

4th of July Trivia and Facts

Declaration of Independence Trivia:

1. What is the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence?

Answer: During a session of the Second Continental Congress assembled on July 2, 1776, delegates from twelve colonies voted in favor of declaring independence (New York abstained from voting). The process of debating and revision continued into the late morning of July 4. In the evening of July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress “unanimously” (all thirteen colonies) approved the final wording of the Declaration of Independence. It took several weeks for the Declaration to be “engrossed” (written on parchment in a clear hand in preparation for signing). Although the exact date has long been in dispute, most historians now agree that nearly all the delegates signed the Declaration of Independence in a special session of the Second Continental Congress on August 2, with a few that signed later.

2. Who was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence?

Answer: John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress, was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence. His large and flamboyant signature cannot be missed: twice larger than most of the other signatures and three times larger than some. It is in the middle of the document, with the other fifty-five smaller signatures in six columns underneath his. There are several versions of what he said immediately after signing the Declaration. Two of the more popular ones are: “There, I guess King George will be able to read that!” and “The British ministry can read that name without spectacles; let them double their reward.” There is no clear documentation for what he said, but the various stories make for good telling.

3. Why wasn't George Washington the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence?

Answer: When the Second Continental Congress convened on May 10, 1775, George Washington was a voting delegate from Virginia. But on the thirty-sixth day after convening (June 15, 1775), the Congress elected Washington as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. He immediately left the Congress and spent the next two weeks at home and in New York preparing for his new assignment. He took command of the Revolutionary forces in Massachusetts on July 3, 1775. George Washington was with his troops a year later when—on July 4, 1776—the Declaration of Independence was discussed and passed. He, therefore, did not vote for or sign the Declaration of Independence.

4. Who composed the primary wording of the Declaration of Independence?

Answer: On June 7, 1776, a motion was introduced in the Second Continental Congress for the thirteen colonies to declare their independence from Britain. The Congress appointed a committee of five to prepare a sample declaration for discussion purposes three weeks later on July 1, the date set for a vote. After discussing the issues, four committee members turned to the fifth member, Thomas Jefferson, to draft the document to be discussed by the entire Congress. On July 4, 1776, with a few revisions, Jefferson's draft proposal was accepted as the final text of the Declaration of Independence.

5. Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July by shooting fireworks?

Answer: In July of 1776 (exact date unknown) John Adams, an influential member of the Second Continental Congress and later to become our first Secretary of State and then the second President of the United States, proclaimed that passage of the Declaration of Independence should be celebrated each year from one end of the continent to the other with fireworks "from this time forward forever more." The first documented celebration of Independence Day with fireworks was the next year in Philadelphia on July 4, 1777. An article describing that celebration appeared in our country's earliest daily newspaper, the

Pennsylvania Evening Post: “The evening was closed with . . . a grand exhibition of fireworks (which began and concluded with thirteen rockets) on the Commons, and the city was beautifully illuminated.”

6. What was done with the original copy of the Declaration of Independence during World War II?

Answer: On December 23, 1941, barely two weeks after Pearl Harbor was attacked, the original signed copies of the Declaration of Independence and of the U.S. Constitution were packed in a specially designed protective container, latched with padlocks and sealed with lead, weighing about 150 pounds. On December 26 and 27, 1941, accompanied by Secret Service agents, the documents traveled by train from Washington, D.C., to Louisville, Kentucky. The train was met in Louisville by a cavalry troop of the 13th Armored Division. Escorted by the armored division, the documents were taken to Fort Knox, Kentucky, where they were secretly stored in the United States Bullion Depository, a fortified vault-building used to store our country’s gold reserves and other precious items. After the war they were returned to Washington, D.C. Valuables from several European countries were also stored there during the War.

4th of July Facts:

1. The Liberty Bell rings 13 times every 4th of July to honor the 13 original states.
2. The first public 4th of July event at the White House occurred in 1801, Thomas Jefferson was President.
3. Three presidents died on July 4th: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both died on July 4, 1826 – this was the 50th anniversary. James Monroe died July 4, 1831.
4. Inscribed on the tablet held by Lady Liberty is “July IV MDCCLXXVI” (July 4, 1776).
5. Calvin Coolidge was the only president born on July 4th (July 4, 1872).

U.S. Flag Facts:

1. The Second Continental Congress passed the Flag Resolution on June 14, 1777, establishing the first congressional standard for official United States ensigns. 13 stars and 13 stripes.
2. Stars formed a circle so that no one colony would be viewed above another one.
3. Francis Hopkins designed the American Flag.
4. The 50-star pattern was created by a high school student.
 - a. When Alaska and Hawaii became states 49 and 50, President Eisenhower received thousands of ideas for an updated flag. Robert G. Heft, a 17-year-old student at Landcaster High, Ohio, created the design for a class project. He got a B- on his project.
5. Federal regulations state that a flag can only be flown from sunrise to sunset, unless illuminated at night.
6. On the U.S. Flag, the “canton” is the blue behind the stars.
7. The U.S. Flag is folded and tucked into a triangle as a reminder of the soldiers who served under General George Washington and the sailors and marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in that Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges, and freedoms we enjoy today.

The Pledge of Allegiance Facts:

1. Written by Francis Bellamy
2. In 1954, President Eisenhower added “under God”.

Star-Spangled Banner Facts:

1. “The Star-Spangled Banner” was made the national anthem by a congressional resolution on March 3, 1931 and signed by President Herbert Hoover.
2. Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics but intended it to be a poem. His brother-in-law penned it on sheet music in 1814.
3. The first sporting event to hear “The Star-Spangled Banner” was a baseball game in 1862 in Brooklyn, NY.