth of her last child. Thomas was inconsolable after her death, writing, “A single event wiped away all my plans and left me a blank which I had not the
spirits to fill up.” In contrast to the prolific writings of Abigail Adams, there are only four surviving documents written by Martha Wayles Jefferson. One, written just before her death in September 1782, offers lines copied from Laurence Sterne’s *Tristam Shandy*:

“Time wastes too fast: every letter / I trace tells me with what rapidity / life follows my pen. The days and hours / of it are flying over our heads like / clouds of windy day never to return— / more. Every thing presses on—” This incomplete quotation was later completed by Thomas: “—and every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make!”

Charles Thomson (November 29, 1729–August 16, 1824; birthplace: County Londonderry, Ireland)

John Jay, the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, wrote in a letter to Charles Thomson: “I consider that no Person in the World is so perfectly acquainted with the Rise, Conduct, and Conclusion of the American Revolution, as yourself.” Thomson became involved in Philadelphia politics in the early 1750s, aligning himself with John Dickinson during the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 and working diligently to keep British goods out of Philadelphia. He was Pennsylvania’s most powerful protest organizer. John Adams called him the “Samuel Adams of Philadelphia.” Thomson was made secretary of the Continental Congress at its first meeting in 1774, and he served in that role through the first and second Continental Congresses and onto the Confederation Congress. In 1782, he was responsible for the final design of our country’s Great Seal. He retired from public life in 1789, occupying himself by using the notes he took as secretary as the basis of a history of the revolution. He destroyed the manuscript before his death, fearing his depiction of the unpatriotic conduct of some colonists would give pain to their descendants.

Andrew McNair (?–1777)

Andrew McNair was the official bell ringer of Philadelphia’s Liberty Bell for 18 years—from October 16, 1758, until his death in February 1777. He was also the doorkeeper for the Pennsylvania Assembly, a position requiring annual election and appointment by the Assembly. He began serving the First Continental Congress in a similar capacity when he was appointed on September 22, 1775, and he continued on with the Second Continental Congress. His responsibilities also included making fires, lighting and extinguishing candles, and keeping the meeting room of Pennsylvania State House, where Congress met, clean.
Images


A 1776 Glossary

Bunch o’ Grapes
Posibly a nod to the Bunch o’ Grapes tavern in Boston, which was the political headquarters for revolutionaries like Paul Revere; after the March 1776 Siege of Boston, George Washington sought entertainment there.

Common Sense
British-born American author and political theorist Thomas Paine (1737–1809) published his highly influential pamphlet *Common Sense* anonymously in early 1776. It was the first widely read publication to argue openly for independence from Great Britain, and its criticism of the monarchy (written in accessible language) brought it swift popularity among colonists. Beginning in December 1776, Paine’s collection of articles titled *The American Crisis* continued to fan the colonial flames of revolution throughout the war. Washington ordered the first of the essays read to his troops at Valley Forge.

Concord and Lexington
The April 19, 1775, battles of Concord and Lexington are considered the first of the American Revolution. The conflict began when Royal Governor of Massachusetts General Thomas Gage, acting under orders from London to suppress the rebellious colonists, attempted to seize colonial military stores in Concord. The colonists were forewarned by Paul Revere’s famous ride, and although outnumbered 700 to 77, they confronted the British troops at Lexington. It is still unknown who fired the first shot, but the British prevailed and continued on to Concord. There, an estimated 320 colonial militiamen met the soldiers at the North Bridge and forced them to retreat. As the British fled back to Boston, colonists followed them, firing from concealed locations. This success encouraged 16,000 colonists to take up arms for the revolutionary cause.

Dickinson’s England
In 1776, John Dickinson objects to John Adams’s bleak depiction of England and argues that Englishmen have much to be proud of: victory at Hastings, the definitive 1066 battle of the Norman Conquest; the Magna Carta (1297), one of the most important legal documents in the history of democracy; Strongbow, born Gilbert de Clare, 1st Earl of Pembroke (1100–48), known for his longbow skills and his
role in the Norman invasion of Ireland; the iconic King Richard the Lionheart (1157–99), who ruled England from 1189 until his death and was a key figure in the Third Crusade; Sir Francis Drake (1540–96), who completed the second circumnavigation of the globe in 1580 and was instrumental to the 1588 English defeat of the Spanish Armada; John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722), one of England’s greatest military leaders in conflicts with France’s King Louis XIV; the House of Tudor, the royal dynasty that lasted from the mid 1400s until 1603; the House of Stuart, which became the royal house of Scotland in 1371 and held the English crown from 1603 to 1714 (although not continuously); and the House of Plantagenet, the dynasty that ruled England from 1154 to 1485 and provided 14 kings, starting with Henry II and ending with Richard III.

Taxation without Representation in Four Acts

Sugar Acts
In 1733, the British Parliament passed the largely ineffective Molasses Act, aimed at reducing sugar and molasses smuggling. At the close of the French and Indian War, a stricter version was passed: the 1764 Sugar Act imposed duties on sugar and molasses from non-British ports, close customs regulation, and harsh punishments for disobedience.

Stamp Act
The 1765 Stamp Act taxed legal papers, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, cards, almanacs, and dice in the colonies. It was the first attempt by Great Britain to raise income directly through taxation. Outraged colonists formed the Stamp Act Congress in New York to petition the king and Parliament; in Boston, violent protests broke out.

Townshend Acts
Nicknamed for their sponsor, Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, the four Townshend Acts were passed in 1767. They were disciplinary in purpose, designed to halt the colonial revolt against mounting taxes. The Acts suspended the New York Assembly until it agreed to finance the British troops stationed in that colony; they placed new duties on tea, paint, paper, glass, and lead; and they strengthened customs regulation. Colonists responded with deliberate disobedience, riots, nonimportation agreements, and attacks on British enforcers.

Tea Act
The 1773 Tea Act was the tipping point in Massachusetts. Unlike its predecessors, the act did not impose taxes; rather, it aimed to prop up the struggling East India Company by sending 17 million pounds of unsold tea to the colonies at a heavy discount. The cheap British tea would undercut colonial smugglers, who evaded the Townshend duties by importing from the Netherlands. On December 16, 1773, colonial resistance culminated in the Boston Tea Party, during which revolutionaries dumped chests of tea into Boston Harbor.
Edmund Burke

Irish statesman Edmund Burke (1729–97) is considered the founder of conservatism. Burke entered the House of Commons of the British Parliament in 1765, where he argued in favor of American secession. In 1776, Georgia delegate Lyman Hall quotes from Burke’s November 3, 1774, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol,” in which Burke said:

Certainly, gentlemen, it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinion, high respect; their business, unremitted attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasures, his satisfactions, to theirs; and above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own. But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure; no, nor from the law and the constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

George Washington

Born in 1732 into a Virginia family of farmers, George Washington pursued the intertwined interests of military arts and western expansion. Commissioned by the Crown as a lieutenant colonel in 1754, he fought the first skirmishes of what grew into the French and Indian War. Like his fellow farmers, Washington felt exploited by the British and, keen on pushing into the Ohio River Valley, hampered by British regulation. When the Second Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia in May 1775, Washington, one of the Virginia delegates, was elected commander in chief of the Continental Army (having been nominated by John Adams). On July 3, 1775, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he took command of his ill-trained troops and embarked upon a war that was to last six grueling years.

Gout

An affliction caused by a buildup of uric acid, gout happens more frequently in those who eat an excess of certain meats, frequently drink alcohol and sweet drinks, have high blood pressure, are obese, and live a mostly sedentary life. Basically, it is a disease associated with hedonism. Typically gout strikes a joint in the big toe or thumb, but it might move around the body and cause headaches or heart palpitations. Although it causes agonizing pain, in the eighteenth century it was also seen to indicate a certain degree of civilization, luxury, ease—even literariness.
Haslet’s Delaware Militia and Smallwood’s Marylanders

John Haslet (1727–77) was the commander of Delaware’s only regiment during the Revolutionary War—known as “the fighting Delawares” for their superior organization and equipment. The first Maryland regiment was known as “Smallwood’s regiment” because of its colonel, William Smallwood. During the Battle of Long Island, Smallwood’s regiment formed a rear guard, securing the Continental Army’s safe retreat.

Hessian Mercenaries

Nearly 30,000 soldiers were rented from the German government to fight for the British during the American Revolution. These men, many from the region of Hesse-Cassel, had no stake in the war, which made them the frequent butt of American propaganda.

Highland Regiment

The British army included several Scottish Highland regiments in its forces—including the famous Black Watch.

Hosanna

Hosanna is a Judeo-Christian exclamation signifying praise to God or an appeal for deliverance.

House of Burgesses

The first American assembly of elected representatives, Virginia’s House of Burgesses was founded in 1619. It was modeled on Britain’s Parliament. Many American Founding Fathers—including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and Richard Henry Lee—served there.

The Howe Brothers

General Sir William Howe (1729–1814) was the commander in chief of the British army in North America from 1776 to 1778. His elder brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe (1726–99), was an admiral in the British navy. The brothers were both known to be sympathetic to the colonies, which may be why they were commissioned to suppress them. General Howe led the British army to victory in the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775. In July 1776, he and 30,000 men landed on Staten Island in an ultimately unsuccessful invasion of New York. General Howe’s command was, on the whole, a success, but he felt that he had not been adequately supported by his government and that his British countrymen disapproved of his inability to quickly and decisively defeat the Americans. He resigned in 1778. After Admiral Howe’s attempts at promoting reconciliation between Britain and the colonies proved unsuccessful, he also resigned in 1778.

“I Have Crossed the Rubicon”

This expression refers to Julius Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon River in northeastern Italy at the beginning of the Great Roman Civil War in 49 BCE; it has become analogous to “passing the point of no return.”
The Lees of Old Virginia
The colonial line of the Lee family tree began with Richard Lee I (1616–64), who settled in Virginia around 1640 and became a prominent tobacco farmer. In his 1776 song “The Lees of Old Virginia,” Richard Henry Lee refers to a number of relatives: Arthur Lee (1740–92) was his youngest brother and an American diplomat and spy based in London during the Revolutionary War. General Harry “Lighthorse” Lee refers to Henry Lee III (1756–1818), a Revolutionary War hero who served as governor of Virginia; he was the son of Richard Henry Lee’s second cousin. Reverend Jesse Lee (1758–1816) was an American Methodist clergyman who eventually served as the chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. William Lee (1739–95) was the brother of Richard and Arthur; like Arthur, he spent much of his career in London as a diplomat and spy. “Bobby” Lee might be an anachronistic (or prophetic) reference to the yet unborn Civil War Confederate General Robert E. Lee (1807–70), Lighthorse Lee’s son.

Matthew 16:23
From the King James Bible: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Melchior Meng
Congressional records note several payments made to Melchior Meng (1726–1816), a Pennsylvanian horticulturalist, for the use of his wagon and horses.

Necessity of Taking Up Arms (1775)
Written by Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson in response to the battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the Declaration on the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms maintained that the colonies respected the king’s authority (believing that his counselors had misled him) and hoped for reconciliation—but also approved the use of force to protect the rights of the colonies. The pamphlet famously claims that colonists would prefer “to die Freemen rather than to live as slaves.”

Philadelphia
Philadelphia was selected as the meeting place for the First Continental Congress in 1774 because it was centrally located and easily accessible to all the colonies. Additionally, it had a population of around 40,000, making it the second largest city in the British Empire at the time.

Ribbon Clerk
Once a reference to a shop assistant or person who sells ribbons or trinkets, this term came to mean an amateurish or unadventurous person.

The Royal Governor of New Jersey
William Franklin (1731–1813) was the illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin. As the royally appointed governor of New Jersey, his loyalty to Great Britain strained his relationship with his father, who left his son nearly none of his wealth in his will, claiming that, had William’s Britain won the war, he would not have had any wealth to leave.
Saltpeter
Saltpeter is created by treating sodium nitrate with potassium chloride and is used as an oxidizer in explosives. It was used in gunpowder and can be produced using manure, urine, wood ash, green plant matter, and thistles.

Triajuncta in Uno
This Latin phrase means “three united in one.”

The Triangle Trade
The westernmost tip of this three-pointed shipping route was the African Gold Coast (in 1776’s “Molasses to Rum,” Edward Rutledge specifically mentions the regions of Angola, Guinea, Ashanti, and Ibo), where New England traders would send rum as payment for slaves. The slaves were then shipped along the hellish Middle Passage to the West Indies, where they were traded for molasses and sugar, which, sent back to New England, were processed into rum. Massachusetts and Rhode Island reputedly produced the best rum.

Truro Synagogue
Truro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, dedicated in 1763, is the oldest synagogue building in the United States. The congregation was founded in 1658 by the descendants of Jewish families who fled the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. In his famous 1790 letter to the “Hebrew congregation at Newport,” President Washington pledged that our new nation would give “to bigotry no sanction and to persecution no assistance.”

Declaration of Independence Timeline
June 7, 1776 Congress receives Richard Henry Lee’s formal resolution for independence. The moderate delegates, fearing the colonies are ill prepared for independence and war, postpone the decision until July.
June 11 Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston are appointed to draft a declaration of independence.
June 12–27 Jefferson, at the request of the committee, drafts a declaration, which is reviewed by the committee.
June 12 Congress appoints another committee to prepare a draft of the Articles of Confederation.
June 28 A draft of the Declaration of Independence is read in Congress.
July 1–4 Congress debates and revises the Declaration of Independence.
July 2 Congress declares American independence as the British fleet and army arrive at New York.
July 4 Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence. John Dunlap prints it and it is sent out the next day.
July 6 The Declaration is printed in the Pennsylvania Evening Post.
July 8 The first public reading of the Declaration is held in Philadelphia.
July 9 Washington orders that the Declaration be read to the Continental Army in New York.
July 19 Congress orders the Declaration of Independence engrossed (officially inscribed) and signed by members.
August 2 Delegates begin to sign the engrossed copy of the Declaration of Independence.
Questions to Consider

1. How is 1776 a musical? How is it a play? How is it a “musical play”?
2. How does the music in 1776 aid in the storytelling?
3. With regards to their attire, which delegates allow themselves to get comfortable in the overheated congressional hall? Which delegates let propriety win out over comfort?
4. In 1776, what are the major arguments for and against independence?
5. What does historical fiction owe history?

For Further Information . . .

National Archives. Correspondence and Other Writings of Six Major Shapers of the United States. founders.archives.gov.