

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> See 1809 (Baltimore) and 1824 (Washington City).