

New Jersey's Revolutionary Role: Celebrating Independence Day



The Fourth of July, celebrated as Independence Day in the United States, marks the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. This historic event signified the thirteen American colonies' decision to declare independence from British rule. New Jersey, one of these original thirteen colonies, played a significant role in the American Revolution and the events leading up to this pivotal day.

New Jersey's strategic location between New York and Philadelphia made it a crucial battleground during the Revolutionary War. The state witnessed numerous key battles and skirmishes, including the famous Battle of Trenton, fought on December 26, 1776. This battle was a crucial victory for the Continental Army. Following a series of defeats in New York, General George Washington led a surprise attack on a garrison of Hessian (German) soldiers in Trenton, New Jersey, after crossing the icy Delaware River on Christmas night. The attack, which caught the Hessians off guard, resulted in a swift American victory, boosting morale and inspiring re-enlistments.

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, voted in favor of independence. Two days later, on July 4, the Declaration of Independence, primarily authored by Thomas Jefferson, was formally adopted. Among the 56 signatories were five representatives from New Jersey:

- **John Witherspoon:** Originally from Gifford, Scotland, he emigrated to New Jersey and became a Presbyterian minister and president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).
- **Francis Hopkinson:** Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but resided in Bordentown, New Jersey. He was a lawyer, judge, and author, known for his contributions to the design of the American flag.
- **John Hart:** Born in Stonington, Connecticut, and resided in Hopewell Township, New Jersey. He was a farmer and politician who served in the New Jersey legislature.

- **Abraham Clark:** Born in Elizabethtown (now Elizabeth), New Jersey. He was a surveyor and lawyer who served in the Continental Congress and later in the New Jersey legislature.

These men risked their lives and fortunes by signing the document, as they were committing an act of treason against the British Crown.

New Jersey's contributions to the fight for independence extended beyond the battlefield. The state was home to many patriots who supported the revolutionary cause through various means, including providing supplies, intelligence, and safe havens for soldiers. The state's residents endured hardships and sacrifices, but their resilience and determination were instrumental in achieving American independence.

Today, New Jerseyans celebrate Independence Day with a deep sense of pride and historical awareness. The state's rich revolutionary heritage is commemorated through various events, reenactments, and educational programs. Historic sites such as the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton and the Princeton Battlefield State Park serve as reminders of New Jersey's vital role in our nation's history.