



The American Revolution

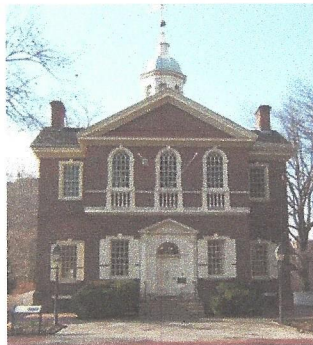
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Sons of the American Revolution

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The First Continental Congress Article 1 of 1

In our previous article we learned about the formation of a “shadow government” called the Committees for Correspondence. So successful had these committees become in regulating colonial life in general, and specifically in administering peaceful, reasoned responses to British tyranny, that it became apparent to all colonial governments that a real need for unification and collective effort must be made. This collective effort came into existence on 5 September 1774 in the form of the First Continental Congress held in Carpenter’s Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Carpenter’s Hall

The reason for calling this congress was to have representatives from all of the colonial Committees for Correspondence meet and act in concert against the *Intolerable Acts*, the punishments of Massachusetts and respond to King George’s Parliament. This congress was attended by 56 delegates representing twelve of the thirteen colonies. The Georgia colony was the one abstention. The agenda was: [1] consideration of colonial options, including economic boycott of British trade, [2] colonial rights and grievances and [3] the fashioning of a petition to King George III for redress of colonial grievances.

This first congress was presided over by Peyton Randolph and met in deliberation from 5 September to 26 October 1774. Sessions were sometimes stormy, but always serious, sincere and deliberate in its debates over the issues. The radicals, Patrick Henry, Roger Sherman, Samuel Adams, and John Adams saw their task as being the creation of a decisive statement for: [1] colonial rights and liberties, [2] the end of abuse coming from Parliament, and [3] the retention of the colonies in the empire and under the authority of the king. They perceived of colonial constitutional rights, as provided for under the Colonial Charters and English Constitution.

A group led by Roger Sherman denied that Parliament had any right to legislative authority over the colonies. Patrick Henry was of the persuasion that the colonial congress needed to develop a totally nouvelle system of governance, which would be independent of Great Britain. The conservative delegates led by Joseph Galloway, John Dickinson, John Jay, and Edward Rutledge opted for the forging of common policies to pressure Parliament into rescinding the *Intolerable Acts*. They proposed a “Plan of Union,” suggesting an American legislative body be formed with limited local authority, but whose consent would be required for any imperial measures.

At the end of the congress, the voice of harmonious resolve and compromise prevailed. The First Continental Congress provided the Declaration of Resolves, which were passed and signed by the Continental Association. They called for a boycott of British goods to begin in December of 1774. Also, they requested the local Committees for Correspondence to enforce the boycott and to regulate local prices for goods. The resolves did not: [1] concede to the legal power of Parliament, or [2] repudiate control

by the royal prerogative, the latter being petitioned to King George a few days later.

What did the First Continental Congress accomplish? First, the fact that it even met signaled a unified sense of purpose running throughout the colonies. Second, it accomplished a compact providing for the boycott of British goods, which began on 1 December 1774. Included in the compact were measures sustaining the boycott to the West Indies for the non-importation of British goods. Third, this congress provided for a Second Continental Congress to meet after 10 September 1775, if the *Intolerable Acts* were not repealed. Before closing its sessions, the first congress resolved on 21 October 1774, to send letters of invitation to Quebec, Saint John's Island, Nova Scotia, Georgia, East Florida and West Florida. The last two locations being within the Spanish Realm.