



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are America's three most important documents. Together they are called the *Charters of Freedom*. Of the three, the Declaration of Independence was the first.

Thomas Jefferson, America's third president, prepared the text. He collaborated on the draft with John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingstone and Roger Sherman. Jefferson based the Declaration on a list of grievances against the British crown prepared a little earlier by the First Continental Congress.

Jefferson presented the draft for discussion at the Second Continental Congress held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On July 2, 1776 the final version was agreed upon and signed. John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, signed first and "with great flourish" so "King George can read that without spectacles." Two days later on July 4 the Congress officially approved the Declaration of Independence and announced that America was breaking ties with England and forming a new nation, the United States of America.

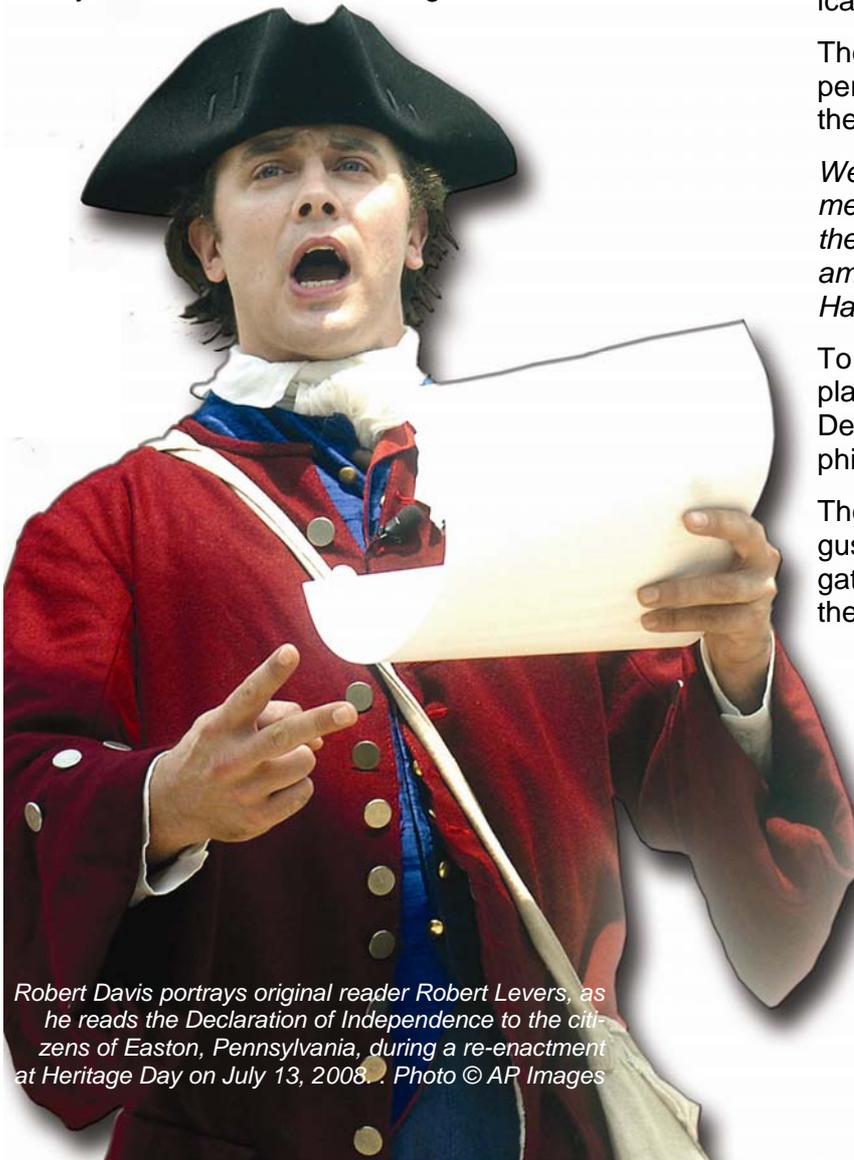
The following quotation from the Declaration is perhaps the best-known and still today expresses the essence of human rights:

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.

To the ringing of bells, ships firing guns, bands playing music and applause from the crowds, the Declaration was read to the public in Philadelphia's Independence Square.

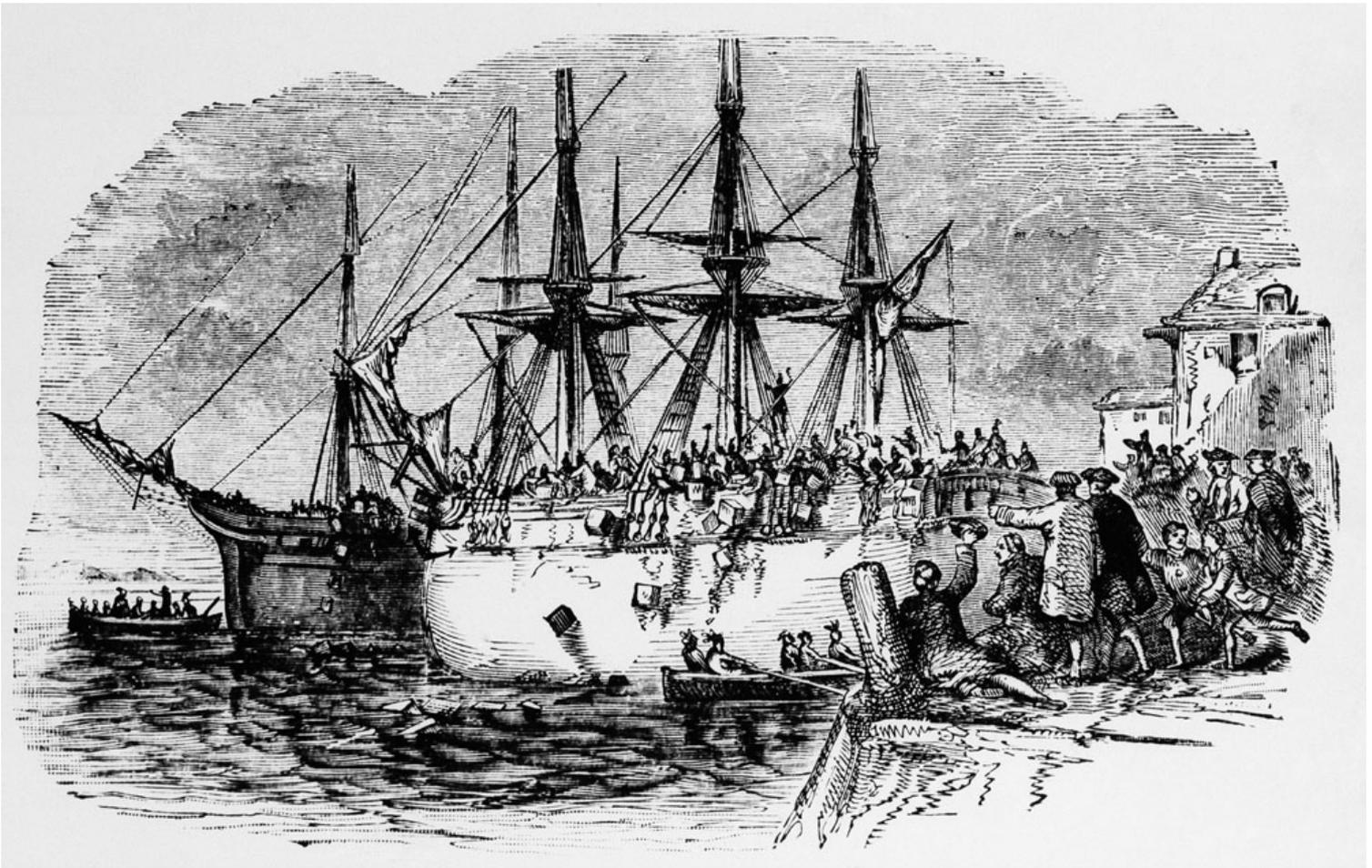
The signing of the Declaration went on until August as John Hancock demanded that all delegates to the Second Continental Congress put their signatures below it.

The Declaration of Independence is a large parchment document measuring 29¾ inches by 24½ inches. Many people are intrigued by what is written on the back. The line on the back reads: "Original Declaration of Independence dated 4th July 1776" This same writing appears on the bottom of the document, upside down. The explanation of this intriguing fact is quite simple. Early in its life the document was rolled up for storage. The notation may then have been added as a label. The one at the bottom is actually ink from the top of the front side that has seeped through the parchment to the back of the document.



Robert Davis portrays original reader Robert Levers, as he reads the Declaration of Independence to the citizens of Easton, Pennsylvania, during a re-enactment at Heritage Day on July 13, 2008. . Photo © AP Images

INDEPENDENCE DID NOT COME EASY



The Boston Tea Party of 1773, as depicted in an old engraving. Bostonians dressed as Indians dumped 342 chests of tea overboard from three British ships in protest against "taxation without representation." The famous tea party took place at Griffin's Wharf, where the ships were tied up. The site remained a landmark even after the waterfront was filled in, leaving the spot several hundred yards inland. Recently there were rumors that the site was "lost". It was re-discovered in the center of rubble of buildings being torn down to make way for an elevated highway. A temporary sign marks the spot. Photo © AP Images

Short-Sighted Policy

Secession of the thirteen American colonies from their mother country, Britain, was not a sudden, spontaneous act. It had its origins in the tough policies that Britain imposed on the colonies. Colonists had to pay taxes to the crown even though they were not represented in the British Parliament. A slogan coined at the time called this policy "taxation without representation". Displeasure with the way that Britain governed her overseas colonies led to the foundation of a secret group called the "Sons of Liberty". Britain under King George III reacted by sending more troops to enforce British rule.

Flames That Sparked the Fire

Confrontation was an easily foreseeable result. It happened in Boston, Massachusetts, in March 1770 with British troops opening fire on a group of angry citizens, killing five. The incident was called the "Boston Massacre". Another event that infuriated colonists was connected with a tax on tea. The British-owned East India

Company enjoyed tax privileges which American colonists believed unfair. They decided not to buy tea from that company. Then a group of Boston citizens led by Samuel Adams dressed up as American Indians, got aboard an East India Company ship and threw the cargo of tea in the Boston Bay. This famous "Boston Tea Party," as it was known, led to the closure of the Boston port by king George III.

War of Arms

As we know from the article about the Declaration of Independence, the First Continental Congress was called to session to write down complaints against Britain and forward them to the crown. The Revolutionary War officially began in April 1775. It went on until 1783, seven years after the United States of America was declared an independent nation. British troops, though much better equipped, had to fight on unfamiliar terrain with colonists who had learned new tactics from Native Americans and who were fighting for a cause. It is no wonder that in the end the Americans won the war.

HOW AMERICANS CELEBRATE JULY 4TH

No other holiday in the U.S. is celebrated in an equally grandiose and spectacular way. July 4 has always been unique. Some people put the "blame" on John Adams, one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence and the second president. Just after the signing of the Declaration, Adams wrote about the event in a letter to his wife:

I believe that it [the Declaration of Independence] will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival... It ought to be [celebrated] with pomp and parades, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illumination from one end of this continent to the other.

Americans have taken these words to heart. Ever since 1777 (America's first birthday) they have spared no cost on celebrations. When the War of Independence finished in 1783, Independence Day was made a

holiday. However, it was only declared a federal holiday in 1941.

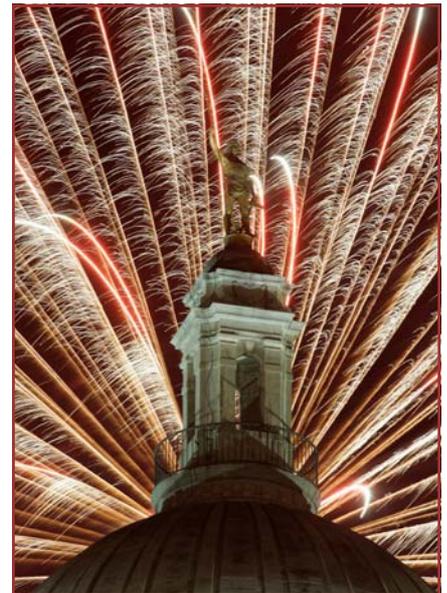
Today many cities organize grand fireworks shows. New York City, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. are naturally in the lead, but the other end of the continent (again to prove John Adams right) does not stay behind. San Diego attracts many visitors with their packed and varied program for Independence Day.

In the 1900s the use of guns was prohibited following many injuries, and the use of fireworks was restricted.

What does an average family do on the 4th of July? They organize BBQs and picnics, visit fairs, watch parades, fireworks and marching bands. But many people do travel and go on tours of national parks. If you are planning a visit to the U.S. around July 4, it is advisable to make your bookings in advance.



A New York Fire Department boat sprays red, white and blue water in the East River in advance of the 32nd annual Macy's Fourth of July fireworks display, Friday, July 4, 2008 in New York. Photo © AP Images



Fireworks burst over the Independent Man, the 11-foot gold covered, bronze statue atop the Rhode Island Statehouse, during Independence Day celebrations. Photo © AP Images



Parade participants during the Independence Day Parade in Mount Olivet, Kentucky. Photo © AP Images



Cindy Arthur during the Caldwell, Idaho Independence Day Parade. Photo © AP Images



Macy Clem, 5, has a patriotic heart painted on her face. Photo © AP Images

ACTIVITY PAGE

Win a Prize!

Summer 2009 CONTEST

How many American colonies formed the United States?

Send the answer (with your home address) to:
zoom@usinfo.pl

Deadline: September 5

Win a Prize!

The answer in the June contest was: "2001"

Thank you for participating

The winners are:
Halina from Lublin, Marta from Krakow, Elżbieta from Zdzieszowice, Silvia from Paraguay, Mohamed and Hicham from Morocco

CONGRATULATIONS

The prizes will be sent to you by mail

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Exercise 1

Look at the list below with days of national holidays in some countries and make sentences as in the example:

The United States of America - 4th July
"Americans celebrate their national holiday on July 4th."

1. Australia - January 26, Australia Day
2. Brazil - September 7, Independence Day
3. Canada - July 1, Canada Day
4. Chile - September 18, Independence Day
5. Dominican Republic - February 27, Independence Day
6. Haiti - January 1, Independence Day
7. Mexico - September 16, Independence Day
8. Peru - July 28, July 29, Independence Day
9. Poland - November 11, Independence Day
10. Sweden - June 6, National Day of Sweden

Exercise 2

America's national anthem is "The Star-Spangled Banner," but the song below: "America, The Beautiful" has many advocates who would like it to be made the national anthem. They say it would be better as it praises the whole country, not just the flag. Read the first stanza of the song, and if you like translation tasks, translate it into your language. If not, just click on a link below and listen to the tune.

America, The Beautiful

O beautiful, for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea.

You can find links to the audio recordings of "America, The Beautiful", as well as to "Stars and Stripes Forever" and "You're a Grand Old Flag" at the bottom of the America.gov page:

<http://www.america.gov/st/arts-english/2007/July/20070605151427GLnesnoM0.9304315.html>

Glossary

(in the order of appearance)

collaborate - work jointly on an activity, esp. to produce or create something

grievance - a real or imagined wrong or other cause for complaint

flourish - (here) an ornamental flowing curve in handwriting or scrollwork

endow - give or bequeath an income or property to a person

unalienable - unable to be taken away from or given away by the possessor

parchment - a stiff, flat, thin material made from the prepared skin of an animal and used as a writing surface

coin - (here) invent or devise a new word or phrase

BBQ - abbreviation for barbecue

(from *The New Oxford American Dictionary*)



A natural display of color lights up the sky to the north of Whitefish Lake as Fireworks explode over Hunter Brown seated above the crowd in a lifeguard chair during the annual Fourth of July fireworks display at Whitefish City Beach in Whitefish, Montana.
Photo © AP Images