A brief history of Independence Day

Posted by Zach Hill  On 07/04/2019

The United States of America - July of 1776 must have been quite the time to be alive. Around 2.5 million people inhabited those 13 original colonies, but it was the same time that the young nation was preparing to round a corner into our modern-day history textbooks.

Everyone knows that the Fourth of July is now a national holiday that closes the government for a day, serving as a commemoration for the day that the nation declared it's independence from Great Britain. However, the fourth was originally not thought of as the most important date in the countries earliest sequence of events.

In fact, the original resolution of independence was voted and approved by the Second Continental Congress on July 2, 1776. Congress then spent the following two days revising and improving Thomas Jefferson's handwritten Declaration of Independence. The date on which the final draft of the document was signed into effect happened to be July 4. Originally, John Adams had written in a letter to his wife Abigail, calling July 2 “the most memorable epoch in the history of America.”

The declaration symbolized to the world that America would no longer be subordinate to Britain’s monarchy and that they were putting the citizen’s rights to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” above all else. The declaration spelled out the “27 grievances” or problems that colonies found with the British Crown’s leadership. These complaints covered everything from how King George III obstructed the nation’s development of government and global economic activity, imposed asinine taxes without colonial consent, and even forcing Great Britain to override colonial legislation in a multitude of situations.

“[King George III] has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people,” Jefferson wrote in the declaration. “He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to [complete] the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & Perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.”

After noting how they tried to petition the King to change his ways, it had been determined that the colony’s only option left was to declare it’s independence in this manner.

“Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States;” the document reads. “As Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which the Independent States may of right do.”

The document was signed by 56 different delegates, of which the youngest was 26-year-old Edward Rutledge of South Carolina and the oldest who was 70-year-old Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania. Four of the delegates that signed the declaration were from Maryland: Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, and Charles Carroll of Carrollton. While the declaration would go on to spark the Revolutionary War, of which the colonies would emerge victoriously, it’s signing into effect is where the significance remains.

Additionally, three Founding Fathers who would all go on to serve as President of the United States, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Monroe, would all meet a variety of coincidental deaths on July 4 in the years to follow. Some historians have speculated that these deaths in combination with the historic signing encourage the case for the date to be recognized as a national holiday.

Although not until nearly a century later, in 1870 the United States Congress declared that Independence Day should be recognized as an unpaid federal holiday. Then in 1938, Congress changed the status of the holiday to a paid federal holiday.

The country has come a long way since 1776. Up from 13 colonies to 50 states. What used to be 2.5 million residents is now around 330 million. Becoming an inspiration, bringing forth innovation, and using hard work and dedication all have been lingering effects of what that Second Continental Congress installed into this young nation.

While often tied to the idea of barbecues, fireworks, and sometimes parades, the National Day of the United States has a long history that every citizen should know and understand. This nation wouldn’t be a nation today if those Founding Fathers hadn’t taken the exact steps that they did back in the 1700s. Remember to take a moment to bask in the beauty of how far the United States has come today.