



America's Historical Documents
J.M. LaRoche

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of transcriptions of physical documents housed in the U.S. National Archives, Washington D.C. These documents attest to the foundation, growth and preservation of our democracy. They span almost two-hundred years of the history of our country from its conception through to mid-twentieth-century. The selection of documents is a sampling of important agreements, legislation, resolutions, speeches, and treaties, some prosaic in wording, others written with great eloquence. All of them are important to what our nation now is.

For one-hundred-fifty years, the original documents were not housed in a dedicated archive. Important government documents were lost due to fires and neglect. In 1926, Congress approved the establishment of the National Archives Building. In the last months of 1935, staff members began moving into an uncompleted building. In the late 1960s, the building's storage capacity of 900,000 cubic feet was full. In 1993, a second National Archives building was completed in College Park, Maryland. When built, its 1.8 million square was the most modern archives facility in the world.

"The development of the U.S. archival profession and timeline for the National Archives:

1800 Fires damaged records of the War Office and the Treasury Department from 1800-1801

1861-1865 Number of federal records surged and the Government grew during Civil War

1877 Fire destroyed top floor of Patent Office Building and led General Meigs to propose a fireproof Hall of Records

1884 American Historical Association (AHA) was founded in 1884. The AHA focused on the development of standardized systems of archival

organization

1895 As a result of his study of European archives, J. Franklin Jamison submitted a program to the AHA for the systematic collection and selective publication

of American historical source materials. The AHA established the Historical Manuscripts Commission and appointed Jamison as its chairman. Jamison was also the founding editor of the *American Historical Review*

1898 Plans for a "hall of records" sent to Congress; no funds were appropriated

1899 The Public Archives Commission was established in 1899 as a result of the Historical Manuscripts Commission's emphasis on the difference between private papers and public archives; the Commission surveyed state archives in the years between 1900 and 1917

1899 Legislation allowed agencies to submit to Congress lists of records recommended for disposal

1904 The publication of the Guide to the Archives of the Government of the United States in Washington by the Public Archives Commission in 1904 was important to the development of the federal archives movement

1908 Nine eminent historians named to a committee on documentary historical publications to report a plan to guide the government in future publications of that sort. The committee recommended the erection of a national archives building and the creation of permanent Commission on National Historical Publications

1909 Conference of Archivists organized to work for the establishment of new archives and the improvement of existing ones

1910 American Historical Association went on record in support of a national archives

1911 Fire in New York State Capitol destroyed much of New York state's archives

1912 President Taft raised the need for a national archives with Congress

1921 Commerce Department fire destroyed census records of 1890

1926 \$1,000,000 was fully appropriated for a national archives building

1930 President Hoover appointed Advisory Committee for the National Archives to draw up specifications to guide an architect

1930 John Russell Pope selected as architect for the archives building

1931 On September 9, 1931, ground was broken for the archives building in Washington, DC

1933 On February 20, 1933, President Herbert Hoover laid the cornerstone for the National Archives building

1934 On June 19, 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the National Archives Act creating the National Archives as an independent agency (48 Stat. 1122) and creating the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC)

1934 R.D.W. Connor became the 1st Archivist of the United States

1935 National Historical Publications Commission meets for the first time on January 29, 1935 in the temporary office of Archivist Connor in the Justice building

1935 First staff moves into the uncompleted National Archives building in November, 1935

1935 The Federal Register Act was approved to provide a National Archives publications function

1935 Historical Records Survey (HRS) was organized in 1935 as part of the Work Projects Administration's (WPA) Federal Writers' Project, to document resources for research in U.S. history. The HRS was terminated in 1942

1936 Survey of Federal Archives (SFA), a Work Projects Administration's (WPA) project, was organized in January 1936 with the National Archives as cooperating sponsor. It became part of the HRS in 1937 and was terminated on June 30, 1942

1936 The Society of American Archivists (SAA) was founded in December 1936

1936 Murals by Barry Faulkner installed on walls of rotunda

1937 Extension to National Archives building completed June 1937

1937 The first annual meeting of the SAA was held in Washington, DC, on June 18-19, 1937

1938 SAA's journal, the American Archivist, was first published in January 1938

1939 Franklin D. Roosevelt Library was made the first Presidential archival depository, the first of the presidential libraries now comprising the Presidential Library system

1941 Solon Buck became the 2nd Archivist of the United States

1941 The first Code of Federal Regulations was produced as the government's central publication point for laws

1941 R.D.W. Connor, 1st Archivist of the United States from 1934-1941, becomes President of the SAA on October 6, 1941; he maintains that office until November 15, 1943

1948 Wayne Grover named the 3rd Archivist of the United States

1949 On June 30, 1949, the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act transferred the National Archives to the General Services

Administration (GSA). Because the agency had gained new responsibilities for current records, its name was changed to National Archives and Records Services (NARS)

1949 Federal Property and Administrative Services Act (63 Stat. 378 Sec. 104) transferred the National Archives to the newly-created General Services Agency. The name was changed to the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) to reflect its responsibility for current records as well as archives. The Federal Records Act of 1950 clarified this records responsibility

1950 The Federal Records Act of 1950 further expanded the records management role of NARS; NARS began establishing a series of records centers to store semi-active federal records

1952 On December 13, Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were transferred from the Library of Congress to the exhibit hall of the National Archives building. See Milt Gustafson's feature article titled "Moving the Charters of Freedom"

1961 Robert H. Bahmer serves as SAA President during 1961-1962

1966 Robert H. Bahmer became the 4th Archivist of the United States

1968 James B. Rhoads named the 5th Archivist of the United States

1974 The Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 gave the government custody over the Nixon tape recordings, documents, and records

1974 James B. Rhoads became the SAA President

1976 Robert M. Warner became the SAA President

1978 The Presidential Records Act of 1978 made all Presidential records created after January 20, 1981, the property of the United States

1980 Robert M. Warner named the 6th Archivist of the United States

1984 The National Archives again attained independence as an agency in October 1984 (effective April 1, 1985), when it became known as the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

1985 Frank Burke served as Acting Archivist of the United States from April 16, 1985-December 4, 1987

1987 Don Wilson became the 7th Archivist of the United States

1993 Trudy Huskamp Peterson served as Acting Archivist of the United States from March 25, 1993-May 29, 1995

1993 NARA's state-of-the-art archival building in College Park, Maryland, was completed in 1993 and dedicated on May 12, 1994

1995 John W. Carlin became the 8th Archivist of the United States

2001 The Rotunda closed on July 5 for renovation of the original National Archives building

2003 The renovated Rotunda of the original National Archives building reopens September 18

2005 Allen Weinstein became the 9th Archivist of the United States on February 16, 2005

Of all documents and materials created in the course of business conducted by the United States Federal government, only 1%-3% are so important for legal or historical reasons that they are kept by us forever.”

—National Archives & Records Administration

Here’s a list of the most requested documents from NARA:

“Military Service Records at the National Archives in the National Archives

Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives

Using Civilian Records for Genealogical Research in the National Archives, Washington, DC, Area

The Trans-Mississippi West

Black History Guide

1930 Census Microfilm Catalog

Guide to federal Records in the National Archives of the United States

Select List of Publications

The National Archives in the Nation’s Capital —Information for Researchers

The Federal Register

Code of Federal Regulations

Prologue: Quarterly Journal of the National Archives

Citing Records in the National Archives

National Archives of the United States (General Information Leaflet [GIL] 1)”

—National Archives & Records Administration

Chapter 2

LEE RESOLUTION (1776)

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances.

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (1776)

IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,
When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.—Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct

object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction

foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws;
giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:
For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:
For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:
For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:
For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:
For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:
For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences
For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:
For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:
For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.
He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.
He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.
He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat 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.
He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.
He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only

by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, 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; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that 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 Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

The 56 signatures on the Declaration appear in the positions indicated:

Column 1

Georgia:

Button Gwinnett

Lyman Hall

George Walton

Column 2

North Carolina:

William Hooper

Joseph Hewes

John Penn

South Carolina:

Edward Rutledge

Thomas Heyward, Jr.

Thomas Lynch, Jr.

Arthur Middleton

Column 3

Massachusetts:

John Hancock

Maryland:

Samuel Chase

William Paca

Thomas Stone

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia:

George Wythe

Richard Henry Lee

Thomas Jefferson

Benjamin Harrison

Thomas Nelson, Jr.

Francis Lightfoot Lee

Carter Braxton

Column 4

Pennsylvania:

Robert Morris

Benjamin Rush

Benjamin Franklin

John Morton

George Clymer

James Smith

George Taylor

James Wilson

George Ross

Delaware:

Caesar Rodney

George Read

Thomas McKean

Column 5

New York:

William Floyd

Philip Livingston

Francis Lewis

Lewis Morris

New Jersey:

Richard Stockton
John Witherspoon
Francis Hopkinson
John Hart
Abraham Clark
Column 6

New Hampshire:

Josiah Bartlett
William Whipple

Massachusetts:

Samuel Adams
John Adams
Robert Treat Paine
Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island:

Stephen Hopkins
William Ellery

Connecticut:

Roger Sherman
Samuel Huntington
William Williams
Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire:

Matthew Thornton



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