JOHN ADAMS:

The Atlas of American Independence

"The man to whom the country is most indebted for the great measure of independency is Mr. John Adams of Boston. I call him the Atlas of American Independence. He it was who sustained the debate, and by the force of his reasoning demonstrated not only the justice but the expediency of the measure."

--New Jersey delegate
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"I am a sincere inquirer after truth, but I find very few who discover the same truth." — John Adams

Those words sum up better than any I could say the man that was John Adams. He was a fiercely proud, independent man long before Jefferson put that fact into words. This, then, is a part of the story of that man—that part which concerns how that mental independence became a physical one. He was no man's slave, ever, and fought as few have, "...against the constant temptation to say and believe, or pretend to believe, what is comfortable, conventional, lazy, or pleasant." He always had to find that own personal truth of his and it did not matter if people did not approve of what he did. He never held a weak opinion and the ones he held were arrived at only through "prodigious effort." He agonized for years over what was to be done concerning England and this paper is to some extent the story of that agony. A letter written to his wife, Abigail, in 1775 revealed a little of his torment and the reason he endured it.

"I saw from the Beginning that the Controversy was of such a Nature that it would never be settled, and every day convinces me more and more. This has been the source of all the Disquietude of my Life. It has lain down and rose up with me these twelve Years. The Thought that we might be driven to the sad Necessity of breaking our Connection with Great Britain exclusive of the Carnage and Destruction which it was easy to see must attend the seperation, always gave me a great deal of Grief. And even now, I would cheerfully retire from public life for­ever, renounce all Chance for Prosits or Honours from the public, nay I would cheerfully contribute my little Prop­erty to obtain Peace and Liberty—But all these must go and my Life too before I can surrender the Right of my Country to a free Constitution. I dare not consent to it. I should be the most miserable of Mortals ever after, whatever Honours or Emoluments might surround me."4

Originally Adams had gone to college in order to become a minister, but opted instead for the lure of wealth and political
power to be found in the law. Nevertheless he carried his religion with him as a banner, and he remained a preacher of sorts all his life. The world was, for him, one which offered sharp, well-defined choices between good and evil. Public issues likewise were to be decided on a moral basis. After the events at Lexington convinced John Adams that independence for America was morally right, he never wavered in that decision. He had admired the British nation as the most civilized one on earth, but that admiration failed in the face of his determination that Britain was in this case totally wrong.

Despite his moral pronouncements, John Adams was very much concerned with the art of the probable. His view of the future was extremely pessimistic, as he did not trust in the innate good nature of man. Yet he dreamed grand dreams of an American republic, and sought to accomplish it despite man's perversity.

"He dared to dream bold and magnificent dreams, yet unlike many dreamers, he was so solidly planted in the real world that he was always acutely conscious of the gap between the hoped-for and that which might be achieved in an imperfect universe."5

He often chafed at the timidity of the Congress but knew just how fast they could be pushed.

"But America is a great, unwieldy Body. Its Progress must be slow. It is like a large Fleet sailing under Convoy. The fleetest Sailors must wait for the dullest and slowest. Like a Coach and six--the swiftest Horses must be slackened and the slowest quickened, that all may keep an even Pace."6

To speak in truth of a man's character, one must talk not only of the good things, but also of the bad ones. Benjamin Franklin remarked once, "Adams is always an honest man, often a wise
one, but sometimes and in some things absolutely out of his senses."7 It often seemed he had a persecution complex, as evidenced by his frequent statements deriding those who opposed independence, claiming that the attacks were personal ones. "'They aim these things at me! Everything is aimed at me..." Adams remarked once in his God-how-I-pity-me mood."8 Adams himself (who knew no great men, Washington and Jefferson included) said he was not a great man. He cited his inability to keep resolutions and various other "faults" which seem to the observer to make him engagingly human. David Hawke detailed some of his faults as he saw them:

"He could by turns be perverse, sulkty, petty, and spiteful. He lacked wit. He often took himself too seriously and equally often could be unforgiveably harsh toward those he admired. When his friend James Otis, then in the midst of a nervous breakdown, slighted Adams, the young lawyer saw only 'a complication of malice, envy, and jealousy' in this man who had once been exceedingly kind to him."9

So--despite his disclaimer, John Adams was a great man, though certainly not a perfect one. This paper seeks to detail that decision which measures perhaps better than any other one, the depth of that greatness--the decision for American independence.

Let me say at the outset that this work is not intended as a comprehensive review of the years covered by its scope, and thus doubtless will not cover in sufficient detail some of the events contained herein. It is, however, intended to pique the curiosity of the reader concerning that extremely important part played by the man who was to become the second President of the United States in the birth of a nation. The concern of this paper is mainly those crucial years of 1774-1776, but the story did not begin in 1774. For the purposes of this paper I will begin in 1761.
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A Storm Gathers

In 1761 a Salem customs official came before the justices of the Superior Court of Essex, Massachusetts requesting writs of assistance to aid in capturing smugglers. In effect, the writs were general search warrants which could be used to enter ships, houses, or business establishments. The trial which ensued was to have profoundest implications for John Adams and through him, for the country-in-the-making.

Many eyes in the colony were focussed on the hearing and John Adams was among the most interested. It seemed to him that this was not the case of the merchants v. the writs, but the case of England v. America, and the results would augur well or ill for the colonists for many years to come. For the first time, the wishes of parent and child were in direct opposition. If England decided to impose her will in this matter, she might soon make other attacks on property, that thing held most sacred to all Englishmen, be they in Britain or America.

The case for the crown was based very heavily in precedent, but the attorney for the merchants was more concerned with principle. John Adams' idol, James Otis declared:

"An act against natural justice and equity was void. If Parliament were to pass a statute especially and specifically the disputed writs of assistance, that statute would be void because it was in opposition to the constitution..."10.

Otis' fiery, emotional speech stirred Adams exceedingly. It had a like effect on the justices, who sent to England for instructions. The writs were upheld and for the first time England had run roughshod over the wishes of the colonists.
From a prospective of some sixty years, Adams declared "...then and there the child Independence was born". If Adams' sense of the dramatic is, not uncommonly, working a bit overtime in this instance, the writs were essential in placing that germ of doubt in the mind of the man who would later be called "the colossus of Independence". He would return with pride to being thought an Englishman, a member of the most civilized nation on earth, but it was a pride tarnished by this very significant event.

1763 brought to an end the hostilities of the Seven Years War, and with it another ominous portent for the future of the American colonies within the British Empire. With the threat of the French gone, the colonists began to feel the superfluity of British protection, while the British decided the colonies should begin to pay back a little of what they had cost. To provide revenue, Parliament passed the Sugar Act in 1764 and the Stamp Act in 1765. This last was an inopportune measure, to say the least. It placed a tax on such objects as newspapers and legal documents, and thus aroused the ire of the most vocal segment of the population, merchants and the legal community. John Adams attacked it as "...burthensome, unconstitutional, and an alarming extension of the power of the courts of admiralty". Adams also objected to the act on personal grounds, as the colonists' refusal to use the stamps had closed down the courts. He was thus deprived of his livelihood, a circumstance calculated to arouse the ire of the most stoic of men.

With the passage of the Stamp Act, John Adams became heavily involved in politics and drew up a protest measure very similar
to the one eventually adopted by the Massachusetts General Court. Meanwhile, a Stamp Act Congress, attended by nine colonies, was called in New York. Its function was to call for the repeal of the Act, but its strategic importance was to lie in another area. It was the first major intercolonial meeting called by the colonists themselves. The seeds of a Continental Congress were sown in New York in October of 1765.

The repeal of the Stamp Act was brought about by the concerted actions of protest and nonconsumption of British goods by the colonists. Most Americans rejoiced at news of the repeal, failing to read that section of the law which Adams read with much consternation: "...that King, lord, and Commons have an undoubted right to make laws for the colonies in all cases whatsoever." It seemed that Parliament had not repented its actions, but was beating a strategic retreat to pass other laws in other years.

John Adams proved a prophet. Lord Townshend became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1767 and passed new duties on paint, glass, lead, paper, and tea to support the army and administration of the colonies. The Massachusetts Assembly drew up a letter of protest and enacted non-importation, along with most of the other colonies. The Townshend Acts were later repealed except for the tax on tea, which commodity would cause a stir in years to come.

After the Stamp Act crisis, John Adams had determined to stay out of politics, citing its debilitating effects on his already nervous constitution. In early 1766, Jonathan Sewell, a friend of Adams and Attorney General for Massachusetts, offered him a post with the royal government. Adams refused the position at
once. If Adams was not at this time in the royalist camp, he was not yet in the patriot camp either. In 1769 he attended a picnic sponsored by the Sons of Liberty, but was there more as a detached observer than as a zealous advocate.

An event occurred in 1770 in which John Adams appeared to side with the royal government. British soldiers had been stationed in Boston ever since the trouble over the Townshend Acts, and its inhabitants were not appreciative of the "protection" afforded by what amounted to occupying troops. On March 5, 1770, a rather nasty mob rushed a sentry post, daring the guard to fire, which he did. In the ensuing seconds, more shots were fired and three men were killed and eight others wounded. This scuffle would go down in history books as the Boston "Massacre". Blood had been spilled and the city demanded blood in return, binding the captain of the guard and eight of his soldiers over on murder charges.

Boston had a reputation of being a rabble-rousing town and that reputation would be even more seriously impaired if the soldiers were summarily disposed of without a fair trial. John Adams felt very keenly the necessity to put the fight on legal grounds to try to present Boston in the most favorable light. He got his chance to see that justice was done, as he was asked to take the case, which he did unhesitatingly. "It was a cause that he could hardly have resisted. He could demonstrate most dramatically that he was an independent man; that law and justice stood higher with him than partisanship and political advantage."\(^{15}\) Page Smith suggests that Adams' motives in taking the case were not entirely pure, that it was partly from a feeling of self-righteousness.\(^{16}\)
Adams' case rested on self-defense, and got all his clients off, with the exception of two who were convicted of manslaughter and pled "benefit of clergy".17.

After the Boston Massacre, John Adams once again swore off politics and succeeded with relative ease till New Year's Eve of 1773. While dining at his cousin Sam's house, he bitterly denounced Great Britain. Later that night he wrote in his diary

"I said that there was no more justice left in Britain than there was in hell—that I wished for war, and that the whole Bourbon family was upon the back of Great Britain—avowed a thorough disaffection to that country—wished that anything might happen to them...that they might be brought to reason or ruin."18

He chided himself for his lack of self-control, but no doubt should have spared himself the breath, for in the years to come he would say much more than this against Britain. For 1773 was to bring the Tea Act.

That Baneful Weed

In 1773, Parliament passed an act which was not intended as an insult to the colonists, but which was nevertheless taken as one. The Tea Act was passed to give the East India Tea Company preferential treatment in paying duties, so that they could undersell even the smugglers in America. The colonists saw it as a trick to make them drink dutied tea and in Boston the tea was not even allowed to land. Abigail Adams described the scene: "The tea, that baneful weed, is arrived. Great and I hope effectual opposition has been made to the landing of it...".19. In any case, the tea ended up in the harbor, duty unpaid. John Adams was elated over the event:
"This is the most magnificent movement of all....This destruction of the tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important consequences, and so lasting, that I cannot but consider it as an epocha in history." 20

The following January, James Warren was of the impression that the colonists had borne oppression long enough:

"(I) have for some time thought it necessary that the People should strike some bold stroke, and try the Issue. They have long enough submitted to Oppressions and Insults following one another in a rapid Succession without finding any Advantage. They have now indeed passed the River, and left no Retreat, and must therefore abide the Consequences. What those will be seems to be a great matter of Speculation..." 21.

No doubt Warren's words would have been stronger had they come five months later, as in May 1774, Bostonians learned of the British response to the matter of a small tea party to which they had not been invited. Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, designed to bring the colonists under control. They consisted of three acts:

1) The Boston harbor was closed till the tea was paid for.
2) British soldiers accused of capital offenses were now to be taken to England for trial.
3) The government of Massachusetts Colony was severely altered and town meetings were forbidden except for very special purposes.

Two other acts passed at the same time also served to anger the colonists. All the colonies were now required to quarter British soldiers in their homes if asked. The Quebec Act was passed to determine the government of that province. Two parts of the ordinance were particularly infuriating to the Americans. First, the southern boundary of Quebec was to be the Ohio River
thus encompassed an area which the Americans colonists had always thought of as theirs in the Northwest Territory. Second, Roman Catholicism was recognized as the official state religion of Quebec, a circumstance calculated to raise the ire of nearby New England Puritans. These five acts were known collectively by the colonists as the Intolerable Acts. Page Smith describes the miscalculations on both sides which led to the impasse.

"When the news of the Port Bill reached Boston early in May, even Hutchinson (the British acting governor) was dismayed by its severity; the patriot leaders saw they had been victims of self-delusion. Great Britain's retreat on the Stamp Act and on the Townshend duties had encouraged them to think that America only needed to stand firm to have her way. Just as Lord North believed the colonists would be too greedy to reject inexpensive tea, the colonists thought the British too mercenary to strike a blow that must inevitably hurt their own commerce.

The extent of their error was now apparent. The full weight of the greatest military and naval power in the world was to be marshalled to bring a handful of trouble-makers to heel."

Meanwhile Sam Adams and others sought to muster support for beleaguered Boston from the outlying areas of Massachusetts and the other colonies. They sought a protest meeting similar to the one held concerning the Stamp Act. A General Congress of the Colonies (it was not called the Continental Congress till much later, but I will refer to it as such for convenience) was set up to meet September 5 in Philadelphia. John Adams and his cousin Sam were among those chosen to represent Massachusetts in the upcoming Congress.

At first John Adams was not as concerned about the Intolerable Acts as some, convinced as he was that such acts of tyranny must surely be the last gasps of a dying ministry. The British people would soon turn the scoundrels out of office. As the summer wore
on, he became more distressed over the seriousness of the situation as he heard no large outcries from the British people. In June he left to ride the eastern circuit and apprehensively wondered "What can be done? . . . The Ideas of the People, are as various, as their Faces. One thinks, no more petitions, former having been neglected and despised. Some are for Resolves--Spirited Resolves--and some are for bolder Councils." A letter to Abigail in July revealed his apprehensions concerning the task before him in September:

"Great Things are wanted to be done, and little things only I fear can be done. I dread the Thought of the Congress's falling short of the Expectations of the Continent, but especially of the People of this Province. Vapours avault! I will do my Duty, and leave the Event. If I have the approbation of my own Mind, whether applauded or censured, blessed or cursed, by the World, I will not be unhappy."23

By mid-July, Adams had decided that "bolder Councils" might indeed be in order, that the traditional colonial mode of protest of non-importation should be abandoned for military resistance.25

"But, what avails, Prudence, Wisdom, Policy, Fortitude, Integrity, without Power, without Legions? When Demosthenes, (God forgive the Vanity of recollecting his Example) went Ambassador from Athens to the other States of Greece, to excite a Confederacy against Phillip, he did not go to propose a Non-Importation or Non-Consumption Agreement!!"26

Tories Adams met along the circuit were preoccupied with the dangers of internal violence if the colonies revolted. Adams himself was very concerned with maintaining internal order, but insisted that sometimes disorder was necessary:

"Shall we submit to Parliamentary taxation to avoid mobs? Will not Parliamentary taxation, if established, occasion vices, crimes, and follies infinitely more numerous, dangerous, and fatal to the community? . . . Are insolence, abuse, and impudence more tolerable in a magistrate than in a subject?"27
John Adams' old friend Jonathan Sewell met him on the circuit and tried to persuade him to give up the political madness of opposing England:

"'Great Britain is determined on her system,' he told John; 'her power (is) irresistible, and it will certainly be destructive to you, and to all those who... persevere in opposition to her designs.'

'I know,' John answered, 'that Great Britain is determined in her system, and that very determination determined me on mine.' And then with a conscious sense of drama: 'I have passed the Rubicon; swim or sink, live or die, survive or perish with my country--that is my unalterable determination.'

So it was that on the tenth of August when John Adams left home for the Continental Congress he was "determined in his system". He was willing to make concessions only if Britain made very significant ones of her own. By this time he was close to advocating a commonwealth theory of association. (See my later discussion of the Novanglus Papers.) Thus Adams would rather have had an arrangement whereby the colonies were connected to England only through the King. The colonial legislatures would make all necessary laws, except for trade regulation which would be reserved to Parliament. However, if Britain made the required concessions, he was willing to let the government remain as it was. He wanted repeal of all the offending acts since 1763 and a return to the colonies' former relatively independent state. Whether this was to occur within or outside the traditional British Empire would be dependent on whether concessions were achieved.

It must be emphasized that regardless of what some delegates may have had in mind (Sam Adams is a notable example), the declared purpose of the meeting which convened September 5, 1774 was reconciliation, not revolution. The instructions from the colonial
governments to their delegates were uniformly bent on reconciliation. Even Massachusetts, the center of the controversy, instructed her delegates "...to deliberate and determine upon wise and proper measures... (to effect) the restoration of union and harmony between Great Britain and the Colonies." The other colonies had sent their representatives to show their support of Massachusetts' cause, but very few were willing to take up arms to determine the matter. This would remain a fact to be dealt with cautiously by the delegates from Massachusetts for at least another year.

A Congress Convenes

The Congress opened on the 5th of September, with the delegates clearly of divided opinion. Nonetheless, the signs for the radical party were good. Radical Charles Thomson of Pennsylvania was appointed clerk for the Congress. Carpenters' Hall, meeting-place for the workers of Philadelphia, was chosen as the site for the Congress. The refusal of the delegates to use the proffered Pennsylvania Hall emphasized a tendency toward rejection of established institutions connected with Britain. Conservative James Galloway and others suspected both the Adamses of wanting immediate independence. However, a meeting of the New England delegates at which George Washington (not yet in the independence camp) was present, convinced him that this was not so. John and Sam Adams were both present at the meeting, and Sam, at least, appears to have done a good job of acting.

After taking a few days to determine the pulse of the Congress, John Adams professed himself pleased with the results.
"The Congress will, to all present appearance, be well united, and in such measures as, I hope, will give satisfaction to the friends of our country....The Massachusetts Councillors and Addressers are held in curious esteem here, as you will see. The spirit, the firmness, the prudence of our province are vastly applauded, and we are universally acknowledged, the saviors and defenders of American liberty." 30

James Galloway introduced a plan for colonial union which would bind the colonies more closely to the mother country. It was destined for defeat as the popular party held the support of the people. The strength of that support was evidenced by the resolves passed by the Congress on the 17th of October.

In order to get around the prohibition on town meetings, a meeting had been arranged by Sam Adams in Suffolk County, Massachusetts to draw up measures to protest recent actions of the British Parliament. The tone of the Suffolk Resolves was a denunciation of British tyranny and pointed toward independence if the British would not relent. However, independence was never mentioned and the force of the argument was toward the redress of grievances. The adoption of the Resolves was a bold step in support of Massachusetts by the other colonies and John Adams was ecstatic:

"This was one of the happiest days of my life. In Congress we had generous, noble sentiments, and manly eloquence. This day convinced me that America will support the Massachusetts or perish with her..." 31.

By early October, Adams professed himself "wearied to death with the life I lead." 32. He chafed at the delay and tediousness of the Congress and complained they did not really understand the plight of Massachusetts.
That First Congress took two other bold steps toward rebellion. It adopted the Continental Association, a non-importation, non-exportation, non-consumption agreement. "Thus the first Congress disdained compromise and refused any solution except on America's terms." In October, Congress passed the Declaration of Rights, a distinctly radical document. It denied the right of Parliament to legislate for the colonies, except in matters of trade. Also, it carried the implied warning that if peaceful resistance were unsuccessful, the colonies would no longer put up with British oppression without resorting to force. Edmund Burnett proclaims the importance of both these measures:

"As the Declaration of Rights was in an important sense a forerunner of the Declaration of Independence, so the Association stands out as an important step toward the creation of an organic union among the colonies. Though not a constitution, for it laid down no framework of government, it was in a true sense an instrument of union and the first to be subscribed by all the colonies then participating."

The members of the Congress were not at all certain of the reception their labors would have in England. Thus they resolved on October 22 to meet again the following May if no redress of grievances had been obtained. On October 25, the Congress drafted a petition to the King: "We therefore earnestly beseech your majesty, that your royal authority and interposition may be used for our relief; and that a gracious answer may be given to this petition." The king's reply to the petition was slightly less than gracious: "The New England governments are now in a state of rebellion; blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this country or independent." However, this is to jump ahead of the story, as the king's reply was not received till February.
On October 28, John Adams took his leave of Philadelphia, apparently fairly well satisfied that England's reply might well be "gracious". Regardless of the resolution to meet again in May of 1775 if no redress had been achieved, he wrote in his diary concerning Philadelphia: "It is not very likely that I shall ever see this Part of the World again". The Congress had done what it had set out to do—it had banded the colonies together in support of Massachusetts. "It had not created a new government, but it had not tried to. It had tried only to persuade England to back down and on that the colonies stood united."38

An Anxious Winter

Back home again in Braintree, Adams vacillated between hope and fear. He indicated his lack of faith in England, but was heartened by rumors of coming British commissioners. The normally impatient Adams counselled patience and moderation to avoid any act which might lead to the shedding of British blood. Any bloodshed would probably make reconciliation impossible.

John Adams devoted himself during that long winter of 1774-1775 to answering the charges of "Massachusettsus" that the patriot party aimed at independence and expounding his own views on government. There is little evidence to support a conclusion that Adams himself wanted independence at this time but his claim that "...there is not a man in the province among the Whigs, nor ever was who harbors a wish of that sort"39, is also unsupported by the facts.
The main thrust of John Adams' *Novanglus Papers* was his support of the continental theory of association. He saw it as the only real hope for a peaceful and equitable solution to the problems confronting the colonies. Americans insisted that there must be a middle ground between complete dependence and complete independence. The solution which they found was the continental theory of association, which was outlined by the Congress in the Declaration of Rights. The colonies admitted their subservience to the king, but denied the right of parliament to legislate for them except in trade matters. Adams insisted that if taxation were conceded to Parliament, the whole base of representative government would be destroyed: "...the question seems to me to be, whether the American colonies are to be considered as a distinct community so far as to have a right to judge for themselves when the fundamentals of their government are destroyed...".40

James Warren was among those weary of the suspense of the winter—"...now is the Time, the exact Crisis, to determine the point, and the sooner the better."41 In February came the news of the king's extremely un-gracious reply to the colonists' petition. Abigail Adams was convinced that the sword was now the only alternative, but was again counselled patience by her husband.

The Die is Cast

John Adams' patience and the suspense of the winter both came to an abrupt halt on April 19, 1775. British regulars and colonial militiamen engaged in skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. The event was of monumental importance to John Adams.
Some twenty-five years later he declared "...and the battle of Lexington on the 19th of April changed the Instruments of Warfare from the Penn to the Sword." \(^{42}\) The colonists no longer had a choice but must defend themselves: "...the Die was cast, the Rubicon passed, and as Lord Mansfield expressed it in Parliament, if We did not defend ourselves they would kill Us." \(^{43}\) Page Smith sums up John Adams' determination that redress of grievances would be attained:

"Word of the 'Battle of Lexington' reached John and Abigail in Braintree. Like many others, they felt a sense of relief. Thus must draw things to a conclusion. Americans everywhere must surely understand that the time had passed for equivocation, for humble petitions and false hopes. Massachusetts had stood firm, had been patient and resolute under extreme provocation. Soldiers had made an excursion into the peaceful countryside, American blood and British blood had been spilled--the issue was joined. America if it could not be free under Britain would be independent." \(^{44}\)

The Provincial Congress at Boston enunciated what would be the official colonial policy for almost a year.

"These, bretheren are marks of ministerial vengeance against this colony, for refusing with her sister colonies a submission to slavery; but they have not yet detached us from our royal sovereign. We profess to be his loyal and dutiful subjects, and so hardly dealt with as we have been, are still ready with out lives and fortunes to defend his person, family, crown, and dignity. Nevertheless, to the persecution and tyranny of his ministry we will not tamely submit--appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free." \(^{45}\)

So--as Page Smith has expressed it, the issue was joined.

Shortly after the battle, Adams went to Cambridge and Lexington to examine the area and its sentiments. The excitement of the journey laid him low in a fever. However, it was time for the Second Continental Congress to convene, and John Adams was not
about to be left behind in the small village of Braintree. Still physically weak, he left for Philadelphia, and was revived either by the trip or the anticipation of what lay ahead for him there.

A Much Different Congress Convenes

The Congress which convened in May 1775 faced a much different task than the one of the previous fall. This was reflected in the instructions to its delegates, which afforded them a great deal more latitude than formerly. Massachusetts instructed her delegates to "...direct and order such farther measures as shall to them appear to be calculated for the recovery and establishment of American rights and liberties and for restoring harmony between Great Britain and the colonies."46

Fateful for the outcome of the Congress were the first two events with which they had to deal. At almost the precise moment that news of Lexington reached the Congress, it also received a peace offer from England. Known as Lord North's Olive Branch, it was never seriously considered as a solution to their problems by the colonists. It provided that if the colonies would contribute their taxes voluntarily the Parliament would refrain from levying them. The proposal was totally unacceptable to all Americans, as it did not mention the Coercive Acts at all and attempted to define American grievances totally in terms of the means of levying taxes. Thus the Congress assembled to news of bloodshed and a specious peace offer.

John Adams was very fearful of a negative reaction to Lexington in the other colonies. There was a very real possibility
that they might elect to let Massachusetts stew in her own juices. On May 8, he had discerned enough of the mood of Congress to be generally optimistic:

"Our Prospect of a Union of the Colonies, is promising indeed. Never was there such a Spirit. Yet I feel anxious, because there is always more Smoke than Fire--more Noise than Musick.
Our Province is nowhere blamed. The Accounts of the Battle are exaggerated in our favour...

Congress was faced with a huge amount of work and it proceeded cautiously. On May 26, it resolved to put the colonies in a state of defense, laying to rest John Adams' most immediate fear. "The Congress will support the Massachusetts. There is a good Spirit here. But we have an amazing Field of Business, before us."48

"If the Ministry, upon receiving intelligence of the battle of Lexington, don't recede, all ceremony will be over. At present we shall be fully united, and, I hope, shall do well."49

Just because the other colonies would support Massachusetts did not mean in any respect that they supported independence.

The Congress gave instructions to Massachusetts on June 10 to form a new government, but insisted that the door be left open for reconciliation. Adams denounced this attitude as naive and dangerous but realized it was necessary for him to be patient.

"I find that the general Sense abroad is to prepare for a vigorous defensive War, but at the Same Time to keep open the Door of Reconciliation--to hold the Sword in one Hand and Olive Branch in the other--to proceed with War-like Measures, and conciliatory Measures Pari Passu.

I am myself as fond of Reconciliation, if we could reasonably entertain Hopes of it upon a constitutional basis, as any Man. But, I think, if we consider the Education of the Soverign, and that the Lords, the Commons, the Electors, the Army, the Navy, the officers of Excise, Customs et., have been now for many years gradually trained and disciplined by Corruption to the System of the Court,
We shall be convinced that the Cancer is too deeply rooted, and too far spread to be cured by anything short of cutting it out entire.

We have ever found by experience that petitions, negotiations every thing which holds out to the people hopes of a reconciliation without bloodshed is greedily grasped at and relied on—and they cannot be persuaded to think that it is so necessary to prepare for war as it really is. Hence our present scarcity of powder etc.

However, this continent is a vast, unwieldy machine. We cannot force events. We must suffer people to take their own way in many cases, when we think it leads wrong, hoping however and believing that our liberty and felicity will be preserved in the end, tho' not in the speediest and surest manner...".

On June 15, Congress nominated George Washington commander-in-chief of the continental forces and adopted the army assembled at Cambridge. Adams exulted in the events—"We shall have a redress of grievances, or an assumption of all the powers of government legislative, executive and judicial, throughout the whole continent very soon." Generally pleased with the mood of the Congress, Adams admonished his fellow Massachusetts delegates to control their tongues and be content with the slow but sure progress toward independence. War spirit was high all over, bolstered by the recent battle of Bunker Hill.

Congress adopted the Declaration of Causes of Taking Up Arms on July 6, 1775. It was meant to secure the support and cooperation of the colonists for the war. It specifically stated that they did not fight for independence, but for their rights. Nonetheless its language was revolutionary:

"Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable...With hearts fortified with these animating reflections, we most solemnly, before God and the world, declare, that...the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and
perserverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to dye Free-men rather than live Slaves."  

On the same day, John Adams was concerned that the Congress was not yet as alarmed as it should be. There were still those who hoped that the ministry and Parliament would recede once they heard news of Lexington. John did not agree: "I think they are much deceived and that we shall have nothing but Deceit and Hostility, Fire, Famine, Pestilence and Sword from Administration and Parliament."  

An Indiscreet Letter

John Dickinson, from Pennsylvania, one of the leading conservatives in Congress, distrusted the New Englanders' motives. When John Adams left the hall one day, Dickinson cornered him. He threatened that he might lead his colony and others out of the Congress and carry out the fight in his own way if the radicals did not modify their demands. Adams replied that he would abide by the majority opinion in Congress but would never compromise his principles purely to insure unity.

Having managed to control himself in the verbal altercation with Dickinson, Adams exploded in letters to James Warren and his wife. He castigated Dickinson for the delay in accomplishing much in Congress of late.

"A certain great Fortune and piddling Genius, whose Fame has been trumpeted so loudly, has given a silly Cast to our whole Doings. We are between Hawk and Buzzard. We ought to have had in our Hands a month ago the whole Legislative, executive and judicial of the whole Continent, and have completely modeled a Constitution:... After this they might have petitioned, and negotiated,
and addressed etc., if they would. Is all this extravagant? Is it wild? Is it not the soundest policy?" 54

As Adams himself said years later "the Ideas of Independence, to be sure, were glaring enough...". 55 As seems to be universally the case, such indiscreet comments were to be paid for. The British captured the letters and had them widely reprinted, much to his later discomfort.

At the end of July, Congress adjourned for a month. John Adams, while not entirely satisfied with its efforts, had to be content, political realist that he was. It had adopted the army, appointed officers and raised money to support it. On his way home, he visited the Massachusetts Provincial Congress at Watertown and Colonel Washington's camp. Once home, Adams declared that he was sick to death of politics, stating in a letter to Mercy Warren that he would be happy to talk of anything but that. However, duty called and he left again for Philadelphia on August 28.

Adams' "homecoming" to Philadelphia was an extremely uncomfortable one. During the recess the errant letters had been published and even some among the patriots treated him coolly for expressing himself so frankly. Dickinson passed him on the street without acknowledging his presence. The two men were never to speak privately again. Adams did not apologize for the letters but rather rejoiced in the fact that they had brought the subject of independence forcibly to the minds of everyone. He later claimed that the letters had more to do with converting the average man's opinion to independence than Common Sense. That point is certainly debateable, but the fact remains that by October many of the members of Congress had come around to Adams' view.
Hopes of reconciliation began to dim considerably as September gave way to October. Sam Adams wrote to James Warren

"The Intelligence received by the July Packett, which arrived at New York a few days ago, has convinced some, who could not be prevaild upon to believe it before, that it is folly to supplicate a Tyrant, and that under God, our own virtuous Efforts must save us."56

John Adams praised the serious spirit which now prevailed in Congress and declared concerning the captured letters "...that the propriety and necessity of the Plan of Politics so hastily delineated in them is every day, more and more confessed even by those Gentelmen who disapproved it at the Time when they were written."57

The decision for American independence was by no means an inevitable one. By mid October, John Adams and others became a little frightened before the enormity of the thing which they had set in motion and concerned that they might indeed all han, either separately or otherwise, for what they were doing. In a letter to Abigail he warned "Pray, bundle up every paper, not already hid, and conceal them in impenetrable Darkness. Nobody knows what may occur."58 "We have few Hopes, excepting that of preserving our Honour and our Consciences untainted and a free Constitution to our Country."59 Sam Adams saw too "the affairs of our country are at this moment in a most critical situation."60

Meanwhile the Congress was inching toward independence. In early November it gave New Hampshire and South Carolina permission to form new governments which would "...in their judgment well best produce the happiness of the people..."61 New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York admonished the Congress that they had consistently held that they did not aim for independence but their
actions of late had not supported that contention. John Adams made no secret that his intentions lay in that direction:

"I labored afresh to expunge the words 'Colony', and 'Colonies', and insert the words 'State', and 'States', and the word 'dispute' to make way for that of 'war', and the word 'Colonies', for the word 'America', or 'States', but the child was not yet weaned. I labored, also, to get the resolution enlarged, and extended into a recommendation to the people of all the States, to institute governments...".62

Samuel Ward proclaimed the spirit of most of those in Congress that they must stick together.

"To Be or not to be is now the Question. Every private View, Passion and Interest ought to be buried; We are embarked in one common Bottom, if She sinks We all perish; if She survives the Storm, Peace and Plenty (the offspring of Liberty), and every thing which will dignify and fecili-tate (felicitate?) human Nature will be the Reward of our Virtue.

Oh my Brother This is not the Cause of the Colonies and of Britain only but of human Nature itself, and that God who is the Author itself, and that God who is the Author of Nature, the Friend of Mankind and who hath so remarkably preserved and prospered these Colonies will still continue his all gracious Protection to which I most devoutly recommend You, my Friends and my Country."63

Despite their recent actions, the colonists still maintained that they did not aim at independence. The king's response to the colonies' latest petition had been to declare them in an open state of rebellion. Congress protested, defining their revolt as against the Parliament and maintaining that their allegiance was to the king and to the king only.

"We are accused (the colonies declaim) of 'forgetting the allegiance which we owe to the power that has pro-tected and sustained us'. Why all this ambiguity and obscurity in what ought to be so plain and obvious, as that he who runs may read it? What allegiance is it that we forget? Allegiance to Parliament? We never owed--we never owned it. Allegiance to our King? Our words have ever been consistent with it. We condemn, and with arms in our hands--a resource which Freemen will never part with--we oppose the claim and exercise of
unconstitutional powers, to which neither the Crown nor Parliament were ever entitled."

The new year seemed to be one destined to bring about American independence. Although the Americans would not hear of his action till mid-February 1776, in December 1775 Lord North had secured passage of the American Prohibitory Act. It brought to a complete halt all colonial commerce until the Americans had surrendered to the British commissioners who were appointed for that purpose. American ships would be free game for pirates, as they were to be completely outside the protection of the British navy. The commissioners had been appointed for the purpose of accepting American surrender and none other. The rumor of "peace" commissioners circulated up until the time the Declaration was adopted, much to the chagrin of John Adams and others. No doubt Adams was glad of the opportunity provided by the Prohibitory Act to press for that other bold step toward independence which was taken by the Congress in mid-February, opening the ports. Meanwhile, a significant event, at least for the constituents of those now gathered in Philadelphia, occurred in January 1776.

Members of the Congress were supposed to have been under bonds of strictest secrecy. This prohibition was honored in varying degrees by its members. Disregarding such leaks as may have undoubtedly occurred and the few public documents produced by the Congress, the general public knew little of what went on in Carpenter's Hall. A document, official or otherwise, which outlined the precise reasons for independence was not available. Thomas Paine, a recent British immigrant, provided that reasoning.
A Seditious Pamphlet is Produced

Common Sense was, next to the actual Declaration of Independence itself, probably one of the most important propaganda documents which would lead to a permanent separation with Britain. Paine stridently attacked British society and particularly "...the Royal Brute of Great Britain". He advocated breaking free from the ties with England and setting up for the first time a society based on justice and freedom. The results of the American struggle would be formative for the future of the world--"...posterity are virtually involved in the contest....Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith and honour." 67

Edmund C. Burnett saw the reason for the popularity of Common Sense in that it was a sentiment whose time had come.

"Paine was indeed a sower who had gone forth to sow at the appropriate seedtime, finding ready for his seeds a congenial soil and well prepared. The colonists had pleaded their cause until they were weary and hoarse of voice....And all the while the bonds that bound them to the mother country had become more and more....frayed, until only a common impulse was needed to snap them asunder. Paine's pamphlet Common Sense had supplied that impulse." 68

John Adams complained that Paine had merely re-iterated the arguments of the past year in Congress, but seemed to forget that most of the public was not so privileged as to have heard those debates. No doubt he was more than a little jealous of this newcomer who had managed to create such a stir over independence when he had worked so hard for over a year for that very end without much acclamation. The tone of Common Sense seemed to undermine all established authority, a circumstance not calculated to win John Adams' respect. Also, the paper contained a contained a prescription
for government that was anathema to Adams—a weak executive and one-house legislature. He wrote a long letter to George Wythe of Virginia outlining his own ideas on government. Paine heard of the letter and gave Adams a rather thorough going-over about it. Years later, Adams had only words of contempt for Paine personally but conceded his pamphlet might have played a small part in the move toward independence.

"It has been a general opinion, that this pamphlet was of great importance in the Revolution. I doubted it at the time and have doubted it to this day. It probably converted some to the Doctrine of Independence, and gave others an excuse for declaring in favour of it. But these would all have followed Congress, with zeal; and on the other hand it excited many writers against it..." 79

Nonetheless, Adams thought enough of the paper at the time to send a copy of it to Abigail, along with a letter declaring in the clearest terms his position. "Reconciliation if practicable and peace if attainable, you very well know would be as agreeable to my Inclinations and as advantageous to my interest, as to any man's. But I see no Prospect, no Probability, no Possibility." 80

On February 17, Congress opened American ports to the world, with the exception of England and Ireland. John Adams had been advocating this measure since the previous July. At almost the same time came the news of the American Prohibitory Act and the recruitment of Hessian soldiers to fight in America. It seemed that Britain would go to any length to subdue the colonies.

Sentiments in Congress were running high toward independence, though of course not fast enough for John Adams. Tempers flared and members controlled themselves with difficulty. Some wanted to wait a little longer because of the talk of coming peace
commissioners. James Warren agreed with John Adams that such moderation was dangerous.

"You know I have never feared the arms of Britain, but I always dreaded their negotiations, aided and assisted as they will be by the silly moderation and timidity of some, by the prejudices and interested views of others."71 Carter Braxton accused the eastern colonies of downgrading the possibility of peace commissioners because they were afraid of reconciliation, even on America's terms. They were aiming at independence, nothing less. For John Adams and several others, he was exactly right.

Congress passed a resolve on March 20 which John Adams took as a good sign. A commission was being sent to Canada to try to enlist support for the American revolt from that other British colony. The resolve which the commissioners were to carry to Canada recommended that they set up a government best suited to produce their happiness. Adams considered this as a good precedent for a future recommendation to all the American colonies to set up their own governments and cited with a great deal of satisfaction their importance as "...strong proof of the real determination of a Majority of Congress to go with Us to the final Consummation of our Wishes."72

Meanwhile, Massachusetts sentiment was in total agreement with Adams' "Majority of Congress". John Winthrop outlined the impatience of those who felt they had suffered long enough and wished to declare independence immediately.

"Our people are impatiently waiting for the Congress to declare off from Great Britain. If they should not do it pretty soon, I am not sure but this colony will do it for themselves....We have a report here that no
commissioners are coming, after all. I hope it is true...
P.S. I hope 'Common Sense' is in as high estimation at
the southward as with us. It is universally admired
here. If the Congress shall adopt the sentiments of
it, it would give the greatest satisfaction to our people.73

Events were moving forward rapidly. On April 12, the North Carolina Provincial Congress recommended outright that the Congress adopt a declaration of independency.

John Adams was as anxious as anyone that there be a formal declaring off from Great Britain. However, he realized the Congress could only be pushed so fast and he became irritated with the constant pleas by Warren and others for a formal declaration. He sought also to control his own impatience: "But We must move slowly, Patience, Patience, Patience. I am obliged to invoke this every Morning of my Life, every Noon and every Evening." Adams insisted that in most respects a formal declaration was just that, a formality.

"Independence? Have We not been independent these twelve Months, wanting Three days? Have you seen the privateering Resolves? Are not these Independence enough for my beloved Constituents? Have you seen the Resolves for opening our Ports to all Nations? Are these Independence Enough? What more would you have?"75

Independence Like A Torrent

Ever since the Battle of Lexington John Adams had been advocating, first quietly, then openly, that Congress recommend that each of the states set up a new government completely independent of royal authority. He was to have his wish on May 10, 1776, more than a year after Lexington.

Adopting a resolution drafted by John Adams, Congress declared,

"That it be recommended to the respective assemblies and
Adams and the rest of the independence party pushed for the resolution as a necessary measure because several of the colonies were in a completely disorganized state. The revolutionary connotations of this measure were clear enough, but its preamble was even clearer.

The preamble was in part the work of John Adams and recommended "...that the Exercise of every Kind of Authority under the said Crown should be totally suppressed..." What did it mean? The colonists had maintained ever since the Declaration of Causes of Taking Up Arms that their only tie with England was through the king. If this tie were broken, were not the colonies then independent? Most members of Congress were not sure. The delegates from Maryland were sure. They were so upset over the connotations of independence that they walked out of the hall, stating they were under instructions not to vote for independence. After two or three days of heated debate, the preamble passed on May 15.

"It would seem in retrospect that until Maryland left the meeting room many of the delegates who had voted for the preamble were unaware of exactly what they were voting for. The measure's proponents had skillfully emphasized in the day-long debate its utility--stable governments were needed to fight the 'myrimidious from abroad'--and implied that timid delegates exaggerated the overtones of independence....Once Maryland had left the hall many of the delegates began to see that the measure held more than met the eye at first glance. 'You will say (it) falls little short of Independence.' Carter Braxton wrote a friend. 'It was not so understood by Congress but I find those out of doors on both sides the question construe it in that manner.' Caesar Rodney had been among those who at the time of voting had noted only the preamble's practical virtues. Two days later he wrote: 'Most of those here who are termed the Cool Considerate Men think
it amounts to a declaration of Independence. It Certainly savours of it,' he added, still not positive of its implications, "but you will see and Judge for Your Self...". 78

John Adams, however, was quite certain what it meant and quite jubilant. "Mr. Duane called it, to me, a Machine for the fabrication of Independence. I said, smiling, I thought it was independence itself: but We must have it with more formality yet." 79

Even though the implications of the resolves of the 10th and the 15th were radical, there were still several in Congress who favored moderation. More importantly, several colonial conventions were still undecided on the question. John Adams had warned friends all along not to let Massachusetts get too far ahead of the rest of the colonies. But now he was pressing the matter himself. Everything depended on the middle colonies. Maryland had been alienated outright. Pennsylvania was still the hands of moderates and would be till the end of May. New York had decided misgivings on the subject on independence. Virginia led the way for the reluctant colonies; on May 27 came news that she had recommended that the colonies declare their independence.

John Adams was certain what the ultimate outcome would be. "G(reat) B(ritain) has at last driven America, to the last Step, a compleat Separation from her, a total absolute Independence, not only of her Parliament but of her Crown, for such is the Amount of the Resolve of the 15th." 80 "Every Post and every Day rolls in upon Us. Independence like a Torrent....we can't be very remote from the most decisive Measures and the most critical events." 81

On June 6, Sam Adams wrote a letter to James Warren;

"You know my Temper. Perhaps I may be too impatient....However, tomorrow a motion will be made, and
a Question I hope decided, the most important that ever was agitated in America. I have no doubt but it will be decided to your satisfaction. This being done, Things will go on in the right Channel and our Country will be saved."

The following day Virginian Richard Henry Lee moved that the Congress adopt a formal declaration of independence. The motion was passed on the 10th, but could not be acted on, as Maryland and New York were still undecided. Therefore, it was moved to postpone a formal vote till July 1st. In the meantime a committee was appointed to draft a declaration. Its members were John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, R. R. Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson. On the 12th committees were established to draft a plan of confederation and procedures for entering into foreign treaties. John Adams was also appointed to these two committees.

Moderates had wanted the delay for consideration of independence because they still hoped for the advent of the so-far illusory peace commissioners. Rather than force the issue further, the radicals accepted the slight setback in exchange for the right to begin writing a declaration immediately. If the commissioners did not materialize before July 1, and Adams was sure they would not, independence was all but declared.

"Objects of the most stupendous magnitude, and measures in which the lives and liberties of millions, yet unborn are intimately interested (he wrote to William Cushing), are now before us. We are in the very midst of a revolution, the most complete, unexpected, and remarkable, of any in the history of nations." 83

During the time from June 10 to July 1, Adams' time was taken up mainly with his duties as chairman of the Board of War and Ordnance. The numerous duties of this committee were generally the administration of the army. Meanwhile, New Jersey and Maryland
voted unanimously for independence. Thomas Jefferson, chosen to write the declaration, presented a draft to the committee. Franklin and Adams made several changes and the document was ready to be presented to Congress. But first must come the resolution concerning independence itself.

Free and Independent States

July 1 finally came, the day John Adams had been waiting for so long. Adams was convinced that all had been said. John Dickinson, however, was determined to make one last speech to fight the measure. He counselled patience because several colonies still had not sent their delegates instructions. The colonies must be united in whatever they did, and there might be deep dissension if the rest of them went much faster than the middle colonies wished to go. Dickinson was also afraid of the price which Spain or France might ask for their help in the fight. After Dickinson finished, an uncomfortable pause ensued. The most logical one to answer his charges was John Adams.

"In any event, Adams was not inclined to let the last word go to his opponent by default. He stood up to reply, short, stout, florid, admirable and maddening, respected even by those who most disliked him. He had not, though never a man needed them more, the talents of the ancient orators, of a Pericles, a Demosthenes, a Cicero or Cato, he declared, but the issue before them might safely be trusted to the guide of 'plain understanding and common sense'. Having made the traditional disclaimer, he went on to make the most notable speech of his life, reviewing in careful detail the legal and constitutional arguments, the measures of the ministers and parliament against colonial liberties, the successive steps of the deepening crisis, the outbreak of armed conflict, the efforts at reconciliation and, finally, the inevitability of independence and the advantages to be gained by declaring it at once."84
Adams insisted that independence was already an accomplished fact. It was the will of the people, regardless of the wishes of their representatives. The main detractors from the measure were the representatives of the proprietary colonies. Following his speech, the New Jersey delegates arrived and wished to hear the arguments again. Adams complied with ill humor, sensing the nearness of a measure which he had advocated for over a year.

A hasty vote produced only nine colonies for the measure. South Carolina and Pennsylvania were opposed, Delaware divided and New York abstained, claiming it had no instructions on the matter. Adams was disgusted but endeavored to save the outcome. Caesar Rodney of Delaware, a firm friend of independence, was sent for from his home ninety miles away. Adams and Richard Henry Lee persuaded Edward Rutledge of South Carolina to vote for the measure if Delaware and Pennsylvania did. Pennsylvania's seven delegates were divided four against and three for. Two of those against (Robert Morris and John Dickinson) were persuaded not to officially take their seats. Thus the colony would go for independence three to two, Supposedly word was on the way that New York had voted for independence. (This was untrue, as New York did not vote for independence til July 9.)

July 2 dawned amidst thunderstorms outside and tension inside the hall. Congress spent the morning on mundane matters and then just after lunch, Caesar Rodney arrived, exhausted from his all-night ride. His vote turned the tide for Delaware. South Carolina and Pennsylvania followed suit and New York abstained. The deed was done.
"Thus at last did Congress, on the 2d of July, 1776, after long hesitation and not a little squirming, resolve that henceforth the United Colonies should be free and independent states. To all intents and purposes this resolution was the conclusion of the whole matter. So at least thought the man who had mainly led the forces of independence to victory."

The next morning, John Adams wrote his wife of the great events which had taken place:

"Yesterday the greatest Question was decided, which ever was debated in America, and a greater perhaps never was or will be decided among Men. A Resolution was passed without one dissenting Colony 'that these united Colonies, are, and of right, ought to be, free and independent States...'.

Adams was interested with the practical business of getting independence declared and cared little of how it was declared. Conservatives were concerned with the actual wording, since they had lost the larger fight. On the 4th, Congress took up consideration of the Declaration itself. It changed the piece very little except to remove the attack on slavery and an ethnic slam at the Scots. David Hawke comments on the ease with which consensus was reached on its wording.

"The process of making Jefferson's Declaration into an American Declaration did more than improve the paper. It revealed that, despite strong divisive forces within the new nation, there appeared to exist a solid ideological basis for unity. Thirteen states, whose representatives only two years earlier had first met in Philadelphia and had been appalled at the diversity of customs, laws, and traditions among the colonies, and who only three weeks earlier had been at loggerheads over the practical question of independence, had with little difficulty been able to agree on a set of fundamental political beliefs."

As when the members of Congress did not know what they were passing in the Resolves of May 10 and 15, they did not know what would be the result of their passage of the Declaration.
"When Abraham Clark foresaw the possibility that Congress might be exalted on a high gallows, he expressed a genuine fear felt by himself and other members of Congress." The Declaration was an act of treason. If the revolution were unsuccessful, its signers stood to reap the rewards of a treasonable act. Thus the names of the signers were kept secret until January 18, 1777.

"In August, as the preparations for war continued, Congress paused one morning for all the delegates present to sign the engrossed vellum copy of the Declaration. 'Do you recollect,' Benjamin Rush asked Adams years later, 'the pensive and awful silence which pervaded the house when we were called up, one after another, to the table of the President of Congress to subscribe what was believed by many at that time to be our own death warrants?'

So--the thing which John Adams had dreamed of and worked for so long had come true. He was convinced that the event would be commemorated for many years to come.

"'It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore.'"

Once again John Adams has proven a prophet. Although he thought we would celebrate July 2nd rather than the 4th, a better description of the way we continue to celebrate our independence could not be found.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 92.

3 Ibid., p. 76.


7 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 72.

8 Ibid., p. 74.

9 Ibid., p. 73.

10 Smith, pp. 55-56.

11 Ibid., p. 55.

12 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 72.

13 Ibid., p. 89.

14 Smith, p. 90.

15 Ibid., p. 121.

16 See Smith, p. 122.

17 Process whereby one reads from Scripture, is branded on the thumbs, and then dismissed without further punishment. It can be used only for a first offense, obviously only one time. This remedy is not available for murder.

18 Smith, p. 140.

19 Ibid., p. 147.

20 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 96.


25 This does not necessarily mean Adams was advocating independence this early. He simply saw no reason why the colonists should not try to better their position through force. Yet he declared during the winter of 1774-1775 that if British blood were spilled, then reconciliation would become impossible. Still, just after the adjourning of the First Congress, he held high hopes of a peaceful solution. The contradiction is apparent.


27 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 96.


31 Ibid., p. 34.

32 John Adams to Abigail Adams, October 9, 1774. Ibid., pp. 66-67.


35 Ibid., p. 60.

36 Ibid., p. 61.

38 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 103.
39 Smith, p. 192.
40 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 99.
43 Ibid.
44 Smith, p. 196.
48 John Adams to Abigail Adams, May 29, 1775. Ibid., I, 207.
51 John Adams to Abigail Adams, June 18, 1775. Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, I, 224.
52 Burnett, The Continental Congress, p. 86.
54 John Adams to James Warren, July 24, 1775. Ibid., pp. 88-89.
58 John Adams to Abigail Adams, October 10, 1775. Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, I, 299.
59 John Adams to Abigail Adams, October 13, 1775. Ibid., I, 300.

60 Sam Adams to William Heath, October 20, 1775. Burnett, Letters, I, 239.

61 From Autobiography of John Adams, Ibid., I, 246.

62 Ibid., I, 248.

63 Samuel Ward to Henry Ward, November 11, 1775. Ibid., I, 252.

64 Burnett, The Continental Congress, p. 117.

65 See Editor's note Burnett, Letters, I, 255.


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., p. 134.


70 John Adams to Abigail Adams, February 18, 1776. Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, I, 348.


73 John Winthrop to John Adams, April, 1776. Massachusetts Historical Society, Correspondence between John Adams and Professor John Winthrop, p. 298.


75 John Adams to James Warren, April 16, 1776. Ibid., p. 227.

76 Hawke, In the Midst of Revolution, p. 119.


78 Hawke, In the Midst of Revolution, p. 125.

79 Butterfield, Diary & Autobiography, III, 386.


83 Ibid., p. 173.

84 Smith, p. 268.


87 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 204.


89 Hawke, A Transaction, p. 209.

90 Smith, p. 271.
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