

Fascinating Facts about the Declaration of Independence

There is something written on the back of the **Declaration of Independence**, but it isn't a secret map or code. Instead, there are a few handwritten words that say, "Original Declaration of Independence/ dated 4th July 1776". No one knows who wrote this, but it was probably added as a label when the document was rolled up for storage many years ago.

Once the Declaration of Independence had been written and signed, printer John Dunlap was asked to make about 200 copies to be distributed throughout the colonies. Today, the "Dunlap Broadside" are extremely rare and valuable. In 1989, someone discovered a previously unknown Dunlap Broadside. It was sold for over \$8 million in 2000. There are only 26 known surviving Dunlap Broadside today.

Although Thomas Jefferson is often called the "author" of the Declaration of Independence, he wasn't the only person who contributed important ideas. Jefferson was a member of a five-person committee appointed by the Continental Congress to write the Declaration. The committee included Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman.

Robert Livingston, one of the members of the committee who wrote the Declaration of Independence, never signed it. He believed that it was too soon to declare independence and therefore refused to sign.

One of the most widely held misconceptions about the Declaration of Independence is that it was signed on July 4, 1776. In fact, independence was formally declared on July 2, 1776, a date that John Adams believed would be "the most memorable epocha in the history of America." On July 4, 1776, Congress approved the final text of the Declaration. It wasn't signed until August 2, 1776.

After Jefferson wrote his first draft of the Declaration, the other members of the Declaration committee and the Continental Congress made 86 changes to Jefferson's draft, including shortening the overall length by more than a fourth.

When writing the first draft of the Declaration, Jefferson primarily drew upon two sources: his own draft of a preamble to the Virginia Constitution and George Mason's draft of Virginia's Declaration of Rights.

Jefferson was quite unhappy about some of the edits made to his original draft of the Declaration of Independence. He had originally included language condemning the British promotion of the slave trade (even though Jefferson himself was a slave owner). This criticism of the slave trade was removed in spite of Jefferson's objections.

Declaration of Independence: Fascinating Facts *(Continued)*

On December 13, 1952, the Declaration of Independence (along with the Constitution and Bill of Rights) was formally delivered to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., where it has remained since then.

The two youngest signers of the Declaration of Independence were both from South Carolina. Thomas Lynch, Jr. and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina were both born in 1749 and were only 26 when they signed the Declaration. Most of the other signers were in their 40s and 50s.

Philosopher John Locke's ideas were an important influence on the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson restated Locke's contract theory of government when he wrote in the Declaration that governments derived "their just Powers from the consent of the people."

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the vote to approve the Declaration of Independence.

Some of the most famous lines in the Declaration of Independence were inspired by Virginia's Declaration of Rights by George Mason. Mason said: "all men are born equally free and independent." Jefferson's Declaration of Independence said: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Mason listed man's "natural Rights" as "Enjoyment of Life and Liberty, with the Means of acquiring and possessing Property, and pursuing and obtaining Happiness and Safety." Jefferson listed man's "inalienable rights" as "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

Nine of the signers of the Declaration died before the American Revolution ended in 1783.

In the summer of 1776, when the Declaration was signed, the population of the nation is estimated to have been about 2.5 million. (Today the population of the U.S. is more than 300 million.)

The oldest signer of the Declaration was Benjamin Franklin, who was born in 1706 and was therefore already 70 at the time of the Declaration. Franklin went on to help negotiate the Treaty of Alliance with France in 1778 and the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War in 1783.

The only signer of the Declaration of Independence to survive beyond the 50th anniversary of the signing was Charles Carroll of Maryland. Carroll died in 1832 when he was 95 years old.

The copy of the Declaration of Independence that is housed at the National Archives is not the draft that was approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. Instead it is a formal copy that the Continental Congress hired someone to make for them after the text was approved. This formal copy was probably made by Timothy Matlack, an assistant to the Secretary of Congress. This copy was signed on August 2, 1776.

Declaration of Independence: Fascinating Facts *(Continued)*

No one who signed the Declaration of Independence was born in the United States of America. The United States didn't exist until after the Declaration was signed! However, all but eight of the signers were born in colonies that would become the United States.

The first public reading of the Declaration took place on July 8, 1776, in Philadelphia. A fictional story written in the 1840s suggested that the bell now known as the Liberty Bell was rung that day to bring the people together. However, historians now doubt that this happened. The steeple that housed the bell was in very bad condition at the time and the bell was probably unusable.

Although August 2, 1776, was the date of the official signing ceremony, there were several people who signed on later dates. Some of these late signers included Elbridge Gerry, Oliver Wolcott, Lewis Morris, Thomas McKean and Matthew Thornton.



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