

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE AMERICAN
REVOLUTION

CONGRESSIONAL
RESEARCH SERVICE

Doris S. Whitney
Government and General Research
Division
November 8, 1951
Rerun, January 12, 1966

Revised

Selwyn B. Walter

March 15, 1973

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1. Preliminaries of the American Revolution

As early as 1761 the British government was thoroughly aroused by the systematic evasion of the Molasses Act of 1733, through colonial smuggling, and by the illicit trade which the colonies had carried on with the enemy during the war of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War. British officials felt that the trade aided the French war effort. To prevent smuggling, the British resorted to writs of assistance, general search warrants which made possible the search of all premises where smuggled goods might be found. This aroused the opposition of merchants who alleged the writs were illegal. James Otis gained fame in his flaming attack upon their use before the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Although the court decided they were legal, the argument of Otis did much to shape public opinion.

1763. Oct. 7. The Proclamation of 1763 prohibited settlement by the colonists in the land west of the Appalachians, restraining expansion.

Nov. 5. - Dec. 1. The Parsons' Cause, argued in Virginia by Patrick Henry, still further aroused and molded public opinion against British policy, in this instance the disallowance of a Virginia statute.

1763-1765. The acquisition of the vast territory from France in America necessitated increased revenues for defense and Indian administration. The ministry decided to enforce the navigation laws, tax the

colonies directly and use the revenue to maintain an army in America. Powers of the admiralty courts were enlarged, and colonial governors were instructed to enforce the trade laws.

1764. The Molasses Act of 1733, having yielded but little revenue, was modified by the enactment of the American Revenue Act, generally known as the Sugar Act, which required the colonists to pay import duties on foreign molasses, sugar, wine, and other commodities. The Currency Act of 1764 increased the tax load of the colonists, for it directed them to pay, within a fairly short time, the whole domestic debt created for carrying on the French and Indian war.

1765. Disregarding colonial protests against previous acts, George Grenville, British Prime Minister, pushed through Parliament the Stamp Act, the first direct tax ever levied by Parliament upon America, providing for stamps on commercial and legal documents, pamphlets, newspapers, almanacs, playing cards and dice. The Quartering Act added to American resentment by requiring each colony to bear part of the expense incurred by the British troops when stationed or moving within its borders

May 29. Patrick Henry introduced into the Virginia House of Burgesses a series of resolutions boldly challenging the position of the British government.

June. The Massachusetts General Court sent an invitation to colonial assemblies to send delegates to meet in New York and consider the Stamp Act. During the summer secret organizations known as Sons of Liberty (the term had been used by Colonel Barré in a speech against the Stamp Act in the House of Commons) were formed in the provincial towns to oppose the Stamp Act. Riots occurred in various cities, including Boston, and stamp agents were forced to resign.

Oct. 7. Stamp Act Congress convened at New York. Twenty-eight delegates from nine colonies drew up memorials to the King and Parliament and adopted a Declaration of Rights and Liberties (October 19.).

1766. March. Repeal of the Stamp Act was followed by the Declaratory Act (March 18) declaring that the King, by and with consent of Parliament, had authority to make laws to bind the colonies "in all cases whatsoever."

1767. The New York Assembly was suspended because of its refusal to comply fully with the Quartering Act. The Townshend Acts imposed duties on glass, lead, painters' colors, tea and paper imported into the colonies. Out of these revenues fixed salaries were to be paid to royal officials in the colonies.

1768. The Massachusetts General Court drew up a petition to the King, sent letters to the Ministry, and dispatched a circular letter to the other colonies, soliciting proposals for united action. Governor Francis Bernard condemned the circular letter as seditious and on March 4 dissolved the General Court.

June 10. The seizure of John Hancock's sloop Liberty, because of false entry, led to a riot and the customs officials fled to Castle William on an island in the harbor.

July 1. When the new General Court refused to rescind the circular letter, it, too, was dissolved.

October. British troops arrived in Boston and the town refused to provide quarters.

1769. Parliament advised the enforcement of a statute of Henry VIII, allowing the government to bring to England for trial those alleged to have committed treason outside the realm.

May 16-18. Resolutions of protest were adopted unanimously by the Virginia house of Burgesses. When Governor Botetourt dissolved the assembly the Burgesses met informally in the Raleigh Tavern the next day and adopted the Virginia Association, a nonimportation agreement.

1770. Jan. 19. A confrontation between soldiers and Sons of Liberty led to a riot, sometimes referred to as the Battle of Golden Hill, in New York City in which some 30 or 40 soldiers used bayonets against citizens armed with cutlasses and clubs. Several on both sides were wounded seriously, but there were no fatalities.

March 5. Popular hatred of the British troops in Boston led to a brawl, known as the Boston Massacre, in which several citizens were killed or wounded. Preston, the commanding officer, was acquitted, being defended by John Adams and Josiah Quincy.

April 12. An Act repealing duties on paper, glass, and painters' colors, but retaining that on tea, was passed. This gesture produced a conservative reaction in the colonies, in which the merchants worked for conciliation. This truce was broken by the arbitrary acts of crown officials.

1772. An announcement came that salaries of governors and judges in Massachusetts were to be paid by the crown, thus rendering them independent of the assembly's control of the purse.

June 9. The Gaspee Affair occurred, in which a revenue boat, whose commanders' conduct had enraged public opinion in Rhode Island, was attacked and burned by a mob in Narragansett Bay.

1772. Nov. 2 - 1773. Jan. Eighty town committees of correspondence in Massachusetts were formed under the leadership of Samuel Adams.

1773. March 12. The Virginia House of Burgesses appointed a Provincial Committee of Correspondence to keep in touch with sister colonies. ^{1/} By February 1774, all the colonies except Pennsylvania and North Carolina had appointed such committees. ^{2/}

^{1/} Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1773-1776, p. 28.
^{2/} Morris, Richard B., ed. Encyclopedia of American history, p. 80.

To provide relief for the East India Company the government allowed it a drawback of the tea duty in England, but the full duty was to be paid by the colonies. There was a protest to the landing of the tea in Charleston, Philadelphia and New York and the consignees resigned.

1773. Dec. 16. In Boston there occurred the Boston Tea Party in which citizens, disguised as Indians, boarded the ships and dumped the tea into the harbor.

1774. March 31 - June 2. The resistance to the landing of the tea provoked the Ministry to the adoption of a punitive policy. The so-called Coercive Acts or Intolerable Acts were passed, including: The Boston Port Act, closing the port after June 1; the Massachusetts Government Act, depriving the people of most of their chartered rights, and greatly enlarging the Governor's power; the Administration of Justice Act, providing that persons accused of a capital crime in aiding the government should be tried in England or a colony other than that in which the crime was committed; the Quartering Act; and the Quebec Act, extending the boundary of that province to the Ohio River, cutting out the claims of Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, and Virginia. (Although not designed as a punitive measure, the Quebec Act was so regarded by the colonies.).

County conventions in Massachusetts protested against the acts (Aug.-Sept.).

1774. May 27. The Virginia House of Burgesses, meeting unofficially after having been dissolved by the governor^{3/}, adopted resolutions calling for a congress of the colonies and copies were sent to other assemblies.

1774. Sept. 5. The First Continental Congress assembled at Philadelphia. All colonies except Georgia were represented. Members divided into radicals led by Samuel Adams and conservatives led by Joseph Galloway of Pennsylvania. A Declaration of Rights and Grievances was drawn up.

1774. Oct. 18. The delegates adopted the Association providing for non-importation of English goods after Dec. 1. If redress had not been obtained by Sept. 1, 1775, non-exportation was to go into effect.

1775. Feb. 1. Lord Chatham (formerly William Pitt) presented to Parliament a plan of conciliation, based on mutual concessions, but it was rejected. On February 20 Lord North made an unsuccessful effort toward conciliation.

^{3/} Burnett, Edmund Cody. The Continental Congress, p. 20.

2. The Revolutionary War, 1775-1783.

1775. April 19. Battles of Lexington and Concord. British troops detailed to destroy stores at Concord became embroiled with provincials at Lexington. Proceeding to Concord, the troops destroyed the stores, but after the fight at the bridge were forced to retreat, first to Lexington, then to Boston.

1775. April 19 - 1776. March 17. Siege of Boston.

May 10-12. Ticonderoga was captured by Ethan Allen and Crown Point was captured by Seth Warner.

May 10. The Second Continental Congress assembled at Philadelphia.

June 15. George Washington was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Continental forces.

June 17. In the Battle of Bunker Hill, opposite Boston, the Americans were driven from their entrenchments, but only after inflicting heavy losses on the British.

July 5. The Olive Branch Petition, adopted by Congress, professed the attachment of the American people to George III, expressed their hope for the restoration of harmony, and begged the king to prevent further hostile actions until a reconciliation could be worked out. ^{4/}

^{4/}Journals of the Continental Congress, v. 2, p. 127, 158-162.

1775. A letter by Congress to the people of Canada having failed to enlist their aid, a campaign against them was planned. One force under Richard Montgomery proceeded by Lake Champlain to Montreal, which was occupied on November 13. ^{5/} Another force under Benedict Arnold advanced by the Kennebec with a view to meeting Montgomery at Quebec. Montgomery was killed before Quebec (Dec. 31). Arnold carried on the unsuccessful siege for the remainder of the winter.

1776. March 4. The Occupation of Dorchester Heights by Washington.

March 17. Evacuation of Boston by the British forces.

(During this period the appearance of Thomas Paine's Common Sense crystallized public opinion in favor of independence.).

May 2. France decided to aid America secretly.

May 15. Congress announced that the authority of the British crown should be suppressed and power of government established under authority of the people of the colonies. ^{6/} The Virginia Convention, called to form a new government, instructed Virginia delegates in Congress to propose independence.

June 7. The Resolution of Richard Henry Lee in Congress read, "That these United Colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent States." A committee of five was appointed to draft a declaration of independence. The committee asked Thomas Jefferson to prepare the document.

^{5/} Dupuy, Richard E., and Trevor N. Dupuy. The compact history of the Revolutionary War, p. 70.

^{6/} Journals of the Continental Congress, v. 4, p. 342, 357-358. For emphasis on the importance of this event see Gordon S. Wood. The creation of the American republic, 1776-1787, p. 131-132.

July 4. The Declaration of Independence was adopted.

Following the British evacuation of Boston, Washington proceeded to New York. General Howe and Admiral Lord Howe prepared to attack.

August 27. The Battle of Long Island, resulted in the defeat of the American forces and Washington's withdrawal to Manhattan Island.

Sept. 11. The Staten Island Peace Conference, attended by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Edward Rutledge, and Lord Howe found no basis for discussion and ended without result.

Sept. 15. New York was occupied by the British; Washington retreated to Harlem Heights.

Sept. 26. Commissioners were appointed to negotiate treaties with European nations.

Oct. 11-13. Arnold was defeated in two naval engagements on Lake Champlain.

Oct. 28. An engagement between Howe and Washington at White Plains was followed by the retirement of Washington to a line back of his previous position.

Nov. 16. Surrender of Fort Washington to the British, followed by that of Fort Lee on November 20.

Nov. 28. Beginning of Washington's retreat across the New Jersey into Pennsylvania.

Dec. 26. Battle of Trenton. Crossing the Delaware by night, Washington surprised and captured about 1,000 Hessians at Trenton.

1777. Jan. 3. The Battle of Princeton resulted in the withdrawal of the British but the Americans were too exhausted to follow up their advantage.

The British plan of campaign for 1777 was to divide the states on the line of the Hudson. Burgoyne was to proceed from Canada by way of Lake Champlain, St. Leger was to advance from Lake Ontario, while Howe was to ascend the Hudson.

Aug. 16. In the Battle of Bennington Stark defeated Colonel Baum who had been sent on a raid into Vermont to seize stores.

Aug. 22. St. Leger abandoned the siege of Fort Stanwix and retreated to Oswego.

Aug. 25. Instead of advancing up the Hudson, Howe, on this date, disclosed his purpose of attacking Philadelphia, Washington offered battle.

Sept. 11. In the Battle of Brandywine, the Americans, under Greene, were defeated.

Sept. 19. In The First Battle of Bemis Heights, Burgoyne held the field, although suffering heavy losses.

Sept. 26. Howe occupied Philadelphia.

Oct. 4. Attempting to surprise the camp at Germantown, Washington was defeated in the Battle of Germantown.

Oct. 7. In the Second Battle of Bemis Heights or Saratoga. Burgoyne was defeated, and, finding himself surrounded, called a council of war at which it was decided to negotiate terms.

Oct. 17. Burgoyne surrendered his entire force to Gates.

Nov. 16 and 20. With the capture of Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer, the British control of the Delaware was complete.

1777-1778. Winter suffering of Washington's forces at Valley Forge. During this period there also occurred the unsuccessful Conway-Cabal effort in the Continental Congress to remove Washington from command.

1777. Nov. 15. Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union were agreed upon in Congress. These provided for a confederacy to be known as The United States of America, and were sent to the states for ratification.

Burgoyne's defeat and surrender stirred France to action in support of the United States. To re-establish French prestige in Europe, so greatly weakened in the Seven Years' War, was the aim of Vergennes, the French minister of foreign affairs.

1778. Feb. 6. After supplying secret aid in money and supplies to the Americans for two years, France signed the Treaty of Alliance and the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the United States. Lafayette and DeKalb had arrived the previous summer to offer their services. Beaumarchais, French playwright, had drawn heavily on his personal resources to aid the Americans.

Feb. 17. Lord North presented to Parliament his plan for conciliating the Americans, which included renunciation of the right of taxation. Commissioners were sent to the United States with a peace offer, which was rejected by Congress on June 17. With the French alliance an assured fact, only independence would now satisfy the Americans.

June 18. Evacuation of Philadelphia. by Sir Henry Clinton, who started to march across New Jersey.

June 28. Washington won the Battle of Monmouth.

July 3-4. Wyoming massacre in Pennsylvania.

July 4. George Rogers Clark, with a force of Virginians, captured Kaskaskia.

July 8. Count d'Estaing's fleet arrived off the Delaware Capes. He and Washington planned a land and sea attack on the British in Newport. After a storm on August 9, which prevented a clash between the French and British fleets, d'Estaing sailed to Boston for repairs, leaving General Sullivan unsupported; Sullivan on Aug. 29 gave up the siege of Newport.

Nov. 11. Massacre at Cherry Valley in New York.

Dec. 29. British forces captured Savannah.

1779. Feb. 25. George Rogers Clark completed the conquest of the Old Northwest and captured Hamilton, the British commander, at Vincennes.

June 21. Spain entered the war against England, on the promise of France that she would assist Spain to recover Gibraltar and the Floridas.

Sept. 23. Naval victory of John Paul Jones of the Bonhomme Richard over the Serapis and the Countess of Scarborough.

1780, May 12. Charleston surrendered to the British.

July 11. Rochambeau arrived at Newport with 6,000 French troops.^{7/}
Despite brave resistance of Thomas Sumter and Francis Marion, South Carolina was overrun by the British.

Aug. 16. In the Battle of Camden, Gates was defeated by Cornwallis.

Aug. 18. Sumter's force was defeated by Tarleton at Fishing Creek and Marion retreated to North Carolina.

Sept. 23. A plot of Benedict Arnold to surrender West Point to Sir Henry Clinton was revealed through capture of the British agent, Major Andre. Arnold escaped.

^{7/} Some writers place the number of troops at 5000.

Oct. 2. Andre was hanged as a spy.

Oct. 7. In the Battle of King's Mountain, in North Carolina, the British under Major Ferguson were defeated.

1781. Jan. 17. In the Battle of Cowpens, the British cavalry force under Tarleton was defeated by Morgan.

March 15. The Battle of Guilford was a British victory.

Sept. 8. Battle of Eutaw, the defeat of Greene and subsequent retreat of the British to Charleston.

Meanwhile British forces under Cornwallis were concentrating in Virginia, where they fortified themselves at Yorktown. While Cornwallis remained inactive, Washington, Lafayette, and Rochambeau closed in on him at Williamsburg, and De Grasse, with the French fleet, entered Chesapeake Bay.

Sept. 30 - Oct. 19. Siege of Yorktown.

Oct. 19. Cornwallis surrendered with 7,000 men.

"From the virtual termination of the war in the closing months of 1781, two years elapsed before the final consummation of the peace; and, strange almost beyond the power of comprehension, many Americans appeared to have all but lost interest in that consummation which would place the United States of America among the nations of the world. The states seemed to be saying, 'Great Britain has at last withdrawn from us her heavy, noxious hand; we are individually free and independent states; why worry more?'"^{8/}

^{8/} Dictionary of American History, Vol. IV, 1940, p. 470.

3. Definitive Treaty of Peace, 1783.

"In the peace negotiations, Vergennes was in the difficult position of trying to please both of his allies, Spain and the United States. This led to delay which aroused the impatience of the American commissioners, who, disregarding their instructions not to negotiate a separate peace with England, proceeded to do so. The British, eager to win American friendship and trade, thereby defeating the aspirations of the French, readily acceded to the American demand for the Mississippi as the western boundary and full rights in the fisheries off the Canadian coast."^{2/}

1783. Sept. 3. Definitive Treaty of Peace between Great Britain and United States was signed at Paris. It recognized the independence of the United States. Provisions of the treaty with respect to the northeastern and northwestern boundaries led to later difficulties with England, while the southern boundary provision led to trouble with Spain. Full rights in the Newfoundland fisheries were guaranteed to the United States. Creditors of neither country were to encounter legal obstacles to collection of debts, while the Congress would recommend to the states the restoration of the confiscated estates of loyalists. Navigation of the Mississippi was to be open to both Great Britain and the United States.

^{2/} Langer, William L. An Encyclopedia of World History, 1968, p. 562.

1784. Jan. 14. "It was only with the greatest difficulty that a sufficient representation could be gathered in Congress to ratify the Treaty of peace; but it was done. The independence of the United States of America was at long last a recorded fact. A question of even greater import, nevertheless, remained as yet unanswered. Now that the American states had their independence, what would they do with it? It was a hard lesson they had set for them; yet in time they would master it." ^{10/}

^{10/} Dictionary of American History, Vol. IV, 1940, p. 470.

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