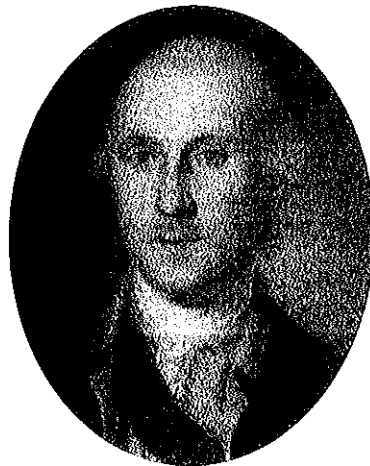


16 On the Way to the Second Continental Congress

Do you think we should make heroes of our politicians? What kinds of people might want to serve in Congress if we treated politicians like superstars? Do you think politicians get enough attention? Or too much?

A Virginian described Washington as "sensible, but speaks little." Washington spoke up when something mattered. In 1785 he wrote about slavery: "There is not a man alive who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it." He believed slavery should be ended by "legislative authority" (laws), because slave owners would not willingly give up wealth and property. Washington remained a slave owner himself. He freed his slaves in his will.



Washington, said his friends, was serious but never stern, and always cheerful with his soldiers.

the greatest nation on earth, they say. They remember the good old days before the French and Indian War. England didn't bother the colonists with many taxes then. They expect those times to return again. Benjamin Franklin's son William is a Loyalist. He is sincere in his beliefs, but he will break his father's heart.

Being a Patriot may mean going to war. That worries you—and it should. What side will you be on? In May, when the Virginia delegation arrives in Philadelphia, you make a decision. You will stick with the American Patriots' cause.

Back in the 18th century there were no TV stars and no big sports figures, which may explain why, in 1775, everyone in Philadelphia seemed to want a glimpse of Virginia's political leaders when their carriages rolled into town. The Virginians had been in

Pretend it is 1775. You are a British subject living in the American colonies in Philadelphia. At least that is the way you have been taught to describe yourself. But now you are confused. You have overheard violent arguments. Some people are calling the Bostonians "heroes"; others call them "rabble." Politics is making people angry. Your parents are no longer talking to some of their old friends.

Your parents are Patriots; some of your neighbors are Loyalists. If there is war, the Loyalists hope Britain will win. They don't see any need for independence. England is

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Philadelphia the year before, when the First Continental Congress met. Now they were back for the Second Congress: heroic-looking men who rode their horses proudly, who danced with energy and grace, and who thought and spoke as well as any Americans anywhere. Even John Adams of Massachusetts said that they represented "fortunes, ability, learning, eloquence, acuteness, equal to any I ever met with in all my life."

Take George Washington, for instance. He was more than six feet tall, big-boned, muscular, lean, and very strong. Once he came upon some young men who were throwing weights as far as they could. They had their shirts off and were sweating from the effort. George Washington asked if he could try. He took a weight—didn't even take off his jacket—and out-threw them all. Does that sound as if he was a show-off? He wasn't. Everyone agreed about that. He was modest, and only spoke when he had something to say.

His adventures during the French and Indian War had made him famous, even in England. In America both men and women admired him. One friend called him "the best horseman of his age and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback." He had gray-blue eyes, auburn hair, and hands and feet so large that several people of his time remarked about them. He loved to dance and he dressed with care. He wore his military uniform to Philadelphia—bright blue with brass buttons—and they called him Colonel Washington.

When John Adams's wife, Abigail, met George Washington she found a poem to describe him:

*Mark his majestic fabric; he's a temple
Sacred by birth, and built by hands divine.*

(John Adams was always jealous of George Washington.)



Dr. Benjamin Franklin

And So to Bed

In early America, inns were often crowded, and travelers expected to share beds. It happened to Ben Franklin and John Adams one night in 1776, when "but one bed could be procured for Dr. Franklin and me in a chamber little larger than the bed." Adams, with his fussy ways, wanted to close the window. (Most physicians then thought the night air foul and dangerous.) This is what Adams wrote in his diary about Franklin's views:

Oh! says Franklin, don't shut the window. We shall be suffocated. I answered I was afraid of the evening air. Dr. Franklin replied...come! open the window...and I will convince you....

Opening the window and leaping into bed, I said I had read his letters to Dr. Cooper...but the theory was so little consistent with my experience that I thought it a paradox. However, I had so much curiosity to hear his reasons that I would run the risk of a cold. The Doctor then began a harangue upon air and cold and respiration and perspiration, with which I was so much amused that I soon fell asleep, and left him and his philosophy together.

Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island had "palsy," which was a vague term for many illnesses in the 18th century. Whatever his disability, it didn't keep him out of a long career in public service. It didn't limit his enthusiasm for independence, either. As he put his pen to the paper to sign the Declaration, he said proudly: "My hand trembles, but my heart does not."

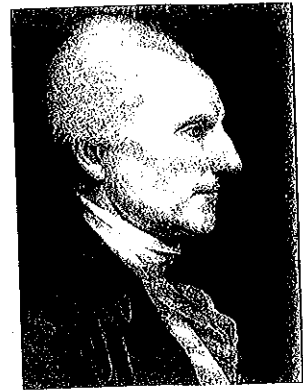
Step Hopkins

Washington rode to Philadelphia with another Virginian: Richard Henry Lee. The fingers on one of Lee's hands had been shot off in a hunting accident; he kept a silk handkerchief wrapped around that hand and pointed with it when he spoke. That gives you an idea of the man's style. He was good-looking, he wore elegant clothes, and he talked smoothly.

Lee was full of surprises. He was a slave owner who hated slavery and spoke out against it. Though he was dashing and aristocratic, he got along well with rumples Samuel Adams. It was Richard Henry Lee (with Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson) who organized the first Committee of Correspondence in Virginia.

Lee came from a talented family. His brothers were all outspoken leaders. That means they said what they believed. So did his sister Hannah. She was furious when she was turned away from the voting polls because she was female. It was taxation without representation, said Hannah Lee.

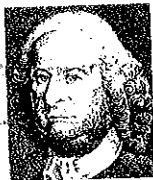
As Lee and Washington rode toward Philadelphia, they were



Richard Henry Lee (above) and Patrick Henry were Virginia's best speakers.

Meet Some of the Delegates

Delegate PHILIP LIVINGSTON lived like a prince in New York. His family had been prominent in the colonies for five generations, but Philip Livingston made his own fortune as a trader and privateer during the French and Indian War. In spite of his wealth, he identified with ordinary people and opposed the colony's royal governor and the Stamp Tax. Livingston believed in political and religious freedom.



JOSEPH HEWES, who came from North Carolina, was

opposed to separation from Britain—even when people in North Carolina told him to vote for it. Then, in a debate at the convention, something happened. "He started suddenly upright," reported John Adams, "and lifting up both his hands to Heaven, as if he had been in a trance, cried out, 'It is done! and I will abide by it.'" Hewes was now for independence!



STEPHEN HOPKINS, who was Selected governor of Rhode Island 10 times, attended the Albany Congress in 1754 with

Benjamin Franklin, Sir William Johnson, and Hendrick. Stephen Hopkins helped Ben Franklin write a plan for a union of the colonies. Most Americans weren't ready for that in 1754. Now it seemed that they were.



Georgia's BUTTON GWINNETT had an unforgettable name and just a year to live. Gwinnett—Georgia's governor—was killed in a duel. Afterward, no one could remember what the duel was about—except honor, they said.



joined by other members of the Virginia delegation. Farmers along the way took off their hats and cheered. Then, six miles from Philadelphia, 500 soldiers on horseback appeared to escort them. By the time they entered the city, a military band was playing and infantrymen were marching—it was some parade.

The Virginians were the same seven men who had been at the first congress in 1774 (although some would leave almost immediately and others would take their place). Three were the best orators in the state, perhaps in the nation: Patrick Henry (who looked like a country boy, and seemed to want it that way), Richard Henry Lee (who asked this congress to declare for independence), and slim, graceful Edmund Pendleton (who debated with cool logic).

Virginia's Benjamin Harrison was the biggest man at the Convention. He was six feet four inches tall and was said to weigh 400 pounds. (Many of the delegates were big—it was normal to be heavy. Meals were large: soup, fish, meat, vegetables, potatoes, pie and cake, fruit and cheese—all at one sitting. John Adams, just five feet six inches tall, grew to weigh 275 pounds.) Harrison told a friend he would have come to this convention on foot, if he'd had to, rather than not come. He became governor of Virginia; his son and great-grandson became presidents of the United States.

Popular Peyton Randolph, another giant of a man, had been president of the First Continental Congress and was expected to preside again. But he did not stay long. Nor did Patrick Henry. They were needed in Williamsburg. Virginia's House of Burgesses had been called back into session. State business seemed more important to them than anything that might occur at this experimental gathering.

Peyton Randolph's cousin, who was just 33, came to take his place in Philadelphia. The cousin was a thoughtful, quiet man who was known to be a good writer. His name was Thomas Jefferson.

The Virginians were the crowd pleasers, but the congress as a whole was so extraordinary it would still inspire awe 200 years later.

The Adams cousins—Sam and John—were back from Massachusetts, along with rich John Hancock, who became president of this Second Continental Congress. John Witherspoon, a Scotsman who had needed persuading to come to America to head Princeton College, was a delegate from New Jersey. So was Francis Hopkinson, an inventor and scientist who wrote poetry, composed music, and painted.

Of Caesar Rodney, the delegate from Delaware, John Adams wrote: "[He] is the oddest looking man in the world; his face is not bigger than a large apple, yet there is a sense of fire, spirit, wit, and humor in his countenance."



Virginia's Benjamin Harrison when he was young and slim.

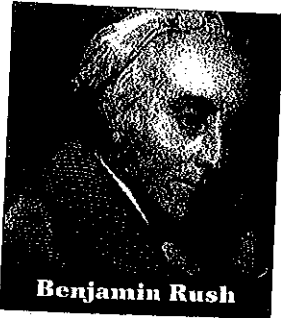


Thomas Jefferson was President Peyton Randolph's cousin.

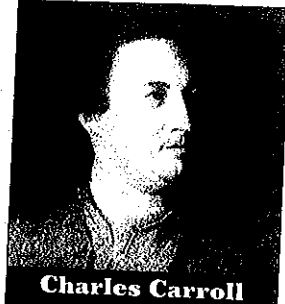


Francis Hopkinson, a delegate from New Jersey.

Men of the Middle Colonies

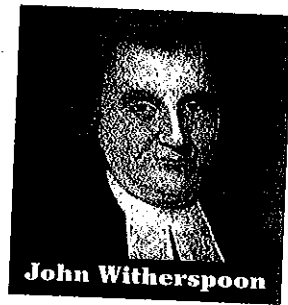


Benjamin Rush



Charles Carroll

Benjamin Rush served as an army surgeon during the Revolutionary War. He set up the first free clinic in America, and became the country's most famous medical professor. When Rush was studying medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland, he helped persuade John Witherspoon, a famous Scots clergyman, to come to America to be president of Princeton, where Rush had gone to college. Dr. Witherspoon was the



John Witherspoon

only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. Charles Carroll of Maryland was the last signer to die (in 1832) and the only Roman Catholic.

Benjamin Rush was a doctor and a teacher. He'd learned medicine as an apprentice to a doctor and then had gone to Scotland to learn more. Rush had ideas that seemed strange to some people: he hated slavery, tobacco, and capital punishment. He thought girls and blacks should go to school and that they could learn as much as white boys. Rush was one of Pennsylvania's representatives, and remarkable. Pennsylvania's Ben Franklin was even more so.

No American was better known than Benjamin Franklin. He'd come to Philadelphia from Boston as a penniless boy and soon made his fortune as a printer and publisher. He made his fame as an inventor, scientist, philosopher, and political leader. Franklin had spent years in London as an agent for several of the colonies. No one tried harder than he to avoid a break with England. He proposed the idea of a British commonwealth of independent nations, each with its own parliament, but all with the same king. The leaders of Britain's Parliament rejected that idea and treated Franklin with contempt.

Franklin changed his thinking; he began to favor independence. He arrived home from England on May 5, 1775, just in time to attend the opening of this congress.

The following March he was off again, this time on a wild goose chase to Canada to try and convince the Canadians to join the other colonies and fight Britain. Franklin and the two Maryland delegates—Charles Carroll (said to be the wealthiest man in America) and Samuel Chase (a leader of the Sons of Liberty in Annapolis)—headed north. It was an exhausting trip, especially for 69-year-old Benjamin Franklin. (In Albany they noted that most people still spoke Dutch. In upper New York, they had to sleep in the snowy woods.) When they finally arrived at their destination, they couldn't persuade the Canadians to join the revolution. (Religion had something to do with it. Catholic Canada feared an alliance with the mostly Protestant colonies.)

In June Franklin was back at the Convention, where he was asked to serve (with John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) on a committee that was to write an important declaration. Some people say this was the most important political statement ever written. It was addressed to King George III. Hold on for a few chapters and I'll tell you all about it.

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