



Key Events



July 4, 1776 is one of the most important dates in American history. On that day, the **Declaration of Independence** was approved by the Continental Congress. It was a very important document. It announced that the Thirteen Colonies at war with Britain were now independent states. They were no longer part of the **British Empire**. It was written mainly by Thomas Jefferson. He also had help from **John Adams** and **Benjamin Franklin**. It talked about how all governments got their powers from the **consent** of the people. This meant that governments were created to serve the people. The Declaration also laid out the principles of independence. It included the rights of all people to **life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness**.



Signing of the Declaration of Independence

It helped to bring the colonies together. It also gave them a common purpose and goal—**liberty**. It was something worth fighting for. The first to sign the Declaration was **John Hancock** in large letters. Then, all fifty-six **delegates of Congress** signed.



When was the Declaration of Independence signed?

Another key event happened in 1778. Benjamin Franklin was sent to France to ask for help. France wanted to get back at their old enemy — Britain. They had lost much to the British after the **French and Indian War**. France sent money and supplies to America to help in the war. After the Patriot victory at Saratoga, France decided to enter the war. In 1778, the **Franco-American Treaty** was signed. Many French officers joined the American Army. Over 5,000 French soldiers fought in the war. The **French Navy** also greatly helped the war effort. Their huge **fleet** helped seal off **Cornwallis in Yorktown**. France entering the war helped to tip the scales in favor of the Thirteen Colonies.

In 1777, the **Continental Army** went through a tough test. After **evacuating** Philadelphia, General Washington set up camp at **Valley Forge**. The army suffered badly through the winter months. There were **shortages** of food, clothing, and equipment. They had terrible living quarters. Twice the army almost starved. Many left the army and **deserted**. Only twenty miles away, the British troops ate and slept comfortably in Philadelphia. At Valley Forge, Washington showed his true character. He shared the same sufferings as his soldiers. It really helped to bring the army together. They suffered and fought for a common goal—**liberty**. News of the victory at Saratoga and France entering the war also helped to boost the soldiers' **morale**.