

# *The real Declaration of Independence is made, July 2, 1776*

On this day in history, July 2, 1776, the real Declaration of Independence is made. But wait! Don't we celebrate the Declaration of Independence on July 4th? It's true. We do celebrate our nation's independence from Great Britain on July 4th, but the actual date of the vote for independence was July 2nd!

During the time leading up to the American Revolution, many American colonists held out hope of reconciling with Great Britain. Letters were written and petitions made to King George detailing their grievances, but none of them made a difference. Once the Battles of Lexington and Concord took place, it became apparent to many that Britain was bent on military dictatorship, but not to all.

Even when the Second Continental Congress met in response to the first bloodshed, the majority was not ready to declare independence. They sent King George an "olive branch," known as the Olive Branch Petition, which was one last attempt at reconciliation. The King wouldn't even receive the petition. He declared the colonies in full rebellion and made it an act of treason to support the colonists in any way.

By mid-1776, full blown battles had been waged at Bunker Hill and Quebec, naval battles had occurred in various places, Norfolk had been burned to the ground and British invasion attempts were made in North Carolina and South Carolina. These events finally convinced enough colonists that reconciliation was impossible. They would have to win a military victory over Great Britain, or be reduced to slaves.

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia presented the Lee Resolution to Congress. The resolution called for three things, a joint declaration of independence from Great Britain, the formation of

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alliances with foreign powers against Britain and a plan of union for the colonies.

By this time, the attitude of most of Congress was in favor of independence, so committees were made to deal with each of the proposals. A date was set for the formal vote on the independence question for July 2nd. During the interim, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. When July 2nd arrived, 12 of the 13 colonies voted for independence with New York abstaining, making July 2nd the official day of American independence.

For the next 2 days, Congress debated the wording of its official announcement of independence, making several revisions to Jefferson's declaration. The final version of the Declaration was adopted on the 4th. So independence was voted on officially on the 2nd, but the wording of the official announcement was adopted on the 4th. That evening, printer John Dunlap made the first copies, which were sent to various leaders around the colonies.

The first public announcement that independence had been declared was in the July 5th edition of the German language *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote*. On July 6th, the full text was printed for the first time in the *Philadelphia Evening Post*. The first public readings of the Declaration occurred in Philadelphia, in Easton, Pennsylvania and in Trenton, New Jersey, on the 8th. As public announcements and readings took place around the colonies, public celebrations were held for the first time, but they occurred whenever the news arrived, not on the 2nd or on the 4th!