

Uniting the Colonies

On September 5, 1774, a group of men gathered in secret in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This was no ordinary meeting—it was an important step toward America’s independence.

At the time, many people in the 13 Colonies were tired of being ruled by Great Britain. The American colonists had no say in how they were governed and were being forced to follow a series of harsh laws.

The 56 **delegates** had come to Philadelphia from across the Colonies to talk about how to unite against the British. Future presidents George Washington and John Adams were among the

WORD TO KNOW

delegates *noun, plural.* people who represent others at a meeting



At the First Continental Congress, Samuel Adams of Massachusetts was one of the biggest supporters of declaring independence.

group. That secret meeting 250 years ago is known as the First Continental Congress.

“This is the beginning of the 13 Colonies becoming the 13 states,” says Brian Krisch of the National Constitution Center. “It was the beginning of a process.”

No Turning Back

The meeting lasted for nearly two months. Finally, the delegates decided on a plan. They created a document that outlined colonists’ rights and their objections to British rule.

But the British wouldn’t budge. In April 1775, the first shots of the

American Revolution (1775-1783) rang out. It would be eight years before America officially won its independence.

The First Continental Congress set the stage for future meetings that would help turn 13 separate colonies into one united country. Later groups of delegates came together in Philadelphia to create America’s founding documents (see “Words to Live By”).

“It’s important to see that this was people learning to work together as a country for the first time,” Krisch says.

—by Alicia Green

Find out more about the Constitution at sn56.scholastic.com.

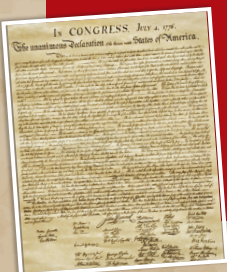
Words to Live By

Declaration of Independence

Created by: Second Continental Congress

Date adopted: July 4, 1776

The declaration announced that the 13 Colonies were free from British rule. It also stated the ideals of the new nation, including the rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”



U.S. Constitution

Created by: Constitutional Convention

Date adopted: September 17, 1787

The “supreme law of the land” set up the government of the newly formed nation with three equal branches. They’re led by the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court.

