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Main Menu

- Home
- George Washington
- Biography
- Battles
- Life and Times
- Washington's Guards
- Revolution by Month
- Founding Philosophy
- Audio
- FAQ

June 1776

Written by Andrew Stough



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June was a month of creation. Determined at last to create a formal declaration of Independence, Congress appointed a committee of five to write the document and present it for approval by the sitting body. The only requirement imposed was that the document must conform to the Virginia Resolves.

To Jefferson, younger and less distinguished, fell the task of doing the writing. Franklin or Adams were more distinguished for their ideas or writing but Thomas Jefferson possessed an ability to write and was stuck with the drudgery of drawing up a new document which must conform to an already published document.

You might inquire why would Franklin or Adams not grab this opportunity to expand on the Virginia Resolves and thusly further distinguish themselves? Several authors have volunteered reasons. Among those suggested are that at its inception the document was seen as simply a restatement of the Virginia Resolves – hardly becoming an incentive to the two older men who may have considered their expertise to be of more value as reviewers than as rewrite authors of a document which would quite simply rely upon another document. A document which would express to the King, Parliament and other nations that the colonies by this writing, here and now, declared themselves sovereign states; free and independent; and capable of being able to negotiate, trade and carry on diplomatic relations with any other nation as it saw fit.

Jefferson pondered the problem. Should he make it a bare bones statement or should he also review the wrongs requiring dissolution of the bonds with the mother country, or should it be an inspirational document to rouse men's souls as had Paine's "Common Sense." To his credit, he did all three. The original writing was much amended to its final version but the essence remained. Jefferson allows that in effect he imports ideas from Mason, Locke, and other political theorists of that day. His secret is the uplifting manner in which he expresses these ideas. They are concise and inspirational causing a flood of reprints so that all may read or own a copy of his document.

There were numerous changes made to the declaration, not only at the request of Franklin and Adams, but by the demands of Congress. Still, the original tenor was maintained. There had been much politicking in the effort to arrive at unity on the Declaration. As time for a vote neared, only New York and Pennsylvania were holdouts. Pennsylvania approved it prior to the final vote on July 1st. New York abstained, allowing more time for consideration without showing a lack of unity among the states.

References: Edmund S. Morgan's "Birth of the Republic"; Don Higginbotham's "The War of American Independence"; A. J. Langguth's "Patriots, The men who started the American Revolution"; Robert Leckie's "George Washington's War" .

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