America's Fight for Independence

1775 - 1776

by Margot Morrell



"Call me an enthusiast," said Samuel Adams; "this union among the colonies and warmth of affection can be attributed to nothing less than the agency of the Supreme Being. If we believe that he superintends and directs the affairs of empires, we have reason to expect the restoration and establishment of the public liberties."

History of the United States, Vol. 4.
George Bancroft

Fort Ticonderoga



Inspired by the battles at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the following month, Ethan Allen, Benedict Arnold and the Green Mountain Boys executed a surprise attack on Fort Ticonderoga and Fort Crown Point. The first-time colonists initiated military action against the British.

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Fort Ticonderoga was strategically located on Lake Champlain. Capturing the fort hindered British communication and blocked an attack on Boston from the northwest.

2nd Continental Congress

On the same day Fort Ticonderoga was captured, May 10, 1775, delegates from twelve colonies gathered at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress.

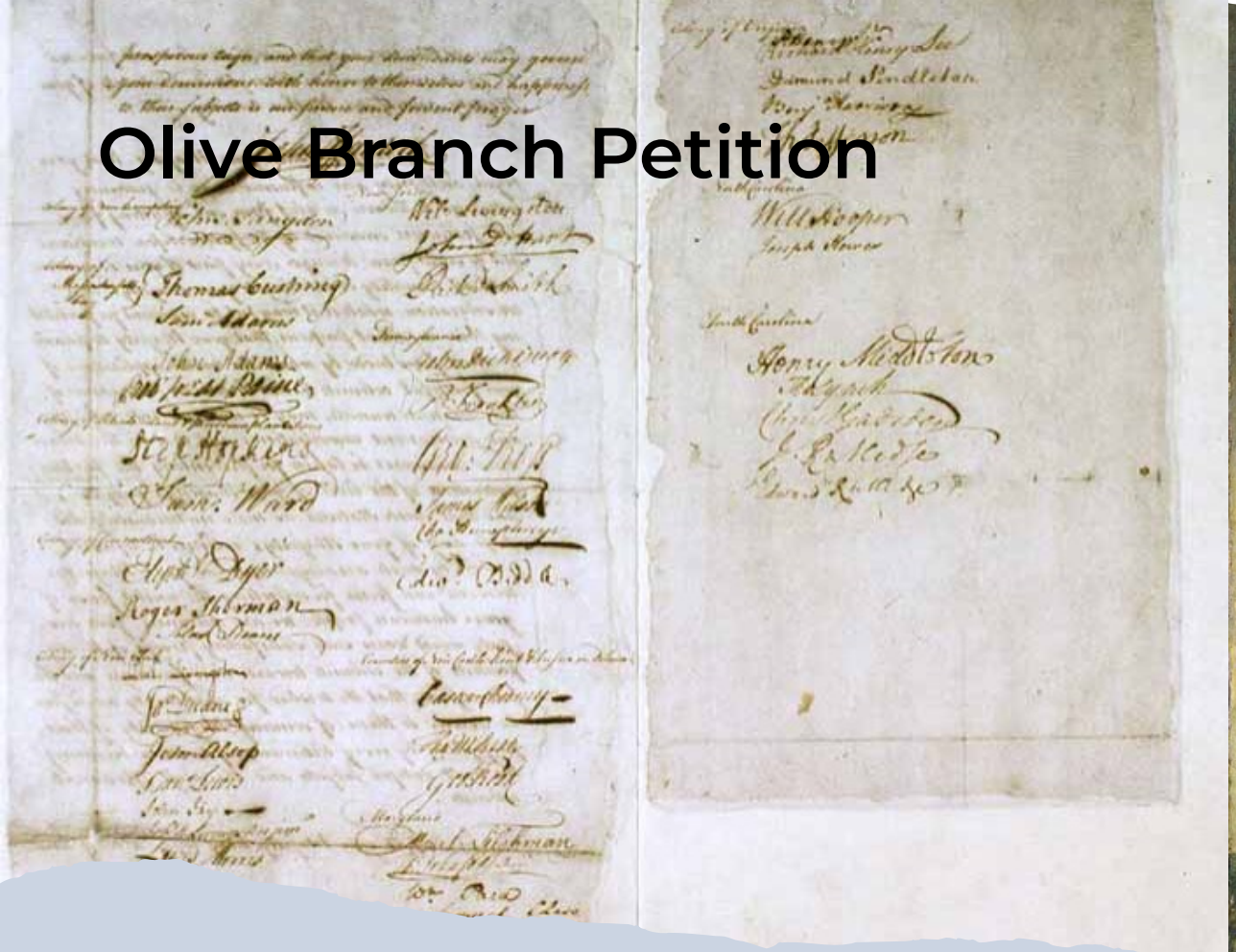
This time, Georgia sent an observer. When Congress declared a ban on trade with Britain, Georgia became a full participant in the proceedings.

For the next six years, Congress remained in session, acting as a federal government – raising militias, appointing diplomats and drafting documents.

To avoid capture when the British seized Philadelphia, the delegates relocated to Baltimore and, later, to courthouses in York and Lancaster, PA before returning to the Pennsylvania State House.



Olive Branch Petition





In a futile effort to avoid war, on July 8, 1775, the Continental Congress sent The Olive Branch Petition, drafted by John Dickinson, to King George III.

The king refused to read the document when it arrived at Parliament on August 24th. In response to the news of the Battle of Bunker Hill, the king had already declared the colonies in rebellion.

Bunker Hill

In mid-June 1775, colonists in Massachusetts became aware of a British plan to capture the hills surrounding the waterfront and seize control of Boston Harbor.

During the night,1200 patriots crept up Bunker and Breed's hills in Charlestown to fortify positions.

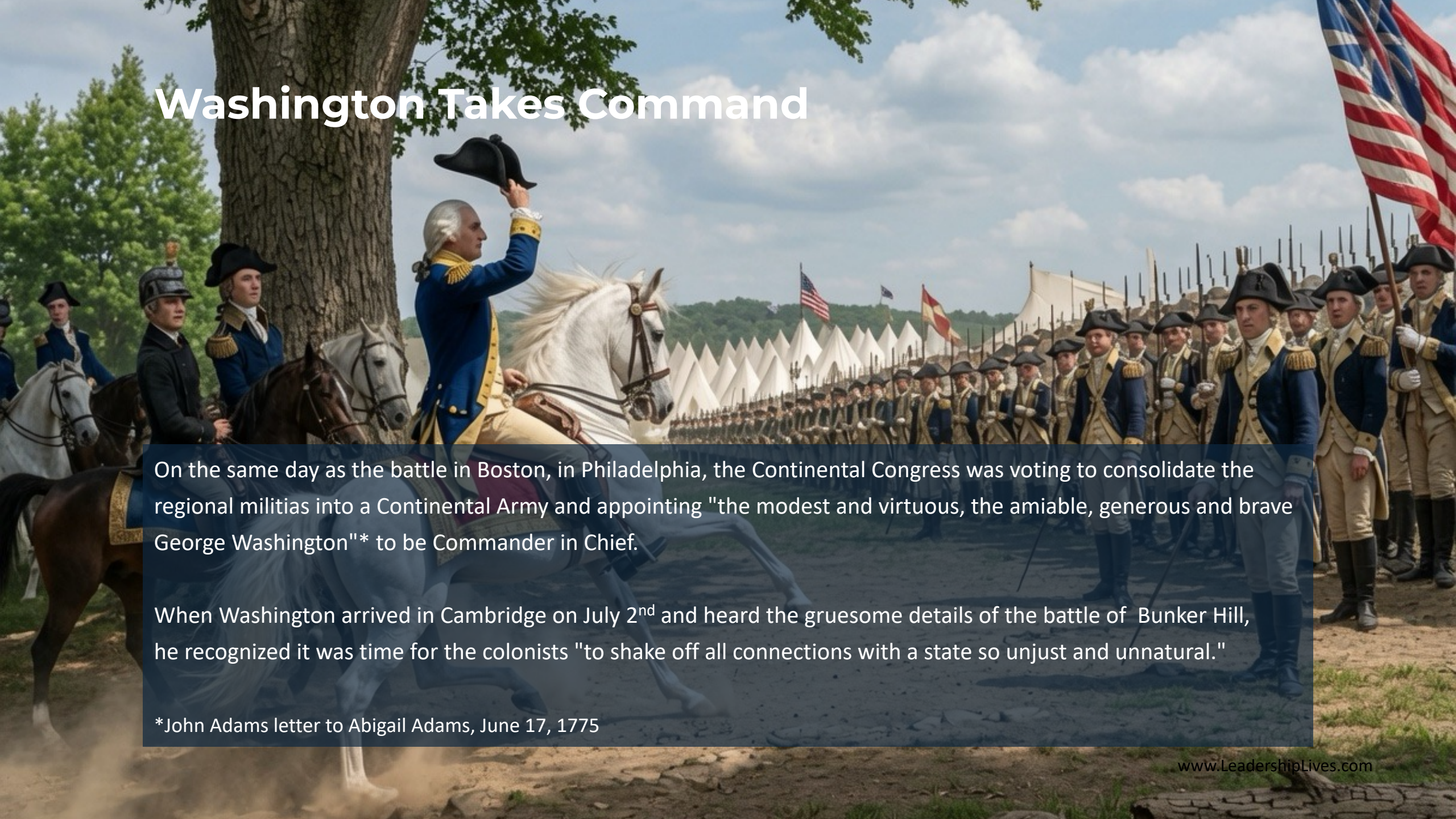
The British attacked on the morning of June 17th. A bloody battled ensued. The British won but at an enormous cost which influenced their future actions in New York and New Jersey. The outnumbered militia had proven their skill and determination against the world's premier fighting force.

The greatest loss for the patriots was the death of Joseph Warren. It was rumored that General Gage said that killing Warren was the equivalent of killing 500 colonists.



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Washington Takes Command



On the same day as the battle in Boston, in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress was voting to consolidate the regional militias into a Continental Army and appointing "the modest and virtuous, the amiable, generous and brave George Washington"* to be Commander in Chief.

When Washington arrived in Cambridge on July 2nd and heard the gruesome details of the battle of Bunker Hill, he recognized it was time for the colonists "to shake off all connections with a state so unjust and unnatural."

*John Adams letter to Abigail Adams, June 17, 1775

Henry Knox



One of the first people Washington in Boston met was Henry Knox who had just turned 25.

Knox distinguished himself at Bunker Hill and then put his skills to use fortifying the defenses of militia camps around Boston. A former bookstore owner, Knox had a passion for mathematics, engineering and artillery.

As the siege of Boston wore on, Knox suggested a solution for General Washington's most pressing problem. The colonial army had almost no artillery.

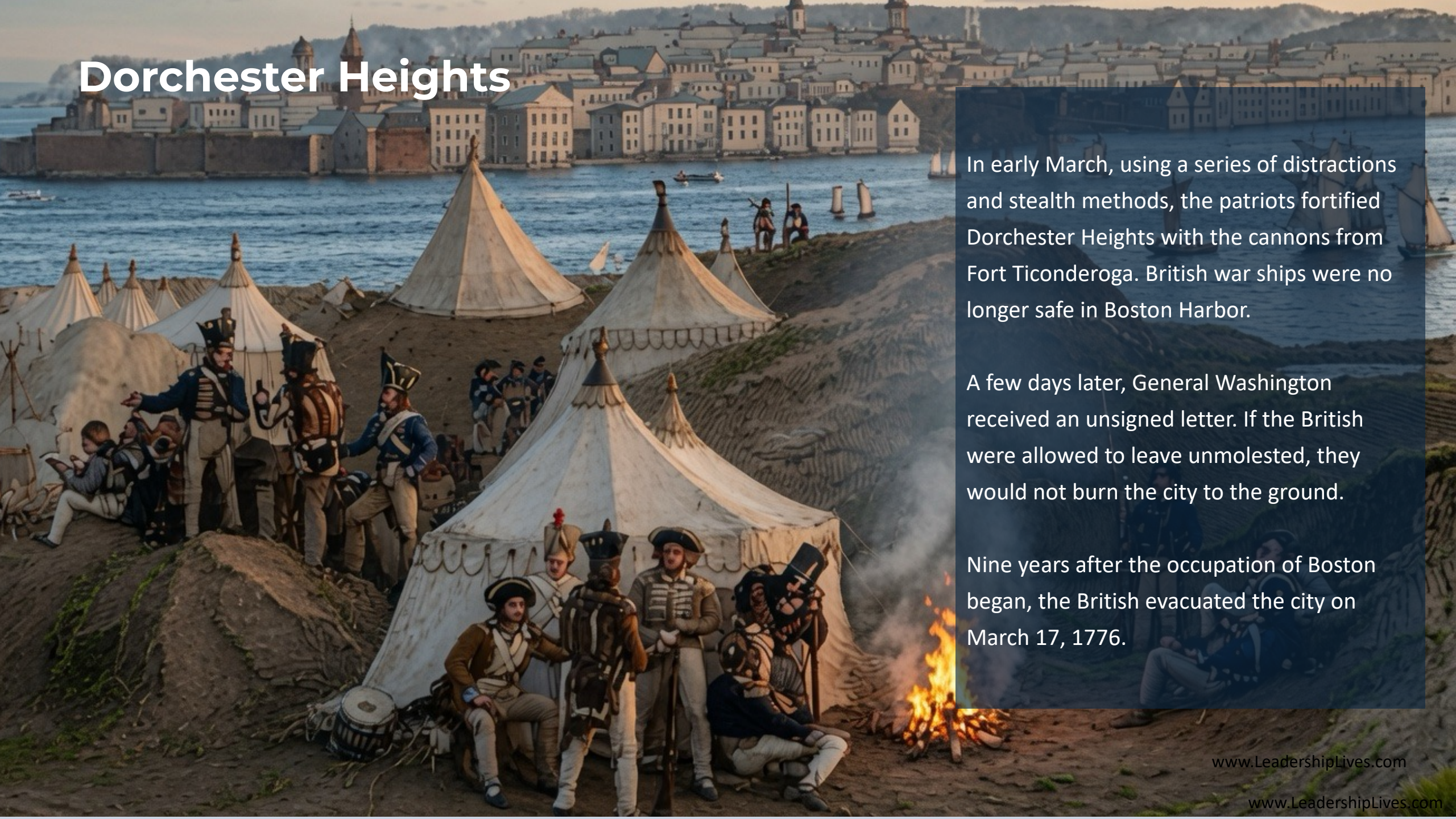
Knox proposed that he and his 19-year-old brother, make the 200-mile journey to Fort Ticonderoga to collect all cannons and armaments and bring them to Boston. With Washington's full support, Knox set out on November 17, 1775.

Noble Train of Artillery



A month later, Henry Knox and his brother were on their way back to Boston with 60 tons of cannons and weapons. With support from hired help and oxen, they transported the valuable cargo across the icy waters and snow-covered mountains of New England. On January 24, 1776, they arrived back in Boston.

Dorchester Heights



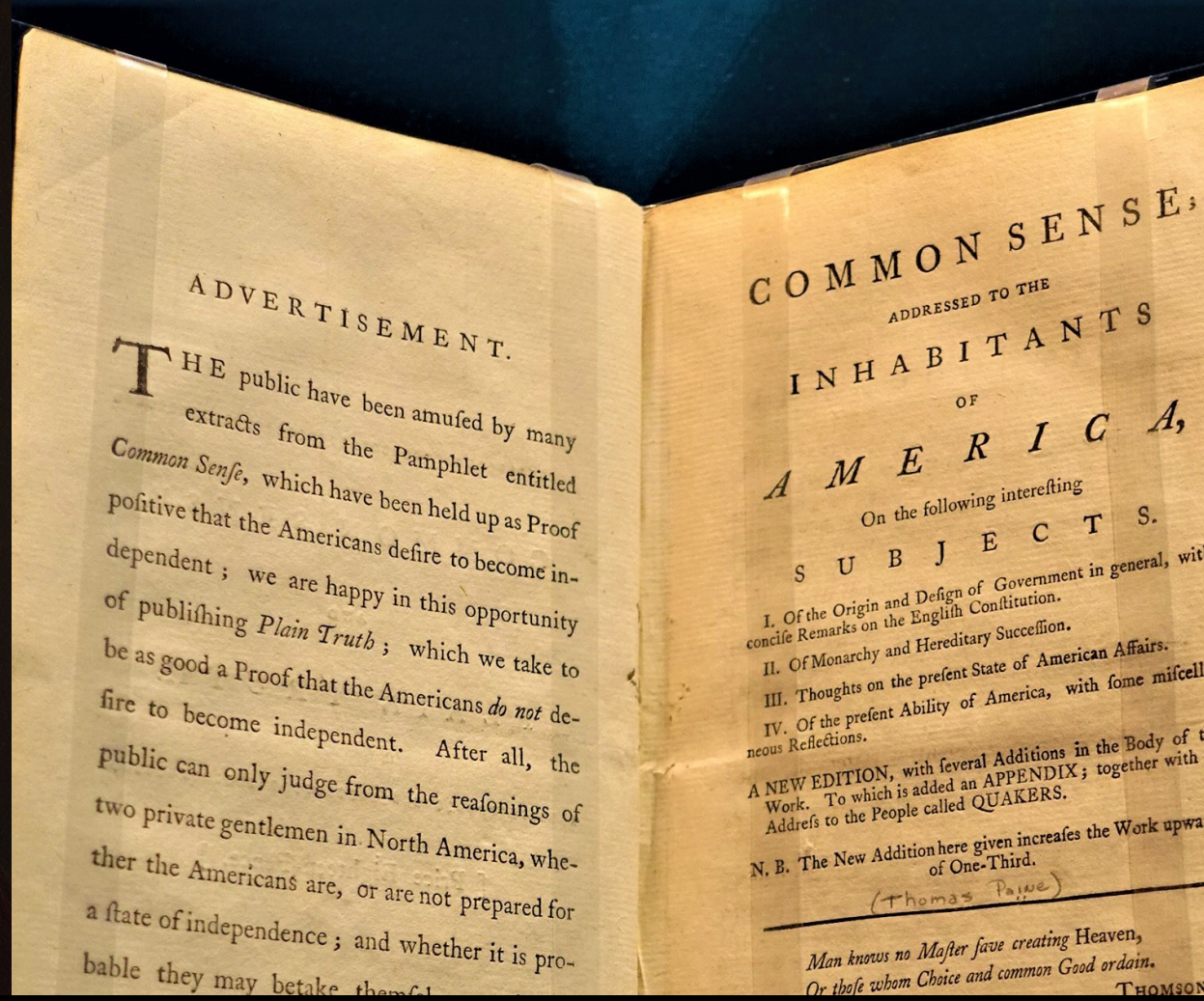
In early March, using a series of distractions and stealth methods, the patriots fortified Dorchester Heights with the cannons from Fort Ticonderoga. British war ships were no longer safe in Boston Harbor.

A few days later, General Washington received an unsigned letter. If the British were allowed to leave unmolested, they would not burn the city to the ground.

Nine years after the occupation of Boston began, the British evacuated the city on March 17, 1776.

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THE public have been amuſed by many extracts from the Pamphlet entitled *Common Senſe*, which have been held up as Proof poſitive that the Americans deſire to become independent; we are happy in this opportunity of publiſhing *Plain Truth*; which we take to be as good a Proof that the Americans *do not* deſire to become independent. After all, the public can only judge from the reaſonings of two private gentlemen in North America, whether the Americans are, or are not prepared for a ſtate of independence; and whether it is probable they may betake themſel-

COMMON SENSE;

ADDRESSED TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF

AMERICA,

On the following intereſting

SUBJECTS.

I. Of the Origin and Deſign of Government in general, wit
conciſe Remarks on the Engliſh Conſtitution.

II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succeſſion.

III. Thoughts on the preſent State of American Affairs.

IV. Of the preſent Ability of America, with ſome miſcell
neous Reflections.

A NEW EDITION, with ſeveral Additions in the Body of t
Work. To which is added an APPENDIX; together with
Addreſs to the People called QUAKERS.

N. B. The New Addition here given increaſes the Work upwa
of One-Third.

(Thomas Paine)

Man knows no Maſter ſave creating Heaven,
Or thoſe whom Choice and common Good ordain.
THOMSON

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published a 47-page pamphlet, *Common Sense* written in the style of a sermon. While many, if not most people, were uncertain about the wisdom of declaring independence from Britain, *Common Sense* galvanized public opinion.

One reader said, the pamphlet gives "liberty to every individual to contribute materials for that great building, the grand charter of American Liberty." Estimates suggest it sold the modern equivalent of 6.5 million copies in three months.



May 10 Resolution

On opening day of the Second Continental Congress, May 10, 1776, the representatives passed a resolution recommending that any colony with a government that was not inclined toward independence should form one that was.

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Lee Resolution

In his 1821 autobiography, Thomas Jefferson noted Virginia took the lead in calling for independence.

On Friday June 7. 1776, at the behest of fellow Virginians, and nudged by his friend John Adams, Richard Henry Lee "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."

Edward Rutledge of South Carolina moved that they postpone a vote for three weeks to give delegates time to write home for instructions.



Committee of Five



On June 11, 1776, the Committee of Five – Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Robert Livingston, Roger Sherman and Benjamin Franklin – was appointed to draft a statement on why the colonies were seceding from Great Britain. The declaration had to be put in writing so Congress could appoint diplomats, access foreign ports, and negotiate agreements with foreign states.

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Jefferson to Draft

Thomas Jefferson thought John Adams should write the first draft, but Adams knew he was too unpopular – he had been involved in too many controversies - to take the lead on this important task.

Roger Sherman was no writer. Robert Livingston was undecided about declaring independence. Benjamin Franklin was suffering from an attack of gout. The task of writing the first draft of this important document fell to 33-year-old Thomas Jefferson.

At William & Mary, Jefferson had received a fine education. He had studied the writings of political philosophers John Locke and Montesquieu and had been mentored by some of the best minds in the colonies, George Wythe and Francis Fauquier.





700 Market Street

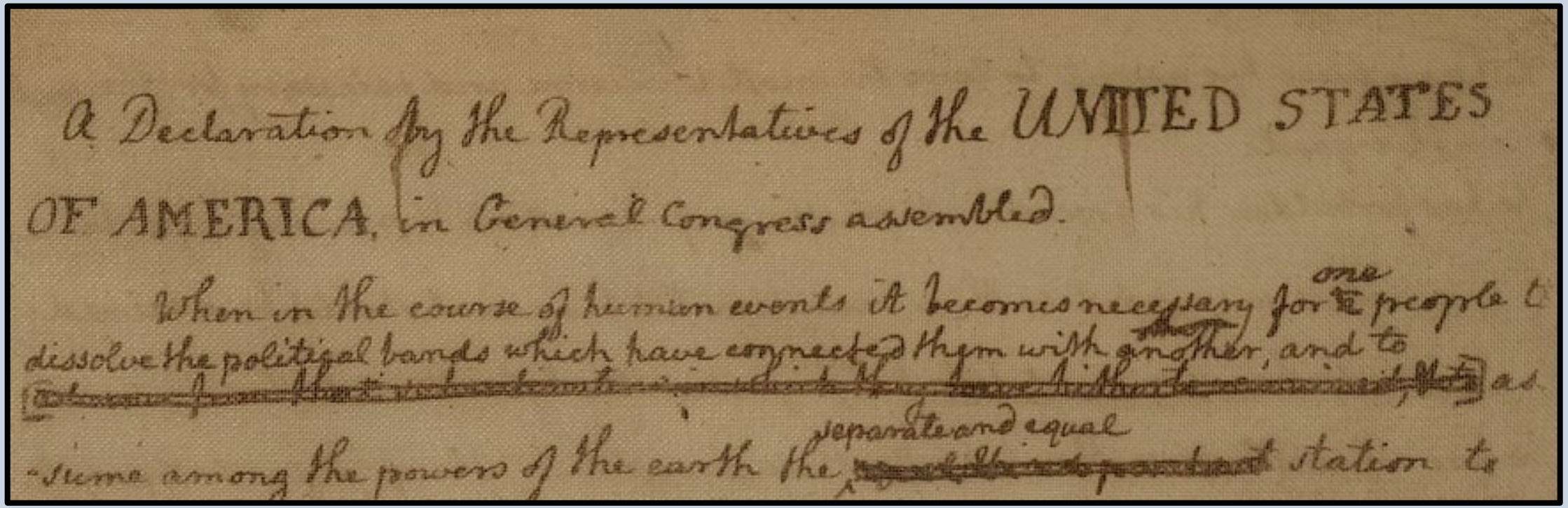
Working mainly from the 2nd floor of the house he was renting at 700 Market Street – a quick 6-minute walk from the State House– Jefferson crafted the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson later said, he did not consult "either book or pamphlet."

Two years earlier, in response to The Intolerable Acts, Jefferson had written *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. Published as a pamphlet, it had established Jefferson's reputation as a thinker and as an author. Now it served as a foundation for the Declaration of Independence.

Polishing the Draft

In one surviving draft of the Declaration, 33% of the words are different from the final edition.
This suggests not only the polishing process but also the invaluable input of Jefferson's co-authors.


A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

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 ~~[illegible]~~ as separate and equal Pow'rs among the powers of the earth the ~~[illegible]~~ station to

John Adams

John Adams got involved in politics two years after he graduated from Harvard Law School when local businessmen mounted a legal challenge to British searches of homes without notice or reason. The court ruled against the colonists. In Adams words, "Then and there the child Independence was born."

Yet, when no lawyers would defend the British soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre, Adams took the case despite the risk to his reputation and livelihood. Toward the end of the soldiers' trial, Adams made his famous statement, "Facts are stubborn things."

Adams, now leader of the Massachusetts delegation at the Second Continental Congress, recognized that some at the gathering were loyalists, some were undecided, and some were for independence.

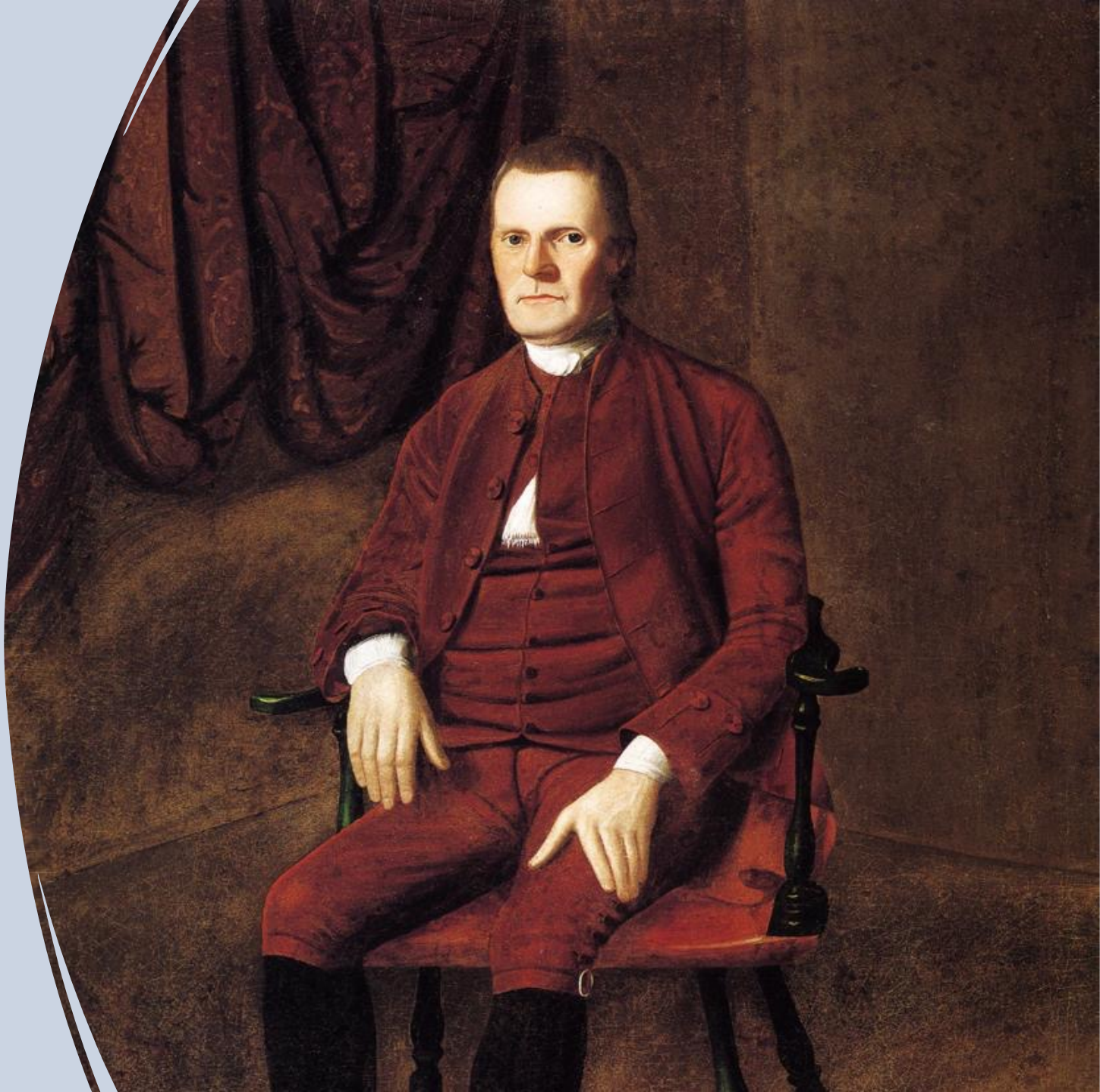
Adams and Benjamin Franklin agreed that independence was inevitable.



Roger Sherman

A "terse, ineloquent speaker" statesman, Roger Sherman from Connecticut was the only person who signed all four of America's foundational documents – the 1774 Continental Association, an agreement among the colonies to ban trade with British merchants, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution. He also signed the 1774 Petition to the King and the 1775 Olive Branch Petition.

A strong voice for less populated states, Sherman's fine legal mind was an asset in designing a new nation.



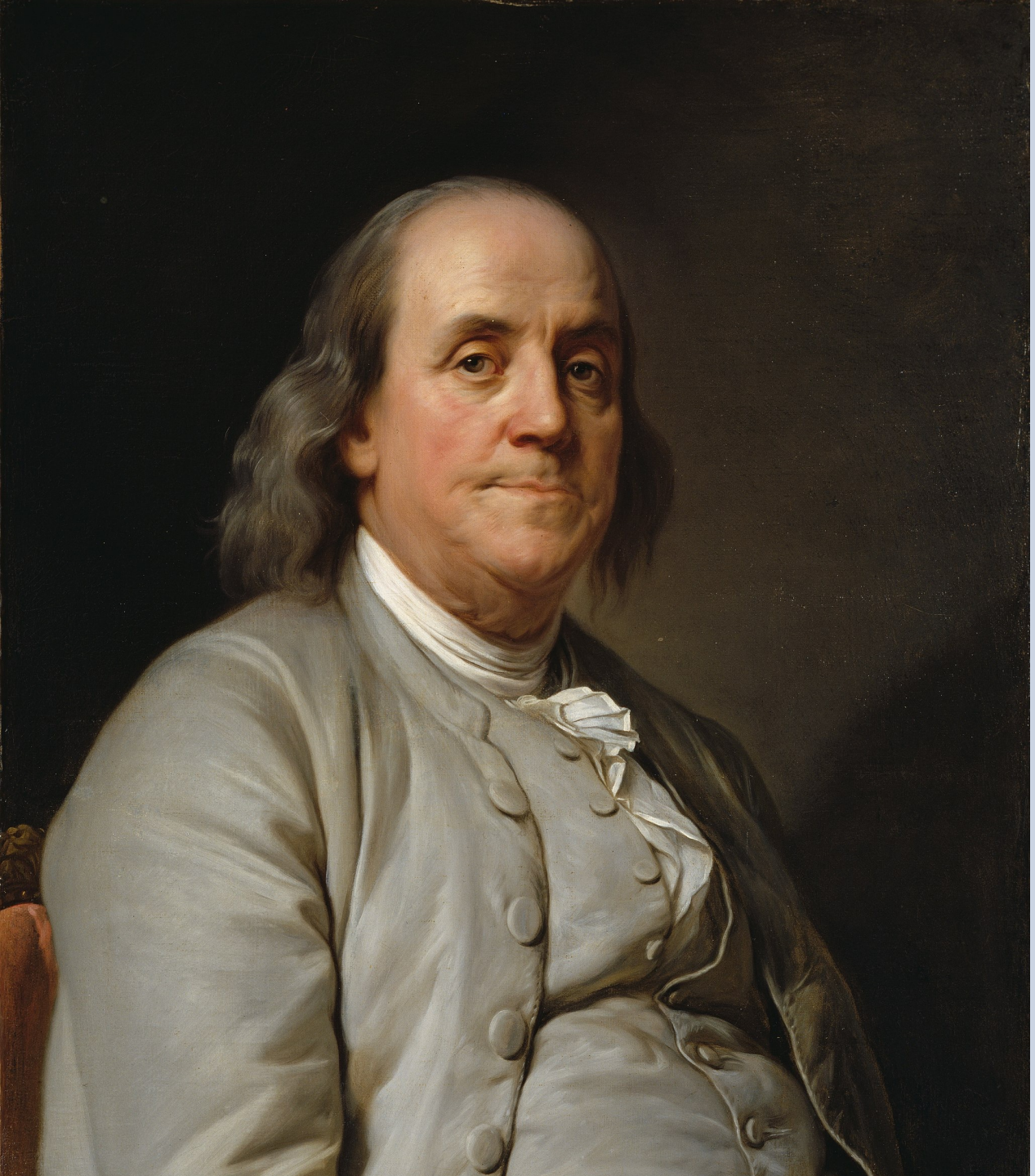
Robert Livingston

Thomas Jefferson described Robert Livingston's 1774 Address to the People of Great Britain as "a production certainly of the finest pen in America" and invited Livingston to be part of the team writing the Declaration.

Before Livingston could sign the Declaration of Independence, he was called back to New York.

In 1789, as New York's highest judicial officer, Livingston swore in George Washington as the first President of the United States at Federal Hall on Wall Street.





Benjamin Franklin

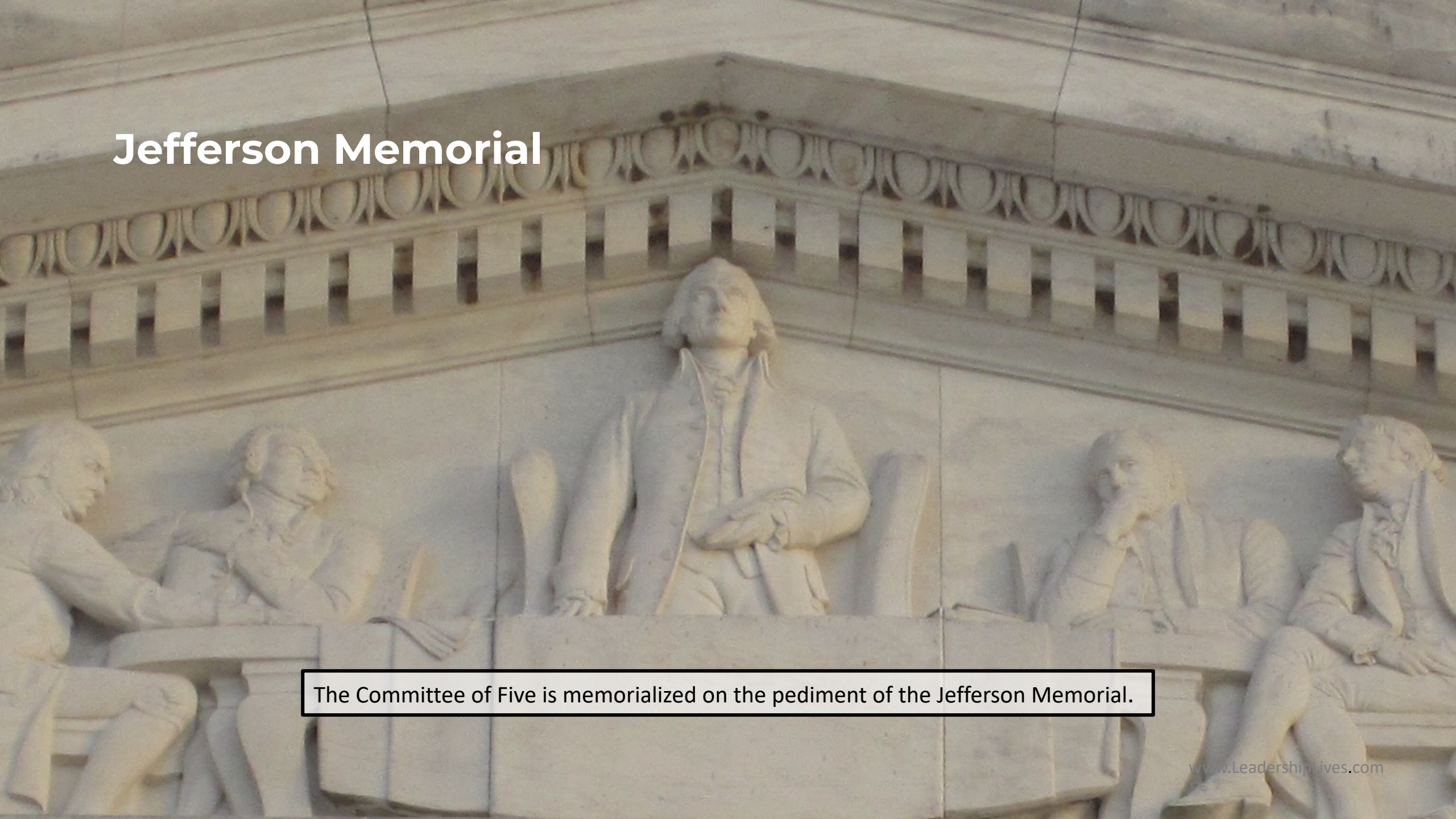
Scientist, author, publisher, postmaster, inventor, ambassador, Franklin has been called "The First American" in recognition of his tireless campaign for colonial unity. Widely recognized for his brilliance, in 1753 both Harvard and Yale awarded him honorary degrees.

In 1757, the Pennsylvania Assembly sent Franklin to London to represent their interests in a dispute with the heirs of William Penn. For the next twenty years, Franklin traveled back and forth across the Atlantic.

The passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, thrust Franklin into representing colonial interests in London.

Handicapped by gout in June 1776, Franklin's participation in drafting the Declaration was minimal but he served as a resource and sounding board for Jefferson.

Jefferson Memorial



The Committee of Five is memorialized on the pediment of the Jefferson Memorial.

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Colonies Divided

As the committee worked on the Declaration, five states, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and especially New York hesitated about breaking free from Britain.

The four southern colonies – Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia - and the four northern colonies – Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire –were in full agreement about declaring independence.



Congress Considers



On June 28th, the Committee of Five presented the Declaration to the whole Congress, and the document was read aloud. On July 2nd, it was read aloud again for the whole Congress.

On July 3, the document was read aloud for the third time to the whole Congress and this time the Congress scrutinized the wording. Two passages were rejected – one passage criticized the British; the second passage was a denunciation of the slave trade and slavery.

Independence Declared



On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress enacted a resolution declaring independence from Britain.

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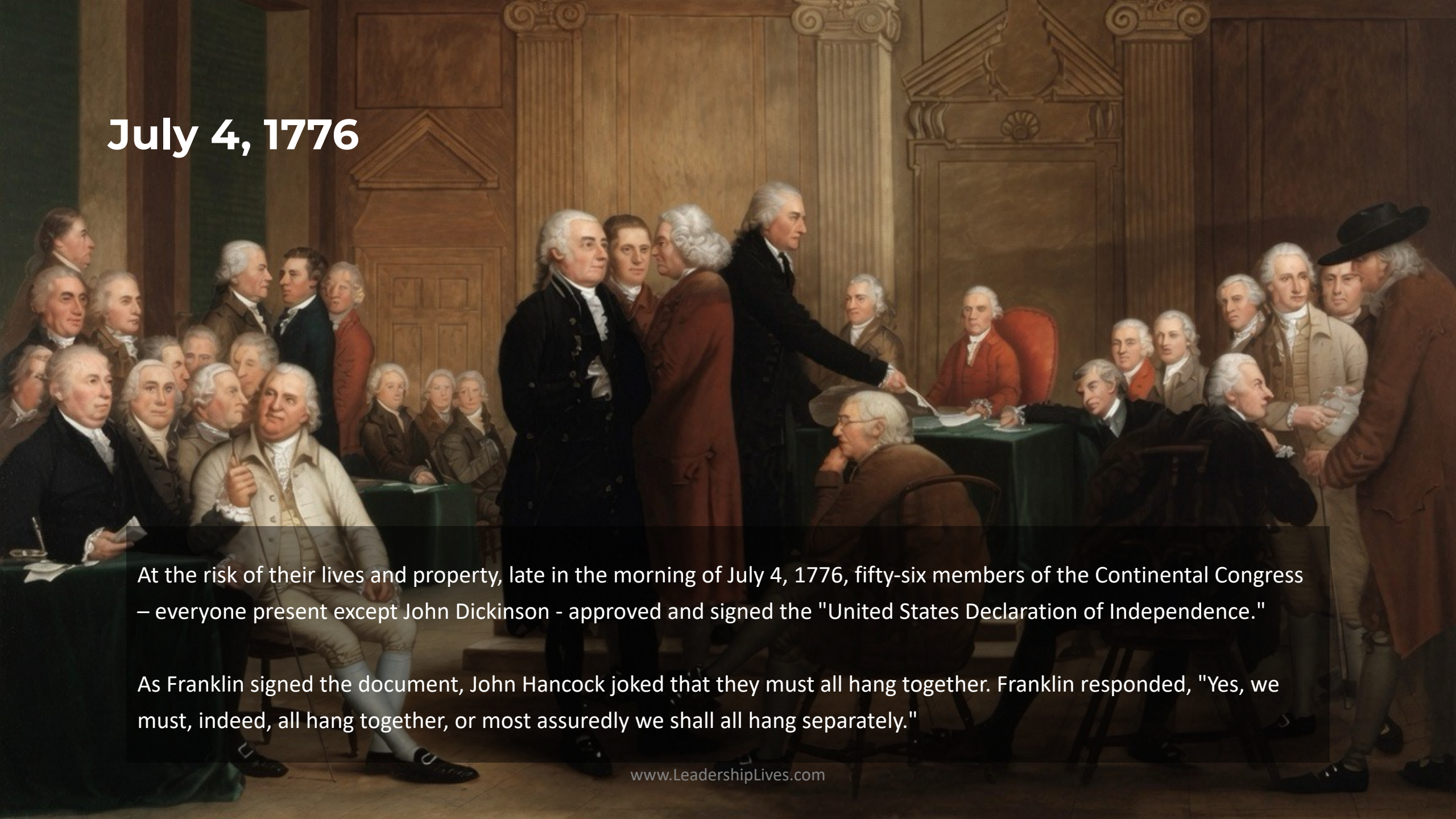
New York Harbor



On July 3, 1776, in an ominous display of force, British war ships gathered in New York Harbor.

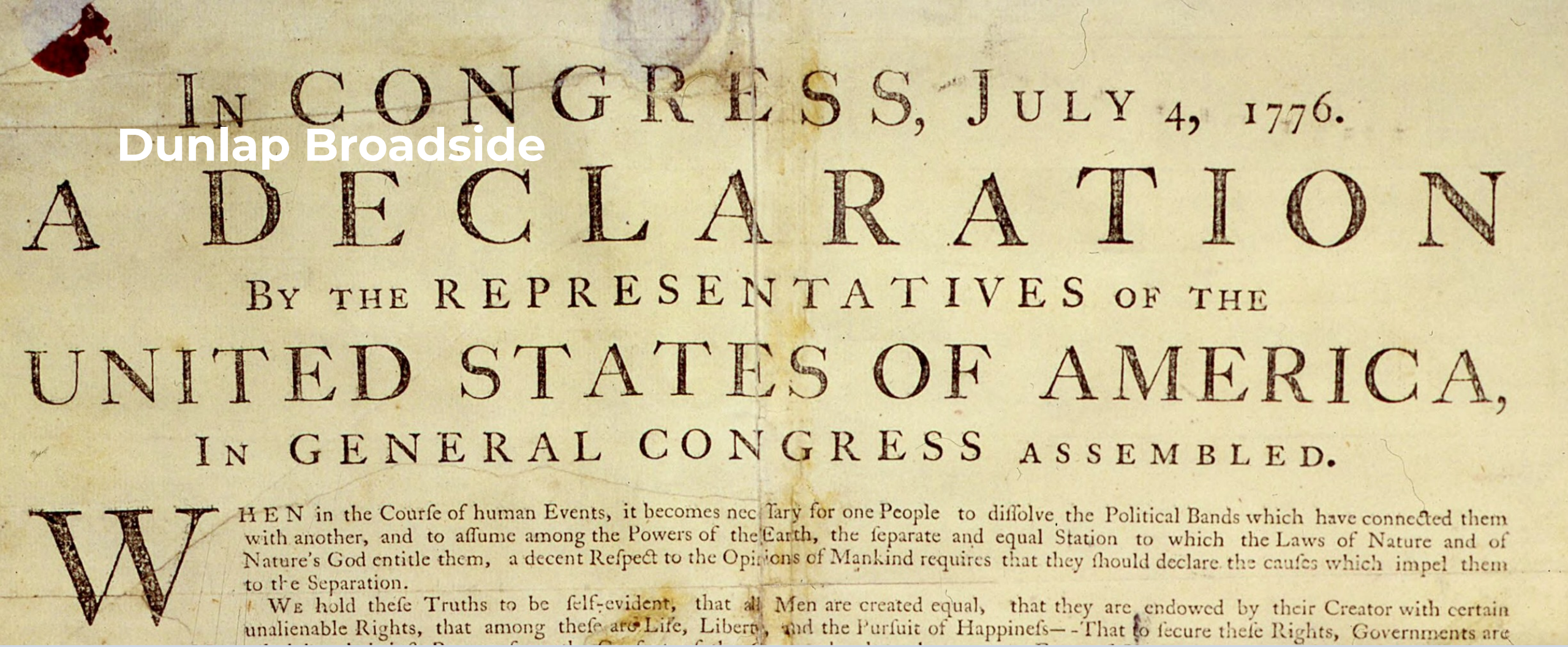
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July 4, 1776



At the risk of their lives and property, late in the morning of July 4, 1776, fifty-six members of the Continental Congress – everyone present except John Dickinson - approved and signed the "United States Declaration of Independence."

As Franklin signed the document, John Hancock joked that they must all hang together. Franklin responded, "Yes, we must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."



On the night of July 4, 1776, Philadelphia printer, John Dunlap, published a draft copy of America's newly-adopted Declaration of Independence. Twenty-five copies still exist.

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Public Reading



Four days later, on July 8th, John Nixon, a prominent Philadelphian, read the Declaration of Independence from the steps of the Philadelphia State House. Today this building is known as Independence Hall.

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The End