



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

FREEDOM, OUR DEAREST HERITAGE, was won only after a long and determined struggle. And the document which sets forth our reasons for founding an independent nation did not spring into being spontaneously, as many think. One June evening in 1776, on a street corner in the city of Philadelphia, a crowd had gathered. On the near side of the street two well-dressed middle-aged gentlemen and a young man had stopped to see what was happening.

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MR. TEMPLE: Hardly an evening goes by without a gathering such as that one yonder. Go over and see what it is, Philip.

PHILIP TEMPLE: Yes, father. Talking politics as usual I suppose.

MR. TEMPLE: How will it all end, Mr. Dickinson?

JOHN DICKINSON: Peacefully, I hope, Mr. Temple.

MR. TEMPLE: I stand with our king. Like him, I have no patience with these fellows who are always shouting for independence.

JOHN DICKINSON: Perhaps if the king had a little more patience, these cries of "independence" would not be heard.

MR. TEMPLE: When did *you* join the ranks of the rebels, Mr. Dickinson? I thought you were one of the staunchest supporters of reconciliation.

JOHN DICKINSON: I am, Mr. Temple. But I admit that our colonies have been sorely tried.

MR. TEMPLE: Sorely tried! Bah! This cry for freedom from the mother country is only from the riff-raff. It's not popular in the best circles.

JOHN DICKINSON: I can't agree with you there, sir. There's General Washington and Dr. Franklin—

MR. TEMPLE: Washington is a fire eater and Franklin is a supreme egotist! I'm speaking of men like—like—

JOHN DICKINSON: Like yourself, sir?

MR. TEMPLE: Well, yes. I owe allegiance to my king, and I've brought up my son to think as I do.

PHILIP TEMPLE: (*returning*) Father.

MR. TEMPLE: Yes, Philip.

PHILIP TEMPLE: It's a man handing out pamphlets. I brought you one. It's called "Common Sense."

MR. TEMPLE: "Common Sense." Something that's needed in these colonies.

JOHN DICKINSON: I've seen the booklet. It's a dissertation on independence and the rights of man.

MR. TEMPLE: Revolutionary twaddle, eh? It should be burned!

JOHN DICKINSON: It's well written. And though I don't agree with the author, it's worth reading.

MR. TEMPLE: Who wrote it?

JOHN DICKINSON: I don't know. Some say John Adams. Others say Dr. Franklin himself.

MR. TEMPLE: The whole Continental Congress ought to be strung up. With a few exceptions, such as yourself, Mr. Dickinson.

JOHN DICKINSON: Oh I'm not the only delegate who wants reconciliation with the crown! A few of us still think that's where our interests lie. Last year there was a plan to introduce a resolution for independence, but I managed to stave it off.

MR. TEMPLE: But your congress sent that renegade Washington to Massachusetts to take charge of a force of rebels.

JOHN DICKINSON: Not rebels, Mr. Temple. Englishmen like ourselves, who are proud of our rights.

MR. TEMPLE: Our discussion seems to have attracted a crowd of your freedom loving citizens. (*voices coming up*)

VOICE I: They're Tories. Tories!

MR. GRATZ: Hold on, boys. It's Mr. Dickinson. He's a member of the Continental Congress, from our own colony, and he's always been fair. I see you have a copy of "Common Sense." What do you think of it, Mr. Temple?

MR. TEMPLE: I haven't read the—oh, it's you, Gratz. I'm surprised to see you in such company! A bricklayer should build, not destroy.

JOHN DICKINSON: Wait a moment, gentlemen. Don't let's have any argument. The Watch will be along shortly, and—

VOICE I: And then I suppose we'll be arrested and shipped to England for trial!

VOICE II: What answer have ye to this pamphlet, "Common Sense," Mr. Dickinson?

JOHN DICKINSON: My answer will be made at the proper time. I'm not against you, truly I'm not. I'm as fond of my country as you are. I sympathize with her ills. I only differ with you regarding the remedy. I can't help feeling that if the colonists could convince the *people* of Great Britain that we are in earnest about our rights, and willing to defend

them, the British *government* would back down, as they did in the case of the Stamp Act.

MR. TEMPLE: Why argue with them, Mr. Dickinson? Traitors should be sent to prison. Mark my words, this country will never be free of British rule.

MR. GRATZ: Tom Jefferson says that some of the delegates have been instructed to introduce another resolution for independence this session.

MR. TEMPLE: Tom Jefferson? Never heard of him.

JOHN DICKINSON: He's a newcomer in Congress. A member of the Virginia delegation. A quiet young man, but a powerful writer.

MR. GRATZ: Mr. Jefferson's boarding over at my house. He's made me realize that we have a right to be free. He says that all men are created equal and—

MR. TEMPLE: That's nonsense! You're striking at the divine rights of kings!

VOICE I: Don't listen to the Tories!

VOICE II: Stone them out of town!

VOICE III: Down with them—

THOMAS PAINE: (*coming up*) One moment, my friends. This bickering won't get you anywhere. If you're looking for a fight, I'm sure that General Washington will welcome you as recruits. Go on about your business. I want to talk to these gentlemen myself.

VOICE I: It's Mr. Paine!

VOICE II: Tom Paine!

MR. TEMPLE: Thank you, sir. I am in your debt. Did I catch the name as Paine?

THOMAS PAINE: Yes, sir.

JOHN DICKINSON: This is Thomas Paine, Mr. Temple. An Englishman by birth, an American by adoption.

MR. TEMPLE: You handled those curs superbly, Mr. Paine.

THOMAS PAINE: Don't call them curs, sir, lest they turn on you and bite. I felt I must send them away because I am more or less responsible for their over-zealous demonstration.

MR. TEMPLE: How so, sir? 'Twas this—this treasonable booklet called "Common Sense" that made them yelp at their betters.

THOMAS PAINE: This booklet, sir, was written to excite the minds of the people. It was conceived as a protest against tyranny and oppression.

MR. TEMPLE: You are familiar then with this seditious pamphlet?

THOMAS PAINE: I wrote it, sir! And my intervention in your behalf was to ask *you* to read it. You and your son.

MR. TEMPLE: I'll do no such thing. Nor Philip—

PHILIP TEMPLE: Yes, father. I'll read it.

THOMAS PAINE: Perhaps it will explain to you *why* there are men like these who have just left us.

MR. TEMPLE: What do you mean, sir?

THOMAS PAINE: We have men like these, Mr.

Temple, because of men like *you*! Good night, gentlemen.

There were three schools of thought in the colonies, the Tories or loyalists, the moderates who sought reconciliation, and the patriots who desired separation. But all of the patriots were not as aggressive in their demands as the group that threatened Mr. Temple. Representatives of two of these schools, John Dickinson and John Adams, a delegate from Massachusetts, met as the Continental Congress assembled on the 7th day of June, 1776.

JOHN DICKINSON: Good morning, Mr. Adams.

JOHN ADAMS: Good morning, Mr. Dickinson. I think we have a surprise for you today.

JOHN DICKINSON: Indeed?

JOHN ADAMS: Last year it was *your* turn. Congress adopted your petition to the king and *I* submitted. This year I trust you will give way with as good grace.

JOHN DICKINSON: What do you intend?

JOHN ADAMS: You'll learn soon after Mr. Hancock calls us to order.

(*sound of gavel*)

JOHN HANCOCK: (*off*) Take your seats, please, gentlemen!

JOHN DICKINSON: Good morning, Dr. Franklin.

May I sit with you and the other members of the Pennsylvania delegation?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: With pleasure, sir.

JOHN DICKINSON: What is Adams hinting about? What are you planning?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: What am *I* planning?

JOHN DICKINSON: I know you are deeply interested in every move Congress makes.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: I'm interested in everything that goes on in the world, Mr. Dickinson.

JOHN HANCOCK: The Congress will please come to order! If there is no objection we will dispense with the roll call and the readings of the minutes and proceed to new business. Do I hear any objection?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Any objection, Mr. Dickinson?

JOHN DICKINSON: No, Dr. Franklin. I am waiting to see what new move you and your friends are planning.

JOHN HANCOCK: The floor is open for new business.

RICHARD HENRY LEE: Mr. Chairman.

JOHN HANCOCK: The chair recognizes Mr. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia.

RICHARD HENRY LEE: Mr. Chairman, as instructed by my colony, I move this resolution—"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."

(great excitement)

JOHN HANCOCK: *(pounding gavel)* Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Please!

(voices stop)

Do I hear a second?

JOHN ADAMS: I second the resolution!

JOHN HANCOCK: The resolution is seconded by Mr. John Adams of Massachusetts. Discussion.

JOHN DICKINSON: Mr. Chairman.

JOHN HANCOCK: Mr. Dickinson.

JOHN DICKINSON: This is far too important a matter to pass without proper discussion and serious consideration. I move you, sir, that Congress resolves itself into a committee—a committee of the whole to consider this resolution.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: I second the motion.

JOHN HANCOCK: Mr. Dickinson's motion is seconded by Dr. Franklin.

JOHN DICKINSON: You, Dr. Franklin? I thought we disagreed.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: We do, John—but the more obstacles you put in our way, the surer we are of reaching our goal. It's one of the best traits our English heritage has given us.

JOHN HANCOCK: I'll put the question. All in favor of Mr. Dickinson's motion?

The motion was carried. Both sides were eager to postpone the actual vote on the resolution. But many members felt that it had a good chance of passing, so a committee was named to draft a declaration, stating the reasons for such a resolution. The committee consisted of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston. Jefferson, considered by many to be the best writer in the colonies, was chosen to make the original draft. One day in the Gratz house on Market Street, Philadelphia, where Thomas Jefferson stayed, Gratz was talking with his wife. . . .

MRS. GRATZ: Mr. Jefferson hasn't come down to his supper. I think I should call him.

MR. GRATZ: Don't disturb him. Mr. Adams and Dr. Franklin are with him. There are important matters being discussed upstairs.

MRS. GRATZ: Maybe Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams would like some supper, too.

MR. GRATZ: Must you always think of food? Important plans are being made for the welfare of our country.

MRS. GRATZ: You're always talking politics and worrying about the country instead of attending to your business.

(knock on the door)

More members of the Continental Congress to track up my floors, I suppose!

MR. GRATZ: You don't appreciate the honor they do us. Some day this house will be known—

MRS. GRATZ: You wouldn't call it an honor if you had to sweep up after them— Come in! Oh good evening, Mr. Philip! It's young Mr. Temple, father.

PHILIP TEMPLE: Good evening, Mrs. Gratz. How are you, Mr. Gratz?

MR. GRATZ: Well, Mr. Philip. How can I serve you?

PHILIP TEMPLE: I was wondering if you could tell me where I could find more books or pamphlets like this "Common Sense." Has Mr. Paine written any more?

MR. GRATZ: I don't know, Mr. Philip. But I'll ask Mr. Jefferson. He'll know.

PHILIP TEMPLE: I'd be very grateful if you would.

MR. GRATZ: Mr. Jefferson's busy now. He mustn't be disturbed. How does your father feel about your sudden interest in this kind of literature, Mr. Philip?

PHILIP TEMPLE: Father doesn't know. But I'm convinced his ideas are wrong, Mr. Gratz. Our country must come first. Before England—any other place. Don't you think so?

MR. GRATZ: Yes, Mr. Philip, I do think so. My parents came from Germany and settled here. They are like your father. They are always talking about the old country. But I'm an American.

PHILIP TEMPLE: So am I. And our duty lies, I

think, with the new country rather than the old. We owe it to future generations—so that they may have a happier and better place to live in.

Meanwhile in Jefferson's rooms, he and his colleagues, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, were formulating the document that was to help make the country a happier and better place. . . .

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Well, Dr. Franklin, now that you've read the draft, what do you think?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: As a whole, Mr. Jefferson, I'm delighted with it. But I hope you won't be offended if a much older man makes a few slight suggestions.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Certainly not, Dr. Franklin.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: For instance, you say, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for *a* people—" Wouldn't "*One* people" be more significant?

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Yes, Dr. Franklin—*one* people—that's right.

JOHN ADAMS: And you say "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable." I would prefer "We hold these truths to be *self evident*."

THOMAS JEFFERSON: "Self evident" *is* stronger.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Above all, we must be careful not to alienate *any* of our colonies at this

time. Unless this declaration of our reasons for freedom is passed unanimously by the Continental Congress, it will utterly fail in its purpose.

JOHN ADAMS: You're right about that, Dr. Franklin. It must be the unanimous will of the united colonies.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: I have called the colonies—"The United *States* of America." Do you like that term, Dr. Franklin?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Yes, Mr. Jefferson, I do. The United States of America! May they ever stand so.

Discussion after discussion caused further postponement of any definite action. On July 1st, 1776, the committee of the whole met and advised the passage of the Lee resolution. The vote was nine colonies for, and four against. On the night of July 1st, Franklin, Jefferson and Adams were discussing the situation. . . .

JOHN ADAMS: Nine votes out of thirteen. It's not enough. If the resolution isn't passed unanimously tomorrow, the rest of the world will never believe our colonies are united—never believe we *are* the *United States* of America.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Four colonies against—Delaware, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and New York.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: The Delaware delegation is evenly divided, the New York delegation has no instructions and none could possibly arrive by tomorrow. The South Carolina delegates feel that their instructions aren't broad enough to allow them to vote affirmatively—

JOHN ADAMS: Rutledge has called them together tonight, perhaps his eloquence may persuade them—

THOMAS JEFFERSON: I'm worried about Delaware. The vote will always remain one to one. McKean *for* and Read *against*. We can't count on Delaware.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: McKean told me that he had sent a post rider for Caesar Rodney. As the third member of the delegation, he's sure to favor the resolution.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Rodney's eighty miles away. They say he's a sick man. We can't expect him to arrive in time to vote.

JOHN ADAMS: It's your own Pennsylvania delegation that worries me most, Dr. Franklin. That's a negative majority that no amount of eloquence or persuasion can change.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: I know. Dickinson and Morris are sincere. So are Willing and Humphrys. Four to three against—Hm—

(*knock on the door*)

Come in!

JOHN DICKINSON: Good evening, gentlemen. I trust I am not interrupting.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Come in, Dickinson. We were just discussing you.

JOHN DICKINSON: Not too harshly, I trust. Gentlemen, I was much impressed with the vote today.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: So much so that you wish to change yours, I hope.

JOHN DICKINSON: No, Doctor. I still believe in reconciliation. But I love my country too well to hold out against wishes of the majority. I know that independence must pass, and I realize the necessity for an undivided front. My conscience won't permit my voting *for* the resolution, but I can stay away from Congress.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: That would make a tie in the Pennsylvania delegation, Mr. Dickinson.

JOHN DICKINSON: I am on my way to talk to Morris. If he also remained away tomorrow, you would have a majority in the Pennsylvania delegation.

JOHN ADAMS: Mr. Dickinson, you and I have long been opponents. Now I want to express my appreciation and gratitude, sir.

JOHN DICKINSON: Of course I can't promise for Morris.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Tomorrow will tell the tale. We must wait for tomorrow.

On the morning of July 2nd, the delegates of the Continental Congress assembled to vote on the Lee resolution. Franklin and Adams were seated together, not far from the chairman John Hancock, as the voting proceeded.

JOHN ADAMS: (*low to Franklin*) There are eight—New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Four more to come, with New York not voting.

JOHN HANCOCK: The chair calls on Mr. Gwinnett of the Georgia delegation!

BUTTON GWINNETT: Georgia votes in favor the resolution!

JOHN HANCOCK: The South Carolina delegation. Mr. Rutledge!

EDWARD RUTLEDGE: Mr. Chairman. Last night we held a meeting of the South Carolina delegates. It lasted well into the morning. But we have come to the conclusion that our instructions are broad enough to allow us to vote on this question. South Carolina votes in the affirmative.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Rutledge must have been very eloquent. I'm beginning to breathe easier.

JOHN ADAMS: There are still two more, and—

JOHN HANCOCK: At the request of Colonel McKean of Delaware, I have postponed calling on that

colony until an attempt had been made to secure a full representation. Yesterday, the vote was even—
(*excitement in doorway*)

COLONEL MCKEAN: Mr. Chairman—Mr. Chairman!

JOHN HANCOCK: Here's Colonel McKean now.

COLONEL MCKEAN: Mr. Chairman, I beg to report. Our third delegate, Mr. Caesar Rodney has just arrived! He has ridden all night, and wishes to apologize for rushing in so unceremoniously, but thanks to his arrival, the Delaware delegation supports the resolution two to one!

JOHN ADAMS: Only your own colony left, Dr. Franklin.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: Yes. Only Pennsylvania.

JOHN HANCOCK: Dr. Franklin, have the other members of your delegation arrived as yet?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: No, Mr. Chairman. And I am certain now that Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Morris are not coming. I therefore announce that the Pennsylvania delegation stands three to two in favor of Independence!

JOHN HANCOCK: Twelve "ayes" with the New York delegation in sympathy but not voting. I think we may call it unanimous.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: It is unanimous!

JOHN ADAMS: Mark my words, Dr. Franklin, July 2nd will be a day of rejoicing and celebration in these United States until the end of time!

But July 2nd, the day the resolution was passed, was not to be the day we celebrate. On July 4th, after much discussion as to its wording, the formal Declaration of Independence, little changed from Jefferson's original draft, was adopted unanimously by the assembled representatives of the United colonies. On July 8th the people of Philadelphia were gathered outside the State House to hear the Declaration read by John Nixon. On the outskirts of the crowd stood young Philip Temple with his father, listening to the reading of the Declaration.

MR. TEMPLE: I can't see why you dragged me here, Philip. You've read that document yourself at Mr. Jefferson's. You almost know it by heart. And we can't hear anything here anyway.

PHILIP TEMPLE: . . . I want to see how the people take it, father.

MR. TEMPLE: The people, eh? I notice not many of our friends are here.

PHILIP TEMPLE: Many of our friends have fled the town, father. I'm glad you're staying.

MR. TEMPLE: I'm waiting to see the outcome of all this. Anyone can put words on paper. But will they live up to their words? Will they sign this declaration?

MR. GRATZ: Indeed they will, Mr. Temple. I'm sure of that.

PHILIP TEMPLE: This is a great occasion, isn't it?

MR. GRATZ: A day to remember, lad. Glad to see *you* taking an interest, Mr. Temple. I feared perhaps you'd left town with your friends.

PHILIP TEMPLE: Father's staying in Philadelphia. But I'm leaving town, Mr. Gratz.

MR. GRATZ: You, Philip?

PHILIP TEMPLE: Tomorrow I start for Boston to join General Washington.

MR. GRATZ: Good lad! Does your father approve?

MR. TEMPLE: The boy's of age. If I tried to stop him, your liberty boys would try to run me out of town, I suppose.

PHILIP TEMPLE: Don't mind what father says. I really think he's rather proud of me.

JOHN NIXON: (*in the distance*) We pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

(*applause and cheers*)

PHILIP TEMPLE: Those men in Congress have pledged their lives, their fortunes and their honor. Could I do less?

(*in the distance, one by one, the church bells start ringing*)

Every church bell in Philadelphia seems to be ringing!

MR. GRATZ: Ringing in a new era!

PHILIP TEMPLE: They've given us the ideal! It's our duty to make it real!

Would the delegates sign? On August 2nd, they assembled to answer this all important question. A large attendance listened to John Hancock as he finished reading the engrossed document—

JOHN HANCOCK: We pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor!

(*murmurs*)

Well, gentlemen, it seems to be correct. Are there any errors or corrections, Mr. Jefferson?

THOMAS JEFFERSON: No, Mr. Chairman. I have followed it word for word with the original. It is correct.

JOHN HANCOCK: Then there seems nothing left for us to do but affix our signatures. We must show a united front.

A DELEGATE: Yes, sir. We must hang together, eh, Dr. Franklin?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: We must hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately!

JOHN HANCOCK: As chairman of the Continental Congress, I am honored to be the first to sign.

(*signs*)

There! King George won't need his spectacles to read that!

JOHN HANCOCK: Mr. Chase! Mr. Stone!—

ANOTHER DELEGATE: Let us get this done as speedily as possible. This heat is unbearable.

JOHN HANCOCK: Mr. Carroll!

A DELEGATE: *You're* lucky, Mr. Carroll.

CHARLES CARROLL: Lucky, sir?

A DELEGATE: There are two Charles Carrolls in Maryland. King George won't know which one to hang.

(laughter)

CHARLES CARROLL: Just a moment.

(signs)

There—

JOHN HANCOCK: What have you written, sir?

CHARLES CARROLL: I've written "Charles Carroll of Carrollton." Now the king can make no mistake!

JOHN HANCOCK: *(continuing to call names)*
Mr. Wythe! Mr. Lee! Mr. Lewis!

JOHN ADAMS: See their eagerness to sign!

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: We can be very proud,
John—proud to be present at a nation's birth!

It was a Nation's birth certificate. Fifty-six signatures, each man pledging his life, his fortune and his sacred honor to uphold the principles of freedom and equality, so that we and future generations should have life, liberty and the chance for happiness. There are no braver names than these in all America.