

**Declaration of Independence: A Chronology including
Highlights from the Fourth of July.
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This is not an exhaustive chronology of the Declaration of Independence but rather selected significant information that adds to our knowledge of this historic and treasured document. Many toasts and public readings were offered in honor of the Declaration of Independence during the nineteenth century but only a selection of examples is included in this paper. Included also are selections of parodies of the Declaration, noteworthy editorials, printings, and significant highlights that casts information on the Declaration as a historic icon.

The first copies of the Declaration printed on the evening of July 4, 1776, served primarily as a means to communicate the news of independence and to help unify the new states in the mission that lay ahead. At first, the document was treated as any other broadside. It was posted in prominent places in towns and cities and read publicly to townspeople and the militia in city squares, churches, and state houses. The inherent value of the document as a historic icon and relic was not fully appreciated until the early nineteenth century when the Revolutionary war generation had decreased in number, and the populace had come to realize the importance of their collective experience. The Declaration served as a link to the past. Public readings of the Declaration increased in momentum. Individuals began carrying copies of the declaration in processions. The craft of printing demonstrated in Fourth of July parades provided opportunities for artisans to distribute copies of the Declaration to crowds along parade routes.¹ Newspapers across the Eastern seaboard included printings of the Declaration as a matter of pride and admiration for Thomas Jefferson and other founders. Some of these issues included enhancements such as the addition of the Great Seal as a header to the text and the listing of the names of states representing the 56 signers. Commemorative and elaborate copies of the Declaration were offered for sale to the public that included proposals by John Binns (Philadelphia, 1816 and 1819), Benjamin Owen Tyler (New York, 1818), and William Stone (1823). Unusual replicas and renditions of the Declaration were created: a presentation copy was reproduced on a swath of white silk in Westminster, Vermont, July 4, 1799, and a poetical version of the Declaration's text was presented at City Hall in Richmond, Virginia, on July 4, 1821.

After the Revolutionary War, because of the continued aggressions by the French in the 1790s and the British as well, new declarations of independence based on the 1776 model were compiled to stir the emotions of Americans as they took a stand to protect their freedoms. In 1798 the urging of severing relations with France in a "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress Assembled," but written by one unnamed individual Whig, was printed in a number of New England newspapers. The author carefully crafted his wording to mimic the original Declaration and listed specific complaints against the French, that included unlawful embargoes, usurpation of

¹ See 1809 (Baltimore) and 1824 (Washington City).

American commerce and the capturing and torture of American seamen. Similarly in 1808, two parodies of the Declaration were issued, each directed against the British for similar reasons. One was a “sketch of a declaration of dependence on Great Britain” written as a sarcastic outrage and the other titled “A Manual of Independence” that listed British aggressions since the treaty of 1783. With the advent of nineteenth century political and such social movements as temperance, abolition, and education, other parodies of the Declaration were written to reflect the goals and missions of those causes.

The general antagonisms that had been exchanged between the Federalists and Anti-Federalist since the adoption of the Constitution, seemed to gain momentum with the election of Jefferson as president in 1801. Federalists “questioned whether the recent general reading of the Declaration of independence by the Democrats, is from respect to the sentiments it contains, or to promote the popularity of its author.”² Some believed that the Federalists’ “hatred” of the Declaration was not only that Jefferson wrote it but that it exhibited “a striking resemblance to his inaugural speeches and messages,” and therefore served as a political device meant to gain favor among the republicans.³ Others deemed it simply improper, if not a “wicked practice” meant to mock the Federalists.⁴ Accordingly many Federalist celebrations, especially those in New England, omitted the public reading of the Declaration. According to Republicans, “Federalists have ceased to read the Declaration of Independence, because it contains plain republican truths respecting the enemy of all nations; truths, which have been lately exemplified in the plunder of our property [and] the impressments of our seamen.”⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed some individuals believed that it was no longer relevant to read aloud the accusations specified in the Declaration since the United States and Britain were now on good terms. Conservators and others became increasingly concerned about the condition of the original signed copy of the Declaration. Various plans were introduced to help safeguard the parchment.

1776

Highlights: July 9-- At a convention of the Representatives of the State of New York, it was unanimously resolved that independence should be declared—July 9.⁶

Printings of the Declaration: *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 6 July 1776, 335-336; *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet or, General Advertiser*, 8 July 1776, 1; *Constitutional Gazette* (New York), 10 July 1776, 1-2; *New-York Journal, or, The General Advertiser*, 11 July 1776, Supplement, 1; *Pennsylvania Ledger*, 13 July 1776, 2; *American Gazette, or the Constitutional Journal*, 16 July 1776, 19, 22; *New Hampshire Gazette, or Exeter Morning Chronicle*, 16 July 1776; *Connecticut Journal*, 17 July 1776, 2; *Continental Journal*, 18 July 1776, 1;⁷ *New England Chronicle*, 18 July 1776, 1; *Newport Mercury*, 18 July 1776,

² *New England Palladium*, 15 July 1803, 2.

³ *Pittsfield Sun*, 3 August 1805, 3.

⁴ *True Republican* (Norwich, CN) and *Albany Centinel* as reprinted in *Norfolk Repository*, 22 July 1806, 295; *Pittsfield Sun*, 3 August 1805, 3.

⁵ *American Mercury*, 10 July 1806, 2.

⁶ See OCLC 191270750

⁷ Has incorrect spelling of “Charles Thompson [!].”

